

WHERE TO EAT LONDON



richmond row cooks

blue ginger

LOUNGE AND GRILLE

written by Holly McWilliams
photography by Jackie Noble

Tucked in behind perhaps the only mature tree on Richmond Row is a gussied-up, yellow-brick century dwelling, inhabited by the strip's youngest restaurant, Blue Ginger.

Here on grooviest, clubbiest Richmond Street, élan is everything. And where style counts, Blue Ginger's proprietor Sonny Steinberg knows a thing or two. The erstwhile high-end fashion retailer and her son Mitchell—no stranger to cutting edge himself—are back after a five-year hiatus from retailing in the town she says has been good to them. And once again, they're mining the tonier Row set.

From their extensive travels through Asia and Europe, the Steinbergs have brought together all they saw and loved into Blue Ginger, their first foray into restauranting. Like the verderis froggies playing patty-cake on the front terrace, the name is whimsical, but the word is haute all around...

"You eat with your eyes first" is a culinary credo of Sonny's, but Blue Ginger is a sort of restrained visual feast even before the food arrives.

Designed by London architect Brad Skinner, this ambitious and stylishly off-kilter makeover of the former Running Room building signifies a major commitment to London's fine dining scene.



Almost anywhere
you find a gentle
hypotenuse on a
square, subtle
enough to keep
your equilibrium,
yet deliberate
enough for you to
play spot-the-angle
with your dining
partners.

Beginning with the concrete monolith outside that bears its name right on down to the floorboards, staircase, menus, and, yes, even the vases and their minimalist floral arrangements—almost anywhere you look you find a gentle hypotenuse on a square, subtle enough to keep your equilibrium, yet deliberate enough for you to play spot-the-angle with your dining partners.

All mocha-grey, brushed steel and white linen, the lines and colours are clean and cool, if a bit chilly. The chairs, on the other hand, are roomy and accommodating, comfy enough to do the evening out, although you may want to migrate about. Says Mitchell, "Our customers might start the evening off downstairs, come upstairs after dinner for champagne or port with plates of cheese."

One of the most fun elements is the glassed garage door (al a Gibson Gallery) on the main level that lets in lots of light and pulls up for evenings, opening onto the front terrace.

"The art is all local," says Steinberg, indicating her personal collection on the main floor, "and then we use upstairs as a gallery where the art will be revolving." A colourful oil donated by local artist Laurie Seaman is featured in the foyer will be raffled off in the grand opening event in September for the Brain Tumour Foundation.

"We're very conscious of putting back into the community," says Sonny. "It's really important right now for us that the community benefits as well." While marvelling at the battle-memes never satisfied any appetite I knew, it can certainly set off imaginative and colourful food, as it does at Blue Ginger. "We are very intense about it being superb in every way," says Sonny.

Out of an impossibly small but well-equipped kitchen, staffed by chef Todd Hoyles, a Newfoundland with London ties who trained at Toronto's Metropolitan, and sous-chef Brian Long from The Church Restaurant in Stratford, comes the really good stuff. As the name implies, Blue Ginger's cuisine leans far to the East for its influences, culled from the Steinbergs' journeys (and personal weaknesses), embellished by Hoyles, and bolstered by a state-of-the-art, infrared grill that heats up to blistering 2000 degrees.

"I love the grilled portion of the menu," says Mitchell. "The steaks, the veal chops, the lamb... we wanted to fuse that with Asian in a fine dining at-

"Our customers might start the evening off downstairs and come upstairs after dinner for champagne or port with plates of cheese."

mosphere. So it's recognizable food, but presented at a level we haven't seen."

Indeed, sesame, lime, lemon-grass, curry, cilantro, coconut, mango and like ingredients enliven most entrées on the lunch and dinner menus. Note that any deep-frying takes place in a highly refined peanut oil.

In keeping with the surroundings, food presentation has strong architectural lines. Right from the get-go, tiny, complimentary pots of bah-

ghanouj and sun-dried tomato tapenade are served with a distinctly angular collection of table breads.

Ditto the very popular Fire and Ice makis (seaweed and rice rolls) that arrive complete with pickled ginger and teriyaki dipping sauce. Differing from traditional Japanese makis, these gingery melt-in-your-mouth-fuls are tempura-fried, which breaks down the otherwise chewy nori wrapper.

There is a Mediterranean presence, too, in pastas, and in ingredients like pancetta in the Caesar salad, the carpaccio appetizer, cambozola-forked potatoes with the veal chop, and the rosemary-scented polenta that accompanies the Angus tenderloin.

The menu is backed up by an impressive wine list, heavy on hearty reds.

The upstairs bar and dining area is airy and so well ventilated, says Sonny, that cigar aficionados can indulge themselves without fear of upsetting others. **END**

611 Richmond Street

☎ 431-5777

Limited parking in the rear

HOMEMADE LUNCHES & DESSERTS

Paddington's TEA ROOM

1656
Hyde
Park
Road
641-3041



★★★★★ "FULL MARKS FOR QUALITY AND FLAIR"
— FREE PRESS '98



667-0535

432 Richmond Street at Carling
free parking after 6pm off queens avenue

RESTAURANT LISTINGS

menu directory

- african 39
- bistro and café . . . 39
- chinese 41
- diner 41
- east indian 42
- eastern european . . 41
- family 41
- fine dining 41
- japanese 43
- mediterranean . . . 43
- tex-mex 44
- other asian 43
- pool and eats 43
- pubs 43
- sportsbars 44
- steak & seafood . . . 44
- tea rooms 44

african

■ ABYSSINIA RESTAURANT: Customers are able to experience traditional Ethiopian food while participating in African eating traditions such as sharing food from a common plate and eating with their hands. 670 Dundas St. ☎ 432-8897

■ EAST AND WEST: Experience Eritrean and Ethiopian African cuisine and Kenyan beer. Traditional and vegetarian dishes and plenty of spicy food. 934 Dundas St. ☎ 433-5079

■ ENAT: Experience Ethiopian cuisine featuring spicy chicken, lamb, and beef stews and vegetable platters, served with salad and injera. 379 Horton St. ☎ 432-8113

bistro & café

■ ANGELO'S: An authentic Italian bakery and deli. Large selection of bread and pastries baked fresh daily. The finest selection of cheeses within the city of London. Angelo's café features cappuccino, pizza, lasagna and a pasta bar. 8am to 6pm Mon. to Fri. (Wonderland location open until 9pm) 8am to 8pm Sat. and 8am to 5pm Sun. 755 Wonderland Rd. ☎ 473-7772, 130 Thompson Rd. ☎ 438-9863

■ ANTHONY'S SEAFOOD BISTRO: A small restaurant serving fresh fish and seafood dishes. The daring customer may wish to try chef-owner David Chapman's "Trust Me" option. Desserts by Karen Chapman. Last chance before they close Oct. 30. 434 Richmond St. ☎ 679-0960

■ BLACKFIARS RESTAURANT: Playfully elegant, this fascinating little bistro is large on taste and personality. A fresh seasonal menu assures an unforgettable culinary adventure. Lunch, dinner and Sunday Brunch are all offered at this quaint spot. Ample parking. 46 Blackfriers ☎ 667-4930

■ BON APPETIT: This bright and comfortable, smoke-free European bistro is located across from the Grand Theatre. Menu includes smoked salmon, fresh pasta, and home-made desserts. 476 Richmond St. ☎ 439-2560

■ CAFE MILAGRO: Great coffee served in a small and friendly cafe atmosphere. Light lunches. 1271 Commissioners Rd. W. ☎ 473-0074

■ CAFE RIVA: The Café Riva is located in downtown London on the second floor of the Weston Hotel. Dinner menu includes pasta, salads, steaks and seafood. 300 King St. ☎ 660-2714

Who Made Dinner?

No time to cook healthy, nutritious preservative-free dinners? Why not call for you very own PERSONAL CHEF! I'll customize and plan your menu, create any dish that you desire, shop for your groceries, prepare your dinner entrée in your kitchen, and clean up.

Helena Bugler
CHEF / OWNER

Ask about our introductory offer, other services and specials.
471-1067



ABOUTOWN

Serving London for over 50 years

432-2222

432-2222
ABOUTOWN