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## More than soul

### Harlem eateries offering stylish alternatives

By JULIA SZABO

For years, dining out in Harlem meant just one choice: sublime soul food. But as delicious as soul food indisputably is, it's not exactly heart-healthy.

Not even a superhero could eat fried chicken, fried catfish, corn bread, candied sweet potatoes and sweet potato pie every day without experiencing a few adverse health consequences.

**News flash:** Clever restaurateurs are now offering alternatives to traditional uptown fare that are positively downtown chic.

Start early at **Settepani Bakery** (196 Lenox Ave., at West 120th Street; [917] 492-4806), which opens daily at 7 a.m.

Co-owned by Leah Abraham and her husband, Italian-born Nino Settepani, this charming café is more Milan than Mississippi, with a focus on Euro-style pastries like foccaccia with mozzarella, rosemary and basil and an artisanal bread called cassareccio.

Since there are so many delicious breads to choose from, Settepani's menu includes items that cry out for bread on the side — think hearty soups — or



Revival owner Rupa Mehta (left) with chef Prem Kumar. Kumar says, "You don't have to go downtown for nice, simple, elegant fare."

employ the staff of life as the main ingredient, such as the Rustico sandwich, a vinaigrette-drizzled mix of prosciutto, arugula and tomatoes.

At **Native** (101 W. 118th St., at Lenox Avenue; [212] 665-2525), the eclectic lunch and dinner menu is flavored with creative Asian and Hispanic flourishes, as in the orange and chicken spring rolls with sweet chili dip or the duck and mushroom quesadilla.

**Revival** (2367 Frederick

Douglass Blvd., at West 127th Street; [212] 222-8338), which opened last Valentine's Day, features "French-American cuisine with a Caribbean-Creole influence," said chef Prem Kumar.

A signature Revival entrée is smoked duck risotto, topped with two sauces: "one a reduction of wine and butter and the other a reduction of meat glaze with a cranberry flavoring," said Kumar.

"People come in and say,

"I think we're in the wrong location — shouldn't this be downtown?" Kumar said with a laugh.

"But that's the point: One doesn't have to go downtown for nice, simple, elegant fare."

The neighborhood's residents couldn't be happier with the expanded menu of dining-out options.

"I love fried foods and macaroni and cheese as much as the next person — but you just can't eat them all the time," says Harlem interior designer Sheila Bridges.

"It's wonderful that, for the first time in the 10 years that I've lived up here, I can finally walk around the corner and have dinner at a stylish, intimate place whose primary focus is not soul food."

For Clyde Williams, domestic policy advisor to Bill Clinton, whose office is located on West 125th Street, the diversity of the new crop of uptown restaurants is now one of Harlem's biggest culinary draws.

"It's great to have more of a choice to pick from," said Williams, who said he's delighted not to have to leave his neighborhood in search of a fine meal. "I live



Harlem residents Shella Bridges and Clyde Williams get comfortable at chic Settepani Bakery.

Post Photos: Jennifer Weisbord

and eat in Harlem."

Williams credited Jimmy Rodriguez, the restaurateur responsible for the popular eatery **Jimmy's Uptown** (2207 Seventh Ave., between 130th and 31st streets, [212] 491-4000), with starting the Harlem food renaissance last year.

"Jimmy's Alaskan King Crab legs with garlic-butter sauce are to die for," said Williams. "You can get some of the greatest seafood uptown."

Vegetarians will also be

happy to note that their uptown options are no longer limited to gravy-drenched collard greens.

Revival offers non-meat-eaters an excellent artichoke and mushroom risotto, while Native features a tempting Mediterranean black-eyed pea humus platter.

But perhaps the new Harlem eateries' greatest culinary contribution is their imaginative, yet deeply respectful spins on traditional soul food.

At Revival, hints of

Southern flavor are subtle: flaked feta cheese, diced tomatoes and basil are served on a layer of sweet potatoes, while mushrooms flashed in a pan with onions, garlic, thyme, tomatoes and chickpeas appear on a slice of corn bread that's glazed with cheese and finished with a lemon-butter sauce.

At Native, the catfish is pan-seared rather than deep-fried, and served with cheddar-cheese grits.

And at Settepani, in addition to tasty croissants,

biscotti, chocolate truffles and mousse, those with a sweet tooth can indulge in a haute new take on an old-fashioned Southern staple: sweet potato bread.

"Yes, we've basically brought Italian pastries to Harlem," admitted Settepani's Abraham.

She added, "We like to experiment [with food], because there's always the client who wants something new with a classic Harlem twist."