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Dinner and a movie? Do both at Cinebistro

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Cinebistro, which has a location in Richmond, offers dinner and a movie at the same time.

By CASEY GILLIS

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Things started looking up for movie-going options here in Lynchburg when our first stadium-seating theater opened in 2009.

And just when I thought we'd finally caught up with the rest of the world, I discovered a little thing called the CinéBistro, a theater that combines dinner and a movie into one very cool experience.

The chain has a handful of U.S. locations, mostly in Florida and Virginia. I recently checked out the one in Richmond.

As our televisions get bigger and bigger, it's becoming easier to forget about movie theaters altogether. You can just curl on your couch and pop in a DVD without having to worry about noisy patrons, ringing cell phones or escalating ticket prices.

The CinéBistro gives those notions a serious run for their money.

The seats — high-backed, leather rocking chairs — are as comfortable as any couch I've ever sat on. And they're much wider than regular theater seats, too; I swear you could fit two people into one of them if you were feeling particularly amorous.

There's a ton of leg room, and the arm rests are wide, so there was none of that pesky elbow bumping that usually drives me crazy.

The way the CinéBistro works is simple: Order your tickets online or buy them at the box office; the Richmond location shows first-run movies in four different theaters, so you'll have your pick of most new releases.

Then arrive at the theater 30 minutes before show time so you can order and receive your meal before the movie starts. If you want to get there even earlier, there's a nice bar area, where old black-and-white movies are projected onto the walls.

Now, here's the cool part: You actually eat your meal in the theater. Each seat has a small table attached to it that swivels in and out.

You order everything up front, all at once, and it's brought to you before and during the previews. Once the movie starts, though, you're on your own to run out to the bar for refills or more snacks.

If you finish everything before show time, waiters will come and take it away. If you're a slow eater, like me, you can take your time and just push the swivel table out — and out of your way — when you're done.

The menu offers a good, varied selection of appetizers, entrees, sandwiches, salads and desserts.

I had a \$13 prosciutto and mozzarella panini with French fries for dinner, and split a \$9 crème brulee trio with a friend for dessert.

My companions tried the New York strip steak (\$23), the Cobb salad (\$14) and an appetizer of chicken, rock shrimp and calamari served in a popcorn tub (\$10), plus a pitcher of beer (that's the CinéBistro's other plus: It's an adults-only experience; patrons must be 21 and older to get in).

They also offer a selection of specialty cocktails and drinks with movie-centric names like the Green Hornet Appletini, the Twilight Bite and the High Noon Ultimate Margarita.

If you're not in the market for a full meal, you can go old school and order traditional movie theater fare. Think Milk Duds, Twizzlers and popcorn served not in plastic buckets but shiny white bowls.

It was definitely different to hear the sounds of silverware clinking against plates mixed in with the munching of popcorn, but I didn't mind it one bit. Our movie choice, "The King's Speech," probably contributed to it; it was a great, but very quiet, movie.

And want to know what the best part is? It's not that expensive.

When I first heard about the CinéBistro from Richmond-based friends, I expected tickets to be on the pricey side. But they only run you \$7.50 for matinees and \$10 for evening shows, which is on par with your average movie theater.

The food definitely pushes the price tag higher, but not much more than if you were already planning to do dinner and a movie separately.

Now, who do I talk to about getting one of these in Lynchburg?

Now, please.

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