

Café offers host of tasty choices

Imagine that today the streets near UC Berkeley are filled with Starbucks and sushi joints, but there was a time when the edge of campus had more than its fair share of bohemian cafés — critically important if you were under age and hampered by limited funds. Lady Marmalade would have fit right in.

Brightly coloured walls boast the kind of art that makes you smile and the collection of mismatched tables and chairs could have been taken from the set of the *Wonder Years*.

Arriving with Vicki to grab a bite recently, it occurred to me that if strains of Dylan instead of Coldplay filled the room here, a survivor of the '70s could be forgiven for wondering if they were having a flashback after a few moments.

This is a popular spot, with good reason. Service is great — if a little short on coffee refills — and staff are polite and helpful. A truly interesting menu offers all-day breakfast and lunch options and everything is made to order, meaning there are times when food takes a little longer than it would in other places. Don't let this deter you — in my experience it is worth waiting for.

It's refreshing to see a breakfast menu that doesn't rely on a list of omelettes and eggs Benedict with the same fillings. Though Lady Marmalade offers a good

LADY MARMALADE

Address: 608 Johnson St., Victoria
Tel. (250) 381-2872

Open daily from 8:30 a.m. - 5 for lunch and breakfast. Dinner served from 5 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday.

Major credit cards and Interac accepted. Partially wheelchair accessible. Please phone for details.

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list of reinterpreted Benedicts (\$10.50 - \$13.95) with well thought out-flavour combinations, such as ham, red onion and chipotle mayo or cheddar with bacon and mango, there are also some unique options. They include waffles made with aged white cheddar and spinach drizzled with smoky orange and tomato cream, served with roasted tomatoes, crisp bacon and a palate-refreshing salad (\$10.50) and organic multigrain porridge (\$7.95) topped with sour cream and cardamom scented apple, served with your choice of milk or soy milk.

With considerable difficulty, Vicki narrowed things down to *huevos rancheritos* (\$10.95) a generous breakfast featuring soft scrambled eggs flavoured with chilies and melted cheese, topped with chipotle salsa and served with warm whole wheat tortillas, a dollop of guacamole and a pool

of delicious black beans. Like many dishes here, tofu can be substituted for an additional dollar. If you want Mexican flavour with a little meat, try the *hevos Miga* for a plateful of eggs tossed with scallions, tomatoes, chorizo, cilantro and organic corn chips, served with brown rice and beans, sour cream and fiery pico de gallo.

I choose from the lunch menu, enjoying an ample chunk of baguette filled with warm breast of chicken, blue cheese, roasted tomatoes, spinach — though it was missing the charred red onion it usually has — served with a good green salad tossed with a particularly well made ginger and sesame dressing. Also notable from this section of the menu is the tuna melt, made with walnuts and Brie, and one of the most appealing vegetarian sandwiches I have ever come across, made from Wild-fire bread slathered with basil pesto and cream cheese, stuffed with roasted eggplant, peppers, tomatoes, zucchini and beets.

Portions are good without relying on the usual half a plate of fried potatoes to fool people into thinking that they're getting some tremendous bargain, but unfortunately this meant neither of us were interested in attempting either of the desserts — rice pudding made with toasted coconut and mango or apple crisp served with vanilla ice cream and berry coulis.

I also visited recently with my friend Lizz, who encountered the usual difficulties in making her selection, but eventually settled on the healthful choice of fresh fruit parfait — a cornucopia of kiwi, banana, strawberries, melon and green grapes layered with yoghurt and honey, crowned with cinnamon granola and berry coulis, served in an oversize snifter with half a toasted bagel.

Due to the generally dreary weather that week, I was in the mood for something warm and comforting, my choice of pork meatballs swimming in a bowl of tomato and chipotle soup with chunks of avocado, melted white cheddar and brown basmati rice served with warmed tortillas won a narrow victory over the option of free-run chicken, chickpeas and root vegetables flavoured with Moroccan spices on a mound of cous cous served with a dollop of yogurt and dried fruits.

It's hard to fault this place, but I hate having to wave people down for a refill of coffee. It would also improve things if the boxes and general detritus cluttering the area near the bar could be dealt with and on recent visits, the bathrooms always look as though they haven't been cleaned in a couple of days.

That being said, it won't stop me from standing in line with my newspaper waiting for a seat.