

Tender Greens

Like a summer meal in your backyard, only better

BY JESSICA RIDENOUR

Where do restaurant industry veterans go to find a satisfying meal on their days off? They go home. That's the premise behind Tender Greens, downtown Culver City's latest addition to a flourishing epicurean scene.

Owner David Dressler, and chef-owners Matt Lyman and Erik Oberholtzer wanted to reinvent what they considered the perfect dining experience: a relaxed evening at home with friends, free-flowing wine and healthful homemade meals culled from the freshest possible ingredients.

The three friends and business partners, who met while working at Shutters on the Beach in Santa Monica, shaped Tender Greens from these laid-back get-togethers. "It's that casual atmosphere where the front door is open and folks come over," avers Dressler, the self-proclaimed business wonk of the trio. "The doors are all open to the backyard and there are steaks on the grill and there's a bottle of Rosé or Sancerre to pour."

Tender Greens nails the comfy ambiance of a casual at-home gathering. Natural wood floors, colossal open windows and reclaimed timber countertops lend an outdoorsy contrast to the stainless steel kitchen area where patrons order directly from the chefs, ensuring every entrée is made to order. Potted herbs and flowers—both decorative and utilitarian (yes, that basil's in your soup)—edge the outdoor patio, a space so calming that it's easy to ignore the whirr of busy Culver Boulevard just beyond the patio's protective parameters (or perhaps it's that second glass of Sancerre talking). Inside and out, cushioned benches beckon to be lounged upon.

But this ain't no backyard weenie roast. For chefs Lyman and Oberholtzer, the connection between the food and its origin is paramount. Fresh, crisp greens arrive every morning, courtesy of Scarborough Farms in Oxnard (who also supply greens to Spago and Lucques, among others). Naturally-raised meats and produce are gathered from area farmers' markets while local bakeries provide the breads and desserts. "There's no anonymity between what we're putting on the plate and the person who's eating it," avows Dressler.

As the name suggests, Tender Greens is salad-centric, but that doesn't mean carnivores can't find something to sink their teeth into. Salads range from the simple—such as baby spinach, goat cheese and hazelnuts tossed in a Cabernet vinaigrette



(\$5)—to the heartier, line-caught ahi tuna niçoise with tomato, potato, capers, olives and Dijon vinaigrette (\$9, pictured at right). "Hot Stuff" from the mesquite grill, including rosemary-accented flat-iron steak or succulent free range chicken, can be added to a simple salad (\$9), made into a rustic bread sandwich (\$9) or served as a hot plate with salad and Yukon gold mashed potatoes (\$10). The comforting roasted Roma tomato and bread soup (\$4) makes for a nourishing accompaniment, while fresh strawberry cookies (\$4) cap the meal off right. Watch for seasonal specials—such as heirloom tomato gazpacho—to make cameo appearances. Like everything else on the menu, the wine and beer menu is well-bred yet affordable; no bottle is over \$30 and crafted ales are \$4 a glass.

Dining at Tender Greens is like having dinner at a friend's house; that is, if your amigo has a stylishly decorated home and just happens to be a talented chef with a flair for conscious cuisine. If you find yourself strolling friendly Culver Boulevard, drop in and make yourself at home.

Tender Greens, 9523 Culver Blvd., Culver City. 310.842.8300. tendergreensfood.com.

