

## Café D-I-Y

Chefs who've trained under such culinary talents as Traci Des Jardins at Rubicon and Paul Bertoli at Oliveto, or developed their craft at Stars in San Francisco, learned to aim big. Morgan Brownlow certainly did. He proved it as chef of Portland restaurant, clarklewis, when it earned *The Oregonian's* Restaurant of the Year award in 2004. But now times are different, and so is Brownlow's perspective. At his new, humble, Café 401, he and partners Kevin Dorney and Marcus Ginther (also veterans on the Portland scene) have pulled together a charming neighborhood breakfast and lunch spot on a do-it-yourself budget.

Wallpaper of aged *Oregonian* newspapers, in varying shades of sepia, is neatly glossed on the walls. The mismatched tiles covering the gas fireplace's floor-to-ceiling chimney adds a vibrant burst, along with the collection of license plates under the long lunch counter in primary colors. The only tables, four booths concocted of particle board and recycled wood flooring, are situated over heating elements, providing a warm spot to sip Stumptown coffee when the large windows are fogged over from the Portland rains.

The bill of fare is a reflection of Brownlow's Italian-influenced "clean and dirty" cooking—clean as in simple, dirty as in rustic. A porridge of fluffy polenta topped with a pillowy poached egg and sharp asiago cheese, for a mere \$5, was once featured in *Food and Wine* magazine during the chef's heyday at clarklewis. Sharing menu space are unfussy breakfast classics: "the ritual," a combo plate of two eggs, a choice of meat, potatoes, and toast; or the "French toast on baguette" served with Mrs. Butterworth's syrup. "I'm letting go of the elitism of food," Brownlow said. "Heinz ketchup has never been in my pantry before, but I want to serve the starving-artist culture that doesn't have much money right now. Now they can come here."

Audacious fare like the "hen" liver with bacon, sautéed onions, and sage, shingled over thick-cut grilled bread, caters to Portland's adventurous brunch crowd. When asked why he uses the term "hen" as opposed to the more modest "chicken," Brownlow said, "it just sounds better"—a marketing ploy he learned from Bertoli and a sign that this chef's old habits die hard.

Café 401 exemplifies the type of restaurant that can open and thrive in this economy—one with a modest budget, creativity, elbow grease, AND an incredibly talented chef. When asked if this is a stepping-stone to another high-profile dinner house, Brownlow said no. "Ask me in five years and I may have another answer, but for now, I just want to cook."

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