



Lunch is on the menu at Domaine Hudson

March 18, 2008 | Kelly Housen

There's a lot we can learn from Europeans. They get six weeks of vacation a year, they have crepe stands on every corner (in Paris at least) and they look at lunch as more than a meal to just hold you over until dinner. Instead of chowing down on a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or a turkey shorti at the desk, they seek out good food, sit, relax and enjoy it.

Domaine Hudson has always managed to capture that European relax-with-a-glass-of-wine vibe, but not at lunchtime. At least, not until recently.

Channeling our inner Europeans, three of us headed to Domaine Hudson for their new lunch. The atmosphere at lunch is just as good as it is at dinner, with the red walls and rich, dark wood exuding warmth, even in daylight.

The lunch menu isn't huge, but there was enough variety on it to please two hungry omnivores and a vegetarian. We started with a few of their appetizers -- two soups and a salad. The seasonal soup of the day was a rich and creamy **Mushroom Soup (\$6)**. There was a peppery background to the soup, and a drizzle of pesto on the top added a little pizzazz. A bowl of **Roasted Tomato-Garlic Soup (\$7)** came to the table with a croque-monsieur floating on top of the vibrant, red soup. That garnish was like a mini grilled cheese sandwich, made with brioche topped with Gruyere cheese and a slice of prosciutto. The burst of salt from the gruyere and prosciutto contrasted with the sweetness from the sweet brioche, which almost dissolved on the tongue.

A **Baked Brie and Arugula Salad (\$10)**, on the menu as an appetizer, was enough for lunch, and an explosion of flavors. The peppery arugula was topped with walnuts, sweet pears and a roasted shallot vinaigrette. A hunk of warm and gooey baked brie, encased in flaky puff pastry was nestled on top of the salad. It was the best baked brie I've had in a long time, with a perfect goo-to-flake ratio.

I was truly tempted by the **Falafel Pita (\$11)** on the menu, curious to see how chefs Jason Barrowcliff and Robert Lhulier would elevate the simple falafel. However, I couldn't resist the **Herb Roasted Chicken Tartine (\$12)**. A slice of thick sourdough bread came piled high with the herby chicken, caramelized onions, gruyere and avocado, alongside a small salad. The caramelized onions were sweet and tender without being mushy, and were complemented by the tangy sourdough bread.

The **Spice Rubbed Flat Iron Steak with Romaine Hearts (\$11, \$15 for a large)** was a small salad of crisp romaine, topped with three ounces of steak, and though it looked small when it hit the table, it ended up being an ideal lunch portion. The steak was seasoned with their version of a pastrami spice, with three kinds of peppercorns, coriander, star anise and smoked paprika, among others. The dressing was a Roquefort vinaigrette, which added tang without being overwhelming like a creamy blue cheese dressing would.

Gnocchi can easily be heavy and overwhelming. But the **Herb and Ricotta Gnocchi (\$9, \$12)** were light, and bathed in a sauce of tomatoes and Valency chevre. The pungent chevre is the first thing you taste, but then subsides, leaving you with the sweetness from the tomatoes. The small portion of gnocchi, like all of the lunch portions, was large enough to be substantial without being too filling resulting in that undesirable post-lunch coma.

Thanks to Domaine Hudson, we've mastered the relaxed and indulgent lunch. Now, if only we could get those six weeks of vacation.



JESSICA BRATTON | spark

The spice rubbed flat iron steak and romaine hearts. The steak is seasoned with Domaine Hudson's own blend of pastrami spice.



DOMAINE HUDSON

1314 N. Washington Street
Wilmington
655-WINE
www.domainehudson.com

Hours:

Lunch 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. M-F
Dinner 5 p.m.-10:30 p.m. M-Sat

Cuisine

Creative American

Dress Code

Spiffy casual

Lunch Prices

apps: \$6-\$10

sandwiches & salads: \$11-\$15

entrees: \$9-\$15

Payment

MC, Visa, AmEx, Discover

INSIDER TIPS

Wine with lunch

If you're skipping the rest of your workday or just want a taste of wine with your lunch, they're offering three ounces of three featured wines for \$3 during lunch. This is a great way to sample new wines, and have just enough to complement your lunch, without getting sloshed before going back to the office.

Reservation?

They do take reservations, but at noon on a Tuesday we had no trouble walking in and getting a table.