



Significant Other, a Significant Vegetarian?

Read on.

by Jami Tryer

Two fabulous restaurants, four satisfying menus...You do the math!

I dated a guy several years back who absolutely would not eat meat. This forced us to think creatively about date spots where we would both be satisfied. At the time, menus in general were either too green or too “raw” for me or had too few choices for “Soy Boy”. (That’s what I lovingly called him back then).

As much as I tried, veggie burgers (no matter how gourmet) and Chik’in bites (no matter how many tasty dips came with) just didn’t appeal to me, nor did they digest well in my system. I’m not into tofu, and when it comes to dishes abundant with veggies, well, let’s just say a Beano appetizer is a must. I bore easily with salads served as a main entrée. Soy Boy was boarder-line obsessive compulsive. On average, he’d ask our impatient server 20 questions before settling on a selection. Eating out became impossible, our relationship suffered and Soy Boy was history. I bet right now he’s in front of the TV munching on a Falafel wrap.

Back then I wished that every restaurant had two menus – one for the Vegan Vinnies in my life, and one for me. I recently discovered two spots that actually cater to the dietary desires of many. The first is The Adobe Café, which is tucked away in a residential neighborhood not far from Manayunk’s Main Street. The other is a relative newcomer – Vesuvio, that is a favorite

with the locals surrounding 8th and Fitzwater Streets. Both are worth the trip whether you’re mad for Mex or dyin’ for Italian.

THE ADOBE CAFÉ - 4550 Mitchell Street - Roxborough 215-483-3947

The Adobe Café bills itself to the world as a Southwest Bar & Grille and Santa Fe Steakhouse – but – don’t be fooled. The stellar vegetarian menu (as large as the house menu) is inventive and tasty. All items are prepared with meat and dairy substitutes. The chef and owners felt that offering healthy alternatives only benefits their customers. And they’re right. This spot, complete with kitschy outdoor seating, funky umbrellas and a laid back vibe, has its pack of ever-growing, loyal patrons.

It’s easy to see why it’s so popular. If you’re in the mood for a salad, you’ll be surprised by Adobe’s selection and innovation. Try the Portobello Mushroom Salad with cilantro pesto marinated mushrooms over pineapple, mango and red chili relish. Other salads beg for their raspberry fat-free vinaigrette (doesn’t taste ff). Ah, when the sizzling Seitan Fajitas come out of the kitchen, it smells, looks and tastes like real beef, but hold on to your cow – it’s not. The Blackened Tofu Dinner is served with a fruit salsa, mixed greens and a balsamic glaze. The vegetable enchilada is made with seasoned veggies, roasted tomato salsa, soy jack cheese and

soy sour cream (yeah try asking for that at your regular, run-of-the-mill Mexican joint.) The Black Bean Soup is also killer. It’s slow simmered with peppers, onions, garlic and a hint of smoke flavor (hello Beano). Salsa and chips come complementary to your table and we all know that there’s nothing better than a cold Margarita as the perfect accompaniment (thank god there’s no meat in Tequila). All vegetarian selections are under \$13.00.

For the carnivorous crowd, I dare you to find a menu more satisfying (there’s even a little kids menu!) Try the Skillet Seared Steak Tips served with smoked jalapeno mayo and warm tortillas. Also delish as an appetizer is the Shrimp Quesadilla with caramelized onions and goat cheese. Heck, Fried Calamari is also on the menu. It’s served with a delicious saffron aioli sauce. Lone Star Lip Lickin’ Mussels (at just \$8.00) is a popular choice. They’re steamed in roasted garlic, rosemary and lager. The pizzas are great here too. I love the Barbeque Chicken Pizza with red onion, jack and cheddar cheese and a BBQ sauce that would make Tommy Guns fire off a few rounds of ammunition. Surprisingly, Grilled Lamb Chops are also delish here served with garlic rosemary demi-glaze and mashed potatoes du jour. Pan Seared Salmon prepared with a wasabi vinaigrette and balsamic glaze and served with rice and braised greens is also satisfying.

Feel free to bring your Mexican food lovin' pals. Your standard Enchiladas, Tacos, Burritos and Chimechangas are all served with rice, melted cheese and gobs of sour cream.

Once you taste the house salsa here, you'll want to snag a few jars for home. It's got just the right combo of spiciness and sweetness (\$2.50 for an 8 oz. jar). Private banquet rooms are available for parties. Free parking across the street!!!! Reservations recommended but not necessary. Casual attire - think Jimmy Buffet Parrot Head.

Just the words "Veal Parmagaina, Please" were enough to send Soy Boy packing. Italian restaurants always seemed to be off the table for discussion. If you think about it, there is very little for the hungry vegetarian to mangia in a place where nearly everything is a combination of meat, cheese and sauce or (gravy). Slim pickins indeed when an antipasto won't do the trick. That is until now!

VESUVIO located near the Italian market - 736 S. 8th Street 215-922-8380, is a continental Italian restaurant chock full of healthy vegetarian and vegan options. It too offers a full veggie menu with a selection that could even tempt mean lovin' maniacs who can't get enough Spaghetti Bolognese. Formally known as Café Lido, this bistro has been in operation for a little over three years. If you land Matt Agosto as your server, you're in luck. He's been there for nearly two years. His knowledge about the menu really helps and he's more attentive than even the most doting Jewish or Italian grandmother - but in a masculine way. Downstairs is all about a neighborhood

pub feel complete with a pool table, authentic jukebox, five TV screens and casual seating. Upstairs has a more romantic vibe, dimly lit, sophisticated but not intimidating.

The new vegetarian menu includes meat and fish-free renditions on Slow Roasted Salmon with Potato Gnocchi, charred fennel, blood orange supremes, mint fumet and nasturtium butter and Steak Frites made from grilled tempeh with fired and red and green chimichurri sauces. There are only a few dishes over \$12.00. Executive Chef Mark McKinney kicks it up many notches having studied under well-known Chef Guillermo Pernet of Passion! Restaurant.

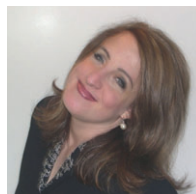
I recommend starting with the Bruschetta Tasting (get 3 or 6 pieces). Bella Vista's Vesuvio gets playful with savory and sweet samplings on crustini. Ask the server ahead of time what the varieties of the day are if you don't want to be surprised. Hungry for creative entrees? Your vegetarian companion will be happy with Grilled Eggplant Steak, which includes faro, and oven dried tomato tabbouleh, smoked mozzarella, arugula and a 30-year balsamic drizzle. Also delicious is the Ricotta Tortellini, which features porcini mushrooms, toasted pine nuts, garlic confit, chervil and lemon infused béchamel. Sides are interesting too. Try the turffled taro root, roasted long hot peppers and the Peruvian purple mashed potatoes.

For those who are cool with meat and fish, choices abound. You can stick with the more traditional pastas or try entrees with flare that really push the envelope. Tilapia Veracruzano is seared and braised in tomato, green olive and oregano sauce, saffron potatoes, preserved spinach salad. It's delish. Also great is the Stuffed Veal Chop, which marries Italian sausage, mozzarella and Ciabatta bread stuffing, cactus paddle scapece, and an Ecuadorian tomato ragout. The Pan Seared Organic Chicken Breast is also outstanding which combines

Pomegranate lacquer, polenta and Brie sandwich, sautéed broccoli rabe in a smoked white peach sauce. Complex on the page perhaps, yet simple and great tasting on the pallet.

The dining room is open for dinner Tuesday through Sunday in addition to a spectacular Sunday Brunch. The Lounge on the first level is open seven days a week and also features a pretty kicked up late-night bar menu.

While Soy Boy is yesterday's news, I can't help but wonder if our courtship may have thrived a bit longer if there had been more places where we both could have been happy and full. Perhaps we would have wed? Nah, I would have never given in to a low carb, wheat-free, gluten free, organic wedding cake with carob icing.



Jami Tryer is a freelance writer, who grew up in Margate, N.J., but has been a Center City Philly resident since 1991. She is a partner with Munroe Creative Partners, a well-known graphic design firm, where she is a Senior Project Manager and helps to develop new business. She has been freelancing in her spare time for five years for magazines such as Philadelphia Style where she has reported on trends in beauty, fashion, food and culture. For PhillyFIT, Jami has countered the myth that dining out can be frighteningly fattening in her column. Contact JamiTryer@phillyfitmagazine.com.