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The infill debate

# OTTAWA

magazine

OUR ANNUAL DINING  
ISSUE INVITES YOU  
TO PULL UP A CHAIR

# food

*in all its sumptuous*  

# forms



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## Avant-Garde Bar ★★★

Theatrical, hopping, ever so smooth

find

The Avant-Garde Bar is one hopping spot. When my friend and I visited one cold evening, things were heating up with a crowd of university students come to hear a poetry reading. Other nights you'll find live bands, DJs, or films. Posters done by the likes of El Lissitzky and Rodchenko give the first indication that the Avant-Garde Bar is owned by Russians, the second being our theatrical waitress with her beautiful Russian accent. Then there are the many vodkas listed on the menu. By the way, if a menu doesn't appear at your table, just pick one up from the bar. This is mainly a place to snack and some tasty treats are at hand. We started with an eggplant salad, like a dip, that tasted ever so smooth. A plate of buttered sourdough (called butterbread) came with big orange salmon roe and capers—so simple and good. Although we enjoyed samza, a Uzbekistani beef turnover, the microwave had destroyed the texture of the pastry. Pelemeni were little beef dumplings, tender and delicate, that came with a pot of hot mustard, sour cream, and a cruet of vinegar. Good with the light Russian beer, Baltika. Other beers include Lakeport Honey Lager and Kozel; wines include Côtes du Ventoux and Castillo de Almansa. Closed Mondays; open until 2 a.m. other days. Stairs down to restaurant. \$45. 135½ Besserer St., 321-8908, avantgardebar.com.

## JAPANESE

### SUSHI 88

★★

If a craving for sushi comes over you while you're in Chinatown, drop in to Sushi 88. Not much more than a square box of a place, this Japanese restaurant manages to give a sunny feeling with its yellow walls, not to mention its smiling servers. Getting the food and drink to the table, though, takes longer than it should. Fish is fresh here, the rice has good texture, and the sushi are nicely rolled. Dinner comes with miso soup or salad, both passable enough. One of the plates, Le Rock Star, holds a variety of sushi, including shrimp, tuna, salmon, a California roll, and cooked eel. The Sashimi Surprise can be fun to order. You might get, as my friend did one evening, smoked white tuna, salmon, whitefish, yellowtail tuna, and red snapper, along with a bowl of hot white rice. This neighbourhood restaurant is popular with the 30s crowd. Beers include Kirin, Asahi, and Sapporo. Lunch from \$6.95, dinner from \$8.95. Takeout available. Open daily. Parking at rear. One step up to entrance; washroom tight. \$55. 690B Somerset St. W., 233-3288, www.sushi88.ca.

## DINER

### TAFFY'S

★★★

Taffy's is cheerful and bright with plants and flowers, some plastic and some real. Here is respite from everyday tedium for either a Canadian breakfast or a Lebanese lunch. Taffy's seems to have started in the '50s; you can see the gradual improvements, and it now has a '70s aesthetic. The Lebanese husband-and-wife team get along well, making easy banter with the customers, many of whom they know. The breakfast is typical of any diner, the difference being that Taffy's does it very well. Sunny-side-up eggs are cooked just so, and the bacon's not too crisp. Home fries have good old-fashioned flavour, while the french toast crunches slightly on the outside and tastes real. Coffee is run-of-the-mill, but if you're doing takeout, a dollar gets you any size you want. Open for breakfast and lunch only, closed weekends. Steps up to entrance. \$10 (breakfast). 100 Gloucester St., 234-6582.

## CAFETERIA

### THE CAFETERIA

★

The National Gallery of Canada used to have a fancy dining room called Restaurant des Beaux Arts, but I suppose they couldn't make it pay, so now the place is a cafeteria called, unpretentiously enough, The Cafeteria. After trudging up the long ramp and then making your way down the cold granite Grand Hall, you end up in the lavish space, the cafeteria. With its magnificent windows and octagonal glass roof, this place is like a cathedral, and one would expect better food, really. A salad bar offers unimaginative macaroni salad, potato salad, and bean salad. A smoked chicken baguette contains a thick slab of juicy chicken breast, but the baguette is processed white bread and the lettuce is limp. Seafood stir-fried rice has a good curry taste, but its dry, over-

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