



PHOTO: MARK WEEKS

# CAFÉ FLORA

TEXT BY KEVIN CARSON

Nestled in the heart of Madison Valley is a delightful place known as Café Flora.

This revolutionary restaurant honors its Roman goddess namesake with divine vegetarian offerings that must be experienced to be believed, as well as marvelously modeling how a successful business can care for the environment.

The community of Madison Valley was thrilled when Café Flora opened in October of 1991. What was once an abandoned Laundromat in the center of the neighborhood, 29<sup>th</sup> and East Madison, became a beautiful gourmet restaurant thanks to the vision and efforts of long-time neighborhood residents, Gracie Close, David Foecke and Scott Glascock. After a year of preparation, they

realized their vision of a friendly, community based, environmentally responsible restaurant that introduced superb non-meat dishes from culinary traditions around the globe.

Their award winning dishes raised the bar for vegetarian cuisine, and although their menus continue to evolve with an emphasis on creativity, seasonality and a variety of cooking traditions, the meals are consistently excellent. This is due in part to Café Flora's chef Janine Doran being with them since 1992. And old favorites remain on the menu like the Portobello Wellington, a grilled portobello mushroom served with mushroom-pecan paté in puff pastry

with Madeira wine sauce. This is a creation of original Café Flora chef Cathy Geier who is currently working on a Café Flora cookbook scheduled for release this fall. It should be full of delicious dishes from a menu that former *Seattle Times* food critic John Hinterberger called "a meld of nutritional righteousness and culinary artistry."

"Though Flora's cuisine is high-brow," wrote *Seattle Weekly*, "there's nothing hoity-toity about the café's atmosphere which is warm and inviting." What few diners realize is that the comfortable atmosphere is also designed to be environmentally sensitive and energy efficient. Architect Clayton O'Brien Smith of GGLO Architects worked with the environmental consulting firm Ecotope to ensure that Café Flora's building was as healthy for the environment as its cuisine is healthy for the customers. This restaurant that accommodates all allergies and dietary needs and won an award from NARN (National Animal Rights Network) for its vegan

meals, considers the environment in everything from earth friendly cleaning products to the energy efficient hydronic heating beneath its sun room floor.

This nurturing aspect also extends to the community. Not only was Café Flora a catalyst in the blossoming of the Madison Valley neighborhood, the owners have also used their talents to support local organizations such as Bailey, Boushay House, at the the west end of the neighborhood. Bailey, Boushay, which provides residential care and day care for people living with AIDS, was started about the same time as the restaurant. Café Flora has hosted the organization's

annual fundraising dinner for the past nine years and will be hosting it again on June 6. This event is one small part of a whole business ethic that was honored in 1997 with the Pacific Northwest Good Works Award, a favorite among the many awards Café Flora has received over the years. A rare award, it "recognizes extraordinary business efforts and partnerships that reflect unusual creativity and commitment to public service."

Of course, this is a result not only of the vision of the owners but the daily efforts of the exemplary staff. The Café Flora staff of 55 employees is the crowning touch in its "whole environment" approach to business.

Their healthy attitude and energy are reflected in the cheerful atmosphere and the delicious food.

This summer, when days are at their longest, Café Flora will be expanding its hours. On June 20, the cafe opens its doors on Mondays so you can experience the blessings of Flora seven days a week. •

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*James Sutherland, Café Flora's operations manager, is also an accomplished artist and contributes to Flying House Productions' auctions. His painting, Heartfire, was used as the artwork for the Seattle Women's Chorus 2004 Spring Concert.*

## CAFÉ FLORA OPERATIONS MANAGER AND ARTIST:

# JAMES SUTHERLAND

TEXT BY KEVIN CARSON

THE SUCCESS OF CAFÉ FLORA IN CREATING A HEALTHY ATMOSPHERE IS EVIDENT IN ITS LONG-TERM RETENTION OF EMPLOYEES, SUCH AS OPERATIONS MANAGER JAMES SUTHERLAND, AN 11-YEAR EMPLOYEE. IT IS THROUGH JAMES THAT THE RESTAURANT BECAME CONNECTED TO THE CHORUS; HIS STORY IS AS INTRIGUING AS CAFÉ FLORA'S OWN.

One week after arriving in Seattle, James started working at Café Flora, which became a catalyst for two pivotal events in his life. On one of his walks to work along tree-lined avenues, he tripped on a root-raised portion of sidewalk and fell "flying with hands out like Superman."

As James stared at the damage to his hands, he thought of how they looked like those of his beloved and recently departed grandfather who had always worked with his hands and encouraged James to do the same. Inspired by the memory, James decided to put his hands to the use he had always aspired to. He began creating art, paintings that included the use of plaster techniques he learned from his grandfather. For motivation, James scheduled a show of his work at the restaurant, which was fast becoming a favorite gallery space because of its natural lighting.

His first exhibit was a huge success, selling out quickly. Everyone loved his tree "portraits," inspired by various trees on his walks to work. He wanted to capture them before they disappeared as many seemed to be doing as the neighborhoods grew and gentrified. One of these tree paintings found itself in a Seattle Men's Chorus concert program. How it got there coincided with the second important event that started at the restaurant: meeting his future partner, Don Zimmer.

Although James instantly felt an attraction when Don came in to dine, the romance blossomed over a period of time. It wasn't long, however, before Don took James to a Seattle Men's Chorus concert. James was impressed by the atmosphere the Chorus created and was "overwhelmed by the audience." "These were the people I wanted at the restaurant," remembers James.

He soon convinced Café Flora to begin advertising in Chorus programs and in its magazine.

Going to concerts became part of James' and Don's life, as did the tradition of celebrating their December anniversary by staying at a hotel downtown while enjoying holiday treats such as riding the carousel. On their sixth anniversary, James noticed that it coincided with the date of their concert tickets. As a surprise, James arranged for a special ad to be placed in the concert program, knowing Don always read the programs from cover to cover.

Sure enough, as they waited for the holiday concert to begin, Don perused the program. James impatiently waited until Don finally got to the page of his ad. At first Don mentioned that someone seemed to be copying James' artwork and then he looked closer. Carved into the painting's tree were their initials and anniversary date. The ad read, "Dear Don, my sweet man, Thank you for six magical years. Happy Anniversary! I love you with all my heart, James." •