

Sophisticated fare, at a fair price, in a friendly setting

Perk on Main

6 MAIN ST., DURHAM
860-349-5335
WWW.PERKONMAIN.COM

As a kid growing up outside Boston, I used to frequent a restaurant called the Magic Pan. Crêpes were the house specialty, and I felt oh-so-sophisticated every time I ordered crêpes Suzette or spinach soufflé crêpes. For a few minutes anyway, I could pretend I was

BARGAIN BITES

sitting in a Left Bank cafe, not in a chain eatery buried inside a shopping mall.

I was reminded of how fun fancy food can be during a recent visit to Perk on Main, a sandwich shop/crêpe place on Durham's charming Main Street. Not that there's anything stuffy or pretentious about this cheerful restaurant. From the down-home decor to the exceptionally friendly servers, Perk on Main exudes warmth. But order one of the crêpes and you'll still feel very cosmopolitan.

The particulars: Open Monday through Wednesday, 6:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday, 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.; and Sunday 7:00 a.m. to 2 p.m. Breakfast is served all day, and credit cards are accepted (but not American Express). There is plenty of off-street parking.

The look: More French country farmhouse than upscale Parisian cafe: A bright



DANIELA ALTIMARI / THE HARTFORD COURANT

THE CRÊPES are delicate and delicious and the sandwiches offer imaginative combinations at Perk on Main in Durham. You'll enjoy the view from the back deck, too.

blue-and-yellow color scheme, oversize posters on the walls and a killer view of the Middlesex County countryside from the back deck.

The vibe: Bustling. You order at the counter, and a server delivers your meal to the table. It's fairly casual; the food is served on paper plates and plastic baskets.

The eats: The crêpes here would do a Parisian proud. These delicate handkerchiefs hold a variety of fillings, from savory (spinach, eggs, onions, garlic, tomatoes and feta) to sweet. The classic combo — sliced strawberries and bananas, with a generous layer of Nutella (a creamy chocolate-hazelnut

spread popular throughout Europe) — could easily become addictive. Even better was a simple crêpe brushed with butter and sprinkled with sugar and a generous squeeze of lemon juice. The ideal blend of sweet and sour, and a steal at \$3.50. Skip the omelets: They're thin rather than fluffy, though they come with a tasty side of home fries.

At lunchtime, the restaurant serves up sandwiches with interesting combinations. The cashew curry chicken salad wrap, for instance, is a sun-dried tomato wrap packed with all-white-meat chicken and crunchy nuts. There are also salads and soups and a kids menu with grilled cheese, pizza bagel and that old standby, peanut butter and jelly.

The bakery case is not to be missed — we loved all the store-made goodies we sampled, especially the light-as-air maple pastry and the cupcake-sweet chocolate peanut butter muffin.

The prices: Reasonable. Most of the savory crêpes and sandwiches cost less than \$7; the sweet crêpes all come in under \$6.

The verdict: Très magnifique!

— DANIELA ALTIMARI



on the web

Visit www.courant.com/perkon-main to see more photos of Perk on Main. Visit www.courant.com/bargainbites to read previous reviews of area restaurants.

Firehouse Steakhouse and Halligan Taproom

412 MAIN ST., MIDDLETOWN. 860-347-4440

The look: Think firehouse-meets-sports-bar.

Downstairs offers a family-friendly dining area; upstairs offers a large bar and lounge area.

The eats: The menu is diverse, from burgers and steaks to seafood and pasta. Appetizers

include firehouse chicken strips and the second-alarm sampler (wings, mozzarella sticks, chicken strips and onion rings). This "firehouse" also offers chili.

The particulars: Monday through Wednesday, 11 a.m. to midnight; Thursday, 11 a.m. to 1 a.m.; Friday, 11 a.m. to 2 a.m.; Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 2 a.m.; and Sunday, 11:30 a.m. to midnight.

Mitchell's on the River

273 MEADOW ROAD, ROCKY HILL; 860-529-3332

This restaurant, a seasonal outpost of the popular

Mitchell's in Rocky Hill, is a well-kept secret among locals who head down to the serene riverside location for breakfast, lunch and dinner during the warm months. If you've never visited, expect to be pleasantly surprised. Just five minutes from the busy Silas Deane Highway, it offers million-dollar water views and dirt-cheap prices.

The particulars: Open seven days a week, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. May through September.

The look: Think dockside clam shack. The seating area is picnic tables with umbrellas on a deck overlooking the Rocky Hill/Glastonbury ferry launch. Just across the parking lot is Ferry Park, a grassy area perfect for catching some rays.

La Vita Gustosa

9 MAIN ST., EAST HADDAM; 860-873-8999

Searching for delicious Italian food? Then head to the family-owned La Vita Gustosa in East Haddam (across from the Goodspeed Opera House).

We visited on a Friday night about 6, and we thought for sure we'd never get in without a reservation. But we were welcomed and, although

the bar area looked cozy and inviting, we decided to eat in the dining room.

Delicious bread with oil and olives was offered to us as we perused the diverse menu. We decided to skip the appetizers, which range from bruschetta to calamari, and order dinner (to save room for dessert of course).

The particulars: Open Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. The bar is open later. Closed Mondays.

The eats: You can pretty much satisfy any craving here. There are several delicious pasta dishes to choose from, including orecchiette con rabe or the more traditional manicotti. The chicken parmigiana is tasty (and the red sauce is fabulous).

Morton's The Steakhouse

852 MAIN ST. HARTFORD; 860-724-0044

Morton's a bargain? Not usually. Especially given its top-shelf steakhouse reputation.

But through the end of September, those who would usually think long and hard before heading to

this tony downtown restaurant can take advantage of the private-club decor, extremely attentive service and, yes, even its renowned prime beef, thanks to a limited-edition hamburger special that will not only satisfy the palate but benefit someone else as well.

The story: The bargain-priced special, \$19.78, covers a Morton's prime sirloin burger with fries and a donation to the Make a Wish Foundation. The burger and its price reflect the year and culinary circumstances when Morton's co-founders, Klaus Fritsch and Arnie Morton, met. According to the Morton's website: "Fritsch was experimenting with hamburger recipes and sent a sample to a visiting executive . . . who happened to be Arnie Morton. After trying it, Morton burst in the kitchen demanding to meet the chef, and so began the partnership."

The particulars: Monday through Saturday, 5:30 to 11 p.m.; Sunday 5 to 10 p.m.



on the web

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