

Go for the sandwiches, stay for the artwork at Café Too

SATISFY YOUR CRAVINGS AT MUSEUM'S HIP EATERY

By Amy Pizarro
for the Mercury News

This time of year, I get strong cravings for my favorite part of a holiday meal: the leftover-turkey sandwich. I yearn to stuff a few pieces of cold meat between slices of simple white bread, smeared with mayo and topped with a dash of salt and pepper.

That's why the roasted turkey sandwich at Café Too, a hip little enclave inside the San Jose Museum of Art, is such a treat. Forget that processed white blob some delis call "turkey" — this sandwich contains a mix of white and dark meat, perfectly stringy and moist, like it's fresh off the bird. It's a generous portion, too, spilling out of soft wheat bread as I crunched down into lettuce and tomato. A subtle cranberry aioli provided a creamy finish.

Super-fresh ingredients also star in the Fire-Roasted Vegetable Panini (\$6.75), with its thick filling of roasted mushrooms, zucchini, yellow squash and red peppers. The veggies are tucked into a round focaccia roll and topped with a rich housemade aioli. It's not a big sandwich, but it's absolutely satisfying.

The Italian Pizza Panini (\$6.95) — offered on a specials menu that changes weekly — has a bit more kick. The light crust encases pepperoni slices and mozzarella cheese, plus a sundried-tomato pizza sauce with arugula pesto. While the sandwich could have used more sauce, the flavors are just right.

Café Too, one of four locations run by the Catered Too catering company, offers many standards, including

Café Too

110 S. Market St., San Jose
(408) 277-0557;
www.sjmusart.org/content/visitUs/cafe/cafe.phtml

Hours: 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays

Types of food: Sandwiches, salads, soups, sweets and breakfast items

Average price: \$7

Good choices: Roasted turkey sandwich, panini

Attitude: Casual

Amenities: Free Wi-Fi; outdoor seating; nice artwork and table games

Vegetarian options: Salads, quiche and several sandwich options

Drinks: Full coffeehouse menu, plus wine, beer, sparkling water, juice, soda and tea. They also sell Coke in glass bottles!

Eat in car: Not a sandwich, but maybe the breakfast burrito or a bagel

Next-day edibility: Decent; I liked that my sandwich came wrapped in old-school white butcher paper.

Who goes there: Families, museumgoers, neighborhood office workers

Credit cards: Accepted

Parking: On-street parking is metered; otherwise, there are several nearby garages.

Restaurant reviews are conducted anonymously. The Mercury News pays for all meals.

soups, salads and quiches. The quiche of rock shrimp, tomato and basil is the size of a pot pie and a bit light on chopped shrimp, though the buttery crust was nice and flaky. Quiches come with a side salad — a ho-hum mix of iceberg and romaine topped with cherry tomatoes, cucumber and shredded carrots

— or a soup. Take the latter. The pea soup was earthy and fresh, and the specials during my visit were the intriguing grilled asparagus velvet soup and carrot, butternut squash and ginger soup (\$2.95 cup, \$5.25 bowl).

The menu also contains some surprises, including a clever section called Edible Art. The Chicken Polenta Towers appetizer (\$6.95 small, \$10.95 large) was indeed beautifully plated. White truffle aioli dotted shimmering golden triangles of polenta, which were layered with grilled zucchini slices. If the grilled coriander chicken breasts hadn't been alarmingly overcooked, the dish would have been a hit.

I spied on a neighbor's plate and was impressed by the ahi tuna tartare (\$8.50 small, \$12.95 large), featuring cubes of yellowfin tuna mixed with fresh ginger, spicy ponzu and sesame seeds, and finished with a wasabi creme fraiche. You can find that on the Edible Art list, along with the fun Lollipop Garden (\$4.25 small, \$7.50 large), bite-size cheesecake, brownie or Rice Krispie treats on a stick.

In addition to its unbeatable location (wouldn't a spin through the exhibits followed by an appetizer and a glass of wine be lovely?), Café Too has a contemporary urban feel, with rotating art provided by the museum adding a splash of color to the earth-toned walls. And the environment is less chilly and more family-friendly than you might expect from a museum. I saw a couple of toddlers climbing the wide leather benches and comfy couches while their moms relaxed with coffee.

Not everything on the menu is a masterpiece, but the creative touches make Café Too worth plenty of visits.

It's about getting the right audience to you. No