

Harlem's Raw Soul Restaurant Review

Contributed by Anne-Sophie Martin-Mondiere
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Founded by Lillian Butler and Eddie Robinson about 6 years ago, Raw Soul offers dine-in, take out, deliveries, catering, raw products (available in health stores around Manhattan) and sometimes even cooking classes. It's on 145th Street, very close to the ACBD stop. The space is fairly small and casual, with table service provided by the person who's also at the counter.

First was the Sorrel Punch, a Jamaican Christmas specialty made out of hibiscus flowers, which are named "sorrel" in Jamaica (very different from the green leaves I expected). It's vibrant pink, chilled, fizzy, slightly bitter, and deliciously spicy (I could really taste the ginger); the perfect pick-me-up for a dark, hot, and humid afternoon.

Then a friend and I split a sweet tooth dinner: he had the Chocolate Heaven, a wonderful smoothie which, when ordered with no agave was just sweet enough, and with added spirulina turned into edible velvet. The spicy sweet potato soup was a bit too salty, but had a nice hint of garam masala, a spice I hadn't had in ages and realized I'd been missing. The chocolate-fig brownie's great if you're a fig fan, but might be too sweet for dark chocolate fiends (if you don't like the taste of chocolate syrup, you probably won't get into it.).

My favorite was the Strawberry Cheesecake: a rawsomely smooth and firm velvety texture, ever so slight coconut flavor and traditional cheesecake sweetness, sandwiched between a crunchy nutty crust and a fresh strawberry coulis. It was pure all American dessert bliss at an all American portion size worth sharing with someone else.

Another day, stuck with hours of computer work and no time to cook, I went down for their dinner special (1 small soup + 1 iced tea + 1/2 burger, 1/2 wrap or a small pizza = \$12). The cream of corn soup was fantastic. It had a smooth texture with crunchy bits of sweetcorn at the bottom, and a lovely creamy savory fragrant taste.

The personal pizza was phenomenal: an ultra thin buckwheat crust covered with creamy walnut cheese, sweet tomato puree and colorful olive, tomato, onion, mushroom and basil bits. Only issue was that it was too small! And the iced tea hit the spot: fruity, sweet and fragrant.

On my last day in the neighborhood, after ogling the daily specials for some time (they included a peach cheese cake, mint patty cheese cake, pecan pie, and a layer cake) I ordered the curry pate collard green wrap. It's served as two rolls of crunch spicy collard green leaves filled with a sweet, buttery curry paste, crispy watery sprouts in the center, and tons of deliciousness. Portions are fairly small, but unlike the pizza, a little bit goes a long way so I'd recommend getting a 1/2 wrap with soup, or sharing an order. Overall a good experience: if you like soul food and American staples, it's worth a visit!((

Raw Soul
(348 W. 145th Street)(New York, NY 10031
<http://www.rawsoul.com>

Hours: Tuesday - Friday, 4:00 - 9:00 p.m.; Saturday, 11:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.; Sunday and Monday, Closed