



MEZZE PLATTER



CHICKEN AND MUSHROOMS SAVORY CREPE



A CASE FULL OF PASTRIES AND DESSERTS



SYRIAN FATA

Roses & Berries Cafe

By Danny Fairchild

Folks, Roses & Berries Cafe is for everybody, and it's beautiful. Let me type that again with the correct emphasis: Folks, Roses & Berries Cafe is for everybody AND it's beautiful. The distinction is important because sometimes such beauty comes across as fancy, which isn't inviting. It isn't casual. It isn't a cool hang. Put that crap right out of your head. That ain't Roses & Berries. Sure, if you WANT your experience to be fancy, you can think of it like that, but the hospitality is there. The seating is comfy and casual. It's a place to sit and read *Pride and Prejudice* for the 5 billionth time while you sip your tea and nibble your croissant. Gah! The nerve of that Mr. Wickham! But it's also a place where you can find some comfy seats with all your friends over some awesome shareables. But it's also the place where you have a date over coffee which... I kind of thought only happened in the movies. But it's also the kind of place where you can post up and put out the vibe. But it's also the kind

of place where you're just here for the food and want to be mostly left alone. But it's also the place where if you're seated near the entrance, people WILL ask you about the awesome things you're eating, as happened to us. I like to think I'm all these people. Except for the *Pride and Prejudice* thing. I've only read it 4 billion times.

I'm sorry. I know that all sounds contradictory and confusing. Here, let me describe the vibe in a way that would have destroyed my word count if I had said it to begin with: It's kind of flirty. And if you're not feeling flirty, they have some of the most comfortable, best lit dark corners you've ever seen. You'd have to try really hard, but I bet you could even brood there.

That's the vibe. Let's talk about the food.

Ugh. Gosh. Now I have to find a way to succinctly describe the type of cuisine Roses & Berries serves. Umm... Mediterranean cuisine with some of the best parts of French cuisine thrown in because everybody loves pastries, most people love crepes, and if you have the talent to do those things well, you shouldn't hide your light under a bushel. That's a 39-word description right there. Down from my first draft of 74. Look, this place is delightfully complex. My job is not easy right now. Leave me alone.

I'll just shut up and talk about the dishes we tried. Then you'll see. Then you'll see what a treasure we have here.

First off, yes, you bet your ass we tried a crepe. It's been several years since

Dubuque has had crepes on this level, and I've missed them. If you've missed them too, then you should try Rose & Berries because you're going to be so, so happy. If you haven't missed crepes, you should STILL try them because you don't know what you've been missing.

We got ourselves the chicken and mushroom crepe.

Now looky here: Roses & Berries has both sweet AND savory crepes. I, of course, KNOW that savory crepes are a thing, but I don't think I've EVER allowed myself a savory crepe until this visit. My sweet tooth doesn't allow such nonsense. And I probably would have gotten a sweet crepe this time, but Bryce ordered it. Folks, don't be like me. Don't let your sweet tooth stand in the way of savory happiness. Such a lovely béchamel, yo. Béchamel is one of the five mother sauces of French cuisine. That's important to note, but doesn't help you taste it. It's essentially milk gravy. And if you thought a milk gravy tasted yum-yum on some biscuits and gravy, wait until you taste it with something light yet eggy like a crepe. Yes, please. More, please. And then the beautifully shredded chicken and the mushrooms. I'm on record as having a hobbit-like affinity for mushrooms. I've eaten them on pretty much everything else. It's about time I had them on a crepe. You can watch the crepes being made, which is cool. Just don't be weird about it like we were.

In addition to the crepes, we got a few more familiar Mediterranean things

like a shawarma wrap and a falafel bowl. But then we asked our server, Shahab, to order us some surprises. He rubbed his hands together like a mad genius and then ordered us some Syrian Fata and a Full Mezze Platter... like a mad genius.

I hate to downplay the shawarma wrap and the falafel bowl by fell-swooping them so I can get to the mad genius stuff and pastries. I love falafel more than most things, and shawarma has had a place in my heart since the earlier days of the MCU. I'm fell-swooping these items because they're some of the more familiar things on the menu. We've had several places that served shawarma and falafel. I am grateful that we have another one and absolutely thrilled that it's served at this level. So good! It scratches that itch like a Q-Tip in an ear canal. Which they say you shouldn't do, but it feels too good for me to ever stop.

Oh! Huge honorable mention to the french fries served with the wrap! They're not thin, they're not crinkle-cut. They look like your average who-cares fry. But a lot of food was taken home unfinished that day. We ate every last fry. It was like how the French would make a french fry if they weren't busy making crepes and pastries all the damn time. Right? I'm not THAT well versed in French cuisine, so try them and you tell me.

Syrian fata. Yes, Syria is on the Mediterranean and therefore qualifies as Mediterranean cuisine. I know because my American ass had to look it up, too.

So, here's how Roses & Berries describes Syrian fata on their menu: ground beef, red sauce, eggplant, yogurt sauce, and crispy pita bread. Yeah, I know. I probably wouldn't have ordered it based on that description, either. But at the same time, I can't abide purple prose in menus of all places, so that's on me. But here's the thing: This dish is incredible, and I want you to try it, and so here I am again searching for a worthy description.

Oh! Okay! You know what it's like? Syrian fata (sometimes spelled "fatteh" unless I'm as ignorant as I suspect I am) is like? It's like a Mediterranean Frito pie. You folks know about Frito pie? It's a Southern thing. Louisiana, specifically. No? Okay. Well... a Frito pie is like a walking taco... in casserole form. So, Syrian fata is like a Mediterranean walking taco in casserole form. But here's the thing: Frito pie is delicious. If it weren't, Louisianans wouldn't bother. Now take that and instead of making it Tex-Mex, make it Mediterranean. How Mediterranean? Well replace Fritos with crispy pita. Yeah. THAT Mediterranean. And then, of course, the flavor profiles are more Mediterranean than Tex-Mex. So yeah, it's Mediterranean Frito pie. A pita pie. A pito pie? I give up.

And we close with the full mezze platter. Look, if you want some ohhhh and ahhhh to go with your mmmmm, the mezze platter is... an event all by itself. A mezze platter is like a Mediterranean appetizer platter. It's to be shared, and Roses & Berries' version is beautiful with these stunning paisley-shaped dishes that all fit together for an awesome display of flavor and color.

First on the list, Shahab mad-scienced us with some za'atar feta dip. Za'atar is a Middle Eastern spice blend with sesame seeds in it. The feta allows you to taste the subtleties of za'atar without any one ingredient begging for attention.

Next was hummus because it's Mediterranean cuisine, you're going to eat SOME hummus even by accident.

Then baba ghanoush, which is just as fun to eat as it is to say. Baba ghanoush, if you don't know, is like hummus made with eggplant instead of chickpeas. I'm positive that's an oversimplification, but love has been founded on worse.

Lastly, other than some olives that make an olive lover like myself just wanna sing, was the muhammara. Oh, gosh. I'm not even going to try to describe muhammara in terms you might better culturally understand. Muhammara is a dip typically made from roasted red peppers, bread crumbs, pomegranate molasses(?!), and walnuts. So as you might guess, muhammara has pretty much ALL the flavors: Savory, sweet, spicy, tangy... and probably bitter, too. It's Mediterranean cuisine; they probably snuck an olive in there somewhere.

And look, if all this sounds like not your thing, at least... at LEAST go for the pastries. Dubuque now has easy access to the delights of a renowned pastry chef in Jonathan Nègre.

I was so blown away by the food and the decor and the atmosphere that I didn't even THINK of checking out the potties. So, I've let you down and can't offer any bathroom report. However, this is a brand-new building that cares about cleanliness. I imagine you could probably eat in the bathrooms. But don't.

So yeah! Add my voice to the many who are singing the praises of Roses & Berries and are excited for what they offer.

Have you tried it yet? Let me know what you think! ■



Roses & Berries Cafe
 4340 ASBURY RD, DUBUQUE, IA
 563-581-0747
 ROSESANDBERRIESCAFE.COM
 Hours: Mon, Wed-Sun: 9 AM-4 PM;
 Tue: Closed

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