

DAILY BREEZE

Whole Foods Market feeds a desire for café dining and grocery shopping in El Segundo



The 2nd, a café experience at Whole Foods Market, does a lot deliciously well, including the chili mango roll. (Photo by Merrill Shindler)

By [Merrill Shindler](#), *Daily Breeze*

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Beast burger (Photo by Merrill Shindler)

THE 2ND

★★½

Address: Whole Foods Market, 760 S. Sepulveda Blvd., El Segundo

Information: 310-333-1900, www.wholefoodsmarket.com/stores/elsegundo.

Cuisine: New American.

When: Lunch and dinner, every day; breakfast, Saturday and Sunday.

Details: Beer and wine. Reservations not needed.

Prices: About \$20 per person.

Cards: MC, V.

The various branches of Whole Foods Market have always had a place to eat, but in most cases that place consisted of a handful of tables near the front entrance and perhaps outside on a tiny patio.

At some of the newer Whole Foods, there's a sort of fast-casual dining zone near the sushi and the sandwiches and the noodles. And several — notably the Whole Foods in Pasadena — have wine bars as well; closed rooms where the vintages from the adjacent wine department can be sampled, for a fee.

But in the case of the Whole Foods in the Plaza El Segundo on Sepulveda Boulevard just north of Rosecrans Avenue, there's a newly opened restaurant as well. Or perhaps it's better described as a café, for though there's sit-down service at the bar, you order at a counter for the tables.

CRAFT BREWS ARE BIG

It's called The 2nd. I like the place, though it's admittedly a curious concept. There's a beer menu of 34 craft brews, including numerous local creations, like from Strand in Torrance (including their properly tasty 24th Street Pale Ale, and their Strand Harvest Ball Orange Wit Wheat Beer).

You want something a tad sweet, there's Belching Beaver Milk Stout from Vista. You want something sour, try the Lagunitas Aunt Sally from Petaluma. Bootlegger's Pumpkin Ale from Fullerton was on the list, but I don't know how long it will remain.

I do enjoy a fine beer list. There's a smaller, but well curated wine list as well, including three very appealing flights. But it does bring up the question: Does one go to Whole Foods to shop, or to drink, or to shop and drink? Or perhaps, to drink and shop?

I feel very much at home at markets like Whole Foods — so much to look at, and occasionally to taste from little tables as well. But is this where I go to bend an elbow? I'm conflicted.

That said, looking at The 2nd as a café separate and apart from the market, it's a pretty good place. The design is functional, but the seats at the bar are comfortable and though the staff does vanish every now and then, the food comes out admirably fast. The menu features tiny green dots indicating "veg" and "vegan" in microscopic type. There are happy hour dishes served from 4 to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, including veggie nachos, a vegan jackfruit quesadilla, poutine, and both a cheese plate and a charcuterie plate.

The regular menu is pleasantly quirky. The guacamole is flavored with charred green chilies, the veggie nachos are made with cauliflower, there's a "Beast Burger" made using no beasts (the burger is Beyond Meat plant protein).

There's a trio of toasts — forest mushroom, smoked salmon and smashed avocado. The kale Caesar is very tasty, topped with lots of shaved Parmesan and a poached egg. There are 10 sushi rolls, half with seafood, half without; the chili mango roll, made with black rice, is just plain delicious.

And lest I give the impression that this is a hotbed of meatlessness, you can get a pound of Mary's wings in three different flavors. There's a grass-fed beef Pub Burger, fish and chips (sustainably caught, of course), maple-glazed pork belly with crispy Brussels sprouts. The question is: Will people head for The 2nd for a meal, without also going for Whole Foods?

It reminds me of the fabled St. Estephe, which used to be just down the street, a fine-dining nouvelle Southwestern restaurant with a Ralphs market next door. After a meal there, I'd drop by Ralphs to pick up half-and-half or whatever I needed at home. Dinner and a shopping basket? Why not?

Merrill Shindler is a Los Angeles-based freelance dining critic. Send him email at mreats@aol.com.

THE 2ND

Rating: 2.5 stars.

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