

London Bridge Pub BY LINDSAY SAUNDERS | PHOTOS BY KAREN DIAZ

Co-owner Darren Bridger had been in the service industry for ten years before opening London Bridge Pub, and knew that when launching a new bar, finding the perfect location and developing a unique identity are key. They're even more important for an authentic British pub because having regulars who love your bar is the cornerstone for making a honest go of it. When he began toying with the idea of opening his own place with business partner Captain Mike Ruiz, they chose the historic entertainment district in downtown Raleigh because it was busy and had the demographic they were looking for. The London Bridge Pub opened on Halloween 2011 in a great location and an identity all its own. Add in a huge outdoor patio and a great drink selection, and Darren had a winner of a pub.

The London Bridge Pub came to find its home in a Victorian looking building with bright red brick and large bay windows. When Darren saw it, he recalls thinking, "Wow, I've got to have this place!" The interior is dark with smooth fine woods like most traditional British pubs, and has quirky areas like the library nook in the back filled with books and knickknacks, a couple of dart boards near the back door, and works of art on the wall meant to bring a piece of London to Raleigh. These pieces have really all come together to make the Pub's patrons feel more at home.

Over time, the pub has grown and developed its own personality. The patio has been improved with new foundation and landscaping. A wooden pergola was built and eventually a tin roof was added on top, which Darren says "is great for our smoking friends" who need shelter outside. In the near future, he plans to install a projector to show movies on one of the outside walls of the patio. Darren makes note that the Pub is dog-friendly. Along with many other local causes, The London Bridge Pub sponsors the SPCA of Wake County every year. There are bowls of water on the patio and treats behind the bar so the dogs can rest and relax along with their owners. On some days, you might be greeted by the Pub's mascot, a Pit-hound mix rescue named Archie.

With its amenities and personality, the London Bridge Pub appeals to a wide demographic of



visitors. After work, you'll see business people stopping by for a pint in the early evenings. Late nights and weekends are more of a 20s and 30s crowd. Their customers' interests are vast so Darren and his bar staff try to make sure everyone enjoys their time at the Pub. Sandwiched midway between Marbles Kids Museum and the Raleigh Times, Darren tries to emphasize that families and their children are also welcome in afternoon and early evening hours (they open at 3pm daily). Even though they don't serve food, it can be ordered and delivered so customers can enjoy eating in the comfort of the Pub or the outside patio.



London Bridge Pub co-owner Darren Bridger and pub mascot Archie

Like all British pubs, you'll find football (that's soccer to us Americans, of course) on the TVs quite often. In fact, Darren and Mike—who recently left Afghanistan after serving a tour with the Army and will be joining in full time on his return—came together over their love of soccer.

Eight years ago, they met while watching the Champions' final match and became best friends or "bezzie mates" in British terms. On Saturdays and Sundays, there's a huge turnout for the English Premier League and \$15 bottomless mimosas help celebrate the occasion on Sundays.

While enjoying the matches, there's plenty to consume aside from mimosas with ten beers on tap, usually five locals and five national brews. There's also a wide range of bottled beers to choose from and an extensive selection of quality liquors. In discussing spirits, Darren wanted his patrons to be impressed enough by the bar's breadth of scotches, tequilas and whiskeys that they would begin to ask for their own favorite labels. A few liquors have been added to their wall because patrons have requested them. "We really try to accommodate our customers here and that's what turns strangers into friends," he emphasizes.

What transforms a good pub into a great one is the atmosphere and the people who frequent it. The Pub has a strong bartender collection in house and they know how to have a good time working. "We're fun, cheeky and we know customer service," says Darren with a grin. You can tell that he enjoys his job and loves what his staff has going on. This attitude is why the humorous (and often insightful) graffiti in the bathrooms isn't stressed over and there's a growing collection of souvenir items sitting on top of a ledge behind the bar that people leave behind.

After nearly two years, The London Bridge Pub continues to blaze a trail on East Hargett Street, and much like the friendly tagline "Cheers mate" on the back of their staff T-shirts, they continue to give a warm welcome and good times to all who enter. 🍷

The London Bridge Pub
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 Open daily from 3pm to 2am
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