

Dining in Lincoln can be intimate, thrifty

By Jeff Zeleny
Restaurant Critic

An intimate, quiet, romantic dinner for two is possible in Lincoln, despite the glowing neon skyline of chain restaurants, overpriced bagel shops and copycat coffee houses.

A dinner date on a student budget also is possible. With a dash of creativity and a touch of planning, a night on the town with your steady companion — or even a blind date — can be a smashing success without thrashing your credit line.

Follow this trail as we take you through a few of the area's well-known hot spots and finest out-of-the-way eateries.

Lincoln's Haymarket is an obvious choice for dinner — at times its popularity makes it almost too obvious. Finding a table can be a challenge, but it is consistently worth the wait.

There also is a good share of variety in the Haymarket.

Lazlo's, one of Lincoln's best (and most crowded) restaurants, is a sure thing. Washing down an open-faced Reuben or a plate of hickory ribs with a brewed beer is highly recommended.

If (and probably when) the wait at Lazlo's is unbearable, a walk next door into Jabrisco is a good second choice. The splatter-painted ceilings and high-back black booths make Jabrisco a fun dining experience. And the unique pizza, sandwiches and pasta will leave a good taste in your mouth that has not been duplicated in these parts.

Jeans, shorts, and sandals are acceptable attire in both restaurants, as are skirts, sport coats and ties.

Also in the Haymarket, Vincenzo's offers casual Italian fare that is sure to please. Vincenzo's is the only restaurant in this historic part of town with a lounge separated from the restaurant. As you sip a cocktail or after-dinner drink, the tall windows offer a neat view of couples strolling through the

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Haymarket.

A few blocks east — and only one block south of City Campus — is Crane River, home of the city's best (and probably only) beer bread. This menu has things that will not be found anywhere else in the city. You have to go to Crane River at least once — if you don't have a date, eat at the bar and strike up conversation with a bartender.

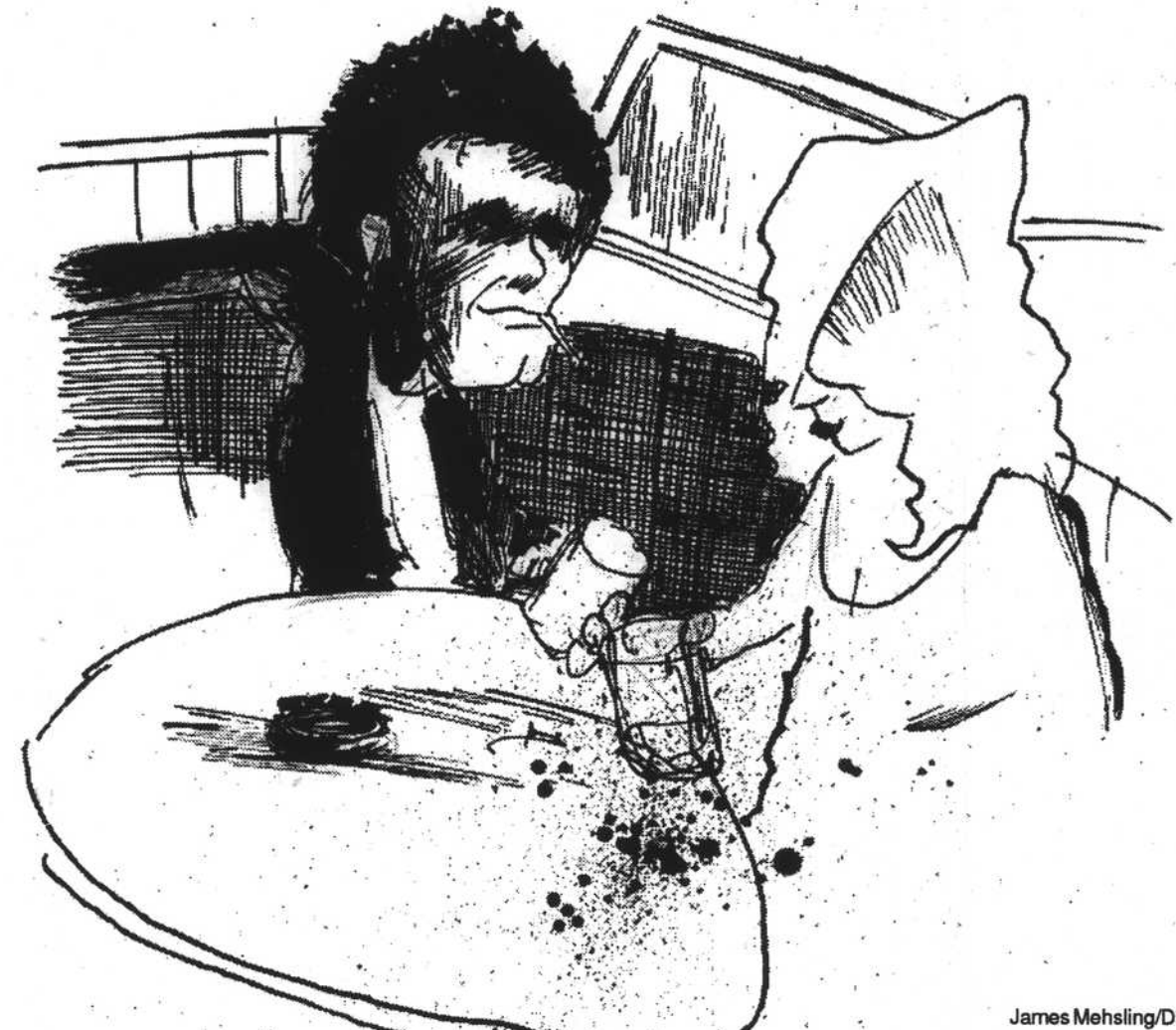
Tucked away in a residential neighborhood south of downtown is one of Lincoln's best secluded places for an upscale dinner. Customers dine in small rooms at Billy's, 1301 H St., in an antique setting.

Billy's, which is a block west of the State Capitol, also is the place to go during the legislative session to see many of the state's movers and shakers. While the white building behind the fence looks like a house, a step inside reveals the perfect ambiance for a special evening.

A stop here on a first date could give the wrong impression, however. If there is a second date, you will have a difficult search to find a place to top Billy's.

Another well-kept secret among the younger crowd is Jax, 27th St. and Woods Blvd. This newly remodeled restaurant — which now has a separate lounge, dining room and gourmet carry-out deli — offers one of the quietest dinners in town.

Like Billy's, save the Jax experi-



James Mehsling/DN

ence for a special occasion like an anniversary, engagement or when your parents come to visit.

In recent years, chain restaurants that offer a little better than fast-food fare have popped up throughout Lincoln. These restaurants — which represent the Wal-Mart syndrome of dining — often serve good food, but the atmosphere is anything but intimate.

When your date and you have tried

all of the restaurants in Lincoln — and the next chain hasn't moved into town, we recommend leaving the city for a short drive.

A 46-mile drive west of Lincoln brings you to The Chances R in York. This restaurant has long been one of the state's best-kept tourism secrets, but now many are discovering what the folks in south-central Nebraska have known for years.

The service is outstanding. The food is incredible. And the prices are affordable. From their crowded Sunday brunch, to a close dinner-for-two in the comfy green dining room chairs, the trip to York is well worth the time.

The 50-minute drive down Interstate 80 is a good excuse to leave the glowing neon skyline of Lincoln. And besides, who says it has to take 50 minutes to get back to the city?

Food & Entertainment



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