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Review

Don't swat it - Fly Trap is a 'finer diner'

By Molly Abraham / Detroit News Restaurant Critic



Kara McClanaghan joins fellow proprietors Gavin McMillian, left, the chef, and Sean McClanaghan in the venture, which opened in December.

The Fly Trap

22950 Woodward Ave.,
Ferndale, 48220
(248) 399-5150



(Superior)

Open: 7:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Tues.-Sat.,
7:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Sun. Closed Mon.

Cost: Breakfast/lunch items \$4.95-
\$15.95; dinner \$6.95-\$15.95.

Credit cards: AE, MC and Visa.

Liquor: No.

FERNDALE -- Don't be put off by the name. The Fly Trap is a tongue-in-cheek reference to the more modest predecessor that filled the space for some 54 years before this snappy contemporary version of a diner came along.

And the only buzz about the place is the word-of-mouth chatter that has been bringing people in since it opened quietly on Dec. 29.

This is a diner for people who like a helping of creativity along with their green eggs and ham -- which happen to be Black Forest ham and eggs tinted green with roasted poblano pesto in the hands of chef Gavin McMillian.

Done up with walls in brilliant red and vibrant blue and expanses of mirror, it doesn't just look good in its complete departure from the past. It offers interesting, well-prepared American melting pot fare that certainly backs up its subtitle -- "A Finer Diner."

The three proprietors -- the brother/sister duo of Sean and Kara McClanaghan and chef McMillian -- did much of the rehab work themselves in little more than a couple of months.

Among other things, they removed a dreary dropped ceiling to reveal the original patterned tin ceiling that dates to the '20s, and the extra space overhead opens up the room and makes it seem larger than its capacity of 41 at red-topped tables and counter with black-and-white patterned swivel stools.

Although they inherited a soda fountain that had been in the place since the '30s, it wasn't functioning, and, says Kara, "it was an enormous beast of a thing," so they sold it on eBay to a collector in Pennsylvania who came and hauled it away.

But they kept the milkshake mixer and offer shakes and root beer floats and other soda fountain-style treats along with freshly squeezed orange and grapefruit juices and soft drinks. They hope to get a small winery license at a later date.

For now, McMillian offers two daily menus, one for what is called "Blunch" and a slightly more elaborate selection after 5 p.m. Daily specials are listed on a big blackboard over the counter.

While the theme is American diner, it's the New American approach with Asian, Italian and African touches. Along with classic sandwiches updated with little twists, such as the avocado and spinach that replace the "L" in what would be a BLT, there are complete departures from classic diner fare, including the lemongrass pho bowl, the chef's takeoff on the Vietnamese noodle dish, and North African spiced chicken breast with Monterey jack cheese, caramelized onion and aioli served on grilled sourdough bread.

Smoking: No.

Parking: Municipal metered lot in the rear and street parking.

Wheelchair access: There are two small steps at the entrance.



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Some dishes appear on both menus. You may have three-cheese macaroni and cheese with herbed bread crumbs any time of day, ditto the moist and well-seasoned house burger on onion roll with crisp French fries, and such dishes as fried brown rice sparked with ginger and beautifully fresh salads of mixed greens with herb shallot or balsamic blue cheese dressing.

The egg dishes, aside from huevos rancheros, which are available all day, are early day choices, ranging from "Eggs a la Boring" -- just two eggs with bacon, spicy sausage or ham -- and crab cakes with eggs and green chili tartar sauce, to steak and eggs with green peppercorn jus. McMillian must have been influenced by Dr. Seuss early in life.

An outstanding dinner dish is creamy smoked Gouda polenta with spicy pork sausage topped with grilled red peppers, a combination of hot and sweet flavors that works beautifully.

In addition to banana splits and sundaes, the chef, who may be remembered from his time with Fiddleheads in Royal Oak, whips up daily dessert specials. The other evening, they included a luscious chocolate bread pudding, served hot and topped with vanilla bean ice cream.

Little touches that add to the experience at the Fly Trap include little pitchers, not paper packets, for the coffee cream, white china tea pots and soft, well-washed old tea towels for napkins.

This new spot deserves all the buzz it's getting.

You can reach Molly Abraham at (313) 222-1475 or abraham67@comcast.net.



The Fly Trap goes beyond normal diner fare with dishes such as the Vietnamese-inspired lemongrass pho bowl, left, and spicy chickpea falafel and caperberry salad over grilled pita.



Bright colors and a raised ceiling help the space look bigger than it really is. Seating is at tables, booths or the counter.