

☞ SUMMARY JUDGMENT ☞
(QUICK THOUGHTS FROM A FOODIE LAWYER)

JANUARY 2007

Here is the deal. I like restaurants. In fact, as funny as it may sound, I've made restaurants my hobby (which, to the delight of my husband, is much less risky than actually opening my own restaurant). I enjoy the anticipation and excitement of experiencing a new restaurant, as well as the comfort of returning to an old favorite. I get a kick out of knowing what is happening on the local restaurant scene. I relish the search for the perfect vacation destination restaurant. But most of all, I love sharing all my restaurant information with others. As such, the idea of Summary Judgment was born.

I am a lawyer and so, of course, I have a couple disclaimers. First, when reading this little piece, please remember that nothing makes me uniquely qualified to write about restaurants other than the fact that I visit them on a very, very regular basis. I've never worked in a restaurant. I don't really like to cook. And I don't think that there is anything particularly special about my palate. Second, my thoughts about any one restaurant are generally based on my entire experience. Obviously food is a huge component of the experience (and I've told more than one person that I like most any food so long as it is well prepared), but other things like service, value and atmosphere or feel are equally important to me.

So, with all that said, here are some quick thoughts about a few places I've been recently.

CHAMBERS KITCHEN (901 HENNEPIN AVENUE, MINNEAPOLIS): I've been to SPICE MARKET in the Meatpacking District of New York City, which is also a Jean-Georges Vongerichten restaurant, and loved it. As such, I eagerly anticipated the opening of this restaurant. Unfortunately, it isn't quite all that I'd hoped. On the positive side, the appetizers are quite delightful. I've sampled the sashimi, the tuna, the mushroom and avocado carpaccio, the satay sampling, the goat cheese fondue and the samosas. I highly recommend everything except the carpaccio and the satays, neither of which I would order again. I also enjoy the fact that they serve Domain Carneros Brut, one of my favorite California sparkling wines, by the glass. With respect to the entrees (of which I've had a fish entrée no longer on the menu, the short ribs and the lobster), "spice" is exactly what seems to be missing. The food is relatively bland and not that interesting. Please don't get me wrong. Nothing is bad. It is just fine. Not memorable. Also, I typically enjoy ordering the restaurant's signature cocktail. I've sampled three (the Ginger Margarita, the Pineapple Mojito (which is the best of the three) and the Vodka Thyme Lemonade) of the seven offerings but nothing was particularly appealing to me. As such, I am generally recommending that rather than going to the restaurant, you should go to the lounge and enjoy drinks and appetizers while viewing the scene and the art, both of which can elicit mixed reactions.

RESTAURANT ALMA (528 UNIVERSITY AVENUE SOUTHWEST, MINNEAPOLIS): On July 5, 2006, Rick Nelson of the Star Tribune wrote that "Alma has become the best fine dining deal in town." I cannot begin to tell you how right he was. Monte and I were there with friends last weekend and it was the best dinner experience that we've had in Minneapolis for a long time. In fact, we gave it the ultimate compliment by suggesting that it felt like a vacation dinner. You know, when you are in the perfect state of mind and both the food and overall experience are exceptional.

Although I could tell you all about the dishes we enjoyed, I won't tease you because Alma's menu changes frequently. After all, they are committed to using the "best fresh, seasonal, organic ingredients available." I am certain that whatever you order will be delicious. The best surprise, their tasting menu (which consists of a starter/salad, grains/pasta and entrée/meat/fish) is only \$42. A steal anytime, and particularly for food this good. The second best surprise, they have a very interesting and reasonable wine list (with several bottles around \$30). I would recommend Alma to anyone for any reason.

MOOSE & SADIE'S (212 THIRD AVE NORTH, MINNEAPOLIS): This is currently my favorite breakfast/brunch place. Monte and I have been here once each weekend for the past month, if not months. And we are not the only couple on this schedule (at least one other family is often there and they are easy to spot with twin babies). The menu is limited to just a handful of items, but that doesn't bother me because I find it impossible to stray from the quiche or the omlette. There are generally two varieties of each, which change weekly, and are filled with tasty goodness (think artichokes, high quality ham or bacon and interesting cheese). I will admit that, in the past, I've ordered the BLT (which is on great bread—the same bread served with the omlette) and the scrambled eggs (served with chicken sausage and a very dry biscuit) but neither were memorable. I've not tried their coffee, and they actually started as a coffeehouse so do try it if you are a coffee drinker, but I sincerely appreciate the fact that they serve Diet Coke. They seem to do a little bit of the locally grown, seasonally appropriate, organic ingredient thing. Restaurants of that type often either do not serve soda or they serve natural soda (which I have tried and is not even close to an appropriate substitute for Diet Coke). But nope, Moose & Sadie's serves the perfect breakfast paired with the perfect breakfast drink (coffee for some, DC for me).

In closing, I just want to say that I am very sad that AURIGA will permanently close after serving its final dinner service on Saturday, January 27, 2007. Although I didn't get here as often as I should have, I often regarded it as one of my favorite places to go in Minneapolis for really well prepared food (and, especially, their tasty flat-bread pizza). I wasn't a huge fan of either LEVAIN or FIVE and, as such, I wasn't particularly bothered by either closing. But Auriga is a loss and will be missed.

On a happier note, there are lots of restaurants scheduled to open this year. Check out Kathie Jenkin's (of the Pioneer Press) list at <http://www.twincities.com/mld/twincities/entertainment/16481657.htm>. I am particularly excited about SPILL THE WINE because it is just a few blocks from my house. Hopefully I'll be able to give a full report next time!

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