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— Lotus owner Amy Young



Organic and Honest

Lotus Cafe

| WORDS JENN REIN | IMAGES LINDSAY LINTON

Ten years ago, when Amy Young landed in Jackson, she was just looking for powder, not a new home. But, she explained, “Jackson chose me.” A match was soon made and, not long after, her innovative restaurant was born.

Lotus Café opened its doors in September of 2007. Young initially planned to be the purveyor of a fully vegan menu. However, that idea met with a chilly reception. “We didn’t have real dairy for the coffee orders. I mean, people literally walked out,” she said. However, she soon adapted to meet local tastes and, eight years on, the menu has blossomed. The two rules of the house are: organic and something for everyone. The menu offers meat, vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options.

The flavors are diverse and fresh, and Young isn’t afraid to mix cuisines under the same roof. Bison biscuits and gravy share the menu with the classic Vietnamese bahn mi sandwich, and a version of Korean bulgogi that reflects her maternal heritage. Her vegan, baked goods have developed a following, with gluten-free options available. There is a raw selection. And on the Lotus Café menu, fresh vegetables reign supreme.

This is all a reflection of her upbringing in Boise, Idaho. Farm to table shaped Young’s palate from a very young age. “We always had around five head of cattle, some rabbits, beehives and a garden going.” Her mother insisted on the family eating together, with few exceptions. “I was always there to help my mom in the kitchen. It could be a chore, but I remember being very young and wanting to make my family a meal.” While her mother imparted a disciplined, traditional approach to cooking, her father was prone to experimentation. His love of PBS’ Victory Garden was passed on to his daughter. “I have vivid recall of that cookbook being a fixture in our home.”

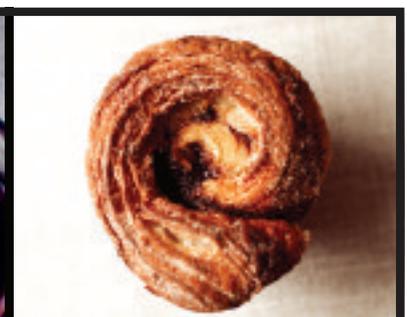
A passion for fresh food took hold. At one point, her journal simply became a list of what she would do if she started a restaurant. Young describes her attempt to break into the Jackson dining scene, “I was naïve, but I had a lot of determination.” With what she describes as “kismet,” and help from a handful of locals, she suddenly found herself in a space on Glenwood.

She was recently forced to cut a popular salad from the menu as she could not source organic avocados. It was a tragedy to her customers, and her staff got an earful. But the explanation was simple, “We do not use GMO products. Our menu is organic.” Food at the Lotus Café is not only tasty, but honest. ■



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