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## WINING & DINING

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### Review

# Plate is packing them in at Suburban Square

By Barbara Allyn

It seems almost superfluous to report on the new Plate Restaurant in Suburban Square because most of the Main Line seems to be dining and wining there already. And for good reason: The food is fine.

The cool new spot, fronted in deep avocado green and black, is mobbed nightly. Since a no reservation policy is currently in play, the small front bar area and any standing room are packed with people waiting for a table, a hightop or a barstool. Suburban Square has long needed good places to nosh and dine. La Parisienne and Za opened as two eateries in one a few years ago, years after early successes like seasons and chains like Proud Popover. (Remember them?) LaP/Za was a short rental, however.

Now, David Mantelmacher, the owner of successful Walnut Street restaurant, Circa, has created Plate in the same Square space. DAS Architects & Designers did the job. DAS brought us the recent Le Bec Fin makeover and trendy restaurants like Morimoto and the suburban mecca, Savona. Coming next from DAS will be Normandy Farm in Blue Bell.

Billed as a casual family and fun eatery with upscale comfort food, Plate in its opening weeks is holding to its promise. Our testing dinner was at a very early hour, but on a weekend. Still, management seemed to handle the crush of business

with aplomb. Whether that is possible throughout each long evening remains to be seen. The U-shaped bar was designed for 20; it should have been built to hold 40. For now, Plate attracts families and seniors to early dining and a hip bar crowd later in the night. The menu has good choices at reasonable prices for both of them. (Lunch hours will bow shortly.)

A bargain opener was Prince Edward mussels, steamed and so delectably velvety and flavorful that the \$8.95 price did indeed seem a bargain. They were covered in a fragrant white wine sauce, generously garlicky, and bites of chorizo sausage decorated the generous plateful of gleaming black bivalves. Less successful, and the only disappointment of dinner was a calzone of smoked duck, shitake mushrooms, goat cheese and what appeared to be kale. The dining partner felt that despite the nice slices of duck meat, the taste combination didn't quite work in the foldover pizza pocket (\$9.50). Other openers included crisped calamari, baked top neck clams, spicy ahi tuna on flatbread, a terrine of baked macaroni and barbecue shrimp, baked Provolone cheese with artichokes and crabmeat, deviled eggs jazzed up with smoked salmon, soups and salads.

Both selected entrees were winners this evening. Ahi tuna as a dinner item was perfection. Sizeable squares of the lush, burgundy-hued rare fish crusted in sesame seeds, encircled the plate. It was a bargain of quality and quantity for \$19.75. With

this gem came sticky rice and nifty sections of baby bok choy. These had been steamed just enough so that we could twirl rib and greens on a fork to eat. An evening special of roasted halibut (\$20) was pure delight. A super red wine sauce and a nest of steamed celery ribs seated the thick slab of snowy white fish. It was topped by a delicious mound of creamy scallions, and the combination was very tasty.

Looking for that "casual" meal? Not to worry. We could have ordered a veggie sandwich from the wood-fired oven for just under \$10, an Angus burger with the works for \$10, a spicy mound of Asian chicken salad for \$12.50, BBQ baby back ribs with potato salad and corn bread for \$13, or turkey meatloaf for \$15.

In between came slow smoked beef brisket, porcupine shrimp, pasta, planked salmon, garlic roasted organic chicken, stone fired pork chops. At the top were filet mignon from the grill and a brick oven shellfish stew.

Sides and a special kids' section on the menu added to the temptation. Other pluses included a lagniappe of white fish and cheese spread with bruschetta, good chewy rolls, and desserts (\$6.50) like an artist palette of four tiny cookie ice cream cones and a dish of hot fudge sauce for dipping.

Plate Restaurant & Bar is located at 105 Coulter Ave., Ardmore, and is open every night for dinner. Lunch hours to come. Call 610.642.5900. Major cards accepted. Ample Square parking.