

A surprising breakfast find at Go Grocer



Find perfect egg sandwiches featuring housemade croissants at Le Cafe, a gem hidden inside Go Grocer. (Michelle Kanaar/CHicago Tribune photos)



Rugelach made with family apricot jam from Le Cafe.

INA PINKNEY BREAKFAST WITH INA

The first thing I check when scouring for new restaurants is hours of operation. Open at 5 p.m.? Nope. Open at 11 a.m.? Nope. Open at 7 a.m. during the week? Bingo! It goes on my list.

Happily, the list keeps growing.

Le Cafe Neighborhood Coffeeshop and Bakery

When I find a secret hideaway that delights me, I must share it.

My neighbor Scott Warner and I listened to a Saturday morning talk at the Culinary Historians by the brilliant and gentle Abra Berens about farming and vegetables, and then Scott offered to walk with me while I electric-scooted back home. When we approached his building, he asked if I had ever been to Go Grocer, an organic, family-owned local convenience store, where there was a lovely cafe run by Danielle Papakanelou, a young woman who was a graduate of the French Pastry School. How did I not know this?

Up the ramp from the sidewalk and into a long space with produce, groceries, lots of alcohol and sundries was a counter on the right with pastries, coffee and a menu chalkboard as well as tables and chairs.

She makes her own croissants! She makes rugelach with her mom's apricot jam! She makes paleo muffins!

I had the croissant sandwich with perfectly seasoned and scrambled eggs, thick sliced applewood bacon and cheddar cheese.

The GOveggie croissant is on my list for next time, since the croissant has the perfect texture to contain fresh spinach, tomatoes, cucumbers, cilantro mayo and an egg.

Also perfectly done: the egg, thinly sliced pork sausage and cheese sandwich on an English muffin.

There are gluten-free options, and I can attest to the fact that the sugarless paleo blueberry muffins were moist and sweet. They didn't make it home.

Tell everyone! If Danielle runs out of something, there's always tomorrow.

Of note: street parking, accessible.

Find it: inside Go Grocer, 4250 N. Marine Drive, 773-857-0224; lecafechicago.com

Hours: 7 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday to Friday; 7 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Sunny Side Up

Some of you know my license plate, BRKFST, with a handicapped icon. I heard there was a plate around town that was BRKFAST and wondered to whom it belonged. Mystery solved.

It's Nick Sord, who owns Sunny Side Up — a wide-open, bright and peaceful place on the street level of a building on Clark Street. We had a good laugh about that when he saw my car parked out front.

I felt right at home, because there were tablecloths with paper on top — like we used to have at Ina's — and the music was background music! Our server was new to the business but well-trained and charming, which made the experience even better.

Chef Michael Fiddler and I ate a lot; we couldn't decide on only two items. We shared the croque madame, because I love brioche toast and almost anything that goes on it, especially ham, Gruyere, sunny side up egg and Mornay sauce.

The steakhouse sandwich on toasted rye, with sauteed spinach, mushrooms and onions, grilled rib-eye and poached eggs, was finished with horseradish hollandaise. A mouthful to say and to eat, but worth every bite.

The extra order of a sweet potato waffle was just for research.

Of note: metered street parking, sidewalk seating, accessible, delivery.

Find it: 1028 N. Clark St., 312-967-0777, chicagosunnysideup.com

Hours: 8 a.m.-3 p.m. daily.

Cafe Robey — Second Helping

I really liked this place when I first visited a few years ago and decided to go back. It was a good choice.

The intersection of Damen, North and Milwaukee is always bustling, and I can't help but wonder: Doesn't anyone over here work?

The restaurant is in a hotel, with seating on either side that offers great views of the street and all those people.

We settled in and went right for the lattes while we scanned the menu for what was new.

I have always been a fan of a well-made Cuban sandwich, and this was the best I've had. The freshly baked ciabatta with tender pork shoulder, Gruyere, avocado, jalapenos and mustard was masterful and tasted just as good for dinner that night.

The Duck Hash had shredded duck, red peppers, onions and an egg on top; it was comforting and tasty.

To make up for all the indulgences, we tried the breakfast salad, because kale, strawberries, goat cheese, medium-poached egg and garlic vinaigrette seemed healthy-ish.

Of note: metered street parking, accessible.

Find it: 1616 N. Milwaukee Ave., entrance through the hotel door, 872-315-3084, caferobey.com

Hours: Brunch daily 7 a.m.-2 p.m., Saturday and Sunday until 3 p.m.; dinner 5 p.m.-10 p.m., Saturday and Sunday until 11 p.m.

Ina Pinkney, aka The Breakfast Queen, owned iconic West Loop breakfast spot Ina's for more than 30 years and now writes "Breakfast with Ina" monthly for Food & Dining.