

# The art of brunch at Sabrosa in Bay View

[Carol Deptolla, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) Published 6:09 a.m. CT Nov. 21, 2017



*(Photo: Michael Sears, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)*

The everyday brunch restaurant has become a thing, thank goodness, since standard-bearer Blue's Egg debuted in 2010. Since then, places like Engine Company No. 3 have opened, and this year brought Mimosa in Franklin and Sabrosa in Bay View.

Sabrosa, standing like a yellow ray of sunshine on S. Howell Ave., does more than serve the king of breakfast sandwiches and Mexican lunch dishes that will ring a bell with fans of the late Taqueria Azteca. It's also a gallery, where a baby grand piano stands ready to provide music, mostly classical (the piano is from the old Marian Center in St. Francis, as is a pew used as a banquette).

It's natural that Sabrosa would combine food and art; its owners are chef Frank Sanchez and his partner, Ruben Piirainen, pianist with the Florentine Opera Company. (Sanchez made his name as the chef at Azteca, which operated near where Sabrosa stands now.)

[Buy Photo](#)



**An exhibition of photographs and a baby grand piano are part of the dining room at Sabrosa Cafe & Gallery.** *(Photo: Michael Sears, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)*

Come at peak hours on the weekend, and you'll likely have time to examine the art (currently black-and-white photographs by Timothy Abler) while you wait for a table. Sabrosa is finding its audience, and weekends are busiest.

Lucky you, if you have time weekdays to pause for breakfast or lunch, when tables are easier to land. For a minimalist breakfast or something sweet to share, there are Sabrosa's own cinnamon rolls and blueberry lemon scones, crowned with lemon cream cheese glaze; both are fine bites with a cup of coffee.

For those who brunch hard, Sabrosa does have a lineup of something stronger, like a Bloody Mary smartly topped with a cube of frozen tomato juice and spices.

[Buy Photo](#)



**Sabrosa Cafe's plate-sized breakfast sandwich, the SBSBBS, which stands for "spicy brown sugar bourbon bacon sandwich."** (Photo: Michael Sears, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

At the very-filling end of the menu spectrum is the SBSBBS (for spicy brown sugar bourbon bacon sandwich, \$12). It's the king of breakfast sandwiches, with two fried eggs, bacon glazed in the kitchen and melted cheese on sturdy, rustic bread, garnished with avocado crema and sour cream for good measure.

That crusty bread is the basis for Sabrosa's version of avocado toast, too (\$13). The avocado smash-up is a complete meal — two poached eggs, radish slices, sunflower sprouts and cherry tomatoes. I had an embellished version as a special one day, garnished with smoked salmon, a very good idea. (It's also a good idea to check the chalkboard of specials when you walk in so you, too, can find dishes like spiced-pear pancakes, at \$12 for a full star. [Buy Photo](#))



**Omelets at Sabrosa include the smoked salmon, also stuffed with spinach and mozzarella. It's served with potato-vegetable hash.** (Photo: Michael Sears, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Every day, though, smoked salmon is tucked into an omelet (\$15.95), along with herbed cream cheese and spinach; caper berries and red onion doll it up. It's a keeper.

Plates such as omelets and scrambles come with toast, house jam and campesino hash, potato fried with seasonal vegetables — you'll spy brussels sprouts this fall.

While Sabrosa does make breakfast dishes that are nice to linger over in the light-filled space, I found myself wishing for a more luscious, custard-like baked French toast pudding (\$12). And in the otherwise fine shrimp and grits scramble (\$15), the sweet grits didn't play well. Make those grits savory instead, with salt and pepper, and all will be well.

Beyond eggs, pancakes and other standards, Sabrosa has several lunch plates and sandwiches, like the Mega-Melt (\$14): ham, chicken and bacon with melted cheese. The chef has resurrected a few dishes from Azteca, which got its start nine blocks away on Howell in 1997.

**Buy Photo**



**Enchiladas verdes at Sabrosa is a dish the chef previously made at Taqueria Azteca: chicken enchiladas topped with creamy peanut-poblano sauce. (Photo: Michael Sears, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)**

One of those is the very good enchiladas verdes (\$12), filled with tender chicken, spinach and mozzarella and topped with a sauce to remember, creamy but textured with ground peanuts and poblano pepper.

Customers who miss Azteca's chile-based soup and the chile-spiked chocolate cake will be happy to know those are served at Sabrosa now.

*Sabrosa* means *delicious* in Spanish; on one expanse of wall are 30 clipboards holding sheets of paper with *delicious* in 30 languages, from Swahili to Finnish.

It's stylish but also welcoming, much like the restaurant itself.

Contact Carol Deptolla at (414) 224-2841, [carol.deptolla@jrn.com](mailto:carol.deptolla@jrn.com) or on Twitter, [@mkediner](https://twitter.com/mkediner) (<https://twitter.com/mkediner>).

**Buy Photo**





Among the garnishes on the Bloody Mary at Sabrosa Cafe is a frozen cube of tomato juice and spices. (Photo: Michael Sears, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

## SABROSA CAFE & GALLERY

3216 S. Howell Ave.

(312) 834-1929

[sabrosa.cafe \(https://www.sabrosa.cafe/\)](https://www.sabrosa.cafe/)

\*\*\* (very good)

**Food:** \*\*\*

**Service:** \*\*\*

**Ambience:** \*\*\*

**Fare:** American brunch fare plus Mexican plates

**Atmosphere:** Warm, relaxed and light-filled

**Hours:** 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday-Sunday

**Prices:** Entrées, \$7-\$15.95

**Parking:** On street

**Wheelchair access:** Two steps at the door; restrooms accessible

**Payment:** MasterCard, Visa, American Express, Discover

**Of special note:** Vegetarian and vegan dishes; high chairs, booster seats, baby-changing station; private parties after hours for up to 49 seated, semi-private space for up to 20 by reservation; pianist on the weekends; Wi-Fi; loyalty program; nonsmoking warm-weather patio; takeout.

**Reservations:** Taken for parties of four to eight on weekends; taken for parties of any size on weekdays. Family-style service for larger parties on weekends.

**Noise level:** Comfortable but buzzing at peak times

### Deptolla's star ratings

**\*\*\*\* Extraordinary.** Consistently outstanding in all areas, including food, service, atmosphere and value. A first-class dining experience.

**\*\*\* Very good.** Most menu items are excellent, though a few might miss the mark. Service generally is very good. A memorable meal is guaranteed.

**\*\* Good.** A worthy restaurant; food is generally appealing.

**\* Fair.** A few entrées may be very good; most are average. Work is needed.

Poor restaurants would receive no stars.

*Carol Deptolla strives to dine anonymously, with food and drink paid by the Journal Sentinel. To sign up for the Journal Sentinel's weekly food and dining newsletter, visit [www.jsonline.com/newsletters](http://www.jsonline.com/newsletters)*

Read or Share this story: <https://jsonl.in/2iCABg4>