



DRESSED: THE NEW ON SKINNY EATING

by Bren Herrera



I'm not skinny. Not trying to be, either. I'm Latin, and I like to eat. Ergo curvy. I look at pictures of Angelina Jolie and wonder how she musters enough physical (and mental) energy to take care of and run after all her children! Only in Hollywood, I guess.

However, with TV appearances coming up and writing gigs taking me to the islands to be scantily clad during the sexiest months of the year, I must reconsider those natural curves. I don't want to get rid of them, just taper them, you know. I open my fridge and do an assessment of what needs to go: half and half, rice, chocolate ice cream, nine-grain bread with butter... and the list goes on and on.

Because cooking for myself becomes a chore of sorts, I look into my eating out options. Sushi is great and really good for the skin, but it's a lot of rice, and I can easily devour three full rolls. Scratch. Italian is great and full of soul, but all those carbs will just force me to spend twice as long in the gym. Not so much. My last resort is going "green" for a whole month. This sounds boring and not appetizing in the least, but I am determined. The last place I would have looked to is a full-out

salad bar. Standing in line and making a salad simply did not interest me.

Until I found Dressed!

Do you remember going to Pizza Hut and making your way around the salad bar? It had all those canned and previously frozen toppings and only one variety of semi-fresh lettuce. Well those days are long gone, and thank the food gods for it — in this case, Chef Justin Smolev. Smolev, a former executive chef at some of our nation's most esteemed restaurants including Daniel in New York and French Laundry in California, retired from cooking and decided to move to the management side instead. He conceptualized a "fast, casual restaurant that brings something healthy to the market." With Doc Green's already in existence and seemingly very popular in Atlanta, he wanted to take salads to new heights.

About the salad, Chef Smolev says, "I didn't invent the salad. I just saw the need to fill the niche of quality, healthy eating."

What makes Dressed different is the process and toppings. With typical and some atypical greenery offerings such as arugula, you're sure to end up with a couture

salad. That's if you test your creative juices and go fancy. I personally like chickpeas, grilled chicken, avocado, kalamata olives, sun-dried tomatoes, mozzarella and cranberries, and the list goes on and on. You get the picture. Though there are no sous-chefs to make up the "chop-pin" team, the salad maker will take your "pickin's" and chop up your ingredients to pure precision. With a salad big enough to feed three, you end by choosing one of 24 dressings, all made by the chef himself.

Seeing as the concept of this salad boutique is modern chic, Smolev and I touched on the strong movement toward going green and eating sustainable foods. Unfortunately, with the mass volume of ingredients, it's hard to get the food from local growers. "I'm partnering up with some local farmers, and I'm especially interested in figs. Peaches are also something I would like to get from Georgia," he says. In talking about the contradictions of eco-friendly practices, he notes that it's more costly to produce and buy "green" plastics.

Ultimately, Smolev "want(s) to create a viable brand. I'm branching out and opening up overseas." With an outpost in Hong Kong opening in 2009, Los Angeles and New York locations are in the works not far behind. I'm personally pitching Vinings and D.C.

Anyone wanting to eat right and still fill up should make this a routine stop for lunch. The space is meticulously branded in green, of course, and boasts \$550 plexiglass chairs! Cute guys in cherry red and lemon yellow scooters will bring you your salad if you don't feel like walking there. Considering gas is more than \$4 per gallon, I'm sure you can appreciate it.

I felt special eating at Dressed. A custom-tailored salad just for me, unlike any other, is what makes the restaurant so worthwhile, and Smolev gets it. The thought of mashed potatoes as a side is oh so passé. He sure has reinvented the salad, and I'm in love.

As I write my last sentence, I'm taking my last bite of a mint chocolate chip ice cream cone. I should have gotten Dressed, instead.

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