Restaurants reviewed; foods tasted and described; what tastes good and why. Without the baloney.

ISSUE 2 • WINTER 2008

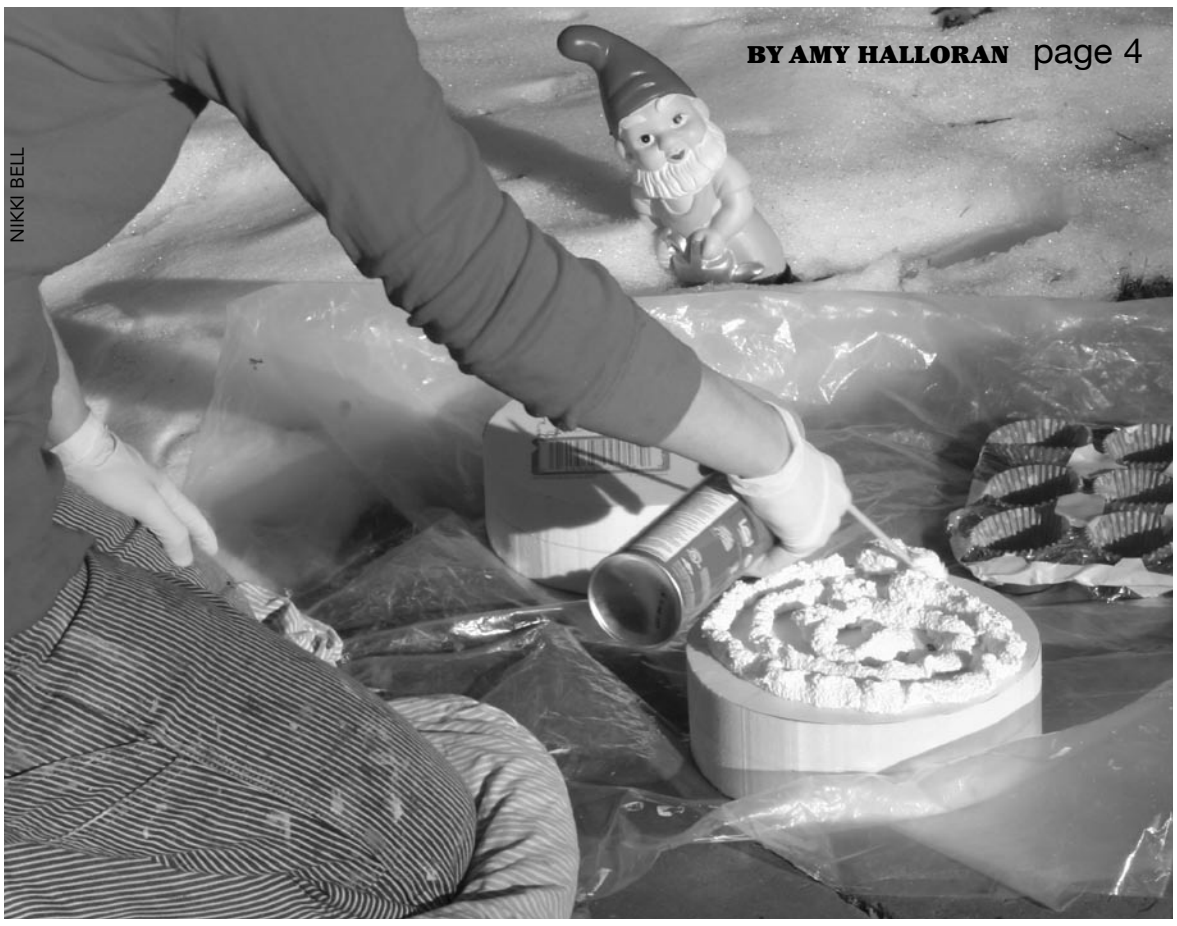
DELICIOUSCITY

NAVIGATING SEATTLE'S FABULOUS FOOD CULTURE

deliciouscity.com

Let Us Eat Cake

One woman's cool obsession with cakefood



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DELICIOUS BELLTOWN

Recommended Belltown Restaurants *For a complete list, see belltownmessenger.com/delicious*

AMORE *Live weekend jazz and casual dining from chef Sean Langan.* 2301 5th Ave. - 770-0606

ANTHONY'S FISH BAR *High volume seafood on the waterfront, nicely done.* 2201 Alaskan Way - 448-6688

ARTISAN CAFE *Formerly the Alligator Pear. A favorite lunch spot for the locals.* 2523 Fifth Avenue - 441-8885

ASSAGGIO RISTORANTE *Central and Northern Italian dining.* 2010 4th Ave. - 441-1399

THE ATHENIAN *A classic Market diner.* 1517 Pike Place Market - 624-7166

BAMBINOS EAST COAST PIZZERIA *East Coast pizza West Coast style.* 401 Cedar St. - 269-2222

BELLINO COFFEE *If you tunneled through the building (Belltown Court) you'd reach Starbucks.* 2421 2nd Ave. - 956-4237

BEBA'S DELI *Lunch action for local workers.* 2301 5th Ave. #103 - 770-9595

BELLTOWN BISTRO *Great seafood, nightlife after dinner*. 2322 1st Ave. - 728-2000

BELLTOWN PIZZA *Dark and cozy pizza spot that comes alive for cocktailers at night.* 2422 1st Ave. - 441-2653

BLACK BOTTLE *One of Messenger food critic Ronald Holden's favorite neighborhood places.* 1st and Vine - 441-1500

BRASA *Consistently voted one of the best restaurants in the State by various foodie VIPs.* 2107 3rd Ave. - 728-4220

BUDDHA THAI *Highly regarded noodle dishes (the chef lady is Thai) and some electrofantastic music and cabaret in the evening-time.* 2222 2nd Ave. - 441-4449

BUENOS AIRES GRILL *Great steaks, says Clark, who lives next door and frequently savors the aromas.* 220 Virginia St. -441-7076

BUFFALO DELI *Wholesome, tasty soups and sandwiches at this favorite for lunching local workers.* 2123 1st Ave. - 728-8759

CJ'S EATERY *Great breakfast and lunch place now open for dinner, too. American food done right.* 2619 1st Ave. - 728-1648

CAFE CASBAH *Most excellent espresso (& falafel, too).* 2219 2nd Ave. - 728-1771

CAMPAGNE *Fancy French fare near the Market.* 86 Pine St. - 728-2800

CASCADIA RESTAURANT *World Class.* 2328 1st Ave. - 448-8884

CAUSELITA'S CARIBBEAN CAFE *Conch fritters and plantains in "North Belltown."* 81 Vine St. - 770-0155

CHAMPION WINE CELLARS *Belltown's best wine selections.* 108 Denny Way - 284-8306

THE CHEESE CELLAR *A wide selection of gourmet artisan cheeses.* 100 4th Ave. N. (at Fisher Plaza) - 404-2743

CUCINA DE-RA *Overlooking the Olympic Sculpture Park.* 2801 Western Ave. Suite E - 728-9600

CUTTERS BAYHOUSE *"Globally inspired Northwest cuisine."* 2001 Western Ave. - 448-4884

CYCLOPS *Comfy booths. Look for the giant eyeball on their sign.* 2421 1st Ave. - 441-1677

DAHLIA LOUNGE *Uncommon Tom Douglas favorites!* 2001 4th Ave. - 682-4142

DAN'S BELLTOWN GROCERY *Belltown's #1 quality grocery store.* 2221 3rd Ave. - 441-0220

EL GAUCHO *Seattle's top steakhouse.* 2505 1st Ave. - 728 1337

ETTA'S SEAFOOD *Fine seafood at the Market from Tom Douglas.* 2020 Western Ave. - 443-6000

FISH CLUB BY TODD ENGLISH *A high-end chain, kind of like the "Ruth's Chris" of seafood.* 2100 Alaskan Way - 256-1040

FIVE POINT CAFE *Breakfast and cocktails here every morning (!) as the rock-n roll-blares.* 415 Cedar St. - 448-9993

FLYING FISH *Belltown's pan-Pacific seafood institution and world-class destination.* 2234 1st Ave. - 728-8595

FRONTIER ROOM *Belltown's best BBQ, and cocktails.* 2203 1st Ave. - 956-RIBS (7427)

GOLDEN SINGHA *Thai food right near the Space Needle.* 425 Cedar St. - 728-1532

IL BISTRO *Romantic Italian at the Market.* 93-A Pike St. - 682-3049

KYO *Sushi and all the trimmings.* 2801 1st Ave. - 441-5188

LA FONTANA RISTORANTE *Sicilian style, with festive Italian waiters.* 120 Blanchard St. - 441-1045

LA VITA E' BELLA PIZZERIA *Pizza, cannoli, espresso.* 2411 2nd Ave. - 441-5322

LAMPREIA *A world-class Belltown restaurant.* 2400 1st Ave. - 443-3301

LE PICHET *Popular and eggsellent French bistro.* 1933 1st Ave. - 256-1499

LOLA *Greek-influenced Tom Douglas place.* 2000 4th Ave. - 443-6000

MACRINA BAKERY & CAFE *Baked goods, old-world style. Especially popular on Sunday mornings.* 2408 1st Ave. - 448-4032

MAMA'S MEXICAN KITCHEN *34 years at 2nd & Bell in Belltown.* 2234 2nd Ave. - 728-6262

MARCO'S SUPPER CLUB *Belltown's longtime Italian place with twists. A Messenger fave.* 2510 1st Ave - 441-7801

MARJORIE *Great food, great cozy courtyard. One of our favorite Belltown restaurants.* 2331 2nd Ave. - 441-9842

MARRAKESH MOROCCAN *Flavors from the foot of the Atlas Mountains.* 2334 2nd Ave. - 956-0500

MISTRAL *Prix fixe fine European dining. Nice...* 113 Blanchard St. - 770-7799

NOODLE RANCH *Curry, udon, Westernized Asian fusion.* 2228 2nd Ave. - 728-0463

OHANA *Fun sushi and cocktails with a dash of weekend cocktail culture. It's a tiki bar, really.* 2207 1st Ave. - 956-9329

PALACE KITCHEN *Nightly rotisserie specials.* 2030 5th Ave. - 448-2001

PESOS KITCHEN & LOUNGE *Family Mexican with great breakfast happy hour.* 605 Queen Anne Ave. N. - 283-9353

PINK DOOR *Funky longtime Market classic. Fun!* 1919 Post Alley - 443-3241

QUBE *Contemporary Asian restaurant and lounge with a French twist.* 1901 2nd Ave. - 770-5888

QUEEN CITY GRILL *Longtime Belltown salmon stop with a thriving late night bar scene.* 2201 1st Ave. - 443-0975

RENDEZVOUS *Our favorite bar since 1990. Food, too. Plus plays, movies and music in the historic Jewel Box Theatre.* 2320 2nd Ave. - 441-5823

ROCKIN BURRITO *Lunch-time taco joint with many followers.* 2501 4th Ave. - 728-1333

SAITO'S JAPANESE CAFE *The best sushi lunch in Belltown. 2122 2nd Ave. - 443-0976*

SEATTLE CELLARS *Great deals on great wines.* 2505 2nd Ave. - 256-0850

SEE SOUND LOUNGE 115 Blanchard St. - 374-3733

SERIOUS PIE *Crisp, crunchy rectangular pizza from a serious oven.* 2001 4th Ave. - 682-4142

SHALLOTS *Cozy Asian bistro at 4th & Vine. Call 'em for delivery.* 2525 4th Ave. - 728-1888

SHIRO'S *The finest sushi from Mr. Shiro.* 2401 2nd Ave. - 443-9844

SHILLA *Korean & Japanese delicacies for three decades.* 2300 8th Ave. (and Denny) - 623-9996 (delivery: 443-8646)

SPITFIRE *Belltown's best sports-bar with massive HDTVs and great Latin fusion cuisine.* 2219 4th Ave. - 441-7966

SUITE 410 *Cocktail perfection.* 410 Stewart St. - 624-9911

SUSHI WAVE *Waves of sushi flavor.* 2904 1st Ave. - 441-4348

TACO DEL MAR *A Seattle chain of "Mexican" restaurants. Fast, decent and cheap.* 2136 1st Ave. - 448-8877

TASTE CAFE *At the Olympic Sculpture Park* 2901 Western Ave. - 654-3190

TAVOLATA *"Fabulous" —Seattle Post-Intelligencer.* 2323 2nd Ave. - 838-8008

THE LOCAL VINE *"Divine pairings a sure bet" —Seattle Post-Intelligencer* 2520 2nd Ave. - 441-6000

TWO BELLS TAVERN *Great burgers, beer. Brainy crowd. A neighborhood classic forever.* 2313 4th Ave. - 441-3050

TXORI *Sensational new tapas bar. San Sebastian-style pintxos.* 2207 2nd Ave. - 204-9771

UMI SAKE HOUSE *Izakaya-style informal dining. Authentic.* 2230 1st Ave. - 374-8717

VIRGINIA INN *A beloved neighborhood watering-hole.* 1937 1st Ave. - 728-1937

WANN JAPANESE IZAKAYA *New Belltown Izakaya!* 2020 2nd Ave. - 441-5637

WASABI BISTRO *High-end sushi, open late!* 2311 2nd Ave. - 441-6044

ZOE *Elegant bistro. Affordable & tasty. A classic.* 2137 2nd Ave. - 256-2060

Vegan Garden is mmrph(crunch)rmph

RH

by Bob Oswald page 5

MISSION STATEMENT:

Delicious City will celebrate Seattle's remarkable food culture. And we'll do so in a manner that respects the intelligence and sensibilities of a readership that has come to expect good and better things from our gustatory landscape and those who opine about it.

"Food culture" is a nicely ambiguous term. Within its ambit lie our restaurants, wineries, and food fairs; our culinary passions, the lifestyles that embrace such as organic, locally-grown and artisan foods; the personalities, whose tireless, loving alchemy makes it all possible; the culinary macrocosm, of foreign-born spices and delectables that find their dauntless way to our shores and stores.

That's plenty. We'll cover it all with integrity, care and a rigorous sense of humor. And our writers and editorial staff will be asked to comport their prose to a style-sheet elegant in its simplicity: do not use the word "eclectic"; at all times defy convention and occasionally treat it to a little rough handling; approach the common cheeseburger with the same respect and reverence accorded the fresh Pacific oyster.

Restaurants reviewed; foods tasted and described; what tastes good and why.

Without the baloney.

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deliciouscity.com

PACIFIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

THIS PRINT EDITION OF *DELICIOUS CITY* IS PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH PACIFIC PUBLISHING CO.

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Panamanian Food: No Mas!

But we had a great time while not eating

BY BILL FENIMORE

PHOTOS BY BILL

This fall the *NY Times* recommended Panama as a nice travel destination, so my sweetie and I chucked our Costa Rica plans and arrived in Panama City with our Lonely Planet Guide and not much else to inform our expectations. Most winters we travel in Mexico, but this year was to be a break from the pattern. In Mexico we have almost always found great local food and bad cops. In Panama things are reversed: Panamanian police will get in your car not to extort a bribe but rather to guide you to your destination.

In the two short weeks that we were in country, we tried but failed to find the delicious indigenous cuisine of Panama. We had some good meals – Cuban, Spanish, Italian, Chinese – but the closer we got to Panamanian home-style cooking the more we encountered the odd and inedible. We tried thin gruel, greasy fry-bread, bad ceviche and overcooked cafeteria mystery-meat (steam tables are big in Panama). I couldn't quite bring myself to try the spiral cut hot dog on a stick, even though hot sauce was provided; under most conditions hot sauce on street food compensates for anything.

My main impression is that Panama is a busy international crossroads and most of the folks who open restaurants there bring their recipes with them from someplace else (to a significant degree, that might also be said of Seattle).

I came back home with my suitcase stuffed with Panamanian rum and a bunch of hot sauce bottles labeled "Congo." DC

***STREET FOOD** in El Valle de Anton, including hot dogs on a stick. No dogs were harmed.*

***TROUT AT A BISTRO** in Boquete, a gold rush town full of North Americans buying land, not much trout.*

Food Curmudgeon

My Armageddon Meal Mix-up

BY J. DAN WHACHO

The Union of Concerned Scientists, Biblical prophecy and some friends of mine are predicting Armageddon again coming up here pretty soon. Now, I know that's a lot of superstitious hogwash, but it did get me wondering: what do you eat during Armageddon? Food would be in short supply during those difficult end-times. The Bible was no help. I lost a lot of sleep.

But then I remembered: hey, we've got a great food resource right here in town. The zoo.

No, no, I wouldn't eat the

animals. Animals have rights, even zoo animals. No, I would just steal their food. After all, that food is paid for by

my hard-earned capital-gains taxes. The animals would not be able to stop me because they're caged. So now you're probably wondering: what do animals eat?

Day 1: Reptile Area

Turns out reptiles eat insects. Hmm. Nope, not eating bugs. I have dignity. But wait: reptiles don't have personalities, so it's okay to kill and eat them. Example: an armadillo. I hunted up an armadillo recipe. It starts out like this:

1 armadillo, cleaned
1 fresh tomato

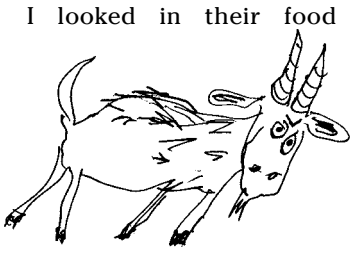
And I'm immediately going: hold on. It's Armageddon, for chrissakes. There are no more fresh tomatoes. Thanks, Betty Crocker Cookbook. About as helpful as the Bible.

Anyway, they don't have any armadillos at the zoo. It was starting to seem like this food project was too complex for them.

Day 2: Petting Zoo

Do not touch the animals in the petting zoo. All day long they are petted by children, whose little hands are major disease vectors. Mumps, chicken pox, croup. After Armageddon, the plague. It's a wonder the animals don't just keel over.

I looked in their food



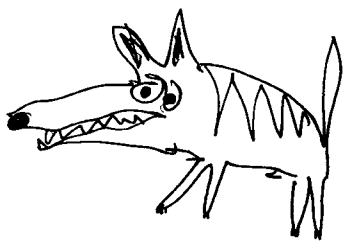
trough. Millet, alfalfa, chaff. When the animals were distracted by the children I stole

some, took it home, cooked it and ate it. It made me ill, but it kept me alive for another day. And that's the whole idea of food.

Day 3: Wild Dog Exhibit

I asked an attendant what the wild dogs were fed. He said they were fed carrion: squirrels, raccoons and possums accidentally run over by zoo vehicles.

Hmm. Vehicles would be in short supply after Armageddon. So I assumed I would have to



provide my own. I went home and rented a Vespa and ran over a squirrel. I had to run over it several times. I took it to the zoo, stole it – stole it twice, actually, for practice – took it home and ate it. Not only did it make me ill, but you know what it tasted like? Yup. It tasted like squirrel.

Day 4: To Hell with it

Some days I'm glad I'm not an animal. Bugs, grains, carrion. Awful. Attention, people who run the zoo: I demand that you provide better food. Until then, you have lost my patronage. DC

foodcurmudgeon.com

RONALD HOLDEN savors local treasures

Oyster, My Oyster

Ronald Holden

AHH ... SHUCKS. *Totten Inlet oysters open wide to reveal their treasures.*

There they were, perched at the counter at ***Steelhead Diner***, enjoying a glass of bubbly and gossiping with the chef: **Jon Rowley** and his wife, **Kate McDermott**, quietly celebrating their appearance in the new issue of *Saveur*. The least ostentatious of Seattle's food stars, Rowley is probably the most influential. He's the oyster guru, the peach guru, and above all the salmon guru. No one in town has done more to change the way we eat, or the way our farmers and fishers think about the food they grow or catch.

Ronald Holden

Saveur names Rowley to its Top 100 list for 2008. (Most of the entries aren't people but food trends and restaurants.) His 500-word biographical sketch is titled *Disciple of Flavor*. "We admire the passion that's sustained him in his pursuits, which, in hindsight, more closely resemble a quest than a career."

KATE MCDERMOTT AND JON ROWLEY *celebrate fish, pie, life.*

The quest is never-ending. "Rowley is acutely curious about what makes a particular food taste good. Environmental factors are crucial, he's discovered, whether it's the unique blend of local algae and minerals that allows the Virginica oysters of Totten Inlet, in Washington's Puget Sound, to grow incomparably plump and sweet, or the precise proportions of water and compost that beget the perfect blackberry." Rowley carries a refractometer to measure sugar content and tell him everything he needs to know about the plant, whether it's a blackberry or a peach.

And speaking of blackberries, that's Kate's blackberry pie in the upper right-hand corner of the magazine cover.

The time has come,
said Cornichon,
For bivalves on the beach:
The moon is full,
the tide is out ...
We'll have an oyster feast!

Okay, so it doesn't quite rhyme. And you have to know your *Alice Through the Looking Glass* to remember that "The Walrus and the Carpenter" is a Lewis Carroll nonsense poem about two unlikely buddies who invite a bunch of oysters to their midnight picnic ... and eat them.

But it's not nonsense at all, a couple of nights ago, as Rowley leads an expedition of intrepid foodies from Seattle to the ***Taylor Shellfish*** oyster beds on Totten Inlet in the South Sound. Full moon, extreme low tide, f-f-f-reezing temperatures, and all the oysters one could gather, shuck and eat. A bonfire to keep body and soul together. Fresh-off-the-beach bivalves, notably Totten Inlet Pacificas and the thumbnail-size Olympias. Oyster-friendly wines, too, notably the Geyser Peak sauvignon blanc.

"The best oysters you'll ever taste," Rowley had promised. "A benchmark oyster experience." No kidding. Oh frabjous day, oh frabjous night!

You know how sometimes it seems like you read about the same damn thing every time you turn around? Like Britney. Or Ron Paul. Or the Sonics. It's going to happen again this week, and the name you'll be hearing is ***Txori***. (Think "chirp," like a birdie.) It's the new Basque café (more accurately, a pintxos bar) in Belltown owned by **Joseba Jimenez de Jimenez** and his wife, **Carolin Messier de Jimenez**, the couple who own ***Harvest Vine*** in Madison Park. Well, this is their week.

The *Seattle P-I* had a review on Friday. *The Stranger* ran a review in Thursday's edition, and Gourmet.com launched its new website with a review on Wednesday. The Seattle Times already did a piece (Small Places) and a mention (Best Bites). *Belltown Messenger*? We were there weeks and weeks ago ("Most Welcome Newcomer," last issue.)

Ah, the relentless calendar. Feast of Donostia (that's San Sebastian in the local dialect) coming up on the weekend.

Continued on page 6

Rex

SORRENTINO'S ENZA *prepares a savory, mussel-bound lunchtime special.*

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Let Us Eat Cake

BY AMY HALLORAN

Cake is too serious a business to be entrusted to the professionals

I don't know when I fell in love with cake. In a family picture, I stare at the lit candles on my birthday cake while my grandmother smiles at me. Was I wearing a crown? Or was the cake the crown, the shining candles playing the part of jewels? Whatever the case, I'm sure I was already long captivated by cake, held in the shine of icing even when it arrived at the table candle-free, no celebration attached.

Eventually, I became the family baker and baked cookies and cakes for snacks and school lunches. I moped when my father wouldn't buy me an Easy-Bake Oven at a garage sale, even though I used the real oven all the time. The boxes of cake at my friend's house fascinated me. The cake mixes seemed like magic, more magic than the cakes I made from big boxes at home. I loved to watch the little puffs rise in the oven. It was disappointing, however, when the promise of the cake was so quickly gone.

Though I made most of my cookies from scratch, I didn't make a cake from scratch until I joined 4-H. It was a domestic sciences club, rather than an animal sciences club, and the first cake we, the 4-H Clovers, made as a group was a German Chocolate Cake. The first cake I made at home was a Bonnie Butter Cake from Betty Crocker's red cookbook, a premium I bought with some family cash and a bunch of pieces of box tops. I could not believe the difference between that cake, so velvety in crumb, and the mixes! The magic of the boxes, big or small, appealed to me no more; the magic of butter, creamed with sugar and puffed with eggs, did.

My love for cake, for the idea of it and the transformative promise of the whole thing and each bite, has developed over the years. By the time I was in my twenties, I couldn't bear to have someone else bake my birthday cake. I was too invested in my hope for what it should taste like to entrust that hope to someone else. I remember the year someone convinced me to let her buy a white cake with whipped cream frosting for my birthday. The cake itself was too light, and too sweet, and the whipped cream had way too much sugar, too. I can still taste how that cake did not meet my expectations.

NIKKI BELL

STAFF ARTIST NIKKI BELL prepares a vegan cake from foam, plaster and caulk.

And yet, baking my own birthday cake is not satisfying either. Birthdays are high holidays. I think the birthday girl or boy should get a week off from financial and household responsibilities to rejoice in the fact of being alive. That week should not include cake baking, but I hate bought cakes. I feel like a drudge, and a bit of a compulsive maniac, making my own cake. Each year I consider the bakers and bakeries I know and wonder who might be able to meet my demands. And I remember the keen short-fallings of past birthday cakes, and go to the kitchen.

> "I remember the keen short-fallings of past birthday cakes"

Last year, when I turned forty, I was about ready to hand in my oven mitts. I was a big girl, so I thought I could finally let someone else handle the cake. Besides, I wanted a big party for family and friends, so I let my sister buy the cake from Debbie's Kitchen, a great sandwich and sweet shop in Albany, New York. I talked to Debbie myself, describing an almond pasty pound cake affair with a thin chocolate coating. I love Debbie's baked goods and figured that she could deliver the taste of love I wanted. Then my aunt died and her wake was the night of the party, so we cancelled.

Now I'm about to be forty-one. I think I want to re-schedule the party and of course I'm tempted to make the cake. But there is a problem in making my own cake, more than the grudging feeling of working for my own celebration. Throughout my life I've courted people with cake. In anticipation of certain friends' birthdays, I read cookbooks for weeks, thinking of which recipes I could alter and combine to best honor the salutee. I wanted the cake to be a material expression of my connection to this person. Cake baking is almost like church to me, I suppose, and the cake becomes like communion. This is heavy-duty baggage to set on a bunch of sugar, flour and fat.

I was raised Catholic, but the church I went to was very Vatican II. Very hippie. We sang Happy Birthday to Jesus on Christmas and had a big cake with candles. I made my first communion at a wedding, and didn't get the hint that I was eating Jesus' body FOR REAL until I read Flannery O'Connor. I thought the unleavened bread we broke was just bread we shared, a symbol of the Last Supper and Jesus' wishes that we share things together and all be friends. I had no clue that communion was meant to be Communion, some kind of strange and impossible connection to the body that went up on the cross lo those many years ago.

But at the risk of offending anyone who believes the facts I missed, I think I almost feel this way about cake. When I bake cake, I bake love. It's a way for people to eat my heart out. I bake bread and I cook meals for my family and friends daily, but I mostly put work into those efforts, not a lot of heartfelt thinking. I put my heart and soul into cake. I don't think I could give that much of myself to food every day, which brings me back to the conundrum of my birthday cake.

How can I put my heart into my own cake? Perhaps this is related to low self-esteem, and I should spend the rest of the year examining my motivations on a pricey sofa. Or maybe the issue is simpler. On birthdays we are supposed to absorb the love other people feel for us. And maybe my need to bake my own cake is related to big fat intimacy issues. Could it be that I can't let people show how much they love me? Ah, enough speculation. It is time to bake, and eat, a lot of cake. DC

WIKIMEDIA

Butter Cake

Here is my favorite butter cake these days. I made it for my son's birthday a few years ago, doubling the butter by mistake. I only realized my mistake when the cake took longer to bake.

This recipe is adulterated from the *King Arthur Flour Baker's Companion*.

3 sticks butter
1 3/4 cups sugar
3/4 tsp salt
2 1/2 tsp baking powder
2 tsp vanilla
5 eggs
2 3/4 cups flour
1/2 cup milk, buttermilk or yogurt

Preheat oven to 350 F. Grease and flour two 8 or 9 inch rounds, or one 13 x 9 inch pan.

Cream butter and sugar with an electric mixer. Add salt, baking powder and vanilla and cream for five minutes. Add eggs one at a time, mixing between additions. Add one third of the flour into the mixture, then half the milk, alternating with flour and milk until all the ingredients are in the batter.

Pour batter into pans. Bake the cakes at least 45 minutes. Cake is done when it pulls away from the edges of the pan and a fingerprint made in the center springs back.

The Mystery of General Tso's Balls

A Review of Vegan Garden

BY BOB OSWALD

VEGAN GARDEN'S "Shredded Tofu Rolls" rool.

I always want to go into that Museum of the Mysteries on Broadway, check out Bigfoot's prints and huff some O2 at the oxygen bar, but no one will go with me 'cause they think it's dumb. My friends are lame: they just don't appreciate mysteries (or oxygen). Well, I've got one for you that doesn't have anything to do with Bigfoot or dissatisfied spirits or that guy who jacked a plane and jumped out with 200 grand. It's the mystery, or, I should say, a cluster of mysteries, surrounding one General Tso and the flavorful balls that bear his name.

Vegan Garden is the latest project of the owners of Moonlight Garden, another favorite vegetarian (though not strictly: meat dishes are served there too) spot. As I am a veteran of Bamboo Garden in Lower Queen Anne (oily meat substitutes so delicious you have to eat them all + big, sweet, strong drinks = well, you know), my interest was not immediately piqued. How many kosher-vegan-pan-Asian joints can one city carry ... even a kosher, vegan, pan-Asian city like Seattle? I piqued up a little at the chance to write a little review of the place, though, because we write to find out what we are writing about, and I wanted to know something about the dish Bamboo- and Vegan- Garden goers know as General Tso's "chicken."

The mysteries: who is the eponymous General Tso and how does a military man rise to such a level of proficiency in creating tangy sauces suitable for chicken or its soy-based substitutes? How is it possible for a tangible, earthly object to taste so good without breaking any laws of physics? Why do so many vegan restaurants follow the naming convention "__ _____ Garden?" And finally, why does the aforementioned mock "chicken" always come in the shape of slightly oblong spheroids ... i.e. balls?

For the sake of readability, let's just assume I've already made every clever joke about that particular aspect of the dish and move on. Also, it should be noted here that I do not intend to solve the aforementioned mysteries. I was just *initiating a dialog*.

For ages, the lowdown in Seattle's hip vegan circles has been that #87, General Tso's Chicken, is the must-have item on Bamboo Garden's menu. I'm not sure if it's the spicy, syrupy, multi-purpose sauce (seriously, no difference between "hot" and "mild") or the flaky-crusted, chewy-centered balls of what appears to be soy protein that sub in for the chicken, but there is something about the simple dish that makes it more than the sum of its parts. I wanted to see if the same was true at Vegan Garden, which I knew also offered the hungry traveler a heaping pile of sweet, saucy balls (OK, last time, I promise). I enlisted a dining companion, hereafter known as Dining Companion, and went to check it out.

General Tso (aka Zuo Zongtáng, aka General Gao), born 1812, was a civil servant and military officer who began his illustrious career by failing the civil exam seven times. I used to administer exams like this here in our own time and country, and if they are anything alike, it goes to show that Gen. Tso was not, as they say, high-functioning. Tso retired — I wasn't aware that retiring was an option in your twenties — and took up the simple, country life. It wasn't until the Taipei rebellion that he rose to prominence and became known for his military prowess. For the rest of his life, Tso was a soldier, and was appointed to the Grand Council in 1880. OK, so obviously when I looked all this up on Wikipedia I learned a lot about Tso, as well as some interesting minutiae about *Star Trek* and minor characters on *The Simpsons*, but there's one problem.

None of this has to do with chicken. When and where did this triumphant warrior's name become connected with the eponymous dish of mangled poultry in a savory sauce, usually served over broccoli?

Dining Companion and I drove up to the Garden. I was determined to find answers. And, I was hungry.

Parking is available at Vegan Garden, though the lot is small and shared by several other businesses. The stalls reserved for the restaurant are labeled "Vegan," which made me feel like a rock star or at least an employee of the month. The décor is, well, pretty much décor. The seating area is large and L-shaped, not highly decorated. The place is clean, bright, and comfortable.

Dining Companion noted that the table was a little sticky, but she's a big whiner anyway.

We are at the Garden early and the place was nearly empty. As we ate, the dinner crowd from the football game trickled in. A vegan dinner crowd from a football game? Still, the place didn't get overly full, and the waiters were courteous and helpful without seeming aggressive. I don't like stalker-waiters, except at Ballet Restaurant where they're cute.

Now, the food. It is still somewhat of a novelty for me to be paid for my writing, compensated for the cost of the food I'm reviewing. It doesn't really make sense to me, but neither does paying for my own food. Ordering on someone else's tab, we got summer rolls as appetizers, an order of some kind of stir fried noodle and vegetable thing, and, of course, the General's finest. We planned on dessert, too.

The summer rolls were excellent, stuffed with fresh greens and that fried, dried up tofu which crunches kind of like bacon bits — you know what I mean. Dining Companion tried her noodly stir fry and proclaimed it good; it was a little heavy, but it tasted like it should have, if it could be said that anything *should* taste like anything.

And then there were the balls. Slightly smaller than those at Bamboo, and lacking their counterparts' flaky crust, the "chicken" balls that made up the majority of the dish were dense, saturated in sauce, and absolutely fun to stuff in your mouth. Longtime "heads" know there aren't many psychoactive substances that are truly addictive, in the strict sense, but there are many things in the world that provoke obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors in otherwise normal people. General Tso's balls are one of them. I have seen fights break out across tables, spilling out into aisles, and out the door for a cigarette, simply because an odd number of diners had the misfortune of drawing an even number of balls. The balls at Vegan Garden are perhaps more dangerous than those at Bamboo, because they are leaner and lighter in the stomach; I can envision a Bukowskiesque "bring me another" situation in which an unwitting diner, unfamiliar with the General and his clever traps, takes on more than he is capable of and ends up with a severely damaged digestive system and, quite possibly, psyche. Still trying to force that last little globe, dripping with sauce, into his mouth ...

EXPRESS YOUR CONTEMPT for meat with their vegan-style "Mongolian Beef."

No one knows how or when Tso's name became associated with the dish. Hailing from the province of Hunan, Tso would have been familiar with thick, savory sauces, not the sweet and tangy goop that normally coats a big plate of balls here in the states. Apparently the dish was invented by refugees from the Chinese civil war in Taiwan and was first served in New York, perhaps in the late '50s, by a chef named Peng Changkuei. But enough with the names ... neither you nor I knew who General Tso was at the beginning of this thing and maybe we still don't. Immortality is an impossible project. If you're even hoping to make your name last, forget success, fame, wealth, art ... better get some food named after you, and fast.

We finished off with a piece of vegan chocolate cake, which was, as far as vegan cakes go, perfect. There was only a hint of that weird dense, dry texture that most no-egg baked goods seem to share. This was a serious vegan cake, and we had it with a nondairy ice cream on the side, which Dining Companion, who is a connoisseur of these things, informed me was Soy Dream. I ate the fortune cookie without thinking, but it turns out that at Vegan Garden the prophetic little delicacies really are vegan, unlike those at another Garden I know of (I'm told Bamboo has difficulty sourcing kosher vegan fortune cookies; not sure if Vegan Garden is 100% kosher). My fortune was something about enduring pain and becoming enlightened, so I chucked it, because both of those things sounded difficult.

We got out of there for under forty bucks, including appetizers, food, desserts, and tip. Not bad, even with someone else's money. But the mystery remained. The world may never know how General Tso found his good name entwined with a chicken dish he likely never ate or heard of, that later carried over to the spicy, chewy, protein golfballs served by the premier vegan restaurants of Seattle. But here is what I think about the good General and his chicken: when called upon, Tso turned around a proven record of failure and triumphed. Sort of. Like veganism as a cultural concept, he was a late bloomer. And now Tso is a household name, but only due to something entirely ancillary to what he would have considered his greatest accomplishments. I see some parallels to my own life. Will there one day be a Bob Oswald's canned-beans-and-leftover-spinach? And hey, why are they always ball shaped? Some questions cannot be answered; some mysteries beget only more mysteries. DC

RALPH HADAC

TOFU AND PINEAPPLE WERE HARMED in the production of these tofu rolls with pineapple sauce.

Vegan Garden
1226 South Jackson
Seattle, WA 98144
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This Bird Has Flown

A Review of Shallots

BY BOB OSWALD

Of course, I support myself entirely by plying the noble trade of the written word. When I'm not smoking the rarest brands of caviar or sipping the rarest vintage wines directly from their boxes, though, I have a day job as a paper pusher at an admittedly flaky alternative school. Just for booze and bail money, you understand. As part of my training, I had to go to this pastels workshop where administrative types from all over the Pacific Northwest were learning to create crude representational images; one of the early hallmarks of human introspection, a vital skill for bureaucrats to learn. I went into the class one day and the teacher, an acid casualty who I think was actually hit by friendly fire, said "At the beginning of time, the wind and the sun danced with one another for what seemed like an eternity. Then one day the wind broke free and began to become a bird, and the sun was so gladdened by this that it became the bird's plumage. Now. Draw that bird."

All of this stuff is vital background information that you must understand before I tell you what I thought about Shallots.

But first. Another financial benefit of being a writer is that occasionally a publication will pitch you a few gift certificates for a local business, in the hopes that you will go there and write a review of their services for a mere pittance (or a paltry pittance, which is less). That's how I wound up at Shallot's the night after I drew my bird-at-the-beginning-of-the-universe. Thanks, *Belltown Messenger*!

OK, so the price range at Shallots is a little above my normal level; not enough to turn me away, but with entrees running $8.95 to $12.95, Shallots is, on a writer's salary, a special occasion (regular occasion: digging through the dumpster outside Than Brothers). But not when you've got the golden ticket gift certificate! Because I have a preference for food that is cleverly disguised as something inedible, I picked the Garden Bird's Nest, with a Widmer Hefeweizen to accompany. My dining companion Allie selected a roasted eggplant dish I've forgotten the name of, because I am an awful writer and I don't care about anyone or anything.

THE BACON-WRAPPED SCALLOPS made our reviewer's veganism feel profoundly wrong.

Verdict on the eggplant: hearty and satisfying. "I think everything in this except for the tomatoes is deep fried," said Allie. But honestly, who cares? Let's move on to what Bob Oswald had to say about the food that Bob Oswald got!

As for the beer, it's as Hemingway once put it: the beer was beer. It was cold and carbonated and it was beer. You drank it and you didn't get drunk, but then you drank some more of it and you did get drunk. It was cold and carbonated and you drank it. It was beer.

But the capstone of the night was the Bird's Nest. Have you ever seen one of these things? Holy cow, it's like a plate of lo mein in peanut sauce, and on top of that is this fried potato-to-taro nest, like those potato sticks they used to give you at summer camp instead of lunch. And inside the nest - thankfully the bird wasn't around - is a WHOLE MESS of tofu and veggies, also well-sauced. This thing was an honest-to-god-work-of-freaking-art. And, much like Van Gogh's "View of the Sea at Scheveningen," I ate it, and ate it, and ate it.

Shallots = win. Good food, waitstaff who were really friendly without being annoying (I wish I had left a better tip, so if you go, do it for me, OK?), the Mariners game on a big TV. I finished the entire Bird's Nest and all of the faux avian detritus around it, much to the shock and horror of my dining companion, who got a take-home box.

Then we went for a walk down to the waterfront, and we decided to go to the Olympic sculpture park, but we couldn't remember where it was, and I followed Allie's directions and they were wrong, because she is a girl. The amount of food in my body must have changed the flow of blood to my brain, because I was having all these psychedelic thoughts about the water and the docks and the bird at the beginning of the universe. I kept thinking of "Norwegian Wood," not because I particularly like the song but because of the subtitle "This Bird Has Flown." In that instant, that phrase meant something to me; it meant everything, but something very specific as well. But that's not the kind of thing one can communicate in words: you've got to go to the beginning of the universe, and get into that bird's nest yourself. DC

Shallots
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Oyster, My Oyster

Continued from page 3

Folklore has it that the San Sebastian's cooks joined the drummers of the regiment protecting the city from imminent invasion by the British. History requires action! Joseba and Carolin organize a high school marching band to parade around Belltown, thumping drums, pots, pans. The Brits retreat. So do the crackheads, at least for one night.

When we're not writing about food, wine and opera, they let us work as the sommelier at ***Sorrentino*** atop Queen Anne. (Keeps us out of the bars, don't you know.)

So a couple of weeks ago, who comes in but a devoted Seattle Opera volunteer shepherding soprano **Nuccia Focile** and tenor **Antonello Palombi** (with wife and adorable kids). Since they weren't drinking anything alcoholic other than a glass of Prosecco, we didn't spend much time at their table. Took a while for the coin to drop, but then we overheard someone say "Pagliacci" and we said, yes, we were going to attend the Sunday matinée.

Sunday? (Mock) outrage! But the Sunday performance has the alternate cast, not Nuccia and Antonello !! (Now it hits us who they are ...)

Gee, we stammer, the Saturday opening night press tickets were all gone ... Maybe we can ask for tickets to your performance later in the run, we say in our halting Italian ... what do you think?

We happened to have the laptop along and had just received an email from the opera's PR department with rehearsal photos and a link to a new rehearsal video ... which they hadn't seen, so we show it to them and all ends well.

Unlike the opera, in which Antonello's character, Canio (as the hapless clown, Pagliacci) stabs Nuccia's character, his unfaithful wife, Nedda, in a jealous rage. The singers leave the restaurant in good spirits, with the high drama and the immortal curtain line (*"La commedia è finita"*) still to come.

Picture a small town in the south (southern Italy in the 1950s, as it happens) where people talk slow and not much happens until the sun goes down and the church bells ring. (Think Faulkner, *Song of the South, Porgy and Bess*.) Then a traveling circus comes to town, a whole troupe of clowns (those irrepressible *pagliacci*), squeezed into a real clown car, a tiny black Fiat 500. You can guess what happens next: sex, jealousy, violence and death.

The lecherous Tonio, whose advances Nedda spurns, overhears the two lovers planning to run away together and reports the news to Canio, knowing that Canio's jealousy will provoke disaster. As he suits up for the play (singing *Vesti la giubba*, whose recording by Caruso became the first opera disc to sell a million copies), Canio expresses the clown's classic anguish: to make people laugh even as his own heart is breaking.

By the time the curtain falls, on the line (spoken by Tonio in this production), *La commedia è finita*, Canio is a mental wreck, having stabbed both Nedda and Silvio. Show's over, folks. Wasn't a comedy at all.

Schultzie's back! In the year since **Uncle Howard** stepped aside from his day job (running ***Starbucks***) to spend time on sexy stuff like movies and music and yogurt, the company's stock price dropped by half. Not good for an outfit that claims to be the world's most popular retailer. Worse, customers started complaining.

Okay, with tens of thousands of employees, most of them part-timers, responsible for customer satisfaction, you can't get it right every time. But the premium coffee biz that Starbucks created has become competitive as hell, and those customers have plenty of choices. Schultzie decided that his hand-picked successor as company prez, **Jim Donald**, wasn't paying enough attention.

(Not that Schultzie's been all that responsive himself, selling off the Sonics to a bunch of right-wing investors from Oklahoma. What kind of hometown loyalty does that show your Seattle customers?)

Now, there are plenty of heart-warming Starbucks stories, none more uplifting than **Michael Gates Gill**'s *How Starbucks Saved My Life*. But that's beside the point. The 800-pound gorilla of fast-food retailing, McDonald's, is about to get serious about the coffee game, hiring and training hundreds of baristas to staff new espresso bars.

Gulp! One thing's for sure: Schultzie ain't lovin' it.

Most recent gossip: Starbucks starts selling $1 cups of coffee in "test" locations. Drip, drip, drip. ◆

Ronald Holden, dubbed "Belltown's Boulevardier" by *Seattle Magazine*, welcomes news and comments from foodies and feeders (write to ronald@inyourglass.com). His blog, Cornichon.org, was named "Best at covering Seattle's restaurant scene" by *Seattle Spin* and one of the Internet's "Top Ten Food Blogs" by About.com.

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