

Come for Brunch, Stay for Dinner: The southern influence of Saje Kitchen finds Fed Hill



“Excuse me, are you a middle school teacher?” a beautiful 20-something with long, wavy locks asked my friend, Mr. M., just as we were finishing up our two-hour brunch/dinner at **Saje Kitchen** on a late Sunday afternoon.

“I am...” he answered hesitantly.

“Oh my gosh, you were my science teacher in 2009!” she said, and in her what-are-the-odds joy, asked for a photo together.

Now I know what you’re thinking: *That’s so Rhode Island*. However, neither my friend nor his former student are from Rhode Island, nor do they live here now. But somehow we all had the same idea: to investigate a new addition to Federal Hill that serves creative American fare with a southern twist. (And I’m guessing the table of 20-somethings was very excited about the large cocktail pitchers — Lavender Lemonade or Apple Cider & Gingerbeer, mixed with a spirit of choice). I can safely say we all walked away with more than we expected that day, reunion photos aside.

As I mentioned, Mr. M and I arrived in time for brunch and stayed until dinner. This dining strategy is hard to achieve in most restaurants because they require a transition period, but Saje Kitchen fully accommodates my level of gluttony. Breakfast, lunch and dinner, all in one sitting! The hobbits of Middle Earth might be disappointed, but I was thrilled.

The restaurant has an eclectic vibe. The décor is very “new age” club, with a backlit bar, various clusters of balloons and velvet green booths. The playlist brought me back to my high school days, and I remember noting that I hadn’t heard “Lose Yourself” by Eminem in quite some time. Meanwhile, the TV above the bar featured an animated penguin movie and *Kenan & Kel*, a nostalgic throwback I haven’t seen since I was Mr. M’s students’ age. Then there was the menu, creative and classy, with a wide variety of drinks and dishes to accommodate any meal or occasion.

We began our gluttony with brunch cocktails. Saje Kitchen has the usual contenders, Bloody Marys and Bottomless Mimosas, but Mr. M is an Espresso Martini aficionado (he *always* opts for Baileys, as one should), and I wanted a Painkiller, which is like the love child of a Mai Tai and a Piña Colada. Contrary to drinking at other Providence locales (perhaps, say, a rooftop), you’re not just drinking juice here — these cocktails were alcohol forward, in the best kind of way, unless dry January really did me in. Thus, we ordered carbs and protein to keep me grounded.



The Savory Sweet Potato Hash, made with pulled pork and poached eggs, was packed with flavor. The sweet potato was thinly sliced, looking like shaved carrots, and the eggs were perfectly poached. The pico de gallo topping had a spicy kick to it that both of us loved, and it was Mr. M's favorite dish of the day. We also ordered the Pineapple Coconut Waffle, which was as tantalizing as it sounds: charred pineapple compote, coconut cream and candied walnuts. When the server dropped it off and asked if we needed anything, I wondered if I should ask for syrup, but after one bite, the definitive answer was no — the charred pineapple compote and coconut cream were perfect. A bit smoky and a bit spicy, sweet but not too sweet. Even though I've been told the Chicken and Waffles are stellar, and I was curious about the Cajun Eggs Benedict, I would definitely order the exact same thing again.



The dinner menu offers a range of plate sizes, allowing people to share light bites as well as some of the

heavier southern favorites. According to Ethan Jaffe, one of the owners who lived in North Carolina for a few years, “I’d always eat so much [in the south], I couldn’t move! I wanted people to be able to pick and choose, to offer a little something for everyone.” In the spirit of sharing, we ordered one “large” plate, the classic Shrimp and Grits, and two medium plates: the Crispy Brussels Sprouts and the Glazed Baby Back Ribs.

One thing that is consistent among all the dishes is that play on sweet and spicy, or smoky and sweet. The Crispy Brussels Sprouts, for instance, were crisped to perfection — what I always hope to achieve at home and never do — and pairing them with sweet apple slices and crème fraiche created a flavor profile that was unlike any other I’ve had. The ribs were tangy and sweet, and the meat delectably tender. The shrimp and grits were served with a remoulade that was smoky and savory, with occasional bursts of warm blistered tomatoes.



Last but not least: the dinner cocktails. One of the highlights of my night was the Flatbush Snush, made with cognac, strawberry, and lemonade. This drink is a vibrant shade of red and arrived with a thin layer of smoke billowing from the top, looking like a volcano. Dry ice — in a drink! “You can get a cocktail anywhere,” Jaffe said, “but we want you to engage in a fun and unique experience.”

Whether you’re wanting a casual brunch or planning to celebrate a special occasion, Saje Kitchen has got you covered. They’re putting together a Valentine’s Day weekend prix-fixe, which you can learn more about by following them on social media. One thing I feel confident about: you’ll discover both sweet and savory surprises. You might even come for brunch and decide to stay for dinner.

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