

WEEKEND

Friday, September 30, 2011

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DINING



Mussel Clam and Chorizo Stew, top, is among the menu choices at Tender Greens in Pasadena, above, a restaurant dedicated to salads and fresh food. At left is another dish, Tuna Nicoise.

Photos by Sarah Reingewirtz
Staff Photographer

TENDER GREENS

621 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena.
626-405-1511

Lunch and dinner, daily.

The Food: The name sounds vegetarian, but this "quick-casual" cafe is happy to serve a nice steak, as long as its provenance is ecologically friendly, a decision made by the trio of owner-chefs, veterans of the white tablecloth dining scene at the Four Seasons, who have created a space in which the to-go containers are biodegradable, and the ingredients naturally/organically grown; no matter what color the walls are painted, the dominant shade here is "green."

About \$15 per person. MC, V
Soft drinks

Reservations: Not necessary

Rating: **☺☺** 1/2

SALADISH

12 W. Colorado Blvd., Old Pasadena.
626-304-3100

Lunch and dinner, daily.

The Food: A casual, usually easy-in/easy-out spot in the heart of Old Pasadena, with a wide selection of pre-assembled salads (and wraps), and an even wider selection of build-your-own salad (and wraps), with thousands of possible permutations.

About \$12 per person. MC, V
Soft drinks

Reservations: Not necessary

Rating: **☺☺**

Tender Greens casual, natural, Earth-friendly

The fast-growing Tender Greens chain — with a lively branch in Pasadena — is dedicated to the joys of, well, tender greens. Though, just to balance things out, it's not a bad place to go for a bowl of soup either — the roasted Roma tomato and bread soup flavored with basil oil is pretty fine stuff, and the rustic chicken soup with lemon and thyme is a pleasure on a chill day, or when you have a chill. This is the sort of place where you can eat day in, and day out, with no pain at all.

Tender Greens is a casual concept, the sort of place where you order at the counter, are given a number, and wait at your table for your food to arrive; self-service with runners. (It's something they've done at Burger Continental on Lake Avenue for decades.) The place has a functional décor, with an outdoor patio on one side. Come lunchtime, it can be very busy; the Dilberts from the surrounding office buildings do like their salads.

I like my salads, too, even for dinner.

There's a fine — if a bit revisionist — version of the Chinese Chicken Salad on the menu at Tender Greens. The tender greens in this case are tatsoi and mizuna, a pair of distinctly flavored ingredients that fans of our local farmer's markets no doubt know well. In this case, they're tossed with golden pea sprouts (which have more substance than gnarly old bean sprouts), carrots, crispy wonton strips, roasted peanuts, cilantro, scallions and a sesame dressing. Chicken, too, of course.

At Tender Green, you can get chicken add-ons, done either salt & pepper coated, or chipotle barbecue if you want to make it multi-ethnic. If I read the menu correctly, you can also add steak, albacore or veggies: a Chinese Chicken Salad without chicken.

There are 12 "Big Salads" on the menu at Tender Greens, along with five more "Simple Salads." They do a snappy Thai Shrimp Salad (tatsoi, mizuna and jicama too!), a fairly traditional Tuna Nicoise, and a snappy Craft



MERRILL SHINDLER

Salad, fashioned out of cured meats, feta cheese, pickled veggies and roasted peppers: good stuff.

If you aren't of the salad persuasion, the steak, chicken, tuna and veggies go well on a sandwich, and on a hot plate with mashed spuds. Though both come with a simple salad. At Tender Greens, you can't get away from the tender greens.

☺ ☺ ☺

Saladish is a storefront dedicated to salads, and more salads. And also wraps, and more wraps. Though the salads and the wraps tend to be the same thing. Only one is in a bowl, while the other is in a wrapper.

There are 12 salad-wraps on the menu, ranging from a Classic Caesar (and a Classic Chicken Caesar), through a Maui Wau (with pineapple and ham, natch), a Bleu Broccoli (named for bleu cheese, not some radioactive GMA broccoli hybrid), and a Blooming Apple (bacon, apple and more bleu cheese).

There's also a curious penchant for sweet salads at Saladish. The Strawberry Madness mixes strawberries with cherry tomatoes, walnuts and mozzarella in a strawberry vinaigrette. The Very Berry adds blackberries, blueberries and raspberries, this time in a raspberry vinaigrette. There are stuffed potatoes, too; remember them? The Loaded Potato is filled with bacon, chives, sour cream and cheddar, just like in the old days.

What I like is the Build Your Own option: a choice of three types of greens, more than 60 toppings, and 18 dressings. The possibilities are many. And you can get them as wraps, too. If that's what you want.

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