

THE ONLY ORANGE COUNTY BRUNCH GUIDE YOU'LL NEED

👤 Minerva Thai and Duc Duong 📅 October 11, 2015

Old Vine Cafe
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Nestled in the natural greens and rusty browns of The CAMP in Costa Mesa, Old Vine Cafe is poised and ready for guests seeking a quaint and secluded dining experience. It will not tear you completely away from the city life but its attention to detail on forming a food-centric dining experience can make the hubbub of Orange County fall away momentarily. Just remember to give yourself ample time to find parking before you get to the restaurant. Founded and helmed by Executive Chef Mark McDonald who has worked in the restaurant industry ever since he was 14 with the goal in mind of opening a restaurant, Old Vine Cafe has been providing breakfast, lunch and dinner to Costa Mesa and other Orange County residents since 2007. Having worked in every aspect of the industry from hosting to bussing to waiting to bartending to managing to what have you, McDonald knows what it takes to run a smooth operation. His culinary training near home and abroad (notably at the Italian Culinary Institute under Chef John Nocita) practically promises that you will fall in love with the food.



We visited McDonald, having heard from many who wax poetic over their experiences at Old Vine Cafe. The dinner menu is impressive as well but what started the restaurant was brunch. The chef explains, "I honestly did what I thought the area needed. I thought they needed creative breakfast and good breakfast." The community has taken hold of this passion as well and without reservations being accepted, the restaurant's brunch sits guests in a first come, first served basis, which results in a wait time many are willing to endure. In regards to what you will find on the menu, what makes it on is determined by the experiences Chef McDonald has during his frequent traveling. One example of this is the inclusion of **Scrapple**, a typically southern dish made from pork scraps and cornbread, which is transformed by high quality ground pork, apple butter, fried green tomatoes and buttermilk biscuits.

Searching for popular dishes? The ones in highest demand are their **omelets**, something McDonald has loved since childhood when his father made them on Saturday mornings for everyone. Their approach is to "try to get creative with the flavors and maybe bring in some non-traditional flavors...a little bit different. A little bit exciting but at the same time, not over the top and approachable." There is a **Goat Omelet** made with Pepperjack and slow-cooked goat. There is a nostalgia-inspired **Pizza Omelet** with housemade meatballs, Mozzarella and hearty tomato sauce. Salty omelet lovers would greatly enjoy the **Smoked Salmon Omelet** with dill and Havarti cheese. At 2-3 eggs per omelet, Old Vine Cafe easily serves up more than 1,000 eggs per day.

They also feature a "comfort" section during brunch, which includes the likes of **Biscuits and Gravy** in multiple ways for different palates (there is a chipotle gravy for you heat-heads!). Seasonal French toasts and crepes keep the menu rotating and relevant – our taste of his **Cheese Mousse Crepes** is heavenly. If you're game, there are also more exotic meats to look through including a **Rabbit Mole**, a glorious plate with cashew and chile mole over braised rabbit and paired with housemade cornbread.

In regards to alcohol during brunch, have no fear. Their extensive and carefully selected wine list can keep you busy the whole time but if you are looking for more traditional brunch cocktails, these are available as well. Their Bloody Mary is made with soju for less bite, and their mimosas come in an amazing assortment of sparkling wines. With his love for pairings, McDonald ensures the best.