

FEED THE SENSES

Solve Eugene's brunch problem at **Lion and Owl** BY WILLIAM KENNEDY

Step into Lion and Owl Brunch, a new food truck located on 5th and Washington, and immediately smile. Lion and Owl is in a converted sleek, silver 1977 Airstream that owner Kristen Hansen calls a “land shark.” The truck began its life in Portland, as Lebanese Scrooge, a food truck open daily from 4:20 to 4:20 (*Why? — Because Portland!*)

“Maybe it was the 4:20 thing,” Hansen says, but Lebanese Scrooge didn’t work out and the Airstream fell into disuse. Eventually Hansen and her wife, business partner and head chef Crystal Platt, rescued the beached shark, bringing it to Eugene.

Hansen says she and Platt met at Marché, where they spent 10 years. Hansen’s passion is for wine and champagne — what would a brunch place be without mimosas? And Platt’s passion is for food.

The couple honeymooned in Europe, exploring a whole new world of breakfast and brunch options. “We’re so stuck here,” Hansen says, recalling that when she and Platt spoke of planning a brunch place, everyone asked: “So, biscuits and gravy?”

“No,” was Hansen’s reply. And Platt doesn’t understand why so many consider breakfast and brunch a chore of a meal. “There’s so much to showcase,” she adds, referring to her menu of small but satisfying plates, featuring everything from fiddlehead ferns to morel mushrooms to crayfish.

While already retrofitted for food service, Hansen and Platt added their own impossibly charming touches to the interior of the Airstream — creating the look and feel of a retro diner with an edge of Northwest earthiness. Succulents hang in jars, suspended from the ceiling, and vintage tunes play on the sound system.

Lion and Owl offers both indoor and covered outdoor seating. Hansen supplies guests seated outdoors with blankets for the unpredictable Oregon weather. The cozy interior is instantly intimate. You find yourself in conversation with Hansen, Platt and other patrons.

One guest is visiting from Napa. Someone else brings up bitter Northwest coffee and IPAs. “Why are we so bitter?” is asked. The response? “It’s the weather!”

Begin with the miso banana bread with farmer’s cheese and rhubarb angelica jam. Light and airy, the bread floats on tart sweetness, remaining tethered to the ground by the cheese’s savory and heavenly fluff. Next try the potato in the style of ham hock with peas, spring onion, mint porcini tea and sour hazelnut cream. Marvel how the potato, deceptively braised in the style of ham, is a cunningly delicious substitute for the real thing.

Then, for something on the savory side, move on to sausage-stuffed morels with boudin blanc, green garlic sabayon and miner’s lettuce. Sabayon is a light dessert or sweet sauce believed to be of Italian origin and made by whisking egg folks, sugar and wine.

For beverages, Lion and Owl offers espresso, juices and a broad wine selection sold by glass or bottle and 16 ounce cans of Rainier — not the champagne of beers but the Northwest equivalent.

“It looks like champagne,” someone points out. “And it tastes like Miller!” I add.

And, of course, for the requisite brunch mimosa, choose from a wide selection of champagnes, blood orange juice as a mixer adding to Lion and Owl’s color palette perfectly.



FENNEL LEEK BREAD PUDDING

Next off the menu, go with the open-faced omelet with asparagus, fiddlehead ferns, violet leaves and lardo — a cured fatback. The net effect for the taste buds, as well as sight and smell, is something like spending a warm spring morning in an Oregon garden — pleasantly face-first in flowers and greenery.

Lastly, there’s the fennel leek bread pudding with crayfish, steelhead roe (with a delightful texture. They pop in your mouth!), lemon verbena and brown-butter bisque. Hansen says the dish is inspired by a summer on the Rogue River, and the dish is sumptuous and delicious, a brilliant mix of water, land and air—transporting you directly to the riverside, filling you with memories of lazy summer days in water.

Which is perhaps what’s most remarkable about the food at Lion and Owl: the use of unlikely, locally sourced ingredients with posh, exotic twists as well as Platt’s deft hand with creams and sauces and Hansen’s welcoming service, creating a truly Northwest experience for all five senses.

“See you tomorrow!” a fellow diner says while paying her bill. “Will you come here every day?” I ask.

“Yes,” she says. But that could’ve been the champagne talking.

Lion and Owl Brunch is open 10 am - 4 pm Thursday to Monday at 501 Washington Street. For more information see lionandowlbrunch.com.

PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER



WARM RABBIT TERRINE



SAUSAGE STUFFED MORELS