

Tropical Life



PEOPLE
MIAMI FRIENDS
CREATE APP FOR
SINGLES, 5C



A spread of bruschetta, vegetable carpaccio, polenta, brussels sprouts, mac 'n' cheese, quinoa salad and more from Organic Bites in Miami.

EVERYTHING ORGANIC

Chef is a native of Portugal who cooked at The Bazaar
Offers organic food for omnivores, vegetarians and vegans



BY LINDA BLADHOLM
Special to the Miami Herald

The motto at Organic Bites in Miami is, "once upon a time, all food was organic." Open since May, the mom-and-pop café offers almost entirely organic food, covering all bases, from meat and dairy to vegan and vegetarian.

The idea is to work with ingredients like they were back in our great-grandparents' days, before pesticides and chemical fertilizers, when all food was "natural." The way of the future seems to be moving back toward organic, with more folks adopting a plant-based

diet. Eating at Organic Bites is not an exercise in deprivation. Get a burger with caramelized onions and smoked truffle



PHOTOS BY LINDA BLADHOLM For the Miami Herald

Owners Andre and Anna Reid of Organic Bites in Miami.

mozzarella on a brioche bun or creamy polenta with shiitake and oyster mushrooms with truffle essence. The husband-and-wife team of Andre and Anna Reid runs the place in the former Taperia

Raca space at 70th Street and Biscayne Boulevard. Inside there's a small counter facing the semi-open kitchen and a few tables plus a covered patio.

SEE ORGANIC BITES, 7C



PATRICK FARRELL pfarrell@miamiherald.com

Chef Benjamin Murray at Azul at the Mandarin Oriental.

MIAMI RESTAURANT REVIEW

After 15 years, Azul is still maturing

BY VICTORIA PESCE ELLIOTT
Special to the Miami Herald

It was 15 years ago this month when the elegant Mandarin Oriental Miami opened its doors on a gorgeous swath of the urban island known as Brickell Key. A month later, Azul ignited its stoves and quickly set the bar for Miami

hotel fine dining. It was there that rising star chef Michelle Bernstein made a name for herself.

Five chefs de cuisine have come and gone, the most recent being William Crandall, who departed in May, leaving an empty spot that was filled this summer by Benjamin Murray.

At just 28 years old, Murray, with a television-ready smile and tattoo collection,

shows promise and an energetic flair, plating compositions that are intricately stimulating and deftly technical. Flavorwise, not everything hits its mark as needed for a restaurant of this caliber and price point.

Azul is as pretty as ever, with lots of stone and polished wood set beyond an open kitchen and wall of wine that make for a dramatic entrance. On our

visits, the restaurant's front door was locked; we had to knock to be let in. Most diners — hotel guests — come through the lobby entrance.

Try to reserve one of the five tables on the terrace for a timeless Miami view of sea and sky. There, nothing can go wrong.

Meals start with tiny pops

SEE AZUL, 2C

FOOD GROUPS

Meet up to eat up

BY CLARISSA BUCH
Special to the Miami Herald

At a recent open-door potluck in Palmetto Bay, Nicholas Bauer poured samples of his home-brewed kratom tea, a controversial beverage with a spot on a government watch list.

Bauer, a Marine and self-proclaimed kratom brewmaster, brought batches that he made with fresh mango, peach, lemon and green tea. He offered them to like-minded enthusiasts of plant-based

foods at a monthly gathering of the South Florida Fruitarians.

"This is the first time I'm experiencing this kind of meetup," Bauer said. "I wanted to bring a treat with me, too, and have people become acquainted kratom."

Kratom tea is brewed from the leaves of tropical tree native to Southeast Asia that has been used for centuries for its pain-relieving and stimulant effects. While legal in the United States, kratom has been labeled a "drug of concern" by the U.S. Drug



CLARISSA BUCH For the Miami Herald

Chris Scarano, left, talks with a guest about some of the plant-based dishes served at a recent potluck at his home in Palmetto Bay, where no meat or dairy is allowed.

Enforcement Administration.

That didn't seem to concern the dozen or so people who had made

their way to Chris Scarano's home for what he calls a health-conscious

SEE POTLUCK, 7C

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