

Westbrook, Food & Drink

# A Place Dedicated to Vegans and the Gluten Free in Westbrook

— Mark M. Braunstein, 1.17.2025



Shayna B's by the Sea, Westbrook, CT all-vegan and all-gluten-free cafe

WESTBROOK – Many restaurants offer samplings of vegan or gluten-free dishes, but few are fully dedicated to both. **Shayna B's** by the Sea stands among the few. All its food is both vegan and gluten-free, and its owner has skillfully donned both chef hats.

Like many small cafés whose owners serve double duty as head chefs,

the singular charm of Shayna B's by the Sea can be attributed to its sole owner and master chef, Christine Reed. Veganism and gluten allergy are two diets that pose unique challenges to restaurateurs. While restaurant goers may follow a vegan diet because they wish to, those who adhere to a gluten-free diet typically do so because they must. When the café owner or chef shares the same diet ethos as you do, her enthusiasm enhances the distinctive flavoring of the food.

Christine began her two culinary quests by delivering bakery goods to food stores and by vending at farmers markets throughout eastern Connecticut. After garnering a faithful following, in 2017 she founded Shayna B's first home as a sit-down café. In 2021, Shayna B's moved from Old Saybrook to expanded quarters in Westbrook. Presently spacious inside and out, its large front entrance veranda offers sheltered outdoor dining with a view of shoreline wetlands and of the wetlands' abundant birdlife. (Birders, bring binoculars!)

Indoors, you're greeted front and center by long glass cases that display an array of gluten-free bakery goods. Folks who adhere to gluten-free diets flock here from afar for the breads, bagels, cakes, cookies, donuts, and other pastries. Most restaurant desserts, including natural food restaurant desserts, are routinely made with white sugar. As a vegan food snob, I shun sugar, but I do consume maple syrup and coconut sugar. At Shayna B's, at least one dessert is sweetened only with those, so worthy of my indulgence. Sweet!

The bakery goods that mostly qualify as desserts unjustifiably eclipse the more nourishing food. What you won't see in the display cases are the made-to-order meals prepared behind the scenes. Wholesome and flavorful, the vegan entrées just happen to also be gluten-free. They include salads and veggie bowls; pizzas and veggie burgers; sandwiches and wraps; smoothies and soups. Breakfast, served all day, features scrambles and pancakes.

The falafel and the tofu in some of the bowls or wraps are pan-fried, but

nothing is ever deep-fried. In other dishes, oil (always extra-virgin olive oil, on Shayna B's lists of ingredients abbreviated as EVOO) is used only sparingly. Salt is added equally sparingly, so nothing ever tastes salty. All the meals served at Shayna B's are both delicious *and* nutritious. No mock meats here, only real foods.

Several fully prepared daily specials available for takeout are displayed in a glass case fridge separate from the bakery goods. The many regular menu items intended for dine-in are made to order, as you'd expect. Ignore the menu shown online. It's merely an outline and anyway obsolete. Better to rely on crowdsourcing. View the photos of the menu signboards that enthusiastic customers have posted with their online reviews.

Among the entrées, Shayna B's excels in its veggie bowls and pizzas. My favorites are the Nourish Bowl, comprised of roasted seasonal vegetables, and the Hawaiian Pizza. When I come here for lunch, I skip breakfast so that I can satiate my hunger with both entrées.

Unconcerned about gluten, I find bland and chalky the gluten-free bakery items sold elsewhere, yet Shayna B's pizza crust made mostly of brown rice flour is tasty and exemplary. Mushrooms are among the Hawaiian Pizza's luscious veggie toppings, and instead of tomato sauce it is adorned seasonally with roasted fresh cherry tomatoes. Its cheese is not primarily coconut oil typical of gooey greasy nut cheeses sold in other marketplaces. Instead, it is made of miso and sunflower seeds. For two bucks more, I order a double dose of the delectable sunflower cheese. I strike it rich when sometimes the sunflower cheese is sold to-go, all on its own.

Almost all dietary allergies and snobberies can be accommodated, including nut-free (hence the sunflower seed cheese) and soy-free (in addition to soy-based tofu, Shayna B's makes its own pumpkin-seed tofu). My food sensitivity is to the alliums, garlic, onions, scallions, et al, I'm thankful that here in most dishes the alliums can be omitted. And if

you happen to adhere to Hindu or certain yogic dietary principles, you'll be thankful too.

Almost once a month, Friday night dinners are served by advance reservation. Check Facebook or Instagram about those dinners. Almost every week, live music is featured, usually on Saturday afternoons, sometimes on Sunday afternoons. Phone to learn which local musicians are performing.

Note that its street signage is small and inconspicuous, so the café is easy to drive past. It shares its ample parking lot with a boat showroom next door, so look for its dry-docked dreamboats. If I owned one, Shayna B's would float my boat.

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**Mark Mathew Braunstein**, a vegan since 1970, is the author of the 1981 book, *Radical Vegetarianism*, the first book to espouse veganism. You can download a free PDF of the Lantern Books 30th anniversary revised edition [here](#).