

DINING

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Another World

No menu, no prices, but One World Café dishes heaping servings of humanity.

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When I tell people about Denise Cerreta's restaurant there's a common reaction. It's the same one I had when I first heard of One World Café, one that goes something like: "Does she make any money? Don't people take advantage?" We'll get to why folks ask those questions in a second. But first, I'll say something about One World Café that I've never said about any other restaurant: It's the most unique eatery I've ever set foot in.

I didn't say it was the *best* restaurant I've ever eaten in. Nor the *biggest*, the most expensive, or the one with the finest service or ambiance—but the most *unique* restaurant I've encountered. Right here in Salt Lake City, One World Café is so innovative, in fact, that the restaurant and its owner have been featured in numerous publications and the broadcast media, including National Public Radio.

Here's why: There are no prices on the menu at One World Café. In fact, there's not even a menu. No prices? No menu? Whaaaaa?

The menu at One World Café changes daily, although there are a few staples customers can usually count on. So why waste paper printing up a menu? As for pricing, well, that's what is so unique about this restaurant. *There are no prices* for dishes at One World Café. This is an "honor system" approach to commercial dining. And remarkably, it works.

As much a social experiment as a business, the basic idea behind One World Café is *responsibility*. Customers "donate" whatever they think is fair for whatever food and drink they consume at this one-of-a-kind eatery. There's a small buffet, which is essentially the same thing as the kitchen at One World Café, where servers/cooks stand by to dish up whatever they've cooked for lunch or dinner. There are always salads available, homemade bread, soup (usually one hot and one cold), quiche and an assortment of mostly vegetarian organic entrees. Simply pick up a bowl from the collection of homey and mismatched thrift store dinnerware and serve yourself some soup (the cream of broccoli is excellent) if you're so inclined.

From there, you just tell your server/cook what foods you'd like from a counter crowded with serving dishes, and he'll provide you with a portion of this or that or of this *and* that. At the end of the meal—and this is the part that people, including myself, initially find it hard to get their heads around—you decide what your meal is worth, and deposit a donation in a small box at the end of the serving line. No cash register. No receipts. No canned raps from servers asking "Have you saved room for our triple-decadent chocolate molten lava cake?" At One World Café there seems to be an underlying notion that the world is a civilized and even honest place. What a concept!

I've heard some people complain about the portion sizes at One World Café, noting they're on the small side and that it's embarrassing to ask for larger portions or a second serving. Well, I think the portion sizes are ideal. I like being able to fit three or four items onto my plate and not have to fight my way past 2 pounds of meatloaf to get to dessert. Then again, there are days

at One World Café when all I want is a plate of their deliciously fresh hand-tossed mixed green salad with red lettuce, arugula and balsamic vinaigrette. That's one of the aspects of One World Café I find so endearing: It's not a one-size-fits-all approach to eating, and certainly not business as usual.

Not coincidentally, business as usual was what One World Café owner Denise Cerreta was attempting to banish when she opened her restaurant, which had previously served as her acupuncture office. Indeed, One World Café looks more like a holistic health center than a restaurant, in the sense that it's broken up into dimly lit dining areas that have more in common with meditation spaces than typical dining rooms. And business—however *unusual*—has been good.

People don't "dine and dash" at One World Café, although there's nothing but your conscience to stop you from doing that. And there's something about *trusting* customers that makes One World Café a cynicism-free zone. Not only do diners often donate *more* than what their



Donations accepted: Sweet chick pea, snow pea, kale and garden salad at One World Café.

ONE WORLD CAFÉ
41 S. 300 East
Open daily from
11 a.m.-9 p.m.

meal was probably worth, but the restaurant itself has come to be somewhat subsidized by generous locals who believe in the concept behind it. For example, there's a customer who donated a lot of a few blocks away for a vegetable garden. There's a retired gardener who cares for the small herb garden out back in exchange for meals, and another retired fellow from the neighborhood who picks up the monthly water bill for Cerreta. In that sense, One World Café is a community project as much as a business.

How's the food? Well, it's just fine. I'm crazy about the sweet onion quiche, and last week I had a delectable chickpea salad (no canned chickpeas here, by the way) with a wonderfully subtle, almost floral spice. I wish I'd have remembered to ask someone in the kitchen what that spice was before I left, because I couldn't quite place it. And I've become so addicted to One World Café's tabbouleh that I can't eat it anywhere else.

As you might expect, One World Café draws an eclectic mix of customers, from neighborhood locals and a pair of EMTs who stop in for lunch, to the Taiwanese media professor I met last week out on the front patio. Joyce Hsiu-yen Yeh is working on a film project about organic food, and shyly approached me with a simple question: "Why do you like this restaurant?" I'm not exactly sure what I said to her. But having had some time to think about the question, I realize now that what I really like about One World Café is that it is a place of *humanity*—trust, responsibility, generosity and community are valued even more than the bottom line. In that sense, One World is really another world. **BT**