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Attention to details makes dining at Tearoom terrific

Enjoy the calm that permeates eatery

By Daniel Mochon

For the Poughkeepsie Journal

The Village Tearoom in New Paltz is a cozy spot for tea, a country supper or perhaps a little indulgence for your sweet tooth. Chef/owner Agnes Devereux literally grew up in a small Irish village hotel and later trained at the Institute of Culinary Education in Manhattan. Devereux opened the place last September with a desire to share her passion for delicious food and old-world hospitality.

Although set back from the road on a knoll, the bright red house is hard to miss. Large letters above the entrance spell out TEAROOM in coffee-like extroversion. You ascend the gentle slope through illuminated trellis archways rooted in raised wooden flower boxes. On the left is a deck that can accommodate about 30 when weather permits — a nice setting to admire the Shawangunks over a cup of Lapsang Souchong.

The 1833 two-story house wasn't necessarily designed for efficient dining, but Devereux, who also studied interior design, has managed to create homey, comfortable nooks throughout. The ground floor dining room seats about 18. Another room upstairs has room for 16. There's also a chalkboard room for children of all ages with an adjoining enclosed patio for safe carousing.

Inside, olive walls intersect hand-hewn beams, some of which have been recycled into sideboard ledges. Amid floral portraits by local artists, a potted daffodil struggled to proclaim the end of a long winter. Soothing Celtic/new age tunes and wonderfully luminous lighting helped create a calm, relaxing environment.

At present, no alcohol is served — BYOB and the staff will open it for you without charging corkage. We stumbled on some exquisite English sodas with adult sensibilities. Belvoir's Elderflower Presse (\$3) was restrained in its sweetness and tasted like a cross between lychee and chrysanthemum tea.

The Lime and Lemongrass sibling (\$3) was full of clean lime flavor and was very refreshing.

Renee, our server, took care of us nicely. She had a cheerful, positive energy that suited the restaurant

well. Renee's menu and beverage knowledge was very good. The service did get bogged down a bit when the restaurant filled up, but never to the point that we became teed off.

The short dinner menu responds to whatever's in season. Local farms supplying produce are identified; many organic items are used. Vegetarians have some tasty options here. All baking is done in-house with Feather Ridge Farm eggs, King Arthur flour and real butter, not that scary hydrogenated stuff.

My house-cured Gravlax (\$7) was like Scandinavian sashimi. Basically an unsmoked lox, the thin slices of tender salmon were served with a lemon-infused sour cream, large caperberries and pumpernickel toast points drizzled with extra-virgin olive oil. The rich gravlax was nicely accentuated by the tart cream, briny bursts of caper and the malty quality of the toast.

THE VILLAGE TEAROOM
Overall **** (Very Good)

Rating breakdown
Food..... ****
Ambience..... ****½
Service..... ****½
Value..... ****

What ratings mean

* poor
** fair
*** good
**** very good
***** excellent.

10 Plattekill Ave., New Paltz; 845-255-3434; www.thevillagetearoom.com; seasonal eclectic cuisine; open Tuesday, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.; Wednesday-Saturday, 8 a.m.-9 p.m.; dinner, 6-9 p.m.; Sunday, 8 a.m.-8:30 p.m.; dinner 5:30-8:30 p.m.; closed Monday; handicapped accessible via side ramp; reservations suggested; Visa and MasterCard accepted; on- and off-premise catering available; entire menu is available for take-out.
Entrée price range — \$12-\$16.

Arugula Salad (\$6) featured baby leaves from a Highland farm picked to order for the restaurant. The peppery arugula worked well with the sharpness of grated aged Cheddar. A whole-grain mustard vinaigrette had an excellent extra virgin olive oil as a base and a pleasant nutty astringency.

The evening's special was rainbow trout (\$16). A bed of perfectly cooked kale — still bright green and crunchy — supported the grilled fish, which glistened with a lemon-walnut oil dressing and thin slices of preserved lemon.

Nutty basmati rice simmered in coconut milk completed the plate. My one complaint here was that the trout was a bit over-grilled; the char flavors overwhelmed the moist meat.

Organic chicken flavorful

Roast Chicken (\$16) had a taut, crispy skin, the result of brining before roasting. The bird was raised organically and had a depth of flavor that conventional poultry lacks. It was served with some marvelous yukon gold mashed potatoes — buttery and full of flavor. A simple gravy made from the roasting juices was spot-on. Northern Spy apples were combined with raisins, cider vinegar, brown sugar and spices to make a (very sweet) chutney to accompany the split, half-chicken.

Meyer Lemon Cheesecake (\$3) showcased that lovely citrus variety well — the tall, fluffy slice was well perfumed with juice and zest and sported a lemon curd topping. The crust was made from housemade gingersnaps and provided a spicy-earthly note.

Sticky Toffee Pudding (\$5.50) was really a square of medjool date cake topped with a phenomenal toffee sauce. Honey, butter, brown sugar and Ronnybrook heavy cream go into this scrumptious elixir, which could probably make polystyrene packing peanuts taste yummy.

We concluded our meal with two pots of perfectly brewed tea. Not only is the filtered water heated to 220 degrees to extract black teas correctly (190 degrees is used for green teas), but you are given a three-minute sand timer to know when to remove your sachet of loose leaves.

Among the many contenders, Peach-Apricot black tea (\$3) and the First Flush Darjeeling (\$5) were ordered. First flush refers to the initial harvest of the year, which produces an especially delicate brew. The Peach-Apricot tea was robust and alive with tangy fruit flavor. Both tasted better on their own, without milk, lemon or sugar.

Our check was accompanied with a cello bag of madeleine cookies. We departed with the wonderful flavor of Nielsen-Massey vanilla lingering on our palates, a nice souvenir. Despite a veneer of rustic simplicity, The Village Tearoom manifests a calm, yet profound perfectionism.

The Poughkeepsie Journal pays for the meals that are the subjects of restaurant reviews and reviewers do not identify themselves prior to the end of the meal. Daniel Mochon graduated with high honors from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park in 2000. He is the director of wine and cuisine at the Hudson Valley's largest wine and spirits store.