



Clockwise from top left: Jam executive chef/co-owner Jeffrey Mauro looks on as sous chef Mike Noll makes hickory-smoked tomato sauce; the cozy dining room; eggs benedict with English muffins, poached eggs, house-cured pork belly, spinach hollandaise and spinach purée.

## Pearl Jam

Nightclub king Jerry Suqi hits Ukrainian Village with a jewel of a brunch

| By Marissa Conrad | Photography by Anthony Tablier |

New brunch phenom Jam—really not much more than one stretch of tables and a small open kitchen—sports all the signs of hipsterdom: artsy Ligne Roset exposed-bulb light fixtures paired with the no-frills, front-and-center cash register of a 24-hour diner; a waiter who dons a lumberjack-plaid shirt yet knows the nuances of fennel pollen; and a substantial crowd for mid-day on a Friday, yet with no Blackberries, business suits or Lincoln Park moms in sight. The storefront is even tucked next to a vegan bakery.

Except somehow, since opening in July, Jam has also become the hipster antithesis: the place that everyone is talking about, with a 60-plus minute wait on the weekends. It's then that the Blackberry crowd, and everyone else in Chicago, invades this corner of Ukrainian Village. With Jam, restaurateur Jerry Suqi—the force behind Sugar, Narcisse and, more recently, Chickpea—has built himself an insta-success.

So far, I'm sold. I've never been to a casual brunch spot that kicks off the meal with an amuse bouche, but today, as we're all sipping orange juice (vibrant, pulpy and awesome, by the way), four doll-sized plates arrive with four mini pear-raisin financiers, each topped with a dollop of mascarpone and a few fronds of fennel. Mine is too dense for a financier, but the flavors are balanced and the fennel a surprising, well-paired accent. A bacon-chive scone is the same story: The texture is more like a biscuit, but who's complaining? The flaky, bacony bite is something I've craved every morning since.

On the other hand, the texture of Jam's breakfast pastry—today, a zucchini bread—is spot-on. The thick, moist loaf boasts a subtle hint of milk chocolate and a light and perfect glaze, the kind that cracks in your mouth, like

you'd find covering a warm, fresh donut.

Ten minutes ago, our waiter—a quiet but attentive presence—had recommended to my vegetarian friend D. that he order chef Jeff Mauro's biscuits and gravy dish without the cotechino sausage, leaving the drop biscuits, sunny-side-up egg and mushroom gravy (impressive!) as meat-free fare, before telling my friend L. that the fennel pollen in the corn soup is pollen from the fennel flower, which is more aromatic than the herb. It doesn't save the soup from being sadly bland, with shriveled chunks of tough corn, and D., always independent, had instead ordered the not-very-exciting sandwich of egg and ricotta salata in front of him now. (With the braised pork cheeks that normally come on this, though, it's a winning dish.)

But my pork belly eggs benedict—the poster child for Jam's artfully designed plates, with a meticulously drawn line of dark green spinach purée contrasting with dollops of light green spinach hollandaise—is the best by a landslide. Crystals of black lava sea salt accent crispy, brisket-style pork belly on thick, house-made English muffin squares, which get drenched in runny yolk. It's masterpieces like this that tell me that Jam, good now, has the potential to be great—a five-star brunch at one-star prices. I don't see the weekend lines getting any shorter. ■



**ONE-BITE WONDER** Pastry chef Jessica Lane's carrot-pecan mini muffin with cardamom-spiced cream cheese frosting, pecan praline and candied carrot.

### Jam

937 N. Damen Ave.,  
773.489.0302. Cash only.

**HOURS:** Wed.-Mon. 7AM-3PM;  
closed Tuesdays.

### THE DEAL MAKERS

Breakfast pastry, \$3

Eggs benedict with English muffins, poached eggs, crisped pork belly and spinach hollandaise, \$9

Biscuits and gravy with house-made cotechino sausage, sunny-side up egg, pickled maitake mushrooms and Frenched green beans, \$10