

EAT BEAT

by Martha Wagner

A Healthy Taste of Portland

Some chefs maintain that the current interest in leaner cuisine is merely a flash in the non-stick saute pan, but a growing number of restaurants are wooing diet and nutrition-conscious diners with new dishes.

Today's healthy restaurant fare is a new breed. At the upscale end, there is what's often referred to as spa cuisine, a hybrid of French chef Michel Guerard's cuisine minceur (slimming cuisine), the fresh ingredients of California cuisine, and the elegant, low-calorie fare of exclusive health spas. No kelp, yeast flakes or alfalfa sprouts here, but plenty of fresh produce (sometimes organically grown), grilled poultry and fish, light sauces and herbs for flavor, minimal use of oil, butter and other fatty ingredients.

At the mass market end of the restaurant spectrum, there's McDonald's with its utilitarian approach to health: three new salads packaged in clear plastic. Fortunately, there are many interpretations of the new health cuisine.

On a recent visit to Portland I sampled the fare at **Cascades**, a popular new purveyor of healthy meals located in the heart of the city's Northwest business district at 323 N.W. 23rd. The first restaurant venture for two recent graduates of Reed College, it does not match the consistent quality of a restaurant like Greens in San Francisco, renowned for its elegant vegetarian cuisine, but it offers diners a sophisticated, eclectic menu that is undoubtedly new culinary territory for many.

Dinner entrees are primarily fish and fowl, with a few vegetarian and red meat offerings. Because Cascades' servings are large, many diners order from the "small plates" category. I chose a beautifully presented small plate of grilled Anaheim chiles stuffed with jack cheese, accompanied by coriander-heavy fresh salsa and a slightly spicy guacamole. Other appealing choices for light appetites include goat cheese with fire-roasted red peppers and basil, pepper and onion shortcake, and chicken brochettes marinated with orange, fennel and pernod.

Salad Pizazz

Salad choices are imaginative, too. The Produce Market salad, a meal in itself, is a beautifully-arranged plate of mixed greens (no iceberg lettuce here, but limestone lettuce, radicchio and other seasonal greens); steamed potatoes, broccoli and carrot chunks; marinated green beans, red and yellow pepper slices; fresh tomatoes; regular and enoki mushrooms; grilled zucchini wedges and halved ears of fresh corn. The vinaigrette dressing it came with lacked the pizzazz of the salad itself.

The breakfast menu caters to eaters of all persuasions. Traditionalists can order omelets and nitrite-free sausage or bacon. Morning adventurers can choose such dishes as blue corn waffles with lingonberry salsa, salmon hash, or sauteed tofu with fire-roasted tomatoes and onions.

Organic produce, hormone-free meats, free-range poultry, non-stick pans, minimal use of oil and salt, and no canned ingredients are part of the Cascades philosophy, according to owner Michael Becker. The philosophy is not rigid, however. Dessert lovers need not fear deprivation. Dessert tray choices range from a burgundy poached pear to a chocolate hazelnut torte in fresh raspberry sauce.

Decor is simple but attractive, the atmosphere casual. There's a no smoking policy. The price range is \$5 to \$8 for a light lunch or dinner; dinner entrees are \$6.95 to \$13.95.

Eat-and-Run Approach

The eat-and-run approach to healthy restaurant meals is the specialty of Portland's **Macheesmo Mouse**, serving healthy Mexican fast food since 1982. The newest

branch is at Holliday's Market, 1200 N.E. Broadway, a new multi-business food market similar to L and L Market in Eugene. Macheesmo Mouse is also at 3553 S.E. Hawthorne and 719 S.W. Salmon St.

"A new breed of fast food for people who like to feel fit," reads a statement on the back of the restaurant's menu. The statement explains that no items are fried, no animal fat is used, and that the chicken is skinned.

Macheesmo Mouse is neither authentic fare from south of the border nor the greasy version of it many of us are all too familiar with. The restaurant uses brown rice, black beans, shredded chicken, lean pork and beef, jack cheese, fresh salsa and its own special tangy Boss sauce, in a menu that includes chili, black bean soup, nachos, burritos, tacos, salads and roast chicken. About half of the items listed have been approved by the American Heart Association.

Macheesmo Mouse is a popular Portland institution because food quality is high, portions are large, and prices are low. It would be difficult to spend more than \$5 on a meal. Although the three restaurants have seating, most patrons order food to go. Now, if they would just open a southern branch, say in Eugene or Springfield. . . .

The local produce season is in full swing. Are you being adventurous with your veggies? Have you tried fava beans, squash blossoms, Armenian cucumbers and other possibly unfamiliar veggies this summer? Local stores and the Farmer's Market (Eighth and Oak every Saturday, beginning at 9 am) carry a number of unusual veggies as well as fruits. When you buy, you can ask for cooking help.

If you enjoy broadening your produce horizons, several books are excellent for reference and recipes. My all-time veggie favorite is *The Victory Garden Cookbook* by Marian Morash, (Alfred A. Knopf, \$19.95). First published in 1982, it doesn't include all the new and trendy vegetables. It offers hints on freezing, microwaving and other cooking methods, plus more than 800 recipes—from soups and pickles to pies and cakes.

Sunset Books has just released *Fresh Produce A to Z* (\$6.95), a market-to-kitchen guide to both common and uncommon fruits and vegetables. This volume has fewer recipes than *The Victory Garden Cookbook*, but excellent information on varieties, selection and storage, freezing and cooking methods. Both books have numerous color photographs.

Tsunami Sushi is not Eugene's first sushi business, but owner Elva Gehr still finds herself having to educate people about Japan's best-known fast food.

Although some sushi is made with raw fish, and some health experts warn that raw fish can be dangerous to eat if not extremely fresh, Eugene's new sushi business does not use raw fish. Gehr's sushi rolls combine marinated rice (brown or white) with fresh vegetables and either cooked seafood (shrimp or smoked salmon) or marinated tofu.

Tsunami Sushi began with a sushi cart at Saturday Market last year. The cart is still in business, and you can also find the locally made sushi at local natural food stores, Northwest Wine and Cheese, Friendly's Market and Humble Bagel. For more information and catering inquiries, call 345-0211.

With the growing popularity of pasta, salads, and ethnic fare, vegetarians can often find acceptable choices on restaurant menus. The monthly magazine, *Vegetarian Times*, makes restaurant choices even easier for vegetarians in its July, 1987, issue. A special guide offers 1000 U.S. and Canadian listings for restaurants and health spas that offer vegetarian fare.

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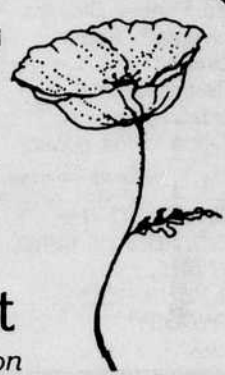
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