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What's New in Princeton & Central New Jersey?

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Greening our Eating Habits

by Pat Tanner

For a restaurant, what does the term "green practices" mean? After all, by its very nature, providing restaurant clientele with a comfortable, even luxurious, experience entails a huge carbon footprint and creates tremendous waste in everything from food and packaging to water and sewer use to indulgent heating and air conditioning. My favorite example of this last came when I dined over the summer at a restaurant on the Jersey shore that had a fire going in the fireplace while the walls flanking it were open, floor to ceiling, to the sea. Charming, yes. Responsible, no.

One of the first and most meaningful steps that restaurants across the region have taken has been to buy "local and sustainable" whenever feasible. Supporting local farms helps maintain open space and, by avoiding long-distance transportation, often nets a reduction in fossil fuel use. If the farm uses sustainable, earth-friendly practices, the gain is even greater. Will Mooney, owner/chef of Brothers Moon in Hopewell (7 West Broad Street, Hopewell, 609-333-1330, www.brothersmoon.com), for example, was a pioneer in putting local farmers and food artisans on his menu. In a poetic closing of the loop, he now reports that all of the organic food waste his restaurant generates is given back to a local farmer for composting.



Carlo Momo and brother Raoul run environmentally friendly restaurants by employing such practices as composting organic waste.

The restaurants featured in this story — some old timers, some new to the scene — all buy local to some extent, and all keep a close eye on waste and energy use, like the Brothers Moon. These eateries are by no means the only ones along the U.S. 1 corridor to excel in greenness, but they were chosen for having gone above and beyond, especially by incorporating green building design, construction, and adaptation. Of course, as Herb Mertz, a board member of Princeton's Whole Earth Center, points out, all of these measures would be for naught if in fact, customers — myself included — didn't like the food, so I also provide a snapshot of what each has to offer.

Eno Terra

Eno Terra on Route 27 in Kingston, one of the area's newest and most anticipated restaurants, is the latest addition to the Terra Momo Restaurant Group, which also includes Mediterra, Teresa Caffe, and Witherspoon Bread Company, all in Princeton. (Owners Raoul and Carlo Momo recently sold their New Brunswick pan-Latino restaurant, Nova Terra.) In the works for seven years, the \$3 million renovation of what had last been the Wine Press opened in mid-September.

Eno Terra, which Raoul Momo calls "the cornerstone of our family of fine restaurants," has been certified by the Boston-based Green Restaurant Association (GRA). The restaurant is one of only six in New Jersey — the other five being the various McLoone's restaurants dotting the



Jersey shore. Of the 12 steps outlined by the GRA, Eno Terra has completed six, among them scrupulous separation of garbage, turning over organic waste for composting, using energy-saving motion-activated lighting, and imposing a complete ban on styrofoam.

As much of a commitment as GRA certification entails — including an initial \$7,000 consulting fee and \$3,000 for annual audits — the Momo brothers have gone well beyond the required strictures in their overall approach, including reuse of an existing structure. The two-story, 8,300 square foot restaurant, designed by the firm of well-known restaurant designer Larry Bogdanow, is built upon the timbers of an existing — and historic — structure that began life in the 19th century as a general store. These timbers are in full view in the spacious bar area, as is an original exposed brick-and-mortar wall that runs along one side of the glass-enclosed wine cellar. (A second wine room is upstairs. Even the restaurant's name implies the focus on wine here, with 380 selections — half of them from Italy — and a capacity for up to 10,000 bottles. It even has its own private label sparkling wine.)

In keeping with Eno Terra's goal to source about 70 percent of its food provisions from within a 50-mile radius, the restaurant design also called for a large prep kitchen in the basement for preserving and butchering. Eventually, 70 truckloads of slate had to be excavated and some of it was recycled into the outdoor landscaping, including a stone bench by local sculptor Jonathan Shor.

Shor is one of several Princeton-area artists and landscapers whose works give a unique character to the indoor and outdoor spaces at Eno Terra. Wood fires in wire-rope fire bowls by Peter Abrams of Trenton greet guests on their way in. Walls are hung with oil paintings by Viola Fisher, photographs by Clem Fiori, and a living, green "wallscape" by sculptor Robert Cannon, whose work many Princetonians came to know from the temporary outdoor installations, Herban Garden and Quark Park. Cannon worked on those projects with landscaper Peter Soderman, whose striking designs, including Eno Terra's outdoor patio that features a wall made from indigenous rock, are drawing rave reviews.

The Momo brothers also act on their commitment to be green by giving back to the community. Proceeds from the first public event at Eno Terra, an afternoon showcasing the local artists and artisans involved in the project, went to the Princeton School Gardens Co-op.

The restaurant's Italian-inspired menu is under the direction of executive chef Christopher Albrecht, who has worked closely with celebrity chef Tom Colicchio (of New York's Gramercy Tavern) through Colicchio's stable of Craft restaurants, including working as executive chef at Craftsteak in Las Vegas. Albrecht is himself locally grown, so to speak, having been raised in East Brunswick. He now lives in Princeton with his wife and three children.

The menu is liberally sprinkled with ingredients from local farms and food artisans: Simply Grazin' porchetta, cheeses from Cherry Grove and Valley Shepherd Creamery, and salad of Terhune Orchards baby lettuce and Muth Family Farm Heirloom tomatoes. Popular starters include crudo sampler (tuna, fluke, and scallops with citrus) and a platter of artisanal cured meats and cheeses. Connie Abodeely of Skillman dined there shortly after its opening, and reported back to me. "After watching the outside construction for such a long time, the inside did not disappoint," she wrote in an E-mail, going on to praise the "serene feeling" of the restaurant, and mentioned that although it was completely full noise was not a problem. She had special praise for the wood-fire grilled scallops and almost-flourless cake. She concluded: "For a restaurant that has been open only for a few weeks, they are doing a terrific job of getting good food on the table in a seemingly effortless way."

Eno Terra, 4484 Route 27, Kingston. 609-497-1777, www.terramomo.com.

Triumph Brewing

The Momos are also involved in an effort to get even more local farm products into other restaurants, and in this regard they are joined by another environmentally aware restaurant group: Triumph Brewing, which has brewpubs in Princeton, New Hope, and Philadelphia. Each of the properties features reused lumber and metal, each was an adaptive reuse of an existing structure, and each encourages patrons who transport their handcrafted brews home to use Triumph's growlers: half-gallon glass vessels that can be used over and over.

In a telephone interview Triumph's owner, Adam Rechnitz, explains why he and his team are committed to making an impact. "If you consider percentage by weight, then restaurant plate scrapings are probably the biggest waste out there." He demurred at my suggestion that it is costly for businesses to go green. "The best thing is when doing the right thing also becomes economically the cheapest. The market will come around. Our natural 'capital' — our natural resources — has never been priced realistically, and we haven't been getting strong leadership from the government. The environmental movement that developed in the '70s, following on the heels of the activism of the '60s, didn't have legs. Look what happened in the '80s," he says, referring to that decade's excessive consumption. "But the same issues have come back: Clean air, clean water, open space. People aren't paying attention to these issues for altruistic reasons. It's totally driven by economics. That's always a component to change."

At Triumph one area where doing the right thing makes economic sense is in recycling. "If you're being charged by the container to haul trash away to a landfill, then fewer containers lead to cost savings," Rechnitz says. Triumph in Princeton also sells its spent fryer oil to a commercial source that converts it to biodiesel fuel. Because storage space is at a premium at the Philly location, fryer oil is delivered in a bulk truck and removed the same way. Rechnitz points out that it is a longstanding practice for breweries to send their spent mash to dairy farms as feed, and his breweries are no exception, although the Philly location pays to have it carted off by a fellow who claims to compost it.

Chambers Walk Cafe in Lawrenceville (2667 Main Street, Lawrenceville, 609-896-5995,

<http://cwcatering.homestead.com>) also donates its used cooking oil, but it knows exactly where it goes: directly across the street to the Lawrenceville School, where it is converted to biodiesel fuel and used to power grounds-keeping vehicles.

Triumph has, well, triumphed by producing distinctive house brews — customarily six or seven on tap at any time — and pairing them with popular bar food that is a cut or two above the expected. Most recently I enjoyed a casual meal at the bar in Princeton, while discussing presidential politics with the friendly barkeep. I washed down the Kobe beef mini-sliders and good, crisp, thin fries with a pint of Triumph's excellent Oktoberfest beer. I find it interesting that the menus vary slightly among the three locations, in part to meet their particular clientele's desires. German soft pretzels in Philly, for example. All feature the Triumph burger, but then there are those sliders in Princeton, a brewhouse burger in New Hope, and a cheddar bacon burger with Amish cheddar and ale fondue in Philly.

The Triumph menus offer more ambitious fare, too, like poussin, seafood paella, and black cod. I also give Triumph kudos for being able to draw a wide clientele. Depending on the time of day, the age and makeup of the crowds vary from business people enjoying lunch or meeting for drinks after work to families with kids in tow looking for a casual dinner to young late-night crowds that enjoy the live music.

Rechnitz and his team are in the process on settling on a site in Red Bank for their fourth and, he says, final project. If they decide to go with new construction, which might be necessary, he says that they intend to go for a LEED certification. LEED stands for Leader in Environmental Engineering and Design and is a program of the U.S. Green Building Society. Rechnitz admits that he obsesses about environmental responsibility even in his personal life. "At home I compost almost everything."

Triumph Brewing Company, 138 Nassau Street, 609-924-7855, www.triumphbrew.com.

Salt Creek Grille

That sentiment is shared by Amy Foulks, bar manager at Salt Creek Grille in Plainsboro's Princeton Forrestal Village. Foulks lives in Plainsboro, has worked for this small restaurant group on and off for 10 years, and is credited with being the impetus behind their eco-friendly initiatives. "It is important in my own life," says Foulks in a telephone interview. "For 2008 I set goals for myself at home and extended them to my work at Salt Creek Grille." Among the steps the Princeton location has taken under her lead is installing what they term cutting-edge technology for drastically reducing energy consumption: the A.G.E.S. Phase Saver. Their latest action was to issue every employee reusable water bottles.

Salt Creek Grille, One Rockingham Row, Princeton Forrestal Village, Plainsboro, 609-419-4200, www.saltcreekgrille.com.

Elements

Energy consumption is a huge issue for restaurants, from the usual HVAC to the massive draw of commercial kitchen equipment. At Elements, like Eno Terra, an eagerly awaited fine-dining restaurant that just opened its doors on Route 206 in Princeton, co-owner/chef Scott Anderson is proud of the many "sensible" eco-friendly aspects of the restaurant, not the least of which is the energy-saving manager on the kitchen hood.

"Kitchen hoods are a huge draw on power — crazily so," Anderson says. On a recent tour, he pointed out that its efficiency and innovation extend even to the comfort of the kitchen staff, by cycling the exchanged air down directly to where they stand rather than over the burners as is common.

The restaurant also has a state-of-the-art water filtering system for all the water the restaurant uses, including bottling and carbonating features.

The 34-year-old, self-trained Anderson lives in Lawrenceville and is familiar to many area diners from his longtime affiliation with Craig Shelton of the acclaimed, now shuttered, Ryland Inn in Whitehouse and, closer to home, his work at Mediterra, Les Copains, and the Lawrenceville Inn.

Everything about the 80-seat restaurant is upscale and ambitious, from Anderson's menu of "interpretive American cuisine" to the striking modern architecture of the building. The principal owner is Stephen Distler, founding chairman of the new Bank of Princeton, the headquarters for which is nearing completion just a short block away from Elements on Route 206. Distler and Anderson hired architect Bob Steele of Richmond, VA, to convert the bones of a concrete structure that had last been an auto repair/service shop into a stunning showcase of minimalist but lush design featuring natural elements of stone, wood, glass, and metal. (In keeping with the minimalism, the restaurant's logo simply features the name, all in low case: elements.)

In a telephone interview Steele echoes Anderson when he states, "The major issue we dealt with was for the project to be sensible. There are a lot of buzzwords out there — green, eco-friendly — but the bottom line for a restaurant business is to create a plan for the enjoyment of the place. As an architect, the most important [environmental] objective is reusing an existing site and an existing building. It's the best thing we can do for society. I'm troubled when I find people developing new sites. On existing ones, the infrastructure is already there; the grading and clearing are done. This is best approach to so-called green architecture. The [Elements] building is a nice mix of old and new. Anyone who knew the old service station will see the bones of the three service bays," he says. These now take the form of oversize frosted glass windows facing Route 206, which allow in filtered light but obstruct the view. Steele reports that restaurateurs in other states are interested in using his model.

The Princeton area, me included, got its first, and impressive, taste of Elements in September at two annual events. At JazzFeast in Princeton and Epicurean Palette at Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton, Scott Anderson and his staff, which includes husband and wife team Joe and Emilia Sparatta — he as sous chef; she as general manager and sommelier — dished up house-cured salmon with cucumber kimchee, soba noodles, and sesame in a cone made of bamboo leaf.

The opening menu that Elements debuted this month draws not only from cultural influences from around the world, but also on ingredients highbrow and low. True Kobe beef imported directly from Japan, jamon Iberico from Spain's acorn-eating black pigs, foie gras, and langoustine share the spotlight with beloved "peasant" dishes like fish and chips, calamari and sardines, and cardoon — a personal favorite veggie from my Italian-American upbringing — here paired with truffles and oysters.

To say that this restaurant has hit the ground running is a bit of an understatement. Mary Gallagher of Princeton, who dined there during opening week, told me that her husband, Bernie, whom she labels "the foodie in the family," after enjoying the suckling pig with fingerlings, Brussels sprouts, and bacon, went into the partially-open kitchen and "got on his knees to the chef." Whoa.

Elements, 163 Bayard Lane, 609-924-0078, www.elementsprinceton.com.

In New Brunswick

The team behind Stage Left and Catherine Lombardi restaurants (which is upstairs from Stage Left) — Mark Pascal, Francis Schott, and Lou Riveiro — was among the first last year to take advantage of a state-sponsored program to install energy-saving solar panels on their roofs. With help from the state's Clean Energy Program, they installed 10-kilowatt solar-powered systems. The total cost of \$80,000 was substantially offset by a grant of \$53,870 from the state Board of Public Utilities, which runs the program. Between the two restaurants, the owners report savings of \$500 per month on electricity, plus an additional \$300 to \$500 a year in tax benefits.

The owners of the Frog and the Peach, another New Brunswick fine-dining restaurant, also took advantage of the program, installing roof solar panels. They had previously installed efficient radiant-heat flooring in their garden dining room. Betsy Alger reports that the solar panels "are producing about 25 percent of our electricity. Funny thing is, that's about how much the cost of energy has increased, so we are about even on electrical when compared to last year."

This year, the folks at Stage Left and Catherine Lombardi also took a look at their restaurant's bottled water usage, especially in terms of the fossil fuels expended by importing water from as far away as Italy. Francis Schott has said that the pair of restaurants would go through about 500 bottles a month of sparkling water alone. Now the restaurants purchase spring water in returnable five-gallon containers from Tupelhocken, PA, and bottle it in-house. Some they carbonate with a home-style soda maker. The process does not use electricity or batteries, and the bottles get reused, Schott estimates, about 200 times. Because of the increased manpower involved, the restaurant does not expect to save money on the change.

Of course, plenty of diners still choose plain old tap water when dining out, at both Stage Left, which offers refined American fare, and at its three-year-old sibling, Catherine Lombardi, which offers upscale takes on down-home Italian-American classics. In addition to sharing the same solar panels, water options, and location, the two venues feature the same exceptional wine list and the same chef. Overseeing both kitchens is J.R. Belt, who stepped up from sous chef when the restaurants' longtime chef, Anthony Bucco, left.

Catherine Lombardi is named after Mark Pascal's Neapolitan nonna and pays tribute to the classic Sunday dinners she produced, including macaroni with meatballs and "gravy," lasagna, manicotti, and eggplant parmigiana. All are made with first-rate ingredients, come in generous servings, and are enjoyed in elegant surroundings — with prices to match. The first time I dined there I was dubious about spending \$30 on veal parmigiana (now replaced by veal scaloppini). In fact, I appreciated the dish's finesse, especially the flavorful, quality veal. Even more impressive is pork osso buco. "Big flavors, yet nuanced" was my dining companion's pronouncement. Excellent espresso and a plate of Mrs. Palmisano's cookies — she was a neighbor — are a fitting end to a meal here.

Downstairs, the perennially popular Stage Left continues to dish out modern, seasonal, market-driven fare in a romantic setting that harkens back to the heyday of New York supper clubs, with curved banquettes, stylized retro oil paintings, and silver candlestick lamps with white pleated shades. Indulgences include butter-poached lobster that for a supplemental charge can be topped with American Osetra caviar, and a sampling of nine cheeses from the rolling cart. One caveat: Add in a fine wine and the tab can escalate quickly.

Stage Left and Catherine Lombardi, 5 Livingston Avenue, New Brunswick, 732-828-4444, www.stageleft.com, www.catherinelombardi.com.

The Frog and the Peach, 29 Dennis Court, New Brunswick, 732-846-3216.

Whole Earth Center

It may seem odd to conclude this survey with a place that (a.) is not primarily known as an eatery, (b.) has no table service, and (c.) serves only vegetarian, mostly organic fare. Yet the cafe at Princeton's Whole Earth Center in that natural food store's newly expanded space merits inclusion not just for its innovative reuse, conservation, and recycling of construction

materials, but because it is a pleasant dining space and, more importantly, the food stands on its own merits.

I agree with Whole Earth board member Herb Mertz, who is celebrating his 25th year on the board of this community-based, not-for-profit retail store, who told me, "Personally, I can't get enough of our food." But he also makes an important point: "From a global-benefit aspect, vegetarianism has a greater impact than green construction. What is the figure? It takes 17 pounds of plant and grains to produce one pound of meat." In fact, a United Nations report concludes that animal grazing has the largest carbon footprint of any activity on earth.

But getting back to the food at the cafe, Mertz says, "After the expansion, some of my curious coworkers went over for lunch and came back loving the food. And they're not vegetarians or vegans." My personal favorites from chef Alex Levine include just about any of the changing roster of soups, such as curried cauliflower, red lentil, and quinoa with spinach. Their tasty Sunburger is the only vegetarian "burger" I deign to eat. Salads, hot entrees, and surprisingly lush desserts (carrot cake with cream cheese icing to name just one) are also offered each day for dining in or taking away.

I recently enjoyed lunch at the sun-filled, modest cafe with my friend Anne Glynn Mackoul of Princeton at an attractive table made by a local tree surgeon from wood salvaged from a local tree. As I devoured creamy sweet potato soup made with locally grown, organic spuds, Anne proclaimed her Colby cheese melt on whole-wheat pita and beet salad with feta "delicious" and praised the mint in the salad for its freshness and subtlety.

For 38 years, the WEC — as the Whole Earth Center is called — has been the first to introduce many of us to such important concepts as "sustainable," "fair trade," and "local." The folks behind the expansion managed to reuse or recycle about 90 percent of the construction waste, including refitting the windows from the space's previous life as a flower shop and, before that, an auto dealership. (For the full story of this most conscientious and innovative of green constructions, see Michele Alperin's story in the April 2, 2008, issue of U.S. 1, in the archives at www.princetoninfo.com.)

"The expansion was right up our alley," says Mertz. "We have always considered the [store] as a laboratory for the community to see what is possible. Among our founding missions/objectives beyond providing good natural foodstuffs and one that we've never really been able to carry out until now was to be a place for research on the green aspects of society. The expansion allowed us to be that. We love for people to come in and learn what they can do to make their own environments more green."

The store has already made good on that promise. Key players in the design and construction included architect Ron Berlin and builder Jim Baxter. A longtime, dedicated WEC customer, Emily Eischen of Lawrenceville, recently was faced with what she terms "an unexpected critical environmental problem" in the middle of a home remodeling project. Through the Whole Earth Center, she hooked up with Baxter Construction, which consulted on her problem.

This example, and indeed all of the above, represents just a few the varied, serious, and thoughtful approaches that restaurants all along the U.S. 1 corridor are taking to address an issue of utmost concern and urgency to us all. As Adam Rechnitz of Triumph Brewing says, "The biggest stumbling block to getting all these initiatives into place is the mindset that says it's too much bother, or what difference does it make. I believe the world is what you make it."

Whole Earth Center, 360 Nassau Street, 609-924-7429, www.wholeearthcenter.com.

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