

A *feminine* TOUCH

BY CHRISTY L. SMITH



Victorian Breakfast

Just hours after proclaiming The Victorian Garden's Southern Egg Casserole (\$11.95) "the best eggs I've ever eaten," my husband described to me how uncomfortable he felt while brunching at the restaurant one recent Saturday.

"I felt like I should have had my pinkie finger sticking up," he said.

He was the only man in the dining room, after all. Mothers and daughters or pairs of women friends populated the other tables, and there were two large parties of women celebrating various milestones, including a baby shower.

That is fine. The next time I go there for brunch, I'll invite one of my women friends to accompany me, and my husband can go golfing. I do believe, however, he would feel perfectly at home there during lunch or dinner.

Owner Margie Michell opened the doors of this intimate restaurant (it seats about 70) in 1992 in an unlikely location — a small strip center next to the Lakewood House, a high-rise apartment building on North Hills Boulevard. The dining room is reminiscent of a Victorian tearoom, with antique buffets lining the walls and chandeliers dangling from the ceiling.

The Victorian Garden is a nice, quiet retreat, even with large parties in the room. Plus, it is one of the few restaurants in this area to offer a Saturday brunch. Michell says everything on the menu is made on site, which guarantees its freshness and that she can guide patrons with diet restrictions to appropriate dishes.

When creating new menu items, Michell looks to her favorite city — Charleston — for inspiration. "The food there is just fabulous," she says. Michell ably takes those foods and adapts them for her restaurant patrons.

The two slices of beer bread our waitress brought to the table prior to our meal disappeared almost immediately, its gentle sweetness reminiscent of the homemade breads our grandmothers used to make.

The Southern Egg Casserole that my husband enjoyed incorporates salsa and green chili peppers that give it a wonderful Southwestern flavor. It comes with fresh fruit, bacon and creamy grits. I was delighted with the Victorian Breakfast (\$11.95), which includes three scrambled eggs with mushrooms and cheese, fresh fruit, bacon and creamy grits.

In addition to breakfast fare, the brunch menu offers soups, salads, sandwiches, and entrées such as Dijon Brisket, Orange Chicken and Angel Hair Pasta topped with vegetables.

My husband and I heartily agreed that Michell's creamy grits were some of the best we've ever eaten. Michell says they are another adaptation of a dish she enjoyed in Charleston. "I took what I thought theirs tasted like and adapted that recipe," she says.

Amazingly, they contain no cheese. Michell understandably declined to reveal what makes the grits so creamy, but she did say they take a little more time to prepare than other grits.

That dedication to quality and freshness is what separates The Victorian Garden from many restaurants. One can almost taste the time and care that went into preparing each dish, which is probably why Michell has been in business for 16 1/2 years. ■

The Victorian Garden
4801 North Hills Blvd., North Little Rock
(501) 758-4299
10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturday
11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday-Friday
5:30-9 p.m. Thursday-Saturday