

to believe, but the hottest new restaurant doesn't have a stove in its kitchen. Not one morsel of the food is cooked in the conventional sense. The menu is all organic and all vegan. The Present Moment Cafe in St. Augustine, Florida, is something that sets it apart from other raw-food restaurants around. It caters to raw-food enthusiasts of a diet that's gaining a lot of

PRESENT MOMENT CAFÉ

101 King Street, St. Augustine, Florida
(904) 827-4499

Open for lunch
through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Open for dinner
through Thursday from 5 to 9 p.m.
Friday and Saturday from 5 to 10 p.m.

Some of some high-profile converts such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and actor Woody Harrelson. The philosophy of eating traces its roots to a time when our ancestors cooked with fire. Raw-food enthusiasts say raw food, or living, unprocessed food, offers numerous health benefits, both for the body and for the mind. You groan and turn the bottom line: the food is raw. Somehow – without heating any-thing above 100 degrees – the food goes beyond the raw, with a creative approach that makes you feel like you're not missing a thing. Yvette Schindler, who owns the restaurant Present Moment Cafe, Nathan, 20, calls it a "kitchen with no stove" and a "living-foods temple." Yvette,



Hurrah for raw!

The Present Moment Cafe turns uncooked food into something to cheer about.

BY CATHERINE ENNS GRIGAS | PHOTOGRAPHER ED HALL



who is 56 but prefers to say she was born in 1951 because she feels so much younger, points to herself as the product of the healthy benefits of eating "kind cuisine."

"I started about two years ago," she says. "After a month of eating 80 percent raw, I felt so much more energy. The arthritis in my knee pretty much went away within three months of eating 95 percent raw. I run two businesses, and I feel wonderful."

Grains, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruits left in their natural state retain their enzymes, allowing them to be digested without the body having to do the work, raw-foodist practitioners say.

There are other benefits, they say, such as weight management, clearer skin and greater energy, not to mention a more peaceful mind, body and soul.

Yvette is such an advocate that she turned the warehouse of her adjacent business, the Sailor's Exchange, into the restaurant, letting the "food speak for itself."

Arame Salad

MAKES 2 SERVINGS

- 2 cups arame (dried seaweed)
- 2 cups water
- 2 tablespoons diced red and yellow peppers
- 2 tablespoons diced carrots
- 1 tablespoon chopped green onion
- 1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon Nama Shoyu (organic raw soy sauce, available at health food stores)

1. Soak arame in water for 15 to 20 minutes. Drain.
2. Add the remaining ingredients and mix together.
3. Refrigerate before serving.

It's a pretty tall order to entice customers into a restaurant where everything is raw, but Yvette and Nathan have done it. About 80 percent of the folks who dine there are meat eaters.

Think about eating nothing but raw food and the most strident diets seem easy. Being a vegetarian is a breeze. Even vegans, who eat no meat, fish or dairy, eat cooked food.

For the creative menu that somehow exceeds the bonds of all those restrictions, Yvette relied on the talent of Chad Sarno, a well-



onions that had been marinated in Nama Shoyu, an organic raw soy sauce. Crispy corn chips and a mixed green salad came on the side.

The Viva Burrito (\$10) was a tortilla filled with a satisfying chili made of pine-nut pate and topped with guacamole and a "sour cream" made from coconut milk and drizzled with a jalapeno vinaigrette. After tasting that, the Tex-Mex version will never be the same for me.

For dinner, there are more elegant choices, such as the Pesto Pasta (\$10), a pasta made from zucchini and sweet peppers and tossed with a pesto made from sage and tomatoes, and the Herbed Nut Loaf (\$12), a blend of sunflower seeds, walnuts, pine nuts, red peppers and herbs that is served over zucchini noodles.

There's a choice of four tempting desserts, more magic in a restaurant that doesn't cook and pretty much considers sugar and flour poison. The Blueberry Parfait (\$6) was a fluffy, vanilla-coconut crème layered with blueberry compote and a crunchy, sweet praline mix made of hemp that was enough of a dessert fix for the two of us.

FOOD & DINING Edining

Because raw foods have a high nutrient content and contain bacteria and other microorganisms that stimulate the immune system, adherents believe the diet leads not only to better health, but can diminish many diseases.

Warm Live Pecan Apple Cobbler (\$6) with a scoop of homemade "live" ice cream, a crunchy mix of pecans and apples with coconut-vanilla crème sauce that was fit for decadence and empty of guilt.

The Present Moment Cafe may have a mission, but in the meantime, it's clearly accomplished one thing – proving that food that is naturally good for you can be tasty, too. It's nothing like the present to give it a try. □



Yvette Schindler sits with her favorite book, *Peace is the Way*, by Deepak Chopra, in her restaurant's lounge area.

CHEF'S PROFILE

Yvette Schindler,
Owner,
The Present Moment Cafe

"Once you start feeling the energy and the life force that you get with this, you understand," Yvette says. "It's the difference between watering a plant with Sprite and then giving it crystal-clear mountain water."

Beginnings: Yvette Schindler has traveled the world, but it was the wind that brought her to St. Augustine, Florida, more than 20 years ago. Born in Baghdad, Iraq, of Assyrian parents who moved to Chicago when she was 2, Yvette says she has a connection to the raw-food diet because ancient Assyria was reputed to be home of the Garden of Eden. She came to St. Augustine on a sailboat from Annapolis, Maryland, and opened the Sailor's Exchange, a boating equipment store.

Raw-food diet: Although she was a vegetarian,

treadmill the next day.

The menu offers much more than salads. In fact, it's hard to figure out what's really in each dish because you have to throw out any preconceptions that come with cooked food. Let's just call it some amazing culinary wizardry that can make pate out of portobello mushrooms and walnuts and pasta from fresh zucchini.

Ordinarily, you'd figure the hummus was made from beans – and the taste could have fooled us – but it was described as "no bean, no mean" Middle East Peace Hummus (\$7). It was made of ground cashews, topped with mint oil and tahini sauce and was a lighter, more delicately-flavored hummus. Served with it for dipping were fresh carrots and red-pepper slices and chins made from sprouted flax and corn.

then a vegan, and then a macrobiotic eater, she says she didn't feel a "dramatic difference" until she began eating raw foods. She was introduced to the movement through a book, *Nature's First Law*, which her son, Nathan, encouraged her to read. "It was very radical to me," she says. "Each chapter ended with the idea that cooked food is poison. But after I read the whole thing, it did make sense." After trying the diet for several months, she and Nathan opened the restaurant and she began a support group for raw foodists.

The most difficult thing about eating a raw diet? "You realize when you're traveling that you miss the convenience of cooked food. It's difficult initially because everywhere you go there is cooked food, billboards for cooked food. You do crave fast foods for a while."

What percentage of raw food do you eat now?

"I say 98 percent is basically what I try to do, but if my old auntie is going to cook me a chocolate chip cookie with butter, I'm not going to say no."

What's the most difficult thing about getting people interested in raw food?

"Well, cooked food smells good, but that's because everything is being cooked out of it. For us, it just can't be a raw carrot. It all has to be done more tastefully, and, eventually, it takes you to where you want to eat more of it. You don't have to give up anything."

Favorite ingredients? "I love ginger, dates, coconut water, coconut meat, cilantro, and I like using agave, a cactus sweetener that comes from the agave plant, which has a low glycemic index so diabetics can use it."

Best thing about the restaurant? "A lot of people don't know what to expect, but we're a full-blown restaurant where you can invite friends, have a birthday party, enjoy a glass of wine and go away feeling better than if you had had a cooked meal."

The cafe offers juices and shakes from an organic juice bar, along with organic beer and organic wines that have only natural sulphides and infused teas. I ordered the Rooted in Courage (\$4.50), carrot and beet juice with a hint of ginger. The beet taste ruled the drink, something I didn't mind because I have a fondness for beets. Meredith had the Magic Drink (\$5), fresh orange juice that had been energized with the herbal supplement Merlin's Magic and a touch of raw honey.

If I had been blindfolded, I would have sworn the Sunlight Burger (\$12) was cooked. It was a hearty patty of ground walnuts, almonds, carrots and zucchini garnished with a tomato, a slice of the pine-nut "cheese" and what tasted exactly like caramelized onions, but were really