

**BRIGHT
GREEN
IDEAS**

ECO-FRIENDLY WAYS BRING IN GREEN

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Akasha's menu will focus on organic and seasonal ingredients, locally produced whenever possible. The restaurant will serve house-bottled, filtered tap water that Richmond plans to price at \$4 to \$5 per bottle.

"We'll do everything we can, but we'll recognize that we're not going to be 100-percent [green]," she says, noting that the limita-

tions of a budget lurk behind every decision. "The 'green' dining room chairs that we loved are \$700 each. But we can only spend \$150 on a chair."

Still, Richmond acknowledges that many of her green choices are adding significantly to the cost of opening, which will ultimately impact menu pricing for the restaurant, whose average tabs are expected to be about \$20 per person at lunch and \$40 to \$50 per person at dinner.

Sustainability is an important value to Richmond, a caterer and founding chef of the quick-service organic-foods outlet Eaturna in Los Angeles, who has long promoted the use of organic and natural products. In addition, Akasha is being backed by founders of the Whole Foods grocery chain, who were early adopters in the organic- and

Beverly Hills frozen-yogurt shop Sno:LA features a countertop made from recycled computer chips, and its yogurt is served in clear, biodegradable cups made from corn.

natural-food world.

"Things can translate to the bottom line in different ways," Richmond says. "Will more customers come to our restaurant because it's a green restaurant? Yes, we think they will."

Others say their efforts to go green may never even be noticed by customers.

"It's a new way of living, not a marketing thing," says Debra Sarokin, a consultant working with the frozen-yogurt shop



Sno:LA, which opened in Beverly Hills, Calif., earlier this month.

In addition to using organic produce from sustainable local farms for its yogurt, the shop's eco-friendly design includes the use of solar energy to operate the yogurt machines, and a counter-



Green concepts' employees dress the part

Restaurant owners have begun substituting eco-friendly materials for cotton or synthetic blends in uniforms, saying the alternative fabrics are better for the environment.

Among the materials such operators use are bamboo, hemp and organic cotton, all of which cost more than such traditional uniform materials as nonorganic cotton or synthetic blends.

Still, the majority of operators are staying with traditional fabrics.

But the problem with traditional cotton, according to environmental groups, is that it is one of the most pesticide-intensive agricultural crops in the world.

"[Cotton] accounts for a quarter of all agricultural pesticides used, which cause major water pollution, chronic illness in farmworkers and devastating impacts on wildlife," says the Organic Consumers Association, based in Finland, Minn.

Polyester, made from petrochemicals, is not biodegradable, notes the website of Green Choices, The UK Guide to Greener Living, based in Sussex, England.

"Making polyester uses large amounts of water for cooling, along with lubricants, which can become a source of contamination," the website says.

Bamboo, a natural fabric made from the pulp of bamboo grass, is considered a sustainable textile because it grows fast and does not require the use of pesticides to thrive, says Lynette Cayson, who designed new, 100-percent-bamboo uniforms for Jardiniere restaurant in San Francisco for about 100 servers. The new attire replaces older uniforms made from a cotton-polyester blend.

Jardiniere, which prides itself on green practices, chose bamboo because "it's sustainable and good for the planet," says Greg Rowen, the fine-dining restaurant's general manager. He also finds bamboo to have better "breathability" and ease of maintenance than the old uniform.

Eight-unit Big Bowl, owned by Chicago-based Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises, recently switched to custom-made bamboo uniforms.

Enterprises, also just switched to bamboo uniforms. The decision was one of several that fit Big Bowl's overall dedication to sustainability, including its methods for food sourcing, its choice of cleaning chemicals and its use of tap water instead of bottled water.

Dan McGowan, Big Bowl's president, says he first saw bamboo fabric in golf shirts while on a trip. He sought out a designer to custom-make the uniforms, since he could not find any that were ready-made. The new uniforms replace cotton shirts and cost about four times more.

"They are more anti-bacterial than cotton," McGowan says.

There is no difference in laundering requirements.

McGowan's colleague, Steve LaHaie, a partner in LEVE's Shaw's Crab House, said bamboo is cost-prohibitive for his two restaurants, but he is researching organic-cotton uniforms.

Hemp is another abundant natural fiber that can be made into clothing, as it is in the two Snappy Salads restaurants in Dallas. Owner Chris Dahlander chose to replace cotton aprons and T-shirts with hemp fabric because he wanted everything in his business to be as eco-friendly as possible.

"Hemp uses less water, fertilizer and pesticides than cotton, not to mention that it is a very durable fabric," Dahlander says.

The shirts and aprons cost about 10 percent more than traditional fabrics, but Dahlander figures they are less costly in the long run because they hold up longer than cotton. "Hemp got a bad rap," he says, because the kind used for clothing is a cousin to the varieties that yield marijuana and hashish. Because it is illegal to grow hemp in the United States, the fabric or clothing made from it must be imported.

Restaurant Nora in Washington, D.C., now a certified-organic restaurant, has used organic-cotton uniforms for about 12 years, says general manager Jack Zeneziano. He likes the quality and durability and says the restaurant has easily absorbed the higher costs.

Some restaurants are seeking alternatives to cloth tablecloths, which require high water and energy usage to launder them. One such operator is Saloon Partners Ltd. in Chicago, which recently switched from linen tablecloths at The Saloon steakhouse to a vinyl that resembles leather. Pete Saloon's executive chef, says the decision was part of the company's overall efforts toward sustainability.

Using vinyl table coverings instead of linen or cotton also saves money on laundering, he says.

—Carolyn Walkup

top made from recycled computer chips. The walls are painted with nontoxic, soy-based paint, and the yogurt is served in clear cups made from corn that look like plastic but are biodegradable.

The cups, for example, cost two to three times more than a comparable plastic version, she says.

"For the most part, it is more expensive [to go green]," she concedes, noting that the group of unnamed celebrity investors behind the concept is planning a second location to open in Malibu, Calif., later this year. "But it's an investment in what we believe in, and it supports our philosophy and the culture of our business."

For some, the application of eco-practices may be purely altruistic.

Others, however, see the green movement as a significant point of differentiation for a brand, says Leondakis of Kimpton.

"More and more consumers are choosing to spend their money with businesses that share their values," she says, "and we believe that will become even more important down the road." ■

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