

# Philadelphia WEEKLY

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## Feed A Full Plate

Still facing challenges, this new Main Line eatery holds potential.

By Robin Rinaldi | [rrinaldi@philadelphiaweekly.com](mailto:rrinaldi@philadelphiaweekly.com)

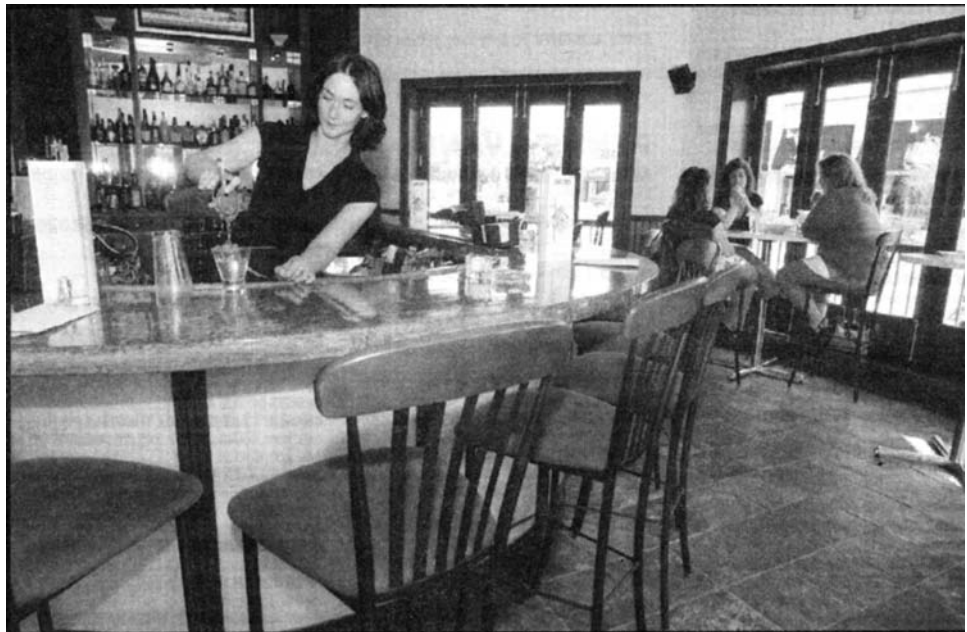
**P**late, Ardmore's new retroesque ode to comfort food from the owner and executive chef who brought us Circa on Walnut Street, is the kind of place I can't wait to try. For one thing, I go everywhere on foot and hardly ever get to see my car, so the seven-minute drive out to Ardmore gives me a chance to check whether my vehicle is still parked where I left it, or whether the Philadelphia Police Department has once again towed it due to street construction.

Second, the low buildings and antiseptic cleanliness of the suburbs have a calming effect on me, as long as I keep my visit short. And Plate's location in

Suburban Square near the Ardmore Farmer's Market is just too enticing. Its octagonal front windows framed in soothing olive and neutrals open out to the quiet street, the fat lowercase letters of its name promising...well, comfort.

Inside, Plate is a study in brown. A horseshoe-shaped mahogany bar leads to a large dining space full of mahogany chairs and paneling, sleek brown banquettes upholstered with mod daisy-like and vertical designs, and a creamy-white textured wallpaper I couldn't stop running my hands over. A poured concrete floor painted sienna warms the room, while tall watery glass panel dividers provide a touch of minimalist chic.

The food could benefit from the same level of attention to detail. There are lots of enticing com-



In the mix: Plate has all the ingredients for an ultimate success story.

fort trends and even a few original twists described on its menu, but their delivery is inconsistent.

For instance, wonderfully fresh, crusty rolls and a potent smoked whitting dip with crostini started us off on the right foot. A crock of macaroni and cheese was nicely browned and crowned with a great idea: barbecued shrimp. They paired oh-so-well with the homey macaroni, but once the shellfish was finished the pasta tasted bland. And the tiny buttermilk biscuits surrounding the plate were charming and tasty—but I wished they were warmer.

I skipped the deviled eggs at Jones, so I tried them at Plate. Their presentation with nibbles of smoked salmon and triangles of black bread was inventive, but the eggs themselves were kind of dull—not that I harbor any idea whatsoever of how to make deviled eggs exciting.

But then, just when I was beginning to feel a bit disappointed, the chef hit a bull's-eye. A curvy white bowl of roasted tomato soup, pumpkin-colored and fragrant, left traces of spice and lemon lingering after each complex spoonful. A tall, cheesy crouton proved the perfect instrument for dipping, as did a tiny grilled cheese sandwich on party-size rye bread. My eyes, tongue and stomach couldn't have been

happier.

The smoked beef brisket was a nice follow-up. Long fork-tender pieces of barbecued beef paired well with a basic potato salad and cole slaw, though the sides could have used a bit more seasoning, and the jalapeño corn biscuits once again could have been warmer, or perhaps fresher.

The cedar plank salmon suffered most. Though it arrived on a room-temperature plank, it bore neither the taste nor smell of cedar and in fact was undercooked, its middle quite undone. The few roasted potatoes and asparagus spears accompanying it weren't nearly enough to make up for that.

But once again, after this letdown, pastry chef Angela Tustin picked me up and dusted me off with two ingeniously simple creations: first, flaky-fresh donut holes sprinkled with cinnamon sugar and served with a creamy coffee dipping sauce (she shoots); then two gourmet "peanut butter and jelly bars" made of chocolate wafers, peanut butter cream and raspberry jelly on chocolate mousse (she scores!).

Besides a killer tomato soup and a kickass pastry chef, it's evident that Plate, open just two months, holds potential. The servers, without exception quite young, nevertheless handled a quickly gathering dinner crowd quite well. The drink

menu features 20 bottles of wine priced below \$30, fun frozen drinks including several flavors of daiquiri, colada and margarita as well as fruity nonalcoholic concoctions. With summer finally here, you can sit out back under a pergola and sample the sandwiches and entree-sized salads.

Even with some of the problems we experienced, the high points were pretty darn high. So I'd urge you to give it a try, and I'd urge the kitchen to get those very controllable mishaps nipped in the bud so that Plate can blossom into the dependable neighborhood eatery it was meant to be.

## **PLATE**

*105 Coulter Ave., Ardmore.  
610.642.5900*

**CUISINE:** *American*

**PRICES:** *\$10-\$23*

**HOURS:** *11:30am-3pm  
Mon-Fri; noon-3pm Sat-  
Sun; 5-9pm Mon-Tues;  
5-10pm Wed-Sat;  
4:30-9pm Sun.*

### **The Rinaldi Rundown**

**ATMOSPHERE:** *Minimalist  
suburban vogue.*

**SERVICE:** *Young but keep-  
ing pace.*

**FOOD:** *Potentially good but  
inconsistent. Desserts  
rock.*