



FUN GUYS: Olivier Said (left) and chef MikeC. say the Kitchen on Fire culinary school will emphasize good times in the kitchen. The school is part of the new Epicurious Garden in Berkeley.

D. ROSS CAMERON — Staff

Epicurious Garden to feature quality take-out food from popular East Bay restaurants



COMING SOON: Scheduled to open March 1, the gourmet food hub will feature new incarnations of East Bay eateries, along with some fresh faces. Below, Yellow Split Pea Soup with Croutons will be on the menu at Soop on Thursdays.

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By Momo Chang | Contributor

IT'S HARD to fathom Berkeley's gourmet ghetto getting more gourmet, but it's about to. Soon, East Bay foodies will have a new one-stop spot to pick up a wide range of delectable food-on-the-go.

Nestled next to Cesar and a door down from Chez Panisse is Epicurious Garden, a new gourmet takeout hub soon to feature many popular East Bay chefs and restaurateurs. Above the court is Kitchen on Fire, a venue for adults' and kids' culinary classes.

The building dates back to 1916 when it was a movie theater. It soon became a furniture salesroom, then most recently Dale Sanford TV. It's since been remodeled, showing off its exposed brick and featuring all new designs, lighting, and a garden with a waterfall in the courtyard.

Several veteran players in the Bay Area food scene have a hand in the new development: Socca Oven by



► **TO-GO**, from Living 1

Gregoire; Kirala2; Taste, by the owners of Khana Peena; and Imperial Tea Court.

Newbies to Berkeley include Ciao Bella Gelato, Alegio Chocolate and Soop.

The concept is simple: good, fresh food at decent prices for foodies frequenting North Berkeley, spawned in part by the success of Berkeley's Gregoire takeout restaurant.

While some have already likened the spot to San Francisco's Ferry Building, developer Soheyl Modarressi says it's a smaller, more intimate model. At 9,000 square feet, it's a Mini-Me compared to the Ferry Building's giant 65,000 square-foot marketplace.

Each nook of the center is specialized; for example, Gregoire's Socca Oven, fitting to its namesake, has a huge, specialty oven for making its featured creation: crepes made from chickpeas with a variety of fillings, from savory to sweet.

Taste, operated by Khana Peena Indian cuisine restaurateur Deepak Aggarwal, features fresh bread, rotisserie chicken and a wine bar. Khana Peena's Indian cuisine already has three locations, one on Solano Avenue, one on Oxford Street in Berkeley, and one on College Avenue in Oakland.

Imperial Tea Court, with locations in San Francisco's Chinatown and Ferry Building, will have a traditional tea house with bright red doors opening

onto the courtyard in the back of the building.

Soop features daily specials of soup, of course, along with salads and panini. Soups, costing from \$4.50 to \$6.50 a pint, are accompanied by bread and individualized garnishes, such as basil pesto, creme fraiche, homemade herb croutons and grated cheese.

The idea, says co-owner Marc Kelley, is to offer soups with organic vegetables and quality ingredients.

Whether customers select a hearty meal or an accompaniment to other dishes, Kelley hopes to bring back the homemade feel to takeout food. The spelling of "soop," in fact, harkens to the mid-1600s, taken from Robert May's "Accomplished Cook, one of the oldest English cookbooks.

The much-anticipated Kirala2 will feature a different menu from its other Berkeley location, including sushi, bento boxes and sozai (side dishes).

Kitchen on Fire is co-owned by executive chef MikeC, and Cesar partner/restaurateur Olivier Said. They say they hope to bring the love of food, family and fun back into people's lives.

MikeC. has been teaching culinary courses for several years in and around Berkeley. He's taught courses at Sur La Table

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to adults, has been an instructor at a kids' cooking camp, and has owned a party planning business.

Now, all of his energy and zest will be housed in one place, right above the food court.

Kitchen on Fire will offer a range of hands-on demonstration and lecture courses, such as basic knife skills, party planning, and classes for kids, as well as private consulting, catering and team-building services.

Developer Soheyl Modarressi, who created the Oxford Center in West Berkeley, hopes to open Epicurious Garden in early March.

As more gourmet takeout places open shop, couples, singles and families opt to take home the goods to enjoy in the comfort of their own homes.

And choosing the to-go route on any given day gives everyone plenty of choices. Just make sure to save room for chocolate, gelato and tea.

► Epicurious Garden is at

1509, 1511 and 1513 Shattuck Avenue in North Berkeley.
www.epicuriousgarden.com.

Yellow Split Pea Soup with Croutons

Recipe courtesy of Soop (featured Thursdays at Soop).

1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1½ cups onion, ¼-inch dice
1½ cups carrot, ¼-inch dice
½ teaspoon dried thyme
½ teaspoon dried marjoram
½ teaspoon dried ginger
½ pound salt pork (can be left out for vegetarians)
2 quarts water
2 cups yellow split peas
Salt and pepper, to taste

► Heat 1 tablespoon vegetable oil in large stockpot over medium heat, add onions and carrots and saute until onions are translucent, approximately 5-7 minutes. Add thyme, marjoram and ginger and saute for 2 more minutes.