

# Home comforts

By **TERESA GUBBINS**  
Special to the Star-Telegram

One of Dallas' most respected chefs, Kent Rathbun already has two successes under his belt: top-ranked fine-dining restaurant Abacus in Dallas and country-flavored Jasper's, which now boasts four branches: Plano, Austin, Houston and San Antonio.

In February, he and partner Bill Hyde unfurled a third entity: Rathbun's Blue Plate Kitchen, a wood-and-stone-lined place that plays off the "blue plate special" concept of a cheap nightly meal, popularized at diners in the '50s.

There's a retro quality to the menu, with meatloaf, pot roast and "Gramma Minnie's fried chicken." Salads such as the wedge and sides such as macaroni and Gouda cheese sound like steakhouse fare, while dishes such as crusted catfish reveal a Southern streak. The overall effect is hearty and comforting.

Prices aren't exactly retro, though, with entrees ranging from \$15 to \$27 and appetizers from \$7 to \$11. The "blue plate" designation seems a bit of a misnomer; still, it's not as expensive as a traditional white-tablecloth place.

Dinner started with tiny biscuits and moist cornbread fingers, served with house-made strawberry preserves; Rathbun hopes to can vegetables and fruit as the seasons unfold, and to display those canned goods on shelves in the restaurant's handsome interior.

South of the border Caesar

(\$8) had nicely torn romaine lettuce with just enough mildly spicy dressing to cling to the leaves without overwhelming the salad. In place of croutons were spicy pumpkin seeds and kernels of toasted "pueblo" corn. Soup of the day (\$7) was baked potato, a terrific version: golden in color, neither too starchy nor overly creamy, the flavor enlivened by notes of bacon and sour cream tang.

The house specialty is the "meatblock" meatloaf (\$16), made upscale by the use of prime beef and lapped with roasted onion pan gravy. Sporting a pretty dark crust, the slab of meat was giddily thick and had a nifty solid texture, as if the loaf had been compressed. Niman Ranch beef rib pot roast (\$19) was just as good, with two behemoth wedges of beef that required only a fork to separate the long, tender strands of meat. Both came with a spoon of mashed red-jacket potatoes and a scattering of roasted vegetables that included a baby carrot and beet.

Pan-fried boneless pork chops (\$22) with mustard gravy were a disappointment, due primarily to a service issue. While starters came quickly, nothing else was brought to the table for a prolonged spell; it seemed pretty clear that our entrees were forgotten, since diners nearby all received their meals. When the pork finally did arrive, it was noticeably thinner than the pork chops at the next table and still pink in the center. The server

took it back for more cooking, which upset the pace of the meal. To its credit, the staff instantly took the entree off the bill and offered a complimentary dessert.

Among the half-dozen finales offered, the S'more parfait (\$7) is the one for chocolate lovers, with its wedge of fudge and graham-cracker "crust," laced with a hit of salt to offset the sweetness of the house-made marshmallows. Cocktails are au courant, with freshly squeezed fruit and house-made syrup. The wine list, sourced mostly from the West Coast, is cunningly arranged into four price categories — \$25, \$35, \$55 and \$75. Maybe not blue-plate prices, but for a wine list, not half bad.

## Rathbun's Blue Plate Kitchen

6130 Luther Lane, Dallas  
214-890-1103, [www.kentrathbun.com/blueplate/dallas](http://www.kentrathbun.com/blueplate/dallas)

**Hours:** 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday

**Cuisine:** American

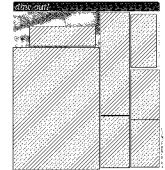
**Entree cost:** \$15 to \$27

**Essentials:** Full bar; major credit cards accepted; smoke-free; wheelchair-accessible; reservations taken

**Signature dish:** Blue Plate "meatblock" meatloaf

**Good to know:** Restaurant is trying when possible to feature locally grown produce.

**Recommended for:** Well-heeled meat-and-potatoes fans



Traditional fare such as meatloaf and pot roast gets an update from noted Dallas chef



The “meatblock” meatloaf, made with prime beef and covered in onion pan gravy SPECIAL TO THE S-T/MIKE FUENTES