



by MICHAEL HIRSCH

Location:

Louie's Ham and Corned Beef

Dish:

Damn near the whole menu

The first time I went to Louie's Ham and Corned Beef was the summer going into freshman year of high school— and subsequently every weekend after that until I graduated. Due to some 8th grade delinquency issues, the courts ordered me to complete 40 hours of community service which my mother insisted I complete in their entirety at Tyree Guyton's *Heidelberg Project*.



3570 Riopelle St,
Detroit, Michigan

Every Saturday morning my mother and I would drive down to the neighborhood-sized art installation picking up garbage, pulling weeds, and gardening. Every so often, Tyree would enlist my help with the painting of one of his famous faces, clocks, or polka-dots. This experience was formative for me—it exposed me to art in new and strange ways, so much so that I continued to spend time there nearly every weekend, even after my 40 hours of mandated community service was complete.

I was a pissed-off suburban teen, pissed-off at the fact that I was a pissed-off suburban teen. These little trips into the city chaperoned by my neurotic mother felt one step closer to the cosmopolitan lifestyle I craved. Real art and real food and real people doing real shit. That was my first observation when going to Louie's at age 14; 14 years later, nothing's changed.



Corned Beef Pita

It's warm and familiar even if for a first timer—the smiling pig logo out front and all the other pork-related tchotchkes inside provide a lighthearted preview to the menu's glory. Located on the Mack Ave. border of Eastern Market, Louie's gets their meats from the source. They have it all; perfectly sliced ham is one of my favorites, thick cut and gorgeous. They've mastered the platonic ideal of ham, almost certainly just braised in its own juices while the buttery crunch of griddled rye turns what a layman would consider a D-3 sandwich into a LeBron James level comfort food. Nothing complicated or overambitious, just straightforward meat and maillard reactions.

The hot corned beef sourced locally, right down the street by one of the dudes sitting at the counter on their lunch break steams as you pull it apart to inspect the cross section. Obviously add a slice of swiss and a thin swirl of mustard to complete the hat trick of flavor. It's tender, warm, briny, and tangy whose juices get soaked up by the caramelized rye bread without losing any of the crunch from the griddle.

Louie's Coney Dog

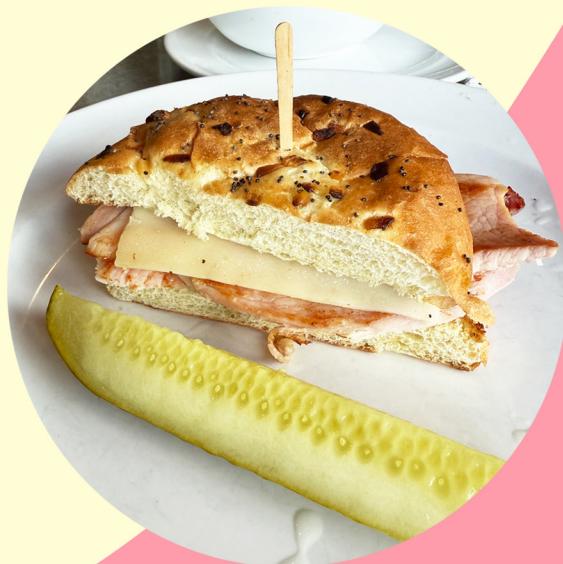


Have you ever ordered a breakfast plate from a diner expecting bacon from a diner and they bring you some wiggling one-ply nonsense? This is NOT an issue at Louie's. The breakfast plates are blessed with picture perfect sides of meat. Hearty and uncompromising food to satiate the truck drivers and security guards who frequent the diner as much as I do.

Since returning to Detroit, I've made this an absolutely necessary semi-weekly excursion. I crave the ham, and the familiarity. I want to slip myself into an overstuffed leather booth where nobody besides the waitresses who call me "hon" or "sweetie" know my name, and I can eat my soups and sandwiches while I watch Maury Povich destroy a family on the big TV hanging over the counter. It's comfort-maxxing, something so many new restaurants lose touch of.

Louie's isn't a place that tries to be anything more than it needs to be and it succeeds because of that. I love its oddities and quirks. I love that they have a drive-thru window where you can order a quart of chili and an entire glazed ham. I love that my car's fuel pump can break in the parking lot and they won't tow it because the waitresses all know me, and that when I have a blood-boiling existential crisis in the parking lot fully-loaded with self-loathing loserisms that the team at Louie's have my back.

It's a place I can go and everybody cares about me. After spending the following 9 hours in Louie's parking lot while a stoned mobile mechanic absolutely destroyed my car, I knew I couldn't do it anymore. The 25 year old fuel-pump on my 2001 Lexus finally did what it was born to do—fail.



Roast Turkey with Swiss on Onion Roll

I knew the bill would be in the thousands and my lack of solid employment and excess of anxiety brewed something fierce in me. Dread. Anger. As I watched the 5'3" mobile mechanic rip out the back seats of my car, my tension rose and my helplessness grew. He told me we needed to get a part at the Autozone in Livonia and that he could drive, so we did the hour-long round trip haul out there. Each panel on his 2011 Nissan Rogue was a different color, patched together from seemingly dozens of Nissans and now being used to shakily transport me at high speeds to outer ring suburbs in a haze of backwoods smoke.

It was an experience that I can only assume was divine punishment. Straight into the void of nothing. I was transported to a pocket dimension where time moved and nothing else could happen. Just Louie's parking lot and a mechanic dropping the rubber cap from a fuel pump into the fuel tank of my car over and over again.

When I finally got my car back from a real mechanic earlier this week, my first stop for lunch was Louie's. The waitresses hit me with a cacophony of hons and sweeties as I walked in—songbirds... "Hey hon, you get your car fixed?" one of them asked me. I lifted the keys over my head and jingled them for the whole diner to hear. They erupted in applause from behind the counter. It was a gold-medal moment, hoisting a trophy of my achievement and getting recognized by a group of citizens who truly cared.

I was back to Louie's the following Tuesday, because that's Cream of Broccoli day.