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Plate

Breakfast or lunch? They both work at Plate.

By: Brian Freedman

There are two schools of thought about brunch. These are implicitly spelled out in the very name of the meal itself. To paraphrase a certain ruffle-collared Englishman, to omelet or not to omelet? That is the Sunday-morning question. I find myself firmly in the camp of the former. As a person who is entirely unable to function without my morning coffee and daily a.m. routine, I look to brunch for breakfast-type foods. Ms. Martini, however, preternaturally chipper at even the most ungodly hour of the morning, is more than happy to start off her Sunday with lunch-like dishes.



So when it came to our meal at Plate, she found herself in a very happy place indeed. Now, don't get me wrong—Plate does serve traditional breakfast dishes at brunch, and generally does them very well. But it was through the more lunch-style offerings that the meal truly stood out.

The **roasted plum tomato soup** (\$5.95), for example, was a fabulous rendition of the classic. The texture of the soup was far more velvety than the one mom probably de-canned when you were a child, and deeply flavored with the subtle richness of basil, caramelized onions, olive oil and garlic. And as if in homage to those days gone by, it was served with a mini-grilled cheese sandwich, a happy little square of buttery, cheddar-cheesy goodness that was even better when dipped, Oreo-style, into the soup. **(CONT'D next page)**

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It wasn't classic breakfast food, of course, or even typical brunchtime fare, but it made sense. If some people chase away the last lingering remnants of Saturday night's bacchanal with a Bloody Mary, then why not tomato soup with grilled cheese? It's the same idea, essentially, just without the vodka playing the hair-of-the-dog role.

Ms. M. also ordered the **Asian chicken salad** (\$11.95), a deliciously dressed, heaping bowl of moist chicken breast, cucumber, cabbage slaw, and sesame noodles that was ingeniously tossed with both a peanut dressing and an Asian-inspired vinaigrette, a fabulous combination that provided both bass-not depth and brighter-toned excitement to the entire enterprise, bracketing its many flavors nicely. Indeed, the salad was solid, a healthy way to make a fresh start following the preceding night's shenanigans. Plus, the portion was so generous that I also had a nice chicken sandwich later that afternoon.

The **smoked salmon omelet** (\$12), unfortunately, suffered from the very aspect that initially seemed to recommend it. The fish itself, while certainly delicious on its own, was cut a bit too thick for the omelet, and the dryish texture that resulted from the smoking process overwhelmed any moistness in the eggs. It's not that it was bad—far from it—it's just that, from a tactile point of view, the omelet didn't hold together as seamlessly as I'd hoped. But the fact that Plate goes through the effort of smoking its own salmon speaks volumes about the ambition—and ethos—of its kitchen.

The **granola and cinnamon parfait** (\$6.50), however, worked wonderfully. Not-too-sweet layers of plain yogurt, homemade granola and strawberry compote (though this changes as fruits come into and go out of season) were assembled in perfect balance, the yogurt taming any sweetness from the strawberries, the granola providing a beautifully crunchy backbone that lifted up the other textures.

The real highlight of the meal, however, was the pastry basket, which included homemade, weekly-changing treats like mildly sweet cinnamon buns and banana bread, accompanied by a house-made fruit compote, were delicate, steaming and warm on the inside, supremely comforting first thing in the morning. They were beautiful too, as if they'd just left the set a breakfast cereal or coffee commercial set. Homemade, at Plate at least, doesn't mean homely. And the flavors were better than anything you could ever make in your own kitchen.

Plate is located in Suburban Square, 105 Coulter Ave. in Ardmore and can be reached at (610) 642-5900. Visit Plate online at www.platerestaurant.com. •

