

Published June 15th, 2016

Find Your Friends and Food at Sideboard Neighborhood Kitchen

By A.K. Carroll



Lafayette's Sideboard offers breakfast, lunch and dinner. Photos A.K. Carroll

It's 11 a.m. on a Friday morning when I walk into Sideboard Neighborhood Kitchen and Coffee Bar, located next to A Runner's Mind, just across from Lafayette's Plaza Park. I take my place in the bustling line of customers and admire the eclectic décor - an antique scooter, mounted deer heads, an array of vintage glass - as I wait to order a cup of light-roast coffee from the woman at the register.

"Would you like anything else?" she asks, as co-owner and chef Erin Andrews, clad in a bright pink chef's jacket, pops out of the kitchen to check on her customers.

"What do you suggest?" I ask.

Andrews opens a case of house made pastries and reaches for a maple scone, then on second thought selects an English muffin. I'm skeptical of her choice, but game to try it. The muffin arrives hot from the toaster and crisp on both sides. Served with homemade preserves, it is thick, dense and flakey, more like a crumpet or British scone.

"No matter how many I make, we always sell out," says Andrews.

I can see why.

Sideboard opened its doors and its heart to the people of Lafayette on May 15. The second location for owners Erin and Ford Andrews (their first is in Danville) this homey New American hot spot offers a friendly local meeting space that serves quality coffee and three square meals a day in a building that dates back to the 1860s and carries a history as old as the city itself.

Customers order at the counter and take a number, or rather a staple - butter, fudge, pastries, and artichokes are just a few of the ingredients listed on table tags. Orders are delivered fresh from the kitchen and water, silverware and condiments are all self-serve from one of two side stations (sideboards).

"When I was a kid my grandma used to put everything on a sideboard," said Andrews. "I'd say, 'Grandma why'd you do that?' And she'd say, '[Because] it makes everyone talk to each other.'"

You'll find that same sort of sensibility here, in a neighborhood sort of place that is anything but pretentious. An odd assortment of large communal tables, which range from vintage 1960s to hand-painted wood, are great for larger parties or for meeting new friends. One back-corner high-top is particularly special. The first community table from Sideboard's Danville location (which moved in 2014), the table came to Lafayette as a sort of good omen.

"More people have met and become friends at that table [than anywhere else in the restaurant]," said Andrews. She has customers that trek all the way out from Danville just to sit at the table with the people they met years back.

Sideboard may not offer table service, but there's still plenty of attention to detail, from the twine-wrapped utensils at the take away station to the quilted picnic blankets on the front porch, where mosaic patio tables and bright turquoise umbrellas accommodate for morning sunshine and pet-strolling customers. Strung lights and heat lamps convert the space into a romantic evening spot.

Sideboard's coffee bar offers a selection of local small-batch coffees (Sightglass, Temple and Four Barrel) and hand-crafted espresso drinks. The fare, which is described as "handcrafted rustic comfort food," features ingredients that are natural, local, organic, seasonal and sustainable.

"We make everything from scratch down to the ketchup, aioli and potato chips," said Andrews.

Breakfast fare ranges from pastries and house-made granola with fruit and yogurt to veggie and bacon scrambles. An extended weekend menu includes made-to-order chilaquiles, French toast, huevos rancheros and shirred eggs, a gluten-free alternative to eggs benedict.

The lunch menu, which features seasonal specials and changes regularly, is heavy on fresh creations, like the shrimp ceviche salad made with hand-squeezed limes and loaded with mango salsa, plump tomatoes, crunchy tortilla strips and fresh guacamole. An array of gourmet sandwiches are served on ACME bread and accompanied by house made potato chips. Try the soft-shell crab sandwich, slow-roasted pork or a Prather Ranch cheddar burger. Sideboard also serves up a hearty mac'n cheese, a variety of savory sides and the best meatloaf Andrews has ever had. Dinner is much the same, with a few additional pastas and entrées.

Most dishes can be served family style and all are eligible for picnic service in the park, which is a great option for diners who have children, pets or an inkling for the outdoors. Fried chicken, which is served by the bucket, is ideal for such a situation.

There is a small selection of beers and variety of local wines, two of which are served on tap. They also do wine margaritas, sake-based Vampiros and house-made refreshers and shrub sodas, which come in flavors like watermelon mint and sparkling orange mango. Other kid-friendly beverage options include hot chocolate and root beer floats.

Eating indoors, under the original wood ceiling and among the mismatched furniture is a little like eating in an antique store-albeit a casual, clean and spacious one.

"It's is a neighborhood place," said Andrews. "That's why we don't have a sign. If you hear about [us] and it sounds good to you, it's going to be your kind of place."

Though you're sure to be taken care of, don't expect to be waited on hand and foot. Anything you need, you're likely to find on the sideboard.

3535 Plaza Way, Lafayette, CA 94549, (925) 310-4773, Open Monday-Sunday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.



Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA