CITY BITES

A Unique Restaurant Corporation eatery near you:

■ Cafe Jardin, 2815 West Big Beaver, Somerset Collection in Troy (248) 649-1348. A casual eatery in the main promenade, perfect for coffee, a quick bite, or people watching.

■ Duet at Orchestra Hall, 3663 Woodward Ave., Detroit (313) 831-3838 is URC's first venue in the city of Detroit, featuring reasonably priced lunches and "orchestrated" plates at dinner.

■ Flying Fish Tavern, 13 Mile and Southfield Roads in Beverly Hills (248) 647-7747 is a casual restaurant serving tavern foods and an expanded fish selection.

■ Milk & Honey, 6600 W. Maple Road, inside the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield (248) 661-2327 is a gourmet Kosher vegetarian restaurant.

■ Morels, A Michigan Bistro, 30100 Telegraph Road, Bingham Farms (248) 642-1094 features Michigan's food bounty in a dining room that surrounds an atrium with herbs and flowers used in the dishes.

■ Northern Lakes Seafood Company, inside the Kingsley Inn, 1475 N. Woodward, Bloomfield Hills (248)646-7900 is a casual seafood eatery with an oyster, cigar and martini bar (with humidor).

■ No.VI Chophouse & Lobster Bar, 27790 Novi Road, inside The Hotel Baronette in Novi (248)305-5210 is a cozy, romantic steakhouse serving USDA Prime cuts of beef.

■ Portabella, 2745 West Big Beaver, Somerset Collection in Troy (248)649-6625 is bustling and casual, featuring Italian cuisine.

Deli Unique locations with typical deli delights.

■ Bloomfield Hills, inside the Kingsley Inn, 1475 N. Woodward, Bloomfield Hills (248) 646-7923.

■ West Bloomfield 6724 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield (248) 737-3890.

■ Detroit at Orchestra Hall, 3663 Woodward Ave., Detroit (313) 833-8810.

■ Plaza Deli, 29145 Northwestern Highway, Southfield (248) 356-2310.

SHIRAZ

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Further orchestration of a wine theme plays out in the wine room, highly visible in the entry, to the four exterior corkscrew-inspired sculptures created by Alex Porbe of Detroit and on to Barney Judge of Northville and his large, artful corkscrew and corks painting on an interior wall.

These are part of the total effects created by Ron Rea of Ron & Roman Designer Architect in Birmingham. A striking, internationally-styled, clean-cut, Zen-like, minimalist atmosphere magically allows intimacy and seamless activity to coexist. Ebony wood highlighted on tightly-woven hemp-like carpeting is accented by camel-colored Roman shades and the soft glow from four abstracted, large, crystal chandeliers. Strategically-placed burning candles in stainless steel niches add to the effect. In lieu of flowers, stainless steel flat plates, accented with fresh grapes are placed behind some of the banquettes.

While retaining the total visual effect of the restaurant, suspended glass walls act as a barrier from smoking, allowed in the intimate bar.

"Restaurant designs have changed," Rea said. "In New York, London, San Francisco and other cosmopolitan cities, the restaurant design trend is toward simpler and not over the top. When the food is special, design can be minimal. There are a number of high-profile steak houses in metro-Detroit, and we did not want the Shiraz design to replicate any of them."

Beef Carpaccio served at Shiraz in Bingham Farms.

STEAK AND OTHER SIGNATURES

Prentice's No.VI in Novi is wildly popular. It's design and that of Shiraz are not at all similar but there are some interesting Shiraz twists on the popular menu items at No.VI. The Shiraz appetizer Lobster Twice-Stuffed Baked Potatoes is a spin off of No.VI Lobster Mashed Potatoes. Shiraz, however, has many more lobster dishes than No.VI.

Among appetizers, Seafood Martinis feature large prawns, priced by the piece, served with both mango chili sauce and traditional cocktail sauce.

Offering an Asian kiss is Oysters Nobu, Barnett's tribute to celebrated chef Nobu Matsuhisa, world-renowned for his new-style Japanese cooking. Seared Sirloin Sashimi with ginger, soy and wasabi served on a banana leaf is another of Barnett's Asian inspirations.

Vidalia Onion Soup with Gruyere Cheese is reminiscent of that served in a top Paris brasserie, while a Wedge of Iceberg Lettuce is thoroughly American and gives those who love it a chance to drown it in their favorite salad dressing.

Barnett credits Tom Keller, chef/owner of the renowned French Laundry in Napa Valley, Calif. for his preparation of Butter Poached Main Lobster with whipped potatoes, sweet corn fondue and ginger-carrot emulsion.

USDA Prime steaks are accompanied by a choice of Port wine, veal essence, horseradish cream, Bearnaise or Detroit Zip Sauce as they are at No.VI. Shiraz goes further offering Special Steak Accompaniments at additional cost. Among choices are Jumbo Lump Crab & Bearnaise, Seared Hudson Valley Foie Gras or a five-ounce Maine Lobster Tail.

Barnett's new spin on Pommes Frittes, fried in some duck fat as they are in France and served in a butcher paper cone, are the accompaniment for brasserie-style Herb Roasted Baby Chicken or they can be ordered as a side served with housemade ketchup.

Restaurants in the URC portfolio never duplicate each other. That's been the success of each. Shiraz, the newest addition, is a dinner best bet for Sweetest Day on Saturday, October 19.

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 18644.

SHIRAZ

Where: 30100 Telegraph Road, Bingham Farms (248) 645-5289.
Open: Lunch 11a.m.-3p.m. Monday-Friday; dinner 5-11p.m. Monday-Thursday, until midnight Friday and Saturday; Sunday 4-9 p.m.
Food style: Exciting innovations from brasserie-style herb-roasted baby chicken to Asian-inspired signature dishes in a contemporary chop house where USDA Prime steaks and lobster take the spotlight.
Cost: Lunch $6-21. Dinner check average $60 per person with wine.
Reservations: Advised.

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