

## **An extravaganza for tired taste buds**

### **Opus on 8th serves delicious Asian tapas in a glamorous setting**

By managing to create that elusive combination of great food, the energy of a night club and the relaxed chill factor of a pub, Opus on 8th has a little bit of everything for the downtown diner.

When Preston Drummond met private chef Matt Binkley onboard a yacht in the Bahamas while on vacation, their similar goals formed a business match. Drummond had cut his teeth in the restaurant business with a chain of small neighbourhood pubs while Binkley was an internationally trained chef. They worked on their concept, capturing all three traits in one spot, and co-opened Opus on 8th in May of this year.

The glamorous lounge has slowly gained momentum with plenty of print advertising and word of mouth. Located a stone's throw from the Uptown and Globe theatres on 8th Avenue, Drummond lobbied hard to have Opus be the official watering hole of the Calgary International Film Festival (CIFF). They worked out a mutually beneficial sponsorship agreement and rolled out the red carpet for VIP events, corporate parties and even a few Canadian celebrity drop-ins. It was the alliance with the CIFF that really brought recognition to the new hot spot.

With its modern colour palette of burnt orange, slate greys, deep chocolate furniture and woodwork, Opus on 8th brings to mind an opulent Zen atmosphere. The long room features high ceilings and modern artwork while hanging pendant lamps and candles on the tables emit soft concentrated amber glows. From tall lounge tables and seating at the expansive backlit bar to more intimate booths, the upscale lounge serves both the corporate lunch and after work drinks crowd as well as late night loungers as ambient house music plays in the background.

The menu features Izakaya, Asian tapas dishes created by Binkley that are primarily appetizer-type dishes with a strong Asian theme, meant for sharing. Binkley knows tapas, having recently penned a cocktail party bible with Jeremy Parsons called Cold Tea at Three. Binkley supplied the appetizer recipes while Parsons contributed a variety of unique cocktails sure to please any gathering.

A co-worker and I settled into a cozy booth on a weekday after a long day at the office and ordered cocktails and four different appetizer-style dishes to share. The food arrived in a stunning presentation, the rich colours and interesting textures spread sparingly across the oversized, stark white angular serving dishes. The steamed Shanghai street dumplings (\$10) were not at all heavy tasting. Densely filled with a pork and vegetable mixture, they were drizzled with a soy sauce reduction and garnished with slivers of green onions. The huge pieces of coconut tempura wild white shrimp (\$14) were covered in a crispy coating with a spicy kick to it. Inside was thick, tender shrimp meat with garlic mayo for dipping.

A bowl of thin, crispy market-fresh Asian root chips (\$6) also came with a piquant dipping sauce. The Diamond Willow organic beef tataki (\$14) are whisper-thin slices of seared marinated beef tenderloin with shredded onion garnish. It was our server's first day, but what she lacked in menu knowledge she made up for in friendliness and attentiveness, taking our questions back to the kitchen promptly for quick replies.

After our meal, our server listed off some eclectic desserts, including white chocolate soup with Grand Marnier, ice cream sandwiches and baked orange gyozas in pastry. They all sounded worth a taste, but the tapas had filled us up and we had to decline the sweet offers. Opus on 8th had satisfied our after-work cravings for delicious food in a cool setting with a hot vibe.

Opus on 8th is located at 637-8th Avenue S.W.; phone, 263-9651.