



## Salazar (Review)

Salazar brings sandwiches and house-made goodies to the OTR lunch scene

BY KRISTEN FRANKE · SEPTEMBER 24TH, 2014 · DINER



*Salazar's melty grilled vegetable sandwich - Photo: Jesse Fox*

There is too much talent in the Over-the-Rhine restaurant scene to leave the doors closed until dinnertime. When chef Jc Salazar decided to serve lunch at his 14th and Republic bistro, however, his focus was hardly on what the various restaurants around him were doing.

“We just kind of work from within and see what sticks,” Salazar says. To him, lunch is a way to bring one of his favorite things in the entire world — the sandwich — to the loyal patrons who feast on his New American creations past sundown.

As we recently perused the lunch menu in the sun-soaked dining room, Salazar’s focus on serving up a great sandwich was immediately apparent. While almost all of the small plates came directly from the dinner menu, the “mains” section was dominated by Salazar’s beloved lunch item. As we watched various sandwiches drift by our table, we were delighted by

another seeming departure from Salazar's less-is-more dinner concept: the serving size. The sandwiches are generous and overflowing with their respective elements, not to mention nestled next to a pile of warm, rustic potato chips. We opted for the Slow Roasted Turkey Breast Sandwich (\$10), which came highly recommended by our server, and the Grilled Vegetable Sandwich (\$9); our foodie selves elated over its promise of house-made flatbread.

The turkey breast sandwich did everything Salazar told me a sandwich should: it took delicious ingredients and combined them to make something "melty and gooey" that kept us entranced until that last bite. The bread — Blue Oven just *gets it* — was toasty and flavorful with sufficient substance to withstand the tender turkey breast (thank you, Eckerlin Meats) and the dollops of aioli.

The most praiseworthy part of this sandwich, however, was the restraint shown in the use of green olive tapenade. Often overpowering, olive spreads can make or break a good sandwich, and this one was just subtle enough to offer a salty kick.

Our second choice took eggplant, zucchini, manchego and garlic hummus and smooshed them all together for a satisfying bite. The house-made flatbread is warm and well made, though perhaps slightly overpowering in herby flavor. Still, as I nodded approvingly with each taste, I could not help but wish I had ordered the super simple burger our server so passionately encouraged, or maybe Salazar's personal favorite, the Cuban (you know, for the meltiness). The vegetable sandwich was successful, yes, but hardly as swoon-worthy as our first selection.

For those less ravenous diners, items from the "nibbles" section of Salazar's lunch menu could provide an ample meal if combined correctly. We tried the fried broccoli florets with sambal-buttermilk emulsion (\$5) and the tomato panzanella salad (\$6), both available on the dinner menu at a steeper price point. The fried broccoli is tear-jerkingly perfect. Served in a small bowl, it looks, quite simply, like someone took broccoli and singed it a little. It is not breaded or carnival-esque, it just burns in your mouth with fresh-out-of-the-fryer flavor and a slightly crisp texture. It is not greasy or dripping with oil, making it all the more mysterious how they did it. Though intrigued by the creamy emulsion it was served with, we actually ignored it, going for the broccoli all by itself.

The panzanella, a traditional Italian bread salad, is gorgeously presented, with colorful slices of tomato, tiny mounds of house-made ricotta, and green and purple tufts of lettuce. Salazar describes it as one menu item that truly encapsulates locavore vision for the restaurant. The cucumbers, tomatoes, bread and onions all hail from local sources. (The onions in the salad are ordered from Sallie Ransahoff, a woman who has been selling vegetables out of the back of her truck "since before it was cool," Salazar says.) The simplicity of Salazar's panzanella, with just a drizzle of balsamic and nothing more, is commendable. But the bread — the centerpiece of any panzanella — felt more crouton-like than I expected. I later discovered that Salazar's approach is to *quickly* soak the lightly toasted, day-old pieces in tomato juices so as to avoid a loss in texture. Having thoroughly enjoyed the salad, I cannot fault him for his technique and welcome it as an alternative to the spongier, flavor-soaked panzanellas of my past.

Salazar's little bistro on the corner deserves a lunch crowd, mainly because just about everything on the menu is made so well. Not only that, but the space is even more beautiful during the day; the afternoon light just pours in through the windows, bouncing off the pretty wooden tables and making the colors in Salazar's dishes really pop. Oh, and do not forget dessert. Their ice creams are — you guessed it — house-made, and when your server says "brown butter bourbon chocolate chip" resisting is useless.

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**Go:** 1401 Republic St., Over-the-Rhine

**Call:** 513-621-7000

**Internet:** [salazarcincinnati.com](http://salazarcincinnati.com)

**Hours:** 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. and 5:30-10:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. and 5:30-11 p.m. Friday; 5:30-11 p.m. Saturday.

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*\*an earlier version incorrectly named Sallie Ransahoff as Sallie Rassenhoff*