



Edible Art

New restaurant inside the AGO promises customers a collection of flavours in every meal BY STEPHANIE ORTENZI

Ask Anne Yarymowich about the most memorable meals she's ever eaten, and she'll take you first to the Mediterranean Sea and then to an unglamorous quarter in a culinary capital of the world.

A few years ago at an outdoor, seaside café in Turkey, she ordered a striped bass that came cured, like gravlax, to which she matched a glass of Rosé. "The flavours," reminisces Yarymowich, "the ambiance, stopping there by chance — it blew my mind."

In Paris she stumbled across a working-class cantina called Le Roi de Pot au Feu, so named for the "king" of the humblest of everyday French meals. "They plop a bottle of wine on the table, a Gamay, whether you want it or not," recalls Yarymowich, and then comes the specialty of the house. If you want something else, their message was clear — "Piss off," she says, laughing. "It was brilliant."

Back home at the newly renovated Art Gallery of Ontario — where Yarymowich has been executive chef for the past 12 years — she takes a decidedly different approach at "frank," the new restaurant she opened this month. It's named for renowned architect Frank Gehry, who designed the building's

new features and grew up not far from the AGO. The restaurant's name also expresses the kitchen's credo: honest and direct.

"I don't dig fussy, highly manipulated plates," admits Yarymowich. "I appreciate the artistry and skill, and as a cook, I understand the drive for high-intensity flavours, but it's not how I like to cook and it's not how I like to eat."

Yarymowich began defining herself as a chef at Mildred Pierce, a beloved, quirky restaurant that endured 17 years and was resurrected last month as Mildred's Temple Kitchen. Her approach to cooking was authentic, imaginative and fresh. "In all these years, many talented chefs have followed in Anne's footsteps," says owner Donna Dooher, "but when I think of Mildred Pierce, I think of Anne."

Some might say she has the Midas touch. When Yarymowich took over the AGO's

kitchen in 1996, F&B revenues were about \$700,000. Five years later, sales hit \$8.5 million. Richard Willett, the AGO's general manager of F&B at the time, was impressed. "Her love of quality ingredients was something that always charged me," he says, adding she demonstrated a passion in the kitchen he'd rarely seen in nearly 30 years in the business.

Jeff Crump, executive chef of the Ancaster Old Mill Inn, also worked at the AGO, and pairs Yarymowich with Alice Waters as his greatest culinary influences. "Anne taught me to master traditional flavours as a starting point for the creative process," he says.

A fine arts degree comes in handy for an art museum chef, especially when she needs to confer with the chief curator. To consider which AGO piece would hang in the restaurant, Dennis Reid gave Yarymowich a tour of the vault where nearly 70,000 priceless pieces of art wait for a chance to shine. Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted a Paterson Ewen, an artist whose work she admires.

"It was such a privilege," admits Yarymowich, to be invited to feel at home in this world of treasures, adding, "I really feel that this is my time." ●

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Favourite ingredient: salt cod ● **Hobby:** photography
● **Favourite utensil:** 8" bone-handled tomato knife bought in Italy, made by a family that has been making them for 400 years