

chef

The American salad has evolved. You know this is true when the first online salad bar comes to town.

Last month, Tossed, an all-salads concept in Manhattan, debuted online ordering for pick-up and delivery of selections from its virtually limitless menu.

Eric Asimov of *The New York Times* praised Tossed, which more resembles a pizza place than a salad bar in the way salads are sold. Customers don't assemble their own salads; each \$7.95 salad includes four "Toss-ins" from a menu of 56 (some of which are seasonal) ranging from avocado to tortilla strips, plus a choice of 14 housemade dressings. A fifth Toss-in is a dollar; higher-cost proteins such as lobster and buffalo-milk mozzarella cost more.

"A year before we opened, we saw a proliferation of all these soup places, sandwich places and wrap places," says Executive Chef Marc Meisel, who opened Tossed in August 1998 with two partners. "Yet you walk down a New York City street in summer, and 75% of people dining al fresco are eating salads as entrees. People love salads. It's not a fad thing. Wraps can come and go, but salad is a real staple." And unlike soup bars, which do better business in winter, salads sell well year-round, Meisel adds.

At Tossed, a walk-in customer (or online orderer) can have the salad of his dreams starting with one of six different lettuces. For the less intrepid, a standing menu of specialty salads created by Meisel, under the heading "Fashions," includes seasoned rock shrimp with romaine, avocado, tomato, grilled sweet onion, black-bean/corn salsa and citrus/chipotle dressing for \$11.95. California spinach with shiitake mushrooms, grilled portobello, grilled onion, hickory-smoked bacon and toasted hazelnuts are tossed with black-pepper/Asiago dressing and topped with croutons for \$8.95. "Old-Fashions" include a chicken-Caesar salad for \$9.95 and a niçoise salad with house vinaigrette for \$14.95.

The menu hasn't changed much in the year-and-a-half that Tossed has been operating, Meisel says. Indeed, his original menu of "Fashions" and "Old-Fashions" hit home immediately, and he can't drop an item even if he wants to (although he bows to the season). But he's impressed with the amount of bacon Tossed sells daily—"about 30 pounds a day," he says. "One of our most popular salads is cobb. We put bacon in the chef salad, and people are putting it in their own salads, as well." And, he sticks up for chicken Caesar. "I don't think chicken Caesar is being overdone. I sell loads of them."

What customers are looking for in a salad, but don't know it, Meisel says, is contrasting textures. "Our Tossed Salad has goat cheese, which is smooth, and toasted almonds, which are crunchy, plus sun-dried cherries, for chewy with a tart tang," Meisel says. "And there's jicama and cucumber, which are crisp and cool. Customers aren't aware of [their desire for texture], necessarily, but they're responding to it. They're putting those combinations in there themselves."

Tossed, with 20 seats on Park Avenue South between 22nd and 23rd Streets, sells a handful of sandwiches and soups and boasts imported and microbrewed beers and American and French wines, plus desserts and coffee and tea. So successful is the concept that a second Tossed—for takeout only—opens in Rockefeller Center this month.

"It's definitely what people want," says Meisel. "The concept is really universal. And having the variety that we do, even though it's salad, you can have a completely different meal every time you come."

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