

## New reviews



## Jam

★★★★★

Only open till 3. Only cash. Only the best thing to happen to brunch in a long time. By **Julia Kramer**

The two best things I ate at Jam were set before me and consumed in a single bite. On one visit, it was a mini raspberry muffin drizzled with honey. On another, it was a petite four—size cube of chocolate bread pudding, dolloped with caramel.

Breakfast *amuse-bouches* might seem stuffy, but this place, from Jerry Suqi (Chickpea) and chef Jeffrey Mauro (a Charlie Trotter's alum) is anything but. Sure, Jam takes more risks than its brunch counterparts—even the more creative ones like Southport Grocery—which will leave Bongo Room acolytes at a loss. Pork-cheek sandwiches and braised-lamb crêpes for breakfast? Honestly, I'm not that interested either. Which is why I'd rather hit Jam for lunch, so I have no excuse not to order that

buckwheat crêpe filled with fall-apart braised lamb, or better yet, that crisp pork-cheek sandwich (pictured), cut through with tart plums.

Even breakfast tropes here exhibit a degree of care that usually gets lost in mounds of poached eggs. Cracked pink peppercorns and stewed cherries add depth to French toast, even if the creamy, custardy stuff lacked a crispy exterior. An acidic tomato-red onion salsa gives some bite to a chorizo-filled Spanish omelette; so what if the accompanying potatoes were forgettably chalky?

Still, it's not the big items—the double-patty Jamburger, the hunk of rib eye in the steak and eggs—that have me looking forward to my next visit to Jam. It's the much smaller things: The way the rustic wood floors play against the cute lime-green place mats; the way the bacon-chive biscuit, fresh from the oven, crumbles in my hand then, quickly disappears.

937 N Damen Ave (773-489-0302). Breakfast, lunch. Average main course: \$9. Cash only.

## 33 Club

★★★★★

Jerry Kleiner fails to meet low expectations. By **David Tamarkin**

Like most meals, enjoying a dinner at a Jerry Kleiner restaurant requires the right expectations. So I went to 33 Club prepared for all the typical Kleiner touches: the flamboyant interior (with touches of zebra print), the midlife-scenester set (with touches of cheetah print) and the flashy cars (including Kleiner's convertible) parked outside.

What I couldn't have predicted were the amateur mistakes that plagued most of veteran chef Daniel Kelly's dishes. It's basically just steaks and fish he's doing here (the most innovative-sounding item is "bacon popcorn," but that turned out to literally just be popcorn topped with chopped bacon), so Kelly should be able to cook this stuff in his sleep.

But no. Something went wrong. His grilled shrimp lay on the plate, looking as tired as they tasted. On another visit, I was served the saddest Caesar salad in Chicago: romaine that looked as if it was poured straight from a bag, with a dressing so thin and pitiful it hardly clung to the leaves. Worst of all was the chicken, stuffed with sour, acrid lobster. Times are tough, I know that. But though these times may be forgiving of stale decor (the chair I was sitting in, a holdover from Room 21, was proof of that), they are not yet ripe for rancid lobster.

So despite a pleasant crab cake with chunky avocado relish, a decent sliced sirloin, and a trio of perfect deviled eggs (pictured), I left the restaurant vowing never to come back.

And to think—I'd had such level hopes. All that Kleiner baggage that

comes with every new restaurant he opens? I was willing to look past it. I like the idea of 33 Club, the notion of a grand ol' club, and I was even charmed by the dark wood paneling, the huge staircase in the middle of the dining room.

"That's rich," one of my companions said about the staircase. "Only rich people have staircases that don't go anywhere." We all nodded.

Of course, using that logic, we were in nowhere—the place the staircase led to was where we sat. Were we indeed in a place that nobody wants to end up in?

Maybe not at the moment. But eventually, yes.

A few days later I relented and went back for lunch. The music: lower. The scenesters: gone. The room: more club, less clubby.

Granted, things started with that awful Caesar and that awkward popcorn. Next came a fried chicken that was so overly fried that all the pleasure of eating fried chicken was annihilated. But there were also some potato chips—purportedly a signature of Kelly's—that were fried to a deep amber and served with a muscular onion dip. In my glass, a balanced rye cocktail (much more pleasant than the sickly 33 Cocktail I'd sipped at dinner). And in front of me, a cheeseburger. Nothing but beef and cheese, not even ketchup, because the thing was juicy enough not to need condiments and rich enough not to need more flavor. Some desserts followed (Boston cream pie: yes; brownie sundae: no), but for that moment with the hamburger I wasn't thinking. This could be so much better.

I was thinking. This could be worse

1419 N Wells St (312-664-1419). El: Brown, Purple (rush hrs) to Sedgwick Bus: 72, 156. Dinner. Average main course: \$18.

