



By Jamie Maw

THE 16TH ANNUAL

RESTAURANT AWARDS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREGORY CROW, HEATHER GOLDSWORTHY, COOPER MEARS AND LINDSAY SIU

CELEBRATING THE YEAR THAT WAS IN VANCOUVER EATERIES—FROM THE CHI-CHI TO THE CHEAP-CHEAP, WE RATE 'EM ALL.
OVER 30 CATEGORIES AND 35 PAGES
—THE CITY'S MOST AUTHORITATIVE DINING DISH!

★ BEST DESIGN OF THE YEAR ★



Best Design is decided using a methodology that differs from other awards. A shortlist of Vancouver-area restaurants opened in 2004 was visited by a panel of three judges: Nancy Boulton, interior designer and principal of Nancy Boulton Design, Robert Ledingham, interior designer and principal of Ledingham Design Consultants and Jim Sutherland, editor of *Western Living* magazine. This year the panel has awarded Gold, Silver and Bronzes, as well as two Honourable Mentions.

Winning Gold is Rangoli, Vikram Vij's venture into takeaway and quick-service dining, designed by Vij himself. The panel was awed by the intricate detail that went into the design of the restaurant, and the subtlety with which its themes were expressed. For example, one meaning of "rangoli" is colour, which helps account for the restaurant's deep reds. A skylight shaft painted pink produces an otherworldly glow at midday, when the restaurant is busiest, and a seasonal patio shelter, usually an off-the-shelf afterthought, is thoroughly integrated into the design. Meanwhile, several elements employ a pleasing shape that turns out to be a highly abstracted elephant, and the front door subtly alludes to the familiar Indian icon of praying hands as well as the bindi mark on a married Hindu woman's forehead. The tight layout combines an efficient, high-output kitchen with seating for 30 (plus 22 on the patio)—and the handsome Alvar Aalto chairs are uncomfortable enough that few will linger, exactly as Vij intended.

Winning Silver is Coast, architect David Nikolay's handsome tribute to west coast architecture of the 1950s and '60s, featuring an intimate loft dining area looking onto a communal chef's table—a Vancouver first. Bronze winner Lift split the jury between those who appreciated the architectural feel, high-quality materials and obvious ambition and others who felt Jon Sunderland's interior should have played more subtle background notes while letting the incredible setting star. Receiving Honourable Mentions were Chambar, which comes into its own after dark, and the Cactus Club's Park Royal location, which carries forward the chain's mid-century theme. ♣



several fits and starts, just as the summer was winding down. His premise: to place a trailer as close to his ingredients as possible. So you'll find Go Fish! (Gold: 73 points) planted in the parking lot at Fisherman's Wharf, just steps from the boats that stock his fish stand daily. And, let it be said, it couldn't be any more informal. Order and about 10 minutes later out shoots your oyster po' boy, sockeye salmon sandwich (with side stripe shrimp-imbued mayonnaise), salmon and wonton soup, or halibut and chips, the fish barely bound in a tempura batter mixed with Granville Island honey lager and served with freshly prepared tartar sauce. For rainy days there's a canopy, and you "can't beat the view, the locale, the freshness or the prices." One judge weighed in on the vagaries of oceanside licensing with this broadside: "Apparently the permit-and-license process involved to set up a chipper right next to the government fish wharf on False Creek was enough to make the Ancient Mariner scream, but I'm glad Gord Martin did it."

Silver award winner Shiru-Bay Chopstick Café (45 points) entered the crowded Yaletown dining landscape, introducing izakaya to the space-challenged. It's a rollicking place with "nothing on the menu over 10 dollars. This latest izakaya entry boasts energy in the room and delicious detail on the plate that puts it firmly at the fore of the small plates stakes in a snappy, deconstructed, minimalist room. It's small plates food with real chutzpah. Think Gord Martin in a kimono." Or not.

Rangoli (Bronze, 37 points), Vikram Vij's prettily designed (see Best Design, at left) new all-day room offers bright Indian curries, naan and side dishes that "improve my disposition." And it's improved the whole neighbourhood, according to one judge: "This smart new expansion of the slow-braised Vij empire is

★ BEST SUPPLIER/ PRODUCER ★

PONDEROSA MUSHROOMS

Voted on by members of The Chefs' Table Society of British Columbia

JOE AND CATHY SALVO cultivate two kinds of symbiotic relationships in their business: the one wild mushrooms share with their life-sustaining terrestrial environments, and the loyal customer relationships that have seen their business flourish. Ponderosa's



company philosophy? "Bringing wild mushrooms to mainstream distribution, making them readily available and striving for consistent quality."

Ponderosa Mushrooms delivers its fabulous fungi onto the plates of fine restaurants across Western Canada and, not surprisingly, they are widely praised within the industry for their masterful touch with one of the most challenging members of the produce department. They've also recently moved to a new Port Coquitlam facility designed exclusively around the intricacies of mushroom handling and hope to be the first specialty mushroom company to receive HACCP certification (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points, a very stringent food safety program) for their quality standards. The company is also developing a line of specialty mushrooms to extend its chain of supply to the retail level. The Salvos have met the frustrations of fungi wrangling head-on with tell-it-like-it-is sincerity and an extensive product knowledge echoed in our chefs' comments. Even if Mother Nature isn't cooperating, Ponderosa Mushrooms' customer service provides consistency. "If my chanterelles are only a 7 out of 10 this week, I'll say so," says Salvo, "I always deliver what I promise." —Shannon Bradey

adding spice to a formerly bland grab-and-go sector.”

BEST NEW CASUAL 2004

Go Fish!

(73 points)
1505 W. First Ave.,
604-730-5040

Shiru-Bay Chopstick Café

(45 points)
1193 Hamilton St.,
604-408-9315

Rangoli

(37 points)
1488 W. 11th Ave.,
604-736-5711

Cassis Bistro

(35 points)
420 W. Pender St.,
604-605-0420

Tamarind

(26 points)
1626 W. Broadway,
604-733-5335



BEST REGIONAL

Gold: C Restaurant

Our critics' committee elected to change the name of this category this year by subtracting the word "contemporary," reasoning that this adjective was now officially and completely redundant. In other words, the restaurants whose cuisine (and often décor) most accurately define where we live are, by definition, cutting edge and contemporary.

Much of that forward direction comes from the overwhelming trend towards aggressive ingredient sourcing. In the case of C (Gold Award, 87 points), that couldn't be more true. With executive chef Rob Clark spending less time at the burners in order to concentrate on sourcing (and the opening of the adjacent and casual Nu this summer), chef Rob Belcham has begun to make his imprint. Many critics spoke to this point: "the commitment of Harry Kambolis and Rob Clark (and now Rob Belcham) to local sourcing, and their support for those who produce seafood of the highest quality, is outstanding."

"The trick in producing a regionally based menu is based on several precepts: locality, seasonality and an unfettered matu-

★ MEET THE JUDGES ★

★ Soon-to-be-dad Murray Bancroft enjoys an Oyama Sausage Company Gamon bacon BLT or catching any sandwich at La Grotta del Fromagio. He thinks the best-under-fire maitre d' in town is Mark Steenge at Lumière, while for a pastry fix he's already on his way to see Thierry Bussiet at CinCin. Bancroft travels across North America as a food stylist and consulting chef, and has written articles for *Vancouver* and *Western Living* magazines. He recently produced and food styled *Vancouver Cooks*.

★ James Barber likes the "encouragement of individual choice and the concurrent need for waitstaff to be conversant with the flavours and subtleties of the menu." His most memorable dishes were crab and lotus root at En and the chili crab at Green Village. Barber is the author of children's and cook's books, but is best known as The Urban Peasant. He is currently farming in the Cowichan Valley.

★ Christina Burrridge thinks Mikal Kantor is one of the best maitre d's in town and likes her cocktails from Chris Sterns, when he's tending bar at Lumière. In the Okanagan, Burrridge loves to eat at Mission Hill, "especially if you get the chance for private dining," or the Quail's Gate Old Vines Patio, "a splendid way to while away the afternoon." But her in-town wild card? The handmade tan-tan noodles at Shanghai Bistro. Burrridge is the wine writer for *Vancouver* magazine.

★ Sid Cross likes the innovation and value at Dan and rates highly the "super terrines and fresh market ingredients" brought to the plate every day by Andrey Durbach at Parkside as a favoured culinary touchpoint. A retired lawyer, Cross brings the same exactness to his wine and food notes for *Western Living* magazine and to his many charitable ventures.

★ Anthony Gismondi "doesn't do drunk," however he enjoys the bar at Chambar and the view around the courtyard at Il Giardino when he's not eating Spaghetti Quattro. Gismondi is an executive editor at *Wine Access* and is completing his 15th year as the weekly wine columnist at the *Vancouver Sun*. Providing comprehensive reviews on his wine website and co-hosting *The Best of Food and Wine* on CFUN 1410AM keeps him out of drunk.

★ Duncan Holmes, one of our favourite judges and not just for the twinkle in his eye, prefers to see and be seen at CinCin on a Thursday night. His favourite loo provider? "The abundance of them at the Arrivals level of YVR," while he contends that the best restaurant view in town is from "the front row at the Cecil." Holmes continues to write for *BC Restaurant News*, *City Food*, *Western Living* and most recently, *Tidings Magazine* from Montreal. In the spring of 2004 he wrote a novel: predictably the detective made great omelets and the bad guy survived for weeks on burgers. He's currently seeking an agent.

★ Gary Hynes, who tuned in from Victoria this year, rates his favourite guilty pleasure as an "eau de vie," even if he sees no sin in that, and rates his home town's Café Brio as a favourite for its "rustic Italian cooking on steroids." Hynes is the publisher and editor of *EAT* magazine and has also written for *Western Living* and *Northwest Palate*. A former sommelier, he owns a restaurant and country inn in Nova Scotia.

★ Bill Jones is a sucker for Moonstruck Blossum's Blue organic cow's milk cheese. He's often to be seen at Spinnaker's Brew Pub in Victoria and rates the pan-fried dumplings at Szechuan Chongqing as "perfectly cooked, with a side of ginger vinegar and

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