

Dining review: Lydia's Kitchen in Fairfax targets organic and raw food lovers

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I HAD NEVER been quite sure what went on at the brightly painted Lydia's Lovin' Foods in Fairfax. I was familiar with her vegan cereals, fruit bars, and crackers I had seen over the years on the shelves of Good Earth and Whole Foods, but the large terra cotta space at 31 Bolinas was always a mystery to me.

Not anymore.

Lydia Kindheart who wholesales both a dry and fresh food line of all raw products has now added a café to the mix which she calls Lydia's Kitchen.

If ever there was a spokesperson perfectly suited for her cause, Kindheart is it. The raw food pioneer has been experimenting and learning about vegan, raw and dehydrated foods for as many as 30 years. She completed a six-day fast when she was just 13, and five years later she had sun baked her first sprouted bread on a boulder in the desert. In the early '90s the Parisian-born Kindheart opened a small deli in Fairfax (where the Scoop is now) and over the years has moved into a much larger space (her kitchen is 6,000 square feet) and built a thriving business. She has as many as 20 packaged products that are distributed in local markets and nationwide.

The three-month-old café is painted a lively yellow green with purple trim. Maroon velvet backed chairs provide seating for as many as 55, and one built in seat for two resembles a tree. Jewelry shares space

in a deli case with packaged cereals and bars, while macaroons, berry

pies and sauces fill another. The space is quirky, but comfortable and definitely has a casual café feel reminiscent of 1974.

Like most of my experiences with raw, vegan or any kind of extreme cooking, the menu is hit or miss. A very accessible cooked French-Mex crepe (\$10) is essentially a black bean burrito wrapped in a buckwheat crepe and filled with beans, avocado and lettuce.

A "kreem y chili" sauce made from sunflower seeds, cashews, coconut and red bell pepper brought the



This "Purple Goddess" salad is on the menu at Lydia's Kitchen on Thursday, Oct. 14, 2010, in Fairfax, Calif. According to the menu, it contains "Purple cabbage, carrot, beet, kale, fulse seaweed, fresh parsley and calamata olives in an olive oil apple cider vinaigrette." The restaurant features organic and raw foods. [1] photo/Frankie Frost)Frankie

dish together. It was satisfying and filling. An

herbaceous, cold blended soup (\$3 cup) of kale, avocado, cucumber and celery with plenty of lemon worked. A raw seaweed lover's roll (\$7.50) included an almond pate of sprouted almonds, carrots, and green onions. The mild almond mixture combined with the salty nori made for an unusual, but tasty wrap.

The menu has a special section denoting "Scrumptious Sauces." I found that anything that had been doused with either a green Goddess sauce or a vegan pesto got a thumbs up. For instance we were treated to a combination plate of two salads (\$10): kale seaweed and Purple Goddess. The kale salad was a well balanced jumble of kale, seaweed and carrots, while the other featured shredded purple cabbage, beets, carrots and sunflower seeds. A generous drizzle of Green Goddess dressing prepared with sunflower oil, pumpkin seeds, cilantro and basil added a rich backbone to the slightly oily and acidic salads.

On our second visit we sampled a newly added quinoa burger (\$6.50) a delicious patty of quinoa and shredded vegetables was sandwiched between two small buckwheat blinis, a Romaine leaf and large slice of tomato. Plenty of vegan pesto elevated the small, but very good burger. Unfortunately, the accompanying cacao shake (\$3.50) had such a chalky texture and bitter flavor, I couldn't finish it. A ginger lemonade (\$2) though heavy on the ginger was much more palatable.

As with the savory items, desserts are also a crap shoot. A crumbly, dry macaroon (\$2) had good coconut flavor, but it completely fell apart. One small taste of a raspberry fruit pie (\$6) burst with berry flavor and featured a dense nutty coconut crust.

"I'm very interested in the 'energetics of food,' explained Kindheart over the phone. "Food that is

closest to its source is the healthiest. Once it is cooked it is killed and destroyed," contends Kindheart who feels strongly that we all need to be more connected to what we eat.

I, too, believe we should have a closer connection to our food. I also want to like the food at Lydia's. I know it is food that is good for my body, and it makes me feel good. But I don't like all of it. Some of that is because I'm not used to eating it, but sometimes the flavors and textures simply don't work. Or many of the same foods are used too often. No doubt the raw food movement has come a long way. I have seen nothing but improvement over the years and I'm glad that Kindheart has stayed the course with her efforts to bring raw, organic foods to the masses.

Tanya Henry, the former senior food editor at cooking.com and a judge at the James Beard Foundation journalism awards, has degrees in culinary arts and nutrition and lives in Marin. Contact her at lifestyles@marinij.com. The IJ invites readers to post their own opinions and experiences about the restaurants featured in Wednesday's dining reviews. Enter your comments at the bottom of this story online at www.marinij.com.

review

Lydia's Kitchen

Address: 31 Bolinas Road, Fairfax

Phone: 258-9866

Web site: [www.Lydia's LovinFoods.com](http://www.Lydia'sLovinFoods.com)

Cuisine: Organic cooked and raw foods

Service: Order at counter and self-serve

Noise level: Moderate

Liquor selection: None

Corkage: NA

Recommended dishes: Quinoa burger, kale seaweed salad, French-Mex crepe

Parking: Street

Wheelchair access: Yes