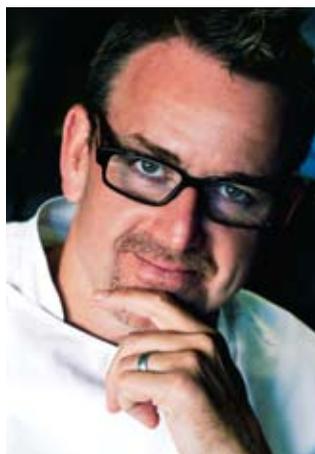


Iron Chef in the 'Peg

Western Living contributor Rob Feenie has faced down Masaharu Morimoto and emerged victorious, but how will he fare putting the restaurants of Winnipeg through their paces?



I WORK OUT OF VANCOUVER and it's been my home for over 45 years, but I also recently bought a home in Winnipeg and now it's home as well. The best part of the new environs is having a whole slew of restaurants to test out, and my wife Michelle and I have been hitting all the spots in town. Here are a few we've tried so far—hit them on your next trip to the 'Peg.

SEGOVIA

CHEF Adam Donnelly

VIBE Authentic (wood and brick) but modern (glass)

MENU HIGHLIGHTS A lot of the menu is tapas size, so you can go a little wild. While there are well-executed classics like Serrano ham with grilled bread and patatas bravas with aioli, I really dug the authentic marinated white anchovies and the chorizo Gala apples with sherry vinegar. Of the bigger plates, I loved the Berkshire pork belly and pickled vegetables, but it was two hard-to-find dishes—sous vide octopus with chili black olive oil and fingerling potatoes, and the roasted-bone-marrow parsley salad with Maldon sea salt and grilled bread—that stick with me. Fantastic. To finish we had a spicy lobster, avocado and onion salad with cilantro, because we love our salad at the end.

VERDICT I've been here three times



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: perogies at Fusion Grill; a glorious tenderloin at 529 Wellington Steakhouse; the Altezza salad at Pizzeria Gusto.

already, so that says it all. I've been to Spain on many occasions and there is no question that it's one of the hotbeds for great food right now. But local, authentic Spanish restaurants like Segovia are tough to find. The wine list is all Spanish and has a number of great by-the-glass choices at reason-

able prices—key to getting people to experiment with new styles. segoviatapasbar.com

FUSION GRILL

CHEF Lorna Murdoch

VIBE Earnest but funky

MENU The name is a little misleading,

Rob Feenie by Leyshton, tenderloin by Steve Salmikowski, Altezza by Jesse Dyeris Oberman

the goods food

as this place is nuts for local product. I started with a panko-breaded fried goat-cheese salad with local organic beets and organic greens. Cold-pressed flax seed oil was well integrated and tasted seriously fresh. And how could I resist the white-truffle perogies with house-made duck sausage and walnut cream sauce? This could honestly be the official civic dish, local but worldly, modest but tasty. For a main I went with a local coq au vin, mostly because I was intrigued by the braising liquid—Nk'Mip pinot noir, which seemed an expensive gimmick but turned out to produce a nice succulent dish. To close, we shared their famous slow-roasted bison back ribs with Seagram's Five-Star glaze—perhaps the most Canadian dish ever invented (it should get a grant). We silently hummed "O Canada" as we ate.

VERDICT The food here is impeccably sourced and presented by chef Murdoch. But huge credit also goes to owner Scott McTaggart who manages the small room like John Elway in the fourth quarter. McTaggart was an early pioneer on the all-Canadian wine list, and he's been one of the biggest sources in Winnipeg for finding local product. It's become a can't-miss spot.
fusiongrill.mb.ca

PIZZERIA GUSTO

CHEF Bobby Mottola

VIBE Walls graced with family portraits of the Mottola family dating back to 1928.

MENU We were here for pizza, but I'm glad we tried three standout salads to start. The Cadere has grilled asparagus with poached egg, Parmigiano-Reggiano and a touch of truffle oil; the Padrona has grilled pears, gorgonzola dolce, candied walnuts and arugula; and the Cavolini has roasted Brussels sprouts with pancetta bread crumbs and chili. For pizzas I went with the Neapolitana because its simplicity—buffalo mozzarella, anchovies and deep-fried capers—makes it a good test, and the Sophie with drunken mushrooms, pecorino and truffle



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oil. (I'm big on properly used truffle oil!)

VERDICT Real Napoli pizza is super-hot right now and I'll let you in on a secret: doing a good job of it isn't that difficult, but doing a great job is a different matter. Gusto puts a lot of thought and care into the salads, something most pizza places pay scant attention to. The pizzas all come chewy and bubbly from a big wood-fired oven and are a nice blend of authentic (San Marzano tomatoes) and modern (fig jam). The room is small and fills up fast—make sure you get there early (reservations are for large groups). We sat at the bar both times and loved it.

pizzeriagusto.com

529 WELLINGTON STEAKHOUSE

THE CHEF Fraser MacLeod

THE VIBE High-end steakhouse done right

THE MENU This is old-school steakhouse through and through. All the mainstays show up here: caesar salad for two prepared tableside, a killer beefsteak tomato salad with buttermilk dressing and a foie gras terrine that was so good I think my wife could have had two. The steaks are king here. They serve Canadian Prime and we tried several different cuts, with the tenderloin and the rib-eye showing best. Sauces and sides are extra; we tried a traditional bordelaise and peppercorn, some creamed spinach and truffled mac and cheese, and some beautiful roasted potatoes with caramelized onions.

THE VERDICT There is no question that this is one of the top steakhouses in the country. My tenderloin was slightly (and beautifully) marbled. The menu isn't innovative, but the execution here is at the very highest level—and they have what's likely the most extensive wine list in the province. All served in a gorgeous mansion on the Assiniboine, in the city's swankiest neighbourhood. It's a pricey night out, but it's worth it.

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