

## Delancey offshoot keeps food simple, atmosphere homey

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The Delancey Street Foundation story is a well-known one in San Francisco and the Bay Area. The self-help residential educational center for people who have hit the proverbial skids provides jobs, a place to stay and a chance to turn around a life.

One of the more visible aspects of the foundation is the Delancey Street Restaurant, a full-service dinner house known for its food, service and style.

Not wanting to rest on its laurels, Delancey Street Foundation has opened a new venture, Crossroads Cafe, just around the corner from the restaurant. And while it's only about a block or two away, it's a world apart.

No crisp white linen tablecloths and no tableside service. Crossroads Cafe is a bookstore with a comfortable setting and a nice, eclectic menu. The name, as you might guess, is born from the members of Delancey Street being at a crossroads in their lives, needing to take "the road less traveled" as a way to straighten out their situation, whatever the situation might be.

Everything at Crossroads Cafe is homemade, from the food to the building itself. Delancey Street workers built the structure, bookcases, hand-carved the bar, poured the concrete, baked the muffins, and squeezed the oranges for the juice.

Did I mention that the CEO of Pottery Barn, Howard Lester, donated all of the furniture and dishes? He did.

Now, having said all that, the bottom line is that Crossroads Cafe is a business just like any other business out there. Businesses provide a service or product — or in the case of a restaurant, both — and charge their customers for that service. So, no kid gloves here.

The cafe is set up in as casual a format as I've ever seen in my life. In fact, if you didn't know about it, you might walk by, thinking it was a bookstore. But if you did wander in, once you saw past the shelves of books and knickknacks, you'd notice a food bar that runs the length of the building where everything is prepared.

There are no menus; large boards suspended above the cash register list what's being offered. It's a simple place, and the simple dishes work best.

There's a fine focaccia pizza, made with tomato, cheese and peppers (\$4.25). It comes with a good portion of tossed greens in balsamic dressing.

And the applewood-smoked bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich (\$4.95) is great. The bacon was thick and cooked just right, not too crispy and not too limp.

The spanakopita (\$4.25) comes with an almost-too-bright mint-cucumber sauce. You can also get this spinach-and-feta pastry as part of a Mediterranean vegetarian platter (\$6.95) that includes olives, hummus and organic greens.

The Caribbean chicken salad (\$7.50) pairs spicy tender chicken breast with crispy greens tossed in a sweet dressing. Chunks of avocado and oranges added a rich and juicy contrast.

A blackened chicken-breast sandwich came with a "Cajun" butter on a slightly-stale Kaiser roll (\$5.95). While I couldn't detect anything special about the butter, the Cajun flavor on the spiced chicken came through.

Other novel sandwiches include brie and pears on focaccia (\$4.25) and cold spicy meatloaf with housemade onion marmalade (\$6.25). All the sandwiches come with a green salad.

Crossroads Cafe is more than just a place to grab a bite. They've got an old-fashioned



Crossroads Cafe entertains young Bailey Wallen and her dad, Jim, during their visit to the restaurant and bookstore.

### CROSSROADS CAFE

- **WHERE:** 699 Delancey St., S.F.
- **HOURS:** Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner daily
- **FOOD:** American
- **AMBIENCE:** Very casual
- **PRICES:** Starters \$2.95-\$4.95, salads \$2.95-\$7.95, sandwiches \$4.25-\$6.25
- **CREDIT CARDS:** Major cards
- **PARKING:** Street
- **CONTACT:** 415-836-5624; reservations not accepted
- **FOOD:** B-
- **AMBIENCE/SERVICE:** B-



fountain, which we enjoyed greatly. A hot fudge sundae (\$4.45) came with two massive scoops of ice cream, homemade whipped cream and nuts. And, in addition to coffee drinks, there's also a full high tea, with scones, tea sandwiches and desserts (\$10.95 to \$14.95).

We did have some problems with the mechanics. Silverware is kept on the tables in large coffee cups, but we had to search around to get some forks. There's a station with ice water and plenty of silverware, but there was nobody to direct us there. In other words, you really are on your own at the cafe (your food is brought to the table, but that's about it), so if you're in the mood for a lot of attention, look elsewhere.

Overall, however, the food

was good, the prices were very reasonable and the setting relaxing. After dinner, we wandered around the little bookstore, checking out the latest releases, leafing through old favorites and just unwinding from a busy day.