

**New Haven**, Food & Drink

## A Vegetarian Staple Since 1975 in New Haven

— Mark M. Braunstein, 1.8.2025



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**NEW HAVEN** — Since 1975, Claire's Corner Copia has served as an anchor of vegetarian cuisine in Connecticut. It deserves accolades for its longevity as a vegetarian eatery.

Until twenty years ago, vegans had little from which to choose, and could

substitute cow cheese only with unadorned and unflavored tofu. Blah. To its credit, Claire's has changed with the times. Nut cheeses now are routinely offered as alternatives. It has added so many all-vegan dishes to its menu that they equal or outnumber the vegetarian dishes. Except for the breakfast egg items and some dairy entrées, most vegetarian dishes can be veganized.

The menus clearly indicate both on the wallboards and online what dishes are inherently vegan and what can be adapted. What's more, its wide-ranging menus are rooted firmly in reality, not just in the imagination of a wishful-thinking chef. "Out of stock" does not exist in the vocabulary of the menus at Claire's Corner Copia. Cornucopia indeed.

The array of choices can be mind-boggling, even for vegans. It is easy to feel overwhelmed when trying to make choices simply by reading the many listings on its extensive menus. In person, you are better off viewing the display case to the left of the cash register. There you'll see some of the standard entrées and most of the specials. WYSIWYG, so What You See is far more informative of What You Get.

You indeed can judge these books by their covers. For example, one memorable special was a veggie loaf with mashed potatoes. It looked far better than it sounds, and tasted far better than it looked! Even the mashed potatoes were divine. What you don't see is that most entrées come with a cutesy personal-size loaf of house-baked bread, your choice of all-white or half-whole wheat.

Portions are very generous. When you order a side, you'll be served what other restaurants might dole out as an entrée. Expect a filling meal and, if you choose wisely, a nourishing meal. Just don't come here expecting a gourmet meal. The regular menu is familiar Americana with emphasis on eggs for breakfast, and on burgers and pizza for lunch and dinner. Noticeably absent are soups. Ethnic accents include Mexican burritos and quesadillas, and Italian pizza and pasta.

Little, if anything, is ever deep-fried. That's a big plus for your health. Rather than fried potatoes as sides, salads are served as sides. The regular menu does feature roasted potatoes tossed in oil, but not soaked in oil. The breakfast menu includes one mock meat made of ultra-processed wheat gluten that is whiter than white flour. That's one too many, but only one. Thankfully, several house-made burgers all are composed of grains and walnuts.

Claire's makes no claims about serving natural foods, just vegetarian food. Still, because of the breadth and depth of its extensive menu, you'll find more here that qualifies as natural foods than at most other vegetarian or vegan restaurants in Connecticut.

During pandemic pandemonium, Claire's expanded into the corner space that had formerly been occupied by a New Haven tourist office. While tables were added, seating remains just as cramped as before. Somehow, like stuntmen in a phonebooth, crowds still cram into Claire's, sometimes waiting in long lines just to place their orders. The lines move quickly because few people stay long. Everyone enjoys Claire's food, if not its ambience.

As a favorite lunch spot of the Yale community, Claire's can be considered an auxiliary part of the Yale campus. Little wonder the noise level during midday approaches that of a college dining hall. If such gentle din reminds you of the fond days of your youth, you just might appreciate it as added flavoring to your food. Just don't meet here for a date. Try to sit by a window where you'll be entertained by the Yale and New Haven crowds parading by, sure to add novelty to your dining experience.

Except on Sundays, finding parking can be frustrating in this congested corner where the New Haven Green adjoins the Yale campus, so expect a long walk. Also except on freebie Sundays, expect to pay ransom to parking meters. Despite the cost of parking added to your meal tab, you still will come out ahead because even for a cafeteria the food at Claire's

is underpriced.

Sometimes even Claire herself can be seen clearing tables or tending to the cash register. She and her staff work behind the counter and in the kitchen that are even more cramped than your seating area. Show them your appreciation through the usual means, your tip. Yet there's no option to add tips to credit card payments, so bring cash to contribute to the tip jar. They deserve it.

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**Mark Mathew Braunstein**, a vegan since 1970, is the author of *Radical Vegetarianism*, the first book to espouse veganism. You can download a free PDF of the Lantern Books 30th anniversary edition [here](#).