



Crêpe Cravings Satisfied

By Marisa Marsey

My friends and I play a game called “Restaurant.” For all the wonderful eateries Hampton Roads harbors, from mom-and-pop modest to hip upmarket, we ruminate about what we lack. We’ve seen many nosh-niches filled over the years—Ethiopian, Laotian, Bangladeshi, pho galore—yet crêperie is one that continually surfaced. Sure, we enjoy Baker’s Crust’s dessert Noisettes and Diablotins, but there was no dedicated spot for French, supermodel-thin pancakes. Until now. Lamia’s Crêpes opened in May on downtown Norfolk’s Granby Street. It’s a petite Parisian-accented place with a couple of crêpe-making stations (one in the front window), a lean-to counter with a dollop of stools inside, and a few tables outside on the sidewalk.

Based on the enthusiastic reaction it’s receiving, we weren’t the only ones craving a crêperie. As I waited in line at Lamia’s one weekday at lunchtime, the 30-something fellow behind me bragged he was working his way through the menu. Thus far, he’d had the Bretonne (ham, Swiss cheese, tomatoes, red onions, house made aioli), the Poulet (chicken, mushrooms, spinach, Swiss cheese, Béchamel), and the Saumon (smoked salmon). We weighed the merits of the Mediterranean (roasted red peppers, tomatoes, red onions, spinach, tapenade, house made aioli) and shared an indulgent smile over the Classic (Nutella, chocolate sauce). He’s fond of the German (freshly squeezed lemon, salted caramel, sugar) and came today for the simple but elegant Parisian

(Swiss cheese, sea salt, ground black pepper).

As crêpe-crazed as he was, the woman at the front of the line was even more thrilled. She’s 96 and originally from Brittany, the cradle of crêpes. But it’s a dream come true most of all for owner Lamia Pappas.

Algerian-born, Lamia (say it like llama with a “me” in the middle) lived in Paris when she was a child and learned the art of pouring batter onto a circular griddle and spreading it with a T-shaped wooden rake, then adding filling and carefully folding the cooked crêpe, from her babysitter. “I love to eat them so much!” she gushes. “I always make crêpes for my family and friends.”

When she moved here in 2001, she lamented: “I couldn’t find anyone doing them.” So she traveled to Washington, D.C. or New York when the urge to go out for crêpes struck. As a flight attendant, that wasn’t as hard as it sounds but still, friends encouraged her to open her own place and, in 2005, she wrote a business plan. For years, she tried to get it off the ground to no

avail. Then, one day last year, she learned about Vibrant Spaces, a Downtown Norfolk Council initiative to attract businesses offering unique experiences that blur the boundary between store and street through incentives including \$20,000 and reduced rent for two years. One of three proposals chosen this go-round (along with Muddy Paws Downtown and Prince Ink), her sweet and savory crêpes—a decade in the making—are finally rolling. She even sells rakes for Gallic gourmets to use in their own kitchens, but most folks seem happy to come here. After consuming her taste of home, the nonagenarian Breton proclaimed she’d be back. **U**

401 Granby St., Norfolk. 757-961-1181. Open Tues.-Thurs. from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., Fri. & Sat. from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Sun. from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. facebook.com/lamiascrepes. Savory crêpes: \$8-11 (buckwheat batter for an additional buck), sweet crêpes: \$6-8 (plus \$1 with ice cream or fruit), Orange, Perrier, coffees, teas and sodas: \$1.50-2.75.

Still MAD About Chocolate

We were sad about MAD About Chocolate when we learned in December that Marcel Desaulniers, the James Beard Award-winning “Guru of Ganache,” would be orbiting one last Golly Polly Doodle and frosting a final Double MAD Brownie before the whimsical Williamsburg chocolate café he opened four years ago with his wife Connie, whose artwork lit up the colorful interior, would go dark. But before we could shed a bittersweet tear for the chocolatier, the Black Mamba cookies and Mrs. D’s chocolate chips are back in business.

The story goes that Mike Riordan, a food-service veteran, came in one day to get a cookie and came away with a whole lot more. The store. Many employees have stayed on and the offerings haven’t changed a lick. The menu still features narcotically delicious sweets and favor-

ites like savory cheesecake (a quiche with the soul of a soufflé) in rotating flavors including veggie and chicken, nutty salads (sometimes chicken breast or perhaps albacore tuna) and MAD-style pizza on Billy Bread. Homemade ice creams, velvety sipping chocolate, and wine by the glass or bottle, continue to hold sway, too.

But there is one change. As the Desaulniers passed the candy-coated baton to Riordan, Connie shared, “He has youth on his side, and there will be longer hours.” Indeed there are, and it’s now open on Sundays.

Marcel dabbled in retirement once before, selling The Trellis, where he rose to international fame and authored a shelfful of acclaimed cookbooks, to David Everett (Blue Talon Bistro, DoG Street Pub, Blackbird Bakery). But before long, MAD About Chocolate became the icing

on his career’s cake, the moniker reflecting his initials (as well as the deliriousness induced by chocolate). Hmm. Given Riordan’s monogram, maybe one day folks will call him MR Chocolate.

204 Armistead Ave., Williamsburg. 757-645-2995. Open Tues.-Sun. for lunch, dinner and sweets. www.madaboutchocolate.us. Entrees: \$7-15, desserts: \$2.50-9.50, most beverages: \$1.50-6.

Taste Returns to Ghent

Taste, formerly known as Taste Unlimited, will return to Ghent. The popular gourmet sandwich shop will open in March 2017 on West 21st Street in the Sleepy’s mattress spot. Borjo Coffee will share the location.

“Our founder, Peter Coe, opened the second TASTE Unlimited on Colley Avenue in 1976, and

for more than 30 years we were part of the fabric of Ghent. We are excited not only about returning to this vibrant community but also about being more accessible to our growing customer base downtown,” said Jon Pruden, President of TASTE.

“Our goal is to transform what is currently an uninspiring mattress store into a uniquely engaging specialty food experience. By doing so, we will contribute both to a dynamic culinary scene along the 21st Street corridor as well as to the vibrancy of the greater Ghent neighborhood. The location will allow us to further our mission of cultivating community through an authentically local place to gather around great food and drink,” Pruden said.

Got restaurant, food or beverage news? Contact Marisa at marseydining@aol.com