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Sip wine, eat steak, watch 'The House Bunny'

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A new theater that will give patrons the chance to enjoy a brew and fine dining with their movie is on the verge of opening in Wesley Chapel.

The Grove 16 theater and its much touted Cinebistro restaurant and bar are set to open Sept. 19 after overcoming the concerns of a nearby Baptist church that didn't want a drink-slinging neighbor.

"On a good day this is adult Disneyland," said Alan Lake, a veteran executive chef overseeing the startup of the Pasco theater at the Grove shopping center at County Road 54 and Interstate 75. Lake's Web site lists such A-list celebrities as Bono and the Edge, George Harrison, Julian Lennon, Tina Turner and Bruce Springsteen as among those who have eaten his cuisine.

Sure, there'll be 16 screens equipped with state-of-the-art sound, but what will set Grove 16 apart is Cinebistro, a restaurant that features a full gourmet menu and bar. The restaurant, which also offers a kids' menu, is accessible to all moviegoers as well as the public.

Regular adult admission will be \$9.50. Patrons ages 21 and older who want to combine a meal with the movie can pay more (\$3 more on weekdays, \$5 more on weekends) for a plush leather

seat in the theater's upper level, called the loge. Loge seating allows them to buy food and drinks, including beer, wine and cocktails, all served to them before the film begins.

"There won't be any nachos and squeeze cheese up here," joked said Jeremy Welman, chief operating officer for Cobb Theatres. Indeed, a Cinebistro in Miami features a \$23 yellowtail snapper dinner (suggested wine pairing: Stag's Leap Reserve Chardonnay), an \$8.50 vegetable burrito, and fried calamari with mojito dipping sauce (\$11) among its menu offerings.

Yet executives say they still want to be family friendly. The theater also offers traditional concessions such as popcorn, candy, and yes, nachos and squeeze cheese. But instead of standing in line while workers fetch items, patrons help themselves cafeteria-style and pay at a register.

Executives could have been forced to scuttle plans for the restaurant and bar in Wesley Chapel after members of a nearby church opposed the company's efforts to seek a waiver from county rules banning alcohol sales at establishments less than 1,000 feet from a church, school or public park. After listening to representatives from both sides, county commissioners sided with the company, which is providing 150 jobs.

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The Grove Theatre 16 opens Sept. 19 off of I-75 and State Road 54 in Wesley Chapel. The cinema's big draw is expected to be its gourmet restaurant and bar, from which patrons will be able to order food and drinks from certain seats in the theaters.