

Omnivores can leave their dilemmas at the door



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COOL WATCH

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Well, folks, it's two months into 2008 and there's a good chance that your well-intentioned plans to banish certain foods from your diet have given way to legitimate loopholes, "just this once" promises or an all-out rebellion against skinless chicken breast.

To be sure, this happens every year: The winter season screams out for heartier fare, business and social engagements are inevitable and eating out is too darn irresistible.

But now that two Toronto restaurants are each offering a fresh spin on higher-end cuisine, what can ordinarily feel like a huge serving of guilt is giving way to a more balanced approach to dining.

Chew on this for starters: Nyood, a stunner of a space from Hanif Harji, the understated restaurateur behind hot spots Blowfish, Colborne Lane and Kultura, has given the old starter bread basket the heave-ho, and so has Four, SIR Corp.'s latest addition to a portfolio that includes Reds, Far Niente and Alice Fazooli's.

And yet, they are very different. One is located on Queen West near Dovercourt in the former DeLeon White Gallery; the other can be accessed through the concourse level of Commerce Court at Bay and Wellington. (Guess which is which and your first glass of water is on me.)

Their names are an amuse-bouche to the experiences they provide. Four primarily evokes the seasons, although it could easily represent the elements. Plasma screens mounted on walls and suspended above the bar feature a repeating series of nature images.

The dark and glossy room reads slick, but accents such



Pared-down food and decor at Nyood (there isn't even a freezer). ASHLEY HUTCHESON FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

as squat flower vases underneath the central glass-topped bar are soft and organic.

A person could be forgiven for concluding that Nyood is the result of too-creative spelling, possibly meant to avoid attracting the kind of client who might frequent a place called "Nude." Mr. Harji says he wanted to leave the entire restaurant concept open to interpretation. "We wanted to do something that we could own. We think the concept has legs and that we can expand outside of Toronto." (Four is also exploring further locations.)

The ambience, designed by Commute Home, proves that superb taste transcends the palate. For people who actually care about design details, Sara Parisotto and Hamid Samad have offered up a one-of-a-kind feast for the eyes. Each wall is an art installation – from a fabric treatment that has been reversed with threads exposed, to a pattern in the wall made from 50,000 staples. The central communal table is topped in black, vegetable-dyed leather.

If we imagine that Nyood and Four are a Venn diagram, their overlapping region reflects the unintended influence of Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and, most recently, *In Defense*

of Food. The ultra-informed gourmand not only wants to savour flavours, but also seeks answers to questions about healthfulness, origin, sustainability and bioavailability.

This helps to explain why food at Four boasts "Four value" – the unique way the ingredients have been matched to provide optimum nutritional benefits – as in pairing tomatoes with healthy fats. Every dish is less than 650 calories, but you would never know it. As SIR Corp.'s chief executive officer, Peter Fowler, points out, "You don't want to take away the pleasure that we get out of dining."

Care of executive corporate chef Gordon Mackie, the sweet and tangy kona kampachi tartare with capers, gherkins and coriander stems, and the buttery smoked sablefish with edamame sweet corn succotash and passion fruit mustard glaze are standouts. The wine list is entirely organic and bio-diverse.

At Nyood, chef Roger Mooking is not concerned about calories and carbs, but his menu reads light and inspired. There is a selection of fruity ceviches, aromatic flatbreads straight from a pizza oven, whole grilled fish and gentle confit preparations that use fat more optimally than frying. Worth noting is that the

open kitchen at the rear of the restaurant does not have a freezer; all ingredients arrive fresh daily. "The art of being a great chef is to procure, not just to cook," he says.

Having just opened its doors this week, Four will probably draw the Type-As from Bay Street who rely on power lunches but are also as serious about working out as they are about their work. Nyood, now two weeks old, is already attracting an urbane crowd that evidently appreciates a holistic lifestyle without obsessing over nutrition. "Our customer is extremely well educated and sophisticated and we need to treat their knowledge with respect," Mr. Harji says.

And while there are many Toronto restaurants that already present healthy menu options and the amount of food consumed always boils down to personal choice (four French fries is less caloric than an entire fish entrée), Nyood and Four are meeting the evolving needs of local chowhounds.

Behind Nyood's bar, there is a grid of shelves stocked with whitewashed books – no writing whatsoever, no covers to judge. The writing is actually on the wall behind it and, as difficult as the words are to decipher, let's assume they are a recipe for success.

Pamela Wallin shows she's got mettle

BY DEIRDRE KELLY

As Douglas Knight quipped about Pamela Wallin, at a party in her honour held recently at the York Club: "That gorgeous blonde is no stranger to war zones, from the Falklands to Afghanistan, from Ottawa to the CBC."

The genial president of St. Joseph Media was speaking to an intimate crowd of about 100 friends and family, including co-host Walrus publisher Shelley Ambrose, who had gathered to celebrate Ms. Wallin's newly minted status as an Officer of the Order of Canada.

The former co-host of CBC's *Prime Time News* and, recently, Canada's consul-general in New York, wore the medal instead of her usual leopard print, a jest-proof badge of honour. But a woman and her trademark aren't so easily separated. Two animal pelts, each in the form of a cosmetics bag, peeked out from behind the flower vases.

"The other belongs to her sister, Bonnie." The speaker was mom Leone Wallin, 85, who flew in with husband Bill, from Wadena, Sask. Growing up, said the proud great-grandmother, both girls "were ambitious, and they worked hard."

Her doting daughter returned the compliment by praising both parents for making her accomplishments possible. "They always taught me that character trumps genius," said Ms. Wallin as she greeted well-wishers, some of whom, like former Sony Music Canada president Denise Donlon and artist Charlie Pachter, playfully genuflected when she flashed her award from inside her black evening coat.

Ms. Wallin has worked hard, with grace and style, to achieve many accomplishments – from hosting *Canada AM* to serving as chancellor of the University of Guelph, to her most recent appointment to a panel on Canada's future role in Afghanistan.

"Getting the Order of Canada



'They always taught me that character trumps genius,' said Ms. Wallin of her parents.

MEAGHAN OGILVIE/
FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

so close to being named to the Afghan panel is really connected, to me. They are both about public service."

A good reason, perhaps, why Rick Hillier, Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff, made room in his busy schedule for the soiree. "Pamela Wallin is a national treasure," he declared, clad in military regalia.

The sentiment was shared by others in the room, from Toronto Life editor Sarah Fulford and novelist husband Stephen Marche, journalist Sally Armstrong and Bay Street money man Gerald Sheff, former Ontario premier David Peterson and theatre impresario Garth Drabinsky. Stephen Harper's image adviser, Michelle Muntean, dropped by as well.

Also in attendance were Michael Decter and Genevieve Roch-Decter; Julian and Anna Porter; Ron Joyce; and Rob Prichard. Molly Johnson was a no-show because she had a surprise party of her own, in honour of her induction.