



Savoury SENSES

Toronto's latest addition to the contemporary restaurant scene combines succulent fare with paramount design

BY JENNIFER LEE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAULA WILSON

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"Why can't we do it, we're batting 100 per cent right now," Executive Chef Roger Mooking recalls thinking, when weighing the option of opening a second restaurant with partner Hanif Harji. The restaurateur team behind Toronto's east side epicurean gem Kultura, Mooking and Harji

have shifted their attention across town for the opening of their latest collaboration, Nyood, a project backed by investment banker Sasha Jacobs.

Situated in the hub of the city's unofficial artists' haven, the neighbourhood of Queen West is undergoing a wide sweeping gentrification that, restaurant-

wise, is being led by the new kid on the block. By the end of its opening week, Nyood's savoury cuisine and alluring atmosphere had east side scenesters flocking over in droves, making it "the" place for fashionable young professionals to eat and drink in the company of beautiful people.

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Catering to a clientele as hungry for status as they are for the scrumptious plates served up here, Nyood’s über-cool interior design is a reflection of not only its patrons’ style sensibilities, but also the firm grasp Harji and Mooking have on the city’s pulse. As both men explain, liberal bouts of globetrotting keep their individual talents fresh.

For Mooking, travel fills his cupboard with the ingredients used to fuse together his kitchen’s flavourful formulations, while Harji credits his getaways for exposing him to the different dining trends popping up around the world, the favourites of which stream into his own projects. His current darling: England. “There is a gastronomy movement in London that is unbelievable,” he gushes.

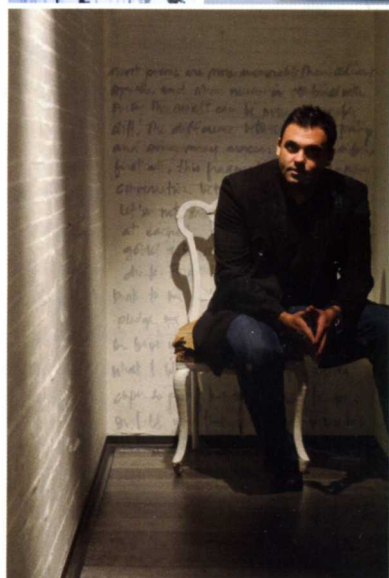
New York is the point of reference for Nyood, but as Harji stresses, the restaurant is uniquely Toronto. “You have to put your own personal touch to everything,” says the restaurateur.

Mooking, too, is dedicated to making each project atypical, which is why

the chef has concentrated his efforts to creating a line-up wholly unique in taste compared to that of Kultura. “They’re very different menus,” asserts Mooking. “The focus and approach are very different; the only similarity is sharing plates.” Though there is an element of culinary mix-matching embedded in Nyood’s dishes, there is far less fusion to the fare here than at Kultura. The palate for Nyood is primarily Mediterranean, though Mooking admits he “always puts a twist on things” when it comes to cooking.

The character of Mooking’s raw, ingredient-focused menu is mirrored by the stark designs of Toronto-based firm Commute Homes. “I literally gave them carte blanche,” says Harji when discussing the development of the restaurant’s interior look. This freedom gave way to an interior that rivals the food for attention. Elements such as the back wall, constructed from 18,000 staples over the span of six weeks, or the sprawling bleach-white bookshelves with their array of objets d’art, distract in the best of ways.

Strikingly tactile, Nyood is beyond just grabbing a bite; it’s a sensory event worth its weight in cool. “I’m a big fan of the restaurant experience,” affirms Harji. “If you’re going to spend your hard-earned dollars there ... it has to be a full experience.” ✦



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