

## **Gourmet Vegan – Cheap!**

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Despite my pronouncements, I went to the parade after all. Not only did I party good, I re-experienced what it's like to have at least one day of the year surrounded by a completely freakin'-gay crowd! Fabulous!

So, after a weekend of dancing and feasting on Grade XY beefcakes (well, mostly with my eyes), what better way to restore those burnt-out body cells than with a hearty, 100 per cent good-fer-ya veggie meal? Besides, a few of my past Pride Weekends were spent at faerie gatherings, where magnificent gourmet vegetarian meals are served up with flair by crazed, criss-cross-dressed "soubrettes" well into the starry, country night. I didn't want to abandon a tradition entirely.

Carnivorous queer that I am, I was lured to the much less flamboyant yet just as hearty Elixir by a genuine (beardless) woman. On my way to the paper two weeks ago, the captivating Cynthia turned and smiled at me. She'd been laying a table on the sidewalk before her cozy eatery that had just sprung up like wheat grass that week on the easternmost part of Duluth. Such promotion deserved to be considered.

The chalkboard menu told me I could restore my health without beating up my wallet. I gathered two friends/colleagues: one, a skinny-girl who had nothing but rotten bok choy in her fridge, is an omnivore like me, and the other a dyed-in-the-cotton vegetarian. So strong is the latter's aversion to anything "critter", as she puts it, she went into remorseful shock the week before when the former informed her that the sauce into she was dipping her veggie spring roll was actually fish sauce. In addition to being meatless, Elixir is dairy free, too.

Though the place was inviting inside – with two tables, a sofa, coffee table and reading stuff, and the kitchen on just the other side of the counter- we took over the "terrace": a wooden table with chairs plunked out on the sidewalk. Delighted, we commenced out our gossiping.

But first, we chose our juices from among four kinds of fruit combination and one vegetable – all made from fresh produce in a juicer, of course. I thought I'd try a vegetable- carrot base with ginger and beet; the balance between the fresh ginger and the rest was perfect- though I coveted my companion's fruit drinks; one with papaya, apricot, mango and orange; the other, cherry and

apple. Both had gorgeous colors and were thick and oh-so-creamy bright on a sultry summer afternoon.

I asked co-owner Graham what all the grass was growing in the window – even veggie-woman wasn't sure. "Wheat grass", he replied. "It's pure chlorophyll. It really cleans your body, and gives you a buzz that builds gradually".

"We-e-lll," we all twittered. Another buzz! And it's okay because it's a healthy one, we rationalized. Just what we all needed after "PVD syndrome" (Pride Vitamin Depletion). He served it in shot glasses and instructed us to first take a sip and let the elixir run through our teeth to feel a tingle and rejuvenate our gums. It tasted potent, all right.

While we waited for it to kick in, skinny-girl chose from the "goodies" section: *pain doré aux amandes*, garnished with dates, raisins, apricots, almonds, mango and orange. Moist, filling, divine Veggie-woman had the Tofu Marine sandwich: Avocado, Dijon, Luzerne, carrot, lettuce, tomato, varied sprouts, cucumber and tofu marinated in tamarind served on dense soft brown bread. Now, I hate tofu. The sight of it floating in bowls like-barbecue-starter fuel makes my stomach heave. But marinated like this, it was transformed into something that rivaled any kind of meat. I had the Fabuleux Végépaté sandwich – a very satisfying, not greasy, delicate mix, tiered with the same vegetables as the other sandwiches. Both were served with salad of chick peas and pumpkin, sunflower and sesame seeds with scrumptious seeds. All was light, crisp and the perfect complement to the sandwiches. In colder months they'll be preparing soups and hot meals.

Everything's made on the premises, including the wide range of muffins and cakes, some topped with banana and apple slices. We all had to get back to the office (service was naturally slow), so Cynthia invited us to sample each one. I was hesitant: most vegetarian deserts I've had were flavorless and dry. These were moist, tasty and, like everything else that comes out of this kitchen, every ingredient could be discerned as they blended together to form a delicious whole that competes with anything Grandma Butterstuffer ever baked.