

## Extra! Extra!

Read all about it as Detroit area restaurants make grade in national magazines

BY ELEANOR HEALD  
SPECIAL WRITER

Diners and restaurateurs in metro Detroit have long lamented a lack of recognition from national periodicals specializing in food and restaurant news. This seems to have turned a corner. May the trend continue.

*Restaurant Hospitality* magazine, a monthly national publication of Ponton Foodservice Network based in Cleveland, Ohio, selected a restaurant "dream team." Editor-in-chief Michael Sanson said he wanted to put the spotlight on those who work in the trenches, not the celebrity chef types, but those who deal directly with restaurant goers.

### Personality key

Believing that personality is the key because it shapes a customer's experience, *Restaurant Hospitality* editors chose Mickey Bakst of Tribute restaurant in Farmington Hills as dream team maitre d'. Sanson wrote, "Tribute with its opulent decor, cutting-edge cuisine and soaring check averages has all the makings of a stuffy place. But there's no chance of that with Bakst at the helm."



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL LERZEL

And what did the Guilianos say? "Mickey knows how to pair better than any sommelier. The

man could have been a great diplomat, psychologist, actor, conductor, walker and much

more."

Hopefully, you have a favorite metro Detroit restaurant. When

Fine Tribute: Restaurant Hospitality editors chose Mickey Bakst of Tribute restaurant in Farmington Hills as dream team maitre d'.



Well served: Rick Rubel sits among the selections of wine at No. VI Chophouse that help make him dream team sommelier, according to *Restaurant Hospitality* magazine.

you have a chance to praise it publicly or in a survey, do so. Metro Detroit area restaurant professionals work hard to please you.

And if you are not pleased, you should tell them. How else will they know?

Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about dining, food, wine and spirits for the *Observer & Eccentric* Newspapers. To leave her a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864.

With wine representing more than 20 percent of total sales at No. VI Chophouse, it's no accident that Sanson's group chose Rick Rubel as dream team sommelier. "He's created an award-winning wine list and constantly educates himself about wine trends," Sanson remarked.

All was quiet on the award scene in January and February this year. But it awakened like spring in March when *Bon Appetit* magazine praised Fendale's Assaggi Mediterranean Bistro in its "The Restaurant Reporter — Top Tables" feature on where to eat out now around the country and around the world.

### Assaggi

Citing Assaggi as "a new, casual spot, boasting unusual art and a lot of charm," the credit passed to "Randy Firestone's open kitchen with imaginative cuisine featuring Spanish, Greek, Provencal, Middle Eastern and Southern Italian flavors."

National recognition for an area restaurant open less than a year has encouraged Assaggi's proprietors Josie Rotondo and George Giso. So much so that they've now opened for lunch from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Tuesday through Friday.

The menu, while shortened for mid-day, includes popular items from the dinner menu, most less than \$10.

Last, but certainly not least, in the spring issue of the *Quarterly Review of Wines*, which has a significantly large subscriber base in addition to being found in every guest room of Ritz-Carlton hotels nationwide, Tribute scored again.

In each issue of the magazine Edward and Mireille Guiliano write a "Wining and Dining" feature, which in the spring issue hails "Top Tastes of 2000."

In the same company with haut de gamme Paris and chic New York City restaurants and bistros, the Guilianos' "Meal of the Year" was created by Tribute's Executive Chef Takashi Yagihashi, pictured in the feature along with a panoramic view of the restaurant's dining room, wine room and bar.

You can read about the incredible menu in the magazine, and in fact, ask Takashi to re-create it for you. The Guilianos express that "He is a young genius who is totally dedicated to doing his very best every day, and he's also friendly, humble and beams to see your spoken or unspoken reactions to his unusual creations."

### Recognition

Bakst said: "This recognition is very important to all the staff at Tribute. While the Guilianos credit Takashi, his Chef de Cuisine Ann Spillman and pastry chef Michael Laskonis by name, we all feel proud. And I have to say quite honestly, their mention of me means more than any recognition I've received in my career."

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