



Restaurant Review

THE MAGIC OVEN
270 Dupont Street
(at Spadina)
(416) 928-1555

One doesn't usually think of a pizza joint as being a haven for healthy food – all that wheat and cheese can wreak havoc on those with food allergies. But after hearing numerous endorsements of The Magic Oven, I decided to check it for myself.

Since I'm sensitive to both wheat and cheese, pizza plugs up my plumbing every time I go near it. So to help give the place a proper review I recruited Daniel Pikelin, customer service supervisor for Whole Life Expo, to take on the pizza eating part of the visit to Magic Oven.

We showed up on a chilly Saturday afternoon and chose a booth under the skylight which added warmth and sunshine to our lunch. In fact that skylight casts a glow over most of the 42 seats in the place. There's also 4 stools where you can cozy up to the bar.

The menu offers organic beer and wine. So we ordered a 1/2 litre of the newest addition to the organic wine menu,

Ciao Sangiovese from Italy (\$7 glass / \$18 1/2 litre, \$30 litre). Even though it's bottled in tetrapak, a type of packaging which I despise, the wine itself was marvellous; a smooth, easy drinking red with berry undertones. In fact we liked it so much that I ended up ordering another 1/2 litre later, over the protestations of my guest. The other organic wine on offer is Frogpond Farm's *Chardonnay*. In terms of beer, there's several from local microbreweries, including Millstreet organic beer by the bottle (\$5).

For the meal, we started with the soup of the day (cream of cauliflower \$5), plus two salads: Gluten-free Grain & Green Salad, and Bombay Salad. The soup was fantastic; creamed cauliflower, asiago cheese, and touch of butter gave it a creamy, comforting texture and rich flavour. It disappeared in minutes.

The Gluten-free Salad sits on a bed of tender baby spinach leaves topped with quinoa, chickpeas, adzuki, mung, black-eyed peas, and brown rice. Doesn't sound very enticing, but the curry

Owner Tony Sabherwal has got a winner here; by catering to every possible taste and dietary preference, Magic Oven can conjure up good hearty meals that will appeal to both saints and sinner.



lemon vinaigrette really brings it to life, and the textures of the beans are quite perfect. I don't know how they do it because my beans never turn out that way at home, they're either too hard or too mushy. So these folks have got the bean cuisine down solid. This salad comes as small (\$8) or large (\$15). We had the small and both agreed it's filling enough to be a meal for one person (especially if you get the soup too), or makes a good sized appetizer split between two people.

The Bombay Salad, on the other hand, was a bomb. Its romaine lettuce looked anemic, and the crown of spanish onions overpowered the hard tomatoes, sunflower seeds, and cumin/lime vinaigrette. I'll



take my \$8 and invest it elsewhere when I go there again.

Turning to the mains, Daniel chose the Bountiful Magic (small \$20) from a list of 'Pizzaceuticals' purported to be good for you. Certainly the spelt crust option is a healthy alternative to wheat; it's thick and hearty (\$1.79 extra), unlike the cardboard version I've had in other pizzerias. Atop the spelt, Bountiful Magic bore a light herb tomato sauce, rosemary potatoes, steamed spinach, artichokes, blueberries(!), pecans, walnuts, oregano, and a light organic mozzarella cheese. Wow. This is surely a Cadillac of pizzas if ever there was one. I snuck a piece from Daniel's plate (allergies notwithstanding), and was thrilled with the flavours and textures of such a weird wal-

nut/blueberry combination. Daniel had planned to take home the leftovers but in the end devoured the whole thing in one go.

In the interests of research, I ordered the righteous-sounding Vegan Magic pizza, which I presumed would not be very magical on the taste buds (small \$12). So I was surprised to actually find it quite palatable. I forgot to order it with the spelt option so it came with a light, crunchy wheat crust which was slathered with a tasty tomato pesto sauce, and topped with zucchini, artichokes, portobellos, roasted red peppers, and soy cheese. The grilled vegetables were generous and well oiled, and the soy cheese nicely toasted. Although I'm not normally a fan of soy products, this method of shredding and toasting the cheese really brings out what little flavour it does have. So this guilt-free pizza was a yummy surprise. Daniel, however, preferred his own cheesy pie.

Magic Oven also offers customers an Express Yourself Magic version of pizza cuisine, in which you can choose from numerous organic cow, goat, soy, or rice cheeses, combined with 6 different organic meats (from Italian sausage to ham), plus a variety of vegetables and nuts. My goodness, the potential combinations boggle the mind. Seems like every possible special diet and taste preference has been anticipated here.

If I had wanted to be even more virtuous, I could have ordered my vegan pizza with a gluten-free rice flour crust (3.99 extra), or a lactose free rice cheese, but instead I chose to sample their rice fare by returning the next day to try one of the pastas.

Upon returning, I ordered Flavonoid Lovers Pasta (small \$15) made with organic brown rice noodles (1.99 extra), to go. The dish came brimming with tomato sauce, spinach, eggplant, zucchini, and a sprinkling of hemp seeds, all topped with vegan soy cheese. If you love tomatoes, this is the one for you. And the rice noodles held up well in spite of the sauce they were swimming in; whitish in appearance and firm in texture, they could have easily passed for standard wheat noodles (a great choice for kids with wheat allergies who are fussy eaters). Other pastas (organic spelt or whole wheat) come with a variety of meats, vegetables and sauces. The portions are generous and the flavours are fresh.

Overall, I'd say that owner Tony Sabherwal has got a winner here. By catering to every possible taste and dietary preference, Magic Oven can conjure up good hearty meals that will appeal to both saints and sinners. And the table service is outstanding.

Review by Julia Woodford

Three other locations in Toronto: 127 Jefferson Avenue, 798 Danforth Avenue, 788 Broadview Ave. Open 11am to 11pm Mon to Sat, 12 to 10 Sunday. And of course they deliver. Order online at: www.magicoven.com.

Café Next Door
feel-good food



magical
catering.com