

WORLD	U.S.	N.Y. / REGION	BUSINESS	TECHNOLOGY	SCIENCE	HEALTH	SPORTS	OPINION
-------	------	---------------	----------	------------	---------	--------	--------	---------

FASHION & STYLE	DINING & WINE	HOME & GARDEN	WEDDINGS/CELEBRA
-----------------	---------------	---------------	------------------

Going Out to Eat, but Staying Green

By FLORENCE FABRICANT
Published: February 13, 2008

AT the Oko frozen yogurt shop in Park Slope, Brooklyn, the counter and walls are made from sunflower seeds and its awnings have solar panels.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Marilynn K. Yee/The New York Times

EARTHWISE B. R. Guest uses paper for takeout.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times
Birdbath bakery delivers by pedal power.

Maury Rubin said that when he opens his third Birdbath organic bakery this spring, in Battery Park City, the roof will be planted with herbs to help air quality and insulate the store. Like the other Birdbaths in lower Manhattan, its furnishings will be made from recycled materials and wheat board.

Gusto Grilled Organics in Greenwich Village has been certified as organic under federal regulations by the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York and its construction complies with standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council, a national environmental building organization.

Places like these, with a countercultural vibe, are what the phrase "green restaurant" might bring to mind.

But at the 13 New York and Chicago restaurants of Stephen Hanson's B. R. Guest Restaurants, where you're more likely to find patrons knocking back margaritas than sipping herbal tea, there's a sanitation expert to help with recycling, as well as paper takeout containers, and organic eggs and other ingredients (as long as they're not too expensive or hard to get).

At Del Posto, near the meatpacking district in Manhattan, where there are little stools for purses, biodiesel trucks fueled by its used cooking oil fetch ingredients from an upstate farm and return with the restaurant's compost.

"There are many ways to be green," said [Joseph Bastianich](#), an owner.

And many places that are trying. Lately, when restaurateurs create a menu or settle on a design, they're considering the environment along with the cuisine. Some do it to save money and others to tap

[E-MAIL](#)

[PRINT](#)

[REPRINTS](#)

[SAVE](#)

[SHARE](#)

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Pizza Fusion delivers by hybrid cars.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times
Oko frozen yogurt has solar panels.



Robert Caplin for The New York Times
Community Food & Juice uses solar lamps.

into a popular trend, but many do it because they believe in it. Jason Hennings said the ingredients at Black Iron Burger, which he is to open soon in the East Village, will come from New York State, avoiding fuel-burning, cross-country deliveries. "I want this to be an ethical burger," he said.

The seal of approval for many environmentally concerned dining places around the country comes from the nonprofit Green Restaurant Association, founded by Michael Oshman in 1990, when, he said, there was no green business movement.

Now, his organization, based in Boston, has more than 350 members, which for an annual fee of \$500 to \$4,000, depending on their size, get a "Green Restaurant" seal for their windows once they replace all polystyrene foam products, agree to recycle as much as possible, and begin to phase in other environmental measures, including composting, conserving water, disposing of grease responsibly and using chlorine-free paper products.

To check on compliance, the association occasionally inspects restaurants, but more often it looks at invoices to confirm that they are buying nontoxic cleaning products, energy efficient light bulbs and the like.

"We have to make these certifications credible," Mr. Oshman said. "We've had issues with some clients, like one who had a contract with a recycler but the recycling company reported that the bins were always empty."

José Duarte, the chef and owner of Taranta in Boston, said the association didn't just approve his efforts, it also helped get things done. "When I needed new business cards I wanted them on chlorine-free paper, and the association could tell me which printers to contact," he said. "Otherwise I would have had to call all over town myself."

Keeping paper products nontoxic may be environmentally sound, but Mr. Oshman said that, increasingly, the industry is going green to save money.

Mr. Duarte, for instance, said that by composting he has cut down on garbage pickups, reducing his costs by about 45 percent. He said

motion sensors in the bathrooms for the fans and lighting have helped cut energy costs by as much as \$2,000 a year.

Mr. Oshman said his members “realize that it’s good for business and good practice.” And, he added, “It’s better to do it voluntarily, so it doesn’t get legislated.”

A growing number of municipalities, including Boston, Los Angeles and Santa Monica, Calif., have started citywide composting programs, which New York is considering, according to David Hurd, the director of the city’s Office of Recycling Outreach and Education.

New York already requires businesses to sort trash for recycling, Mr. Hurd said, but the service is not offered by all carting companies, and the law is not well-enforced. So it takes initiative to commit to recycling, as does Community Food & Juice, a small spot in Morningside Heights. And going green can add costs, at least in the beginning. Along with installing energy-saving appliances, Sharab, a lounge under construction in Gainesville, Fla., is using environmentally sound building methods that are often more expensive than conventional ones.

Christopher Fillie, the restaurant’s contractor, specializes in LEED construction (for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), which follows standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council, a nonprofit group based in Washington. Mr. Fillie said green construction methods, like using recycled materials and nontoxic paints, may add 10 percent to costs. But that can be offset with savings from energy conservation, utility rebates for more efficient appliances and federal tax credits for solar panels and other equipment.

“There’s a misconception that it’s only some kind of a [bleeding](#) heart thing and will be expensive,” Mr. Fillie said. “But the reality is that the cost of doing business poorly is going up — like the cost of energy, for example.”

Some efforts are modest. Community Food & Juice uses solar-powered lamps. To use less [gasoline](#), restaurants, like Pizza Fusion in Fort Lauderdale and Deerfield Beach, Fla., make deliveries with hybrid cars. (Birdbirth uses bicycle-powered rickshaws.) Stage Left restaurant in New Brunswick, N.J., cans its own local tomatoes, and Cava Greens in Denver, which sells tossed salad to go, discounts takeout orders that can be filled in the customer’s own containers.

Some require more ambition. The Pain Quotidien chain of bakery-restaurants, which began using organic ingredients about four years ago, now has a composting plant in Queens for its New York restaurants.

Danielle Venokur’s Manhattan firm, DVGreen, plans parties with caterers like the Cleaver Company, Fancy Girl, Wichcraft and FreeFoods NYC, that use organic products, recycle, compost, and take other measures. She even looks for organic flowers.

Robert L. Garafola, New York City’s deputy parks commissioner for management and budget, said his department is encouraging restaurants and snack bars in the parks to follow Green Restaurant Association standards, and will consider how well concessionaires comply when granting future contracts.

Mr. Hanson said he had B. R. Guest’s New York and Chicago restaurants certified by the Green Restaurant Association in part because his company is in a joint venture with the Starwood Capital Group, an international hotel company that already has a green agenda. But, he said, ethics played a role, too.

“It’s also about emotions,” he said. “You have no choice if you have a conscience. I’m thinking about my kids.”

Jason Birnbaum, who owns Doc Green’s Gourmet Salad & Grill, with casual salad bars in Austin, Tex., said the new unit he just completed there was built according to LEED standards and complies with many of the Green Restaurant Association’s requirements.

Whether his customers care about all this is another matter.

“Austin is a very green city, like Seattle and San Francisco,” he said. “For some people it doesn’t matter, but with others, if they like our food and know we’re green they may choose us.”