

# The Restaurant Dieter

Dieting and eating out shouldn't be so hard...

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## New York review: Rouge Tomate comes totally clean and aids dieters in the process



Lobster tagliatelle

With the exception of chains that post their dubious nutritional information online, it's rare to find a sit-down restaurant that is so transparent.

So imagine the surprise when the [menu](#) at [Rouge Tomate](#) offers that a diner need only ask in order to see the full nutritional information -- on everything. "Just a moment," the waiter says, and suddenly a ring binder lands on the two-top.

Under vinyl page protectors is everything a dieter would want to know, and every single dish appears to be well within that dieter's reach. Amazing.

A recent Saturday night meal at Rouge Tomate goes down in dieting history as the first and only time The Restaurant Dieter has been able to use Weight Watchers E-tools and figure the points value on before the food came to the table.

Dinner rounded out at a healthy 28 points. I probably ate more than I would have ordinarily, but only because the whole affair was so relatively guiltless.

Where does a restaurant like this come from? The website says the restaurant follows a charter called [Sanitas Per Escam](#), which is Latin for Health Through Food. The whole thing appears to be both a restaurant and a consulting gig rolled into one.

The restaurant is the work of one [Emmanuel Verstraeten](#), a "serial entrepreneur" (his website's quotation marks, by the way). It's the New York outpost of a similar restaurant he opened in 2001 in Brussels, according to the website. He is also the founder and CEO of [SPE Development US Inc.](#), a consulting company in the area of -- you guessed it -- healthy food.

In what appears to be a nod toward keeping an ethical distance, the SPE website notes that Rouge Tomate itself is not SPE-certified because "It is SPE Certified's policy to provide third-party certification only." Hence the use of the phrase "follows a charter" and the arm's length. There will be no nutritional self-dealing here apparently.

Anyway, the food was, for the most part, quite good.



Ricotta and carrot spreads

Dinner started with crusty whole grain rolls, accompanied not with butter but two spreads: a savory carrot puree and a house made ricotta cheese. Had I known that, I might not have ordered the toasts, but at 2-3 Weight Watcher points each, why not?

Three come for \$13. The spaghetti squash version was the standout, with Maryland crab, honeycrisp apple, jalapeno and cilantro. The cranberry tapanade tasted like...cranberry. The wild mushroom, redolent of thyme on a bed of ricotta, tasted pretty much like the mushroom pate from "[The Moosewood Cookbook](#)," the much-beloved vegetarian cooking bible from the 1970s and 1980s.



The toasts: mushroom, crab and cranberry tapanade



Cauliflower salad

A roasted cauliflower salad with hazelnuts, salted grapes, bok choy and toasted buttermilk really needed a kick of some kind -- something acidic or fiery. It arrived looking every bit like a Miro -- dips and dabs and squiggles of color all over the plate. Perhaps it's the trendy technique itself; when a dish is so deconstructed, it can be difficult to get it mixed enough to enjoy the whole effect. It clocked in at a meager 4 Weight Watcher points.

For the main course, 10 Weight Watcher points seemed a small price to pay for a fresh herb pasta tossed with a sauce made from fennel and lobster oil, with a touch of saffron and lemon. A couple fat claws and a small tail of lobster gave the dish enough protein to balance the perfectly al dente tagliatelle, studded here and there with bits of herb. With some broccoli and big wheels of leek to provide fiber, it was a meal any dieter would find satisfying.



Cookies

The [dessert menu](#) offered a range of tiny treats, including a couple with dense chocolate, for as little as 3 points. When a pastry chef is confident enough to express himself or herself in the humble cookie, I'm inclined to order them. The portion for one person consisted of six miniature cookies, including a tiny biscotti and a date brownie, and came with a shooter of apple cider. The latter was so foamy it appeared to have been freshly extracted from a juicer back in the kitchen.

For this part of the meal, I only estimated. So confident was I in the kitchen's discretion that I forgot to ask the server to bring over the nutritional ring binder one more time. The need for transparency had given way to trust. Now that's something a dieting restaurant patron doesn't do every day.