

RABBIT-FOODIES, REJOICE!

Vegan options needn't be flavorless kibble

ROUNDUP BY LINDSAY CRUDELE

If you prefer your lamb chops still plaintively bleating, your estimation of the vegan lifestyle is probably less than savory. The rules of veganism can vary, but by most accounts, it requires avoidance of all animal products—sometimes right down to honey. At its best, it's a socially conscious, lower-impact way of being a human in the world; but in exchange for moral righteousness, many (how can we put it gently?) adjust their standards of taste.

I've smarmily maintained a running joke with a friend about food that is "vegan-amazing." This rave is reserved for menu items that are heralded as miraculously meat-free, but come off like an all-star reunion of Roald Dahl characters: sponge in gloop. But in an effort to extend an olive branch—or in our case, a bloody ham hock—we decided to take our meat-craving taste buds out to some spots where "delicious vegan food" isn't oxymoronic. Behold these untraditional, local, upscale-yet-still-vegan-friendly stops where herbivores and bloodhounds alike can share a menu; where resourceful chefs celebrate produce and vibrant seasonings; and where bees, we hope, buzz happily unexploited outside.



that his kitchen embraces the challenge of preparing a vegan meal, from soup to nuts. He recently treated a couple to a multiple-course vegan meal. In all his dishes, he favors grains, flowers and fresh herbs; and arranging a vegan feast puts his skill with all three to the test. Look for

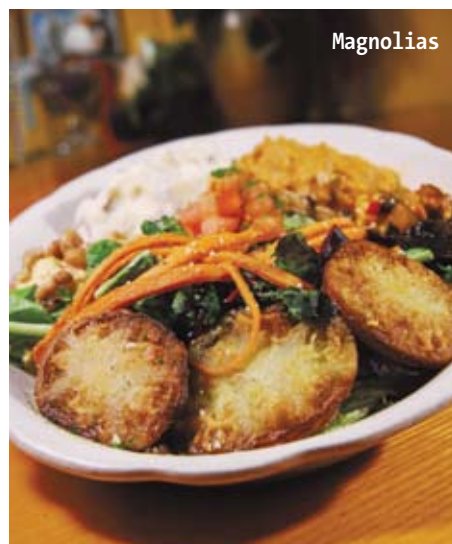
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CRAIGIE STREET BISTROT

"Of course, most of our food is cooked in animal fats," says chef Tony Maws of the Craigie Street Bistrot menu—which is freshly overhauled each day. "But people say they've had some of the best vegetarian and vegan meals they've ever had here." With some notice (no really, call at least a day ahead), Maws says

quickly marinated veggies in mustard oil; a salad of hearts of palm, pomegranate seeds and quinoa in pistachio oil; and vegetable *pot-au-feu* with poaching liquid, sake and beet juice poured table-side—all while "the person next to you eats lamb three ways."

[5 Craigie Circle, Cambridge. 617.497.5511. craigiestreetbistrot.com]



EVOO

It's not on the menu, but if you order a vegan version of their popular Chinese box entrée (\$23), chefs Colleen and Peter McCarthy will whip one right up for you. The dish substitutes golden fried cubes of tofu for shrimp, and grilled sweet onions in place of the hoisin-braised beef. Served in a Chinese takeout box, then tipped on its head, a tower of crisp stir-fried red peppers and gingered vegetable cashew salad on a foundation of jasmine rice slides out, a tofu crown perched atop the pile. The mustard-glazed tofu cubes are a textural delight, soaked just a bit and still crunchy in an aromatic sweet-and-spicy coconut milk sauce, with just a breath of horseradish. This dish is a double triumph—sweet but not cloyingly so, and so pretty.

[118 Beacon St., Somerville. 617.661.3866. evoorestaurant.com]

MAGNOLIAS SOUTHERN CUISINE

We didn't give a big fat Back Bay rat's ass about Magnolias' vegan plate leaving behind so many of our favorite meaty Southern staples. Omitting the goat-

cheese-stuffed mushrooms that appear in the regular veggie plate, the vegan offering at this cozy, Southern-oriented spot holds its own in a territory known for slug-gishly barbecued meats, rib bones piling up aside tureens of savory stewed meats and ... well, let's not get carried away. Truth is, we didn't miss any of that stuff. The vegan plate here (\$12.95) was a swoon-worthy feast with highlights of smoky, earthy Hoppin' John (black-eyed peas and rice); olives packed with piquant capers; a luxurious, lusty portobello mushroom cap, laced with garlic and befitted with a flourish of fried sweet potato strings; and fried green tomatoes—big, meaty bites through a crackly cornmeal crust into sweet, green tomato flesh.

[1193 Cambridge St., Cambridge. 617.576.1971. magnoliascuisine.com]

ELEPHANT WALK

The Franco-Cambodian alchemists at Elephant Walk generously set aside an entire page for the vegans. On a recent evening, I sampled Somlah Kako (\$16.95)—a Cambodian stew made with golden russet potatoes, squash, mushrooms and spinach swimming in a comforting (albeit subtle) broth of lemongrass, galangal and toasted rice powder. A standout was the "*Betterave rouge, coeur de palmier et orange*," a salad of sliced beets and orange, hearts of palm, Italian basil and toasted almonds in blood orange vinaigrette: a successful marriage of vibrant flavors and deep hues (\$8.95). Tofu Amrita (\$15.95) boasts flash-fried organic tofu in a satay sauce with a laundry list of spices; and the Cambodian spring rolls (\$8.95) with shitake mushroom, vegetables and bean thread noodles are worth the trip all by their perfect little selves.

[For locations, visit elephantwalk.com]