

CityBites

Toronto's guide to great food and drink

April / May 2005 | FREE |



Sandwich for All Seasons

Andrew Pyper's WQW faves

'The New Passing of the Joint'

Geddy Lee on wine

Cheap Brunch Dates

Coq and Roll

Mark Thuet flies solo

Get Organic

A new reason not to eat crap

Coffee Bean Throwdown

4 contenders > 1 winner

Tales from the bar | The cheese and I | Daniel Lenko | Asparagus confessions

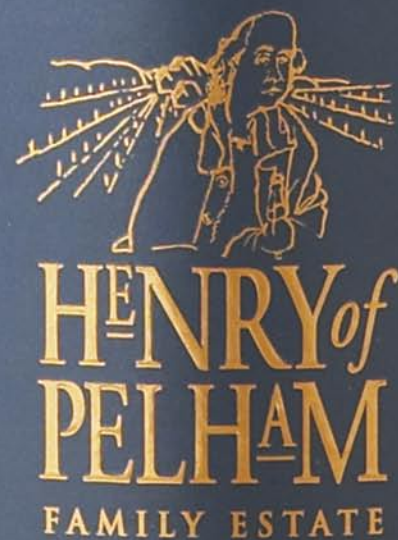
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George Brown
The Toronto City College

Letter from the Editor



Can you name the best meal you ever had? The best wine? The best cheese? I hope not, because food shouldn't be measured in absolute terms. Oh, sure, there can be healthy competition – who makes the best coffee or icewine – but we mustn't get carried away with superlatives and ego. It's been said that the cynic knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. How sad to be cynical about something as lovely as food.

A friend once told me he didn't like pasta. But on a holiday in Italy, he fell in love with it. "Turns out I just didn't like shitty pasta," he said.

City Bites doesn't like shitty pasta either. So we'll highlight the great food emporia of Toronto and recognize the people who are creating superior products, from farmer to restaurateur. We won't be puffy and self-congratulatory. We've got lip, but we will wield our acid tongue for good, not evil.

Why a food magazine? The idea sprung up as we stood in front of a giant smoker at the Calgary Stampede last summer. My partners – two guys who run the *Parkdale Liberty* newspaper – and I did some research. That is, we hunkered down at the pub and kicked around some ideas. What the hell, let's take a shot.

We'd do a magazine about food and drink in Toronto. We'd focus on the downtown core. We'd impose our warped sense of humour. We'd never use the term "foodie." (On page 28, novelist Andrew Pyper sums up the problem with "foodies" nicely.) We'd run articles by great writers.

Some amazing people have come on board and offered support. I know why: food makes people feel good. Food can be artful, evocative, inspiring. This we sometimes forget, wrapped up in the day-to-day speed of life and a crappy takeout salad. Let's discuss it over a glass of wine.

– Dick Snyder

Photography: Dexter Pointon

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Andrew Pyper offers the goods at Bar One.

Cover photo: Finn O'Hara

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FreshBites

Coq of the Walk

Mark Thuet flexes muscle on King West

By Dick Snyder

Is he a bad boy or isn't he? Does anyone really care? The famous and famously infamous Mark Thuet — depending on what articles you read; see for yourself on his website — finally opened his own joint in March along King Street West's burgeoning restaurant row. A Valentine's Day invite-only preview allowed a select few to taste his debut fare (\$140 for seven courses, paired with wines) at a surprisingly uncrowded event.

Each course was a delight, a towering trio of fennel-sauced seafood a highlight. Thuet's wife and business partner, Biana Zorich, paired each course with inspired wine choices that leaned to Alsace, California and Italy. And she maintained a steady eye on the service, which was jovial yet letter-perfect.

Perhaps the real point of the exercise was to give the *Opening Soon* TV crew something to shoot, given that the real "big day" — delayed by the usual license hassles, as well as a new city bylaw banning any new bars or restaurants in the area — was still weeks away. (If the show's report on the Drake's opening last year is any indication, this episode will feature a similar, shall we say, bending of the timeline for dramatic purposes.)

The big and beautiful room is dressed in dark wood and accented in cream linens. Neighbourhood gourmards will love the long, sexy bar that invites solo dining, or just a glass of wine and a bread basket. (The man makes his own butter, for god's sake!) But meals will not be eat-and-run affairs. Four menus are offered. The first, a "degustation surprise," is a pure Hail Mary affair in which the diner puts full trust in the maestro's hands. The menu d'Alsace (\$74) brings Thuet's roots to the fore, with seven courses capped by authentic choucroute garnie (sauerkraut topped by a plethora of meats). The menu principal is a seven-course meal (\$89) that offers spectacular renditions of seafood and game that play off seasonal and local ingredients and Alsatian themes. The menu theatre (\$65) offers a bistro-paced three courses. As tasting menus go — for a chef of Thuet's repute — the pricing is more than reasonable.

From the street, Thuet Cuisine is a subtle presence, apart from a pair of red-jacketed valet jockeys. Note Thuet's mascot, a rooster in profile that graces the windows, which glow softly at night. Says our server: "I think it's an Alsatian icon. Plus, it kind of fits Mark's personality."

Thuet Cuisine, 609 King St. W., 416-603-2777, thuet.ca



DoEatDrink

April 8 - 10

Toronto Wine & Cheese Show

An annual extravaganza of food, wine, beer, cheese... you name it — as long as it can fit in your mouth, it's there. So yes, there's a cigar lounge too. Live demonstrations and seminars along with hundreds of food producers, retailers and purveyors make the TWCS worth the trip to the airport. \$18, plus 50 cents/tasting ticket. International Centre, 6900 Airport Road, Mississauga, 416-229-2060, towineandcheese.com.

April 12

Canadian Premium and Rare Reds with Guest Speaker Derek Barnett

The Toronto Vintners Club hosts a Canadian wine smackdown, with Ontario versus B.C. in a lesson hosted by Derek Barnett, former Southbrook winemaker who now plies his trade at Lailey Vineyards. Premium wines, rare finds and award winners will provide ample fodder for discussion. What? An \$80 Canadian wine? Taste and learn. Full list of wines at the website. Arrive promptly at 6:15. \$48, members; \$56, guests. The Ontario Club, Fifth Floor, Commerce Court South, 416-209-1442, torontovintners.org.

April 18

California Wine Fair

A big event for big wines — 100 of the state's best producers come to pour and banter about 400 wines at this annual event presented by the United States Consul General and the Wine Institute of California. Silent Auction to benefit Arts Etobicoke. \$60. Royal York Hotel, 100 Front St. W., 905-336-8932, calwine@sympatico.ca.

April 28

Truffles & Cheese Boutique Wine Dinner

The city's exotic cheese pioneer Fatos Pristine brings the full weight of his family-run Cheese Boutique to the posh surrounds of Truffles in the Four Seasons. Dinner will focus on old-world cheeses paired with appropriate regional wines. Cocktails at 6:30; dinner at 7. \$145, plus tax and tip. Four Seasons Hotel, 21 Avenue Rd., 416-928-7331, truffles@fourseasons.com.

April 29

Ontario Wine Awards Gala Dinner

Ten years running, our own wine guru Tony Aspler has shepherded this judgment of the province's best wines. The event moves to Niagara-on-the-Lake this year (venue TBA), which bodes well – proximity to the lifeblood of the vines should bring added magic. Ticket prices TBA. tony.aspler@sympatico.ca.

April 30

Ontario Winery Dinner with Konzelman

Chef Tomas Riding of the Sam Jakes Inn teams up with winemaker Hugh Kruzel to present a five-course meal with specially selected Konzelman wines. \$75, including gratuities. 118 Main St. E., Merrickville, 800-567-4667, samjakesinn.com.

May 11 – 15

Santé: The Bloor-Yorkville Wine Festival

Big, rich, fabulous, and more than a bit tipsy – the hobs rub shoulders with the nobs at a gazillion events, from gala dinners to seminars for wine eggheads and novices alike. Guest chefs and international winemakers set the scene and the theme: keep an open mind and drink everything in sight. 416-928-3553 ext. 27, www.santewinefestival.net.

May 18

Lesson: Joanne Yolles of Pangea

Toronto's rock star of pastry – she's worked magic at Fenton's, Scaramouche and Pangea on Bay Street – will bestow her expertise on 10 lucky students in a demystifying and tip-laden session. Call now! Wednesday, May 18, 6:15 – 8:45 p.m., \$110. Great Cooks and The T Spot, The Bay Queen Street, 176 Yonge St., Lower Level, 416-861-4727, greatcooks.ca.

NewsBites

... A tiny new restaurant opening on 504 Adelaide W. at Portland promises “great food in an ugly building,” according to a sign in the window. **Eat Me** — yes, that's the name — proffers a full range of cuisine, from breakfast to late-night grub. It's a construction disaster in there right now, so expect doors to open late spring...

... The new vintage of our favourite New Zealand pinot noir will be available in May from Diamond Estates (416-488-4922, diamondwines.com). The **Koura Bay Awatere Valley 2003** (\$39.95) is subtly rich and elegantly styled in an old world meets new world kind of way; great for food...

... Speaking of wine, anecdotal evidence suggests that **Sideways** — you know, that wine movie — is having a detrimental effect on sales of merlot, the result of the main character's anti-merlot rant. His rapturous opinion of pinot noir has driven that grape's U.S. sales up 15 per cent...

... **Jason Woodside** is now part owner of **Oyster Boy** on Queen West, after putting in eight years as product manager. The deft left-hander took first place at the national oyster shucking competition last year in Tyne Valley, PEI, and placed tenth at the Galway International Oyster Festival in September...

... BYO may take awhile to reach critical mass, but it seems to be kick-starting some creative thinking about wine service. Located on Parliament Street beside the Ben Wicks Pub, the new **Left Door** restaurant (leftdoor.com) sports a card of wines marked up just \$10 over LCBO prices. What's more, with 48 hours notice, they will go out and buy any wine you want, and still only charge the \$10 fee...

... Here's a cause we love: **Bag-A-Cork**, run by the Girl Guides, collects used wine stoppers and recycles them, diverting a portion of the estimated 100 million corks that hit Ontario landfills each year. The Guides place collection bins at wine-oriented businesses such as the LCBO, Inniskillin, Jackson-Triggs, Ruth's Chris, the CVA, Il Mulino, Oro, Crush and George. A full list of partners can be found at bag-a-cork.org...

... Leading the pro-carb back-backlash is a little virtual outfit called **Zivot's Good Carbs**, run by entrepreneurial all-natural-muffin man David Zivot. He's testing interest in his product by offering four muffins (and these are big muffins) for a mere \$3 delivery charge. The delivery zone is south of Queen from Dufferin to Parliament. If all goes well, he plans to open a retail store. Place your order at zivotsgoodcarbs.com.

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Tasting Throwdown



Taste it Black

City Bites' blind evaluation of beans — three locally roasted and one imported ringer — is the first of an ongoing series of taste-offs

By Tom Gierasimczuk

The Test Market

A trifecta of coffee hounds who stopped drinking Tim Horton's right around the same time they ditched the Wild Cat for micro brews; equal parts coffee-deprived (it was, after all, almost three hours since we woke), hung over (it was, after all, Saturday morning); and curious (the beans were unmarked, labeled only with a cryptic number 1 through 4).

The Process

It was agreed upon that, as a rule, a ground bean has nothing to hide in the interrogation vessel that is the French Press, or — for those who call tissue Kleenex — a Bodum.

The Evaluation

Although borrowing heavily from cribbed wine terminology (mostly Paul Giamatti's), some adjectives appeared unforced — as if the java-soaked palate took over the vocal chords and articulated what a cloudy head could not.

1. The beans were medium, regularly roasted and quite dry. The first sip was lightly woody, with a subtle lingering bitterness. It was a mid-bodied, bright number with very little aftertaste. There were no overpowering flavours and its slight tanginess was almost palate-cleansing. Its balance was enjoyable sip after sip, even to those who subject their coffee to milk and sweeteners.
2. The beans were noticeably oily. This was likely a Full City roast. The initial sip tasted of caramel and slight chocolate accents... definitely full-bodied taste with a heavy viscosity that enveloped the tongue. The fragrant aroma hinted at the sweet, warm characteristics of the bean.
3. The beans were very oily — probably a French roast. Once ground, the coffee filled the room with a pungent scent reminiscent of a Bastille café. The first sip was a divine assault of chocolate, nuts and a mellowed complexity that refused to finish. This full-bodied masterpiece had one lactose-dependent tester offering the contents of his wallet for some steamed whole milk.
4. A Full City roast with an exceptionally smooth and balanced flavour. The mellowed acidity kept it from rolling over with subsequent sips. An incredibly balanced, almost Bordeaux-like subtlety.

And the winner is... **coffee #3**. Perhaps its pungent slap was just what the lingering Red Bull and Vodka ordered, but this coffee grabs the palate and refuses to let go. To drink this harried is to disrespect the artist roaster — and your digestive track.

The Beans

1. Jet Fuel

It's the only roast they sell, and the provenance is kept secret. The always-packed and eclectic Jet Fuel café and bike courier hangout is a local legend for its reasonable prices (\$3 all-in for a massive latté). \$10/pound. 519 Parliament St., 416-968-9982.

2. Alternative Grounds Organic Morning Must Full City Medium Blend

The "Full City" roast style is slightly darker than medium; bean processing is requisitely friendly to the environment and workers. Main Roncesvalles location; also at specialty shops. \$12/pound. 333 Roncesvalles Ave., 416-534-6335, alternativegrounds.com

3. Balzac's Organic Farmer's Blend

Micro-roasted in Toronto from fine Arabica, organic and fair-trade beans, this is a medium-light blend. Home base is Stratford; located locally in the Distillery District, with a new downtown outlet opening soon. \$13.50/pound. Building 60, 55 Mill St., 416-207-1709, balzaccoffee.com

4. Kicking Horse Kick Ass Blend

A dark-roasted organic, fair-trade blend imported from British Columbia, where it's roasted at 3000 feet above sea level, the same height at which the beans are grown. "We believe that right altitude gives you the right attitude." Available at specialty shops and Dominion. \$16/pound mail@kickinghorsecoffee.com

Behind the Bar

Drink & Shut Up

The essential lessons of bartending can never be taught in school

By Tanya Cole

The strangest drink I was ever asked to make was a scotch and milk. I sent the not-so-swift waitress back to the table three times to check the order. Turned out it was for a 70-year-old alcoholic with an ulcer.

I've had a zillion and one customers order a shot of Cuervo Gold with a slice of lemon and a salt shaker. Only one dumped the contents of the shaker on the bar, cut it into lines with a credit card and snorted the salt up his nose, shot back the tequila and squeezed the lemon in his eye. It's called a Suicide Shot.

I've made a Slow Comfortable Screw Up Against the Wall for a guy I could have sworn was just being an asshole. I've had a gaggle of giggling girls order a round of Red Haired Sluts and a group of jocks order frothy shooters that taste like bubble gum. I've watched customers puke into their freshly drained pint glasses, at the bar, and then ask for a shot of peppermint schnapps to freshen up. I've served a well-poured Guinness with a shot of grenadine and been paid fifty bucks to spit into a thirty dollar shot of scotch and watch the guy down it in one.

I've worked in this industry for more than 15 years and I am reluctant to say there isn't much I haven't done to butcher spirits in the name of customer satisfaction. And of course be rewarded with a generous tip.

Inevitably a customer bloated with arrogance will stroll into the bar hoping to stump me with some obscure drink that he probably invented in the wee hours from the dregs of his parent's liquor cabinet. Or he just saw *Cocktail* and thinks he's clever. Good bartenders — ones who've been in the biz for years — don't give a shit about these jackasses. If you can muster up some contorted cocktail that we've never heard of and would never drink, good on yah. We're just pouring the booze, not inventing it.

The problems arise when some showboater orders a Frozen Purple Parrot's Nest during a slamming busy night and then brings on the attitude. I have been in this industry far too long for this. My memory is full of cocktail and shooter recipes whose nuances change from bar to bar, and whose appropriate glassware depends on the speed of the dishwasher. If you can tell me what's in a Frozen Purple Parrot's Nest before the guy standing behind you can perform the international hand signal for a bottle of beer, then you'll get your cocktail. Otherwise step aside. I've got real customers to serve — the ones who won't be spewing purple fluid out of their noses at 1:15.

In a different time, a drink order that stumped me made me feel inferior. These days I am happy and proud of my limited knowledge of these peculiar, putrid, high-maintenance drinks. I'm okay with not knowing all there is to know about blended and shaken and strained and sugared and frozen and layered and frothy, pretty, sparkly drinks.



And under no circumstances will you catch me tossing bottles behind my back and juggling shakers to the whoops and yells of idiot yahoos.

I will be more than happy to serve you a scotch and milk or a Red Haired Slut, but if you ask me how we make our Twisted Mud Slides I'm gonna tell ya it's a secret recipe that tastes uncannily like a rye and coke. And if that's not to your liking, may I suggest the ever popular Suicide Shot. Happy drinking.

Tanya Cole tends bar in order to travel. She is currently somewhere in Asia, looking for an Internet café.

The Local



Hole-in-the-Wall Chic

Pol Williams and Selena Cristo at Sweaty Betty's.

Sweaty Betty's takes the 'dive' up a notch

By Leanne Delap

When the notoriously grubby bathrooms at the Gladstone were replaced last year with fancy porcelain stylings, the relentless pace of gentrification in the city's west end could not be denied. Not only has the formerly grotty neighbourhood between the mental hospital and Dufferin been transformed by galleries large and small, but there are now velvet ropes at the Drake where once only crack-addled prostitutes dared to tread.

So the backlash had to come. Both locals and destination drinkers were donning Gucci to go to the Beaconsfield. Whither the slacker? Well, the Communist's Daughter, at the godforsaken corner of Dundas and Ossington, has been doing land-office business at its Sally Ann-chic crokinole tables for a couple of years. Then came the Press Club, another beer, rail Scotch and gin joint even deeper into the Dundas desert at Euclid.

But it was with the arrival of Sweaty Betty's at Ossington and Queen last November that the new hole-in-the-wall trend really took hold. Selena Cristo (former owner of Luft Gallery in the same space at 13 Ossington) and boyfriend Pol Williams (the guy who did Hive magazine) leased a building near the frantic smokers who chat furtively in the bus shelter at the corner.

From their residence upstairs, they set about building a bar they themselves would like to hang in. A rich coat of orangey-red paint, some elbow grease and ingenuity, and bang, a very cozy bar was born.

The logo is an intricate, gothic heart tattoo in an eagle's clutches; tattoo art is the main decoration in the front room. A jukebox plays loud and unusual tunes, and most action centres around the bar itself. The couches and lamps are all troupes from Selena's hometown of Sudbury, where she says the Goodwills have not been raided for the best stuff.

I would recommend a real martini here: this is a hair-on-your-chest booze place, not some fancy cosmo castle. They do a nice absinthe ritual, and offer good whiskeys and sakes without pretense. They really mean it when they say Cheez Whiz, Nutella and Marmite sandwiches. Open nights, as well as weekend afternoons, which is a great idea — much better than a movie theatre to lose track of time and place.

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Photography: Steve McKinley

Smell the Love

From across the room, cheese beckons

By Andrew Hilton

I've always been curious about cheese — from a distance. Like a casual crush, I hadn't really gotten to know cheese well. Attracted to its sophistication and complexity, I was limited to glances from across the room.

My wife saw the crush for what it was. This past Christmas she introduced me to someone who would facilitate an intimate meeting. I had been gifted an Andy Shay cheese box. When the box was placed in my lap — and I sensed the unmistakable barnyard pong — I realized cheese and I were going to get it on.

Shay's boxes reflect a devotion to hooking people up with quality curd. His monthly delivery — couriered in a Styrofoam box — contains tips on tasting and storage, and a description and history of each cheese. Like a skilled matchmaker, he picks promising specimens, introduces them to his customer, and then helps break the ice.

The box contained a soft cow's milk cheese, Prince de Jura, that tasted of the mountain grass the cows eat. A St. Marcellin was so creamy, it seemed easier to scoop it out with a finger. Tomme de Haut-Richelieu, a nutty Quebec goat's milk cheese, will haunt me for years.

I ordered another box right away. February's came featuring a washed-rind cheeses — strong-smelling, but delicate. Paradiso, a lovely sheep's milk produced in Millbank, Ont., had a creamy, almost fluffy texture that encouraged obsessive consumption. Tomme de Grosse-Ile, an unpasteurized cheese from Quebec, was washed with local cider and had a lip-smacking, round barnyard taste.

There are, of course, consequences with this level of intimacy. A Munster stunk up the kitchen with an eye-watering odour reminiscent of cat piss. But once I put it in my mouth, the pee was replaced by a silken dairy bitterness. Andy Shay has changed my life. My veins now flow with unpasteurized milk and my fridge smells like a barn. I have been well and truly hooked up.

Contact Shay Cheese at shay@interlog.com or call 647-274-5629.

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Eat Ontario

Touring for Food

Symposium examines culinary tourism in Ontario

By Samantha Maxwell

The Canadian Institute of Advanced Culinary Arts recently hosted a three-day Culinary Tourism Symposium — the first of its kind in Ontario — to stimulate discussion and plan the future of food tourism in the province.

Delegates came from all across Canada, including Sinclair Philip, who owns the Sooke Harbour House, a gourmet restaurant and inn on Vancouver Island renowned for using local ingredients. Chef Michael Stadlander, who apprenticed at Sooke, made the trek from his Eigensinn Farm in Singhampton. There were also food producers, farmers, distributors and people from government and the hospitality industry.

“Culinary tourism is growing globally,” said Bill Allen, Ontario’s deputy minister of tourism and recreation. “It’s the experience people are looking for.”

Food activist and gastronome Anita Stewart opened a roundtable with people in every facet of food production and tourism. “Gastronomy puts food and food products into the greater context of society,” she said. “In the contemporary world, good eating cannot be dismissed as trivial.”

Stewart pointed out that Ontario has 17,000 licensed restaurants, 120 farmers’ markets — and that the food industry has a \$1.8 billion economic impact. In lively debate, a central question emerged: How can we put more Ontario-grown and processed foods on Ontario menus? “We must put learning about local, good food on the school curriculum from kindergarten on,” Stadlander said, to applause from the audience.

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Brunch Time

Cheap and Over Easy

Four neighbourhood hangouts for a comfy brunch

By Angela Lawrence

In my world, Sunday just wouldn’t be Sunday without brunch with my best friends at a comfy restaurant that dishes out tasty wake-me-up fare. I love my Sunday brunch ritual so much that driving clear across the city is not out of the question. I now have favourite spots based on occasion (impress an out-of-town guest: Xacutti or the AGO’s Agora) and timing (Bonjour Brioche only after the noon-to-2 p.m. rush). However, the following are some of my go-early, wear-anything places. What they share is affordable, good food (\$7 to \$15, meal and coffee) and service, and something extra-special that makes them stand out.

The first time I visited **Edward Levesque’s Kitchen** (1290 Queen St. E., 416-465-4600) in burgeoning Leslieville, I wasn’t very impressed. Recently, I gave it another go, and thank god I did! It’s now my brunch spot du jour. Perhaps it’s the mix of young urbans, the backdrop of eclectic tunes (from Earth, Wind & Fire to Everything but the Girl), or the cheeky expanded menu that quietly notes, “Political, religious and cellphone discourse is discouraged.” Brunch leans to frittatas and perfect omelettes, such as my favourite, filled with sun-dried tomatoes and whipped herbed ricotta.

Down the road, the back patio at **Verveine** (1097 Queen St. E., 416-405-9906) is like a secret outdoor room, the perfect spot to while away a summer Sunday. Inside, large booths make for cozy dining, sleet, snow, rain or shine. This casually elegant restaurant offers delicious brunch specials and a menu that includes a refined lumberjack breakfast (if there is such a thing) with your choice of herbed farmer’s sausage or steak.

When I’m feeling a little bohemian, I head to **Mitzi’s** (100 Sorauren Ave., 416-588-1234) in Parkdale. Tucked at the corner of two residential streets, this place is small; the restaurant’s kitchen and dining areas are separated by a slim counter. This makes for great people watching and an easy atmosphere. I usually go for the scramble special, delivered with sliced fresh fruit and hearty whole-grain toast. When I throw carb caution to the wind, the eye-popping fruity pancakes or French toast specials fit the bill.

New to the scene, **Morning Glory Café** (457 King St. E., 416-703-4728) is located on a quiet strip of King East in Corktown. What makes this cheerful sliver of a restaurant — only 16 seats! — special is a short menu of cheap breakfast dishes (\$4 to \$8 for eggs, French toast, etc.) and lunches of sandwiches, salads and the like. The food is focused and the ingredients are fresh, with slow-tended soups and stews. I ordered the omelette of the day — a fantastic mix of brie and pear teamed with a potato rosti and bread baked fresh — boosted by a small pot of homemade aioli ketchup — *dee-lish*.

Photography: Tom Pointon



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Chef Speaks

On Roots and Grapes

Chef **Eric Madden** has helmed the kitchen in many Toronto establishments over the years, and is now lost somewhere in the 705 region. He has been known to spit roast a whole pig on occasion for a friend's wedding, and is always willing to dispense sage advice on the art of eating and drinking.

Beets

Roasting is the way to go. Boiling dilutes the beet in 'em. Spray a roasting pan with Pam (the kitchen slut) or rub with veg oil, the juice that leaks out is deadly to clean! Wash and do not cut the beets at all. Place washed beets in sprayed pan and roast at 375F covered with foil. Golf balls take about an hour and 15 minutes. Check by sticking a toothpick in the biggest one. Beets are weird and there is no exact time to them being done. Sort of like Jerusalem artichokes.

Peel them as soon as your hands will permit. Hands are not pretty after this. This job in a restaurant kitchen is usually delegated to someone that has a potential romantic liaison later that evening. If you are serving them cold, dress them while still warm. They drink in the dressing. Plain high-fat yoghurt works very well, as does rice vinegar and a neutral oil-like grape seed. Crumbled Bleu d'avergne or Fourme d'ambert can be added when cold. Magic. Served hot, I like them with horseradish or fresh ginger and orange.

Burgundy

Good Burgundy is for me the ultimate. Once you have drunk a good Chambertin, La Tache or even a simple good Bourgogne Rouge from a decent maker like Rion, Aussie shiraz tastes like the fucking prune juice it is. Yellowtail can suck my dick. Over-ripe high-alcohol gunk with all the subtlety and nuance of a tarantula on an angel food cake. Best mixed with 7-Up and lemons or served as gluewein out of Dixie Cups where the outdoor activity takes precedence over the quality of the victual.



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The Good Bite

Local Asparagus

By Trish Kaliciak

I once dressed up as an asparagus for Halloween. It was during high school and I didn't know that I was committing a seasonal faux pas. I would be the only Ontario-bred asparagus standing tall in late October.

Now I know that late spring is when local asparagus is plentiful and at its finest. Those slim green fellas gathered in tidy bunches at the neighbourhood grocer beg to be brought home. Ontario-grown is the way to go, for freshness and flavour. (Besides, why would you want to eat something that has more air miles than you do? Just think how you'd feel after a plane ride from Chile — tired, pale, dehydrated, fibrous....)

Steamed with a little butter and lemon juice, or blanched then tossed on the barbeque for a quick hit of grilled flavour, asparagus is quick and easy to prepare. A new favourite — with traditional roots — is baked lasagna with asparagus and pesto, which I found in (Iron Chef) Mario Batali's *Simple Italian Food*.

Asparagus is a tactile vegetable. Snapping off the ends — to eliminate the lower woody bits — is surprisingly fulfilling. Don't discount it as a crudité either. It makes an elegant dipper next to the common carrot. Would you be surprised to learn that asparagus is a member of the lily family? Now that's good pedigree.

Timing: Look for Ontario-grown asparagus from mid-April to late-June.

Price: \$1.99 - \$2.79 per bunch.

Tip: Wrap trimmed spears in a damp paper towel, place in a paper bag and they will keep for up to three days in the fridge.




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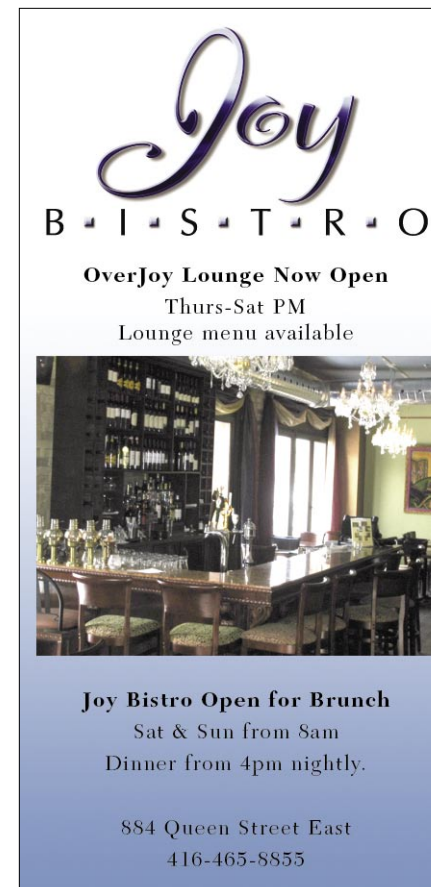
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Lee's cellar leans heavily to France, with nods to Germany and Northern Italy.

A WINE CELLAR THAT ROCKS!

Touring with Rush was one way for Geddy Lee to experience the world. Collecting great wine is another

By Greg Bolton

GEDDY LEE LEADS me down a spiral staircase leading under the kitchen of his downtown Toronto home. At the bottom there's a heavy wooden door and stone threshold, looking very much as a wine cellar should. I follow him inside and scan dozens of well-ordered vertical shelves that house his wines, mostly red, from the Rhone, Bordeaux and especially Burgundy.

"I'm a real Burgundy nut," he offers enthusiastically. In my head, a battle begins: on one hand, fond memories of subtle, earthy pinot noir; on the other, the blood-curdling fear that I'll knock something over. But the room is spacious and tidy; the mood, relaxed. Lee is the exact opposite of the stereotypical uptight wine geek.

By any standard, it's an impressive cellar, but it's not the main attraction. "I built this one thinking it was bigger than I'd ever need, but..." His voice trails off as he chuckles sheepishly and walks down the hall. Arriving at another door — identical to the first — he takes out a key, opens the door and flips a switch. It emits a low whistle. "I've gotten a bit out of control," he admits.

In the late 1970s, while other hard-rock musicians demolished suites and Smirnoff with equal abandon, Lee, touring with Rush,

established a far more civilized habit. "At a certain point," Lee explains over a mug of coffee in his living room, "we were on the road all the time, and it was quite common for us to receive gifts from promoters." Guitarist Alex Lifeson, Lee's band-mate and lifelong friend, was by that time an avid wine collector, so when promoters asked about their backstage requirements, Lee says, "we would ask for wine." Before long, Lee and Lifeson made wine appreciation part of their touring ritual; hunting for restaurants and wine stores became a way to explore new cities. Touring became tourism.

"I built this one thinking it was bigger than I'd ever need, but... I've gotten a bit out of control."

A self-described obsessive, Lee resisted serious wine collecting for many years, fearing it might distract from his other commitments — "like my other obsessive hobbies," he jokes — but about 15 years ago, he became intrigued by the more obscure

wines in his collection, at that time about a hundred bottles or so. He hit the books, researching specific vintages and broadening his general knowledge. "You cannot read about wine for too long without getting thirsty," he says. "So I started tasting these wines and cracking bottles that had been sitting in my cellar for all these years. And I just got hooked."

"You can't read about wine for too long without getting thirsty."

He estimates his current collection — the size of which he's "too embarrassed to admit" — is 90 per cent French, rounded out with German and Northern Italian selections. "And of course, Champagne," he adds. Given the sheer size of his collection, I wonder aloud how he keeps track of the wines that are at their peak and ready to drink. "All in my head," he says. "I used to keep an inventory on my computer, but I never used it."

On his own or with his family, Lee takes regular trips to France and Italy, and participates in wine events across North America and abroad, sharing bottles with wine luminaries like Jancis Robinson, Michael Broadbent and Hugh Johnson.

Lee considers himself "fortunate" to be invited to such events, but the reputation he enjoys for his palate suggests he's not out of place there: recently, he was asked to join the expert panel assembled by wine guru Mark Oldman for his award-winning and approachable guide, *Oldman's Guide to Outsmarting Wine*.

On the home front, Lee thinks Toronto shows steady improvement as a food and wine destination, boasting stellar chefs and deep, innovative cellars. As a collector who often dines out, he's delighted with the new Ontario law allowing customers to bring their own wines, and he's confident we'll see more restaurants participate in future, especially at the higher end. A veteran of BYOW restaurants in other cities, he outlines the etiquette: call ahead to ensure the wine you bring is not on the restaurant's list; be sure to order something from the house — bubbles to start, perhaps, or a Sauternes with dessert; finally, since the waiter's not getting a cut of that '85 Haut-Brion you finally decided to pop, tip well.

The BYOW development aside, Lee fears that the LCBO's monopoly on the industry hampers Toronto's ability to grow as a serious wine town. "I don't know why we

See *Geddy's wine cellar* page 19

Dining out

Geddy Lee's favourite restaurants, in his own words.

Celestin: "Super food by Pascal Ribreau, and an excellent wine list chosen with passion, with particular emphasis on Southern France."

Starfish: "A great selection of fresh oysters, seafood and inventive cooking. Very reasonably priced, with a diverse wine list."

Barberian's: "Great steak! A very deep list with a great selection of old-world and new-world wines that's also very well priced."

Crush: "Great bistro food and a really interesting, reasonably priced wine program."

Splendido: "Superb cooking by David Lee, and a very good wine list."

Scaramouche: "Among the most consistently good wine-friendly restaurants in town and a very well chosen list."

Susur: "Superb. Highly inventive cuisine, and a well chosen wine list."

Bymark: "Great food, and a nice list with emphasis on new-world wines."

Avalon: "Very good food and a good deep list."

Lee: "Great food, but BYOW!"

Opus: "A very large list with a lot of variety, and good food, too."

Geddy's Faves

Get your cellar rocking. Some of Geddy Lee's favourite wines, excerpted from *Oldman's Guide to Outsmarting Wine*.

Red Burgundy: Chambolle-Musigny, Vosne-Romanée, Volnay, Georges Roumier, Dugat-Py, Jayer, Arnoux, Lafarge
Northern Rhone: Chave, Gentaz-Dervieux, Guigal, Jamet

Southern Rhone: Les Cailloux, Mont-Olivet, Rayas, Beaucastel

Barolo and Barbaresco: Altare, Scavino, Sandrone, Mascarello, Giacosa

White Rhone: "Great with lobster... oily and powerful!" Chave, Guigal, Paret, Beaucastel Vieilles Vignes

White Bordeaux: "Structured honey." Haut-Brion, Lavielle-Haut-Brion, Chevalier, Smith-Haut-Lafite

Cru Beaujolais: "There is no better everyday food wine." Diochon, Thivin, Duboeuf

Meat

Every Hipster Needs a Good Butcher

A little shop opens on a trendy strip, serving up organic food and traditional dishes. The cool kids seem to like it

By Harry Otis Parsons

THE DAY FINALLY arrived, as it does for most small businesses that are just starting out, several months late. But anticipation really does whet the appetite for success, as Mario Fiorucci and Tara Longo discovered when they finally threw open the door of their year-in-the-making venture just a few weeks ago.

On their first day, they almost sold out of their artfully butchered, pristinely aged organic meat. The locals, who had watched in anticipation for the brown paper to come off the front windows, poured in right up until 7 p.m. closing time. Like kids in a candy store, they snatched up organic breads, cheeses, meats and prepared salads and stews. Dazed, a little surprised, but delighted, the two co-owners flitted about the store as customers oooed and ahhhed. The Healthy Butcher hit a bull's eye.

"We're all about the cutting-edge chefs and the old-world cooks," says Fiorucci, pointing out the glass-doored freezers stocked with frozen cannelloni, meat pies and burgers. He hired a hotshot young chef, Pedro dos Santos, schooled in the kitchens at Latitude and The Fifth. Dos Santos was let loose with a challenge: create grab-and-go meals of superlative quality and taste, the likes of which have never been seen downtown.

The Healthy Butcher is a bold concept for such an idiosyncratic neighbourhood as Queen West, but Fiorucci and Longo have a plan. It's a "build-it-and-the-hipsters-will-come" kind of thing, but with the sound business foundation that you'd expect from a former lawyer and a former investment banker. Indeed, the shop went from concept to opening in just over a year, which is quick for a start-up. But given the owners' backgrounds, not entirely surprising.

This is as pure an organic shrine as it gets, but not in some hippy-dippy save-the-world kind of way: this is a gastro emporia first and foremost, pushing the organic mantra as much for the enviro and health benefits as for the superior flavours. In that way, the place is both backward and forward thinking at the same time, harkening to an age before growth hormones, pesticides and overcrowded stock pens.

Perhaps backward isn't the correct term. It's more a respectful nod to tradition. Here, Fiorucci gets a little help from mom. Mama and Dos Santos make a nice team: hearty Italian meets contemporary experimental. (Which pretty much sums up the local populace, too.) Dos Santos fills the cooler with dishes like fresh-made coleslaw, Bohemian chocolate creole chicken stew and orange-zest cilantro duck. He also designs the ready-to-cook meats: orange-yoghurt marinated chicken, say, or pork chops stuffed with spiced apple.

Mama does the baked pastas, as well as spectacular meatballs — massive 100-gram orbs drenched in a tangy tomato sauce. Fiorucci knows they're good: "If these aren't the best meatballs you've ever had, come back and I'll make right the situation. I grew



Tara Longo and Mario Fiorucci: the neighbourhood's organic saviours

up on these so I stand by them."

In the back of the shop, head butcher Sebastien Cortez reigns over his small, immaculate workshop with a custom walk-in cooler that houses his precious bounty. Sides of organic beef are bought fresh and dry aged to the ideal 21 days, all under Cortez's watchful eye. This is a kid who has been bitten hard by the butcher bug. He came to Canada from Chile in 1999, bringing with him a passion for food. He schooled as a chef at George Brown, worked in Jamie Kennedy's kitchen at the ROM, and then went to Beretta Organic Farms, where he learned to appreciate superlative meat.

"Butchering is an art. Even carrying the thing. You should see this guy lift a side of beef," says Fiorucci. "He just picks the whole thing up." The meat comes from two suppliers: Field Gate Organics and Hungry Hollow, both collectives of family farms. Mario is excited by the quality he can bring to his customers using these small outfits. "They'll call us up and say, 'we have a side of pasture-raised beef' and I'll say, 'I'll take it!'" That doesn't happen at the big grocery stores. And, it doesn't happen anywhere near Queen and Bathurst.

Having a skilled butcher in the shop means customers can get almost any cut they want; and if he can't make it



Photography: Finn O'Hara

happen on the spot, he will find a way to do it next time. For Fiorucci, it's about giving the customer exactly what he would want if he was on the other side of the counter.

And it's the reason they opened the shop. "We live in the neighbourhood, and we know it's growing. People want good quality ingredients. People come home after a busy day at work and they don't want to cook, but they want great food. That was us!"

The two pioneers bought their building on Queen — formerly Don's Furniture — in June, and gutted it. Renovations continue on three apartments upstairs; Fiorucci and Longo will eventually move into one. Meanwhile, the customers are coming, business is booming, and the hipsters are finally getting what they need.

The Healthy Butcher, 565 Queen St. W., 416-674-2642, thehealthybutcher.com.

Geddy's wine cellar

Continued from page 17

put up with it," he mutters. At a minimum, Lee suggests opening the market to fine wine aficionados wanting to run small boutiques that wouldn't represent major competition to the LCBO. "The fine wine end of things isn't where they're making their dough. So leave us alone," he pleads with mock desperation. "Set us free, LCBO!"

Given the opportunity, Lee wouldn't rule out opening such a boutique himself, or even following in the footsteps of celebrities like Francis Ford Coppola and Greg Norman, who have enjoyed successful second careers as vintners. "Every wine lover dreams about having their own vineyard," he says, but for now it remains a retirement fantasy.

Having broached the topic of future plans, I can't resist asking him what he'd pull from his cellar that night if it was his last opportunity to uncork a bottle. He wrinkles his nose a bit. "Wine is for enjoying with friends," he explains, and at his regular gatherings with fellow "wine nuts," pretty much anything goes. "I try not to be precious about the wine. If I have someone over who's as enthusiastic as me, I'll pretty much open anything that's in my cellar. In some ways, it's the new passing of the joint." Rock on.

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Cheese

The Cult of Curd

As a fetish for cheese sweeps the city, purveyors and educators will happily feed your every fatty indulgence

By Leanne Delap

NOTED FOOD CRITIC Courtney Love, the infamous widow and lead singer from the punk band Hole, told *Harper's Bazaar* early in her career that cheese is the root of all evil. Evil in a women's magazine is code for weight gain. Of course, this was about the time Social Services was seizing her infant because she had told *Vanity Fair* about her heroin use. So one would assume her palate was a little wearied, and that curds would pretty much gross her out anyway.

Cheese does suffer a public-relations problem. Most of North America thinks cheese is actually orange, though mass-produced medium cheddar deserves to be relegated to the household slop bin. So, what do we do with something that is "bad" for us? Why, in the grand tradition of wine, Scotch, cigars, Manolo Blahniks and unprotected sex, there is a fabulous marketing opportunity: create a fetish and a connoisseur class.

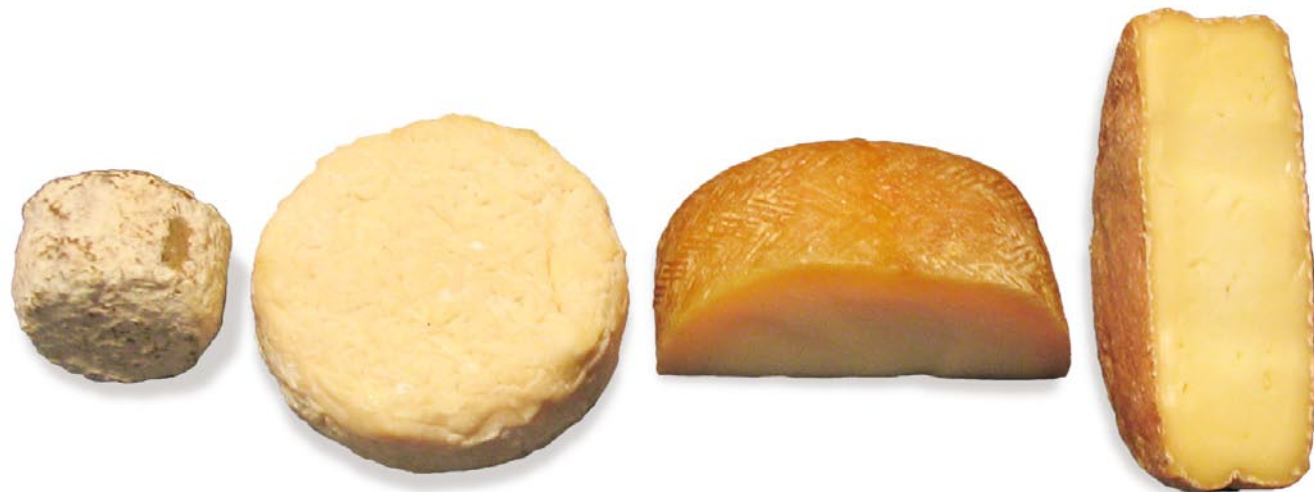
Suddenly there is a race to be the first on your block (or in your boardroom) to mine cheese's deeper veins. "Na-na-na-na-na, my cheese is the stinkiest, rarest, most authentically artisanal, impossible-to-get-your-greedy-little-hands-on wheel!"

Julia Rogers is a cheese expert who is heavily involved in the international and local Slow Food movement. The idea of SF is to rid the world of the fast and the crappy, and teach us to worship pure foods made by growers and craftspeople of integrity and authenticity. Rogers, in her work in cheese retail around town, has observed the broadening of the market for special cheeses made here. Quebec's raw-milk makers, and Ontario's goat-cheese

"Once people were exposed to wine there proved to be a tremendous, er, thirst for information – we are finding the same thing about fine cheeses."

makers draw her particular admiration and support. She and partner Tonia Wilson (a chef and sommelier) give classes and throw joint events with producers around town through their company, Cheese Culture (www.cheeseculture.ca). "In the same way that once people were exposed to wine there proved to be a tremendous, er, thirst for information, we are finding the same thing about fine cheeses. We are here to feed that need."

Andy Shay of the adorably named Shay Cheese is another local



A cheese line, from left: Two goat's milk cheeses by Chaput (Montreal); Le Petit Basque (France); and Le Gamin (New Brunswick). All from Chris's Cheesemongers in St. Lawrence Market.

Photography: Betty Barker

stinky cheese proselytizer. He writes for gremolata.com and has recently done a fine job of compiling a cheese tour of Manhattan for the site. If you are hewing closer to home until winter finally clears, you can order a monthly box of Shay's carefully selected artisanal cheeses online through the Gremolata site.

Perhaps the coolest cheese booster is a guy who goes by the *Reality Bites*-ish name "The Cheeseman." He apparently will deliver your order on his bike. He states on his website (cheese-a-la-cart.com) a warm regard for Torontonians' desire to know more about his cheesy passion: "I have found there exists a desire for knowledge about cheese as well as for cheese itself. Having worked in the restaurant industry for almost nine years I have watched the level of wine knowledge in the general public increase dramatically. I believe a similar rise in interest in cheese is occurring." Awesome, dude!

In the brick-and-mortar cheese-marketing area, we have many educated and passionate cheesemongers with walls. One of the early carriage-trade purveyors, All the Best Fine Foods (Julia Rogers cut her cheese teeth there), worked tirelessly to hook us on raw-milk cultures. The small but impeccably maintained cheese case is a treasure.

Summerhill Market down the street in Rosedale also has a fine cheese counter, but my vote for best of the city is Cheese Boutique on the Kingsway, where you will find a range to rival even the best restaurants. (On that note, the cheese trolley at The Fifth is easily the best way to finish a gourmet meal, served perfectly every time; there is always a runny Epoisse on hand, to be slurped off your baguette and then sent off to your stomach with a fine belt of aged Porto.)

Among the larger spots, Whole Foods (where Rogers works now), has some yummy picks, plus organic offerings. The Alex Farm chain has appropriately obsessive yet approachable staff. And Pusateri's has nice, if often pre-portioned and wrapped, curds of requisite high milk, goat, sheep or exotic fat content. No doubt Ms. Love would not approve.

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Organics



Share and Share Alike

Make friends with an organic farmer and eat well all summer

By Abi Slone

IN THE ENTRYWAY of a home converted from an old drive shed up in Garden Hill there's a sign that reads "If you ate today, thank a farmer." Fitting, since the land, backing onto the beautiful Ganaraska Forest an hour outside Toronto, is where Sherry Patterson first got her Chick-a-Biddy Acres farm off the ground (or in the ground, as it were).

Chick-a-Biddy is a small, organic operation, part of a network of like-minded, food-growing revolutionaries who refer to their farming structure as Community Shared Agriculture (sometimes the S in CSA stands for "supported," depending on who you talk to). The system links the eater directly with the grower, providing the farmer a living wage and the consumer the freshest possible produce. City folk in downtown Toronto buy a share of the farmer's crop, and each week from May to October the farmer delivers the picked-that-morning bounty, usually to a central drop-off spot in someone's backyard.

The economics speak for themselves. By pre-selling shares each season, the farmer can calculate exactly how much to grow, and get paid upfront to cover seed and operating costs. Patterson charges \$650 for a full share, enough to keep a family of four in veggies for a week (a half costs \$375). Chick-a-Biddy, still in its infancy, is one of about 1,000 CSAs in North America.

"This is the sixth year of Chick-a-Biddy and I am expecting to have 70 shares this season," said Patterson from her 72-acre farm in Keene, about two hours northeast of Toronto. Not bad for an organic produce and free-range chicken farmer who, six years ago, had 12 shares and was growing on rented land. Up until three years ago, she worked entirely by hand; then she finally got a tractor. Now two seasonal helpers bring some needed muscle.

"Jesse [one of Chick-a-Biddy's helpers] came to me through [my partner] Adina. She was

treating Jesse's wife for Chinese medicine and there was farming experience in his background, but he had never done the hands-on work. Last year I had a student with me from April to October and for this season I'm still looking." And with not much time left. The season has already started.

Patterson has been planning the new growing season for months. The leeks went in a few weeks ago, followed closely by onions, scallions and parsley. Last year, at her two drop-off locations in the west end of the city, shareholders picked up giant heads of romaine, delicate tomatillos and grab-all-you-can fresh herbs (no limit, save for decorum). There's always a table of free goods — usually herbs and unusual veg — while the rest are portioned out self-serve style. A giant blackboard lists each person's allotment: a pound of carrots, three heads of lettuce, five heirloom tomatoes. The math can get overwhelming, but no one seems to mind. People meet, chat, trade celeriac for basil, exchange advice on cooking a strange tuber... and then disappear for another week.

Chick-a-Biddy also has free-range chickens, available by special order, and there are often samples of cheese and other goodies like goat's butter to try, and order for next week (Patterson leaves a notebook out so people can write in their orders.) The milk, eggs, cheese and meat come from like-minded farmers she's developed relationships with over the years.

"I am always looking for people who have that kind of product [organic beef] and who don't have a way of getting it out there. I work as the link. The first people I was doing this with... I picked up a flyer from the Peterborough market to see what they had. Another bunch I heard about in the paper and got in touch with them."

That's good news for the committed members who arrive every Tuesday evening in eager anticipation of this week's edible delights. Most of the time, Patterson is standing by, keeping a relaxed yet watchful eye on things. And she tends to receive more than a few thank yous.

Illustration: Mark Herd

Sources

There are only a handful of CSAs that service the GTA. Some, like Chick-a-Biddy, deliver to a central location; others will come right to your door. If you're ready to eat with your conscience, get in touch ASAP, as shares sell out fast the closer we get to spring. Check out www.planetfriendly.net/organic for more organic resources and CSAs that operate outside the GTA.

Chick-a-Biddy

Sherry Patterson delivers to two west end Toronto locations once a week. Chick-a-Biddy wares can also be found at For Life Natural Food in Kensington Market, at the corner of Augusta and Nassau. (Full share, \$650; half, \$375.) Contact Patterson at 705-696-3605 or try emailing her at chick_a_biddy@hotmail.com. (Keep in mind that busy farmers don't spend a lot of time on the Internet.)

Plan B Organic Farm

Rodrigo and Alvaro Venturelli have been growing on their land since 1998 and deliver to Parkdale and High Park — a quick jaunt from their Hamilton farm. (Full share, \$700; half, \$400.) Give them a call at 905-659-2572 or email planbof@execulink.com.

Thurston Organic Farm

A small-scale operation located in Dunsford (Kawartha Lakes), about 120 kilometres north of Toronto, this farm has been certified organic since 2002 and delivers weekly to Toronto. (Family share, \$590; single share, \$340.) Check out these web-savvy farmers at thurstonorganicfarm.com or call 705-793-2327.



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Wine

Two for One

Sommelier duo raises the wine bar

By Alan McGinty

Okay, so they're both named Szabo, and both sommeliers... but that's where the similarity ends. And they're not related. "Szabo in Hungary is like Smith here," says John Szabo. The other one, Zoltan, is Transylvanian, which sounds scarier than it is.

Their surnames may be unassuming (if you're from Eastern Europe), but these two young sommeliers recently paired up to form a consulting service aimed at boosting the quality of wine lists and wine service in Toronto. And talk about bringing out the big guns: John is Canada's first Master Sommelier and Zoltan is going after his Diploma from the Wine & Spirit Education Trust, a path that will eventually lead to the Master designation.

Both are experts on food/wine pairings. Zoltan favours organic or "biodynamic" wine, including unfiltered wines. "I want the winemaker to add as little as possible to my wine. Some winemakers prefer filtered for its clearer, brighter colours, but you are losing flavour, some extract and some concentration."

If nothing else, these guys will knock the image of wine geeks sideways. Zoltan — who is effusively enthusiastic about, well, everything — also promotes the Slow Food movement. (Slow Food doesn't mean digging out mom's Crock-Pot and boiling up cheap cuts of meat for 12 hours: it means, says Zoltan, "slowing down your life, taking the time to use fresh foods... I promote market fresh cuisine and avoiding processed foods. I encourage everyone to move towards healthy eating and drinking habits.")



Zoltan (left) and John: sommeliers for hire.

For restaurants, the Szabo & Szabo alliance is a win-win situation. These sommeliers even come with a money-back guarantee. "If you don't sell more wine after working with us, we will give you your money back," says Zoltan. Sounds like an offer that can't be refused.

szaboandszabo.com

Food and Wine

Here are a few of Zoltan Szabo's favourite pairings, from the menu and wine list of Il Mulino restaurant on Eglinton (ilmulinorestaurant.com):

Fish and Bubbles

Dish: Smoked salmon on corn cakes with avocado salsa
Wine: Henry of Pelham Cuvée Catharine, Niagara

Oysters and Zip

Dish: Fresh oysters
Wine: Peninsula Ridge Sauvignon Blanc 2003, Niagara

Sea and Chablis

Dish: Fresh linguini with baby clams, Chablis, lemon zest and fresh thyme
Wine: William Fevre Champs Royaux 2003, Chablis, Burgundy

Jackson-Triggs reigns at Cuvée

By Alan McGinty

There are lots of Canadian wine awards, but only one calls itself the industry's "Oscars." That's because the 200 entries at the Cuvée Wine Awards are judged by a panel of peers — the winemakers themselves — in a series of tastings that narrow the field. Winners for 2005 were announced in March at a sold-out gala in Niagara. Tom Seaver of Jackson-Triggs walked away with the most hardware, snagging awards for best red and best sparkling.

Seaver's winning Meritage — a blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and cabernet franc — came from the stellar 2002 vintage. Remember how hot that summer was? Good for red grapes. Jackson-Triggs' sparkling wine win justifies the amount of care and money spent on their stunning ultramodern winery just outside of very traditional Niagara-on-the-Lake. "All the grapes for that sparkling wine came from right around the winery," said Seaver.

Perennial Cuvée winner Sue Ann Staff of Pillitteri picked up the top honours in

the crowded field of icewines. "I've been fortunate enough to win almost every year at Cuvée," she said, "but each one is more exciting because I never know in advance and each year the competition gets stiffer."

Niagara College Winery's chardonnay took best white; however their wines are currently available only in their small boutique and in a few select restaurants.

The wine delivery outfit winerytohome.com offers assortments of 2005 Cuvée winners, which can be delivered to your home.

Daniel Lenko Estate Winery

Daniel and his mom want you to sit and have a glass

Daniel Lenko's family-owned estate winery in Niagara makes letter-perfect wines from some of the region's oldest vines. Every grape is grown on the property, giving Lenko full control from bud to barrel. If you visit and taste the latest releases, you're entering into a lifelong relationship — and if you're really lucky, his mom will even give you a slice of pie. Here's what you'll hear around the kitchen table.

"We like people to come to the house. You show up and you like the wine, you're welcome to buy. I don't go in for all the schemes, events and functions. It's a horse and pony show, you put some candles out, listen to some jazz — I don't have time for that. We keep it right to the basics: You're here to buy the wines, we're happy to see you.

Last year we sold out of the reds very quickly. People would show up and ask for our merlot and I'd say we only have whites left, and they'd turn around and walk out! A highlight this year is our '02 Signature Chardonnay (\$39.95). It's aged in brand-new French oak for 18 months and the grapes come from our vineyard planted in 1960. It's the oldest chardonnay in Canada. The strategy was, hey, the Cuban missile crisis is happening, let's plant grapes, wait 40 years, and start a winery.

The '03 Viognier (\$34.95) is fantastic — fresh peaches and wild flowers and mango. We've really honed it to perfection. Last year the '02 won best aromatic wine at the Cuvée Wine Awards and gold at the Ontario Wine Awards. Viognier is coming along, but it's a bit of a sleeper. It falls in the ABC category — anything but chardonnay.

The '02 Cabernet Franc (\$34.95) has a huge jammy cassis plumminess and is very rich in colour. To me, cabernet franc is an old library, stately manor, wingback chair kind of wine. Ours is unique because of our cropping levels: 30 per cent of the grapes go in the ground in July to reduce the crop. What's left behind is varietally correct, with a light herbaceousness at the finish, but in front it's a red muscaty ripe flavour.

I sell wine out of my mom's kitchen on weekends. Just show up, first come, first serve. During the week, I work on a farm. People ask what kind of farm and I say a grape farm — my own. — *told to Dick Snyder*



Blackie the farm dog (top). Daniel Lenko and co-winemaker Ilya Senchuk (right) enjoy the fruits of their labour.

Dine With Lenko

A select list of restaurants carrying Lenko's wines (but call ahead to make sure):

Reds	Pangea
Canoe	Crush Wine Bar
Biff's	Beaver Café
Oyster Boy	Bardi's Steak House
Via Allegro	Tundra
Queen's Pasta Café	The Hot House Café
Allen's	Susur

For a list of the 2005 releases, and a map, go to daniellenko.com.

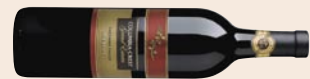
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Tasting Notes

Twelve wines were offered at the Washington event. While overall they were complex, substantial and approachable, these are not wines for long-term ageing; most are ready to drink, or will peak within five or six years of vintage. Here are some highlights:

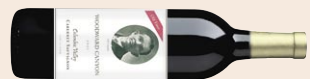
The **Novelty Hill 2003 Klipsun Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc** (\$17.50 U.S., not available in Ontario) is elegant, aromatic and less of the in-your-face grassy style common to California or New Zealand.



A perennial LCBO favourite, **Columbia Crest 2001 Grand Estates Merlot** (\$19.95, Vintages) is an easy commercial style, big but not overblown, with mellow smoky plum and raspberry fruit, backed by faint mineral (wet stone) traces.



Gordon Brothers 2001 Syrah (\$33.15, Barrique Wine Imports) is an almost opaque purple, with ripe dark berry aromas and dense but well-integrated blueberry chocolate spice flavours.



At a higher price point, **Woodward Canyon 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$54.35, Barrique Wine Imports) is classic cabernet, with forward cassis and blueberry notes backed up by a mix of dried green herbs; it's very dry, balanced and well structured. — DS



Washington Invasion

Expect a deluge from our wine-savvy southern friends

By Dick Snyder

There's much power in Washington these days. Nevermind the tee totling Bush and his D.C. strongmen — it's the invading forces of left-coast leaning Washington State and the winemakers from the regions of Yakima, Walla Walla and Puget Sound that merit attention.

It's important stuff, this wine, despite the funny sounding names. While not the everyday plonk for the Little Penguin set, these wines are, on the whole, easy to approach, demanding little more than curiosity and an open mind. From quaffable merlots to esoteric and expensive Bordeaux-style blends, Washington is having it both ways. There are approachable wines for the commercial market and idiosyncratic wines for the hedonists.

For Ontarians, the problem right now is finding them. The bigger commercial operations such as Chateau Ste. Michelle, Columbia Crest, Kiona and Hogue are usually present on LCBO and Vintages shelves in limited quantities, but smaller operations are noticeably absent. This could soon change. In a recent visit to Toronto, the Washington Wine Commission put on an impeccably executed tasting for trade and media in an effort to open up palates and wallets.

Spurred by four terrific growing seasons in a row, Washington's wines are solidifying an identity that is more French than Californian. The state sits atop Oregon, and much of the wine-growing regions fall along the southern extension of BC's Okanagan Valley.

Note City Bites will cover everything from everyday plonk to esoteric and exotic vintages (when we can get our hands on them). Our goal is to educate and inspire, but we recognize that wine is anything but democratic. As well, Ontario's archaic wine-selling strictures make it difficult to easily source products that the rest of the world may be freely enjoying. We will still report on these occasionally, and try to advise on how to find such wines (short of smuggling, which we may practice from time to time, but can not condone on the advice of our lawyer). We will note wines available at the LCBO/Vintages (you can search availability at lco.com and vintages.com) or through wine agents (most agents require purchase of at least a case of 12). Please email us with any questions: info@citybites.ca.

Washington's cool climate actually enjoys two more hours of sunlight each day of the growing season than warmer California, arguably bringing fuller ripeness to the grapes. But cooler nights and an earlier fall season temper this effect, so the wines aren't too fruit-forward or cloyingly sweet. Mineral notes from the sandy and rocky soil come through, adding complexity to the flavours, even among the lower-priced wines.

At the trade tasting of two whites and 10 reds, the wines asserted a definite Washington style. "The front end is fruity and oaky, but the back has a drier mineral feel that's more like Bordeaux," said *Wine Access* magazine's David Lawrason, who led the tutored tasting session. The state's wine regions are on a latitude that bisects Burgundy and Bordeaux, but the mineral character is due more to careful crop management and the cooler climate.

Merlot dominates in Washington bottles, but often with small percentages of cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc



(even if merlot is the only grape variety identified on the label). Syrah is gaining in popularity, as Washington jumps on the bandwagon for this populist grape. Smaller quantities of sangiovese, pinot noir, gewurtztraminer and pinot gris are also grown.

While it far from California's monstrous output, Washington is officially the second largest vine-grower in the United States. The modern industry goes back to the 1960s, and the first wine grapes were planted by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1825. Today, expansion continues apace: there are more than 300 wineries in Washington in 2005, compared to 270 last year, and growth will likely continue at about 10 per cent each year. Sooner or later, this stuff is going to hit our shelves in a big way.

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On the Block

Best of the West

Lots of eats and a dog-friendly deli keep Andrew Pyper in the 'hood

Ah, West Queen West — still the outlaw frontier of downtown, even with the street signs sporting a WQW insignia. It may be a quaint and thrilling adventure for the fur-and-Jaguar set, but some people actually live — and eat — here. For instance: renowned, respected and much-loved novelist Andrew Pyper, his wife Heidi Rittenhouse, and their dog Madox. The three are tucked away comfortably on a little street of row houses near Queen and Bathurst. Pyper has spent several summers in the Yukon researching and writing his new novel, *The Wildfire Season* (HarperCollins), due out in late April. That experience makes WQW seem like a walk in the park — with better foraging.



How important is food in your new novel? *The Wildfire Season* is set in a remote community in the northern Yukon, so of course, moose burgers play an essential role.

Have you ever shot and eaten something? Never. Only things that others have. Lots of moose and, once, bear (it was nasty).

Will you ever set a novel in a diner? Unlikely, though I can write anywhere, including diners.

Do you consider food to be art or simply sustenance? Depends who's doing the cooking.

Okay, tell us about your neighbourhood. Finish these sentences:

You're shaking, weak with hunger and need to eat something now. You grab your coat and run to... Ghandhi Take-out for their awesome butter chicken roti.

You rented *Super Size Me* and polished off a huge... takeout traditional turkey dinner from Shanghai Cowgirl. It was Thanksgiving, and nobody wanted to cook.

It's after midnight, you've been at some

glamorous media party thingy all night and they ran out of food. You grab a taxi and head for... the corner store for Miss Vickie's salt-and-vinegar.

Fill in the blank: "I actually hate **BADLY MADE RISOTTO** even more than sun-dried tomatoes."

When they offer a choice between chocolate cake and the cheese plate, you pick... the cheese plate.

Not that you're in the market, but it's fun watching the hot staff at... the Beaconsfield.

When you let your dog Madox choose the restaurant, he goes straight to... the Prague Deli. There's a nice lady there who gives him ham.

There actually is a \$5 lunch! It's at... Pizzaiolo.

The best deal in the hood is at... Bar One. The whole menu there is surprisingly affordable.

You really wish there was a place close by serving... good Thai food (the options on Queen West are dreadful).

For great coffee and a place to read the paper, you hit... my sofa.

The thing that drives you crazy about "foodies" is... their complete inability to enjoy good crap.

On your strip

Where's the best:

Pizza Pizzaiolo (for "American" 'za), and Terroni (for "real" 'za).

Burger The Paddock (you have to ask for it, because it's often not on the menu).

Grilled cheese Shanghai Cowgirl.

Haut cuisine Bymark.

Wine list Spoke Club.

Cocktail The Paddock ("great bourbon Manhattan").

Pinball machine The Done Right Inn.

Jukebox None, sadly. (Check out Sweaty Betty's on Ossington – editor).

People watching The Drake.

Photography: Finn O'Hara



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