

VENTURA COUNTY STAR

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VENTURA, Calif. - A new spot for fresh and satisfying food has sailed into Ventura Harbor Village. Boatyard Cafe, now cooking on all burners at breakfast and lunch hours, is docked where Spinnaker restaurant reigned for a few decades but is spiffily redressed with a fresh paint job and wood look-alike flooring.

BOATYARD CAFE

Location: 1583 Spinnaker Drive, Suite 10, Ventura Harbor Village. 850-0202; theboatyardcafe.com.

Hours: Breakfast 7-11 a.m. daily; lunch 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. weekdays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekends. Bar open from lunchtime into evening Tuesdays through Sundays.

Impressions: Nicely renovated order-at-the-counter spot, with indoor and outdoor seating; friendly and helpful service; freshly cooked breakfast dishes with some sea-oriented items.

What's hot: Brioche French toast, seafood scramble, spiced Irish oatmeal, biscuits, hash browns.

The cafe is order-at-the-counter, but we found the helpfulness there at breakfast time superior to a number of places we've been with table service that was seldom visible. Two staff members were at Boatyard on our first visit, which was so pleasant we returned within days to check out a few more items.

We did indeed order at the counter, with a cheery young woman helping us over the bumpy spots. A friend ordered the seafood scramble (\$13.95) and had to choose from hash browns, home fries or sliced tomatoes as a side. The potatoes, she joked, probably came "from the freezer." The server swiftly assured that wasn't the case; the hash browns and home fries are made fresh in the kitchen.

The hash browns that arrived on my friend's plate were so much better than many I've tasted at other restaurants that they easily backed up the order-taker's declaration. They were light, crisp and deftly seasoned and could never be mistaken for something warmed up after freezer-time. The scramble, with shrimp, crab, spinach, diced tomatoes and Jack cheese stirred in, was a winner, too. Omelets, combos and scrambles all come with the potato/tomato choice and with either toast, biscuit or English muffin. I ordered a biscuit (\$2 a la carte) to sample at the table and it too stood out, with its light, perfectly baked texture.

Our other main dish, brioche French toast combo (\$10.95), comes with two eggs (I had mine scrambled) and a choice of sausage, apple-wood smoked bacon or ham. The French toast was outstanding and the sausage also was quite good.

I couldn't resist returning with a different friend a few days later to introduce her to the simple pleasures of Boatyard. She ordered a Harbor Combo (\$9.95) with her two eggs scrambled and ham as accompaniment and found both to her liking.

An item that had piqued my curiosity on my first visit, spiced Irish oatmeal (\$5.95), seemed a good choice on the next, and I added a bowl of fresh seasonal fruit (\$4.50). The addition to the steel-cut oats of spices, walnuts, dried cranberries and apricots brought out the best in all of the ingredients and made a hearty breakfast dish. The seasonal fruit included pineapple, strawberries, grapes and melon.

Finally, I couldn't resist sampling the a la carte waffle (\$2.50), which arrived in substantial size with butter and syrup, an impressive bargain as well as fine food.

Among Boatyard's other breakfast offerings are Shipyard Omelets like The Ventucky, with ham, bacon, bell peppers, onions and cheddar cheese; and El Caballero, with chorizo, potatoes, bell peppers, onions, jalapeños and cotija cheese. The Harbor Combos offer chargrilled wild salmon or a 4-ounce steak among their pairings. Boatyard Specialties include the Haul & Launch with eggs, Angus burger, chili, cheddar and potatoes; biscuits and gravy with or without eggs; Kelly's corned beef hash and eggs; and a South Jetty Burrito.

Boatyard doesn't forget the kids, who have their own breakfast special and a separate lunch menu. Sandwiches for grown-ups run the gamut of familiar favorites and salads and soups round out the menu. Fish fans will find a Coastal Catch-of-the-Day on the line. Peet's coffee is served along with other familiar beverages.

Rita Moran visits restaurants unannounced and pays for her food. If you know of a new, unusual or just plain good restaurant, contact her at rita.j.moran@gmail.com.

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