

A (Short) Trip to Bountiful

As more and more restaurants grow their own veggies, produce can go from farm to table in 60 seconds **BY ALISON GARWOOD-JONES**

Across the city, industrious chefs are getting their hands dirty, digging up back lots, hauling dirt to rooftops and tailoring crops to their particular microclimate. Forget the 100-mile diet—the next frontier is the 50-metre meal.



The Drake, 1150 Queen St. W., 416-531-5042

The dirt: This spring, chef Anthony Rose took a hoe to the back lot, planting dandelion greens, radishes and peppers. To extend the growing season, he installed underground heating cables. "We also talked about putting chickens back there, but it's illegal."

The dish: Dandelion stems from the garden, sautéed in a garlic-lemon sauce with anchovies served on toast (\$10).

The enemy: Raccoons. Rose is liberally sprinkling the soil with eggshells to keep them at bay. But those giant ring-tailed rats are unstoppable.



The Royal York, 100 Front St. W., 416-368-2511

The dirt: The rooftop garden has three beehives and nearly 50 different herbs, fruits and veggies, including okra, alpine strawberries and four varieties of eggplants. Chef David Garcelon added four grapevines last summer (they grew a whopping nine feet in weeks).

The dish: At Epic, Garcelon caramelizes the precious vidal and cabernet franc grapes, plating it with prosciutto and greens (\$15).

The enemy: Marauding birds. Last year the vines produced only six tiny cabernet franc grapes, so Garcelon has put up nets to protect the first real harvest from the feathered set.



George, 111C Queen St. E., 416-863-6006

The dirt: Twenty tubs of lettuce, Barese cucumbers, bird chilies, fava beans, zucchinis, strawberries and blueberries line the balcony above the garden courtyard. "What can I say, I'm Italian," says chef Lorenzo Loseto. "Fresh produce shares equal billing with proteins."

The dish: Red bird chile tapenade and zucchini flower tempura served with Ontario Wagyu beef and a side of arugula (\$24).

The enemy: The sun. There's no escaping the rays on the balcony. Restaurant staff will have to remember to dash upstairs to water the plants twice a day, or else the produce will fry.

the creamy, expertly deboned flesh. Service is friendly and honest. 339 Spadina Ave. (at Baldwin St.), 416-340-8603. ☞

CONTINENTAL

CANOE

★★★★

It's impossible not to be impressed walking into this space, whether for the first time or the 15th. The greeting is as formal as it should be on the 54th floor of a bank tower, but it's comfortable, too; the room bears all the fineries of high-end dining, but none of the fuss. The view over the city, through wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling glass, is second only to the view from the CN Tower. But chef Anthony Walsh's well-staffed kitchen doesn't cook like that of a touristy res-

taurant with a billion-dollar view. The cooking—resolutely Canadian and remarkably accomplished—is the best thing about the place. Seared yellow perch from Point Pelee gets a creative Spanish treatment, set over a loose and heady red risotto made with sweet red peppers, wild rice and honey mussels from B.C. St. Canut Farms roast organic suckling pig brings three interpretations of the Quebec producer's unparalleled milk-fed piglet. Roast loin on mustard-zinged spaetzle is tossed with rapini, riesling-soaked yellow raisins and bacon; a torchon is crusted in panko; and the belly is first braised, then roasted to fork tender, making it so deeply caramelized it's on the cusp of being candied. Desserts reach for a similar level and succeed. Pastry chef Maria Cheung's sticky toffee-date pudding is outrageously delicious; the only

misstep is its accompanying parsnip ice cream. Service is terrific; wine pairings are thoughtful though expensive. Closed Saturday and Sunday. Mains \$39–\$45. TD Tower, 66 Wellington St. W. (at Bay), 416-364-0054. ☞ ☞ ☞

CENTRO

★★★

Patrons who learned to eat well in the '80s find the food and atmosphere comfortably luxe. Soaring walls are adorned with huge mirrors and abstract paintings, columns are draped in golden fabric, and everything is bathed in glowing yellow light. Chef Bruce Woods makes a virtue out of simplicity. Miniature crab cakes are divine, so plump with crabmeat they threaten to fall apart onto the stripe of mango-jalapeño



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