

## Tin Angel shows its mettle

By REBECCA DENTON  
[The Tennessean](#)

### *Popular West End bistro perseveres through road work, plans expansion*

**WEST END** — With its exposed brick walls, brick floors culled from Church Street and a 1930s-era tin ceiling, Tin Angel feels as much like a neighborhood bistro these days as when it opened 10 years ago.

That friendly ambiance is what attracted owner Rick Bolsom in the first place, back when the building was a burger-and-fries kind of pub and Bolsom was a music writer living in an apartment across the street.

"This place was very close to me emotionally," he said recently over coffee as the lunch crowd filtered out. "I felt it deserved to be reborn. I knew the neighborhood, so I took a shot at it — and it was a struggle."

These days the place — named for the famed and now-defunct Tin Angel restaurant in Greenwich Village — is an established West End restaurant, known for its pastas, salads and creative dishes like pan-seared salmon with Thai barbecue sauce.

And while he doesn't believe in messing with success, Bolsom has modest plans to expand next year, moving into the space next door left vacant by a hair salon a few months ago.

It won't be a big move, he said. The idea is to add a small dining room for private parties, maybe adding 15 more seats to the 110-seat restaurant, plus a food-staging area, some office space and wine storage.

"The big mistake restaurants make is overbuilding the front and still having the same kitchen," he said. "We don't want to get trapped in that."

Bolsom and his wife, Vicki, know firsthand about mistakes. They made a few in the beginning — the kind you can't really foresee.

They opened Tin Angel as a contemporary meat-and-three, a kind of advanced diner concept, but it never really caught on.

So the Bolsoms kicked their menu up a notch, switching to more contemporary, sophisticated fare — not too fancy, but a lineup that matched people's perceptions of the elegant little building.

It worked.

Then came West End construction six years ago with its dust and noise and traffic tie-ups that drove people away. Tin Angel's business dropped by at least 50% immediately, and it stayed that way for more than six months as bulldozers and jackhammers worked to widen the busy roadway.

"That came close to putting us out of business," Bolsom said.

He and Vicki supplemented their wait staff's income to make up for lost tips. They knew the situation was temporary, and they didn't want to lose their experienced people.

After that, it took another year or two to build business back up — a fragile, hairy time — but it's been building steadily since then, he said.

Now they have their share of regulars who swear by the place.

"This is one of my new favorite restaurants, no doubt," said Trine Mitchell, who has lived in Nashville about a year. "I'm Italian and from Florida — I look for good food."

She was eating lunch with her friend Mark Kleeman, who comes to Tin Angel quite a bit.

"It's a nice quiet place where we can get away from everything, and the food is always excellent," he said. "We have a couple of special places we go to in Nashville, and this is one of them."

Bolsom and his wife operate as partners at Tin Angel, and they have money invested in a network of other restaurants — Zola, Mirror and Red Wagon Cafe — run by couples who are also their longtime friends.

He sees their venture as part of a community of independently owned restaurants throughout Nashville that compete for customers but also build on one another's successes.

It's a tough business but worth the effort in the end, he said.

"It's the hardest thing I've ever done. It's brutally hard if you do it well," he said. "But it's a passion."

### **Getting there**

Tin Angel is at 3201 West End Ave. Hours are 11 am. to 11 pm. Mondays-Thursdays, 11 am. to midnight Fridays, 5 p.m. to midnight Saturdays and 11 am. to 3 pm. Sundays for brunch.

Dinner entrees range from \$9 to \$20, and the menu changes with the seasons. The restaurant offers free valet parking for lunch Mondays-Fridays, brunch Sundays and dinner Thursdays-Saturdays. Call 298-3444