

Cafe feeds body, mind

What do you get when you cross a small, contemporary bookstore with a simple, quaint cafe, complete with ceiling fans? You have the Hardback Cafe on South Columbus Street, a unique combination of literature, live music and absolutely divine cuisine.

According to co-owner Grant Kornberg, the combination of an upbeat bookstore with a cafe is a perfect match, because people want to look at something or read while they eat. Kornberg and his partner Tom Cook got the idea of combining the two places from a similar venture in Washington, D.C.

The two said they could think of no better place to try the idea in than Chapel Hill, a rapidly growing city with a broad mix of people. The Hardback Cafe is the first of its type in the area, although the concept is a popular one on the West Coast. Kornberg said he is confident that the Hardback Cafe is "a Chapel Hill sort of place."

The food at the Hardback Cafe is as pleasing to the eye as it is to the palate. Everything is prepared to order by hand in the kitchen in an effort to eliminate fatty, frozen foods from the cafe menu.

The bakery items are carefully prepared in the kitchen every morning. The chocolate layer and carrot cakes, served in large slices, are cuts above the rest, with moist, firm layers and creamy frostings. Not to be outdone, the chocolate croissant is heaven itself with a flaky, buttery roll that literally melts on the tongue and a creamy, soft, bitter-sweet chocolate filling on the inside.

With such a praiseworthy menu, one might think the prices would be outrageous; but the menu is so reasonably priced, it is within even a college student's tight budget. Sandwiches start at \$2.25 for a grilled cheese and go up to \$5.95 for the Hardback Club. Each sandwich, prepared on natural grain bread with lettuce, tomato, mustard and mayonnaise, comes with chips.

The Gourmet Burgers range in price up to \$3.50 for 1/4 pound lean ground beef with a choice of topping, chips and red cabbage slaw.

Light eaters will be pleased with the choice of five salads and the soup du jour. (The gaspacho - a cold, spicy tomato-based soup with chunks of zucchini, celery, tomatoes and parsley served in a mug - is great.) For snacking or side orders, a variety of bagels, nachos and croissants are available.

A major drawback to an enjoyable meal at the Hardback Cafe is size, or lack thereof. Unfortunately, the restaurant is the size of a shoebox, and one stone-faced waitress kept squeezing and bumping her way



DTH/Dan Charlson

Hardback Cafe has literary atmosphere

Anne Doggett Restaurants

between my table and another, making my already-bruised ribs crack under the pressure. To make matters worse, while Miss Personality was doing the humba with the table, live music was vibrating the lettuce off the end of my fork, even though I was sitting the entire way

across the cafe from the band.

The cafe has live music only on Tuesday and Thursday nights, so it is possible to eat there without going deaf in the process.

If you're in pursuit of a restaurant with attentive service and a great atmosphere, I can't help you. If, however, you are looking for large portions of fresh, carefully prepared sandwiches, salads and desserts, I suggest the Hardback Cafe, which opens everyday from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.

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