

This Week's
Issue



district

NEWS, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT FOR LONG BEACH

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Restaurants

AFFORDABLE LUXURY

■ Ellen Griley ■ Wed. September 03

Leave your wallet open at At Last Café

UPCOMING EVENTS

Music/Clubs

• Arts

- Health/Rec
- Politics/Comm.

Thursday, September 4

- Latin Night @ Executive Suite
- DJ Marlon @ The Gaslamp
- Dreamgirls @ Ripples
- Flyer @ Buster's Beach House
- Karaoke @ J. King Neptune's
- Karaoke w/ Tim @ The Liquid Lounge
- Karaoke @ Paradise Piano Bar
- Dios Malos @ Alex's Bar
- Salsa @ Sevilla
- Trevor Green @ Viento Y Agua
- Greater California @ The Prospector
- The Year Zero @ The Pike

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PHOTO by ROSHEILA ROBLES

There is something vaguely un-American (or at the very least un-Californian) about the interior of At Last Café—could be the number of tables (six), or the space between them (not much), or the

HAIR LICK HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD - Sep 4

DTV Book Club

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separation between the dining room and the kitchen (there is none). For a people so accustomed to our notions of personal space, airiness and, well, the kitchen being in the kitchen, I imagine this can be somewhat jarring. But then you sit down—either in a chair or on a built-in cushioned bench along the wall, and soon you're joined by a glass of fresh squeezed orangeade and the only reason you'll ever need for coming (and coming again soon) to At Last: the menu.

Here, the much lauded, award-winning chef John McLaughlin—whose résumé cites hors d'oeuvres for the Academy Awards, teaching gigs at UC Irvine and LBCC and multiple executive chef positions at area hotels and restaurants—takes what I already loved about my favorite restaurants in this city (the innovation and fresh ingredients at Shillelagh, the execution and presentation of Starling Diner) and combines them in a menu so obscenely affordable, you'll want to plunk down extra change for all his trouble.

Take the wild arugula salad, for example: For \$4, a heaping serving of homegrown arugula arrives at your table inside a pristine white bowl, dressed with a light homemade lemon vinaigrette and parmesan cheese. The bite to the arugula is astounding; even if you're used to the green's peppery kick, the earthy, enticing flavor of this salad is unlike anything you'll buy bagged or boxed at the store. And if you're not feeling adventurous, the garlic croutons and creamy (also homemade) dressing on the classic Caesar salad (\$4.95) alone make for a great first course.

From there, hit the sandwich menu, which offers a veggie sandwich with sliced peppers, tomato, lettuce, zucchini, eggplant, roasted garlic aioli and olives (\$7.25); as well as a roast beef French dip; and an oven-roasted turkey sandwich with Swiss cheese, lettuce, tomato and cranberry (both \$8.25). At \$6.50, the no-nonsense grilled hamburger comes highly recommended to me by friends I've sent to the café, and on a recent visit, one friend's grilled chicken breast sandwich with lettuce, tomato and pesto (\$7.25) was finished before I could even start in on my mac and cheese.

Mac and cheese? Yes! Listed with the main dishes, the gigantic bowl of three-cheese mac topped with buttered and rosemary-seasoned breadcrumbs (\$7.95) was slightly saltier than I expected, but the leftovers lasted well through the next day and only improved in taste (though this might have had something to do with requesting they be boxed alongside the generous side of balsamic-and-olive-oil bow tie pasta salad that came with the sandwich).

Also on the main menu: brick chicken (\$9.25), stir-fried veggies (\$7.25), French pot roast with red wine and honey-cured bacon served on fettuccine with fresh vegetables (\$10.25!), a tomato and basil omelet with mozzarella cheese (\$6.75), center-cut pork chop with apple herb stuffing (\$10.95, pictured, also recommended), and at \$12.25, the most expensive item to be found at the place: a beef flat iron steak cooked to order with sautéed mushrooms and caramelized onions and smashed potatoes.

There are daily specials, too, which during my visit included a salmon entrée and spicy carrot soup that I considered ordering but couldn't quite justify given the heat. Additionally, the daily specials include a side of pan-roasted seasonal vegetables.

That night, the roasted portabello mushroom and polenta dish (\$6) jumped straight off the blackboard and on to my table, the tender mushrooms washed in a light sauce that meshed so

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- **AND FOR MY NEXT TRICK... (1)**
- More Aul puleeease....loved him/her since the OC Weekly days...

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