

Comfort food for days at Citizens Kitchen & Bar

Brock Radke

Wed, Mar 20, 2013 (2:12 p.m.)



The smaller version of the muffaletta sandwich at Citizens Kitchen & Bar is still pretty big.

Photo: Saeed Rahbaran

The main photo on the website for the new Citizens Kitchen & Bar shows a bearded guy in a denim jacket eating spaghetti and meatballs with his hands. The tagline is “Real Food. Real People.” There’s a challenge on the menu, a planet-sized muffaletta sandwich for six. “If one person eats the Muff, it’s on us!” Seriously. That’s right off the menu.

You already know what this restaurant is. It's next-gen fancification of bar food, from the same Light Group team that's given us pre-club cafeterias like Fix and Stack and the Strip-front party spot Diablo's Cantina. Sure, there are juvenile flourishes, but we shouldn't dismiss the food just because it's trying to be fun. (And don't forget, Light Group has also given us superior Japanese at Bellagio with Yellowtail.)

At other restaurants, Light's lead chef Brian Massie has transformed dishes into comfort food favorites, like Fix's lobster tacos or crab cake BLT. At Citizens, it's all comfort food, all the time, including breakfast. In the morning, Mandalay Bay guests looking for something more than coffee-shop fare can get sausage and biscuits with gravy (\$14.50), banana pancakes (\$12.95) coated in macadamia nut anglaise and brown butter maple syrup, and the ultimate grab-and-go bite: a New York-style bacon, egg and cheese sandwich on a kaiser roll (\$12.50). The takeout counter up front is a great idea.

Lunch or dinner starts with a dish of beef, pork and veal meatballs (\$12.50). Don't accidentally fork anyone fighting for these. There's perfect fried chicken (\$23.50), a half-bird in four crunchy pieces with jalapeño honey for dipping. The human-size version of that monstrous muffaletta is stacked with Italian meats and crisp vegetables, but another sandwich might grab more attention. The fatty melt (\$18) uses two thin burger patties layered with cheese, caramelized onions and special sauce, and the "bread" is actually two tomato and grilled cheese sandwiches. Yikes. Normal burgers, steaks, fish tacos and many more sandwiches round out the offerings.

Citizens is the second base-hit for Light at Mandalay Bay, which already successfully updated the food and mood at Red Square. Next up is a second Japanese concept from chef Akira Back, coming soon where China Grill once stood. That one needs to be a home run.

The Details

CITIZENS KITCHEN & BAR

Mandalay Bay, 832-9200.

24/7.



Photo: Saeed Rahbaran

The fatty melt: a double decker burger and grilled cheese sandwich hybrid at Citizens Kitchen & Bar.