

## Newish and Notable

Chef Michael Noble's gourmet comfort food reflects his 30 years of experience as a top chef and restaurateur

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Deep in the heart of Montgomery, along the section of Bowness Road N.W. that flows through that riverside community, there's a new building called Montgomery Place. It's a four-storey condominium that houses retail and office businesses on the main floor.

It looks like so many buildings in so many neighbourhoods. But it smells different.

Montgomery Place smells like good food; the lustrous scent of fat dripping onto blazing wood, creating a smoky waft of savoury seduction. It smells like soup, lovingly simmered all day. It smells like dessert resting gently after a stint in the oven.

These smells are coming from one of Montgomery Place's ground-level spaces. Specifically from Notable, chef Michael Noble's labour of love that opened in August. Notable is Noble's place, pure and simple. Just look around. The cocoa walls are decorated with framed medals and certificates he's earned in international competitions. There's a photo of him with stern-looking Iron Chef Morimoto, and more shots of Noble with his brigades from previous restaurants like Vancouver's Diva at the Met and Calgary's seafood classic, Catch. There is a

framed article about Catch winning enRoute magazine's Best New Restaurant of 2002 under his auspices, too.

Noble has spent most of his professional life working at the top of the culinary food chain, and now he has stepped out on his own.

And it's a big step, both literally and figuratively. In essence, Noble is one huge, open room accommodating 132 customers over two inside levels, an open kitchen bar and a harvest table. It has perhaps the most "open" open kitchen we've seen. It's front and centre when you enter, and directly ahead of you is a big wood-fired rotisserie that can handle up to 30 chickens at once, or a range of beef, pork, salmon and lamb cuts. A grill extends from it to accommodate burgers, steaks and chops, too.

The rest of the kitchen opens behind the rotisserie, and you can watch as chefs prepare spinach and speck salads with pickled strawberries, or albacore tuna sandwiches with pickled cucumbers. (At least, that's what they were preparing when we wrote this. By now, as the winter chill is setting in, there will be different, seasonal items on the menu.)

The on-view look fits with Noble's concept of "gourmet comfort" food. Noble is about premium ingredients prepared simply so their natural elements come out: seared scallops with a bacon and caper dressing; local tomatoes dressed with white balsamic and Highwood Crossing canola oil; steaks cut from Galloway natural beef.

The menu is the result of 30 years of training and cooking, and decades of dealing with farmers, fishers and food suppliers. And it's about thousands of customers served dishes ranging from astoundingly simple to absurdly complex.

For Noble, it all distils to this: a kitchen where nothing is hidden, a dining room that invites you to come as you are and a list of "gourmet comfort" dishes that satisfy without overwhelming. You won't find anything overworked here.

A plate laden with a rotisserie half-chicken arrives glistening in a red wine jus. It's a big, white plate that has the chicken piled on one side and a mound of goat cheese-infused mashed potatoes, with a scattering of carrots and asparagus, on the other. It looks like something we might cook at home — if we had a wood-fired rotisserie, that is; and if we knew how to get just the right combination of potatoes and goat cheese to whip into that super-creamy texture; and if we knew how to create that red wine jus. Sure, the plate looks simple, but the food taste so much better than we could ever do ourselves.

Just like the pot of mushroom soup that preceded it. This is mushroom soup that transcends the genre. Precision-cut mushrooms, stock that's not too creamy, but is just-right creamy and a delicate hand with the spices. How do you do that, make a mushroom soup that's better than the rest? It's just stock, mushrooms, cream, goat cheese and seasonings, isn't it? Plus 30 years of experience. And the confidence that such sublime simplicity can work, and that it will.

Guess that's why Montgomery Place smells so good.

*Notable is located at 4611 Bowness Rd. N.W., 403-288-4372, [notabletherestaurant.ca](http://notabletherestaurant.ca)*