

Ethos Vegan Kitchen Has a Winning Recipe!

Some restaurants have great food and some have great atmosphere, but VERY few have both. Today I discovered Ethos Vegan Kitchen, a neighborhood charm in across the street from Gaston Edwards Park in Orlando. Well, I didn't exactly "discover" it by accident, I found it after I did a search for vegetarian-friendly outdoor dining in Orlando. Ethos had some of the highest online ratings on various restaurant search engines such as my VegOut iPhone app where they hold a Five Star rating with 56 reviews! On Urbanspoon 90% of 372 people like it! According to Ethos customers, owners Laina and Kelly Shockley know how to please!



From the online photos and the view from the road, I wasn't so sure about the restaurant. But as soon as I stepped inside, I felt at home in this inviting atmosphere. The warm yellow and red tones on the walls are accented with brick and wood. The floors are partial tile and partial rough concrete. It works very well for this down-to-earth locally-owned restaurant. The lighting is just right—not too high or low. And the music is a mix of sensual tunes like *Midnight In A Perfect World* by DJ Shadow and *Brown Skin Lady* on Black Star, an album assembled

by emcees Mos Def and Talib Kweli.



While I was in line, a talkative birthday girl celebrating her 40th randomly introduced herself to me. I told her it was my first time to this restaurant and she raved about the food telling me that everything on the menu is fantastic. She was talking among lots of her yogi friends in line telling them all about the fabulous food.

It was quick and easy to place an order. You order at the front register and then they bring the food to your table. The two tables near the front windows are great seating with a view of the park and lake. It's also a nice spot to sit if you're waiting for a friend to arrive before you place your order. The front windows are bright and beautiful in the daytime! And if you're inside, you can access free WiFi.



Near the back of the restaurant, there's a great area with not only tables, but also a couch and some chairs. It's a comfortable place to congregate and that's just where the 40th birthday girl was schmoozing with her friends.



No business is complete without local art! If the number of pieces were a measure of their commitment to local artists, then I would say that Ethos is very committed to the well-being of the local community—not only in providing tasteful vegan delights, but also in supporting local artists. In fact, when I asked about the art, one of the employees told me that they recently had an art show put together by their resident artist, Scott White.

“Resident artist?”

How many businesses can boast of their resident artist?



Apparently Scott recently coordinated an art show displaying collaborative art among local artists. How much more can one restaurant help create camaraderie among local artists and customers? Check out this creative concoction between Scott White and El Shanebo. Priced at only \$60, this piece is sure to be adopted by a customer very soon! I like how they used both images and words in this work entitled “Go Robot.” Learn more about Scott at his website GhostsOfScottWhite.



After you’ve had a chance to check out some local art, be sure to check out the scenery. If you’re near the front of the

restaurant either inside or out, you can look across the street and through the park to see the lake. I saved the best for last. Not only can you get great healthy food here, but you can also sit outside and enjoy the your meal in a covered area. Rain or shine you can enjoy the fresh air, well at least as fresh as it can be alongside a street with occasional cars going by. And you can also enjoy the green plants in the eating area.



But that's not all that's right about this restaurant. They have three restrooms with signs on the door that say "bathroom." That makes so much sense! Other less efficient restaurants can learn from this. If the ladies room is locked at Chipotle or another restaurant where they label the doors "men" and "women," I often use the men's room because it's not an efficient use of any woman's time to wait for the women's room if the men's room is free! Yet so many obedient female customers do just this—they wait and wait and wait, and don't never complain to management! If you want to learn more about my restroom philosophy, check out my "Gotta Go" video on YouTube:

When I was planning my trip to Orlando, I thought about contacting owners Kelly or Laina in advance to see if I could interview them, but I didn't want my first experience to be swayed by people who have a vested interest in the business. I'm not even sure if they were in the restaurant for the majority of my time here, but I'm pretty sure they weren't

there most of the time because I didn't see anyone who looked like them walking around the restaurant.

That's even more points for this successful business—for their willingness to show their faces on the About page on their website and one more point for the fact that the customer experience is fabulous whether they're here or not.! I saw lots of happy customers coming and going and I didn't notice even one complaint or go-back! All the staff was friendly and you can learn more about them on the same About page. It's clear that the owners value their employees.

At most restaurants I have to search for ways to say more positive things than negative, but the opposite is true here. If I were to offer a few suggestions for improvement and potential for increasing profitability, here's what I'd say in order of priority:

- Collaborate with a sustainable local greenscaper to improve the outdoor seating area by adding an enveloping, rejuvenating greenspace, perhaps even including some edibles.
- Offer consulting services to other locally owned healthful restaurants in Florida. You obviously have a tremendous scope of talents that other like-minded restaurant owners need.
- Open a second Ethos closer to a place with higher foot traffic, like St. Augustine please :)
- Set a goal to continuously increase your 50% organic food to higher percentages over time.
- Add more character and context to your restroom. When people are sitting around or standing in place for a minute or two, you have time to give them a message. Don't lose this opportunity.
- As it got dark, the track lighting on the ceiling felt a bit harsh—replace purple/redish bulbs with something less harsh. It distorted the color of the artwork after sunset.
- Add free WiFi to the outdoor seating area.

Next time you're in Orlando, I highly recommend that you stop

by here for at least one meal. I'm sure I'll be coming back!

