

A bagel revolution for Madison at Gotham New York Bagels and Eats

By Linda Falkenstein

For as long as I have been keeping track of the Isthmus "Eats" restaurant database and over-seeing the "Madison's Favorites" readers' poll we take every year, I have been hearing complaints about Madison's bagel supply. (That's since 1999, for you accuracy nuts out there.)

Every year in the poll, for the category "Favorite Bagel Place" or whatever we call it in a particular year, there'd be a handful of wags who'd scribble in their vitriol: Bagels! Madison doesn't have any bagels. Yeecchhhhhh. Nothing here like the bagels in New York, they'd wail.

Ian Gurfield of Ian's Pizza and Joe Gaglio of MATC's culinary program likewise perceived moans of distress from Madison bagel lovers and decided to do something about it. This month, Gotham New York Bagels and Eats opened in the former Jacobson's space at 112 E. Mifflin St.

While I am admittedly less fussy about my bagels than the people who fill up their Faves ballots ragging on Einstein Bros. and Bagels Forever, I do like good fresh breads, and Gotham's bagels will be manna to dough-lovers.

A taut exterior and a chewy-but-not-too-chewy interior have a fresh-out-of-the-oven wholesomeness, but are never a labor to gnaw through. Bagels there come in a handful of standard flavors: plain, poppy, sesame, salt, garlic, onion, pumpernickel, whole wheat honey, egg, cinnamon raisin, everything, and super egg everything.

While I give high marks to the bagels themselves, the "Eats" part of the menu gets mixed reviews. The seven sandwiches on the menu seem on the pricey side. I enjoyed the somewhat salty "Spanish Harlem" (shredded roasted pork shoulder and capicola ham fried on the grill, with melted Swiss and mustard) and the Corona (chicken breast, avocado and chimichurri cream cheese) but at \$7.25 and \$7.75, respectively, could they at least toss in a bag of chips? The three tiny pickle slices didn't do it.

And if this is supposed to be all New York style, where is the big New York deli dill pickle?



LINDA FALKENSTEIN

Other sandwiches include the "Long-guy-land" (turkey, fontina and arugula); Williamsburg (pastrami on rye); Brighton Beach (smoked salmon and cream cheese with watercress, onion and tomato); and the Spring Street (baked eggplant, broccoli rabe, fontina and mint pesto).

Two seasonal seafood sandwiches are unique on Madison sandwich menus -- a clam sandwich (Sept.-April) and a softshell crab sandwich (May to August) will be worth investigating when the time comes around. Sandwich prices run from \$6.25-\$8.75).

The Friday soup of the day was an excellent Lemon and Chickpea with black olives and feta. The texture was a little chunky, but I found the lemon irresistible. My dining companion had the opposite reaction to the soup, though -- too thick and too lemony.

There are two featured soups daily, \$3.50 for a cup and \$5 pint. And it's \$8.50 for a take-home quart. The roster of inventive soups (e.g., matzo ball and turkey; curried red lentil, steamed greens and harissa; toasted barley, wild mushrooms, and pecorino romano; and more) will pull me in again.

And the basic bagel with cream cheese and good Illy's coffee in the morning? I'll definitely be heading to the office via East Mifflin street more often. ♦

