



Picking Favorites

Ingredient adds quality and diversity to your next deli stop

By Chris Larkin

Ingredient

3201 Farnam St.
402-715-4444
ingredientrestaurant.com
Mon-Sat: 6:30 a.m.- 9:00 p.m.
Sun: 8:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.
Entrées: \$
American/Deli/Casual

There are very few things that make me boil over with rage, typically. Having just quit smoking, however, the amplification of those things seems to have been, shall we say, encouraged. Naturally, then, the thought of a dinner partner taking an *egregious* amount of time to decide on a meal has elevated from mild annoyance to white-knuckled fist clench.

I mention this only to illustrate a point: If the same occurrence happened at Ingredient, I wouldn't take fault. There is too darn much on this menu. The new Midtown Crossing breakfast-lunch-and-dinner stop opened last month and has a menu that's encyclopedic in propor-

tions. Normally, I'd call this a warning sign – a Cheesecake Factory-like danger of trying to be all things to all people (something only the Cheesecake Factory has successfully done, really). As I learned, however, this regional deli chain, and its newest, sixth location, makes it delightfully hard to decide on a favorite.

With so much to offer at any given time, getting a good sample of everything was a challenge. I started with their special of the weekend, a ham and tillamook cheddar sandwich with a red pepper dijonaise (\$8.95). The medium-sharp cheddar tended to dominate the flavor, and it being shredded was a bit off-putting, but the sandwich as a whole was a safe bet for lunch satiation. The daily sandwich can also be served as a half and paired with a three-ingredient salad or cup of one of their four daily made soups for the same cost. I sampled their tomato-basil (cup \$3.00, bowl \$4.50) and was surprised by its rich flavor and bisque-like consistency.

The star entrée I tried was the Vietnamese Dim Sum Chicken wrap (\$8.95) – chicken, marinated in coconut curry and grilled, served with carrots, cucumber, peanuts and cabbage. The wrap hit on traditional, pleasing

Pan-Asian flavor profiles and, dressed with a light sesame, soy dressing, was a sure thing in my experience. As a choice of side, I sampled their pasta salad, featuring gemeli pasta and sun-dried tomatoes, which had a sweet spice quality to it, almost as if cinnamon or clove were involved – surprising, but not offensive.

On a return visit, I took their breakfast menu for a spin, sampling their Eggs Standard (\$6.95) and their Portobella and Spinach Benedict (\$8.95). My two eggs were cooked perfectly, an oddly difficult feat for most breakfast places, and while the red potato and onion hash was very good, the Benedict was a very successful dish. While, like the shredded cheddar, the use of diced mushrooms was off-putting and the Hollandaise was on the thin side, the flavor spoke for itself. If you traditionally order Eggs Benedict and like the earthy qualities of portobellas, this is highly recommended. Most importantly, breakfast was fast, thoughtfully assembled, and delicious – all you need from a good a.m. location.

On future visits, I'm looking forward to giving their brick oven pizza a try, as it seems to be the "food du jour" in Omaha this past year. With eight house offerings (\$9.95-

\$10.95) like the Jamaican BBQ Chicken and the Applewood Sausage, I'm curious to see what Midtown's newest casual gourmet spot has to say about making a good pie. And if the menu offerings don't suit you, you can build your own (via the twenty different toppings and nine cheeses) for the same price.

To be fair, given the immense amount of offerings at Ingredient, anything less than four or five visits might not be doing it justice – something I'm not ashamed to admit. Ingredient could be mistakenly dismissed as "just another Panera-like chain," but I might disagree. There are just too many different options that, with regard to my visits, are presented very well. Normally, my culinary mind might look at the vastness of their menu and think a) their execution must be dreadful, or b) their quality must be substandard. Ingredient is neither; rather, if you're in East Omaha, looking for a deli alternative, and aren't particularly decisive on what to order, they have you covered. And perhaps after your fifth or sixth visit, you'll have your favorite, too. **SI**

Dining Cost Key \$ - \$10 / \$\$ - \$20 / \$\$\$ - \$30 / \$\$\$\$ - \$40 / \$\$\$\$+ - \$40+