



## ROJAS' REVIEW

### *Solar Crepes*

**I**s it wrong that every time I gaze upon the beret-wearing poulet emblazoned upon the Solar Crepes cart, I immediately think: oui-oui, s'il vous plait?

Solar Crepes co-founders Danna Andrews, she's the blond parked in front of the sizzling griddles, and Camille Dierksheide, the raven-haired cashier/phone jockey, may hang their hats on fluffy house-made crepes—buckwheat serves as the base for savory wraps, white flour pulls sweets duty—but they dress up their signature creations with a cornucopia of gourmet ingredients.

Daily specials run the gamut from kabocha squash-pea-garbanzo bean soup to farm-fresh eggs- and baby spinach-filled crepes bound by melted Swiss.

A hummus-stuffed crepe feels substantial in your hands and follows through on the gullet, filling the mouth with pureed cannellini beans brightened by lemon juice, balsamic and Italian parsley.

Roasted chicken gets top billing in another offering, but the real stars are the sultry Swiss chard, caramelized onions (punchy sweet) and pungent cave-aged cheddar. No mere filler, the irrepressible culture foists

meet. He greets customers as if they are neighbors coming into his home and thanks each and every one of them for their patronage.

Now it is early evening, and I am exhausted. Guas seems just as alert as when I first arrived.

He offers me a turkey sandwich

#### **Solar Crepes**

9th St. and N. Stuart St., Arlington; 202-276-6083; [www.solarcrepes.com](http://www.solarcrepes.com)

**Hours:** Open for breakfast and lunch Tuesday through Thursday.

**Prices:** Average entree: under \$12 (\$)

an organoleptic urgency usually exemplified solely by veiny blues upon its meal mates, the robust tang both complementing the bitter greens and celebrating the latent sweetness of the batter.

Glazed apricots and fresh cream get acquainted beneath the folds of white flour covers that are, quite correctly, eggier and floppier than their savory counterpart.

The wonderfully refreshing experience is made even more so by a foundation of honest-to-god fruit—no marmalade or preserves in here—which means every bite is rewarded with whole mouthfuls of tart apricots swimming in syrup.

The real pièce de résistance is a mesmerizingly sweet rose petal crepe—think: hand-picked Armenian tea roses (cultivated near Mount Ararat) simmered down in simple syrup—that's probably as close as we'll ever come to eating ambrosia.

called the Creole Pilgrim, which I happily eat along with sweet tea that I could drink by the gallon. I pack up and, although I am stuffed, I buy some treats to take home: PorKorn (a bacon and caramel popcorn) and heavenly hash (a fudgy confection with marshmallows and pecans), both which I saw

It's a little after 10 a.m., and the place hasn't slowed a bit.

Guas cooks, instructs his employees, calls orders and even works the register with ease. He is literally involved in every single aspect of the place.

The line seems never-ending. At one point, I peek around the corner and discover it has subsequently snaked out the door.

Guas remains calm, cheerful, and continues to be everywhere at once. I wonder how much coffee he had, as I am already fading.

And it's not even noon yet.

I realize that this easily is a place that once you visit, you never forget. One taste of Guas' creations, and you are hooked.

I watch as beignets, heavenly hash, croissants and hot coffee are passed to the customers. One girl happily dispatches her breakfast and then rushes back in line for a second round. I hear a father ask his little girl if she wants to order a cupcake or a beignet. She excitedly asks for the beignet, and I am happily surprised.

Guas could easily have a different attitude; after all, he has his own cookbook ("Dam Good Sweet"), has made appearances on Food Network and is well known in the culinary world. However, Guas is down-to-earth and one of the nicest people you will ever



Doing It (clockwise, from bottom left): all buckwheat; chef Dierksheide checks her fillings; huddled together; stopping by; inspiration.

**"I marvel for hours as they go nonstop—baking, roasting, cleaning and mixing."**

## LUNCH. RUSHED.

*Danna Andrews and Camille Dierksheide* aren't new to the food world.

Both are graduates of L'Academie de Cuisine's prestigious pastry program. And Dierksheide operated a boutique catering company called The Beehive prior to joining the food truck fracas.

Both are also very artistic, Andrews as a graphic designer and painter, while Dierksheide's passion for music and singing has earned her the nickname "The Singing Chef."

For now, the duo rent out the kitchen of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Arlington to prepare their dishes for Solar Crepes. It is a very cold morning, and they greet me inside the kitch-

being made that morning. I tell him I am going to head out and ask when he will get home. He says probably around 11 p.m. or later.

I get home and collapse onto my bed, thinking that Guas is still at Bayou with at least another 8 hours to go. I wonder how he will manage.

Then I think about all the smiling faces I saw, the sandwiches and biscuits being devoured, the children studying the cards announcing the Louisiana parishes, and the family reading a book in the corner of Bayou together while listening to jazz music—all of them immersed in the culture of Louisiana. I suddenly have the urge to grab a book and head back for a beignet and chicory coffee. Then I realize that for Guas, this must be what it's all about.

This is what makes it all worth it.



## MY FIRST TASTE OF CREPES

**AS FAR AS I CAN RECALL**, I had never had a crepe—at least not a crepe worth remembering. I think I had one several years ago at IHOP, but that doesn't count. Solar Crepes co-founders Danna Andrews and Camille Dierksheide assured me that the roasted chicken crepe with herbs and soy sauce is one of their best sellers and encouraged me to begin my education there. Andrews skillfully prepared the made-for-folding meal and handed me my first crepe. It was huge. And it was delicious. Fresh roasted chicken is paired with herbs, cheese and soy sauce to deliver a sweet and savory breakfast. Mind you, I had already had breakfast that day. But the crepe was so good, I couldn't stop eating it. I left with the crumpled wrapper still in hand and made a vow to return soon. **—ES**

Crepe Crew: Andrews sizes up the situation (right); a creative conference (middle); the proof is in the package (bottom).



en fully bundled up in snow hats and scarves. The space is not temperature controlled, and neither is their cart.

Solar Crepes opened on July 27, so this is the first winter they have had to contend with working, effectively, in the outdoors. “It was really hot when we opened, and now we are facing a whole different set of problems,” Andrews admits.

I look around the kitchen and see suitcase-sized tubs of organic flour, organic sugar and buckwheat. The tubs are on wheels to make moving them around easier. Andrews hoists up huge sacks of flour and pours them in.

I help peel onions, probably around 20 pounds, until my eyes are so watery I can barely see. Meanwhile, Andrews and Dierksheide have several pots on the stove, pans in the oven and are each also juggling many other tasks.

Dierksheide is making béchamel sauce and doing the dishes, while Andrews is mixing up a yogurt-Dijon sauce for the ham-and-cheese crepes while baking parsnips.

I marvel for hours as they go at it nonstop—baking, roasting, cleaning and mixing.

Dierksheide chops garlic by hand and pours in olive oil for her home-made hummus. She tells me that it is her special Tuscan hummus and that it is a secret recipe. She offers me a taste, and I immediately understand why. The hummus is garlicky, fresh and worlds away from the typical chickpea spread you might find at your grocery store.

Once their prep work is done, Andrews shows me how she loads up the trailer with the food, and we shuffle from the cold kitchen to the even chill-



## SOLAR CREPES

### By the Numbers

#### Day 1

**6 a.m.** Andrews and Dierksheide arrive at Trinity Presbyterian Church.

**7 - 8 a.m.** Andrews and Dierksheide peel onions and begin cooking.

**8 - 10 a.m.** Andrews and Dierksheide cook nonstop, preparing: apricot jelly, roasted parsnips, béchamel sauce, chicken pot pie filling, Knewtella and hummus.

**10 - 11 a.m.** Andrews and Dierksheide load up their trailer and pull out of the parking lot.

#### Day 2

**10 a.m.** Andrews and Dierksheide set up shop in Ballston.

**11:15 a.m.** Andrews and Dierksheide are in the trailer prepping food and taking orders.

**noon** Andrews feeds me a roasted chicken crepe.

**2 p.m.** I leave Solar Crepes while Andrews and Dierksheide stay, huddled in the trailer.

#### BREAKDOWN

7 hours;  
0 bathroom breaks;  
1 meal

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# Degustation

ier outside. The trailer is hot pink and small. She shows me where they store all the food and where the register is.

It is freezing, and I wonder how they will last in there all day.

I watch as Andrews and Dierksheide hook up the trailer to their Ford F150 and head out. They are still bundled up as they have been all day, and I can't wait to try a crepe.

The next time we meet, Dierksheide and Andrews are all set up in Ballston. The trailer is set to go, and their chalkboard already lists the day's offerings.



**"Each dish fired out by the kitchen, Watson quickly corrals, alerting his servers to 'Pick up. Pick up!'"**



Watson's World (clockwise from left): finishing touches; a hands-on approach; all hands on deck; artsy lamb; yummy!

I have a scarf wrapped around my head and mouth like Ralphie's younger brother from "The Christmas Story," but it is so brutally cold that my eyes are watering. The glass partition separating the cart's occupants from the elements is clamped shut, and Andrews and Dierksheide are huddled inside with gloves, hats and scarves on.

Shivering customers come to the window in search of hot coffee and a hot crepe. They keep the window open, chatting with me and showing me how they make everything. I have never had a crepe in my life, so I am excited to try the roasted chicken buckwheat crepe that Dierksheide says is one of their best sellers. (See: My First Taste of Crepes, page 102).

Finally, it is so cold that I can't feel my arms or legs, and I head out. As I point my vehicle homeward, I take one last look at the hot pink trailer and notice that the ordering window is once again closed.

I hope they are staying warm.

## DINNER, DONE.

*I arrive at BRABO and am immediately greeted* with a cup of hot coffee. Chef Watson warns me that today is going to be very busy. They have a lot going on, including a wine dinner planned for that evening. We make a pact for me to observe and try to stay out of the war path.

Watson has already started on the wine dinner and has several pots going on the stove. I feel feverish and glance up at the four thermostats. All but one proclaim that it is 84 degrees Fahrenheit (one stays stubbornly at 83).

Minutes ago I was freezing. Now I feel like I am baking along with the bread.

Watson offers to give me a quick tour of the entire complex, which includes BRABO, Tasting Room and The Butcher's Block. We walk through a quaint outdoor courtyard to the other places and spend a few minutes in