

Go Lady, Go

Funky art and fabulous sandwiches go together

By JAMES RUSSELL

If you're downtown and hungry between 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. daily, check behind the scaffolding and plywood on the corner of Johnson Street and Government for Lady Marmalade, another great addition to our lively restaurant scene, serving hearty, healthy, all-day breakfast and lunch.

That construction site seems to have been there for ages, but there is a buzz about this restaurant and people are finding it despite the scaffolding.

The place is hip and cool—colourful, mismatched retro vinyl chairs surround about 10 tables, and T-shirts, tattoos and construction guys are common sights. The Marmalade staff is laid-back, too, often welcoming the construction workers from outside their front window, some of whom come in for lunch, others to fill up their water bottles.

The all-day breakfast has been getting rave reviews, with items such as the poached egg BLT on Wildfire bread with chipotle mayo (\$9.50), Annie's organic buckwheat fresh fruit crepe with lemony yogurt, granola and honey (\$8.95) and a good selection of the ever-popular eggs Benny with your choice of black forest ham, steamed spinach, roast tomato or bacon. They come with potatoes, salad and "lovely lemony" hollandaise—just the way I like it (\$9.50-\$10).

The lunch is good too. Salads, sandwiches and beginners are available all day, the portions are generous, and nothing is over 10 bucks, although there isn't much under \$8. In fact, the full flavour and large portions of everything made me think that smaller sized options would be a great addition to the menu—half portions would be plenty for some, and it could be a great way to attract people wanting lighter lunches (and may encourage patrons to try more than one item, if their appetite calls for it).

I recommend either of the beginners as appetizers, snacks or a lighter lunch. The roasted vegetables (\$7.95) were excellent: a nice selection of tender, savoury root vegetables, eggplant, broccoli, and zucchini, well-roasted and served with a soy and balsamic reduction. Some of the vegetables were almost caramelized, having spent long enough in the oven to bring out a sweet, soft, roasted flavour.

The bruschetta—with roasted tomatoes, kalamata olives, feta cheese and fresh herbs on organic Wildfire focaccia (7.50)—was marvelous. When I think of lunch at Lady Marmalade, I now think of fabulous bread and perfectly roasted vegetables. The sweetness of the roasted tomatoes perfectly complemented the saltiness and zing of the olives and feta,



Lady Marmalade
608 Johnson Street (at
Government)
8:30am-4pm
381-2872

and the bread from Wildfire bakery—what can I say? If you don't already know Wildfire (1517 Quadra St.), all you need

to know is it's arguably Victoria's best bakery, especially if you like substantial bread made the old-fashioned way, in a wood-fired oven with local organic ingredients. (Call it the anti-Wonder Bread place.) And

kudos to Lady Marmalade for supporting Wildfire—the bread is not cheap, but it's worth every penny.

Speaking of bread, there are half-a-dozen sandwiches to choose from, including a club sandwich with poached chicken, bacon, avocado and smoky chipotle mayo (\$9.50), a tuna melt with brie and walnuts (\$9.50) and a panini with grilled Wildfire herbed-blackpepper focaccia with roasted vegetables, podano and cheddar cheeses and kalamata olives (9.50). When I had the latter, the bread and vegetables were excellent, but being an olive fan I was hoping for more than two olives in my large sandwich.

However, the crunchy Thai slaw (6.95) I sampled that day more than made up for it. Explosively fresh and flavourful, the combination of sliced green and purple cabbage, fresh cilantro, raw peanuts, and the spicy-sweet ginger dressing made my taste buds sing, and made me want to stay and try some of the other salads: spinach, Caesar, big mixed salad, Asian noodle and Mediterranean. Most people I know who have been there have been over and over again.

And like many other Victoria restaurants—in a city with both more artists and more eateries per capita than just about anywhere else in Canada—eating and art share the room. Some people expect art to simply decorate, or better yet, blend in; they don't want to feel like they are eating lunch in a gallery. And while they may wonder at the validity of "those doodles on canvas," others might recognize the cartoonish style of the work currently on view as akin to much of the drawing-based work currently popping up in the art magazines. Not only are the paintings and mixed media pieces lively and refreshingly idiosyncratic, they suit the youthful, funky atmosphere of the place. I liked it. M