

Wen Raiti is the owner of House of Leaf & Bean located in Jacksonville

FROM CHINA TO AMERICA

Wen Raiti creates healthy meals one day at a time



TABLE TALK

with LEIGH CORT

The House of Leaf & Bean, which opened in 2018 on Beach Boulevard in Jacksonville, is an organic restaurant committed to vegan, gluten-free, sustainable and simple, fresh organic meals that heal — while delicious and affordable. It was created by Chinese-American Wen Raiti, who grew up eating plant-based protein in China, especially tofu and soy milk, and home-made vegetarian foods made by her mother, a devout Buddhist. Her popular organic café where West meets East is dedicated to her family in China — and providing a fantastic dining experience for people who really love to eat, care about what they eat and

want to improve their health and the health of the earth we share.

Whether dining in or driving through, the unique healthy menu is rooted in plant-based proteins, and the restaurant is committed to using fresh organic ingredients that cater to a wide range of palates and dietary needs.

At the House of Leaf & Bean, one of only a few tofu producers in the U.S. and the only commercial tofu producer in the South, Wen makes fresh premium tofu following traditional Chinese recipes. Simply, the process begins by grinding soybeans into pulp repeatedly, which is then cooked and pasteurized



ABOVE: Lettuce wraps filled with tempeh, hummus, julienne vegetables, house-grown beansprouts and brown rice

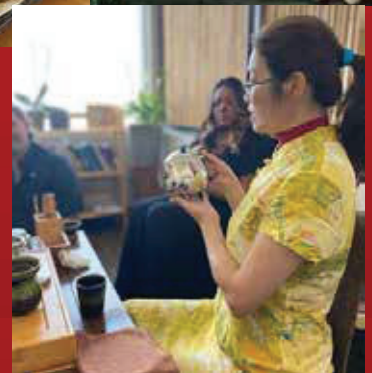
LEFT: Dumplings with tofu and mushrooms

Photos provided by LEIGH CORT



TOP LEFT: Organic crispy tofu bites

TOP RIGHT: Blocks of fresh organic tofu



RIGHT: Wen Raiti leads a traditional Tea Ceremony

into soy milk. Calcium and magnesium are mixed into the fresh soy milk, which creates soy curds that are then pressed to the desired firmness that comes out in blocks — or tofu cakes. Wen often does culinary presentations explaining the process of tofu making. In the future, she plans to have a production facility where she can offer tours of how her fresh tofu and her other vegan and vegetarian foods are made.

Why is this tofu at House of Leaf & Bean so unique? Aside from being the freshest tofu possible, her premium tofu is especially formulated to hold up to wok-frying or grilling, which gives it a much firmer texture than customers expect. It's denser than the extra firm tofu found in stores. And this means it can take a good bit of handling and still hold together like clean white meat or tuna or swordfish steaks. Imagine that it can easily soak up open flame flavors on the grill, or even deep-frying small slices into crispy chips with a crunch similar to bagel chips!

People throughout Asia have been eating all types of bean products for 3,000 years and enjoying long, active lives. Growing up in a small town in Xingning, Guangdong Province, she learned about the life and stories of her mother and grandmother having to be self-sufficient and grow everything on their land to support their daily needs. During and after World War II they had limited resources and access to the protein from animals to feed their large family of seven. Their diet consisted of a lot of fresh and organic vegetables, grains and beans that they grew on their land, which was naturally organic because no chemical fertilizers, pesticides or preservatives had been introduced or even available at that time. Soy beans were the most popular among all beans because they have rich protein and calcium.

Wen learned to make tofu by hand for special occasions like Chinese New Year, weddings, newborn baby celebrations and other important events. Wen recalls "They made the most delicious tofu dishes!" So, she started experimenting with making fresh soymilk and tofu from organic (non-GMO) soy beans a few years before opening her restaurant, realizing that her customers were hungry for authentic, raw, organic plant-based proteins and healthy foods!

Before opening House of Leaf & Bean, Wen found a warm welcome at the Beaches Green Market in Jarboe Park where she began selling her products, helping and encouraging more people to be able to have access to healthy food. She introduced her extensive line of organic freshly brewed tea (caffeinated and herbal) — a perfect combination that her clients enjoy. The most unique part of House of Leaf & Bean is also being able to de-stress and relax in a Zen-type of environment in her Meditation Room.

Wen, a CPA by trade, is passionate about Lifestyle Medicine due to her personal health journey. She is very knowledgeable about the incredible health benefits of drinking tea and sells more than 30 blends of organic loose-leaf teas in her café. As only one example, the Organic Matcha Mate Tea Blend is an East-meets-West fusion, a high-energy blend that results in a natural appetite suppressant and EGCG antioxidants — a powerful caffeine boost.

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Northeast Florida is so fortunate to have someone like Wen offering simple, fresh and organic meals that heal. She is currently working with Kailo Nutrition on the "Meals that Heal" program and the Synergy Lifestyle Center to make meals that help patients to reverse or improve their health conditions, such as heart problems, high cholesterols, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and so on. Wen is proud of these healthful, healing dishes being affordable and delicious. She believes that what we eat and how we make our food should be simple, sustainable and beneficial not only for our health but also for our environment. That's why she created House of Leaf & Bean for her community that is beyond a restaurant. It is a community to educate and to offer a different way of making our food.



Wen Raiti's mother Xueqing Zhong (left) and grandmother Shuiyao Niao helped inspire Raiti's passion for "healing" meals.

As a community leader, Wen has taken many leadership roles in organizations like Jacksonville Sister City Association, National Asian American PAC FL, Jacksonville Chinese Association, Jacksonville Mayor's Asian American Advisory Board, Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association, Leadership Jacksonville and more.

For Wen, somehow Mother's Day lasts all year long, not just as a tribute to her mother and grandmother, but as a calling to care for Mother Earth — to give back — so that the Earth will be

healthy, green, lush and nurturing for our future generations. How does she do this? It's simple: first — eat more plant-based meals — an easy way to do your part! Second, she reminds us — don't waste! Be mindful of what you take and use. From the amount of food you buy to the packing and disposal utensils you use, Wen and her staff follow Reuse, Recycle, Reduce and Compost at work.

There are many exciting times ahead for Wen and House of Leaf & Bean. Watch for upcoming news about her new Tea Sippers Group: "Cha Dao." It will be the first in Northeast Florida and perhaps in America!

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