

# Diner's Journal

## Veggies With Grace

Leaving Hangawi, I felt cleansed and refreshed, as if I had come from a spa instead of a new vegetarian Korean restaurant. This is partly because the experience of eating in that calm, elegant space with its smooth wooden bowls and heavy ceramic cups is so utterly peaceful. And partly because even after a two-hour meal of many courses my body still felt buoyant.

Diners remove their shoes on entering and sit at low tables with their feet dangling comfortably into the sunken space beneath them. They are surrounded by unearthly Korean music, wonderful objects and people who move with deliberate grace. Everything here seems soft, slow and rhythmic. And then the food begins to arrive.

Even people accustomed to eating on the far side of food may find these greens, porridges and mountain roots exotic. Just reading the list of teas is an extraordinary experience: red ginseng, date paste, mushroom. And all the water is purified.

Much of the menu can be sampled by ordering the emperor's meal, \$19.95 at lunch, \$24.95 at dinner. It begins with pumpkin porridge, a smooth orange purée that tastes like the pure essence of the vegetable. It is followed by mung bean vermicelli, a basket of vegetables tempura, and mushrooms in a thick sweet and sour sauce. Next comes a plate of Korean pancakes, some with leeks, some with scallions, some red with chili peppers, and tofu "sandwiches" filled with mushrooms and accompanied by spicy pickled vegetables.

But the next course is the most amazing. A tray of nine kinds of mountain greens is set on the table and surrounded by 10 side dishes: water kimchi, cold spinach, sweet lotus root with sesame, chili cabbage and the like. The tastes are so varied and so unexpected that I sat there for a long time, tasting first one vegetable and then another.

At the end, a fiery bean paste soup is followed by a cool, sweet cinnamon soup topped with pine nuts. Afterward I floated out to the street, surprised to find it so gray, so cold, so busy.

*Hangawi, 12 East 32d Street, Manhattan,  
(212) 213-0077.*