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Bakery manager Carli Call preps a box of pastries for a customer.
PHOTO/ALLISON YOUNG

Bread winner

Perenn Bakery in midtown proudly proclaims, “Embrace the gluten.” This is Old World baking focused on a limited number of breads and pastries that are almost too beautiful to eat—almost. If you’re doing the low-carb thing, this place is worthy of a cheat day.

My friend and I arrived bright and early on a Saturday, counter to my policy that Saturday mornings are for sleeping in. Good thing we did, because they’d nearly sold out of goods by the time we left. There is a huge communal table in the center of the room—all seats were taken—and some strip counters around the walls; some with stools, some standing-room-only. After receiving our goods we chose to stand.

Giant boules of seeded and unseeded sourdough were on display, accompanied by a basket of yard-long baguettes. The display counter featured an array of croissant and *kouign-amann* pastries. Beverages include ice water and locally roasted coffee. A short menu of prepared items makes for a nice, light brunch.

Tartine refers to an open-faced sandwich, harkening back to the medieval Europeans’ use of a slab of bread in lieu of a plate. My lox *tartine tartine* (\$8) was a sizeable, toasted slice of sourdough with schmear of *labneh* (thick, tart yogurt), a sprinkle of *za’atar* (a Levantine-Arabic herb and spice blend), mild pickled cucumber, sesame seed, fresh pea shoots and—of course—thin-sliced, brined salmon. It sounds pretty fancy, but the young woman who delivered it said simply, “Here’s your toast.” That’s some pretty fantastic toast. The sour notes of the bread, spread and pickle countered well with the slightly salty fish and spices, and I particularly enjoyed the fresh note of just-plucked

microgreens.

My friend equally enjoyed her six-inch sandwich (\$8) made with baguette, triple cream brie and fig jam. The bread was a perfect combination of crunch and chew, and the fruit and cheese combo was pretty solid. There’s an option to add dry cured ham for another \$2, but she apparently isn’t the ham fan that I am. I made up for it with a prosciutto and gruyere croissant (\$5), which was so sexy I kind of hated to bite in and ruin it. The buttery flakiness, the layers, the air pockets—I almost didn’t notice the small layer of quality pork and cheese in the center, having lost myself in a truly transcendent example of what a croissant should be. My friend’s young daughter appeared to agree, making short work of a chocolate-filled croissant (\$3.75). I actually didn’t get to taste that one; she was pretty protective of her morning bounty, with good reason.

A plain *kouign-amann* (\$3.75) is a sort of cousin to the croissant. The Breton word literally means “butter and cake.” The flaky, layered texture is similar, but it’s got a nice, light sweetness and composition all its own. Perenn’s is as good as I’ve encountered, maybe the best. The seasonal variety of the day—coconut creme brulee (\$5.25)—kicked it up to another level. Shaved coconut topped the crown of the cake, with a surprise filling of coconut custard gushing forth on my first bite. It was a little messy, and though I’m not a huge fan of coconut, this lightly sweet use of the palm fruit/nut was quite pleasant. I took a hefty loaf of sourdough home (\$9), extending my cheat day with no regrets. □

Perenn Bakery

20 St. Lawrence Ave., 451-7722

Perenn Bakery is open Wednesday through Sunday from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Learn more at perennbakery.com.