

Artisan Eatery pairs craft cuisine with casual vibe

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By Florida Weekly Staff | on January 31, 2018

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The Port Richmond cheesesteak is named after a Philadelphia neighborhood.

The name of Artisan Eatery sounds like an oxymoron. The first word implies unique, hand-crafted slow food made with carefully chosen ingredients. The latter suggests a casual restaurant with perhaps less ambitious food, prepared and served quickly.

Well, this new South Fort Myers restaurant is taking some of the snobbery out of the word “artisan” and adding levels of quality and complexity to the simplistic term “eatery.” The menu relies on standard breakfast dishes, hot and cold sandwiches and a couple of entrée specials for the nighttime crowd. But your morning meal could consist of eggs and handmade sausage

from local Circle C Farms washed down with coffee brewed from locally roasted beans. That Cuban sandwich you order for lunch or dinner will be layered with house-roasted pork, and the meatballs on the fresh-baked baguette are made with Wagyu beef.

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The Mediterranean flatbread uses hummus instead of a sauce.

Chef Timothy Yoa, who opened Artisan Eatery with his wife, Healy Yoa, is dedicated to putting in the time and attention required for scratch-made food. A graduate of the International Culinary School at the Art Institute of Philadelphia, he trained at some of the city's top restaurants. After 25 years there, Mr. Yoa became sous chef at Naples Grande Beach Resort before striking out on his own in December with Artisan Eatery in a newly developed plaza on Daniels Parkway.



Wagyu meatballs are offered as an appetizer as well as a sandwich.

The décor is modern but homey, with framed graphics of butcher charts diagramming cuts of meat mounted on mint-green walls in the long, narrow dining space. Glistening subway tile contrasts the distressed wood planks that cover the face of the counter. The restaurant's branding is on point, with a silhouette of a cast-iron skillet in the logo to suggest homespun wholesomeness. Artisan Eatery uses the fast-casual model, where you order at the counter for delivery to your table. That probably works well during busy lunch service, but seemed a little awkward at night when we wanted to sit down and enjoy an adult beverage before deciding what we wanted to eat. The staff kindly accommodated us, as they weren't too busy yet. They even asked if we wanted them to change the music, but we liked the jazz singers crooning in the background.

A chalkboard list touts specials of the day, which included dinner entrees of New York strip



steak and seared sea scallops and Parmesan risotto with tomato-caper butter for \$26-\$28. Most of the regular sandwiches, salads and flatbreads cost less than \$15, and we found plenty of appealing options there.

Beer and wine are half price between 3 and 6 p.m., so our house Pinot Noir and Bury Me Creamation Ale were just \$3.50 each.

From a half-dozen starters/sides, we decided on the Wagyu meatballs (\$9) and Parmesan truffle fries (\$6). The trio of meatballs were nicely browned and moist within. They could have used a splash more tomato sauce, but shards of Parmesan and slivers of fresh basil added flourishes of flavor. The menu mentioned untoasted baguette, but it was missing from the plate.

There are sea salt and pepper fries and sweet potato fries with maple aioli, but it's hard to imagine either outshining the addictive Parmesan-truffle fries served in a basket big enough for three or four people to share. Uniformly golden and super-crisp, they were showered with grated Parm, minced rosemary and just enough truffle oil to add some earthy essence. The garlic aioli served on the side wasn't garlicky enough for our taste, but that was our only quibble as we nibbled our way to the bottom of the basket.

The scallop dinner special was tempting, but we decided to stick to the regular menu for our first visit. There are a handful of salads with quinoa or greens and optional chicken, as well as craft sandwiches such as a Mediterranean chicken wrap, lobster roll and chicken curry. Toasty options from the panini grill include an intriguing vegetarian version combining eggplant, roasted sweet peppers, sun-dried tomato pesto and fresh mozzarella.

Considering Chef Yoa's roots in Philly, we figured his Port Richmond Cheesesteak (\$11) — named after a neighborhood in the city — would be the real deal and it was. The shaved ribeye was moist and beefy — you might hear him chopping meat on the griddle to order — and the onions were caramelized to silken sweetness. You can choose other cheeses, but you can't go wrong with the classic Cheez Whiz, which deliciously binds together the meat and onions. Even the pickle on the side was impressive — a bright-green half-sour spear tasting fresher and snapping more crisply than a typical pickle has a right to.

in the know

Artisan Eatery
8951 Daniels Parkway, Fort Myers; 887-4884

Ratings:
Food: ★★★★★
Service: ★★★★★½
Atmosphere: ★★★

>> **Hours:** 8 a.m.-9 p.m. daily
>> **Reservations:** Not accepted
>> **Credit cards:** Accepted
>> **Price range:** Breakfast \$4.50-\$12; lunch/dinner main courses, \$9-\$28
>> **Beverages:** Beer and wine
>> **Specialties of the house:** Breakfast food, sandwiches
>> **Volume:** Low
>> **Parking:** Plaza lot
>> **Website:** artisaneatery.com

★★★★★ Superb
★★★★ Noteworthy
★★★ Good
★★ Fair
★ Poor

You might think that flatbreads have been played out for a while, but you probably haven't encountered one like Artisan Eatery's Mediterranean (\$12). Served on a wooden board, the thin, crisp crust is spread with lush hummus, which makes a good base for chickenbreast chunks, artichoke hearts, sweet peppers and creamy dabs of goat cheese. It truly put a new spin on flatbread.

Desserts vary and might include crème brulee, bread pudding or flourless chocolate cake. I took home a hefty wedge of banana cake (\$6) — two layers of moist, dense cake held together by cream cheese icing and decorated with vanilla wafers.

One visit probably isn't enough to do Artisan Eatery justice. With an extensive menu of breakfast favorites and complex dinner specials like brownbutter monkfish with polenta, there are plenty of reasons to return to place that's so much more than an "eatery." |

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