

## CHEAP EATS PRESSED SANDWICHES

## The latest trend: simple and quick

BY SHERYL JULIAN | GLOBE STAFF

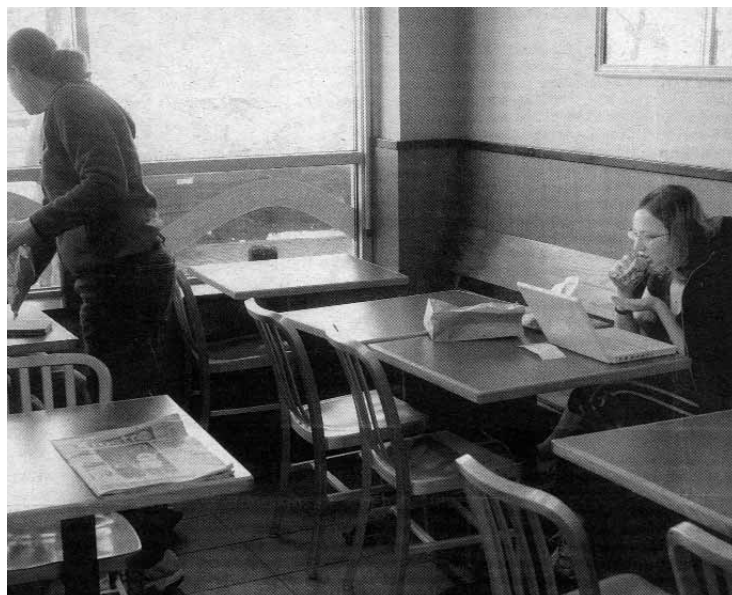
The latest cheap-food trend doesn't share much with the traditional model of putting a certain kind of restaurant into a certain kind of neighborhood. The new way centers on targeting a particular kind of customer: Someone who eats out a lot and wants fresh, simple food at a good value. The new places catering to this clientele tend to be sleek and cleanly designed, with quick sit-down service and appealing, well-executed menus. An owner is constantly on the premises, which is one key reason why the concept works. The approach is so streamlined that you can plug these restaurants into just about any neighborhood in any city — which is the ambition of some of the entrepreneurs behind this trend.

One of the recent arrivals on this wave is Pressed Sandwiches, with restaurants in the Financial District and Cambridge's Central Square. Co-owners Jack Schoaf and Laurence Wintersteen have plans to open four more locations next year, 15 more by 2009. Pressed Sandwiches locations are decorated with an artichoke motif,

with handsome market photographs and copies of old food illustrations. The menu is self-serve and features more than a dozen sandwiches, which are flattened in large presses and served on small boards. Offerings also include salads, soups, and cookies. Ed Doyle, former chef at Aura at the Seaport Hotel, developed the initial menu when the Boston store opened a year-and-a-half ago. The Cambridge location is six months old.

The menu uses fine ingredients, including multigrain bread from Weymouth's Fire King. It's full of bite, especially when stuffed with garlicky hummus and vegetables (\$5.50), or covering melted goat cheese with grilled portobellos (\$5.75). Ciabatta, a rustic, chewy Italian bread, comes from Clear Flour Bread in Brookline. Slices make bookends for the classic Cuban with pork and ham, melted cheddar, and chipotle aioli (\$5.95).

Pressed Sandwiches has a bit of the pre-fab character of Au Bon Pain, but presumably, with just two locations, Pressed Sandwiches (unlike ABP) still has its quality control in hand. Or does it? One night in



Pressed Sandwiches in Cambridge is a new quick sit-down place. Below, the classic Cuban Sandwich

Cambridge, half an hour before closing, there was no more soup available. When we asked for a prosciutto and mozzarella sandwich on parmesan focaccia (\$6.25), the counter person told us there weren't any, and offered no reasons. We asked if he was out of prosciutto, and he had no answer. It then became a kind of game; we asked for a prosciutto and fig (\$6.25) sandwich, and he had it. The sandwich was a splendid runner-up.

Several days later, the same counter person was in a fine mood. A blackboard special of lamb with hummus on lavash (\$6.50), hot from the press, was meaty and satisfying. It was well seasoned. A generous spinach salad (\$6.75) boasted organic greens and was topped with red grapes, gorgonzola, bacon, and walnuts. Mediterranean vegetable soup (\$2, \$3, and \$4) contained slightly undercooked vegetables.

Schoaf, formerly of Vinnie Testa's and Copa Cafe in Lexington, later told



me on the phone that before opening, when he visited panini shops in New York, he thought, "I can do this, and I can do better." He probably can — and I'm rooting for him. I'm part of his target audience, after all — a diner looking for simple food, well made.

## PRESSED SANDWICHES

736 Mass. Ave., Central Square, Cambridge.  
617-864-9600. 2 Oliver St., Boston  
(Financial District). 617-482-9700. MasterCard, VISA,  
American Express. Fully accessible.

**PRICES** Sandwiches and salads \$2.50–\$6.25.  
soups \$2–\$3.25.

**HOURS** Boston: Mon.–Fri. 7 am–3 pm, Sat. 9 am–8 pm  
Cambridge: Mon.–Fri. 8 am–8 pm, Sat 9 am–8 pm.

**NOISE LEVEL** Conversation easy.

**DRESS** Very casual.

**LIQUOR** None.

## MAY WE SUGGEST

**Sandwiches** Lamb and hummus special; prosciutto and fig,  
goat cheese and portobello.

**Salads** Spinach; Mediterranean; Cobb.