

BEST VEGETARIAN MENU

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NEW HAVEN REGISTER

by Lisa Reisman | Lifestyle

http://www.shorelinetimes.com/lifestyle/best-vegetarian-menu-g-zen-branford/article_7de60f22-01da-55ca-8ab4-cd65469b78ed.html

Best Vegetarian Menu, G-Zen, Branford

Stroll into Branford's G-Zen on any given evening, and it's clear why readers selected the East Main Street enclave as the restaurant with the best vegetarian menu on the Shoreline.

There are those with the vegan's tell-tale stringbean look and vibrant skin. There are also hippies and hipsters. All three groups are to be expected at a restaurant named for G, as in "green" business ethics — food remains composted, glassware and utensils recycled, tables made from reclaimed wood — and Zen, as its website explains, for "living mindfully."

Keep looking. There are also traditional-looking families, couples on a date night, groups of friends out for drinks, and everything in between.

And that, according to the New York Times, means that owners Mark Shadle and Ami Beach Shadle, have met what they set out to do when they opened G-Zen in 2011: "to appeal to a nonvegan audience ... a tall order for a restaurant offering vegan versions of well-loved classics like pizza and crab cakes, in addition to regular vegetarian fare."

Of course, G-Zen, which was named a Top Ten Upscale Vegan Restaurant in America by Shape magazine and featured in Travel + Leisure magazine as among the Best Vegetarian Restaurants in the USA, hasn't won over the palates of omnivores, carnivores, and pescadores, as well as vegans and vegetarians, on the basis of its plant-based cuisine alone.

There's the serene, relaxed ambiance — Zen-like, as its name would suggest; the wooden and white brick accents affording a warmth to the space; the gracious, knowledgeable, and attentive staff; and, above all, the stunning visual presentation of the food.

That said, it's the inventive menu of raw foods and cocktail elixirs that sets G-Zen apart, from the Thimble Island Vegan Crab Cakes, Tofu Napoleon, and Downward Dog Burrito with sweet potato fries to the coconut cacao truffles to the fruity Zengria and Bunny Zinger, a fresh-squeezed carrot, celery, and ginger juice.

That the food lacks meat or dairy, in short, is beside the point, given its rich flavor. In fact, if you didn't already know you're dining at a vegan restaurant, you might need to be reminded.