

# The New York Times

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## When 'Useful' Is High Praise Indeed

*From "The Occasional Shout-Out: The Smith," by Frank Bruni on Diner's Journal:*

A restaurant doesn't have to be particularly good to be worthwhile (maybe the better word is "useful") under the right circumstances. And for what I needed when I needed it, the Smith — 55 Third Avenue, near 11th Street; (212) 420-9800 — served me well.

It also served me economically, which is especially worth noting and broadcasting during these times. The Smith's menu and many of the dishes on it have been composed with an eye toward satisfying customers at a relatively gentle price point.

The Smith opened about a year and a half ago and, at least to my ears, didn't make all that loud and persuasive a case for attention among all the other clamors. But I was always curious to try it, if I had the chance.

The other night I did. . . .

Somewhere I'd read a description of the Smith as an East Village analogue to the Odeon, but that comparison flatters the décor, which has pool-hall and beer-hall strains of scruffiness. It's a good scruffiness, making you feel that you can slouch to your heart's content, lodge your elbows on the table without offense, get sloppy, be messy — whatever. There's not an iota of ceremony here.

The American-bistro menu is utilitarian; you can see a recent menu and a full price list by visiting the restaurant's helpful Web

site, [thesmithnyc.com](http://thesmithnyc.com).

I was in the mood to fill up without having to lean too heavily on a breadbasket, and I wanted decent wine without confronting a list of bottles all in excess of \$50. These were goals the Smith easily accommodated.

Not a thing I ate rose to the level of truly impressive, but a side of beer-battered string beans (\$5) was generous and total fun: an upgraded bar snack of sorts.

Orecchiette with chicken sausage, broccoli rabe and hot chili (\$15) was the kind of thing that, if you'd whipped it up late at night at home, would leave you very impressed with yourself. . . .

After that we had the char-broiled organic chicken with smashed potatoes (\$18), yet another bountiful plate. And it was more tender than much of the chicken I've had in restaurants that flaunt more ambition.

Lamb schnitzel (\$19) was a greasy letdown, to be honest. But the warm potato salad with it was just fine, and it was yet another example of the restaurant's sustained effort to find satisfying but low-cost ways to stretch the amount of food it serves without lifting prices.

A carafe of white Rioja (\$21) from a wine list that emphasizes affordability over variety yielded slightly more than three glasses. All of the roughly 20 wines come by the glass, carafe or big carafe. And there are exemplary draft beer and bourbon selections.

I find that worthwhile. And, on some nights, very, very useful.