

Mixed Use: Muss & Turner's

By CHRISTIANE LAUTERBACH

Proponents of new urbanism tout architecture as the key to a balanced and carefree lifestyle. Live in a multiuse development and you're steps from the market, minutes from gourmet dining, blocks from fine art galleries. One development that embraces the good life is Ivy Walk, a prime residential/commercial community in the evolving suburban zone where Vinings melts into Smyrna. Residents can mosey over to Muss & Turner's and enjoy upscale deli fare by day and sophisticated contemporary American cuisine by night in a versatile establishment that also sells chef-quality prepared foods and serves as their unofficial clubhouse and bar.

Muss & Turner's established itself as an exceptional lunch and takeout establishment roughly two years ago. Now that this suave chef-run deli has extended its hours to capture the dinner crowd, it has become a nonstop gourmet hub for the neighborhood. The nimble switch from day to night and from deli to dinner is facilitated by the restaurant's flexible L-shaped space, which, like the open-plan architecture of the townhomes of Ivy Walk, is designed to be multifunctional. The long side of the "L" is dominated by a tall community table facing a formidable row of refrigerator cases, while the short side serves as an intimate dining nook with a handful of sturdy, polished wooden tables. A posh bar corner mediates between the two areas. Find a good vantage point and you'll observe Muss & Turner's many types of customers: the young mom making a cookie run, the bachelor loading up on cheeses, the big-shot who wants a two-inch dry-aged Angus rib-eye cut and sent to his table as an off-the-menu alternative to the entrees.

During the day, business is pretty typical of a deli, albeit one with an uncommon passion for the culinary arts. One of the restaurant's most endearing qualities is the way it tempers braggadocio with humor. The sandwiches made on artisan bread bear names like Reason to Reuben, Insult to Philly, and Are You Kidding Me? Perusing the list of menu items, one finds funny commentary and family lore ("Muss's grandfather, Papa Max, served this at his deli in Boston"). Ordering takes place at the counter, with heavy assistance from a staff that meets you at the door and walks you through the process. Then, at 5:30 p.m. sharp, the formula changes to full table service, and the same pleasant youngsters, still wearing black T-shirts that say "The Belly Rules the Mind," become proper waiters.

While a few of the signature sandwiches remain on the dinner menu, it is the ambitious plated dishes such as precious Berkshire pork loin over buttery lentils with a crisp endive and apple salad and Harris Ranch flank steak with roasted beets, fingerling potatoes, and fresh horseradish that rule the dining room. The dinner fare changes every three weeks and fetches luxury prices, and while the items are as ambitious as any at a Midtown bistro, the atmosphere is decidedly low-key, with patrons coming fresh from work or after tennis. The bar, commanded by Ric Brown (an old-timer with a comfortable paunch who stands behind a curvy red slab ready to discuss Belgian beers and, to a lesser degree, fine wines), is a busy scene.

The to-go options could amount to a rousing dinner, with selections such as a fabulous pulled pork sandwich topped with applewood bacon or a hot pot made with diver scallops in miso broth. One can purchase *recherché* food products such as the most expensive and best soy sauce in Atlanta, olive oil perfumed with *herbes de Provence*, heirloom grits, and specially bottled *peri-peri* hot sauce.

Weeknights draw a steady stream of Ivy Walk residents and professionals from nearby developments who are happy to eat *foie gras* in their flip-flops, but Muss & Turner's tends to empty out a little on

Saturday night. After all, who wants to lead someone special past a display of potato chips on the way to a not-so-romantic table set with a candle and a bottle of wine (but no tablecloth)?

In case you were wondering, Muss & Turner aren't made-up characters. Chef Todd Mussman ("Mussy" to his business partner and front-of-the-house man, Ryan Turner, who, incidentally, lives above the store) is a well-known veteran of the Fifth Group Restaurants' mini-empire. A Jewish kid from Boston who had no problem executing contemporary Southern food for South City Kitchen and pretty brilliant authentic Mexican food at Sala, Mussman is in his element kipping salmon (a light curing process) and cooking corned beef from scratch. He assembles and ages his own chorizo, and you can see him daily slinging fat "Romanian drip" sandwiches crammed with tangy pastrami and Dijon mustard and retrieving crunchy pickles from huge glass jars.

You may eventually notice that all prices on the menu end in the number "3." This is to remind the owners of what they call the three-legged-stool philosophy: quality food, a comfortable atmosphere, and gracious hospitality. This strategy can't help but succeed. No matter what your needs are, they have been anticipated by this eclectic beacon of good taste.

Critic's Choice

Sandwich: "The Burger" features grass-fed local beef, Grafton cheddar, and homemade cilantro mayonnaise on a fat kaiser roll.

Soup: The selection changes every day. Called "Yesterday's Soup" on the menu and made the day before to let the flavors mellow, this is a hearty course you won't want to miss.

Entree: You can't go wrong with dry-aged beef or Berkshire pork (shown above), both from exceptional producers and used in a variety of daily dishes.

Dessert: At the opposing end of the spectrum, "Tagalong" cookies (an homage to the famous Girl Scout cookies) and rice pudding brûlée will prove equally satisfactory.

Vital Statistics

Cuisine: Jewish deli meets quality contemporary American cuisine

Capacity: 75 seats

Setting: Bright and opulent gourmet store with dedicated dining areas and fun wine bar

Prices: \$8.93 sandwiches, \$14.93 foie gras appetizer, and entrees inching into the \$30 range

Reservations: Accepted for parties of six or more

Credit Cards: All major

Hours: Mon.–Thurs. 11 a.m.–9 p.m.; Fri. & Sat. 11 a.m.–10 p.m.

Address: 1675 Cumberland Parkway, in Ivy Walk, Smyrna

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