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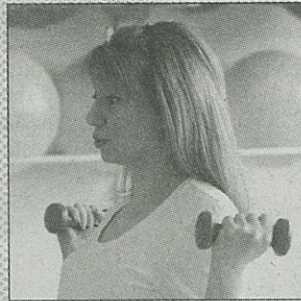
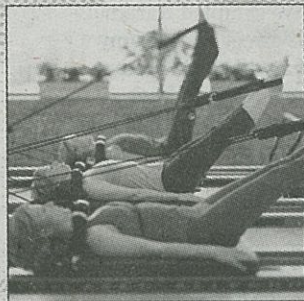
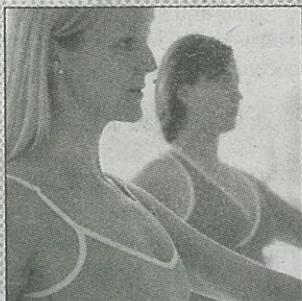
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Social dining king

All the foodie news fit to print by Ron Johnson

HANIF HARJI IS social dining in Toronto. The man behind some of the hippest resto-lounge-type operations in the city (Blowfish, Doku 15), Harji's ode to social dining — Kultura — is sure to shake the foundations of culinary Toronto.

Located in one of the few historic King Street East buildings to escape the "big fire," Kultura is three floors of fine dining and lounging brilliance. Think original working fireplaces, soaring 20-foot ceilings, exposed brick, floating staircases, smoked glass and enough style to burn. Then, there is the food.

After discovering his cuisine at Queen East's Barrio Lounge, Harji hand-picked hot, up-and-coming chef Roger Mooking to helm the Kultura kitchen and create its unique "cross-cultural" menu.

"All the ingredients will be fresh from the market," says Harji. "If we run out, we run out."

If the name Roger Mooking sounds familiar, it should. As MC Mystic, Mooking was one third of seminal Canadian R & B group Bass Is Base.

Fed up with the music business, Mooking, a third-generation chef, headed to George Brown for training and graduated at the top of his class.

Together, Harji and Mooking have created a temple to social dining. A trend that seems well-suited to the culinary climate in Toronto.

"There is an older demographic in Toronto that needs to be entertained, who are past the club stage," says Harji.

"In this environment, people can enjoy a great dinner, then sit back and relax in an upscale lounge. They don't have to figure out where to go next."

The main floor of Kultura will act as the lounge, while the dining room is located on the second floor with a private dining facility on the third floor.

Kultura is located at 169 King St. E., 416-363-9000.

Makeover madness

Ithaca Restaurant, on Bloor Street near Yonge, is the latest dining establishment in Toronto to go under the knife, courtesy of the fine folks at the *Restaurant Makeover* TV show.

The restaurant has been a local fixture of the Yonge and Bloor neighbourhood for nearly a dozen years. When Ted Ntoulis (formerly of Ampelli on the Danforth among others) came on board a few months ago to partner with owner Simon Lettocaridis, he knew the tired old school decor had to go.

"It had grape vines, trees and ugly plants everywhere," Ntoulis laughs. "It wasn't just for the show [*Restaurant Makeover*], the place needed renovating."

The faux-Med tacky decor of old has given way to a modern and clean design with mocha and cream the colours of choice of *Restaurant Makeover* design expert Meredith Heron.

"Everybody that walks in is astounded," says Ntoulis.

Although there was some tweaking in the kitchen, courtesy of celebrity chef Brad Long, of the Air Canada Centre, much of Ithaca's menu remains the same.

**In the house:
Michelle Gebhart
brings
casual fine dining
to the Beach**

