

TABLES FOR TWO



COUNTER

105 First Ave. (212-982-5870)—This is a meat-and-potatoes kind of joint, if by meat you mean “meat loaf”—portobello mushrooms ground up with almonds, macadamia nuts, and cashews in a porcini-mushroom-and-cabernet gravy—and by potatoes you mean cauliflower and pine nuts whipped into a fluffy cumulus and seasoned with parsley and a few shards of uncooked garlic. On Raw Tuesdays at this mostly organic vegetarian restaurant, the raw-foods chef Michele Thorne serves up these dishes with wines chosen by Donna Binder, one of the owners: biodynamic Muscadet, organic Zinfandel, and sustainable Riesling. (A quick gloss: biodynamic wines are not only organic, meaning no chemicals or pesticides, but are grown using what one employee called a “more holistic approach”—they might, for example, be harvested according to the cycles of the moon. Sustainable wines are produced organically but haven’t been certified as such by the F.D.A.)

The regular menu, designed by Thorne and the executive chef, Eric Hunter, combines the raw and the cooked—Cape Cod cakes (crusty fried tofu and seaweed in tartar sauce), wasabi crêpes drowned in a tangerine sauce, a grilled vegetable salad covered in a nut crumble—and attracts a loyal crowd of long-haired sirens so eerily happy-looking and outgoing they might be mistaken for members of a West Coast religion. Which, in a way, they are. One recent evening, a man walked in and saw a pigtailed woman sitting alone on a red vinyl stool at the bar, chatting with the proprietor about organic-food distributors while jotting notes in a burlap-covered journal. She flashed him a euphoric smile. “They have the best food here!” she said. “Do you work here?” he asked. (She said she didn’t.) He sat down next to her, but as she began to point out her favorites—maybe it was hiziki (a sea vegetable) or the rapini salad, bitter and gritty and garnished with peppery coils of parsnip—he realized what he’d got himself into. “No, no, it looks good. Really? Wow, that’s amazing,” he said effortfully as she explained the benefits of eating raw. But he stayed, even when she turned and flashed her smile at someone else. It’s nice to think he might have topped off his dinner with the Banana Split Sundae. God knows what’s in it, but it’s icy, sweet, rich, and very satisfying. (Open daily for dinner and weekends for brunch. Entrées \$10.95-\$16.25.)

—Dana Goodyear