

Times Herald-Record: March 18, 2005

The Village Tea Room

When are you free to take some tea with me?

Where: 10 Plattekill Ave, New Paltz

Phone: 255-3434

Web: www.thevillagetearoom.com

Entree price range: \$12-\$16

Hours/days: 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Tues., 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Wed.-Fri., 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Sat., 9 a.m.-8:30 p.m. Sun., closed Mon.

Children's menu: yes

Parking: limited; public parking nearby

Reservations: appreciated

Bar: no

Handicapped accessible: with some limitations

Low fat/vegetarian menu: yes

Other amenities: afternoon tea, private parties, take out, and catering

Signature dishes: Apricot Almond Oatmeal Scones, Roast Chicken and Turkey Pot Pie

Credit cards: MasterCard, Visa

The Village Tearoom is a relatively new place in New Paltz. The restaurant, still an infant at just 6 months old, is in a small quaint building that is perfect for its unique concept.

Three oval arches lead you up a path from the tiny parking lot and past an outside deck that looks inviting for a sunny day. The mellow red building has TEAROOM boldly printed across its entrance, so it's hard to miss.

Inside, it's like a dollhouse come to life. Directly ahead is the display counter filled with cakes, pies and cookies displayed like jewels in their glass cases. To the left is a small (actually all the rooms here are small) dining room, one mini-table perfect for younger guests; a small posse is there tonight drawing pictures while their parents enjoy dinner. To the right is another small dining area where dark wooden tables and chairs are set with napkins and small bowls of salt with tiny spoons – a cute touch. Upstairs are the main kitchen and two more small rooms for dining. Low ceilings with antique wooden beams add to the character of the space, but it is also somewhat cramped. I feel a bit like Gulliver in Lilliput.

The focus here is on tea and baked goods. The place first opened for lunch and afternoon tea, then added dinner. It is now open for breakfast as well. The dinner menu consists of four appetizers, three entrees and one special entree. There is also a selection of lighter dishes such as Turkey Pot Pie and various sandwiches. An entire page is devoted to an extensive list of teas. I'm not a true tea lover, but a real aficionado would be delirious with pleasure at the opportunity to sample such a wide-ranging selection.

Soup is a good idea on cold nights and the one offered here, Celeriac and Winter Greens Soup (\$5), has a certain appeal. The cream-based soup features celery root, kale and wild rice in a hazy broth. The ingredients are tender and the flavor, earthy but muted, makes for a wholesome start.

We also try House Cured Gravlax (\$7), raw salmon cured with fresh dill. A large platter holds the thinly sliced seafood along with giant capers and lemon cream. Toast points accompany the dish. The combination is salty, tangy and savory all at once.

I order the Roast Chicken (\$16), which the menu boasts is certified organic. The half-chicken is huge and brawny; the organic lifestyle obviously agreed with this fowl. Yukon gold mashed potatoes and pan gravy are alongside, and a flavorful apple chutney with raisins adds to the appeal. The bird itself is moist and hearty, full of chicken flavor. It stands head and shoulders above commercially produced fowl.

Bistro Style Rich Beef Stew (\$15) is another cold-weather dish, but ours has a bit of problem getting out of the kitchen. The first version served to us is actually cold and has to be sent back for more heat. The second version arrives blistering hot and almost too fiery to taste. After it cools off a bit the mixture of tender beef, potatoes, carrots and red onion is fine in a rich sauce flavored with just a touch of orange.

Dessert is a new age version of an old favorite, Ginger Bread (\$2.25). The dark cake is flavored with ginger and cinnamon and served with cardamom creme. The result is both familiar and exotic, quite good.

Although it may change in the near future, there's no liquor license here yet, so you're welcome to bring your own spirits.

Service is friendly and casual, if a bit haphazard. The lone waitress is assisted by the owner, who also serves as the chef. Though we sometimes wait a bit for our food, the relaxed atmosphere and good jazz make our time here enjoyable.

Prices are low, and since there's no wine, our check comes to a very inexpensive \$45.25 for two, a good value.

This is a restaurant with a conscience, and its owner makes the point of supporting local farmers and producers, actually printing a list of suppliers on the menu. Although the sustainable theme limits its ingredients this time of year – kale seems to make lots of appearances – this doesn't seem to impact the quality. In fact, it may enhance it.

The Village Tearoom is like New Paltz itself, an original that doesn't follow the traditional path. Agnes Devereux, the owner, should be proud. The food here is good; it tastes homemade in the best sense of the word. Prices are low and the space, while cramped, is engaging and warm. Service is smiley and laid-back. I'll come back the next time I visit New Paltz, and I suggest you give it a try.

Restaurant critic Bill Guilfoyle has more than 25 years experience in the restaurant industry as a sommelier, manager, and chef/owner. He is an associate professor at a local college. He welcomes readers' comments; e-mail him at poptopics@th-record.com.

The Dish rating
(out of 5 possible)

Decor: ***

Service: ***

Food: ***

Value: ****

Overall: ***