

ANNELIESE DOYLE KLAINBAUM

The Boston Globe

WORLD TABLE

Posh spice

The elegantly wrapped French bundles at Oliviers & Co. are not gift-wrapped, exactly. They're bouquets garnis (six for \$6), which contain dried oregano, thyme, and savory rolled together tightly within bay leaves and tied up with kitchen twine. The herb bunches will impart a pleasing taste to your pot of soup or stew, but if you use half a bouquet at a time — they're quite chubby — you'll still get lots of flavor. Cut them in half crosswise and tuck the twine snugly beneath the bay leaf to keep it all together, then remove it when your simmering pot is ready for the table.

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Bouquets garnis are at Oliviers & Co., 161 Newbury St., 617-859-8841.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/LANE TURNER



Chopping broccoli

Think of a bowlful of steamed broccoli florets as a blank canvas. Almost anything dresses it up, as long as the flavors are bold enough to stand up to the strong taste of the little buds. Start by cutting off the stalks of a bunch of broccoli, leaving about 1 inch of stalk on even-sized florets. Place them in a steamer basket in a saucepan filled with several inches of boiling water. Cover and steam for 4 minutes, so that the crunch, color, and taste aren't lost. Then drizzle on flavor, à la Jackson Pollock — a dollop of hummus along with olive oil and paprika, finely chopped garlic sautéed briefly in olive oil with lemon juice and salt, or toasted sesame oil and soy sauce.

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Fresh broccoli costs about \$1.49 at supermarkets.

When life gives you lemons, eat lemon curd

Lemon curd is a traditional English spread, like a thick jam, with a fruity and tart flavor and the most lively yellow color. It's a heavenly topping for toast, breakfast breads, or pound cake. Stonewall Kitchen's Fresh Lemon Curd (\$8.50 to \$8.99 for an 11.5 ounce jar), made in Maine, is a velvety custard of sugar, egg yolks, butter, and lemons. Once you open the jar you'll find other uses, such as adding a dollop to the top of blueberry pancakes or filling simple crepes and pastry shells. Or eating it right out of the jar on a spoon.

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Stonewall Kitchen Fresh Lemon Curd is available at Stonewall Kitchen, the Mall at Chestnut Hill, Route 9, Chestnut Hill, 617-332-5258; Cardullo's Gourmet Shoppe, 6 Brattle St., Cambridge, 617-491-8888; and A. Russo & Sons, 560 Pleasant St., Watertown, 617-923-1500.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/LANE TURNER

For new cafe, keeping it simple has great appeal

By Anneliese Doyle
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

SOMERVILLE — Ben Dryer and Karyn Coughlin planned to open a cafe last summer, but construction and permit requirements delayed the project. For months, passersby in Union Square peeked into the soaped windows and witnessed the gradual overhaul of the space.

Among the couple's other worries was the idea, says Dryer, that "people think of Union Square as a place where nothing happens." They did not want to be perceived as just another hipster coffee shop.

Their concerns are over. White china plates, chic Japanese iron teapots, a storefront where the sun pours in, and some fine food characterize Sherman Cafe, which opened in January.

What's most appealing about the place is that it's daring — not because of a gourmet sensibility or a cooler-than-thou factor, but because of a genuine simplicity. There is no formal wait staff, but once you order a meal, someone brings it to the table. Then there are

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GLOBE STAFF PHOTOS/SUZANNE KREITER

Sherman Cafe makes standards into standouts

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those stunning teapots, filled with top-quality leaf teas, and an array of homemade baked goods. The menu is straightforward, with few choices — these include an egg salad sandwich with homemade mayonnaise on seven-grain bread and a beet salad with goat cheese — but they seem to be exactly what customers want. A platform on one side of the cafe has a living room appeal.

Dryer, 29, and Coughlin, 30, who were married in 2001, have solid New England roots. She went to Mt. Holyoke College, he to Hampshire College (they met in the Pioneer Valley); they managed the Toscanini's ice cream chain for several years, and Coughlin still puts in hours there. They also founded the Weekly Week, a local newspaper now out of print that resembled The Onion in comedic absurdity. Although Coughlin is an Army brat, her extended family has long lived in Somerville. Her cousin, Jonathan Reis, 17, works the espresso machine, and her 2-year-old niece, Meredith Chasse, scampers around on weeknights.

Sherman Cafe makes customers feel right at home, though home doesn't look like this. Muted sage and blue-gray painted walls are a contrast against a hammered brass counter. Dryer's architecture degree was put to the test when he designed and built the cafe with consultant Brian Spinks. With his black-rimmed glasses and dark hair swept across his forehead, Dryer looks more like an architect than a barista.

Coughlin has her own do-it-yourself approach. She slipcovered the sofas and, with Spinks, developed the menu. She is not professionally trained in baking but makes all the confec-

Sherman Cafe's egg salad sandwich

Fluffy and smooth because the yolks are blended with mayonnaise before the whites are stirred in, this egg salad is made with the cafe's own mayonnaise and house dressing. You'll still have a good sandwich filling with commercial mayonnaise and your own vinaigrette. *Serves 2.*

- 4 eggs
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1½ tablespoons fresh chives, chopped
- 1 cup mixed salad greens
- 2 tablespoons vinaigrette
- 4 thick slices seven-grain or whole wheat bread
- 4 slices bacon, cooked until crisp (optional)

1. Bring a saucepan of water to a boil. Prick the eggs with a straight pin on the rounded ends. Lower the eggs into the water, let it return to a boil, then lower the heat so the water bubbles steadily. Cook the eggs for 10 minutes. Lift them from the boiling water and transfer to very cold water. Crack the eggs and peel a strip of shell off each. Return to the cold water until the eggs are

no longer warm. Remove remaining shells.

2. Halve the eggs lengthwise. With a spoon, scoop out the yolks and transfer to a bowl. Chop the whites and set them aside in another bowl.

3. Mash the yolks with the back of a spoon. Blend in the mayonnaise, salt, and pepper.

4. Add the mayonnaise-yolk mix and the chives to the chopped whites and mix gently.

5. In another bowl, toss the greens with the vinaigrette.

6. Set 2 slices of bread on the counter. Divide the egg salad, greens, and bacon between them. Top with the remaining bread and cut the sandwiches in half.

Adapted from Sherman Cafe

tions daily. She's after real appeal. "Sometimes you want something simple to eat," she says. You can spot her hurrying around the kitchen in a vintage apron or arranging small bunches of daisies and tulips in water glasses.

Old copies of the Weekly Week serve as wallpaper in the restroom. The couple use that same wit and sarcasm on this venture, joking that they should change the menu from "hot/cold sandwiches" to "yuppie sandwiches." But at \$4.50 to \$6 for a generous serving with flavorful spreads and organic meats, the sandwiches seem more

like bargains. Everyone, from the graduate students who study here to the teachers and administrators who work at nearby public schools, seems to appreciate the menu.

Fruit scones (\$1.75) aren't bulky or dry, but rather fluffy and moist. The fantastic egg salad sandwich (\$4.65) gives this old-fashioned favorite the good name it deserves. Slices of roast chicken in a sandwich are seasoned with Parmesan cheese, roasted tomatoes, and chipotle mayonnaise (\$5.95). Carrot bisque (\$2.95 and \$3.95) is smooth and creamy. And

there are plenty of vegetarian and vegan choices, along with a children's PB&J (\$3.95) on scallion or seven-grain bread.

Except for bread and Toscanini's ice cream, everything is made in house. There are no bags of chips or name brand colas. Plans for the future include developing their own flavor syrups and making fresh Italian-style sodas, selling books, and hosting movie nights.

The couple is still working out details of how they organize the cafe. Dryer worries about where to store surplus boxes of napkins and bags of sugar, but the fact that they're just stacked in the corner is what gives Sherman Cafe a down-to-earth feel. There's no promise of perfection here.

Although Union Square is home to Toast, the Independent, and Neighborhood Restaurant, it has always lived in the shadow of Davis Square. Skeptics worry that food businesses can't survive in Union Square, especially after the recent closings of Eat and Macondo restaurants.

Sherman Cafe, named for Union Square's Civil War involvement and also after Dryer's grandfather, opened during the week in January when temperatures dipped well below zero, schools were closed, and news reports cautioned against going outdoors.

Coughlin remembers thinking, "There's no one in Union Square," not realizing that the cold snap affected business. "We made a terrible mistake!" she told her husband.

As the weather has warmed up, so have the customers. And spring is just around the corner.

Sherman Cafe is at 257 Washington St., Union Square, Somerville, 617-776-4944.