



Restaurant review: Somewhere in Time is somewhere wonderful

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If you haven't been to Somewhere in Time Café, then you are in for a treat.

This Old Mystic diner-esque café would fit right in on Guy Fieri's popular Food Network show, "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives." Host Fieri travels the country to sample the best of this genre. The joints he highlights inevitably fall into one of three categories: the bar with good food; the throw-back, where nostalgia is what's really on the menu; and the homey spot, where creative cooks dance around the classics, infusing them with fresh ingredients in creative combinations.

The latter is where Somewhere in Time fits in.

Partners Sarina and Gwen McGugan bought the restaurant in 2000 and, according to the menu, "wanted to have a little breakfast and lunch place filled with the smell of coffee and yummy food. We pictured our restaurant filled with friendly people and the comfort of home."

Indeed, this is a seat-yourself, breakfast-all-day kind of place. To keep the chill out of the dining room, visitors are asked to enter through the side door, which opens into a carpeted hallway flanked by bulletin boards crammed with local business cards. Up the ramp and to the left is the door to Somewhere in Time.

A fabulous assortment of mismatched tables and chairs of the vintage, chrome-legged variety fill the space. The dark teal walls feature knotty pine wainscoting and are broken up by handmade art work and the bright front windows that let in the light.

This is also a place where you help yourself to coffee. There is regular and decaf, flavored and not, plus hot water and tea bags and an assortment of milk, all in thermal containers waiting for you to choose your favorite.

The sizeable menu is augmented by specials boards, one each for breakfast and lunch, and baked goods - homemade muffins and scones that come in flavors such as cranberry orange, almond joy and red velvet.

Indeed, if you like a sweet start to your day, you'll find it here. The banana bread French toast is on the regular menu, back by popular demand, alongside buttermilk or whole grain pancakes to which you may add everything from blueberries and cranberries to homemade granola, chocolate chips and cream cheese. On a recent visit, the specials board included a caramelized peaches and toasted pecan pancake topping as well as Christmas French toast made with apple cinnamon bread and drizzled with caramel and walnuts.

Savory breakfast choices include the basics - eggs, bacon, toast - as well as the more exotic. All kinds of omelets include filling options like chicken-apple, turkey or veggie sausage; broccoli, roasted red peppers and fresh spinach; and cheeses from jalapeno and cheddar to Swiss and goat. There are breakfast sandwiches and burritos, quesadillas and even huevos rancheros. Or perhaps you'd prefer a bowl of oatmeal or a side of Cajun corned beef hash.

A recent specials board included a breakfast enchilada - scrambled eggs, avocado, sausage and cheddar, wrapped in a flour tortilla, topped with cheddar and enchilada sauce and served with a side of sour cream - as well as a steak and pepper omelet and a healthy egg white omelet.

The sizeable lunch menu includes soup of the day - tomato and goat cheese ravioli soup on our last visit - and a banquet of sandwiches, many of which feature Somewhere's fresh roasted, hand-carved turkey: I count the Mookie - Thanksgiving on a bun - and the turkey club among my favorites. There's also a Black Angus burger and a veggie

burger; a BLT and a steak, turkey or avocado Reuben; and a variety of grilled chicken sandwiches and a selection of wraps.

On my last visit, I had my favorite turkey club and Sarina's Salad, a generous mix of fresh greens, carrots, raisins, walnuts and cheddar, with a tangy white zinfandel dressing. Delicious. My husband chose a wrap from the specials board, grilled chicken with spinach, apple and goat cheese, and a side of the tangy artichoke and chick pea salad. The wrap was crunchy and packed with flavor, and salad was rich and herbaceous, a good complement.

Despite the great food and the homey atmosphere, the best thing about Somewhere in Time may be the service: it's simply delightful. The waitresses are busy - the place is often hopping - and efficient, but they always seem glad to see you. They know the menu inside and out, and they make you feel comfortable from the moment you sit down.

I'd say the McGugans have realized their vision.

Somewhere in Time Cafe

3175 Gold Star Highway (Route 184), in Old Mystic Plaza, Mystic

(860) 536-1985

www.somewhereintimecafe.com

Cuisine: Diner-plus, familiar breakfast and lunch favorites but with creative combinations, fresh ingredients and amazing homemade baked goods and sweet offerings.

Service: Fast, efficient, always friendly.

Prices: Breakfast, \$5.50 to \$12, and lunch, about \$7.25 to \$10.

Hours: Monday through Friday, 6 a.m. to 2:15 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 7 a.m. to 2:15 p.m.

Handicapped access: At the main entrance, there is one step up into the dining room, but the side entrance provides access via a ramp.