

VIRGINIA DINING

Heart in Hand

7145 Main St., Clifton
(703) 830-4111
Hours: 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

By Barbara Ruthackild and Daniel Zwerdling
Special to The Washington Post

If Heart in Hand could just refine its cooking a bit, it could become the country American version of Auberge Chez Francois.

woods and over ravines until you rattle across the old railroad crossing in the town of Clifton, a storebook with just a touch of curry, tucked in lovely fresh mushrooms; we can't tell you how many bedraggled mushrooms we've had at other restaurants.

The restaurant is in the building where the old general store once was and it's almost worth the 45-minute drive from the D.C. area just to see it. It's a spectacular renovation, with battered wood plank floors, crusty brick and narrow wood paneled walls painted country shades of red and green.

The food isn't as memorable—yet—as the rest of the restaurant. We say "yet" because there is enough good food, enough flashes of inspiration, to make us think the kitchen has plenty of room to grow.

Begin with crabmeat-stuffed mushrooms, the nicest version we've had—plump, juicy shells of mushrooms with just a touch of curry, tucked in lovely fresh mushrooms; we can't tell you how many bedraggled mushrooms we've had at other restaurants.

Soups, so far, have been lackluster. We've been more frustrated with the main courses, because one of the dishes might be delicious and another so pedestrian that they seem to have come from different kitchens.

beautiful big chop, with the bone—and twice the kitchen has insisted on overcooking it till the pork thigh? lifeless and gray, even after we asked for pink (pork is perfectly safe medium rare). If they'd cook it right, it'd be a wonderful, simple dish.

The thing that's so frustrating about some of these dishes is that they sound so delicious—the ideas behind them are good—but the kitchen doesn't quite pull them off.

The price tag for a meal at Heart in Hand, especially with a bottle of champagne or wine, can be a little steep—\$60 or more for two. But this restaurant is such a pleasure that you're paying for an evening as well as the food.

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