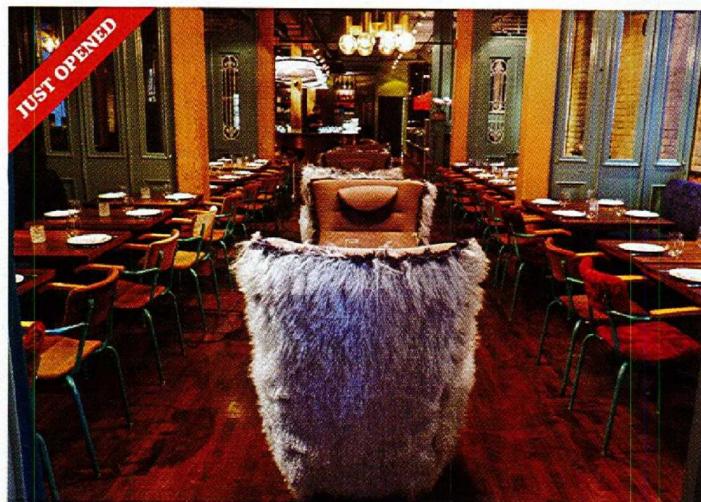


Restaurants



Fring's ★★★

RESTO-LOUNGE Drake denies he's an investor in Susur Lee's new King West place, but he *is* invested in its success, hyping it on social media and deejaying the opening party. Lee's sons, pals of Drizzy, conceived the comfort-food menu, the star of which is a heap of fried chicken served with pickled watermelon, chili-laced maple syrup and garlicky aioli. It's all better than it needs to be for the assembled partiers, who are more interested in popping \$725 bottles of Armand de Brignac. 455 King St. W., 416-979-9696. \$\$\$

DOWNTOWN

Bac Ky ★½

VIETNAMESE This Vietnamese canteen on King West places one foot squarely in North America with a health-focused smoothie bar and a soundtrack of uncut hip hop, but it nails many of the most important details. Pork rolls bursting with fresh mint and cucumber are made even better with piquant peanut sauce, and a punchy mango salad balances sweetness from julienned fruit with the earthy funk of dried shrimp. At only \$9, a tender pork chop served with rice, a fried egg and lightly dressed pickled veggies is one of the best deals in the neighbourhood. 567 King St. W., 416-599-7468. \$\$

NEW Figo ★★

ITALIAN Standout service and delicious dishes at Charles Khabouth's newest venture make its clubby beats and soda-heavy drinks forgivable. The room itself is quite lovely, too, with a ceiling fresco of roses and wine cabinets shaped like chapel windows.

Chef Anna Chen, who's cooked at Buca Yorkville and the U.K.'s Zucca, has put together a crowd-pleasing but sophisticated menu. Fried zucchini, drizzled with lemon crema fresca and honey, tastes like the best kind of tempura, and house-made tagliatelle alle vongole is bright with dill and chilies. The pastas and pizzas are a few dollars more than at the average Italian restaurant, but the wine list has plenty of offerings at all price points. 295 Adelaide St. W., 647-748-3446. \$\$\$

NEW Parcae ★★★

CANADIAN The nose-to-tail-to-entail menu in this windowless room in the Templar Hotel's basement brings some very good Québécois food. Creative extras by chefs Danny Hassell and Joseph Awad make even common dishes surprising: a braised octopus tentacle on a marrow-filled shank comes with uni-slathered toast, buttery potato purée and beef tendon chips, the

HOW WE DO IT

The following restaurants are recommended by our anonymous reviewers. Restaurant bills are paid by *Toronto Life*; reviews have no connection to advertising. Stars are awarded for food and wine quality, as well as presentation, service, atmosphere, ambition and originality. The reviews have been selected from our online directory and shortened. Because of changing menus, specific dishes referenced may not always be available.

THE STARS

- ★ Fair
- ★★ Good
- ★★★ Very Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Exceptional

THE SYMBOLS

- ♿ Restaurant and its washrooms are wheelchair accessible
- ☼ Outdoor dining in season
- 🌱 Kitchen has interesting vegetarian options
- 🍷 Bring your own bottle
- 🕒 Kitchen open past midnight on weekends
- 🍳 Serves weekend brunch
- NEW Restaurant has opened in the past six months

THE PRICES

- \$ Mains under \$10
- \$\$ Mains \$10-\$20
- \$\$\$ Mains \$20-\$30
- \$\$\$\$ Mains \$30 and up

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pretty assemblage brightened by lemon-dressed purslane. Complicated cocktails are pricey and potent. 348 Adelaide St. W., 416-398-5335. \$\$\$

R&D ★

INTERNATIONAL Last spring, *MasterChef Canada* judge Alvin Leung and the show's first winner, Eric Chong, opened this impressive-looking restaurant in Chinatown. The trouble is, their Asian-American snacks lack the layers of flavour that could make them addictive. Dishes like the condensed milk-laced fried chicken can be cloying, while others, like the seafood chow mein, are just plain salty. Cocktails are more creative and balanced. The Peking duck old fashioned, enriched with duck fat and kicked with a shishito tincture and a smoked Chinese plum, pairs nicely with the truffled shrimp toast. Enjoy them at the bar, then move on to one of the many great kitchens on the Spadina strip. 241 Spadina Ave., 416-586-1241. \$\$



PHOTOGRAPH BY RENÉE SUEN