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Lunch of the Month:

Opera Café & Patisserie

If you are craving gourmet French café fare with great service and a relaxed atmosphere, look no further than the Opera Café & Patisserie, open at its new location in Sorrento Valley since July 2008. This French bakery turned bistro offers crepes, sandwiches, quiches, salads and, of course, indulgent pastries and desserts, all for under \$10.

“Our concept is fresh, quality French cuisine with friendly and quick service,” said owner Thierry Cahez. “Our promise is to have your order to you within three minutes.”

My dining companions and I had the pleasure of trying some of Opera’s most popular lunch offerings. We loved the Croque Monsieur, a French version of grilled ham and cheese with black forest ham and melted Gruyere cheese. We also recommend the open-faced steak and Brie cheese sandwich with caramelized onions on warm Focaccia bread, accompanied by extra crispy seasoned French fries. Two of my personal favorites were the quiche Lorraine, an especially light, fluffy quiche with pancetta, onion and parsley; and the roasted vegetable crepes with sautéed mushrooms, asparagus, spinach and cheddar cheese, covered in a delectable, creamy beurre blanc white wine sauce. We also tried the pear and bleu cheese salad with sliced sweet pears, caramelized walnuts, cherry tomatoes, dried cranberries and tangy Dijon vinaigrette. This sweet, slightly tart but still delicate salad is perfect for those looking for a lighter lunch entrée.

The lunch hour gets busy, but the restaurant has plenty of room in the open dining area or large outdoor patio. Opera Café stuck by its “three minute” promise, and we enjoyed attentive and very quick and professional service. But don’t be fooled – plenty of patrons stay for hours enjoying their crepes, desserts, and wine or espresso. “Dining should be a relaxed and social experience,” said Cahez. “Would you like another espresso?”

True to its name, this patisserie excels in pastries. Dessert lovers will revel in the selection of cakes, tarts and cookies. Love chocolate? Try the flourless chocolate cake with a molten, bittersweet chocolate center or the chocolate mousse trilogy. Want to indulge in cheesecake? Try the French concoction of vanilla cheesecake mousse with white cake and a raspberry filling. Opera also serves great espresso to top the meal off, and recently began serving wine (Bordeaux, Cotes du Rhones, Fume Blanc, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, all between five and eight dollars a glass) and extended their hours to stay open Friday evenings.

Opera’s dedication to fresh food means that specials change daily. If you’re lucky enough to stop in when they are serving the boeuf bourguignon, you won’t be disappointed. This hearty dish features exceptionally tender and flavorful braised short ribs of beef swimming in a delicious red wine sauce.

Opera Café & Patisserie is conveniently located near the Sorrento Valley business park at 9254 Scranton Road, Monday through Thursday from 7:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Fridays from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., and Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (be sure to stop in and try their new Saturday brunch with homemade mimosas!) Opera also caters private parties and office lunches. For a full menu and more information, visit www.operapatisserie.com.



By Lisa Gesner