

# StarTribune



EAT & DRINK

## Barnes & Noble's new Edina restaurant has all the makings of a bestseller

REVIEW: The bookstore's restaurant opens a new chapter on chain restaurants. | ★★½ out of 4 stars

By Rick Nelson | FEBRUARY 9, 2017 — 9:42AM

GALLERY  GRID

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LEILA NAVIDI — STAR TRIBUNE

Go figure. The most impressive chain restaurant to land in the Twin Cities in — well, I can't remember when — is located inside a bookstore.

Last fall, when Barnes & Noble announced plans to include Barnes & Noble Kitchen as a part of the relocation and reinvention of the company's 25-year-old Galleria location, my knee-jerk response was "color me skeptical." Anyone who encountered the dreary, prepackaged fare at the store's somnolent, Starbucks-fueled cafe probably had the same reaction.

Color me corrected.

The bookseller is following the example of other retailers — including Anthropologie, Urban Outfitters and Restoration Hardware — that have recently discovered that good food served in an attractive setting can act as a powerful customer magnet. It's hardly rocket science. Department stores have been doing the same thing for generations.

So far, three Barnes & Noble Kitchens have opened — the other two are just outside New York City and Sacramento. Two more — in Texas and Virginia — are scheduled to debut this summer. The retailer, sticking to what it knows best, wisely outsourced the nuts-and-bolts of the restaurant to a Los Angeles consultant, the Branstetter Group; the company's Sheamus Feeley is the chef behind the menu.

Allowing quality ingredients to shine without injecting too much fuss appears to be both Feeley's philosophy and skill set. He clearly understands the risk in serving roast chicken — it's so easy to screw up — but with risks come rewards.

## **Barnes & Noble Kitchen**

**★★1/2**

**Info:** 3230 Galleria, Edina, 952-929-4366, [barnesandnoblekitchen.com](http://barnesandnoblekitchen.com).

Here, the airline cut arrived piping hot, the skin tantalizingly crisped and pocked with salt and herbs, the meat juicy and succulent. It was served with buttery mashed potatoes and a rich, flavor-packed pan gravy, an

**Hours:** 9 a.m.-10 p.m. Mon.-Sat., 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Sun.

**Service:** Personable, attentive and knowledgeable.

**Price ranges:** With one \$23 exception, nothing exceeds the upper teens.

**Recommended dishes:** Burger, tomato soup, guacamole, burrata, hummus, chicken, salmon, pancakes, avocado toast, cookies.

**Beverage program:** 22 (familiar, around-the-world) wines available by both bottle and glass, priced above average. Happy to see a half-dozen Minnesota craft beers, all \$6. An OK, Starbucks-affiliated espresso bar.

**Special menus:** Kitchen gives a nod to vegetarian and vegan diets.

brazenly delicious potatoes, which are basically pulled-apart and deep-fried baked spuds, a formula that just might put a dent in America's love for the French fry.)

There are a handful of well-composed salads — and, yes, kale makes its dutiful appearance — but what held my attention is the hearty, borderline luxurious tomato soup. So uncomplicated, and so delicious.

Naturally, it's paired with a grilled cheese sandwich, one that's exactly what it should be. In other words, two butter-drenched slices of Rustica's finely

understated combination that couldn't have been more appealing on a frigid February night.

Salmon, farm-raised in the Faroe Islands, was seared on the flat-top grill, leaving the skin crisped but the flesh fall-apart succulent, served with a tailor-made accompaniment: a colorful, delightfully lively tabbouleh.

That's about as formal as it gets, and about as expensive; either can be had for roughly the cost of a hardcover novel. For a burger, Feeley rejects the skinny, double-patty route, opting instead for a hefty, single-patty blend of brisket and chuck that's topped with a slice of sharp Cheddar and slipped into a toasted, milk-enriched bun from the skilled folks at Rustica.

The results easily rank among the Top 20 in a Twin Cities' burger pantheon. (And that's not even getting into the



grained pain de mie, filled with that sharp Cheddar and a Wisconsin-made Havarti, then crisped until the cheese can't help but go gooey all over the place.

A book club could easily convene over the shareable dishes, which echo Feeley's straightforward approach to modernizing classics while using first-rate ingredients.

Kudos to the chunky, brimming-with-cilantro guacamole with crisp, salty tortilla chips (crank up the heat by adding a smoky tomatillo salsa), and the tahini-laced hummus, spread across sturdy house-baked lavash.

But top honors belong to the generous hunk of imported Italian burrata — mozzarella's upper-tax-bracket sibling — that's presented with toasted bread, a lively basil pistou and roasted tomatoes, the oven slowly but surely intensifying their flavor. Don't miss it.

The kitchen pulls together a handful of uncomplicated sweets, including a pleasant seasonal fruit crisp and an appropriately luscious butterscotch pot de crème.

Still, the dessert to order is a trio of warm-from-the-oven cookies: a tender chocolate crinkle that radiates bittersweet wickedness, a buttery chocolate chip wonder that's matured well beyond its Toll House brethren and a chewy, raisin-packed oatmeal cookie that comes off as virtuous but probably isn't. They're baked in small batches throughout the day, and are noticeably fresh.

### **Flexible, user-friendly space**

Although it doesn't quite feel that way, the restaurant is located in the basement (or "Valet Level" in Galleria-speak, which surely ranks as an all-time favorite Edina-based euphemism). The saving grace is a bank of windows, which contribute much-needed sunlight but unfortunately also offer a view that's primarily parked cars. Remember, it's a shopping mall, not an arboretum.



LEILA NAVIDI, STAR TRIBUNE

Chip Purnell, left, and Dennis Mongoven eat lunch at Barnes & Noble Kitchen in Edina.

Galleria's most comfortable solo-dining acreage. The next layer is an attractive lounge, anchored by a laptop-friendly communal table. Finally, the small-scale dining room.

Because we're meant to hang around, there's decent Wi-Fi, but a free rack of honest-to-goodness newspapers was a detail that cheered this old-school print guy to no end.

Not once was I asked the highly annoying, "Would you like to buy a Barnes & Noble membership and save 10 percent?" That omission is enough to get me to return, but get this: Members do receive the discount in the restaurant.

### **(Very) good morning**

The restaurant's brief breakfast menu isn't going to redefine America's approach to The Most Important Meal of the Day. It's limited to just coffee and pastries (after doing his research, Feeley had the good sense to rely upon Patisserie 46 for top-shelf muffins and croissants), plus three dishes.

Happily, they're three terrific dishes, in both approach and execution.

The appealing, wide-open space (designed by New York City-based AvroKO Hospitality Group) is tricked out in handsome, vaguely Danish Modern overtones, all blond walnut, clean lines and cheery blue upholstery. The restaurant's savvy, something-for-everyone layout was probably focus-grouped ad nauseam, but it works like a charm.

The line between bookstore and restaurant is blurred by a walk-up coffee and pastry counter. That's backed by a semicircular bar, easily the



One of the hottest trends in a.m. fare is avocado toast, and this one's a doozy: a lightly crisped, lavishly buttered slice of Patisserie 46's sturdy sourdough Levain that's piled high with creamy scrambled eggs and mashed, perfectly ripe avocados, their flavor enhanced with sea salt flakes and splashes of olive oil and lemon juice. Why am I not preparing this at home on a regular basis?



LEILA NAVIDI, STAR TRIBUNE

The lemon-ricotta pancakes.

Pancakes, lightened by ricotta's magical powers, feature occasional (and welcome) pops of lemon, and the double stack is finished with a massive dollop of heavy, slightly sweet whipped cream, some usual-suspects berries and rich maple syrup. They're irresistible, to the nth degree.

An enormous burrito breaks absolutely no new ground, choosing instead to repurpose components culled from other dishes: those amazing crispy

potatoes, the dreamy brisket from an equally dreamy mac-and-cheese, and the fluffy scrambled eggs. Oh, there are even sides of guacamole and tomatillo salsa, both of which improve everything they touch. Add it all up, and who cares if it's all one giant instant replay? The results work, big time.

Here's one quibble: The pancakes and burrito — both are served until noon — weigh in at \$11. The avocado toast, an all-day item, goes for \$12. Like so much of the rest of the menu, all three feel a tad overpriced.

Given a relatively small number of dishes to master, the kitchen's consistency quotient is spot-on. But the bummer is that frequent diners might find themselves growing bored when faced with such a limited and fairly static menu. Shoppers cannot subsist on award-worthy burgers alone.

Still, good for you, Barnes & Noble. The Nook, your stab at the e-reader, might be a dud. But don't give up, because this whole restaurant thing? Keep going, you're definitely on the right track.