



The Villager Living

Text and photo by Marjori Sovaa

Sidewalk cafes and style can be found together

When you are in the mood for some sumptuous yet light summer fare and also want to imbibe in a lively outdoor ambience, where can you go downtown at almost any hour of the day or night to do so? The western reaches, both north and south of 14th St., are peppered with a wonderful array of crossroad outdoor cafes which offer consistently excellent casual cuisine in charming surroundings from early in the day to the wee hours at super affordable prices. The following, from sleek to splashy to simply serene, are some favorites.

Merchants N.Y., 112 Seventh Ave. (366-7267), a sophisticated and sleekly casual restaurant with a Parisian-feel sidewalk cafe across the boulevard from Barneys, has fast become a comfortable mecca for Chelsea's stylish gentry. The perfect place to dine on light bistro fare with a friend, lover or business associate or just watch the fashion scene go by on Lower Seventh. Merchants N.Y.'s charmingly professional waitstaff serves up a handsomely presented menu from A.M. to well past the bewitching hour. Nouvelle light cuisine with a twist is the ticket here, with some of the distinctive choices including creme vichyssoise (served chilled or hot) or gazpacho (\$3.95); beef carpaccio with sliced parmesan cheese, select greens, oil & vinegar dressing (\$8.95); sun-dried tomato and smoked gouda ravioli in a mushroom, leek, cream sauce (\$8.95); Cuban sandwich of ham, smoked pork loin, topped with onions, pickles and swiss cheese on grilled baguette or fresh mozzarella, roasted peppers, marinated zucchini and eggplant served on foccacia with a side of vegetable chips (\$6.95 per). Their alluring dessert list includes amaretto mocha cake -- a surprisingly light melange of amaretto laced with dark chocolate filling and mocha frosting (\$4.95) and a wide spectrum of espressos, cappuccino and teas. Merchants N.Y. has a full bar, accepts all major credit cards and is open seven days a week from 11:30 A.M.-4 A.M.