

Best Restaurants of 2011: #4 Oz Kafé

Shawna Wagman, Ottawa Magazine January 23, 2012



Oz Kafé's roasted eggplant stuffed with duck ragout, yogurt, chilies, herbs, and fish sauce.
Photo by [photoluxstudio.com/Christian Lalonde](http://photoluxstudio.com/ChristianLalonde).

A few days after I took my new-to-Ottawa friend to Oz Kafé, she emailed me with this message: "I can't stop thinking about that corn. What was in the sauce?"

The answer is butter and chili. It's pretty much what you'd find poured over a pile of Buffalo chicken wings. Not brain surgery, right? But on top of nutty-sweet, peak-of-summer cobs of corn finished on the grill, this dish became unforgettable. Simple, fresh, and unpretentious but also a little bit bad-ass and freakin' delicious: it's such an Oz dish.

These same chefs, Jamie Stunt and Simon Bell, offer a tight but eclectic comfort-food menu that includes a crowd-pleasing steak and caesar salad with smoked mashed potatoes and homemade barbecue sauce. They are also the only ones brave enough to serve local farm-raised Tibetan yak. The simple dish, Yak Tataki, pairs sweet, tender slices of barely seared meat with crunchy bacon-fat-fried breadcrumbs, yuzu, parsley, and horseradish mayo.

But the real magic of Oz is that its tiny closet of a kitchen has the best karma in town. It's where cooks go to get unhooked, preparing prix fixe dinners for their own kind at monthly industry nights. In August, chefs, servers, and dishwashers piled in for a "spare parts" themed meal. The first course was called quadruple bypass – salmon, chicken, beef, and lamb hearts. Oz Kafé makes a party out of cooking and eating. And every other restaurant in town benefits from its existence.

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