

Your Entry Into Arts & Entertainment

TICKET

June 25/26, 2003

Plate brings 'Modern American comfort food' to the suburbs

By Frank D. Quattrone

When we met Emily DiNubile, she seemed to be posing behind her Painter's Palette of Ice Cream, mid-luck, savoring the homemade chocolate ice cream in the homemade cone, served with chocolate sauce and sprinkles. Then she slurped again, this time the vanilla, and smiled broadly. This happy 6-year-old had just graduated from kindergarten that day, so her parents, Dr. Nick DiNubile and his wife M.B. took her to Plate to celebrate.

This was not their first visit to the popular new family dining spot in Ardmore's Suburban Square. Emily's father enjoys the whole menu, but this time he was talking up the desserts. "I love the Doughnuts in a Bag [freshly made donut holes sprinkled with cinnamon sugar served with a coffee dipping sauce]. But Plate is great for the whole family. M.B. is a vegetarian, so she can always find some food she likes here. And our 2-year-old Dylan really likes the Capellini with Pomodoro Sauce from the Kids Menu."

As the DiNubile family were enjoying their little celebration at their table just before the open kitchen, where Executive Chef Tom Harkins and his staff were conjuring up all manner of culinary magic, several parties of friends were toasting the end of the work day in Plate's ultra-sophisticated lounge. Sitting at the base-lighted U-shaped bar or standing around it under an amazing rounded lighting fixture resembling an inverted bowl (or plate), they appeared at ease in this new haven on

the Main Line.

The latest venture of Penn Valley's David Mantelmacher, the owner of Circa, one of the gems of Restaurant Row, Plate is an entirely new concept for the region. "I didn't want to create a Center City restaurant in the suburbs," says Mantelmacher. "I wanted to create a place where people would want to come two, three, four times a week to enjoy what

I call our 'Modern American Comfort Food.'

"With Tom Harkins at the helm here, as he has been at Circa," he continued, "we offer good American cuisine with a contemporary twist, like Crispy Calamari with a Rice Krispies crust [served with shredded slaw and chili vinaigrette], or Deviled Eggs served with Smoked Salmon and homemade black bread.

"One guy last week, for example, came in for lunch and then dinner the same evening! Honestly, anything we have here you can make at home — but not the way we do it here. After all, we make everything ourselves — including the ice cream and the cones."

A unique dining experience, Plate seems to have found that elusive balance that draws lots of families in to eat between 5 and 7 p.m.,



Above (clockwise, from left) are three Plate appetizers: Crispy Calamari with Rice Crispy Crust, Deviled Eggs with smoked salmon & black bread, and Steamed Prince Edward Island Mussels with chorizo sausage.



To celebrate her graduation from kindergarten, Emily DiNubile, 6, enjoys a Painter's Palette of Ice at Plate. Below is Plate's P B & J Bar dessert.



Plate
105 Coulter Ave.,
Suburban Square
Ardmore
(610) 642-5900

HOURS:

Lunch:

Mon. – Fri., 11:30 – 3;
Sat. & Sun., 12 – 3 p.m.

Dinner:

Mon. & Tues., 5 – 9 p.m.;
Wed. – Sat., 5 – 10 p.m.;
Sunday, 4:30 – 9 p.m.

Reservations: 6 or more only.

All major credit cards.
Facilities for handicapped.
Smoking at bar only.
Banquet room available for parties up to 20.
Dinner entrees: \$14 - \$23.

when couples and groups of friends, many wearing jackets, drop in for dinner. And now that summer seems poised to welcome people outdoors again, up to 60 guests can luxuriate under the cedar pergola outside. And soon, promises the enterprising owner, retractable awnings will be in place to keep guests dry during inclement weather.

Mantelmacher gutted the two previous restaurants that occupied this space — Za and La Parisienne — to create his new brainchild. Why open a second restaurant and why here? He says, "I live in the neighborhood; Circa is 10 years old; the kitchen was in place here; it's a great location; plus I was able to get a liquor license.

"Things are going so smoothly at Circa," he continued, "that I felt it was time for something new. As a matter of fact, we complement Ruby's, also located in Suburban Square. That's where kids take their parents, and here the parents take their children."

Aside from the attractive if understated décor,

Plate offers up contemporary American food ...with a twist

which also includes two neat vertical sculptures by John Douglass behind the foyer desk (of five asymmetrical, oval-shaped metallic plates), plus handsome bleached mahogany tables and circular track lighting fixtures in the two main dining rooms, Plate also offers a user-friendly wine list, featuring 20 bottles of fine wine for under \$30.

"Just because wine is expensive," says Mantelmacher, "that doesn't necessarily mean it's good. I want to complement my menu prices with the best-tasting wines I can find." The list includes a big Chilean red called Big Tattoo Red, created by Erik and Alex Bartholomaus, two brothers who donate 50 cents from the sale of each bottle of their wine to various cancer research funds in the name of their late mother Liliana, who died of cancer.

And now to Chef Harkins' menu. Hard-working and unpretentious, Harkins says simply, "We just want our food to be casual, simple, everything-made-from-scratch, from sandwiches to filet. We add fine touches to comfort food."

Appetizers and salads that fill this bill include Baked Macaroni & Barbecue Shrimp (\$9.50) served with buttermilk biscuits; Roasted Tomato Soup (\$5.50) topped with mini-Cheddar grilled cheese; Steamed Prince Edward Island Mussels (\$8.75), served with chorizo sausage in a roasted garlic parsley white wine sauce; and a humongous meal-in-itself Cobb Salad (\$16) of grilled beef tenderloin, crab, shrimp, crisp bacon, avocado and hard boiled eggs in a creamy feta dressing.

Sandwiches available at dinner include Angus Burger (\$10), Oven Fired Vegetables (\$9.75) and BBQ Beef Brisket Sandwich (\$9.75), served with smoked mozzarella, coleslaw and crispy onion rings.

Plate's signature dinner entrée, in fact, is its Slow Smoked Beef Brisket (\$16.50), marinated 48 hours for maximum tenderness and flavor, and served with potato salad, coleslaw, barbecue sauce

and jalapeño cream cheese bread. Other popular dinner entrées include Porcupine Shrimp (\$17.50), served with remoulade and cocktail sauce; Baked Turkey Meat Loaf (\$15), with onion and mushroom gravy and creamy buttermilk mashed potatoes; Cedar Plank Salmon (\$18.50), herb crusted and served with asparagus and

roasted potatoes; and Stone Fired Smoked Porkchop (\$18.50), served with caramelized apples, braised red cabbage and sweet potatoes.

And how's this for the kids? Besides the aforementioned Capellini with Pomodoro Sauce, Macaroni and Cheese and Chicken Fingers with French fries (all \$6), Plate also offers Petit Filet Mignon (\$10) with mashed potatoes, peas and carrots.

Be sure to leave room for Pastry Chef Angela Tustin's fine and fun desserts. A mainstay at Circa since March 2001, Tustin previously interned at Le Bec-Fin while studying at The Restaurant School, and also served up spectacular pastries at The Four Seasons for three-and-a-half years before Circa snapped her up.



DINING



At top left is Plate's complimentary Smoked Whiting with homemade crostinis and rolls. Top, Plate's owner David Mantelmacher (second from right) chats with regular patrons Dr. Nick DiNubile and his daughter Emily. Above left is Plate's signature dish, Slow Smoked Beef Brisket. Above is Executive Chef Tom Harkins firing up some goodies in Plate's open kitchen.

"It's really fun working with pastry," Tustin says. "It's instant gratification. I've always liked to cook, but one of my instructors at The Restaurant School noticed how much better I was with pastry and suggested I go that route. I'm happy I did. It's so fun! All I do is play with food."

Below is Plate's chic lounge, with its unusual plate-shaped lighting fixture.



Such foodplay has resulted in the previously mentioned Painter's Palette of Ice Cream, Doughnuts in a Bag, Stone Fired Seasonal Fruit Cobbler served warm with vanilla ice cream and fresh berries, Apple Pecan Cake, and Tustin's personal favorite — Plate's PB&J Bar, a wonderful concoction of chocolate wafers layered with peanut butter cream, raspberry jelly and chocolate mousse. All desserts are \$6.50 and worth every penny.

The true measure of how successful Plate has become since its opening April 28, 2003, is how much Mantelmacher's own children, Eliza, 6, and Aidan, 3, "love it here." That, and the fact that Mantelmacher has just closed a deal to open a second Plate restaurant in Wyncote some time this December or January — at the site of Johnny Mott's Restaurant in the Cedarbrook Apartments.

The skinny on Plate is entirely upbeat — spinning and ready to grow.