



macdaddy's macaroni & cheese bar

Robert Dunn had resolved to get out of the restaurant business when, on a trip to New York City, he happened upon a macaroni and cheese joint. That's when a light bulb turned on.

"I thought, 'I could do this so much better,'" Dunn says, and he set out to do just that. On June 8, 2009, he closed the doors of his full-service Italian restaurant in Georgetown, Connecticut. About a month and \$10,000 later, the brown leather chairs and Frank Sinatra music were replaced by an obscene amount of orange. Macdaddy's macaroni & cheese bar was open for business.

"Our motto is comfort food for discomfoting times," Dunn says. But make no mistake, this is not the homey stuff your mom used to make—unless she was a chef. Options like the mac mushroom, with crimini and shitake mushrooms, porcini emulsion, manchego cheese, and truffle oil, or the mac french onion, with Gruyere, caramelized onions, and applewood bacon, are comfort food dressed to the nines.

"It's creative expression in macaroni and cheese," Dunn says. Macdaddy's macaroni concoctions start out with a béchamel-based sauce, are topped off with a dusting of panko bread crumbs, and served in the cast iron skillet they're made in. Customers order at the counter, take a number, and get their food in 7–8 minutes.

At time of press, the menu included 18–20 varieties of macaroni and cheese, with a few specials added to the mix each day. Dunn says he hopes to make some of those specials permanent and increase the menu size to about 30 options. All macaroni dishes come in three sizes—snack, mac, or macdaddy (the mac being the most popular). Prices range from \$6 for a small mac U.S.A., with American and cheddar cheeses, to \$57 for a large mac lobo that feeds four, with fresh lobster, roasted corn, and Asiago cheese.

Gluten-free macaroni is available upon request, and for customers looking for something a little less cheesy, there are a few salads on the menu. For the over-21 crowd, macdaddy's features a full bar. For the little ones, Dunn turned an entire wall into a blackboard for doodles.

"The kids can go draw while mom and dad relax with a glass of wine and a skillet of mac and cheese," Dunn says. The concept is also popular with teenagers, who stop by after school and sports practice.

When macdaddy's opened, sales started off about \$7,000–\$8,000 a week. Three months in, the restaurant was grossing \$14,000–\$15,000 a week. The average check falls between \$12–\$14, and Dunn says his food cost runs around 17 percent. Alcohol accounts for 25–30 percent of gross sales.

The restaurant started out keeping hours from 11:30 a.m. to about 9:30 or 10 p.m. daily but recently expanded its morning hours with the addition of a few breakfast macs. Business skews more toward the dinner daypart with late-afternoon and evening hours accounting for more than two-thirds of sales. To-go orders make up 40 percent of sales and are on the rise, Dunn says.

Macdaddy's had only one traditional location as of press time, but Dunn recently purchased a converted Ford E-350 van to take operations on the road. He was also engaged in lease negotiations for a second traditional unit in Danbury, Connecticut, which would be run under a licensing agreement. Franchising, he says, is definitely in the future.



“At least two or three times a day, I have people asking me if it’s a franchise already,” Dunn says. One place he imagines the concept working well is on or near college campuses, where there are a lot of students with disposable income and hearty appetites.

founder: Robert Dunn
HQ: Georgetown, Connecticut
YEAR STARTED: 2009
PROJECTED ANNUAL SALES: Undisclosed
TOTAL UNITS: 1
Franchise UNITS: 0
WEB SITE: www.macdaddyrestaurants.com (<http://www.macdaddyrestaurants.com>)

“We’re at that price point where kids want to be,” Dunn says. “They want something that will fill them up and not take too much time to do it. They’re heating up Stouffer’s in their dorm rooms, and we’ve taken what they’re eating in the dorm room to the next level.”

He also sees macdaddy’s working in ski-resort towns or cities where inclement

weather has people craving comfort food.

“If this were at the bottom of a ski hill and you could come in and have a couple of cold beers and a hot mac and cheese, it doesn’t get any better than that,” Dunn says.

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