

ing hot with
hal makhni
nt with gin-
pilaf is per-
der chicken
he glass is a

outhdown

open arms
West curry
om OCAD.
e low, and
dishes that
ed sojourn
ith grease,
atoes and
oo marries
atoes in a
ump swim
cked with
aves. Like
chen, the
uperlative
e city—is
nd smoky

(St.),

Yorkville
at roman-
loud for
menu fea-
on-trend
ns and a
e aspara-
ated par-
ng mini-
y outside
h, grilled
tes like a
a tasting
s, might
st is brief
d-to-find
attentive
t-\$32.

nd bon
s quaint
Middle
d buzz-
to lamb
seafood,
ost pal-
ad com-
Eastern
Burger
esh top-

(ve.),

GREG COUILLARD'S SPICE ROOM & CHUTNEY BAR ★★

Zigzagging banquettes line the walls of this small, grotto-like room, which feels decadent with its deep blue walls and gauzy curtains. Service begins smoothly, with thyme-accented hummus and soft coconut bread, but the gracious patina soon gives way to an almost frenetic vibe. When not busy confusing tables, servers work forcefully to up-sell from a wine list that, albeit superb, lingers largely in the \$80 to \$140 range. Still, apps arrive in good time. Two huge sea scallops are nicely seared to rare, a masterful but excessive hand is apparent, leading to oversized plates that overwhelm with competing flavours. Gorgeous beef tenderloin brings smoky, molasses-like Nyonyan seasoning on a sumptuous ginger demi-glace, but tandoori on an accompanying strip of foie gras is lost in the mix. A pakora of curried potato is nicely piquant, but its accompanying vegetables are in a goopy, sweet sauce that confuses the palate. Ironically, vidal icewine ice cream lacks flavour. Closed Sunday and Monday. Mains \$34-\$45.

Where: 55 Avenue Rd. (at Yorkville Ave.), 416-935-0000. ☎ 🍷 🍴

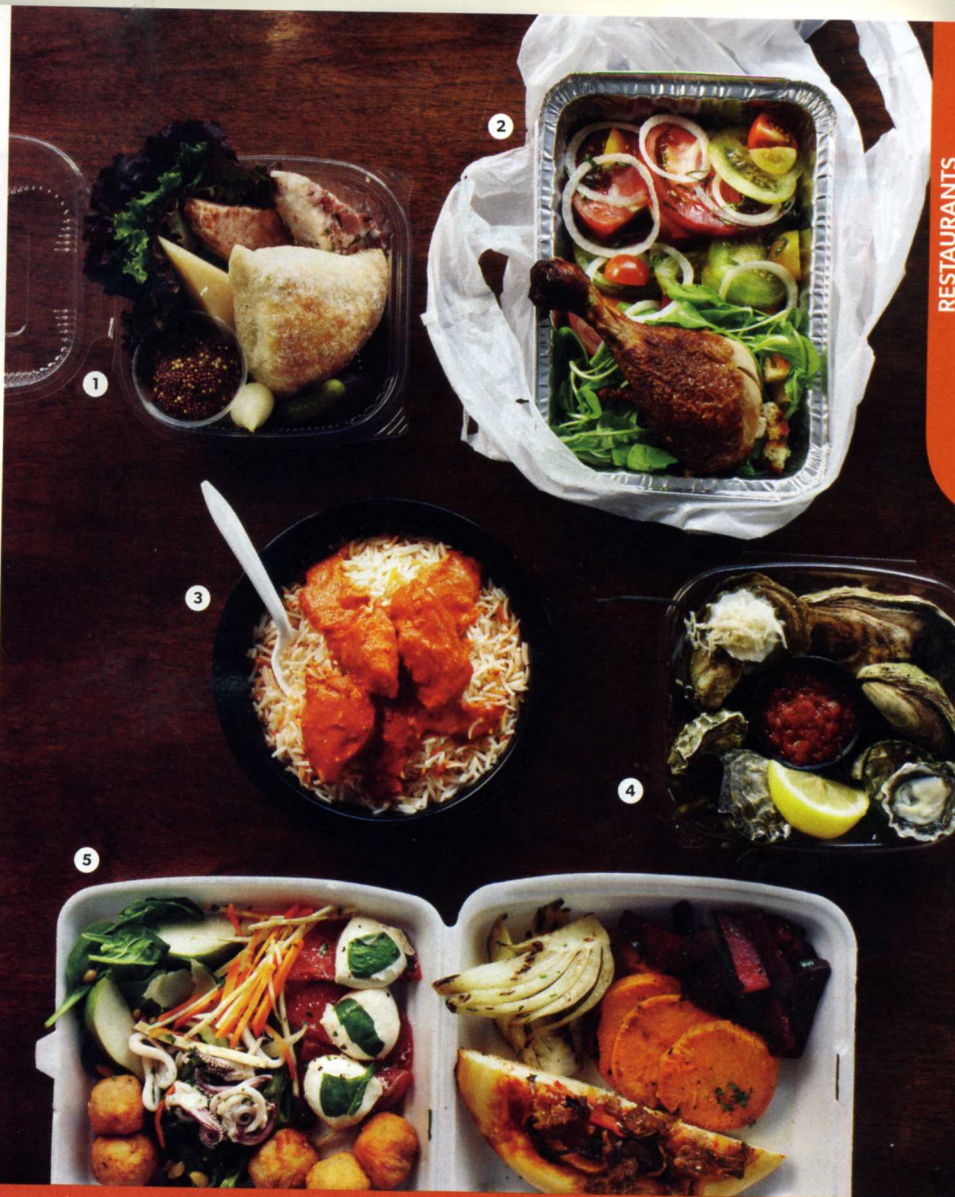
LEE ★★

Susur Lee's colourful, funky spot remains a popular destination, despite its founder's exodus to New York. Giant cockatiels painted onto copper scrims look down on pink Lucite tables. Friendly servers explain the menu, which has a bevy of appetizer-sized dishes for sharing that show off Lee's Asian-Western manifesto. Many dishes dazzle. Caramelized black cod—buttery petals of moist fish glossed with miso mustard sauce and sweet-tangy Cantonese preserves—is a triumphant harmony of flavours. Oddly, the most conventional dishes disappoint: the chewy texture of beef and pork satays, for example, distracts from their exemplary peanut, kung pao and mint chutney sauces. Slow-braised beef may be the signature: amazingly tender and rich meat mounted on a potato-leek purée. The mango panna cotta with sesame and black pepper crumble delights. A little international wine list has plenty by the glass. Closed Sunday. Mains \$6-\$18.

Where: 603 King St. W. (at Portland St.), 416-504-7867. ☎ 🍷 🍴

NYOOD ★★

The artsy feel of this former gallery space, now the latest hot spot from restaurateur-of-the-moment Hanif Harji, fits the trend of gentrification sweeping through bohemian WQW. The remarkable interior of Nyood (hokily pronounced “nude”) features a towering library of white-painted books, suspended black cables with tentacles tipped with lamps and a faux birchbark wall textured with staples. Where the room is refined, however, the service is not; every passing apron or suit finds reason to interrupt. Thankfully, some of those interruptions bring delights from chef Roger Mooking's menu, which offers some 22 tapas-style dishes showing primarily pan-Mediterranean and Asian influences. Olive oil-cured beef tenderloin, seared to rare, cooled and sliced thin, arrives in a ruby fan on a chopping block. Though it's gorgeously tender and well complemented by grilled radicchio and fennel salad, the beef desperately needs a



ROUNDUP

Good to Go

For no-cook dinner parties or upmarket meals on the couch, these takeout spots offer fine dining without the fuss

1 GILEAD CAFÉ

Jamie Kennedy's midday spot lets King Easters grab locavore lunches. The ploughman's plate (\$9) teams artisanal cheese and terrines with Kennedy's bread (the sourdough is to die for) and cornichons. Page 58.

2 ATELIER THUET

Marc Thuet's outpost in Liberty Village is a bistro-store combo offering such signature fare as Thuet's roasted Perth County capon and greens for two (\$32). In case of leftovers, crunchy house-baked

baguettes make yummy sandwiches. Page 8.

3 AMAYA EXPRESS

This takeout spinoff of Amaya (page 34) packs up butter chicken and ethereal gobble-on-the-go naaninis stuffed with such fillings as pulled lamb, chili beef and saag paneer (\$9.95). 1574 Bayview Ave., 416-322-0020.

4 RODNEY'S OYSTER HOUSE

Toronto's favourite oyster expert, Rodney Clark, has launched a front-of-house Wet Market, offering fresh

fish and seafood. While oysters are the main draw, special occasions might call for the lobster supper (\$50). Page 72.

5 GRANO

This uptown Italian stalwart has 30-odd rainbow-hued antipasti (\$15 for any three choices), including rapini with raisins and pine nuts, and eggplant parmigiano. And talk about service: dinner orders can be delivered to the car like an haute drive-in, minus the girls on roller skates. 2035 Yonge St., 416-440-1986.



NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

CHAKRA ★★½

Johnson Yohannan is a globetrotting entrepreneur who once attempted to open a Pizza Hut in India. In his latest venture, he takes cultural exchange in a much tastier direction, offering sophisticated Indian fare at Yonge and Eg. The mood here is welcoming: jovial chefs readying yogurt-coated chunks of chicken for the tandoor greet customers from the gleaming open kitchen. As with most dishes, the spicing in a chicken tikka masala is impeccably balanced—flavour before fire—and the meat is tender. Here “modern Indian” means high-quality ingredients and thoughtful execution of satisfying classic dishes. **Mains \$10–\$24. Where:** 2497 Yonge St. (at Castlefield Ave.), 416-928-7331. ☞ ☞ ☞

sprinkling of sea salt. A grilled pork chop served on Israeli couscous comes with a sweet orange-honey glaze and a zippy sprinkling of jalapeño. Competent desserts—a chocolate soufflé and crème brûlée—are predictable. Drinks feature exotic teas, champagne cocktails and a smallish wine list that starts at \$45 and features many by the glass. Closed Sunday. Small plates \$9–\$18.

Where: 1096 Queen St. W. (at Dovercourt Rd.), 416-466-1888. ☞ ☞

TOBA ★½

With a name like Toba, assumptions lead to Japan. But this menu spins around the atlas. While the pastas are firmly planted in Italy, there's a little Mexico and Morocco thrown in. The roasted eggplant soup is silken and rich, the flavour deep, garnished with a raft-like crostini floating in the creamy expanse. On this night, halibut fritters sparkle, thanks to a sweet and spicy Thai drizzle. In many restaurants, gnocchi starts to bore by the third bite, but Toba's flawless potato parcels are nestled beside house-made Italian sausage in an addictive fontina and tomato sauce. Mains don't disappoint: one might find a crispy-skinned Cornish hen, the juicy, sweet poultry accompanied by a good but overwrought harissa sauce. Fingerling potatoes are roasted with salsify, which chef Tony Barone transforms into a melting, nutty delight. A rich, creamy brûlée is served with a sidecar glass of soo jung gwa, a traditional Korean tea garnished with roasted pine nuts. The wine list offers unique non-LCBO bottles. Closed Monday. Mains \$16–\$27.

Where: 243 King St. E. (at Sherbourne), 416-367-8622. ☞ ☞

TOMI-KRO ★★½

Rambling, busy and boisterous, this formerly diminutive room has swallowed the neighbouring dry cleaner and antique shop—all without the glitches usually associated with rapid expansion. This is the kind of place where patrons dress down, donning Hawaiian shirts, Topsiders and *cing à sept* smiles, while jeans-wearing servers saunter around three rooms of whitewashed brick. Chef Laura Prentice's menu is a clever fusion of Asian, American and Mediterranean tastes and techniques. Flavour-packed Miami ribs fall from the bone, and tempura lobster maki balls match a perfect crisp exterior with a soft, sweet centre. Wonderfully pink Cedar Valley organic duck breast goes well with cherries and vanilla-scented sweet potato, while ephemeral veal osso buco in an intense leek and mushroom sauce melts in the mouth. Sides are creative: brussels sprouts are treated like the tiny cabbages they are and turned into slaw. Desserts can be classic (dense flourless chocolate cake) or savoury (whipped brie with dried fruit compote and crostini). A long wine list offers only a few by the glass. Closed Sunday. Mains \$19–\$24.

Where: 1214 Queen St. E. (at Leslie St.), 416-463-6677. ☞

UTOPIA 630

The cacophony of sound (generated by the boisterous crowd, kitchen clatter and a raucous Van Halen soundtrack) reverberates in the tiny room and amplifies as the evening progresses. Hungry 20-somethings waiting in line brush up against those sitting at closely arranged tables and con-

centrating on massive portions of starving-artist staples: burritos, burgers, quesadillas and sandwiches. Lamb merguez poutine is loaded with molten brie, spicy sausage and unremarkable gravy. A garlicky yet dull caesar arrives sans bacon. Dwarfed by a mountain of so-so fries, a house-made char-grilled bison burger delivers eight ounces of gamy, moist, well-flavoured meat on a fully loaded sesame seed bun. The beer list is satisfying, with its selection drawn from around the globe. Outsourced desserts, such as a fridge-fatigued raspberry tart, are unnecessary. Service is perfunctory. Sit on the back patio for the quintessential beer and burger experience.

Where: 586 College St. (at Clinton St.), 416-534-7751. ☞ ☞

VERTICAL ★★

Packed at lunch, this King West spot also deserves a dedicated evening clientele—people who will appreciate the smart, comfortable room, the wine list filled with interesting Italian bottlings (and not one French wine), and Tawfik Shehata's cooking. Southern Italy is the menu's principal inspiration, but it's nuanced with a nudge and a wink from North Africa and the Mediterranean. Gorgeous grilled octopus is chicken tender, spiked with an intense combination of dill, paprika, arugula, preserved lemon and shallots. Mains might bring organic B.C. black cod with corn cakes, or a roasted Berkshire pork loin with pecorino, fresh herbs and green beans. Desserts need work. Exceptionally affable servers. Closed Saturday and Sunday. Mains \$20–\$52.

Where: First Canadian Place, 100 King St. W. (at Bay), 416-214-2252. ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞

ITALIAN

ACQUA ★½

Venetian kitsch—glass baubles and gurgling fountains—creates a carnival atmosphere as tourists and suits dine on chef Robert Buchanan's Mediterranean menu, which offers more delights than duds. A crispy sweetbread dish turns out to be offal's answer to popcorn shrimp. Served with creamy tarragon dipping mayo, the battered and deep-fried bites are addictive but seem more like bar snacks than a fully realized appetizer. Mains deliver numerous sea creatures, such as a perfectly seared and seasoned sea bream served with poached fennel and grapefruit wedges in an unlikely broth of prune consommé and coffee oil. The sour, sweet and savoury elements complement the meaty fish. A luscious 16-ounce veal chop, seared to mahogany, receives too much support from over-salted olive polenta, crispy cumin onions and a delectable soy reduction. Desserts deliver an excellent chocolate-orange crème brûlée. Service is formal but lively. The wine list shows strong international selections in all price ranges. Closed Sunday. Mains \$26–\$38.

Where: 10 Front St. W. (at Yonge), 416-368-7171. ☞ ☞ ☞

AL FOGOLÀR ★

Reminiscent of a medieval schnitzel house, the room's dark wood beams, plaster walls, wrought iron chandeliers and open hearth (or fogolàr) create the feel of a traditional private club—the ideal spot to celebrate a 50th wedding anniversary.

World Tour

Good news for brazen distavores: the city's most interesting new ingredients come from far away

1 PALTITA AVOCADO OIL

Emerald green and richly flavoured, avocado oil from Chile's Aconcagua Valley is high in antioxidants, omega-3s and vitamin E. **Where to buy:** Fresh From the Farm (page 134), 375 mL \$20. **Where to try:** Chef Claudio Aprile of Colborne Lane (page 20) uses it to sear raw yellowtail (\$21).

2 JAMÓN IBÉRICO DE BELLOTA

Nutty and sweet pata negra jamón is Spain's melt-in-your-mouth answer to prosciutto. **Where to buy:** Cheese Boutique (page 134); shoulder cut, \$250 per kilogram. **Where to try:** Chef Martin Kouprie of Pangaea (page 25) pairs it with serrano ham, Niagara prosciutto, toscano cheese and ham croquettes (\$25.95).

3 KONA KAMPACHI

Better known as Hawaiian yellowtail, this fish has a silky, buttery white flesh that's ideal for sushi or searing. **Where to buy:** Taro's Fish (page 126), 100 grams \$8.50. **Where to try:** Chef Roger Mooking of Nyood (page 37) pairs it with yellow tomatoes, Peruvian chili, tarragon and kalamata olives (\$15).

4 ROSE PETAL PRESERVE

Made with flowers grown in Armenia's Ararat Valley, each jar contains up to 300 petals. Perfect with lamb or game. **Where to buy:** Cheese Boutique (page 134), 536 grams \$13. **Where to try:** On his cheese plate, chef Lino Collevicchio of Via Allegro (page 49) uses it to crown thinly shaved tête de moine (from \$13.95).

5 COQUITO NUTS

New to North America, these Chilean exotics resemble tiny coconuts in look and taste, but with a smooth skin, they can be eaten whole. **Where to buy:** Harvest Wagon (page 126), three-ounce package \$6. **Where to try:** Not yet on any menus; watch for them to catch on this year.



cut into bite-size pieces for you and tossed with sliced onions. There's smoked fish aplenty: salmon, mackerel, black cod, lake trout, whitefish and carp. Prepared foods are popular—say, grilled sea bass in sun-dried tomato sauce. The in-house bakery makes bobkas, blintzes, knishes, rugelach and pies.

Where: 3535 Bathurst St. (at Wilson), 416-781-6101.

ED'S REAL SCOOP

The aroma of fresh waffle cones lures sweet toothers into this friendly ice cream parlour. With over 100 flavours in his arsenal, Ed Francis uses such premium ingredients as Callebaut chocolate, Tahitian vanilla beans and real fruit purées. One case is dedicated to smooth Italian-style gelato and sorbets in such tempting flavours as blood orange and red-hot chili chocolate; the other is packed with decadent, rich ice creams, like the popular apple pie (made with a whole pie blitzed in). In fall, pumpkin flavour is a big hit, as is a scoop of Guinness-infused ice cream (it's not as bad as it sounds) around St. Patrick's Day.

Where: 2224 Queen St. E. (at Beech Ave.), 416-699-6100.

GELATO FRESCO

You could buy Hart Melvin's tubs of gelato at your local Loblaw's, on an Air Canada flight or at the scoop shop at Whole Foods Market (page 137). But to get a taste of his best flavours, it's worth the drive to the factory door. There, Melvin puts together custom batches for chefs and sells the overstock to gelato pilgrims. Mascarpone makes a fine, slightly sour alternative to vanilla and a wonderful base for his marsala-spiked tartufos. Ruby blood orange makes a tart palate cleanser. Ask for Melvin's personal stash, made from an especially good batch of Sicilian lemon. Closed Saturday and Sunday.

Where: 60 Tycos Dr. (at Dufferin), 416-785-5415.

GREG'S ICE CREAM

Going strong for 27 years, this iconic Bloor Street shop has changed locations (it moved west six years ago), but the basic formula is the same: lots of cream, lots of good ingredients and plenty of sticks for sampling. Retro flavours are back, from banana rum (a rummy, caramelized treat) to coconut, apple spice and a pumpkin flavour at Halloween. You won't get a taste of the exclusive roasted cashew ("It's ridiculously expen-

sive," says owner Greg Mahon) unless you visit Truffles or Studio Café, but all the old favourites, from roasted marshmallow to coffee toffee, will keep you sated throughout the year. Richer than Croesus, they are best served as a mid-afternoon snack rather than as the finale to a meal.

Where: 750 Spadina Ave. (entrance on Bloor St. W.), 416-962-4734.

HOLLYWOOD GELATO

On hot summer nights, customers line up out the door for their fix: one or more of the 22 flavours, made fresh each morning. It could be the dense Valrhona chocolate that keeps them coming back, or the ever-popular Rocky Roché. And there's something to be said for the thrill of discovering an exquisite pear gelato (full of authentic pear flavour and texture). Ingredients are natural, starting with ripe, fresh fruit in the sorbets, high-quality chocolate and whole roasted nuts.

Where: 1640 Bayview Ave. (at Manor Rd. E.), 416-544-9829.

IL GELATIERE

Since May 2007, summer nights have drawn line-ups and a throng of gelato lovers to this family-