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RESTAURANTS

Masterful food at reasonable prices

Hawsworth delivers calm, confident food in a dazzling setting

BY MIA STAINSBY

VANCOUVER SUN

That sticky bit during the recession played havoc with opening dates, but David Hawsworth is finally back. This time, he's running his own restaurant — Hawsworth.

About that recession, here's the silver lining. Star chefs like Hawsworth have become hyper-aware of price points. His food is as masterfully prepared as when he was heading the West kitchen, but most entrées are in the twenty-something zone. For the high-end food and service, that's incredibly reasonable. His chef de cuisine, Kristian Eligh, was opening chef de cuisine at Market by Jean-Georges and Hawsworth has five sommeliers (one, lured from London's one-Michelin star Chez Bruce) to help diners on the wine front.



Chef/owner David Hawsworth (left) and chef de cuisine Kristian Eligh show one of their dishes at Hawsworth in the renovated Georgia Hotel.

The restaurant dazzles with an enormous twinkling chandelier, pristine white glass table-tops, pearly carved plaster walls and oh my gosh, is that a Rodney Graham painting? It is. (Helps to have famous artists love your food — his paintings would cost somewhere in the six figures.) The painting's called *Anamorphic Psychomania* and alludes to a 1971 zombie movie. "The colours work really well in that room," Hawsworth says. The restaurant is divided into the bar, the Pearl Room and the Art Room. And for something more private, there's the York room, which holds up to up to 60 people.

One design flaw that might need to be addressed to prevent a face plant or a lawsuit are the area rugs. They either need to be taped down securely or turfed completely. The edges are like tripwires. My tripping score: two. Our server: one. I won.

It was a stroke of luck that led Hawsworth to a location he'd coveted for years. With the dramatic VAG building and fountain across the street, it conjures images of Paris or London.

He'd approached the Georgia Hotel owners several years ago, but a partnership never happened. Then a friend came into West restaurant with a developer, who just happened to be the president of Delta Land Development, which just happened to have bought the

Georgia Hotel. Said developer loved Hawksworth's fish soup and asked Hawksworth to come on board with the development. (Rosewood Hotels and Resorts are the property managers.)

Hawksworth continues his calm, confident, unfussy way with food. Flavours are freed from a heavy hand with butter and cream and oil. It's lovely to behold and there are surprise elements (a \$600-vegetable sheeter shears vegetables and fruits into papery sheets, for instance) and most importantly, each bite brings pleasure. The elements on the plate have roles, whether to balance flavours, textures or colours.

Like Cezanne, Hawksworth can astonish with an apple. A long, curvaceous sheet of apple winds through an apple beet salad (\$11) strewn with chèvre and candied walnuts and touched with



The Sablefish dish at Hawksworth.

caramelized honey vinaigrette.

Asian flavours are a seamless part of his food as in the seared weather vane scallops (\$16) which come with a gentle hit of house-made XO sauce. Maple bacon sweetbreads (\$15), battered and deep fried, come with black truffle, kohlrabi and kumquats. The 48-hour beef short rib (\$16) with black pepper jam, shrimp salt, honeydew and green

papaya, shocks the mouth with deep deliciousness.

Sooke River trout (\$22) are little filets (I personally have had enough accusing trout eyes staring at me), served with fingerling potatoes, haricot vert, olives and brown butter sauce. Spring pea agnolotti (\$22) took you into a spring garden and into the wild (wild morels).

He inserts assertiveness to low-key flavours of slow-cooked halibut (\$28) with a wrap of chorizo; artichokes and tomato preserves finish off the plate. And Yarrow Meadows duck breast (\$30) has a knockout sidekick: Duck leg confit, about the best I've had.

Pastry chef Wayne Kozinko has learned a thing or two from former boss Thomas Haas. One of the dessert options are six macaroons, a perfect, light, not too sweet end to the meal. (Although

At a glance

HAWKSWORTH

Rosewood Georgia Hotel,
801 West Georgia St.,

Phone: 604-673-7000.

www.hawksworthrestaurant.com

Open: For breakfast/lunch,
Monday to Friday; brunch,
Saturday and Sunday; dinner,
seven days a week.

Overall: ★★★★★

Food: ★★★★★

Service: ★★★★★

Ambience: ★★★★★

Price: \$\$\$

*Restaurant visits are conducted
anonymously and interviews are done by
phone. Reviews are rated out of five stars.*

\$: Less than \$60 for two before tip and tax

\$\$: \$60 to \$120

\$\$\$: more than \$120

one evening, they didn't have decaf coffee, which would have completed my macaroon high.) His milk chocolate mousse with passion fruit jelly, however, was more milky than chocolatey.

Sound-proofing cocoons diners from Georgia Street traffic (staff and diners were unaware of the Stanley Cup riot until a customer brought news of the calamity outside).

But inside, one evening, a table of bellowing alpha males and a high-decibel woman next to me had everyone else increasing their volume to be heard. In other words, it was a din. I wished for a shield and baton to quell the disturbance.

The wine list is impressive but a work in progress and the aim is to stock value-oriented wines. There's also an impressive scotch list.

There's another Hawksworth project coming soon. Bel Cafe (named for wife Annabel) opens in August. Look for those macaroons as well as croissants, pain au chocolate, sandwiches, soups and salads.