

## Des Moines Register

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### Check out these dining discoveries

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*Special to Des Moines Register*

Datebook Diner is a new convert to steak at Kelley's, but ticked about misleading descriptions at Forty Three.

By W.E. Moranville

Datebook Diner

Here are some finds and flaws I've recently come across while eating around town:

**MONDAY NIGHT STEAKS AT KELLEY'S:** A friend of mine recently dragged me kicking and screaming to Kelley's (3606 Beaver Ave. 277-3272) for dinner. Nothing against this good-natured Beavertown bar, but a smoky joint with TVs tuned to football is not my top choice for dinner out with friends.

But it was Monday night -and for my pal, this meant there was only one place to be: Kelley's for the Monday Night Steak Special.

What a steal! For \$7.50, the top sirloin steak was a good one and came with Texas-size garlic toast and a baked potato (but no salad). Fine dining it's not, but a good time at a great price it was.

**COSI CUCINA CHANGES ITS MENU:** I recently caught wind of a major overhaul of the menu at Cosi Cucina, so I asked chef/owner Doug Smith to fill me in.

"It's the most fun menu we've ever done," said Smith, adding that the menu will change twice a year for the sole purpose of hitting seasonal products.

The new fall/winter menu made its debut Oct. 28. New items include some sandwich surprises for lunch, including a BLT made from arugula and Cosi's own house-cured bacon, a fresh tuna salad sandwich with lemon-pepper aioli and a chicken-breast sandwich with herbed goat cheese. Breads will come from the bakers at Basil Proserpi.

Two particularly intriguing dinner entrees include Potato Ravioli with Smoked Mozzarella and Beef Tips, and a chicken breast stuffed with charroula (a Moroccan sauce), served over tomato risotto.

What won't change is Smith's dedication to offering inventive food at reasonable prices. Lunch entrees average around \$7.50 to \$8 dinner and pasta entrees average \$13.

**RECENT GRIPE:** The inventive dishes of fine-dining restaurants today take a lot more care and attention to detail than the mid-century steak-and-potato style of dining many of us grew up on. Still, I've noticed that a little too often -at places from private clubs to hot bistro-style joints -what comes out of the kitchen hasn't quite been living up to the impressive descriptions you see on menus.

Someone leaves off a promised gremolata relish a generic side dish is substituted for a more well-chosen one -without advance warning.

A recent case in point: A terrific-sounding duck dish at Forty Three (10th and Walnut streets 362-5224) promised balsamic glazed figs what came to the table were balsamic-glazed strawberries instead. There's a huge difference. The strawberry saga continued: For dessert, the pear-raspberry crisp turned out to be a pear-strawberry crisp.

Here's a plea to the area's fancy kitchens: If you want to raise the standards (and prices) for fine dining in Des Moines, lots of folks will march in your parade. But you've got to keep on top of the details. They're the difference between a good dish and a great one, which in turn is the difference between a restaurant that's "pretty good for Des Moines" and a great one in general.

**SANE PORTIONS, SANE PRICES:** I recently came across a nice surprise at Mezzodi's (4519 Fleur Drive 287-3333) -many entrees are offered in light-sized portions at reduced prices. Considering that most places serve twice as much food as most people should eat, this makes sense. Smaller portions also make it easier to save room for dessert, which is free on Wednesday nights.

DINER ALERT: All great cities boast good diners you know, the types of places that Dagwood heads to for mystery meatloaf, surprise soup and a chance to be away from Dithers a while.

A good old-fashioned, nothing-fancy diner has opened on Ingersoll. Pat's Corner Cafè (2716 Ingersoll Ave. 288-0982) is similar in genre, but serves much less dubious-sounding foods than at Dagwood's haunt. You'll find eggs any way, pancakes and omelets for breakfast burgers, tenderloins and other sandwiches for lunch, as well as a few daily specials. All in all, it has the easygoing vibe of a simple, good-natured neighborhood diner.

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