

Vegan restaurant in Manhattan tries its luck with rather odd name: Dirt Candy

It's not the only one with, um, unique moniker: There's Noodle Pudding, Metro Cafe, Jackson Diner and Flex Mussels

BY SHEILA MCCLEAR, JUSTIN ROCKET SILVERMAN / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS / Friday, January 3, 2014, 2:00 AM



SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
Amanda Cohen, chef/owner of Dirt Candy, with cauliflower with waffles, horseradish and wild arugula salad

Is there a restaurant anywhere with a worse name than Dirt Candy?

Evoking filth or muck, the E. Ninth St. vegan eatery says its moniker is a tribute to what great veggies really are: treats from the dirt.

"We were dead-set on not having a one-word name," says Amanda Cohen, the chef and owner. So she and her husband chatted about "what vegetables meant to me" before coming up with the eureka moment: "They really are like candy from the dirt."

Cool origin story, but the restaurant has no doubt lost a bushel of business because of its name. "It's a strange name for a restaurant and doesn't sound appealing at all," says Roja Shirzad, 32, Manhattan. "I wouldn't put anything in my mouth that is called 'dirt.'"

Fellow Manhattanite Hester Abrams didn't have a problem with the name, per se. "I just don't care for dirt," she says.

Restaurant consultants were divided on whether Dirt Candy was a disastrous name or merely a bad one. But they do agree that naming is a key part of a restaurant's branding.

"It's just as important as any of the other design elements, because it holds out what you're trying to be," says Andre Neyrey, CEO of Manhattan Restaurant Consultants. "You're really distilling your concept down to a word or two."

Even some of the best restaurants in town botch the big decision — causing countless diners to skip what might have been a great meal. Here are the worst-named great restaurants in town:

"Since the concept of the restaurant was doing over 20 different varieties of mussels, the play on words was just something that developed," says Shapiro. "We're flexible."

METRO CAFE
4924 Eighth Ave., Brooklyn

You might think Metro Cafe is a place to get coffee, but this blandly named restaurant in Sunset Park serves "incendiary" Szechuan food, News reviewer Michael Kammerer wrote.

Owners Ella and Kang Chan said the generic name was inspired by cities such as her hometown of Hong Kong and her new home of New York. "I just liked the name," she says. "I'm from Hong Kong, which is really a metro city."

Chan isn't worried about the name. "People know already," she says of their cuisine. "Because of Yelp, and our Facebook."

Besides, in Chinatown, no-name names such as "Triple 8 Palace" and "Prosperity Dumpling" are more the norm than the exception.

**NOODLE
PUDDING**
38 Henry St., Brooklyn

Who would name a classy Northern Italian restaurant after a peasant dish your Jewish bubbe serves on Passover?

"I probably said 'No' 20 times before I finally let him bring me here," says Julie, who was dining the other night with her boyfriend and declined to give her full name. "Now I feel like an idiot because the food is so good."

JACKSON DINER
37-47 74th St., Queens

An Indian restaurant with a Greek diner name? Only in New York.

The highly respected Indian joint took over from the original Greek greasy spoon in 1983 — and first served a 50-50 mix of Indian and Greek food.

Eventually, the food became exclusively Indian — but the name stuck.

Chef and co-owner Gian Saini, who is Indian, says there's no confusion about what type of food the restaurant serves, despite the generic name.

"Everybody knows," he says. "Americans, Indians, everybody knows!"

Everybody? Well, Neyrey, the restaurant consultant, didn't.