

# The new West Coast look

Vancouver's typical woodsy dining decor is becoming more cosmopolitan. Two new restaurants – the Glowbal Grill & Satay Bar and Wild Rice – are drawing rave reviews both for their culinary creations and for their eclectic styles.

By Janet Collins Photography by Janis Nicolay and Martin Tessler



**Above left:** Partitions provide the illusion of many small rooms within the larger Glowbal space. **Above right:** Illuminated cubes serve as tables in the casual seating area near the entrance.

**Facing page, left:** High seating at and across from the bar gives patrons an alternative to traditional seating. **Top right:** The private "landing" is illuminated by a backlit photo of a Mexican street. **Bottom right:** The main dining area. *Photos by Janis Nicolay.*

As a lifelong West Coast resident, it is with great reluctance that I admit that Vancouver suffers from low self-esteem. Just look at the much-photographed skyline. Shiny glass towers as far as the eye can see. Two notable exceptions bear a remarkable likeness to the Sydney Opera House and the Coliseum in Rome. Yup, this is one city that seems rather reluctant to try anything new. The penchant for the tried and true even extends to dining establishments.

Okay, so White Spot triple-Os don't have quite the strong hold on the burger market they once held, but one really has to wonder if the population can support yet another Umberto Menghi eatery.

Thankfully, in recent years, the civic palette has loosened up enough to embrace the likes of John Bishop (of self-named restaurant fame) and Rob Feenie (of Lumiere) and their top-drawer fare. Those who feel slightly more adventurous have moved beyond the white tablecloth and candlelight to indulge in the fragrant Indo-American offerings of Sami's and Vij's. If only their dining décor had as much flavour as the cuisine.

At last, in the late 1990s, Vancouver's dining destinations started to take a bolder approach to design – of both what's on the plate and what's around it. Witness the mod styling of Zin and ginger sixtytwo where the colours and textures entertain the eye just as the menu delights the taste buds.

The Glowbal Grill & Satay Bar is one of the notable new dining establishments. Situated in the heart of the trendy Yaletown district, Glowbal is doing its best to set itself apart from the competition in this restaurant-dense neighbourhood. As if the hazelnut-crusted rack of lamb with wasabi sweet apple syrup weren't tempting enough, Glowbal doesn't look like the other restaurants in Yaletown. The style is more metropolitan, so patrons will feel at home whether they are from San Francisco, Melbourne, Tokyo or Vancouver.

"We didn't want a typical Yaletown space," says Shannon Bosa who co-owns Glowbal with her husband Emad Yacoub. "We wanted something that was fresh and sophisticated. Our menu is globally inspired – global flavour mixed with fresh local ingredients – and we wanted that to be reflected in the room." David Nicolay, of Vancouver-based Evoke International Design, guided the couple through the process of transforming the exposed beams and brick walls into an approachable upscale grill. The couple met Nicolay through a mutual friend, and he came with some added experience. In addition to knowing a thing or two about design, Nicolay is also well versed in the restaurant business – he and business partner Robert Edmonds also own the Tangerine Lounge/Restaurant across town. Bosa and Yacoub brought their own ideas about restaurant design to the table, gained from experience running two restaurants (Brownstone and Solo) in Toronto. While each had his or her own vision for the space, none would have the final word. Project manager for Evoke was Mark Korall.

Building code considerations helped to push the design. For example, because there are two floors above the restaurant, the code required the beams to be covered for fireproofing. Similarly, the ramp to the parking lot below the space meant that a portion of the floor had to be raised. "It turned out to be a good thing," says Bosa, "because that raised area provides an intimate space at the back of the main dining room."





A degree of intimacy is given to the main dining area as well, thanks to the installation of a tall partition that separates the space from the bar area. The high seating area (high bar stools and banquette) across from the bar is likewise separated from the "chef's table" by another high partition and curved banquette. This treatment of the area across from the bar helps ensure the 40-foot Corian-covered bar doesn't dominate the space to create a bowling alley affect. In all, the series of walls provides the illusion of many small rooms within the larger space.

A long light wall (made of Lumacore, a sheet-poured acrylic inlaid with rice-type fibres to look like rice paper) runs the length of the main dining area and around the perimeter of the raised "landing," thereby unifying the two sections of the room. At one side of the landing is a backlit image of a Mexican street. The image – along with smaller images from other parts of the world – is a reference to the global aspect of the restaurant's name. The subtle illumination from the backlighting is the glow.

The restaurant has been so successful since opening in March, plans are already underway to expand. "The fact that we have entrances on two streets allowed us to put a funky take-out space [at the back door] on Hamilton Street," says David Nicolay. "We're in the process of punching out the wall of the private dining room from Glowbal that backs onto the take-out space."

The result will be Afterglow, a lounge. Afterglow will pick up many of the décor elements found in Glowbal but with an added twist. For example, the illuminated cubes that double as tables in the casual seating area near the entrance will make an appearance in Afterglow

