

life+style dining

Garden of earthly delights

Greenz's refreshing, low carb rabbit food provides perfect summer treat

By Arnold Wayne Jones Staff Writer

If the three most important variables in real estate are location, location and location, then the triumvirate in the restaurant business is fresh ingredients, fresh ingredients and fresh ingredients. But while a steakhouse might get away with store-bought baking potatoes or a taqueria might slip some frozen ground beef by a few customers, a salad shop has no room for error. Vegetables, especially lettuces, age about as well as raw fish in the hot sun. You don't always need to eat a bad salad to know it's bad — sometimes you can just tell.

You have to hand it to Greenz, then, for taking the risk of filling its menu with virtually nothing but fresh salads. And you'll be delighted to find that the risk paid off so beautifully. The quality of the food is all the more remarkable when you learn that the owners, Casie Caldwell and Jennifer Huval, started the place with no restaurant experience between them.

That might not be such a big deal if Greenz were simply a make-your-own salad bar. But Caldwell and Huval have devised some gourmet dishes for simple yet tasty fare.

For those on the run, most salads can be converted into wraps if you just ask, but if you have the time, get the originals. These big, generous collections of greens are surprisingly lovely and prepared in diverse styles.

The bar none (\$8.95) is served in a bowl that looks like a taco salad shell but is actually a giant, edible pretzel dish. A mixture of lettuce, tomatoes and nuts topped with flank steak, it's hearty without weighing you down — filling, not fattening.

If you're looking for something without red meat, about half of the dozen items that make up the menu are vegetarian (although even these can be accented with chicken or steak for a few bucks extra). We liked the tofu salad (\$7.95), made of sprouts, peppers, carrots and other goodies, accompanied by crisp tofu medallions. Because tofu takes on the flavor of what it's served with, try cutting it up and eating it along with the greens.

Other than the freshness, Greenz's chief selling point is its variety of elegant dressings. None we tried were very heavy (though Roquefort and



Co-owner Casie Caldwell is proud of the menu at Greenz, including a spicy panko shrimp salad that is as lovely as it is delicious.

Caesar are available on some salads). Instead, light vinaigrettes predominated. The tangy wheat beer admixture on the bar none was very good, although the best dressing was the strawberry balsamic on the grilled chicken Riviera (\$8.95). The salad itself (which comes with slices of fresh fruit) was just okay, so the symphonic vinaigrette livened it up considerably.

The chipotle chicken (\$7.95) is an excellent overall choice, combining a cream dressing that makes for an uptown version of the traditional chicken salad — spicy with soothing shreds of jack cheese, pecans and crunchy tortilla strips.

The menu at Greenz includes several soups (all \$2.50 cup/\$3.75 bowl). I loved the pesto, a

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miso-like broth with a float of basil and olive oil. I'm no fan of mushrooms, but even I have to admit they worked here. The ancho tortilla soup was thick as cookie dough, richly accompanied by avocado and sour cream. Think of the soups as the warm part of an ideal light summer meal.

REPORT CARD

Greenz, 2808 McKinney Ave. Open 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Mon.-Sat. Take out and limited-area delivery available. 214-720-7788.

Food: B+

These high-end salads are a far cry from the routine salad bar, with inventive combinations and wonderfully fresh ingredients.

Atmosphere: B

The style, including a witty eggplant-and-celery color scheme, is pleasant and light, but also small and diner-y.

Service: B

Even though it's counter service, the staff checked up on us several times and even refilled our drinks.

Price: Inexpensive

Although a little pricier than your "average" restaurant salad, Greenz is well above average in quality while keeping everything on the menu at less than \$10.