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Tekst 11

Our drive-thru fancy feast

Maybe there's hope for modern civilization after all: Fast-food chains are giving menus a facelift in a quest for fitness and flavor. And fuller houses.

To head off obesity lawsuits and recapture the interest of baby boomers, corporate kitchen wizards are serving up products that supposedly are more nutritious and tastier than the still-dominant burger-and-fries fare. Blue cheese and orange slices now lurk in those black plastic salad bowls. In pouches of

dressing, herbs and spices share space with sodium benzoate and xanthan gum.

But can this neo-sophisticated chow taste divine, fatten the bottom line and, in some cases, even trim the waistline?

USA TODAY food and wine writer **Jerry Shriver** visited eateries in California (the spiritual home of grown-up salads), sampled the newer fare and filed these curbside comments. (Prices and ingredients may vary; nutritional information comes from company Web sites.)

McDonald's Grilled Chicken California Cobb Salad

I couldn't hear the crunch of the veggies over the din of lite rock and heavy teen angst. But the roughage looked and tasted fresh, except for the tomatoes, which were ripe but shriveled. The blue cheese, grilled chicken (there's also crispy chicken) and smoky bacon are well-integrated and enticing, but the dressing drowns them out. Still, this entrée salad is good enough that I would choose it over the burgers but not good enough to allow me to resist the fries. Kudos for a well-done nutritional information section at www.mcdonalds.com.

In the mix

White-meat chicken chunks, mixed greens, shaved carrots, blue cheese, chopped egg, grape tomatoes and bacon bits. Comes with a packet of Newman's Own Cobb Dressing, a creamy vinaigrette with cheeses. \$3.99



calories **400** grams of fat **23**

Burger King Santa Fe Fire-Grilled Chicken Baguette

I had high hopes for this new line of "Fire-Grilled Chicken" sandwiches (there's also a Chicken Whopper and a Chicken Caesar Club), because I've always been a sucker for BK's flame-licked burgers. But this bland entry owes more to Peoria than Santa Fe. The unnaturally shaped chicken part was moist but needed more grilled/smoked flavor; the "baguette," while soft and chewy, deals another blow to Franco-American relations; the sauce is just so-so salsa; and the veggies kept smooshing out the end of the bread. If I'm putting my new Metallica T-shirt at risk, there had better be more flavor.

In the mix

All white-meat chicken filet, roasted peppers and onions, baguette and Fire-Roasted Sauce, similar to a salsa. \$2.89



calories **345** grams of fat **5**

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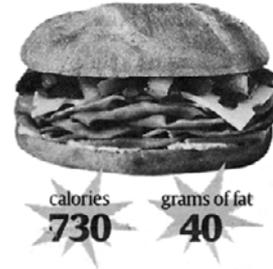
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Arby's Philly Beef Supreme Sandwich

Yes, I know Arby's wins the most praise for its neo-classic Market Fresh Sandwiches. The bread on the Ultimate BLT (\$4.19; 820 calories, 49 grams of fat) is terrific. But ultimately, I was seduced by this limited-time-only offering, because it contained a huge heap of the strange, salty, shaved brown/gray roast beef that is the chain's hallmark. Ignoring all gourmet precepts and nutritional common sense, I can't get enough of the stuff, especially when it's slathered with Horsey Sauce. Here, the casing is a soft, buttery hoagie bun that combines with the gooey processed cheese to keep the meat and generous toppings snugly in place. It's so bad it's good – my ultimate fast-food tribute.

In the mix

Baguette, mayonnaise, roasted red and green bell peppers and onions, Swiss-style cheese and shaved roast beef. \$5.99



Taco Bell Southwestern Steak Bowl

Despite the festive presentation and promise of complex flavors, the bulky beans and rice, excess cheese and unripe tomatoes suck the vitality from this dish. The Fire Packet adds some vibrato but also ramps up the heartburn potential. Instead of being the centerpiece, the tender but meagerly portioned steak bits are little brown after-thoughts. (Of course, subliminally, I might have been acting out my annoyance at that yappy Chihuahua in the ads.)

In the mix

Refried beans, green onions, rice, grilled beef, tomato and yellow and white cheeses, topped with a packet of creamy jalapeño sauce. \$3.49



Jack in the Box Turkey Jack Sandwich

I'm not sure what's going on here. Most of Jack's burgers and chicken sandwiches have fewer calories than this one, and it's hard to imagine they have less flavor than this one, so what's the attraction? You do save a little on fat content because of the turkey, but this is one tepid tom. Most of the flavor comes from the red onion, pickle and cheese, and that's just wrong. I gave up halfway through and tried the new Ultimate Asian Chicken Salad (\$4.99; 610 calories, 35.5 grams of fat with dressing). It's essentially a decent knock-off of the Wendy's version, only with carrot shards, red onions and grill marks on the chicken. Attractive flavors, though not a great value.

In the mix

Turkey patty, cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, red onion, pickles, ketchup and mayo-onion sauce on a toasted sesame bun. \$3.39



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- ^{1p} **39** Welk van de hier besproken producten vond de schrijver het lekkerst? Noteer de naam van dit product.