

# Seed

A gourmet macrobiotic kitchen sprouts in Venice

BY LUCINDA MICHELE KNAPP

**T**he building at 1604 Pacific Avenue, with decorative molded details across its wide façade, offers a kind of neglected charm, with the distinct sensation of a once lovingly-maintained community now gone to seed.

“It took us two hours to sweep around this whole block,” says Sanae Suzuki, gesturing out the window of Seed Kitchen, where its summery storefront has newly claimed the central unit at 1604 Pacific. With just a handful of local volunteers, Sanae, co-owner of Seed with her restaurateur husband Eric Lechasseur (formerly of M Café de Chaya), has begun a weekly program to help beautify the area, reclaiming the charming neighborhood from its state of subtle disrepair.

Debuting as an instant hit in the seaside boho community, Eric and Sanae’s Seed Kitchen has been welcomed by everyone from the Material Girl herself (who’s sent representatives over to pick up her fave dessert, a



coconut mousse) to the building owner — thrilled at the prospect of hosting an eco-friendly, community-minded business — to the locals, who’ve embraced it as a weekly (for some, daily) pit stop for delicious and sweetly simple cuisine.

After blazing a long trail from cooking school in France and Japan to a litany of world travels and subsequent stints as personal chef to Madonna, Sting and Tobey Maguire, Eric’s cooking has journeyed as well, from classical French to vegan and macrobiotic. It’s a deeply personal transformation. When, in the midst of his career, Sanae was diagnosed with cancer, Eric began preparing macrobiotic fare for her. When Sanae’s cancer vanished and his own allergies disappeared, Eric knew he was on to something. Now they eat macrobiotic fare almost exclusively, and Seed Kitchen is part and parcel of that lifestyle transformation.

“It’s all about balance,” explains Sanae, who now pro-

**Top photo:** Blackened tempeh burger with sauerkraut  
**Right:** Seed’s weekly neighborhood cleanups transformed the once neglected street



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vides macrobiotic counseling for those seeking to adjust their diets. Macrobiotics emphasizes foods that create harmony, both with nature and with the human body.

“And of course there are fun party foods, like this,” she gestures around Seed’s long communal table at crispy sweet potato fries, southwestern burger with a melt-in-your-mouth patty crafted from beans and grains, and a *donburi* bowl filled with festive colors. “Then there are healing foods, when you work with food as medicine.” Sanae is completing a third cookbook (she and Eric already have two others) focused on macrobiotics as medical food. After her journey back from cancer, she knows of what she speaks.

It’s not hard to believe Seed’s food is healing. There’s a subtle sense of balance — of flavor, of texture, of something indefinable — in each dish. And the restaurant itself has been healing for the neighborhood. Every weekend Sanae’s community sweep draws more helpers, and each week the sweep takes less time. Helpers get 10 percent off their meals at Seed after the morning of community service. Locals come together over the food and neighbors meet for the first time.

Eric is by no means the first LA restaurateur to offer up Asian-inflected vegan food, but his is the first establishment to do so with such style. Despite the stipulation that all food must be served in take-out boxes and bowls (per the previous restaurant’s permits for the location), Eric’s classical French presentation shows in the lavish plating of each delicious dish. “I don’t believe in using garnishes that only look good but cannot be eaten,” he says.

In fact, the to-go containers — all recyclable, and about 90 percent sustainable — lend ad-



**Above:** Vegan chocolate, vanilla and green tea cupcakes  
**Left:** The Venice cafe is a hit with locals and celebrities alike

ditional charm to the easy, breezy offerings of an Asian kale salad with jicama and miso-sesame dressing, a fresh Caprese panini with soy mozzarella, or a Japanese vegetable curry. The generous portions also encourage take-home dining. Comfort foods re-worked with a macrobiotic eye to balance include a southwestern “burger” with tasty, rich vegan soy cheese, guacamole and ancho chile spread, and Eric’s own secret recipe for seitan pepper steak. The sumptuous smoky flavor is a perfect match for the seitan, which manages to avoid seitan’s common pitfalls of being tough and rubbery. Eric’s special recipe results in super-tender, flavorful seitan that’s almost indistinguishable from the animal protein it intends to supplant.

Then, of course, there are Eric’s desserts, which steal the show (as they did before at M Café de Chaya): vanilla, chocolate and green tea cupcakes are better than their non-vegan counterparts, yielding a light, fluffy crumb and

a not-too-sweet icing with the consistency of a light mousse. There’s handmade vegan chocolate truffles, each a decadent jewel of rich cacao, a chocolate terrine, and Madonna’s perennial coconut mousse.

As friends and neighbors crowd into Seed, the evening deepens and the kitchen shifts into high gear; the mood in the dining room is jovial and encourages conversation amongst strangers. Sanae gestures to an expanse of blank wall that will soon be filled with images of seed pods and fruits. “We want pictures of seeds,” she explains. “Even this restaurant is a seed we planted.” Looking around at the enthusiastic diners, Seed Kitchen seems well on its way to blossoming. 🌱

» **Seed Kitchen**  
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