



DAN ZAITZ PHOTO

Roots offers farm-to-fork fare; (right) chef Adam Siegel presides at Bacchus and Bartolotta's Lake Park Bistro.



MARK BERTIERI/MKE IMAGES

# to dine is divine

Taste your way through Milwaukee's restaurants. Go around the world or around the block; it's a trip you'll be glad to take.

BY JEANETTE HURT

Even students sit with rapt attention at the glossy granite counter while Michael Feker performs, emulsifying a salad dressing with roasted garlic and demonstrating how to properly reduce a vodka-and-fennel cream sauce. Feker is a thing of constant motion as he teaches and prepares a private meal for his audience. "Sometimes I amaze myself—it's perfect," Feker says, winking, as he tastes his sauce.

His frequent performances at the Chef Michael Feker School of Culinary Magic, adjacent to his Il Mito Enoteca restaurant, reveal strong evidence of how far Milwaukee's culinary scene has evolved. Once a city of dark-paneled supper clubs and mostly German ethnic haunts, this lakeside city has grown to a destination of epic culinary proportions.

Just this year, Adam Siegel, executive chef for both Bacchus and Bartolotta's Lake Park Bistro, received the James

Beard Award for best Midwestern chef. He is the second Milwaukee chef to receive the award: Culinary Institute of America grad Sandy D'Amato of Sanford Restaurant and Coquette Café received it in 1996.

Siegel's innovative and classical cuisine sets the foundation, but he doesn't stop there. "It's all about the complete dining experience," says Siegel. "Everything from having the perfect flatware to having the proper glass for the varietal of wine you

are drinking to choosing the right flavors for a dish ... It all has to go together."

Everything comes together for chef Marc Bianchini's restaurants, too. Another CIA grad, Bianchini was the opening chef for Ristorante Bartolotta in 1993. Milwaukeeans were largely unfamiliar with fresh mozzarella and tomato salads; not only were they ready for that Italian treat, they've since hungered for more exotic fare. Bianchini has kept up with their taste buds, opening fine-dining Osteria del Mondo in 1994 and the casually hip Cubanitas with his wife, Marta, who's of Cuban descent, in 2003. Just this year, the husband-and-wife duo joined sommelier Jaclyn Stuart to open Indulge, an extravagant destination for wine, chocolate, cheese, and charcuterie.

Indulge is just one example of the hip, casual foodie hangouts to open in Milwaukee. Chef John Raymond partnered with farmer Joe Schmidt to open Roots, a farm-to-fork hillside eatery that boasts some of the best views of the city skyline. This locally conscious and

eclectic restaurant blends a variety of culinary traditions, including Asian and French, and comes up with something new: a cuisine that is as daring as its iron- and wood-sculpted interior.

Ethnic mingling can also be found at La Merenda, an international tapas bar on the city's south side. The name is Italian for early snack, but the quote on the menu says it all: "La merenda cannot be confused with a modern snack. The snack is snatched, la merenda is shared," from Patience Gray's book *Honey From a Weed*. Though the ambience is distinctly Mediterranean eclectic, the menu spans the globe with treats such as made-fresh-daily ravioli, Filipino egg rolls, and South American empanadas.

Almost as eclectic is Peggy Magister's Crazy Water. Though she doesn't teach her audience the way Feker does, she is an entertainer—her kitchen is in the front window, just behind the bar. A Culinary Institute of America graduate from the West Coast, Magister brings together wine and her own magical touch to create

such dishes as three-cheese tartlets with lingonberry sauce and a barbecue shrimp dish that pays homage to Emeril Lagasse.

Eclecticism and luxury come together in the new Hinterland Erie Street Gastropub in the Third Ward. Chef Dan Van Rite offers classical American cuisine with a spin. "A lot of the dishes are very classic, things we're all familiar with, but then he comes up with a little bit of a twist," says Lindsey Weigel, marketing coordinator for the restaurant. A simple salmon dish be combined with braised beef ribs, or homemade Korean kimchee might be added as a vegetable side. Van Rite changes the menu to offer his customers the freshest and the best ingredients; dishes can be paired up with an extensive wine list or beers that the company crafts at its Green Bay brewery.

"In Milwaukee, you can find a dining scene for every different palate," Feker says. "It's an exciting place to be. You're going to walk out and say, 'Wow. I thought I could only get this in New York,' but it's not the case."

## Milwaukee's Premier Art Deco Hotel



888.322.DECO  
www.ambasadormilwaukee.com

**Bacchus** / 925 East Wells Street; Tel: 414-765-1166; bacchusmke.com

Tel: 414-443-1414; milwaukee cooks.com

**Bartolotta's Lake Park Bistro** / 3133 East Newberry Boulevard; Tel: 414-962-6300; lakeparkbistro.com

**Crazy Water** / 839 South Second Street; Tel: 414-645-2606; crazywaterrestaurant.com

**Chef Michael Feker School of Culinary Magic** / 6917 West North Avenue, Wauwatosa;

**Cubanitas** / 728 North Milwaukee Street; Tel: 414-225-1750; getcubanitas.com

**Hinterland Erie Street Gastropub** / 222 East Erie Street; Tel: 414-727-9300; hinterlandbeer.com

Tel: 414-390-9463; getindulge.com

**Il Mito Enoteca** / 6913 West North Avenue, Wauwatosa; Tel: 414-443-1414; ilmito.com

**La Merenda** / 125 East National Avenue; Tel: 414-389-0125; lamerenda125.com.

**Indulge** / 708 North Milwaukee Street;

**Osteria del Mondo** / 1028 East Juneau Avenue; Tel: 414-291-3770; getosteria.com

**Roots Restaurant and Cellar** / 1818 North Hubbard Street; Tel: 414.374.8480; rootsmilwaukee.com

**Sanford Restaurant** / 1547 North Jackson Street; Tel: 414-276-9608; sanfordrestaurant.com