

Chez Colette's lunch a winner; Amazing Thailand a work in progress

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You've probably said it yourself: "I'd love to meet friends for a nice lunch, but I can't fit it into my busy schedule."

Well, the people at Chez Colette at the Hotel Sofitel in Bloomington heard that so often they decided to do something about it. They're calling it the 30-Minute Lunch, and it's more than soup and sandwich. For \$18, you get four minicourses - appetizer, salad, entrée, dessert - with three choices per course. The food comes all at once on a divided dish, bento box style.

I went with the onion soup, duck confit salad and pan-seared salmon. My friend, Lori, chose the crab cakes with mango chutney, Greek salad and quiche Lorraine. For dessert, the pastry chef sent out a fruit parfait topped with chocolate mousse.

The portions were tiny, but they filled us up and were satisfying. This may not be for your deli-loving friends who prefer two-fisted sandwiches, but it's perfect for the ladies-who-lunch crowd.

The room was comfortable, service couldn't be nicer, and everything came in 20 minutes. I suspect, though, once this lunch deal is discovered, it will take the entire half-hour.

Chez Colette, Hotel Sofitel, 5601 W. 78th St., Minneapolis; 952-835-1900. The 30-Minute Lunch is available Monday through Friday. Price: \$18.

Amazing Thailand is amazing to look at, but the food is quite average. The dining room at the new restaurant in Uptown Minneapolis is stylish and uncluttered with sophisticated, big-city looks - Thai art, woodcarvings and an enticing patio. Too bad the aesthetics don't carry over to the food.

The menu has all the usual Thai stuff - satays, salads, curries, noodles - prettily arranged on plates. The best thing I ate on my first visit was the shrimp pad Thai - if you can't do the national dish of Thailand right, you may as well give it up. The green curry would have been better if it had more depth of flavor, more chicken and the vegetables had been cut a lot smaller. The tod maan appetizer - salty shrimp and crab pressed together and served with sweet chili sauce - had me chugging water the entire afternoon.

Does Uptown really need another Thai restaurant when it already has Sawatdee, Chang Mai and Tum Rup? If the food improves to match the decor, then the answer would be yes.

Amazing Thailand, 3024 Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis; 612-822-5588. Open for lunch and dinner daily. Prices, \$3.50 to \$18.95.

Small Bites are first glances - not intended as definitive reviews - of new or changed restaurants. Pioneer Press restaurant critic Kathie Jenkins can be reached at 651-228-5585 or kjenkins@pioneerpress.com.