

[A Million-Dollar Vegan Vision](#)

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HEALTH/SOCIETY

A Million-Dollar Vegan Vision

A retired Silicon Valley entrepreneur puts a fortune on the line to bring a master chef's passionate cuisine to mainstream USA

Mark Hawthorne, California

Chapter one of a new vegan cookbook begins, "Aloha and welcome to a transformation journey into new realms of culinary creation. Vegan World Fusion Cuisine is a peaceful and loving approach to food preparation that unites cooking traditions from around the world. Through conscious and wise food choices we can heal our bodies and restore balance to our planet. By honoring the cuisine, art music and spiritual traditions of the world's cultures we cultivate understanding and peace." Spawned from the small Blossoming Lotus restaurant on Kauai, Hawaii, it is a fresh incarnation for ahimsa, the seed of a new enterprise initiative to spread the vegan message to the world.

It may sound like a New Age pipe dream, but it's not. Angel investor Bo Rinaldi is a serious business force. Once a renowned talent agent in Silicon Valley, he negotiated contracts for over a thousand software engineers who helped develop products for Apple, Adobe, ETrade, NetFlix and more. Previously, as a VP of Marketing, he helped ComputerLand grow from 30 to over 500 stores. Before computers, in the sixties, Bo was a young herbalist in Southern California. His products from those days are still on the market.

In 1999 he sold the software agency and immersed himself in yoga and sadhana for six years, striving to get back to his roots. He says an inner message drew him to Kauai, and when he had the "Radical Mystery Meal " at the Blossoming Lotus Cafe, it struck a chord. Bo recognized a unique spirit behind the restaurant's vegan team.

Within a week, Rinaldi, a committed vegan, became the restaurant's main investor. As of 2006, he has put in over a million dollars into a new, full-blown Blossoming Lotus Restaurant (often called simply "Lotus"), the www.VeganFusion.com website and the delightful Vegan World Fusion Cuisine cookbook.

Behind the creative, vegan fusion cuisine is Mark Reinfeld, a master executive vegan chef from New York who came to Kauai for spiritual retreat in 2002. He decided to help Gabriel Zingaro transform a small Internet Cafe called The Portal into an all-vegan business. Two days after the new cafe opened, Bo Rinaldi and his wife, Starr, walked in and recognized the potential of Reinfeld's and Zingaro's vision. Everyone's lives changed in a big way. It was time to take the message to the world.

Rinaldi, Reinfeld, Zingaro and the others of the 12-member Blossoming Lotus LLC are passionate about their seva. They even called upon the monks from Kauai's Hindu Monastery, home of Hinduism Today, to bless the restaurant's opening in 2004. "I characterize our work at the Blossoming Lotus as a spiritually transformative process," says Rinaldi. "The business is characterized as the best of everything we can possibly find from the vegan world. People come in because they understand that food is transformational, that it's healing. We try to lay down the most unbelievable meals on the planet." They do this with considerable care, making everything by hand, right down to the condiments. "Our chai as well as our bread are handcrafted here at our restaurants," he says. "It's an evolving process, and it's working."

Lotus was recently named the number-one vegetarian restaurant in Hawaii and is the state's first Certified Green Restaurant. Their award-winning cookbook is getting rave reviews. In addition to the Hawaii restaurant, they have opened a Blossoming Lotus Cafe in the Yoga in the Pearl studio in Portland, Oregon, and are planning a robust franchise program.

Chef Mark Reinfeld has created hundreds of tried and tested recipes. He says the Lotus is special because of "the acknowledgement that all food is sacred, giving thanks for preparing, serving and enjoying the abundance of the Earth. World fusion cuisine unites the culinary traditions from around the world to emphasize our unity. We hold an intention for healing and love, and this vibration enters into the food. Sensitive people notice this without a doubt. The names of the recipes are selected to further impart this healing vibration, so simply mentioning the names of the

recipes brings a blessing: Mahadev's mango chutney, Bliss of Krishna tropical rice pudding, Shiva Shakti Himalayan stuffed bread."

Of course, it also helps to have the finest ingredients. In acquiring these, the Lotus supports more than a dozen local organic farmers, orders whole grains from natural-food manufacturers and buys fruits and vegetables from the farmer's markets. Being 100 percent vegan, the restaurant serves nothing that comes from an animal or insect (such as honey). You will have to leave your goat cheese at the door, but you will be delighted with the Lotus' amazing "Live Almond Milk Cheeze."

Award Winning Cookbook: The commitment to sharing the ideals of nonviolence with those who may not be able to visit Hawaii led Reinfeld and Rinaldi to collaborate on the absolutely gorgeous and must-have-in-your-kitchen Vegan World Fusion Cuisine cookbook. It is a celebration of sustainable living intended to nourish the soul as well as the body. With its delicious recipes, luscious photographs and words of wisdom, this book looks as natural on the coffee table as it does in the kitchen. All the recipes from the book were created at the Blossoming Lotus. Like the restaurant, they reflect the culinary styles of a many nations, including India, Mexico, Thailand, France, Italy and Greece-- "Hindi's Bindi Masala, " "Domo Arigato Heavenly Arame Salad, " "Mother Africa's Spicy Kale and Yam "--what executive chef Reinfeld calls "world fusion cuisine."

"The book's message is very clear, " says Rinaldi. "The way to get off of our pharmaceuticals, to get off of factory farming, to get off of our highly processed food system--to really reclaim our lives--is go to your farmer's market and make a few recipes out of the book. We'll do anything to help you understand that this is one of the most effective ways to bring peace to life. It's easy, it's fun, it's inexpensive, and most of all, it's rewarding on every level. That's what it's about for us."

The Founders: After graduating from college and going to law school in New York, Reinfeld traveled the world on a spiritual odyssey. From Europe in 1989 he went to Israel and India. "It was during that journey that my focus started shifting inward. On the Kibbutz one day I was asked to collect chickens for slaughter. I started helping out and suddenly realized I wanted no part of it. That's when there was a real change in my diet. It was the beginning of a period of deep self-reflection." Traveling through India and Nepal "opened up another part of my being, " he says. After such experiences, studying law just didn't hold the same interest. Soon after

returning to New York, Reinfeld started a vegan consulting service called the Blossoming Lotus. A string of successful commissions followed, including creating a menu for the luxury spa at the Peninsula Hotel in Manhattan and a vegan manual for the Credit Suisse First Boston, one of the world's largest financial institutions. But his spiritual quest led him to discard life in the Big Apple, give up most of his possessions and travel to California. He eventually settled on Kauai and gave Blossoming Lotus new wings, feeding people as karma yoga.

Bo Rinaldi was born in 1948, the year of Gandhi's mahasamadhi. "I read my first Gandhi biography at 12, " he says. "I saw and felt to my core the meaning of nonviolence, and how challenging it is to manifest in our culture. I began to see the need to speak out, which I did at school, the YMCA--anywhere people would listen. I still find myself drawing upon ancient Hindu wisdom as a beacon of sanity. I became an herbalist and developed health food products before going into the computer world."

After major financial success, Bo retired from software development in 1999. "When I was able to decompress, I turned within a lot more, " he says. "I married, and my wife had some health challenges. We found that when we adopted a vegan lifestyle, those health challenges were minimized. I had lost track of what was going on in the natural foods world, because I had been in technology for 15 years, but I found that there was now much more science to support the vegan lifestyle. As I applied this to help my wife's healing, I once again realized we're really onto something here. If we could greatly reduce our use of animal products, we could actually solve the world's hunger problem and bring true peace to the planet. And things started to click."

The vegan fusion initiative is an innovative model for modern karma yoga, showing us how people can put their fortunes and their lives to work for a higher cause.

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