

An appetite for Ottawa: here's a look at some excellent dining establishments

MtlRestoRap

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Readers are well aware by now that I travel to Ottawa quite often for family reasons. This was the third summer in a row that we chose to holiday in the nation's capital. I strongly recommend it, notably for the culinary scene. Here are some tips from my latest visit.

Starling

The historic York on William (YOW) building, which encompasses Starling Restaurant & Bar and Apothecary Cocktail Lounge, represents a must visit. We were delighted to get a coveted rooftop table at Starling with a panoramic view of the market.

Starling is named after a highly social bird that likes to travel in large flocks. We enjoyed a fabulous meal, starting off with some scarlet tanagers from the bar, three ounces of excellence: Dillon's strawberry gin, brut, apple simple syrup, lemon and strawberries. I also tried the *Anthony*, a tasty drink minus alcohol containing orange juice, lime, ginger simple and chilli peppers.

Following a thorough study of the menu, we began with 12 oysters. They were of good size and did not last long on the serving plate. We then shared some terrific burrata toast, olive oil fried true loaf sourdough, local heirloom tomatoes, fresh burrata and aurelius fig balsamic.

For the main courses we chose two absolute winners. The pan seared six ounce west coast sable fish was beyond extraordinary. It was served with mint, pea and fine herb risotto. This is a fish we have always enjoyed, yet it is so rare to find on an east coast restaurant menu. It was moist and literally melted in our mouths. The 14 ounce rib eye, medium rare, with loaded mashed potatoes on the side, was another excellent choice. Paolo cooked it to perfection and the bordelaise Larry sauce was just right to add more flavour.



Chef Paolo DiBello runs the Starling kitchen

When it came for dessert we shared the ever so rich chocolate mousse, which included brown butter streusel, brunoise mango and strawberry. Indeed this was a meal fit for a king and rooftop terrace we look forward to experiencing again and trying some of the other delicious looking items we had to pass on. Info: www.starlingottawa.ca.

Métropolitain Brasserie

Last summer I made my first visit to Métropolitain Brasserie, just steps away from Parliament Hill at 700 Sussex. Home to Ottawa's largest oyster bar, the restaurant is open seven days a week, serving lunch, dinner and brunch on weekends. We started off the evening with some drinks and then took a good hard look at all of the options available among the appetizers. The small size seafood tower was more than enough for three of us to share. It contained shrimp, oysters, mussels, snow crab, cod croquettes, scallop Crudo and ceviche. Wow, this was a meal unto itself and we savored every morsel. There is a larger platter for four available. The burrata toast for two was another treat for the three of us to share. It includes sunflower seed and beetroot pesto, avocado, fried sourdough, sprouts and chili oil.

There is a nice selection of main courses. I remembered The Duck Confit from my last visit, an item I do not see available at too many restaurants I frequent. It was superbly prepared, with crispy skin and served with warm potatoes, red cabbage citrus slaw, duck fat fingerling, orange curry sauce and basil. As for the others, they opted for the fish of the day, some perfectly seared scallops and an order of lamb chops. For dessert we shared the flourless chocolate cake, with caramel sauce and raspberry preserves. It literally melted in my mouth. Info: www.metropolitainbrasserie.com or call: 613-562-1160.

Lavender Grill and Lounge

Lavender Grill and Lounge opened in the Byward Market in the summer of 2022, the vision of owner Reza Khakbaz. We began our meal by sharing two bowls of delicious and piping hot carrot soup among the three of us. That was followed by a bruschetta. We also split the salmon tartare, sushi grade salmon with chopped shallots, chives, parsley, dill, capers, a splash of chardonnay, soya sauce, grainy mustard, tabasco, lemon and lime zest. While I quenched my thirst with a mocktail (yep I am a safe driver), the two others enjoyed some Lavender Royales, containing Saint Germain, London Dry, Crème de Violette and Prosecco. For the main course, I went for the chicken parmesan, (tenderized chicken breaded and fried), topped with tomato sauce and mozzarella. It was served with tomato pasta on the side. As for the others, they sampled the Lavender ravioli and the filet mignon. The four cheese ravioli was tossed in creamy Lavender sauce and mushrooms, with onions and garlic and topped with Lavender crumbs. The eight ounce filet mignon was served with a side of vegetables and a garden salad. For dessert, we shared the chocolate explosion. Info: www.lavendergrill.com



The seafood tower at Métropolitain Brasserie



The "Lavender" look



Christopher Michaud, owner of Ottawa's Marzitelli Marzitelli

Pierrefonds native Christopher Michaud operates a supper club on Elgin Street called Marzitelli, named after his Italian mother. On my most recent trip I went to visit with Chris and take advantage of the ever so popular Marzitelli Sunday brunch on the beautiful rooftop terrace. The breakfast was top-notch. I ordered the Galette au Saumon Fumé: two sunny-side up eggs, accompanied by a potato galette topped with Norwegian smoked salmon, wafer-thin red onion, sour cream & capers. On the side you can have some crispy roasted potatoes or a garden salad, garnished with fruit. I also ordered a clubhouse wrap to take back with me for lunch, marinated chicken breast, roasted peppers, onions, bacon and mozzarella. It was delicious, especially after putting it in the microwave oven for 30 seconds. The dinner menu is noted for excellent pasta dishes, all made from scratch and from the Marzitelli family recipe book, as well as French classics, pizzas, burgers, steak, shrimp, whiskey maple braised salmon, fish tacos, a poké bowl and more. Chris's late dad was a musician and his mom a cook. On the stage sits Chris's baby grand piano and it isn't uncommon to see him come out of the kitchen after dinner service to enjoy a few cocktails with the guests while playing well-known hits. Often, guests are also entertained by one of his many musical friends invited as performers. In fact, his house band is called the *Men From Marz* and performs about once a month. It includes Chris and NDG musician Dimo James Papadimitrios. Info: www.marzitelli.ca.

For more details on these restaurants and more please go to the Ottawa section of www.MtlRestoRap.com