

Article rank ■■■■■**DINING OUT****Wacky + puzzling + fun****MICHAEL BLACKIE works the wow at Perspectives***BY ANNE DESBRISAY*

PERSPECTIVES Brookstreet Hotel, 525 Legget Drive (at Solandt Drive) 613-271-1800 www.brookstreethotel.com Access: Fully accessible Price: Starters, \$13 to \$16; main dishes \$36 to \$51 Open: Daily for breakfast; brunch/lunch Sunday to Friday; dinner Monday to Saturday

CHRIS MIKULA, THE OTTAWA
CITIZEN

Executive chef Michael Blackie's menus are ambitious and inspired.

Perspectives is the handsome restaurant of the swank Brookstreet Hotel and the playground of its executive chef, Michael Blackie. If you enjoy palate-expanding experiences overlooking a golf course, you will enjoy this place. The food is brilliant, thought provoking and technically sound. But the man at the plush table next to mine was clearly out of his comfort zone. "Couldn't I have a medium steak, some plain rice and a Caesar?" he asked after examining Blackie's wacky menu. "And maybe some butter for my bread?" he added as his server anointed a dish of artisanal sea salt and fermented black beans with extra virgin olive oil.

Well, of course. This is a hotel. The guest rules. But it must surely be tempting for servers to redirect such guests to any number of chain eateries that dominate the Kanata landscape, where steak and Caesars with whipped butter packets rule. Perspectives, with its ambitious menu, is an anomaly out here.

Take Blackie's September menu. It is intricate (Thai rubbed bison carpaccio with mizuna, tatsoi greens and Singha beer crackling); puzzling (under section "Rolled" there's "Kick: squid + tobiko + momijioroshi sting"); and fun ("wide-eye Ontario rack of lamb with chevre cosmopolitan"). Blackie plays with temperature and flavour combinations. He layers Asian flavours on to French classics, using fine regional ingredients. He focuses on texture and structure and on the wow factor.

And he plays with words. It can be wearing, especially if you have questions — which, of course, you will ("Just what is momijioroshi?"). This can be especially fatiguing if your server isn't on intimate terms with Blackie's inspirations. I have had a gem of a server who knew her stuff absolutely, and another who hadn't a clue.

Who'd have thought some of the city's best sushi could be found in a Kanata hotel? My favourite plate is "Kick," an artful display of sushi-grade squid, perfectly calibrated, with cucumber for crunch, wrapped and rolled in very fresh and wellbalanced rice and topped with tobiko. A spiced-up grated daikon salad is piled on the side. Scallops are nothing short of fabulous: seared in lots of nutty-dark butter, these beauties are settled on a lumpy bed of rosti potato, roasted pineapple and chorizo sausage.

There are cheeks of fish, fowl, veal, beef, dimpled all over this menu (as there are on most fashionable menus round town), but a starter of cod cheeks turn out to be the one dish that doesn't work. Trouble is less with the cheeks (themselves luscious little treats in tempura jackets) than with what they sit on. The menu's caramelized pear fingers turn out to be spring rollwrapped cigars of too-sweet pear, anchored with a cold sweet potato mash, chunky and dry. Too much packaging and there's nothing yuckier than cold and lumpy spuds.

You will pay dearly for it, but you won't find better lamb. For its \$51 price tag, the luscious meat is superbly tender, roasted to medium rare and with a flavour packed crust, is served with a rich brioche stuffed with lobster and topped with a mousse of chevre.

Another winner is the striped bass: on a long oval plate, the fish is crispy skinned and gentle fleshed. It sits in a rich celery root purée with sautéed bitter greens and bok choy; raisins and capers are the sweet and pungent accents, while deep fried sweet potato curls are the crunchy contrast.

"Caramelized pear + mascarpone pain de gene + whipped apple glacier + 10 spice fête coupe" turns out to be a gorgeous assembly of poached Seckel pears, apple and pear cream, and a spice cake. A mandarin cheesecake is lovely to gaze upon, but turns out to be uncomfortably sweet.

Perspectives' wine list is heavy on Canadian content, with a ready-to-drink selection of international wines priced between \$36 and \$400.