



## Against the tide

**Coast is an exception to the unwritten rule that West Coast seafood restaurants must be heavy on nautical themes, or at least have a seafoam or blue palette. Instead, its look is the pared down modernism of clean lines and expansive surfaces with only a few select nautical elements.**

A mosaic fish at Coast Restaurant, in Vancouver, pays homage to local artist B.C. Binning. The modern, tasteful design features clean lines and expansive wood surfaces, with the vertical grain of the fir paneling used throughout giving the impression of higher ceilings. A few carefully chosen graphic elements are the only indication that Coast is a seafood restaurant.



Given that Vancouver is located along the Pacific coast, it isn't surprising to hear that yet another seafood restaurant has opened its doors in the already eatery-heavy Yaletown district. What is interesting about Coast is that it reflects its port city location in a way that sets it apart from other area establishments flogging finned food. There is no hint of the Whistler-esque West Coast style, nor warehouse cum loft esthetic – read, no large wooden beams, no exposed ductwork. Instead, Coast gives a nod to the West Coast modernism of Ron Thom and Arthur Erickson.

Located at 1255 Hamilton Street, Coast is owned by the same people behind Glowbal and Afterglow (*Canadian Interiors*, May/June 2004). Both those spaces punched up the mod end of modern with expanses of bright colour providing a warm edge. At Coast, the retro influence is the pared down modernism of clean lines and expansive wood surfaces. The glass mosaic mural near the entrance is reminiscent of the 1950s and '60s murals by local artist B.C. Binning, who used coastal imagery in most of his work.

That mural is one of the few design elements that hints to the fact that Coast is a seafood restaurant. Evoke International Design Inc., the project designers, also added a few select elements – "bull kelp" pendant light fixtures, fish scale-like material on the bar facing and back wall of the mezzanine, a graphic lightbox in the stairwell leading to the upper level dining area – to reinforce the theme. The overall effect is understated but elegantly hip. "It's such a change from the way the space used to look," says Evoke principal David Nicolay, referring to the décor of the East Indian restaurant that once occupied the space. "Only the exhaust fan and the general kitchen layout were kept. The rest we gutted."

Now, a panelled bulkhead over the downstairs bar hides the royal blue makeup air unit that had hung over patrons of the former establishment. The rest of the overhead mechanical system has been neatly hidden by new ceiling panels. "We lost about four feet of ceiling clearance when we covered the mechanical," says Nicolay. Far from being a drawback to the design, the bulkhead and adjacent wine cellar (created by extending the base line of the bulkhead to the mezzanine) visually tie the mezzanine to the main room. The vertical orientation of the grain in the fir panelling – which is used liberally throughout the entire restaurant – gives the illusion of a higher ceiling, especially in the mezzanine area.

A glass railing along the front of the mezzanine allows those dining on the upper level to take in the action below, especially around the centrally located chef's table, a feature of the main dining room. The raised chef's table not only allows those seated around it to be the room's centre of attention, but also affords those dining there to have a front row view of the action on the cooking surface at one end of the table. For those wanting a more secluded dining option, there is a solitary table tucked behind the stairwell across from the secondary bar on the mezzanine level.

The light wood, glass mezzanine and minimal use of colour and graphic elements combine to give the space a clean, tasteful ambience – the appropriate backdrop for highlighting the food served and the people who come to enjoy it. And should the tide of taste ever cause seafood cuisine to flounder, only minimal changes need to be made to the décor for it to suit another restaurant genre. ☀