

# Calendar

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# WEEKEND

## 'Real' Means 'Fresh and Meat-Free' at Real Food Daily

### First Impressions

By S. IRENE VIRBILA  
TIMES RESTAURANT CRITIC

All call for vegans! You and like-minded organic vegetarian food enthusiasts can now dine at the new Real Food Daily in West Hollywood. The popular Santa Monica health food cafe has opened a second locale on La Cienega Boulevard, a stroll away from the Beverly Center.

It's a virtuous restaurant all right, one that studiously avoids meat, dairy, unnecessary fats, occasionally wheat and always refined sugars, preservatives or dairy.

For all that, the freshly prepared food is much better than it sounds. I'm happy with a bowl of miso or vegetable soup. A dish of cold sesame noodles dressed up with julienned vegetables and scallions has a dressing with a shrewd bal-

ance of hot to sweet. How about a platter of corn chips with black bean dip, guacamole, a vinegary hot carrot salsa and tofu "sour cream"—aptly called "NoCheez"? Or Red Sea Opener, a medley of hummus, a nice lemony tabbouleh and salad greens with olives, tomatoes and cucumbers you can roll up in whole wheat tortillas any which way?

Ribbons of romaine in a creamy faux Caesar dressing can be dressed up with blackened tempeh if you like. For those new to the genre, the restaurant thoughtfully provides a glossary as part of the menu. Seitan, for example, is described as "wheat meat" and is made "by a process that removes the starch and bran from whole wheat flour. The result is a dough-like food with a high gluten content which has no saturated fat or cholesterol." Who knew? If you want to try it, get the seitan fajitas,

served, like the original, with Spanish rice, black beans, guacamole and warm corn tortillas.

Craving some deli? You can even get a Reuben on rye, which subs baked marinated tempeh for the pastrami or corned beef. I can't really say that it is as good as the original, but there's a resemblance.

And if you really want to go spartan, you can create your own bowl or plate from the list of basics, such as brown rice, millet and quinoa, tempeh or sea vegetables. But then you probably wouldn't have room for the strawberry kanten (definition: a Jell-O-like dessert made from agar-agar, fruit and juice) or the lemon tofu cheesecake.

On a weekday night, there's a line out the door, a small traffic jam of SUVs in front of the valet. The crowd is young and fashionable, lots of black leather and cell phones. The place has a hip look, too, with a striped laminated wood

bar, bright yellow walls and, in front, a small patio set off with Calder-esque red and yellow metal cutouts. At the front is a copper board listing all the produce available that day, marked certified, organic, transitional or conventional. Here, you really know what you're eating. And it is all real food.

Delivery service is provided by LA-TO-GO (call [310] 440-4455). The restaurant also has a fax number, (310) 289-9911, which is handy for takeout orders. And a Web site: <http://www.realfood.com> in case you don't have a menu handy.

### BE THERE

**Real Food Daily**, 414 N. La Cienega Blvd., West Hollywood; (310) 289-9910. Open for lunch and dinner daily. Starters \$4 to \$9; salads \$6 to \$8; sandwiches \$7 to \$11; main courses \$9-\$12. Valet parking.