

F E A T U R E

London's newest entertainment complex has the 'wow' factor in spades.

palasad wonderland

AND LA FIAMMA RISTORANTE



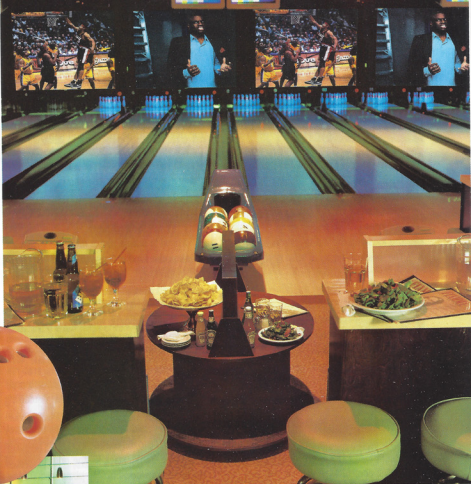
either its sheer indoor acreage will wow you, or its punchy decor, or simply its ability to hit the hyperactive notes along with the mellow ones.

The Palasad Wonderland and La Fiamma Ristorante in the south end are the spanking new and rockin' little sisters of the billiards mecca and eatery of the same name uptown.

Its owners, Barbara and Louis Szabo with son Rob at the helm, took the successful pool-and-eats theme of their original location, and wrung a little retro out of the bowling lanes this building once housed, then stirred them up into an eclectic mix.

"There's nothing like us in London," says manager Sean Wilson.

With the help of architect Brad Skinner and designer Lori Ireland, Rob Szabo engineered a splashy, nine-month retrofit of the old Southland Bowl, producing more than 33,000 square feet of non-stop entertainment for the folks in Westmount, Bryon and beyond.



Each of its four quadrants—billiards restaurant, billiards, bowling, arcade—has its unique groove. But no matter which way you look, there's eye-candy, usually after a '50s fashion, for the kids and the kid-in-you to gobble up.

"The downtown location is still big with university students, and good for small corporate functions because of all its private rooms," says Wilson. "But here, we wanted to cater to the general public."

In contrast to the north location's layout and singular brand of funky charm, Palasad Wonderland is a straight-up, wide-open playground with flash and techno as its underpinnings. Apart from that, the two have a lot of the same stuff. More or less.

Wonderland has bowling. Really cool bowling.



opposite: Great noshing and a view of the billiards room from its own elevated bar area. Large poster art by George Brunton.

this page above: The Palasad's 10-pin bowling area is a videotronic fiesta.

middle: Comfy semi-private lounges lie at the foot of each bowling lane. **left:** Curvy table-tops made from salvaged bowling lane hardwood are part of La Fiamma's casual chic. George Brunton wall mural.

menu directory

■ AFRICAN	40
■ BISTRO AND CAFE	40
■ CHINESE	42
■ DINER	43
■ EAST INDIAN	44
■ EASTERN EUROPEAN	43
■ FAMILY	43
■ FINE DINING	42
■ JAPANESE	45
■ MEDITERRANEAN	44
■ MEXICAN	45
■ NIGHTLIFE	46
■ OTHER ASIAN	45
■ POOL AND EATS	46
■ PUBS	46
■ STEAK AND SEAFOOD	46

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. ☎ 432-8987**

■ **AFRICA:** 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 AND CAFE

■ **ANGELO'S:** An authentic Italian bakery and deli. Large selection of bread and pastries baked fresh daily. The finest selection of bread and 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 5pm) 8am to 6pm Sat. and 8am to 5pm Sun. New summer patio at Wonderland location. 755 Wonderland Rd. ☎ 473-7772, 130 Thompson Rd. ☎ 438-9863**

■ **AL FREDO'S ITALIAN KITCHEN:** Go for coffee and a break from the hustle and bustle of the market. Or go for pasta drenched in light and tasty Alfredo sauce. Their panini sandwiches and salads hit the spot for lunchtime. **Covent Garden Market ☎ 438-7222**

■ **AUBERGE DU PETIT PRINCE:** At the Gallery, A quaint luncheon café at the London Regional Art and Historical Museums which overlooks Harris Park and the Thames River. Daily specials, soups, smoked salmon, salads, sandwiches and freshly baked bread. **Closed Monday. 421 Ridout St. ☎ 433-9394**

What hits you first is probably the sense of space. Before the busier evening hours, Palasad Wonderland looks like an airplane hangar filled with toys and giddy possibilities. But once it's filled with wall-to-wall people, you start to wonder how could they have managed with only less.

Each of its four quadrants—restaurant, billiards, bowling, arcade—has its unique groove. But no matter which way you look, there's eye-candy, usually after a '50s fashion, for the kids and the kid-in-you to goggle up.

The best example of this is the bowling area, where the actual game—10-pin, incidentally—is only part of the fun.

Above each of 20 phosphorescent, black-lit lanes is a giant-screen, digital montage of 600 images, brief video clips from a century of TV, ad and movie moments that appear in 25-minute loop. Their retro content is fun and evocative, and speaks to boomers to the gen-Xers, -Yers and -Zers alike.

At the foot of the lanes are semi-private, curved booths like cozy, upholstered rec rooms. And (excellent) you can 'order in' cocktails and food from your server. Suspended cable TVs, controlled at the bar, will sate inexplicably bored members of your party with a ball game or whatever till it's their turn to bowl.

Just wanna watch? Take it all in from a raised bank of mint-coloured naugahyde booths across the aisle.

Behind the reception desk lies a sea of Brunswick billiards tables, 26 in all, standing on a floor still scored with original bowling lane markings that impart a sense of history.

For now, the pool room's decor is largely woody, decked out with scary-movie, movie-poster art and two giant comic-book murals painted by artist George Brunton. With its spectator bar and steady-as-he-goes action, there is a sort of relaxed schmoosiness here that is appealing, far less frenetic than the bowling quadrant.

There's lots of long-legged seating along the perimeter walls, a narrow counter to plop your drink on while you're making your shots, and all the elbow room you need.

In the thrills-and-spills category is the virtual arcade, where the heart pumps a little faster for less physical effort and only a loony or two.

The games cater to all tastes from air hockey and shooting hoops to sci-fi's The Grid. And for the Lee Majors in you, there's Big Buck

Hunter. Thrill riders can hop on snow mobile racers and snack into trees unscathed, and kids can pit their virtual-bowling wits against their favourite anti-hero Homer Simpson. There are 40 games in all.

A glassed-in room across from reception is the duffers' shrine. In this golf simulator, you pick from famous international courses, and play the game as you would, using your own trusty clubs, or theirs. The computer does the rest, calculating speed, trajectory, and bounce-back, landing roughly where you would if you were playing the real thing.

Whew! It seems like a mere post-script to mention the food at Palasad Wonderland. But it shouldn't be.

Off and away in its own little, smoke-free world is La Fiamma Ristorante, anchoring the front of the building with its beefy, 30-foot, neon-topped chimney.

Making up-front impact was important to Szabo at this location.

"When people drove by the (north-end) restaurant, they'd have a hard time visualizing what was inside," says Szabo. "Here, we put in big windows and accent brick walls to convey what is inside to the outside world. My favourite part is the smoke stack"—the outcropping of the interior's wood-burning pizza oven.

The tabletops here are made from some of Southland's salvaged bowling alley hardwood. Some still have the original markings—a nice touch.

Across from a sunburst wall mural is La Fiamma's pristine-white open kitchen. The menu is a combination of roadhouse and casual Italian fare: a good variety of pastas and salads, where everything is artfully presented. Pick from a range of excellent pre-set, thin-crust pizza recipes or calzones, baked in their wood oven, or design your dream 'za by choosing from about 50 gourmet toppings.

Hefier entrées include New York strip steak served with rosemary mashed potatoes, and chicken Marsala that comes with veggie and an herbed linguine.

If you dine late enough, there's a small rock'n' roll floor-light show behind the lanes that'll have the kids playing hop-scotch together while you lick the tartufo plate clean and pay the bill.

Once you get over the 'wow', you'll find the Palasad Wonderland is a surprisingly relaxing place to spend time with your family, or to go out on a tear with your pals. **GO**

**141 PINE VALLEY BLVD. 685-1390
(OFF SOUTHDIALE, WEST OF WONDERLAND)**