



Thoughts on Orosoko

My colleague, Neil, stopped by for drink on Friday shortly after 5, and I wanted to share his impressions! I should explain that he's not, strictly speaking, the target demo—he drives a pickup truck and listens to country, but he works with me in consulting and is knowledgeable about service. Regardless, he loved the vibe and the décor! Here are the highlights:

- Despite my concern that the exterior/entrance is *too* mysterious, he found it both impressive and welcoming.
- The cast member at the host stand exhibited a minimal amount of friendliness. As you touched upon, Neil identified the need for two hosts—one to greet and work the tablet, the other to seat.
- He was told the bar was reservation only—something I actively dislike but suspect was on account of the unusually busy weekend. He was offered the rail as a good alternative, though! No one was seated at the bar itself for the duration of his stay.
- He noted that the rail seating can feel a bit awkward when the two tops in front of it are seated. Maybe an 18-inch divider made of reeded glass? It would create an illusion of privacy without blocking eyelines and nicely diffuses candlelight.
- Speaking of candles, they weren't lit until 5.45, so the venue wasn't fully show ready at opening.
- The third bartender did in fact wait on the rail. Both the bartenders and servers were friendly and attentive. The servers appeared to hit their marks with ease and readily made suggestions with respect to their favorite plates. They weren't as adept at building a connection with the guests or telling the story of Orosoko. This *can* be done quickly without bogging down service and would help guide guests along a journey.
- One server wore a hoodie, another put on a jacket and a third was visibly taking a dinner break—little things that broke the immersion.
- Neil also spotted a member of the kitchen team in jeans and a sweatshirt, something we don't typically see in upscale venues.
- The music genre, volume and acoustics—things we're trained to be particular about—were excellent.



- The manager was easily identifiable but seemed a bit disengaged and failed to make eye contact or interact with guests, which might be expected under the circumstances.
- The Firecracker Shrimp were “better than Bonefish.” (There’s a reason Neil is NOT my culinary expert.) He was disappointed that there were no Hazy IPAs, a popular style. The bartender was genuinely apologetic, but we thought an explanation such as, “These beers were curated to go with signature dishes such as our Okonomiyaki and Citrus Buttered Lobster. Would you like to try a sample?”
- Based on the miniscule amount of time spent in the venue, Neil believes your PPA should skew higher than it currently does. (Based on ZERO amount of time spent in the venue, I agree.) He also noted, however, that one guest with a reservation ordered only one drink and an edamame, which may be atypical, but prompted my thoughts below ...
- Overall, the venue was professionally run and very unique, with many additional opportunities to build upon that uniqueness!

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That intersection between restaurant and lounge creates a unique challenge. To maximize revenue, restaurants must successfully utilize renovations, whereas lounges by nature want to be more freeform. Restaurants rely on the ability to turn tables efficiently, whereas a club or lounge often does better by retaining its guests for that extra round of drinks or plates. If Orosoko is a hybrid of sorts, its format could benefit from a hybrid approach.

For example, as demand grows, make the conscious decision to set aside x number of tables, plus bar and rail, for walk-ins to retain that more spontaneous freeform lounge experience. Continue to encourage reservations, but consider requiring the purchase of a curated tasting menu. You could do a three-course value play midweek and a pricier weekend offering, along with a full Chef’s tasting. If every reservation represented a commitment of even \$39 up to \$100+ without beverage, your per head would improve drastically.

The real success of a tasting menu, however, comes from punctuating it with inherent upsells throughout. If every server is conditioned to offer peanuts or edamame for the table as a matter of course, that’s a small boost. A wine, sake or signature cocktail pairing is obvious but wildly enhances the guest experience. Include an optional seafood course on the menu. Add a premium Waygu upcharge. Check average soars.



There are numerous ways to upsell without changing the existing format; this is just an example of how my thought process works and how one might take an analytical approach to revenue while honoring the spirit of the venue and allowing guests to choose their own adventure!

I also want to stress there are no “expert hacks” when it comes to growing a business. Much of it comes down to fundamentals, and the job of instilling them is never truly done. I believe the priorities here are honing the messaging and digital presence, building upon the existing culture, creating/organizing developmental material, implementing advanced sales strategies with the cast and growing additional revenue streams, such as booth sales, private events and the to go operation.