

INCLUDING THE
18
BEST IN
WESTERN
CANADA

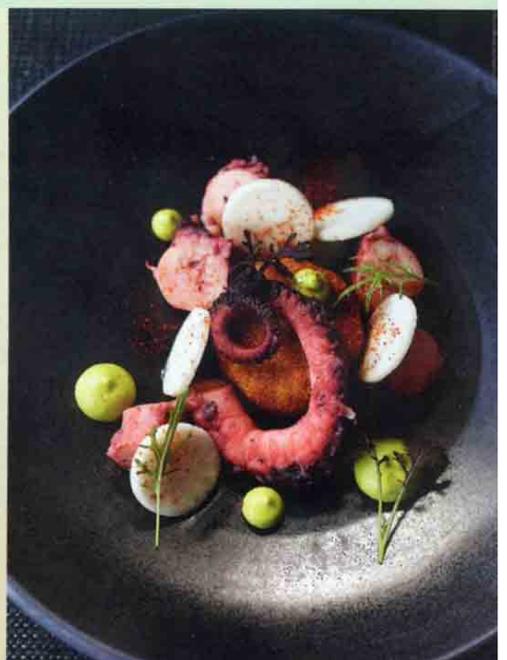
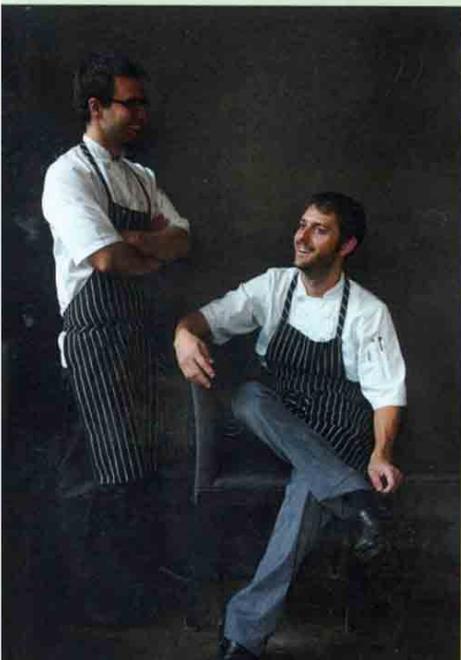


MACLEAN'S

CANADA'S BEST RESTAURANTS

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RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR HAWKSWORTH

VANCOUVER

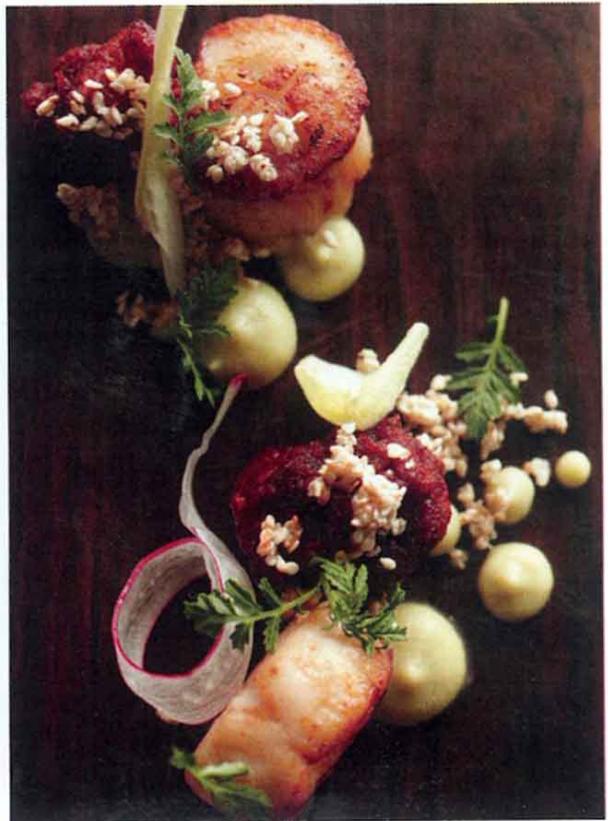
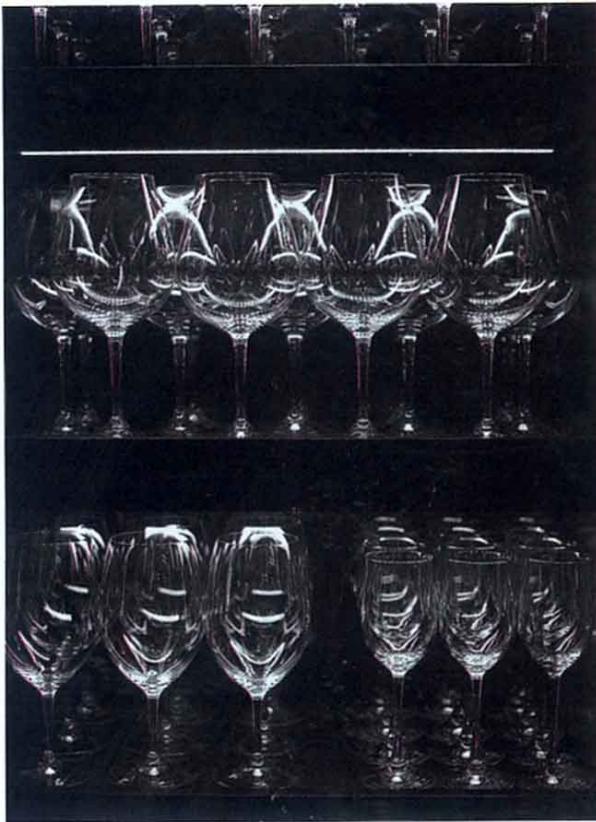
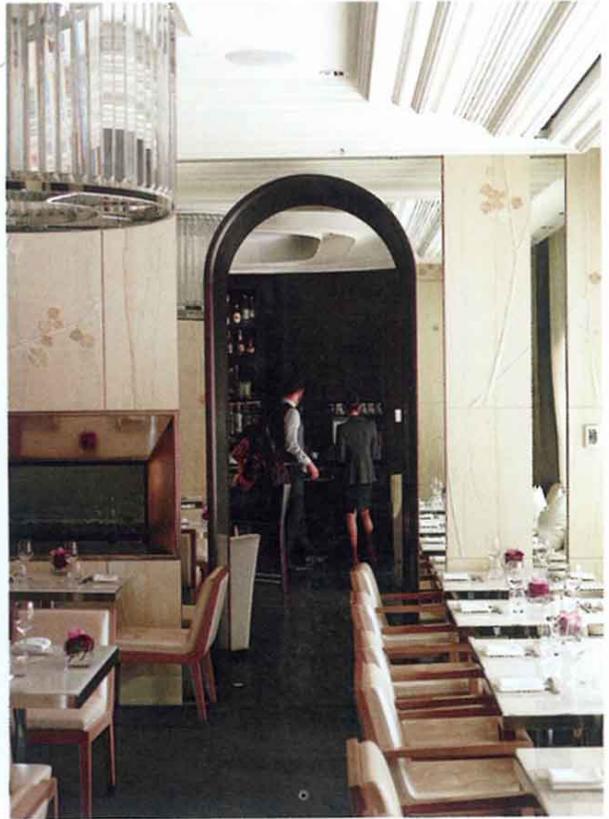
Ever since the last recession came along and dealt a near-fatal blow to our fine dining scene, most of our established restaurateurs have struggled with what to do next. Most have been fishing downmarket, opening comfortable trattorias and bistros with nicely priced, safe little menus that put educated diners to sleep. New, exciting food has instead mainly come courtesy of those young chefs opening fun, small rooms on the cheap, without reservation books or proper cellars, their loud music and mismatched chairs anathema to grown-ups coast to coast. And then there's Hawksworth, our restaurant of the year.

It gets the nod because it captures the zeitgeist perfectly. On the one hand it is sublimely swanky, with a Damien Hirst "heart and butterflies" gracing a wall in its elegant, leather-panelled lounge, a grand chandelier in the Pearl Room, a commissioned Rodney Graham in the Art Room and a 1920s heritage salon for its private functions upstairs. But you cannot call it fine dining. There are no tablecloths or purse stools or *amuses gueules* and sorbets—and an average dinnertime main course is priced under \$35, a tick under what you pay at the Keg. Basically, Hawksworth strikes a perfect pitch of casual posh—precisely as one more typically finds it in cities like New York, London and other sophisticated places four times Vancouver's size.

Still, none of that would matter much if the food did not hit the same note—and it does, every time. Chef and owner David Hawksworth's compositions are playful, artistically colourful, and feature bold flavours, along with an increasing—nearly Asian—preoccupation with texture and mouth feel. But they are also conceptually simpler than those of his fine dining past, with fewer elements on the plate. The culinary message can usually be grasped in a mouthful or two, as opposed to some of his earlier dishes, which more frequently demanded your full attention.

"You start off with something to prove, full of piss and vinegar," Hawksworth said recently of his evolution as a chef. "Then one day you say, 'Forget it. I'm not putting nine things on that plate. I'll put three. And each of them will be perfect.'"

The perfectionist chef has assembled a team from chef de cuisine Kristian Eligh on down that can execute this particular vision, even when chef is travelling and not at the pass. Whereas his haute cuisine relied on his personal touch, Hawksworth is still Hawksworth even when Hawksworth is not there. Which is why it is the restaurant—rather than the owner-chef who came up with it—that takes the prize. JACOB RICHLER (review p. 24)





HAWKSWORTH

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hawksworthrestaurant.com

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KFC (KOREAN FRIED CAULIFLOWER)

Tempura Batter

2 cups rice flour
2 tbsp. sesame oil
1 tbsp. baking powder
1 tbsp. baking soda
2 tbsp. sherry vinegar
3 tbsp. grapeseed oil

Cauliflower

1 head of cauliflower, cut into one-inch florets
Vegetable oil
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup Korean chili sauce (*gochujang*)
1/3 cup toasted white sesame seeds
3 green onions, sliced

Whisk all tempura ingredients together in a large bowl until fully combined. Some lumps are okay. Set aside.

Prepare a large bowl of ice water. Set aside.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add cauliflower and blanch for 15 seconds. Spoon florets into ice bath to stop cooking. Drain once cauliflower is cold.

Heat enough oil in a cast iron pan to reach a depth of one inch over medium high (350° F).

Toss cooked cauliflower with flour in a large bowl. Dip florets in tempura batter then place in hot oil. Cook until crispy, turning carefully if needed. You may need to cook in batches.

Spoon crispy cauliflower out of oil and transfer to a large bowl. Toss with Korean chili sauce.

Sprinkle with sesame seeds and green onions.

Serves six.

David Hawksworth rose to prominence a decade ago at West, the South Granville Street restaurant that he made the epitome of West Coast fine dining. When he left in 2008 to create his own eponymous room in the beautifully refurbished Hotel Georgia, the global market crash put the project on hold for almost three years. When Hawksworth finally opened last year, it became the city's must-visit room, and so it remains: busy, happening, and welcome proof amid Vancouver's trend to cheap, cheerful fare that if you deliver tightly executed dishes in a well-conceived setting in an ideal location, people will still bring their credit cards and their friends. Even at lunch, the bold and the beautiful raise spirits and decibel levels in the three adjoining rooms. Dungeness crab chowder—brightened with lemongrass, star anise, lime leaves and coriander, and perhaps accompanied by a glass of riesling from the extensive list—shows the chef at his elegant best. Dinner brings appetizers like yellowfin tuna ceviche, and foie gras parfait set in apple jelly. Mains include pan-roasted sablefish with *lap cheong*, grilled sturgeon with *charmoula*, and a take on lamb loin—with charred green garlic, crispy English pea and truffled lamb consommé—that embodies Hawksworth's ability to marry concentrated flavours and exuberant colours in a refined, aesthetically flawless whole. Rooms of this quality are not common in downtown hotels. Rooms of this quality are not common, period.

Pan-seared scallops with 'KFC' (Korean fried cauliflower)