

## **This “Third Place” Wins First Place Review by C.J. Newton**

Aqus Café  
189 H Street at Second Street  
Petaluma, CA 94952  
(707) 778-6060  
[www.aquscafe.com](http://www.aquscafe.com)  
Open 7 Days a Week, Hours Vary

Aqus is a lively and casual café in Downtown Petaluma. I like the Reuben Panini for lunch and it's a delightful excursion from the typical dark rye. I have also lingered, people-watching or writing at a table outside with a pen and paper or laptop, an espresso drink or glass of wine. For this review I had breakfast there for the first time.

My breakfast sandwich choice was the Foundry, a generous serving of eggs, ham, avocado, tomato and Gruyère cheese on multi-grain bread. It reminded me of a piled-high sandwich that Dagwood made in the Blondie comic strip!

The latte had a swirling top and foam that I admired as a former barista at the San Francisco State University Union Depot Coffeehouse back in the 1980s. Good choice of sugars, sweeteners and creamers. Beware the chocolate and cinnamon sprinklers, however. Chocolate comes out with a sharp shake but go easy with the cinnamon, which pours more freely.

My date's Scrambled Egg Breakfast Plate was the Petaluma, with cheese and Canadian bacon. She liked that the latter was not a flat slice needing to be cut but rather diced chunks and embedded with diced cheddar. The fruit cup contained honeydew, cantaloupe, strawberries, blueberries and raspberries, all fresh and a nice compliment to the protein. The Sumatra coffee was bold and hot from the self-serve canister.

Service is friendly and casual. You put in your order and pay at the counter. You give your name or if it's busy or you sit outside, get a plastic table tent with a number and then the counter staff deliver your drinks first then the food to you. I visited at about 8:15 on a Sunday and the food arrived pretty quickly.

### **Decor, Vibe, Philosophy**

Artist Doug Ballou painted the tables in vibrant red, black and gold, drizzled like chefs do with raspberry, butterscotch and dark chocolate sauce. The smaller square tables sport chess or checkerboards. Harmonizing are the terracotta walls, the high, burgundy ceiling in industrial chic, and the attractive back bar area reminiscent of Art Nouveau Parisian style.

Aqus is inspired by Third Place (see Wikipedia) theories by Ray Oldenburg and Edward Soja, to serve as a place between the workplace and home life. Owner John Crowley envisioned a place where the “culture of community” could be “rewoven” and indeed it's a place where independent artists and writers, stay-at-home moms and dads, musicians, business owners, city commuters, non-profit employees and volunteers mingle and exchange ideas.

You can join the Aquus Community and get a card entitling you to 10% off purchases and advance notice of members-only events and parties, lectures, mutual interest mixers and themed nights, and a login on the web site. The web site has a public calendar which shows a splendid variety of public events open to all, ranging from bluegrass to film discussions to jazz sessions, language groups, chess, trivia nights and improv comedy.

Aqus is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and also an “Extremely Happy Hour” 4-6:30pm Mon-Sat. There can sometimes be a line for the bathroom in the festive evening hours but you can read the bulletin board while waiting. To-go menus are available, the pastries and many items are locally-sourced, and the Happy Hour menu is sophisticated pub grub with beer and wine specials adding to the conviviality.

In sum, Aquus is a visually attractive, thoughtfully conceived place for hot food, fresh salads, hot and cold drinks, with a very cool vibe! And a sense of Community.