Where to go for lunch? I’m wondering, as my friend Katie and I drive around the good old town of Harrisonburg. We decide to try Northern Exposure, one of the town’s very newest restaurants. As we pull up, I can’t help but think of that old clothing store, Northern Comfort, or Northern Experience, whatever it was.

I enter, half expecting either mid-western, turquoise colored decor or some sort of trendy, more New York look. I see neither. Then I remember that this restaurant has only recently replaced the old Shenandoah Grille.

The décor is comfortable: lodge-like and very Virginian. There’s nothing northern about this, I think to myself.

Katie and I are seated promptly, and given menus. The choices mainly consist of sandwiches, soups, salads and pizza. Katie decides on a turkey and croissant sandwich. I choose the grilled chicken breast and ask our waitress what sides my sandwich might come with. The waitress, although very polite, looks a little confused and pardons herself as she leans over to look at the menu. Not a good sign.

After thinking about it for a moment, we decide to preface our meal with the mozzarella sticks. As our waitress walks away, Katie stops her suddenly.

“Wait! Are the mozzarella sticks fried in peanut oil?” Katie is terribly allergic to all nuts and their bi-products. The waitress nods. Katie and I scroll the list again, trying to decide on something that is not fried in peanut oil. We finally order the portobella mushroom appetizer.

The atmosphere is quiet and peaceful, and Katie and I find it conducive to catching up. Soon the massive portobella mushroom arrives. It is delicious! When the rest of the food arrives, we dig in. Katie is seemingly impressed with her sandwich; however, my grilled chicken breast tastes much like every other grilled chicken breast sandwich I’ve ever had. Nothing spectacular.

Northern Exposure has already gained much local interest, as college students and Harrisonburg residents alike are trying out the new place in town. Susan Daniels, a friend and fellow college student, visits Northern Exposure regularly.

“In my opinion, Northern Exposure adds a much-needed flavor to the Harrisonburg restaurant scene. Although the decor is incongruous with the intended feel of an urban New York cafe, I can appreciate the quality and variety of foods they serve. It’s one of those places you can make a weekly ‘tradition.’ I know I have,” says Daniels.

Am I impressed? Not sure. Aside, from the portobella appetizer, the food seems average. There’s still much that this little restaurant needs to accomplish. I’m hoping that once renovated, Northern Exposure will indeed harbor a more distinct atmosphere. I’m assuming that the wait staff is also new and perhaps inexperienced. Would I go there again? Yeah, I would. In about a month. Better let this place work out the kinks and, while they’re at it, invest in a large supply of vegetable oil.