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Açai Berry Bowls Come to Lafayette

By A.K. Carroll



Owner Shachar Gilad with operations manager Gabi Lazar stand outside Vitality Bowls in Lafayette. Photos A.K. Carroll

It all started with one bitter little berry. Actually, with 200 bitter little berries that together form the base of an açai berry bowl - one of the latest trends in health food and the premier product of Vitality Bowls, a San Ramon-based chain of superfood cafés that will open over 30 new stores by the end of the year. Native to Central and South America, the açai (ah-sigh-EE) berry really packs a punch, promising the benefits of weight loss, immunity, anti-aging, anti-inflammation and antioxidants to regular consumers.

"One taste and I was hooked," said Shachar Gilad, owner of the Lafayette location that opened May 22. He isn't alone. Many East Bay residents have already jumped on the açai berry bandwagon. "This is a chance for me to bring all of this goodness to the local community."

Vitality Bowls was founded in 2011 by Gilad's brother and sister-in-law, Roy and Tara Gilad. With a background in organic farming and athletics, the couple had always been health-conscious. After discovering the benefits of the açai, they were compelled to share it with a broader community. They found a connection in Brazil from which they source actual açai berry pulp, which is more potent but much less common than the concentrate you might find in juice drinks and powdered supplements. The Gilads spent long months perfecting healthy all-natural recipes (no ice,

sweeteners or powders to be found) and set out to pioneer the concept of the superfood café.

"We wanted to bring more healthy food to the area," said Roy Gilad. "Something safe and healthy and affordable." When he uses the word "safe," he is referring to Vitality's commitment to work around food allergies. As the parents of a child with severe allergies, this was an important part of Roy and Tara's business plan.

Vitality Bowls isn't just a snack option; it's a way of life.

"It's the future of food," said Roy Gilad. "When you know what you're putting in your system it changes the way you think and feel about eating."

Shachar Gilad agrees. A pilot who has been involved in athletics his whole life, he has always been health-conscious and immediately saw the benefit that Vitality's products offer. "We have the opportunity to bring this to the youth community, young adults, and, of course, the older people as well," he said. Vitality Bowl's San Ramon and Walnut Creek locations have seen a large number of teens and students pass through their doors. He expects the same will be true in Lafayette. "I wish we'd had this stuff when I was growing up," he said with a laugh.

The 14 açai bowls (which include two breakfast and two dessert bowls) range in composition from the banana, strawberry, açai and flax base of the original Vitality Bowl to the broccoli, spinach, guarana and kiwi found in the Power Bowl. Toppings include organic granola, goji berries, bee pollen, honey, almonds and coconut shavings. The recipes have been carefully developed and tested, but Shachar Gilad assures that the staff can accommodate for any personal preferences.

"Our employees have been really well-educated," said Gabi Lazar, operations manager of the Lafayette store. "They've been trained to help you understand the product and make the best choice."

In addition to berry bowls and all-natural smoothies, Vitality Bowls' menu also includes homemade soups, salads, paninis and a juice bar.

"We never cut corners on our products," Roy Gilad assured. "We've built a good relationship with our suppliers and are building more with our community."

"The community is craving this sort of food," added Sharchar Gilad, who grew up in the East Bay and has lived here most of his life. "I'm excited to be offering this in Lafayette. The people here really seem to want this kind of thing."

Vitality Bowls is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., giving a 12-hour window in which to take your mind and body through the Vitality experience.

"Once you try it," said Shachar Gilad, "you're going to be hooked."

Favorite Bowls

Shachar: The Dragon Bowl-a base of pitaya, mango juice, coconut milk, bananas, pineapple, raspberries and immunity boost topped with strawberries, kiwi, almonds, goji berries, bee pollen and honey.

Gabi: The Energy Bowl-a base of açai, almond milk, guarana, bananas, strawberries and flax seed topped with organic granola, bananas, strawberries, goji berries, bee pollen and honey.

Roy and Tara: Warrior Bowl-a base of açai, almond milk, bananas, blueberries, raspberries, flax seed, broccoli and vitamin boost topped with organic granola, bananas, strawberries, almonds, goji berries and honey.

Amanda: Detox Bowl-a base of açai, almond milk, flax seed, kale, spirulina, bananas and strawberries, topped with bananas, blueberries, almonds, goji berries and honey.

Vitality Bowls

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The Detox Bowl

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