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HAPPY MEALS

Fall is my favourite season. I find it more stimulating than spring. I think it smells better. Because it's cooler out, you don't get so much rank city smell, and that allows the wafting aromas of cooking food—from restaurants and neighbourhood homes—to make a statement. Walking around downtown can be a sensual tour of the world. Fall makes me very hungry.

But this fall, I'm a little wary. More and more, there are reasons to offer thought to our food choices, for health, ecological and societal reasons. If China's melamine debacle and the Maple Leaf recall have taught us anything, it's that the uncertainty around food safety is very real. And when we fall victim to these kinds of things, the sense of powerlessness is overwhelming.

Food is becoming a political issue, as Michael Pollan wrote in October's *New York Times* food issue. Food production depends on oil production, for instance, which makes rising oil prices a serious threat to the ability of lower income earners to access quality products. At its most simplistic, this logic helps explain America's obesity problem: the only food the poor can afford is crap, and getting crappier. For now, food remains off the political agenda, likely because it's a literal hot potato. But that will change, as organizations like The Stop and SeaChoice continue to lobby for the visibility of these issues. Read about them here.

Food isn't all doom and gloom, even with so many books telling "the real story" about what we eat. I think this is good, but let's not forget that joys of eating, the social aspect, the great tastes, the surprises, and the cool people who make it all happen. The holidays are coming, so let's eat, drink and be merry—with a social conscience.

Dick Snyder, Editor
dick@citybites.ca



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THE STARTERS



Proprietor Jen Agg and chef Grant Van Gameren: meat on the menu.

The place for charcuterie

A HIP EURO-STYLE WINE BAR HITS DUNDAS WEST

Here's the general idea: A place that doesn't feel pretentious, has great tunes, and no poseurs; walks the line between upscale and low-key, masculine and feminine, but most important between food and drink. The Black Hoof, just opened on Dundas west of Bathurst, brings it in spades. That'd be because the proprietor, Jen Agg, honed her refined sense of perfection at College Street's beloved Cobalt bar, one of the very few places in Toronto where the cocktails didn't suck.

At the Hoof, the charcuterie plates are beautiful and delicious, but you can have a draught beer to go along and no one will say boo. Nightly wine flights are culled from a rotating list selected for value and esoterics. You can still get one of Miss Agg's legendary cocktails (classics like manhattans and sours, of course, and a nightly special Brown (whiskey based) and White (gin or vodka)). The hot menu includes items like cabbage soup with bone marrow and foie gras on brioche.

Chef Grant Van Gameren, ex sous/charcutier at Lucien, turns out horse bresaola, salumis of beef and dill, smoked venison with cherry, and wild boar with fennel, along with a variety of terrines and rillettes. For the vegetarians, there's a delightful beet salad and an embarrassment of preserves. The Jamon Iberico de Bellota—from the pata negra, or black-hoofed pig—can be had for a song (\$30 for small plate/\$60 for large). Charcuterie goes for \$13/\$23, and cheese plates for \$14/\$24. A draught is \$5.50, wines between \$5 and \$12 a glass, and cocktails \$8 and/or \$10. Open late, with food all night.

Takeaway: Go for the meat, the crazy good prices, and stay for the Eames bar stools—the most comfortable in town.

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CRUMBS

QUICK HITS

El Bulli chef Ferran Adria was in town a couple weeks back. Where did the godfather of modern gastro-technics choose to eat? Jamie Kennedy Wine Bar, natch Sad news: Lady & Son butcher closed last month, just after celebrating its first year anniversary *City Bites* contributor and sommelier Lindsay Groves is organizing local women in wine to participate in a calendar to raise money for Grapes for Humanity, Tony Aspler's very worthy charity; the calendars will be available in November Correction: we incorrectly spelled mourning dove in the last issue; apologies to all the birders who wrote in Karen Viva-Haynes closed her College Street shop last month, but continues to cater (see p. 11); she's also starting up a weekly Chef's Table Dinner Party at her Henry Street catering facility. To get on the e-vite list, contact her at Karen@vivatastings.com.

EVENTS

Fawltz Towers Dinner Event (Oct. 31)
Five courses of themed dishes based on the cult classic TV show, complete with wine pairings and celebrity impersonators of the famed innkeepers. (\$140, The Millcroft Inn & Spa, millcroft.com)

Consider the Oyster (Nov. 2) Dig in to an afternoon of oyster lore and sampling with hosts (and Starfish proprietors) Alison and Patrick McMurray. (\$75, 100 Adelaide St. E., rom.on.ca/programs/lectures)

What's on the Table (Nov. 5) Chefs from some of the city's most revered kitchens dish out local cuisine in support of The Stop Community Food Centre. (\$225, Palais Royale, thestop.org)

The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair (Nov. 7-16) Ontario farmers come to town to decide who has the province's top livestock and crops. (\$18, Exhibition Place, royalfair.org)

The Gourmet Food and Wine Expo (Nov. 20-23) Sample some of the finest wines, spirits, and craft brews from around the world, matched with food from Toronto's top chefs and restos. (\$15, Metro Toronto Convention Centre, foodandwineexpo.ca)

The Wine Tasting Challenge (Nov. 24) Industry tasters and public connoisseurs go head-to-head for the world's largest prize purse in a wine tasting competition. (Free, Four Seasons Hotel, winetastingchallenge.com)

By Jamie Drummond

Confessions of a Sommelier #180

Assemblage [ah-sahm-BLAHJ]

The French term for “assembling,” referring to the ancient art of blending.

Many, many moons ago, I was working as sommelier for one of Scotland's top dining establishments. Twelve months earlier I had been introduced by a Mr. Martin Callis, one of our regulars, to the fascinating Bonny Doon bottlings of the great Randall Grahm. In particular I was drawn to Grahm's Cigare Volant (or “flying cigar”, with reference to an obscure French law forbidding UFOs from landing in the vineyards of Châteauneuf-du-Pape). Grahm's Cigare Volant was a heady mix of Californian Syrah, Mouvèdre and Grenache, and it was unlike anything my developing palate had ever experienced.

One evening, a table of four English “big shots” entered the restaurant and asked to see a sommelier. One of these gentleman asked if I would recommend a Californian wine, “something a little different,” and so I immediately began to wax lyrically of the virtues of Cigare Volant. I asked the restaurant's other sommelier, Richard, to grab me a bottle from the cellar. Looking back, I recollect Richard looking at me rather strangely. But I soldiered on, saying a hearty good evening to Mr. Callis, who had just walked through the door and was being seated beside the Bonny Doon table.

Richard had been in the cellar for quite some time but he eventually appeared, dutifully opened the bottle, and poured a little

tasting for the host before retiring behind the bar in a suspiciously sheepish fashion. The host sniffed and slurped at the glass, turning up his nose a little. “This certainly does not show in the manner I was expecting....” I nervously explained that there tended to be quite an interesting vintage variation with this particular bottling. Mr. Callis had been listening in and politely interrupted, proudly stating that he had visited the Bonny Doon tasting room just



Sommelier Jamie Drummond.

“This certainly does not show in the manner I was expecting....”

two weeks before, and that the Cigare Volant was one of his favourite wines. The chaps passed the pouring over to Mr. Callis and invited his informed opinion. He swirled and nosed the glass with much exaggerated deliberation before declaring it even better than the wine he had tasted “alongside Randall.” A rousing cheer went up.

Returning to the bar area I spied the cellar door slightly ajar, with a small puddle of red wine creeping out. I peeked inside to find Richard on his knees, hurriedly mopping the floor with napkins, looking extremely guilty. Three open bottles of red wine and a plastic funnel were scattered about. “What the...?” I asked.

It transpired that during our busy period we had sold out of the Cigare Volant and Richard had concocted his own approximation. He showed me how he had carefully taken 60% Clare Valley Shiraz, 20% Catalonian Garnacha and 20% South-western French Mouvèdre, mixed them in an empty Cigare Volant bottle, then re-corked it. I was shocked at his unacceptable actions but rather intrigued at the bugger's ingenuity. Looking back at the table of gentlemen heartily enjoying Richard's proprietorial blend, I decided to hold my tongue...

Around half an hour later I was restocking the wine cellar for the next day's lunchtime shift when Richard poked his head around the door. He looked white as a sheet.

“Shite... Jamie... They want another bottle...” **CB**

Sommelier Jamie Drummond oversees the wine program for Jamie Kennedy's various establishments. Names in this story have been changed to protect the guilty parties.

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Thrills at No Frills

By Maia Filar

Just the other day my father and I were discussing the makings of a good grocery store. His trigger is the hard-to-find Sazon Goya, a Latin-style spice mix that is our secret ingredient for the perfect paella. And, low-and-behold, there it was, the first thing to catch my eye as I turned down aisle three at the Dufferin Mall's No Frills outlet.

This No Frills is great because it is like one giant international section. For starters, there is Tajin (\$2.99), a lime and chili shake from Mexico that tastes perfect on some fresh jicama and tons of limejuice. India "presents the world's first sweet and salty cookie to the world" with Krack Jack (\$1.99/package), and even more enticing are the Chinese Ovaltine cookies, a malted-barley delight. Pocky, Koala cookies, and Yam Yam's are some of the more recognizable Pan-Asian pleasures, while Cajeta, a spreadable dulce du leche treat my aunt used to bring back from her native Mexico, is \$5.99 for a ketchup-size bottle.

Aisle three goodies aside, No Frills is far from highbrow. Low-priced produce means the stuff doesn't languish on the shelves, so it's about as fresh as can be. You'll find choice exotic fruits, fresh herbs, and a good assortment of fresh hot peppers (it's the small stuff that counts). Their stellar bread selection includes German ryes, Swiss flatbreads, and crusty Portuguese selections. Surprisingly good cheeses and vegetarian options set the store apart from the discount competition.

I just love that I pay \$3.49 for my cereal compared to \$5.99 at my local Dominion, and I can pick up a simple flour mix to make my own Churros. No Frills lets you treat yourself without breaking the bank, making this place lunchbox heaven for hockey moms and Joe six packs everywhere.

No Frills Dufferin Mall,
416-532-1152, dufferinmall.ca.
Read more of Maia's food musings at
petrozilia.blogspot.com.

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Bunny always had a can at the Reddi

By Trish Kaliciak

I love a man named Bunny. All his friends call him that. And he had a LOT of friends—but more on that later.

Earlier this evening I indulged in my third pecan tart inside of an hour. It wasn't just that it was extremely tasty, but what was on top sent me back again and again: whipped cream.

Whipped cream with a hint of brandy, actually. Delicious.

As loyal *City Bites* readers know, I am a fan of the fall dinner party season, which is also a heavy-use time for whipped cream. My next few months are flooded with friends and family birthdays—plus, of course, the really big one in December. And this time around, they are all going to get the gift of brandy whipped cream.

I learned from a friend (and gifted baker) that two tablespoons of a warm, fragrant liquor like brandy can transform whipped cream into—if you can believe it—an even more spectacular experience than its already pretty-damn-good iteration.

Which brings me to my man Bunny. In 1946 Aaron “Bunny” Lapin invented pressurized whipped cream, and named it Reddi-whip. It made him a millionaire pretty quick. He bought Cadillacs “two at a time,” along with Gloria Swanson’s Hollywood mansion. What a guy!

Bunny made the impossible possible! Whipped cream whenever we want it—wherever we want it. (Yes, I mean right there in aisle four.)

Imagine being at a party Bunny hosted at his Hollywood house: There’d be cans and cans of Reddi-wip for all the guests to indulge in. The host would be wearing a holster with cans at the “reddi.” Imagine a key party... drop ‘em in a big bowl of Reddi-wip and get ready to have a good time!

Bunny passed away in 1999. I sure wished I’d had a chance to thank him.




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By Ivy Knight

Embracing the “V” word

VEGAN COOKBOOK PUTS FLAVOUR AHEAD OF DOGMA

Jae Steele wants you to eat more vegetables. Her new book, *Get It Ripe: A Fresh Take on Vegan Eating and Living*, is a primer on achieving a healthy diet free of animal products. Now, why should all you Époisse-addicted carnivores care?

“Anyone can, and should love food that just happens to be vegan, as long as it’s prepared right,” writes the Toronto-based holistic nutritionist in the book’s intro. “Vegan or not, we could all use the nutritional benefits of eating more vegetables.” After you buy a bushel of apples and a bouquet of rainbow chard, what do you do with them? Steele’s book can help. Not only will it give you the lowdown on the nutritional content of your crisper, it will also give you recipes to ensure said crisper is always in need of re-stocking.

This twentysomething dynamo has been self-publishing for years, with more than 17 zines on vegan cooking and baking under her belt. *Get It Ripe* contains the collected

wisdom of those cookzines and her three-year old food blog domesticaffair.ca.

Steele is one vegan with a palate you can trust. Need proof? With delicious recipes for Butternut Risotto, Blueberry Breakfast Polenta or Adzuki-Squash Soup with Chipotle, she’s left the tofu off the menu.

The book is a must-read for all those 13- to 17-year olds who’ve gone vegan to stay at size zero. Steele’s non-harpy approach makes this tome easier to swallow than the typical “meat is murder” approach.

Steele isn’t all broccoli and brussels sprouts, she also has quite the sweet tooth. Her New Classic Chocolate Cake was inspired by an elementary school volcano project. “You’d be hard-pressed to find a two-layer chocolate cake as simple and satisfying as this one. Adding vinegar to the batter creates a noticeable baking soda reaction, which gives the cake its lightness. No eggs required.”

Vegan newbies will find advice on



Vegan recipe goddess Jae Steele.

maintaining a balanced diet along with useful tips on stocking the pantry. Solid information on preparing grains and legumes features an easy to follow chart that lists soaking and cooking times.

In a world where TV viewers get their dinner ideas from a broad who shills for Dunkin’ Donuts, maybe it’s time for a little more rabbit food. **CB**

PHOTO: MICHELLE CLARKE

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Save the sea

WITH HER NEW BOOK, **JILL LAMBERT** AIMS TO SPREAD THE GOOD WORD ON SUSTAINABILITY—AND TASTY RECIPES

The first time I saw a SeaChoice card, I was horrified. (If you don't know what I'm talking about, visit seachoice.org and download a seafood guide. Or pop into a smart restaurant where you might find one on a table.)

By scanning the list of fish in the "Avoid" column, I could see that some of my favourite fish was very bad for the environment. I had no idea there were problems with red snapper, which I ate often. Clearly I would have to make some changes. On the list of "Best Choices" I noticed some unfamiliar names. Tilapia? I wasn't sure how to cook that. I decided to learn to cook the good fish options and swear off the bad ones.

To help me figure out this challenge, I did some research. I contacted chefs all across Canada and asked for their favourite fish recipes. I called the David Suzuki Foundation, which is part of SeaChoice, and asked them for help. I realized that the marriage of good recipes and sustainability information might be a good match. And so my book, *A Good Catch* (\$24.95, Douglas & McIntyre), was born.

I learned that finding out exactly what kind of fish I was buying, where it was



caught, and how it was caught, was the key. Sometimes this was a matter of reading labels or asking questions. Sometimes it was

impossible. I just did what I could to make the best decisions. And I ate some great fish as a result.

The book has more than 70 recipes that highlight sustainable freshwater and saltwater fish and shellfish. There's also www.agoodcatch.org, where you can keep up to date on sustainable fish and see pictures of the finished dishes.

For me, it all started with the card. Get one. **CB**



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TWO HANDS WINES
44 QUALITY WITHOUT COMPROMISE 44

Good karma, Good eats

By Ainsley Tyreman

THE STOP'S ANNUAL FUNDRAISER BRINGS OUT THE TOP CHEFS

What began as Canada's first food bank more than 30 years ago has developed into the charity of choice for Toronto's top chefs, the crème of whom are gathering next month for the fourth annual fundraiser aptly named "What's on the Table." The Palais Royale plays host to this hot ticket, where \$225 buys not only good karma, but the opportunity to enjoy spectacular food prepared—and dished out—by the city's top chefs, like Keith Froggett, Jamie Kennedy and Mark Kutrra.

The event provides a critical infusion into the annual budget for the Stop Community Food Centre, which strives to increase access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds community and challenges inequality.

"We are much more than a food bank—we are this idea of a community food centre," says executive director Nick Saul.

From its roots in the 1970s in Kensington Market, The Stop has expanded its reach into the Davenport West neighbourhood it now calls home. As an advocate for social justice, The Stop has created a support system for not only people affected by low incomes, but also individuals who are eager to be educated on local and organic eating, how to properly nourish the body, and how to bring a community together.

The success of The Stop does not just stem from its hundred-some volunteers, but from the 16,000 people that use the centre each year. "We have been working on developing a range of more participatory

and less stigmatizing programming around the food banks," says Saul. "One of our core messages is that everyone deserves access to healthy food—the best food possible." In addition to the food bank, The Stop offers a drop-in for breakfast four times a week and lunch twice a week, kitchens for communal cooking and educating, a gardening program and a prenatal support group called Healthy Beginnings. "What we have been very successful at doing is building a bunch of very different kinds of programs, all based on food, around the food bank."

The Stop's new baby, set to debut in November, is the eight-years-in-the-making Green Barn, a 10,000 square foot renovated streetcar warehouse at Bloor and Christie. It will host a temperate greenhouse, commercial kitchen, outdoor bake oven, sheltered gardens and classrooms. The Green Barn is designed to increase food literacy and to educate the community on local and seasonal eating. Or, as Saul puts it: "Reconnect adults and kids to food." **CB**

See p. 3 for more information on What's on the Table.

SAVOUR THE SEASON at Toronto's Historic Sites






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Gingerbread House Workshop
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Sundays, December 7 or 23, 1:30 or 3 p.m., 416-394-8113

Cast Iron Chef: Regency and Victorian Christmas Treats
Todmorden Mills, Saturday, December 6, 1 to 4 p.m., 416-396-2819

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UPCOMING EVENTS

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THE FINE WINE RESERVE

A City Bites venue of choice, the Fine Wine Reserve is located near King and Spadina in a non-descript building with no signage. Why the subterfuge? Because there's an awful lot of expensive wine in there! This is a members-only place, with a fully stocked tasting room and catering available from nearby Crush. Rates are remarkably reasonable. finewinereserve.com

DRAKE HOTEL

Love it or hate it, you gotta admit they do right by the food. And a more styling venue downtown is hard to find. Chef Anthony Rose is committed to quality, locally sourced ingredients—some from the Drake's own garden. A raw bar and some of the best pastries in town kick it up a notch. Capacity for several hundred with combined outdoor patio, Sky Yard, lounge and dining room. Best of all, you can crash out in one of the hotel rooms at night's end. 1150 Queen St. W., 416-531-5042, thedrakehotel.ca



BERKELEY CHURCH

CAMERA

Perfect for dinner and a movie, Camera has a 50-seat screening room and a bar/lounge with 70-person capacity. There's even a lovely fireplace with space for two to curl up in, and a long communal table overlooking Queen West. Guests can arrange their own catering, or work from their preferred list. Rates start at \$700 for four hours in the evening, including use of the bar and two staff; or combine with the adjacent Bulger Gallery for extra space for \$1000/four hours and three staff. 1028 Queen St. W., 416-530-0011, camerabar.ca

THE BERKELEY CHURCH

A secret gem is about to get raging hot, now that uber-chef Nathan Isberg of Coco and Czechoski is running the house catering. Add super sommelier Kim Cyr, of George, Kultura and Nyood fame, and you've got perhaps the best gourmet team to ever lend their talents to a venue. And what a venue: dating from 1871, and carefully preserved, features include 17-foot stained glass windows, Victorian bar, fireplaces and a "grand arch wall." Chef Isberg's focus is northern Italian, with his signature seasonal focus. But his real skill is in working with clients to design the perfect, non-conventional food experience. Expect to be dazzled. 315 Queen St. E., 416-361-9666, berkeleyevents.com



CAMERA

FRANK AT THE AGO

The name makes a lot of sense, what with Mr. Gehry being involved and all. The name also references a work by Frank Stella, which will be on display. The new restaurant opens Nov. 14, with a menu designed by executive chef Anne Yarymowich and chef de cuisine Martha Wright. The food will feature "natural ingredients in eco-friendly packages." Chic, casual, minimal—expect modern Danish chairs, Gehry-designed acrylic tables and cork flooring. Accessible from Dundas Street, the restaurant will be open beyond gallery hours. Frank has room for 130 guests, while the Baillie Court event centre can accommodate 450. 317 Dundas St. W., 416-979-6660, ago.net

LIBERTY GROUP

The Grand Poobah of event spaces in Toronto (or one of them anyway), Liberty encompasses the Liberty Grand Entertainment Complex on the Exhibition Grounds, the Rosewater Supper Club and the Rosewater Room located upstairs, and the new-ish Spice Route on King West. They also handle Casa Loma and the Tattoo Rock Parlour. Capacity ranges from 10 to 4000 guests. Best for food: the Rosewater is always a great bet, with a serious wine cellar to boot. The Spice Route has solid and inventive Asian cuisine in a showy atmosphere. libertygroup.com

be Merry

Give the gift of gourmet

The gift of food may be the best gift of all. Especially if it's to yourself, and especially in the hectic entertaining season. The beauty of caterers and food prep experts is that they take the pressure off, so you can concentrate on your signature dish, or just spend the whole time with your guests. Here are some great options.

GREAT COOKS is not so much a caterer as a caterer's friend. You being the caterer. Enroll in one of their classes, helmed by a pro chef from one of Toronto's top restaurants, and you'll have a new skill to unleash on your friends and relatives. (See recipe below for a taste.) *401 Bay St., Simpson Tower, 8th Floor, 416-861-4333, greatcooks.ca*; plus one other location.

VIVA TASTINGS is the much beloved catering business run by Karen Viva-Haynes. She'll cater any sized event, or take orders for delivery to her St. Lawrence Market location on Saturdays. Try the "intense" soups; just \$6 for 16 ounces. Karen specializes in custom work; she'll design a menu around any occasion and any taste. *416-506-0054, karen@vivatastings.com*.

WANDA'S PIE IN THE SKY is the perfect grab-and-go solution for the busy holiday entertainer. Seasonal offerings include pies of all sizes, in flavours of apple "mincemeatless," pear cranberry, marzipan raspberry and spiced walnut, among others. *287 Augusta Ave., 416-236-7585, wandaspieinthesky.com*.

THE BUTCHERS can get you the best bird around. Delivered to your home, \$125 gets you a roasted 12-lb. organic turkey with roast potatoes, mashed sweet potatoes, steamed broccoli and carrots, stuffing and gravy. They also have the highly coveted bronze turkeys and smoked bone-in hams. *2626 Yonge St., 416-483-5777, thebutchersorganic.com*, plus a new Thornhill location.

MARK MOFFATT is the guy you call when you need a sommelier to crank it up a notch. He's the restaurant manager Chez Victor, and has just launched Dine N' Vines to provide food and beverage services to everything from corporate events to in-home affairs. He'll work with your menu, source wines from your own cellar or beyond, conduct a tutored tasting, and even bring along a name-brand chef, if you like. *dinenvines.com*

STUFFED DATES



with Stilton and Pistachio Nuts Wrapped in Prosciutto

1 cup of Stilton cheese, room temperature
1 cup of cream cheese, room temperature
1 cup of soft goat cheese, room temperature
1 cup of pistachios, shelled, toasted and rough chopped
48 dates, pitted (don't buy pre-pitted)
48 pieces of prosciutto, thinly sliced

Preheat oven to 350°F. Pit all the dates. In a mixer using the paddle attachment, blend the all the cheeses together until it becomes a smooth texture. Add in the nuts.

Using a teaspoon, fill the centre of each date with a heaping amount of the cheese mixture. Wrap with a slice of the Prosciutto and place on parchment lined pan.

Heat in oven for 10 minutes or until cooked through.
Makes 48 dates.

Private Affairs

GET THE FULL MONTY IN THE "SPECIAL" ROOM AT THESE RESTAURANTS

Private rooms are just that—private, very chi-chi, exclusive, and often appointed with extra touches and flourishes. But the best part: there's usually no premium charged to access these tables. You just have to ask. Perfect for seasonal festivities, birthday parties, and celebrity roasts—or a friendly game of poker after the meal. Here are some of our favourites.

BARBERIAN'S STEAK HOUSE

Private room, located in the newly renovated lower-level wine cellar, affords a fantastic view of the stock. One of Toronto's best steakhouses, and certainly its top wine cellar (for selection and value). Seats 12. *7 Elm St., 416-597-0335, barbarians.com*

COLBORNE LANE

Claudio Aprile's gastronomic pleasure house offers two private experiences. The Kitchen Table has a massive picture window overlooking the kitchen and seats six (\$150/person, food only). In the Park Lane Room, with its custom mother of pearl boardroom-style table, Chef will tailor any menu whims your group may have; or go with his menu at \$55/person food-only at lunch; \$100 at dinner. Room for 14 guests. (You can also book the whole place; check website for info). *45 Cokborne St., 416-368-9009, Colbornelane.com*

FAT CAT BISTRO

Less a private table and more of a table next to the kitchen, you'll want Table 13, flanked by a golden Elvis bust and a giant mortar and pestle. *376 Eglinton Ave. W., 416-484-4228, fatcat.ca*

TREVOR KITCHEN AND BAR

Trevor Wilkinson will prepare a custom tasting menu, centred on seasonal and local ingredients, for parties of eight, served in a private alcove offering a clear view of the culinary team in action. A la carte is also an option. *38 Wellington St. E., 416-941-9410, trevorkitchenandbar.com*

THE DRAKE'S ROOM 222

Enjoy the culinary mastery of chef Anthony Rose and team in this intimate and funky room, which holds 14 seated and 22 on foot. Full audio/visual facilities, so you can pretend to do business, meantime the exclusive access to the Sky Yard is the real draw. *1150 Queen St. W., 416-531-5042, thedrakehotel.ca*

By Lindsay Groves

Food, music and the good life

FOR ROGER MOOKING, THE HITS KEEP COMING

If success is measured by popular acclaim, then by all accounts Roger Mooking should have peaked by now. How dare he keep on racking up accomplishments?

The man with the golden touch, Chef Mooking presides over Queen Street West's sizzling-hot restaurant-lounge Nyood, which has barely had an empty seat since opening nine months ago. Along with his partner Hanif Harji, he also runs King Street East's hip Kultura. What's more, the duo plans to open a third restaurant in the next year.

Mooking also produces and hosts a new series on the Food Network called *Everyday Exotic*, and just dropped his first official solo album, *Soul Food*. Wait there's more: he's got a wife, 16-month-old daughter and a brand new baby girl at home. So what drives him to keep on making things, and making things happen? "I want to create something that I will be proud to show my children when they grow up."

The third generation of his family to be in the food and beverage industry, Roger was born in Trinidad and later moved to Edmonton with his family. A pro chef since he was 14, he used his earnings to finance his music career and found success as a member of the popular R&B trio Bass is Base back in the 1990s. When the group disbanded, he went back to his roots and donned his whites. "It's in my blood," he says. He enrolled at George Brown, graduated in 2001 with top honours and went on to work at several Toronto restaurants including Barrio Lounge, Verveine and Epic. He now holds a position on the advisory committee for George Brown's culinary program.

His accessibly exotic cuisine has garnered much critical acclaim. "Just by osmosis you pick up so many things," he says, discussing an eclectic range of influences. His cosmopolitan style employs colourful ingredients from all corners of the globe. Mooking's "no-borders" approach to the reinterpretation and reinvention of food results in gorgeous combinations such as Nyood's lychee ceviche with prawn, cucumber, pickled chili and fennel milk. At Kultura, a menu highlight is a playful version of a classic like the orzo paella with tandoor shrimp, saffron, clams and chorizo sausage.

Each episode of his new show, *Everyday Exotic*, highlights an "obedient ingredient" ranging from papaya and lychee to nori and Chinese five-spice. His food is about accents, judiciously applied. "I think simplicity stands the test of time."

With the *Soul Food* CD, Mooking maintains his unifying approach to food, music and life. It comes packaged with a recipe book. The project was based on the principle that music and food are both forms of nourishment—"one feeds the body, the other the soul." It's a pretty tasty approach. **CB**



Mooking, the hardest working man in the chow business.

WIN A UMEUS CD SINGLE!



We're giving away 10 singles from Roger Mooking's new CD, *Umeus*. To enter, just email info@citybites.ca and put "Umeus" in the subject

line. Include your mailing address and phone number. We will draw winners on Nov. 15. Meantime, check out recipes, giveaways and have a listen to some tunes at rogermooking.com. And catch *Everyday Exotic* Thursdays at 12:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. and Sundays at 11a.m. and 7:30 p.m. on the Food Network.

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Espresso Ratings

Ratings refer strictly to the espresso as delivered à la minute. Out of five stars: ★ Poor. ★★ OK. ★★★ Good. ★★★★ This must be Italy. ★★★★★ Nirvana.



Crema Coffee is worth a trip to the Junction.

CREMA COFFEE

THE RATING ★★★★★

THE JOINT: Out in the Junction boonies, this pretty corner locale is plenty bright and clean, with high ceilings and absolutely no pretensions or kitsch. It's the essence of cool. **THE MUSIC:** Rilo Kiley (see, how cool is that?!) **THE BEANS:** Organic espresso blend from Vancouver's 49th Parallel Coffee Roasters. (On weekends, two choices are offered.) **THE PRICE:** \$2 flat. **THE ESPRESSO:** Outstanding. Heavy with coffee-ness aroma, thick crema (that creamy, foamy layer on top), beautifully balanced bittersweet flavour. **THE EXTRAS:** Expertise: Dude refused to charge me for the first pull, as he said the beans hadn't had time to breathe. (But it was a good coffee!) He made another: And it was even better. **THE VERDICT:** We're moving to the Junction!

3079 Dundas St. W., 416-767-3131,
cremacoffee.ca

Espresso heaven

By Dick Snyder

RATING FIVE OF THE CITY'S MOST LAUDED BEAN BARS

Toronto's espresso culture has been boiling hot for a couple years now. While the latte art scene is a hotbed of barista handiwork, it's the humble espresso that is the measure of quality, sincerity, and skill. Yes, skill. The making of a great espresso involves many variables—the blend, the grind, the machine—and all are subject to the whim of the hand. City Bites was recently invited to tour and judge five Toronto nominees for the Krups "Kup of Excellence" award, along with a few other journalists and a famous chef (ok, it was Chris McDonald of Cava). The ratings below are strictly ours, though the buzz from the other judges indicated general consensus. (Especially for the clear winner.)



Mercury brings the funk and the funky.

MERCURY ORGANIC ESPRESSO BAR

THE RATING ★★★

THE JOINT: Funky with street cred, and kind of grungy. Dark and shadowy. **THE MUSIC:** Smooth/death metal meets creepy electronica. **THE BEANS:** Farmer-friendly organic six-bean blend from Granville Island's Origins Organic Coffee. **THE PRICE:** \$2 plus tax. **THE ESPRESSO:** Full bodied, rich, with excellent crema, but a tad bitter. Could be nice in a latte, where the milk would take the edge off. (Our friend's second round was much better.) **THE EXTRAS:** Cassette deck. **THE VERDICT:** There's sincerity here. 915 Queen St. E., 647-435-4779, mercuryorganic.blogspot.com



Red Rocket owners Liako Dertilis and Pamela MacDonald.

RED ROCKET

THE RATING ★★

THE JOINT: A lovely, airy room filled with natural light and accented in light tones and the work of local artists. Staff is pleasantly earnest and easy-going. **THE MUSIC:** Silence. **THE BEANS:** Reunion Island organic four-bean espresso blend. **THE PRICE:** \$2 plus tax. **THE ESPRESSO:** Nice crema, but the espresso is thin and remarkably bitter—the problem is likely with the barista and not the beans. **THE EXTRAS:** House-made sandwiches and baked goods. Free wireless. Catering. **THE VERDICT:** Worth another shot. Possibly an inexperienced barista. 1402B Queen St. E., 416-406-0880, redrocketcoffee.com

continued on page 14



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Dark Horse's Deanna Zunde is serious about coffee culture.

DARK HORSE ESPRESSO BAR

THE RATING ★★★

THE JOINT: A lot of wood makes for a warm place to hang. Great art and nice comfort touches, like a massive communal table. **THE MUSIC:** The Police.

THE BEANS: Intelligentsia from Chicago.

THE PRICE: \$2 plus tax. **THE ESPRESSO:**

We wanted to love it, alas: watery, with ashy/smoky notes, bitter. The overall balance wasn't so bad, but lacked coffee essence. **THE EXTRAS:** Gorgeous glass water carafe. Sugar on the tables. **THE**

VERDICT: A gorgeous, vibrant space.

Worth a re-visit/re-taste.

682 Queen St. E., 647-436-3460,

darkhorseespresso.com



Manic Coffee uses a really cool font.

MANIC COFFEE

THE RATING ★★

THE JOINT: A long, thin space, lots of room to wander, and choose your spot: light and airy at the front, cozy and dark at the back, or quick and dirty along the bar. **THE MUSIC:** Johnny Cash. **THE BEANS:** Intelligentsia from Chicago. **THE PRICE:** \$2.35 plus tax.

THE ESPRESSO: Very acidic, thin, not much coffee essence. Short, overly fruity finish. Not pleasant. (Tasted twice.) **THE EXTRAS:** Vegan baked goods. Espresso catering. **THE VERDICT:**

Over-hyped; under-delivers.

426 College St., 416-966-3888,

maniccoffee.com

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www.harthouse.ca



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accessibility@harthouse.ca

November 6th | 8pm.

The Rhone Ranger

Randall Graham

Hart House is proud to kick off its 2008 Wine Series with the highly esteemed Randall Graham of Bonny Doon Vineyards in Santa Cruz, California.

November 13th | 8pm.

I Just Bought an '05 Chateau de Beaucastel, Now What?

Konrad Edjbich

So you're looking to invest in some serious wines but don't know where to start? This evening will be guided by Konrad Edjbich as he tells us what factors to consider when purchasing wines to age.

November 20th | 8pm.

Wine Party Tricks – otherwise known as how to annoy your non-wino friends

Stephanie Kern and Sheila Person

Petrol, barnyard and rose water. Do you ever wish you could identify these aromas and the wines that are known for them in a blind tasting?

November 27th | 8pm.

Psst... The Holidays are Coming!

Billy Munnelly

The holidays are fast approaching, I know, but someone had to say it. Don't panic - let Billy Munnelly guide you to the perfect gift - wine!

Roll out the (whisky) barrel

SCOTTISH BLENDED WHISKIES FIND THE RIGHT WOOD

By Stephen Beaumont

If you pay attention to the goings on in the world of whisk(e)y, you may have noticed considerable attention being paid to barrels of late. This makes sense, since it is in the cask or barrel that the whisky develops a not inconsiderable amount of its character.

If you've ever seen a still in action, you'll know that the liquid which emerges from the distillation process is as clear as water. It's the barrel that contributes all of the colour and a good deal of flavour.

So, single malt whiskies that are aged in, say, used sherry barrels, like most declarations of The Macallan, present an entirely different base character than those aged in wood that has previously held bourbon, as is the case with most Scottish malts. This is not to say that all bourbon barrel-aged whiskies taste the same, but there are typical traits associated with each type of wood.

Which brings us to the blended whiskies of William Grant & Sons.

All this attention to barrel aging is usually limited to single malts from Scotland, a handful of whiskies from Canada and the occasional American specialty. What you don't often hear of is a blended Scottish whisky being aged in specialty wood, presumably because most blends, are expected to be consumed over ice; either straight, with water or in a cocktail or mixed drink. Hardly the kind of careful treatment that merits the finely nuanced flavour notes that come from sherry or port wood, one would think.

But then, one would probably not know the folks at Grant's, who have recently launched a push for their specialty barrel aged blends, known as Grant's Cask Reserves, quite astonishingly available at the same price as regular Grant's.

For the reason that it's so rarely done, I was fascinated by this pair of blended whiskies aged in, respectively, used sherry casks and used ale casks. Given the generally straight-forward characters of most blends, wondered I, could this be a legitimate endeavour or is it merely a savvy marketing ploy?

After tasting them both, plus the original Grant's Family Reserve, I can tell you



Grant's Sherry, Ale and Family Cask Reserves.

this is no gimmick. And having poured each over ice and topped them with a spritz of water, I can further report that the distinctions hold up even over the treatment you're likely to give a blend.

The Family Reserve, to begin with, is a fine whisky on its own, with a fruity character (banana, pineapple) and impressive complexity layered over a moderate smokiness and ample vanilla. To this base, the Sherry Cask Reserve adds luscious notes of soft fruit (overripe peach) and fruity toffee, while the Ale Cask Reserve offers a spicier, smokier take, with a more aggressive character and a noticeably drier, edgier finish.

Henceforth, the uniquely styled Ale Cask Reserve will be my default whisky for cocktails, as it has the assertiveness to stand up to anything from Drambuie to sweet vermouth and bitters, while I think the Sherry Cask Reserve is well-suited to sipping over rocks, when you want a spirited distraction rather than a malt which commands attention. And the Family Reserve? Well, years ago I developed an admittedly odd taste for Famous Grouse and Perrier while visiting my now-late aunt and uncle at their home in the south of France. While I indulge in the combination rarely, I just might have to sub in the Grant's the next time I do. **CB**



STEPHEN BEAUMONT contributes to a wide variety of international publications from his base in downtown Toronto. He wrote this column while drinking, err, tasting whisky in his bathrobe.

Reif Vidal Icewine,
Duke Ellington,
and wild
blueberry pie...



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Oaky-dokee!

IS THAT A MOUTHFUL OF TOOTH-PICKS, OR ARE WE PULLING SPLINTERS FROM OUR GUMS?

By Konrad Ejbich

Over-oaked wines are for the dogs. Hell, if I want to taste wood, I can go suck on a tree. That may sound simple, but an awful lot of people have yet to figure it out.

The problem is that winemakers think they're making wine writers happy when they produce heavily oaked wines. The fact is they're really making one writer happy, and his name is Robert Parker.

Parker is "the world's most influential critic," and the grades he awards can make or break the sales potential of a wine. Parker likes oak, and he began giving top marks to wines that featured bold, toasty aromas of wood, layered over sweet, buttery flavours of overripe Chardonnay. In the quest for higher marks, winemakers began to play to Parker's tastes.

Chardonnay became so entwined with oak that it became a challenge to find one that wasn't overpowered by woody flavours. Inevitably, this led to the ABC movement—Anything But Chardonnay. It was a disservice to a lovely, classic grape. There was nothing wrong with Chardonnay, the problem was the overuse of wood.

Wine doesn't just pick up woody flavours by hanging around in barrels. In the late 1980s, winemakers (especially, but not exclusively) in Australia and California discovered oak chips. The vintners collected wood shavings they gathered from barrel-makers, threw them into gauze bags and plunked them into their wine vats. Think of it as the equivalent of a giant teabag steeping in a pot of hot water. It was way cheaper than aging wine in costly barrels, and it took far less time.

Don't get me wrong. There are real advantages



Oak put to good use.

to aging wine in wood, and there's a real science in deciding what kind of barrels to use, where they come from, whether to age in new ones or used. Wood aging also can add to a wine's longevity, and it can lift bouquet and taste in the same way as a sprinkling of salt and pepper can pick up the taste of a fried egg. Operative word there: sprinkling.

Oak treatment of wine should be like a gentle tap on the shoulder, not a Louisville Slugger to the back of the head. As one wine aficionado recently put it to me, "I love oak as long as I can't taste it."

When I dive into a wine glass, what I really want to smell and taste is fruit. After all, wine comes from grapes. And since those grapes grow in the ground, there might be some nuances of earthiness or minerals in the bouquet and taste too. But lumber? No thanks. That much oak does not give me a woody. **CB**



Konrad Ejbich delivers wine wisdom to publications worldwide, including *Decanter* and *Wine Spectator*. He fields caller questions regularly on CBC Radio, and penned *A Pocket Guide to Ontario Wines, Wineries, Vineyards & Vines* in 2005.

BOTTLED UP WOODY

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Tequila Rising

By John Szabo

MEXICO'S MOST PROMINENT MEZCAL DRINK IS SHOOTING TO NEW PROMINENCE

"Mezcal is one of the finest spirits for human consumption," begins Sergio Ynurrigarro, mezcal sommelier and president of the Pro-Mezcal Association at a recent tasting in Toronto. "Transmit this to the younger generations. They are just shooting it, doesn't matter what it is, they just shoot it." I shift a little uncomfortably in my seat, as though it is plain to everyone that the majority of my tequila/mezcal experiences have been of the shooting, not sipping kind. I doubt I was alone.

Spiritistas know, of course, that the finest distillates from the agave plant can be some of the world's most profound flavour experiences. But here in Canada we are well behind our neighbours to the south when it comes to appreciation of mezcal, which, incidentally, does not require a salt shaker or sliced fruit. Americans have embraced the spirit of agave with a vengeance, almost single-handedly saving the industry from certain demise. First it was the popularity of the Margarita, which according to some is the world's most popular cocktail. Now it is the premium and ultra-premium mezcal market that is drawing the greatest amount of interest.

With nearly 900 registered brands of Tequila alone, some arriving in unique hand-blown glass, crystal, ceramic, or Talavera pottery bottles that easily top \$100, confusion abounds. So, here is a little mezcal primer to avoid being singled out, at least immediately, as a boorish gringo.

MEZCAL: The name derives from the Nahuatl word Mexcalmetl, a pre-Hispanic name for the maguey, or agave plant. It is the generic name for the spirit distilled from agave, of which there are about 200 sub-species that grow from Texas to Columbia; 173 of these grow in Mexico, but only about a dozen are used for mezcal.

GUSANO: "Worm." That's right, gringo, a hang-over from a 1940s mezcal marketing ploy. Go ahead, make my day.

TEQUILA: All tequila is mezcal, but not all mezcal is tequila, just as not all sparkling wine is champagne or all brandy cognac. Tequila is a controlled appellation for the production of agave spirit centred



Drink like a mezcal sommelier

According to Señor Ynurrigarro, it is best to generate a little saliva in your mouth by pursing your lips like you're about to give someone a big wet one (the original purpose of lime and salt). The enzymes in your saliva will begin to breakdown the alcohol in your mouth before it even reaches your head and cause a predictable outcome. This way you can actually taste the spirit rather than just the burn. Sip, don't shoot. Brandy snifters/ cognac glasses are best, or if you're super keen pick up a set of Reidel tequila glasses.

around the town of Tequila, in the state of Jalisco in central-Pacific Mexico. Tequila means "lava hill," referring to the dormant volcano around the town on which blue agaves grow. There are two main categories: 100% Blue Agave, and Tequila Mixto (Mixed). Avoid the mixto, which can contain up to 49% of "other" spirits, mostly cheap sugar cane.

Tequila is made by from the piña (core) of the blue agave, usually cooked in steam kettles. A traditional method, still frequently used for mezcal, is to roast the piña underground in a fire pit or occasionally in a wood-fired oven. Both of the latter techniques give a highly distinctive, smoky flavour to the spirit. After cooking, the piña is mashed, fresh water is added, and the natural sugars are fermented into a lightly alcoholic beverage called pulque. This was the end product consumed in Mexico before the Spanish arrived with the technology of distillation. Pulque is double distilled into tequila and aged for shorter or longer periods, depending on the style desired.

BLANCO/WHITE OR PLATA/SILVER: The purest form of blue agave, clear and with no ageing, bottled straight after distillation.

JOVEN ABOCADO/GOLD/MIXTO GOLD: Usually reserved for Tequila Mixto, where colourants and flavourings have been added prior to bottling.

REPOSADO: "Rested" tequila, aged from two and 12 months in barrels. The spirit takes on a light golden colour and delicate wood flavour.

AÑEJO (AN-YAY-HO): "Mature" or "Old" tequila aged one year or more in wooden barrels. The aging period darkens the spirit to amber and softens up the rough edges. The resulting tequila is smooth and complex, like fine brandy. Some Tequilas are aged in used bourbon/whiskey, cognac, or wine barrels, and take on the flavours of the previous liquid.

EXTRA AÑEJO: A new classification introduced in 2006, applicable to tequila aged for three or more years. Expect a deep mahogany colour and a rich, complex flavour profile that is similar to XO cognac.

BACANORA: Another (rare) appellation for mezcal made in the state of Sonora, from the agave angustifolia that grows in the mountain range of the state. **CB**

AT THE LCBO

PORFIDIO 100% AGAVE AÑEJO \$199	CABO WABO REPOSADO TEQUILA \$75.70	CORZO SILVER TEQUILA \$89.90	DON JULIO BLANCO TEQUILA \$39.95 (375 mL)	LEYENDA DEL MILAGRO TEQUILA SILVER \$45	LOS ARANGO REPOSADO TEQUILA* \$42.40	PATRON AÑEJO TEQUILA \$98.10
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In September hundreds of chefs and food pros met at Eigensinn Farm for two days and nights of camping and cooking. Our home and native land got a lot smaller as like-minded people from across Canada bonded over muskox, cod tongues, and saskatoonberries. (Not a drop of maple syrup or back bacon to be found.)

Fine Ontario wines were poured, along with shots of Screech, and the best of Ontario craft brews. Fireworks and bonfires lit the night. Local chefs fell in love with the visiting chefs. And now, David Chrystian is making plans to head to the Northwest Territories for a cooking visit, Anthony Rose wants to go to Newfoundland to hunt rabbits with his new BFF Jeremy Charles (above, with the ice cream), and Paul Finkelstein is trying to send his whole class from Stratford Northwestern Secondary to learn from chef Ray Lovell in Nunavut.

The Chef's Congress is not open to the public; bored CEO's and ladies who lunch need not apply. This is one event where the people who peel the potatoes and pick the grapes are the VIPs. — *Ivy Knight*

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