Competitive Edge

Market scores by pairing a sporty atmosphere with familiar food that's far from average.

By John Long

Market is not your typical place to catch the game. The new Rocky River hot spot is more of a stylish and comfortable neighborhood watering hole that merges sports-bar staples with an upscale atmosphere.

Ten large flat-screen televisions float above the beautiful granite horseshoe bar that anchors the space. The surrounding bar area and spacious dining room seem designed with crowds in mind.

Like the best sports bars, Market is also a domain for the beer lover, with 100 brews available by the bottle and 24 craft creations on tap. It’s also one of just four Northern Ohio bars to offer Goose Island Dominique, Goose Island Pepe Nero, Widmer Brothers Drifter Pale Ale and Sam Adams Revolutionary Rye on tap.

Sounding a bit familiar so far? True, like many game day destinations, Market has no shortage of TVs or beer. But the quality of the food is where the restaurant leaves the competition behind: The menu works because it sounds so familiar: steaks, salads, sandwiches and dippable appetizers.

"Fine dining is not what it was here a few years ago," says Market executive chef Robert Geul. "Those crowds aren’t around anymore. What we are doing is trying to make the customers comfortable."

Comfortable yes, but there are also surprises. The Market reuben ($11) substitutes corned beef with smoked brisket for bigger flavor. Traditional roast beef is tossed aside for grilled filet mignon in the gourmet French dip ($14), and mac and cheese ($15) with white cheddar is dressed up with black truffles.

Wisely, most of the appetizers are designed with beer in mind. The food conjures memories of tailgates and watch parties. There’s buffalo chicken dip ($9) with diced grilled chicken, warm buffalo cheese sauce and tortilla chips, the latter of which you can also sample in the sausage flight ($8) with a trio of mango, pineapple and sweet corn salsas. Little piglets in a blanket ($9), hot dog franks wrapped in a house-made puff pastry, gets a stylish dressing from whole grain mustard and creme fraiche.

The pretzel-covered pickle chips ($9), with a salt-sour flavor, are deep-fried and served with house French onion dip. But the best appetizer we tried was the tuna wonton crisps ($10). Fresh cubes of ahi tuna mixed with sweet diced mangoes and slightly bitter sprouts tame the bold wasabi aioli.

Open for both lunch and dinner, Market offers a separate sandwich menu not available to evening diners. Standouts include the Brooklyn walleye ($10), battered in Brooklyn Lager and served on toasted ciabatta, and the shrimp BLT wrap ($10) with roasted garlic shrimp and applewood bacon wrapped in a spinach tortilla.

But if you have to pick just one meal to savor at Market, make it Sunday brunch. If you’re game, hit the bloody mary cart and build your own cocktail from dozens of garnishes such as stuffed olives, smokies, fresh fruit, cheese and bacon.

Brunch includes your choice of omelets, eggs and skillets, and stuffed or plain pancakes. The platter-sized blueberry pancakes ($6) were so stuffed they appeared as if they were going to burst. The breakfast burrito ($8) was equally enormous and filled with chunks of chorizo, black beans, pepper, onions and cheese.

But the eggs Benedict ($7.50) was the big surprise. The two poached eggs and Canadian bacon were doused with one of the best hollandaise sauces I’ve ever tasted. Geul says there is no secret ingredient for the dish; he just doesn’t take any shortcuts. The result is a sauce that’s tangy and creamy and not at all floury the way so many commercial sauces can be.

The biggest disappointment over three visits was the failure of the dining room to deliver in the evening the way the breakfast and lunch team do. A salad advertised as pear, smoked Gouda and spinach ($9) was an unremarkable mound of greens topped with a few thin slices of pears and cheese. The veal chop ($23) was an embarrassing, nearly raw, piece of meat that lacked flavor.

But Market redeemed itself with near-perfect short ribs ($21) that were tender with hints of exotic Asian spices and served alongside wasabi mashed potatoes.

All in all, Market has a lot going for it. The young restaurant had barely been open 90 days at the time of our visits.

So far, the excellent brunch and great luncheon fare are carrying Market well, and it looks as though the night staff may be ready to join them.

When You Go

Market
1137 Linda St., Rocky River, 440-799-4292, marketbeer.com
Mon-Thu 11:30 a.m.-midnight, Fri & Sat 11:30 a.m.-2 a.m., Sun 10 a.m.-midnight

TRY THIS
The eggs Benedict ($7.50), with a hollandaise so rich and creamy you’ll want to lick the plate

HAPPY HOUR
Mon-Fri 3:45-7 p.m., beers $3, wines by the glass $4 and appetizers $5