

Yaletown vino tasting

Hamilton Street Grill in Yaletown will hold a wine tasting next week as part of its monthly tasting series. For \$25, the price includes samples of three wines, each paired with a vino-inspired appetizer. Monday night has a waiting list, but seats are still available for Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. For info, call 604-331-1511. — QMI AGENCY



Toy drive for Sally Ann

The Donnelly Group is gearing up for its ninth annual toy drive for the Salvation Army. The company will hold a cocktail party Dec. 20 at Republic nightclub, 958 Granville St., and collect unwrapped gifts to donate. Starting at 8 p.m., partygoers will enjoy free appetizers and DJ entertainment until midnight. — QMI AGENCY

Seasonal faceplant



Colin Jack
Justthereforthebeer.com

Not all great beers have great names. Those that do, often leave a lasting impression on consumers.

What makes a great beer name? Humour? Geography? Perhaps an obvious hint of quality or craftsmanship? Maybe it's an allusion of flavour or colour? What about a number or a year? (think 1516, not Colt 45)

Names can tell a story about a brand or brewery. Catchy seasonal names are also extremely effective. This month, sample or gift-wrap every beer that starts with "chocolate" or "winter" and makes a witty reference to Santa Claus.

My Pick:

Faceplant Winter Ale – Nelson Brewing Company

This 6.5-per-cent alcohol by volume brew almost seems pedestrian nowadays with the high alcohol content of other winter beers. But this is 100 per cent organic and a six-pack is only \$11.75.

Made with a touch of brown sugar, molasses and dark roasted-chocolate malts, this drop has a smooth finish that warms the palate.

Like the name suggests, tipping too many of these back could lead to a wipeout.

Listen to Just Here For The Beer Radio live Mondays at 6 p.m. on AM 650, or visit justthereforthebeer.com

VEGAN QUEST

West Vancouver vegan-style



Raj Taneja
Urbanmixer.com

Living in captivity isn't so bad. I've been captive and forced to go vegan and alcohol-free for over a month.

Contrary to what I thought, I haven't become ill and I'm not lying on my deathbed. I get time to workout daily and I've actually become stronger and more flexible. The weight seems to be coming off quickly and I like what I see in the mirror.

One thing that appeals is all this special treatment from people working at the city's fanciest restaurants. This week it's the creations of chef



The main course is reminiscent of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 - a play on all kinds of veggies. PHOTO SUBMITTED

Dino Renaerts at Fraîche Restaurant in West Vancouver. This place has the best view in town and one of the city's best chefs to match. My captors know how to

dine in style. So what if every kitchen in the city has been penetrated by a secret society of raw vegans bent on world domination? The meals coming out of the restaurants I've visited during my confinement have been brilliant.

Back to Fraîche, the chef must be an incarnation of Sergei Rachmaninov. Everything reaching my table was intricate, beautiful and creative beyond my imagination. The three courses and starting taster were orchestrated so masterfully it's impossible to talk about a single item.

The amuse bouche, a celery, Granny Smith apple and

lime shooter, garnished with a celery leaf and some lime oil had me in disbelief.

Raw vegan? How? Chef reassured me everything was prepared raw. That was only the start. The first and second courses thereafter didn't disappoint and the sorbet for dessert – a superb creation.

For raw vegan at Fraîche, given day or two notice, chef Dino can create anything. I believe him.

Raj Taneja is part technologist, part entrepreneur, part social media thought leader and part foodie. He needs serious help; we think he has Stockholm Syndrome. On Twitter his username is @tinhead.

Hapa mood, food simply epic



Sarah Rowland
Dining Chronicles

I'm not sure why, but most of my favourite Japanese joints always seem to have the worst lighting.

As such, when I have a serious hankering for the raw stuff I usually do take-away – unless it's lunchtime and all I need is a casual environment.

If it's a dinner date, forget about it! I want a restaurant with some nice ambiance and great Japanese food. I finally found such a place: Hapa Izakaya (1516 Yew St.).

Now I haven't tried the other

two Hapas (1479 Robson St. and 1193 Hamilton St.), but I can definitely vouch for this Kits locale. It's got cozy and romantic corners for intimate dinners, but also a lively and fun vibe for bigger social gatherings like birthdays, etc.

And oh yeah, the food totally rocks!

For a cold starter I recommend the beef tataki (\$7.95), a delicious take on beef carpaccio with chili sauce, fried onions and sesame seeds. Then there's the ebi mayo (market price). Imagine big wild prawn tempura tossed in a light and creamy, slightly spicy sauce. It

may sound simple, but the taste is epic.

The selection of assorted sashimi is amazing as well. For the less adventurous (I'm talking the people who only order California rolls every time they eat Japanese) there's plenty of cooked meat, rice and noodle dishes to choose from (rarely any rolls though).

For dessert, the sesame-crusted cheesecake is a must! Trust me, under that warm and inviting (not to mention flattering) lighting, you'll have such a good time, you'll want to stick around for a sweet course.



Not just a feast for the eyes, the ebi mayo dish packs a great flavour. PHOTO SUBMITTED

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