

# THE GEORGIA Straight

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## Hawksworth lands flawlessly

**W**hen you show up for an early dinner at one of the most anticipated restaurants in the city to see the chef himself getting up from the table right next to you, there's only one thing to do. Ask him what he'd have to eat.

Hawksworth Restaurant, in the still-being-renovated Rosewood Hotel Georgia, takes its name from chef David Hawksworth, a Vancouver native who spent a decade in some of the U.K.'s best spots before coming home in 2000 to head West.

For someone you'll be hearing a lot about as the buzz over his new digs continues to grow, the guy could have an ego the size of the Boston Bruins' Zdeno Chara. He doesn't.

Seemingly calm even as the first Friday night in his stylin' spot was just getting rolling, with passers-by on the street constantly stopping to peek in the windows, Hawksworth kindly obliged and suggested the salmon. (No, he didn't know I was reviewing.) A nightly special, the wild spring salmon—the first of the season—came with a bright-as-rainforest-moss snow-pea *nage* and a cool Indian cucumber salad, the contrasting colours making for a piece of art on a plate.

Single white calla lilies, their leaves perfectly curled, adorn every white-marble-topped, silver-edged table. A dark-wooden wall with two tall arches

separates the dining area into two spaces: the art room, where we were, with Rodney Graham's multipanelled abstract painting covering one wall and funky, black, spiderlike ceiling lights; and the pearl room, with its stunning and massive oblong chandelier. (There's an intimate lounge too.)

And yet like the chef himself, Hawksworth Restaurant doesn't have the air of pretence one might expect. Service is detail-oriented, efficient, and professional but friendly. Every table gets a visit from a member of the "wine team"—which is a good idea considering the wine list is a whopping 17 pages long, including dessert wine, sake, and sherry—but even if you're just ordering a glass with dinner, you're never made to feel anything less than a valuable guest.

Although you're dining in a spot that will undoubtedly attract celebs, mates making marriage proposals, and well-heeled ladies who lunch, this being Vancouver you can also show up in jeans and a T (as I did on a subsequent solo visit) and not get any attitude.

But back to that salmon (\$30). It's cooked *sous-vide*, a technique that involves vacuum-sealed food, extremely low temperatures, and long cooking times (in this case, 24 hours, according to our server). The result here is a perfectly done filet with remarkably even texture and flavour.

The halibut (\$26) is similarly slow-cooked. The super-thin layer

of chorizo sausage that envelops it doesn't overpower the fish's taste but rather elevates it.

The seared weathervane scallops (\$16) are a bold starter, with its accompanying beech mushrooms, edamame, slightly grilled whole green onions, and a kicker of a house-made XO sauce. The appetizer is topped with a swirl of puffed pork rind; a cool effect, but not to my taste. A comforting complement is the beet and apple salad (\$11). With goat cheese, a sprinkling of fresh herbs, and a grand Fuji ribbon, the item looks like a Christmas wreath Martha Stewart would be proud of and tastes equally sublime.

Desserts like the Valrhona milk-chocolate mousse with fluffy passionfruit cubes (\$8) are just as picture-pretty.

While desserts anywhere aren't necessarily must-haves, what absolutely can't be missed here are the cocktails.

The recipe for the Hotel Georgia (\$12) goes back to about 1945, and the drink remains ooh-la-la to this day. With Plymouth gin, freshly squeezed lemon juice, aromatic orange-blossom water, and frothy egg white, it's silky smooth and dreamy.

Twentyfour Flowers (\$12), meanwhile, mixes sparkling wine and bittersweet Aperol with tangerine-, rooibos-, hibiscus-, and rosehip-infused gin to abhh-inducing effect.

The dinner menu also features a five-course tasting menu that includes yellowfin-tuna carpaccio and



Halibut gets its garnish from chef David Hawksworth, whose titular restaurant at the Rosewood Hotel Georgia lives up to all that buzz. Tracey Kusiewicz photo.

Yarrow Meadows duck breast (\$72) and a 22-ounce rib eye for two (\$76).

For a more casual turn, go at lunch and try the burger (\$18), a tower of applewood-smoked bacon, aged white Cheddar, buttery lettuce, and tomato, complete with a crispy onion ring and tangy barbecue sauce all piled onto a house-made cheese bun. It's juicy, messy, satisfying, and comes with fries. Temper that calorie-laden beast with a "zero proof" drink, like aloe-vera juice refreshingly punched up with fresh lime juice, lime zest, and wheat grass (\$5). Dinner for two, with a cocktail,

glass of wine, appetizer, main, dessert, and an Americano each came to about \$150 before taxes and tip.

The only thing that wasn't perfect were those coffees. (No *crema*; slightly bitter.) Everything else was flawless. ♦

**HAWKSWORTH RESTAURANT** 801 West Georgia Street; 604-673-7000. Open for lunch Monday to Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and for dinner Monday to Saturday, 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. Daily breakfast, weekend brunch, and Sunday-dinner service are scheduled to start June 20.

### Best Eats

Gail Johnson

