

Belltown Dining: A New World Order

by Ronald Holden

Three new Belltown places this month have their roots in Asia, the Mediterranean and Louisiana. If that's not multicultural, I'm Fannie Farmer.

ALEXANDRIA'S ON SECOND fills a niche I wasn't even aware that Seattle lacked: upscale southern cuisine. Owner Jim Buchanan, also a record producer, grew up in Seattle, but his mom hailed from Louisiana. His is concept has already made its mark in Cleveland, where *Alexandria's on Main* was a diner's delight since 2002.

Can collard greens and catfish be "upscale," you might wonder? Well, wonder no more. The most important part of "upscale southern" is, in fact, old-fashioned southern hospitality: a generous, welcoming and embracing spirit.

And high time, too. It's been three years and counting since *Falling Waters* locked its doors and left one of Belltown's prime restaurant spaces begging for an operator with savvy and experience. Whew! The wait is over. Alexandria's executive chef, Michael Franklin, is a 15-year veteran of high-end soul food, including the acclaimed *Shark Bar*, *Mekka* and *Justin's*.

Alexandria's isn't cheap, though. A jambalaya of chicken and shrimp with a spicy creole sauce will set you back \$26.95, as will a plate of the house linguini garnished with chicken, shrimp, mushrooms and peppers. On the other hand, where in Seattle—outside the Central District—can you expect "soul rolls" made with collard greens, black-eyed peas, red beans and rice, or a side of fresh string beans that have simmered for hours in a homemade stock of pork knuckles?

It takes confidence to turn out food like this, at prices like this, but if your clientele in Cleveland includes the likes of Lennie and

Shaq, and your studio records Ziggy and Tupac, you won't be surprised if their friends turn up at your bar in Belltown—and perhaps drop \$200 for a bottle or two of Caymus. In fact, with Alexandria's big street-side windows, it's a far more visible place for stars and celebrity-watchers than 'The Gauch.' That kind of hospitality, friends, is genuine.

TOM DOUGLAS has his own east-west axis, more or less, along Virginia Street. Adding to his previous Triple Crown—*Palace Kitchen*, *Dahlia Lounge* and *Etta's*—Douglas recently unveiled *Lola*, just off the lobby



of the remodeled Andra hotel. Stunningly professional, Lola boasts good-looking wait staff, polished woods, dazzling porcelain, and a menu that celebrates Greece, including a \$4 glass of pungent retsina. It made a fine accompaniment to a luncheon assortment of spreads, including a yogurt tzatziki, minty feta, purée of carrots flavored with sumac, a little pot of red pepper, a second of smoky eggplant, and a garlicky skordalia for \$14 a plate, accompanied by a delicious, freshly grilled pita. (But only one.) A second pita cost \$3 more. Boo, hiss! Aside to Tom: fix this. The kebabs, served with a Greek salad or garlic fries, are just yummy. Don't forget to add the three skewers of delicate lamb's tongue (\$12). Yes, tongue. Yuk, you say? Hey, dude, where's your sense of adventure?

U WA KITCHEN has replaced *Fortune* on the sidewalk in front of Seattle Heights. It's the ambitious creation of Kenny Ma and Jack Wong, and aims to extend the "Taste of



NEW U WA: Nice sushi and other asian Cuisine.

Asia" another block north along Second Avenue. The street already has sushi outposts every couple of blocks—*Saito's*, *Wasabi Bistro* and *Shiro's*—so it will be fun to see how U Wa develops. I counted 24 maki rolls on the menu, along with a dozen appetizers; several curries; noodle dishes from Vietnam,



Thailand, China and Japan; and a selection of complete dinners. And that's before I started drooling over the display of yellow tail, squid, octopus, surf clam and scallops at the sushi bar. I'm eager to try the Dynamite Roll ("extremely spicy tuna w/tempura scallion" for \$5.25), but will restrain myself until the boys get their liquor license and I can quench the fire with an Asahi or Sapporo.

NEWLY OPENED FOR LUNCH: *Flying Fish*, or, as I like to call it, Poisson Volant. (One man's fish is another man's poisson.) Christine Keff, having closed *Fandango*, is now able to offer a half-hour, two-course "Fish on the Fly" lunch (\$15.95), a complete takeout menu, and an extensive à la carte

selection of newcomers like ahi tuna poke (\$8.95) and rock shrimp risotto (\$14.75), along with longtime favorites like calamari with honey-jalapeño mayonnaise (\$8.80) and Dungeness crab cakes (\$13.95). As other lunch places are doing, Flying Fish offers a selection of classy non-alcoholic drinks, notably a tamarind-flavored agua fresca and a rosemary lemonade.



photos by Ronald

And while we're on the subject of lunch, *Marco's Supper Club* is extending its hours and inviting Belltown's hungry hordes to a mid-day meal in the secluded back patio, one of the neighborhood's sweetest secret spots. And *The Belltown*, which has dropped the "Pub," is also offering a new, moderately priced lunchtime menu, complete with sidewalk seating.

A FINAL NOTE: Mark your calendar for a Farmer's Market dinner at *Zoë* on Wednesday, September 8th. Chef Scott Staples's enthusiasm for neighborhood markets (in his case, Columbia City) will also be featured in the September issue of *Sunset Magazine*. The "market-to-table" concept, which is getting a lot of favorable buzz, supports regional artisans and family farms. Once again, Belltown's in the vanguard. More details can be found at www.seattlefarmersmarkets.org.

Restaurant reviewer Ronald Holden welcomes news and comments from foodies and feeders alike. Seek more of him out at www.cornichon.org.

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