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Restaurants Article

Coffee Bar

Let the Reign Begin!

By [Chrissy Loader](#) (Mar 06, 2009) [ShareThis](#)

- [Coffee Bar](#)
1890 Bryant Street , San Francisco, CA 94110
+1 415.551.8100

There comes a time in every critic's life when they have to write a review about something they hope no one (or at least no one else) finds out about. This is one of those reviews.

Coffee Bar is an establishment between Potrero Hill and the Mission where one might find better-than-average café fare, what's being hailed as the best macchiato in town, free Wi-Fi and a sea of laptops. Oh, and for your typical café, the space is being used in atypical ways -- and to great success! For instance, they just started showing free movies every second Wednesday. And during the weekend evenings, Coffee Bar transforms itself into the nomadic restaurant, Radio Africa -- currently receiving rave reviews for Chef Eskender Aseged's North African

inspired menu.

The Red Flags

But, first off, a few warnings: Coffee Bar is pretty busy and noisy. For instance, on any given Tuesday (or Wednesday -- let alone Saturday and Sunday) you'll find it a struggle to plug your rinky-dink PC into an outlet between someone's too-cool MacBook Air and someone else's powered up aluminum PowerBook (no lie, a recent count came to 15 Macs in the café at one time).

Also, Coffee Bar is definitely on the louder end of the café spectrum. The ceilings are high and provide great acoustics for all the talking that goes on over their modern, reclaimed-wood tables, and the music, though nothing to balk at (MGMT, the Zombies and Serge Gainsbourg were on all played on a recent visit), is played via iPod at a pretty high volume. Also, another bummer, because of those Radio Africa dinners, you better be finished writing your dissertation (or the next great American novel) by 5 pm on weekends or you'll be kicked out.

Lunch Time

Nevertheless, Coffee Bar's setting includes plenty of tall windows and lots of light, and despite not really being a restaurant, you'll find the food not only quite good, but also worth the trouble. Actually, everything on the menu is extremely fresh -- from their healthy and imaginative breakfast offerings (such as the Nutella and banana on multi-grain Pullman's bread (\$4)) to their sandwiches, soups and salads, and afternoon cheese and charcuterie plates (\$9).

On a recent visit, a yummy P.L.A.T. (\$9) was available via their "specials" board to the left of the register. Made with pancetta, lettuce, avocado and tomato, and served on a soft ciabatta roll, this hearty sandwich was served with a side salad of spring greens dressed with a light red wine vinaigrette. Similarly, their tuna sandwich -- made with tuna, chopped "queen" olives and served on grilled multi-grain Pullman bread -- was also served with a side of tasty greens.

Actually, all their vegetation is fresh and tasty -- their Cobb Salad, in particular, is a bit of a variation on the classic. Made with finely shredded chicken tossed with bacon, egg, slivers of avocado and spring mix (\$8), and like all the sandwiches, this salad was served in a lovely white ceramic dish and brought to you among the masses at your hard-won table.

Coffee Bar also offers delicious baked goods: a chewy chocolate chip cookie (\$2), mouth-watering donut muffins (\$2) and gougères -- savory scones made with spinach and parmesan (\$2). And, all of their sandwiches are served on superior bread -- either the ciabatta, Pullman or



Photo credit: Chrissy Loader



Photo credit: Chrissy Loader



(what a friend and regular insists really *makes* their sandwiches) their focaccia bread.

Coffee Talk

Given that this establishment does have the word “coffee” represented prominently in its name, many a visitor will skip the food and suffice on a diet of different incarnations of Coffee Bar’s superior espresso. And given that these folks know their lattes (with Mr. Espresso’s Luigi Ruocco as one of the owners, Coffee Bar represents an outpost for Mr. Espresso, Oakland’s own espresso roaster and espresso machine supplier), you won’t leave unsatisfied by their way with their coffee beans.



Photo credit: Chrissy Loader

For good reason, since Coffee Bar provides all the regular espresso offerings -- always with Strauss Organic Milk and two shots of Mr. Espresso’s oak roasted espresso -- as well as espressos made with the single-serve Clover machine. Which means at Coffee Bar you’re just as likely to run into your foodie friends, and those coffee fanatics from the Pacific Northwest, as a few of your favorite SF baristas from other well-known SF coffee roasters (yes, it happened!).

During the afternoons, in an effort to counteract a day brimming with caffeine, patrons of Coffee Bar trade in their espressos cups for glasses of wine and either a charcuterie plate or one of their lovely cheese plates (both \$9). This last, comprised of a selection of aged gouda, creamy pave d’affinois and Bermuda triangle served with quince paste, toasted walnut bread and a drizzle of acacia honey, is generous. When accompanied by a glass of their Pt. Conception Voigner/Rose (\$7), the combination puts one slightly closer to a hypothetical late summer day in the South of France, as opposed to the heart of winter near the Bay.

Overall, Coffee Bar is friendly place with a knowledgeable staff. And with its mellow vibe and all their tasty bites and delicious beverages, you couldn’t find a better way to waste away the last bit of your severance. So here’s to Coffee Bar and Mr. Espresso’s empire building -- and hopefully success will lead to expansion.

Coffee/Cafe fare

Mission

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