

dining & entertainment

GAZETTE RESTAURANT Of The WEEK

by Teresa Barile

GRAND CAFÉ

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Grand Café on 30th Avenue in Astoria opened only six months ago, but is already a popular spot with everyone from 20-somethings to families with kids. Grand Café offers freshly prepared casual fare for breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as a full range of cocktails, wine and beer to facilitate cozy conversation. The interior is reminiscent of a resort, with cool slate floors, woven rattan bistro tables and chairs and a spa-

creating a laid-back atmosphere where one could enjoy a cup of coffee and dessert, a hot pressed sandwich, light appetizers, a crepe, or a full meal, all at affordable prices, and indeed, the most expensive item on the menu is the skirt steak platter, at just \$13. The stylish bar ensures that there is something for everyone at Grand Café. Specialty drinks include a peach cosmopolitan, sake-tini with peach flavored sake, Brazilian caipirinhas, margaritas and other fresh fruit concoctions. Hot or cold coffee drinks, such as frappe floats, espresso floats and iced mocachino, are also very popular.

Appetizers can be ordered by themselves with no pressure at all to order more. We sampled some slender, crisp crab and shrimp spring rolls, filled with sweet crab and shrimp and accompanied by home-style sweet and sour sauce that was great for dipping. A serving of four cost \$9. Greek style cheese or spinach pie is wrapped in flaky phyllo dough and served warm. Quesadillas, soft tortillas filled with cheese, chicken or vegetables, are served with fresh guacamole and salsa. Crispy calamari rings beg to be shared, as do home style chicken tenders with honey mustard. Order the Grand Platter for a sampling of many appetizers for a whole table to share (\$15).

Fresh salads can be an addition to your meal or can stand as a meal in themselves. Roasted vegetables and mozzarella combine for the Tuscan salad, feta cheese, onions and olives for the Greek salad or the tender greens and ingredients can be topped with grilled shrimp. Portobello salad that tastes almost like steak is topped with creamy goat cheese and roasted peppers (\$9). Ask about the home-style soup of the day.

Nearly a dozen wraps and Panini are available, but I have to give a special recommendation to the Grand Sirloin Burger. This hefty burger is specially ground from lean sirloin and cooked to order. It's so juicy and delicious, it's perhaps the best burger I've tasted in a long time. It's served on a flaky

brioche roll and you can top it off with Swiss cheese, bacon, avocado or mushrooms. It is served with choice of field green salad or crisp

Indulge in tender crepes filled with bananas and nutella, fresh fruit or savory ingredients such as ham and cheese. Desserts also

Grand Café Offers Casual Fare, Comfortable Lounge

icious bar that is backlit by a spectacular fish tank housing dozens of tropical fish.



Six friends, Stu, Teddy, Nick, Tony, John and Kirk, opened Grand Café with the intention of



THE DINING ROOM AT GRAND CAFÉ

shoestring French fries.

I also enjoyed a hot pressed sandwich called a Greek toast, made with sliced Greek sausage and goat cheese and pressed between slices of sourdough bread. A classic toast is filled with ham or turkey and choice of cheese for \$7.25.

A Mediterranean wrap filled with herb roasted veggies, grilled chicken slices, feta cheese and mesclun greens is a healthy and filling choice for lunch, dinner or a late night snack. The vegetable wrap contains fresh, grilled veggies and no meat for another healthy choice. Next time I'll try the Grand Panini, filled with grilled skirt steak or chicken, mozzarella, caramelized onions and red roasted peppers (\$9.50).

Entrées such as penne alla vodka and tender gnocchi Bolognese round out the menu. The cooked-to-order skirt steak platter is served with either mashed potatoes or fries and field greens. A simply prepared, marinated grilled chicken breast is served with rice, vegetables and field greens for just \$11, making Grand Café affordable for every budget.

include European pastries, creamy cheesecake, home-style yogurt with honey and nuts and chocolate soufflé.

If you prefer quiet conversation, slip into the cozy lounge area with its comfortable couches or the red velvet seats lined up at the bar and watch the fish swim by. Grand Café also has an elegant private room for sit-down parties of up to 45 people, or 75 for cocktails. There's a private bar and four nicely appointed rest rooms for guests. A smoked glass divider provides privacy.

Grand Café is open seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m. weeknights and 3:30 a.m. weekends. There's a very popular brunch on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The \$10 price includes a brunch cocktail, eggs, omelets, frittatas, Grand Café's famous burger and more. Lunchtime offers the same great sandwiches and wraps at great prices and delivery is available.

Visit Grand Café any time for breakfast, lunch, dinner or a late night snack, or enjoy intimate conversation in the sleek, comfortable bar and lounge. The food and service are very good and the prices are affordable for all.