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\$13 at ... Shaker Square's Fire

Wed Apr 30, 2008 at 03:28:14 PM

In this weekly feature, C-Notes stretches your dollar at restaurants around the region, because, as it turns out, most bistros don't accept Monopoly money. The picky bastards. This week ...

Fire Food & Drink

13220 Shaker Square, Cleveland, (216) 921-3473,

www.firefoodanddrink.com

For Scene's full review, [click here](#).

What \$13 got us: Braised pork crepes with crème fraiche, Argentinean pepper relish and fried egg, and a cup of Columbian coffee.

What else \$13 can get you: A variety of apps, from soups and salads to fruit and yogurt; a variety of sides, including house made breakfast sausage and applewood smoked bacon; most entrees, including a cured salmon plate with Bialy's bagel, egg salad, shaved onion, and capers (\$10); chicken salad with cherries, carrot bread, baby watercress, lemon and olive oil (\$12); brioche French toast with roasted apples and Snake Hill Farm maple syrup (\$10), house made pancetta, French brie, poached apricots, and baby arugula flatbread (\$12); and lemon soufflé pancakes with blueberry compote (\$11).

The Verdict: Completely worth crossing a (formerly) Burning River. ...

I'd been looking forward to Sunday brunch at Fire Food & Drink for some time, beyond eager to sample the farm-fresh fare that comes out of Chef/Owner Doug Katz' kitchen. Fire's brunch has quite the reputation, based both on word of satisfied mouth and the national media attention it's received. My expectations were

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set squarely in the “quite unreasonably high” category.

And even these lofty expectations were blown to bits by the flawless cuisine and delightful atmosphere of my brunch.

The only reason I hadn't gotten around to it before now is that whole bothersome “crossing the Cuyahoga and then getting lost in the Heights” problem that plagues most Westsiders. But this time, I armed myself with a genuine Eastsider to help me navigate the genuinely perplexing suburb. And, of course, \$13.

It was the perfect spring day—a gentle breeze flirted with the hems of our skirts and tickled toes that had been confined too long to boots. Spring accompanied us into Fire, where the sunlight poured through the space's huge windows. We were seated courteously, and then were poured generous cups of gratis Columbian. It was smooth, rich and mellow, and our server proudly informed us that the blend is from Cleveland's own Van Roy.

We set about examining the menu, and my accustomed brunch debate—savory or sweet?—kicked into over drive. There were too many tempting options; I wanted to try them all. The epicurean quagmire was resolved by the proposal to return again in the future to sample what we couldn't order today. Thus liberated, my companion ordered the special vegetable frittata of the day (\$11), and I selected the braised pork crepes with crème fraiche, Argentinean pepper relish and fried egg (\$12).

As we waited for our food, we drank in the clean lines and artfully crafted decor of the comfortable space. The sunlight bounced off of a large mirror and illuminated the warm-colored walls, exposed brickwork, and fabric covered ceiling, dotted with button details. We enjoyed watching the exposed kitchen, observing the chefs calmly bustle around and produce the most enticing-looking (and smelling) offerings. Our conversation drew to a mutual pause on several occasions when something new and even more tantalizing-looking than the last appeared that we had to ogle.

Finally, the artfully plated entrees that appeared were destined for our table. My companion's frittata was light, fluffy and golden, filled with bell peppers, banana peppers, asparagus and just the right amount of cheese. It was topped with a generous salad of field greens tossed in vinaigrette, a lively complement to the richness of the eggs.

My crepes were mesmerizing. Served in an earthenware gratin dish atop a hammered metal platter, two thin and tender crepes were wrapped, enchilada style, around succulent and luscious

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braised pork. It was topped by a perfectly prepared sunnyside up egg that which when breached with a fork released a creamy infusion into the dish. The whole thing was such an amalgamation that I couldn't even pick apart single flavors or notes—the whole thing just went together so well. The textures and flavors worked with each other in magical ways that elude my ability to identify. It was savory but with a bit of sweet; rich without being cloying; tender but with occasional bites of crisp. Perfection.

I finished every bite and only wished for something to sop up any remaining sauce. My companion boxed the remainder of her supersized frittata for later, and then together we shared our surprise that such a filling, inventive gourmet meal cost so little. As we lingered over the coffee, we looked around at our fellow brunchers—all different ages, races, walks of life—all similarly enjoying themselves, and decided definitely to return to Fire again. I still have some lemon pancakes to sample. -- *Tori Woods*

Tags: \$13 at ...

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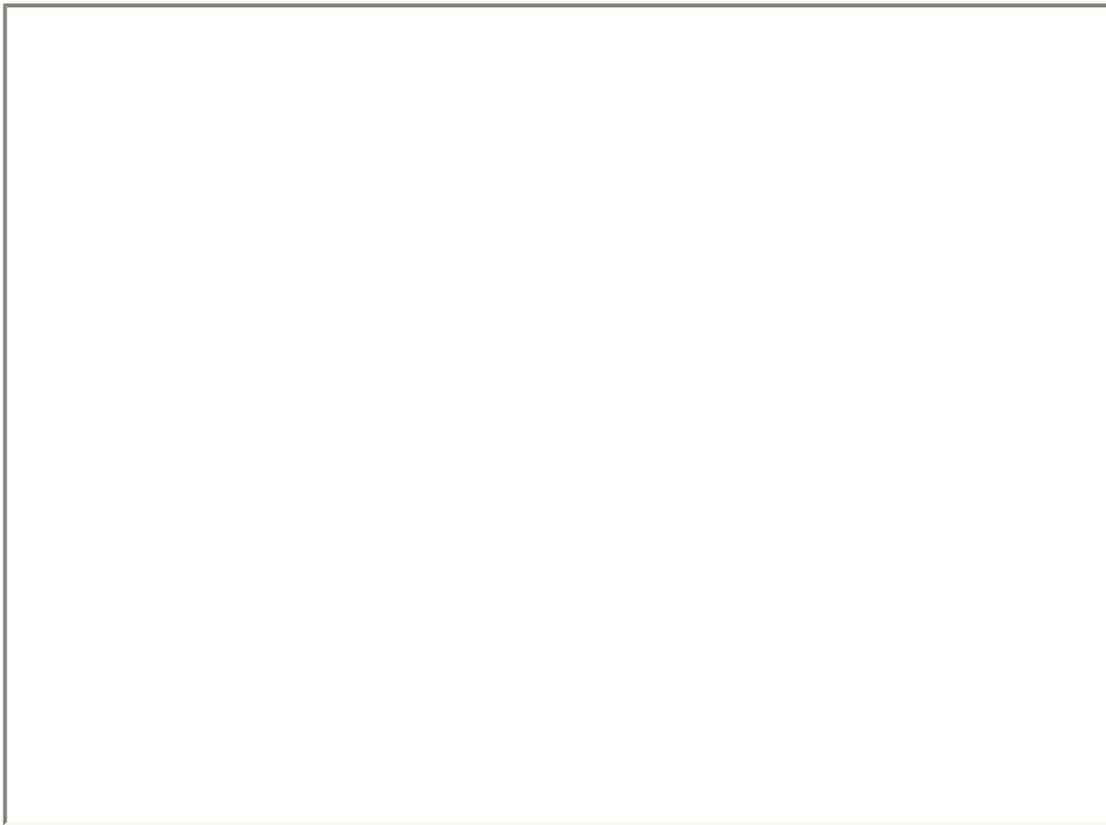
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