

Tea for two

The Windsor Arms embraces tradition with crumbly scones and a nice cuppa.

After taking afternoon tea defined either by tradition, luxury or beauty, how nice to find a tea room that combines all these qualities, along with good food. Windsor Arms Hotel (18St. Thomas St., 416-971-9666) The ground-floor tea room looks like the drawing room of an elegant country manor. Plaster mouldings crown the high ceiling, velvet drapes frame leaded glass windows and a muted oriental carpet covers the marble floor. It telegraphs quiet good taste, what with the subtle classical music and gas fireplace to make the space cozy.

Actually, it's snug to begin with since there are only 20 seats - well-padded armchairs and comfy loveseats upholstered in rich golden tones. On weekends, you're advised to reserve for a 1.30 or 3-30 pm seating, but mid-week drop-ins will likely find space.

We pop in one blustery fall afternoon and find ladies knee-deep in shopping bags from the tony stores nearby- Tables are set with yellow damask and Bernardaud's white-on-white Louvre china, but the tea pots are unmatched "to make it look nice," explains a spokesperson. Raising your voice above a discreet murmur will get you shushed by fellow patrons. We skip the cream tea, a \$20 spread of scones and petits fours, in favour of the savory content in the full afternoon tea (\$27). For an extra \$5, you can sip a glass of sherry or Prosecco. Very civilized.

From the list of 12 loose-leaf teas we select Russian Caravan, a blend of lapsang souchong and black teas with a hint of bergamot oil.

"Very smoky flavour, ma'am. Is that all right?" double-checks the thoroughly professional waiter.

Not only is it all right, it's the best version we've ever had. The blend, imported from Serendipitea in New York City, is so smoky we smell it before it enters the room. The waiter tells us how long to steep the leaves (elsewhere I must ask) and adds hot water to the teapot periodically.

If you order spiced Chai Arms tea, he'll suggest sweetening it with honey instead of sugar. Tea this good doesn't



Tea and Sympathy: The Windsor Arms hotel lays out the best afternoon tea in the city, a refreshing meal.

happen everyday.

Ditto the scones. If you've ever eaten the hockey pucks some call scones, you'll be pleased to know the Windsor Arms makes the real deal.

Scones are said to be named for the Stone of Destiny (or Scone), where Scottish kings were once crowned.

How regal, then, to split open the icing-sugar dusted versions done here - one plain, the other wonderfully perfumed with orange zest - and slather the crumbly interior with clotted cream and Greaves preserves.

Flaky tart shells hold goat cheese and caramelized onions. Then there are the sand-wiches, pinwheels of flavour. Smoked salmon is paired with orange-coloured cream cheese, made with oven-roasted tomatoes, and gar-

nished with wasabi green flying fish roe. Finely diced tomatoes crown tender roast chicken, while asparagus spears poke out of chive-flavoured cream cheese. With such emphasis on looks, it's too bad they couldn't better trim the crusts off the egg bread.

Suffused with contentment, we can only nibble on the strawberries blanketed with soft whipped cream, the homey date squares and the intensely chocolate brownies.

WHAT THE TEA LEAVES SAY: With afternoon tea like this, who needs dinner?