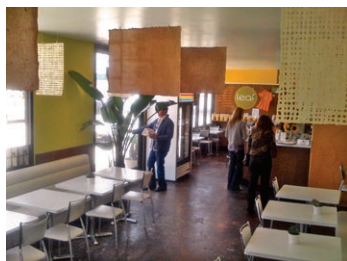




BITE CLUB From top: M Café de Chaya on Melrose; Bev Hills' Greenleaf Gourmet Chopshop; Leaf Cuisine in Culver City; Tender Greens' Salad in the Raw.



Fast Foodies!

Haste makes waist? No longer. L.A. is in the midst of a quick-serve, gourmet-meets-healthy revolution, thanks to a bumper crop of new mini-chains

| By Lesley Balla |

We are deep in the land of car culture, living in a place so spread out that eating on the run has become the norm. Indeed, ever since the first burger joint that would become McDonald's opened in San Bernardino in 1940, SoCal has been a prime launching pad for new fast-food ideas. But look at what convenient, cheap, mass-produced food has done to our guts—it's so bad, there's even a current, one-year moratorium on new fast-food spots in South L.A.

Now a new generation of restaurants is proving that good food (organic, free-range, macrobiotic, local) and convenience aren't incompatible. The best part: They're on the road to becoming mini-chains (most with several local outlets) and looking at regional or even national domination. Wouldn't it be great to have as many green leafy options on every corner as we do fried?

Lunch lines spill out on to the sidewalk every day at **Tender Greens** (tendergreensfood.com) a casual, quick-turnaround café founded by Erik Oberholtzer, Matt Lyman and David Dressler (two chefs and the former food/bev director from Shutters on the Beach).

"Everything we use you could find in the luxury dining market—locally grown produce and sustainably farm-raised cattle and chicken—but it wasn't really available for the daily, neighborhood consumer," says Oberholtzer. Tender Greens offers a relatively simple concept: Choose a protein—free-range grilled chicken, marinated Angus flank steak, fresh albacore—and put it on top of a salad, in a sandwich, or on a hot plate with mashed potatoes and Oxnard-grown veggies. All for \$10.50, almost as much as a Biggie Meal at your nearest drive-through.

Open since last year, **Greenleaf Gourmet Chopshop** (greenleafchopshop.com) also fills the gap for entrée-sized salads—like the Antioxidant Orchard—served from its open-display kitchen in Bev Hills' Golden Triangle. "This is the way L.A. eats now," says owner Jonathan Rollo. "If people like the concept and quality of food and can make it part of their routine, then places like this can last."

The time was ripe for this sort of dining—convenient, healthful, eminently affordable— CONTINUED ON PAGE 127...