

dining HOPE S. PHILBRICK

## Back to basics

New Morningside location of Food 101  
aces the test of good food fundamentals

BASIC DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN common. This is the lesson at Food 101 Morningside, the new sister restaurant to the Sandy Springs original. Built around classic American offerings like meatloaf, pot roast and fried chicken, the menu raises home-style traditions to a new level with Chef Ron Eyester's creative touch.

Saturday evening reservations are

easy to secure, even online via OpenTable.com an hour prior to the desired time. Parking is another matter, giving neighborhood residents within walking distance a clear advantage.

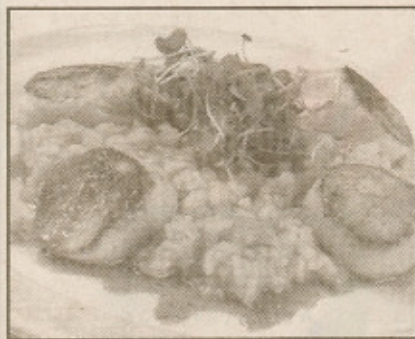
After wiggling the car into a parallel space, I enter and am greeted and seated promptly. The server arrives shortly and proves to have a deep knowledge of the menu. Throughout the evening, she strikes the right balance between attentiveness and respect for privacy. But the relationship is complicated when multiple runners deliver the food.

Located in the former Indigo space, the dining room is renovated with contemporary touches like geometric upholstery, glass tile and warm wood.

Before long, the room fills with a nice blend of gay and straight folks, typically seated in pairs.

FOR STARTERS, CRAB AND SHRIMP cakes (\$10) are satisfying. Served atop tangy mustard slaw and drizzled with zesty rémoulade, the cakes' large lumps of savory meat are delicious.

The golden beet and avocado salad (\$7) is



Comfort food with a gourmet twist is just what diners needed in Morningside: a second location of Sandy Springs' popular Food 101. (Photo courtesy Food 101)

named for its star ingredients, served carrying a nest of baby spinach leaves drenched with buttermilk poppy seed dressing. The sweet flavor and crisp texture of beets is a pleasant contrast to the buttery, soft avocado. Both complement the bitter spinach. The mild dressing softens the flavor edges and brings the whole salad together.

The buttermilk fried chicken (\$14) is a revelation. One bite erased memories of my mom's blackened mess and those greasy cardboard container versions that came thereafter. Food 101's exquisite version is tender and moist inside, crisp outside.

Indeed, frying chicken is possible without drips of grease or a trace of rubbery skin. It's served with green beans, slaw, mashed potatoes and gravy; familiar side dishes that manage to transcend home preparations.

The braised pork ravioli (\$16) proves that familiar foods can benefit from modern, creative interpretations. Sweet shredded pork is

tucked inside tender pasta then topped with caramelized onion, fresh sage, mushroom cream and goat cheese. The delicious combination is unique but remains comforting.

A glance around the dining room reveals that the fried chicken and Georgia mountain trout (\$17) are popular — and that the portion sizes are satisfying but routinely polished off. Hungry guests may want to try the braised lamb shank (\$18) or grilled Kobe burger (\$14), both served in portions so generous that they inspire gasps.

CARROT CAKE (\$4) IS THE SOLE DISAPPOINTMENT. To call this a cake is deceiving; cream cheese frosting decorated with golden raisins and julienne carrot sticks would actually be a better menu description for this pile of creamed sugar.

The problem is not that the frosting tastes bad — quite the opposite, it is good. But the two thin layers of orange nestled in the white fluff are too thin to contribute the spiciness and dense texture needed to contrast the frosting.

The better bet for dessert might be the chocolate cake, brought in from the highly regarded Alon's Bakery across the street.

Overall, the meal at Food 101 Morningside is definitely enjoyable. The atmosphere is as comfortable as the food. This is a place where you can put your elbows on the table without worrying about spills; the tablecloth is covered with brown paper.

The only real problem is that Mom may be a bit heartbroken when she learns that you prefer someone else's fried chicken. Or in my case, that you shared her culinary failure with the reading public.

### i FOOD FILE



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Food: ★★★★★  
Service: ★★★★★  
Comfort & Aesthetics: ★★★★★  
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