

TORONTO LIFE

REDS BISTRO & WINE BAR

★★★

Since taking over in May 2006, chef Michael Steh has made the menu his own, playing exotic ideas superbly next to comfort food staples and grounding his well-executed dishes in impeccably sourced ingredients. Steh's northern woods mushroom soup, based on a recipe of his mother's, is hearty and flavour-dense without the addition of too much fat; made with fungi sourced near Collingwood, it's topped with gruyère-goosed croutons and a few dots of tarragon-infused oil. A bowl of tortelli made with stracchino cheese induces swooning; the sublime little pockets are tossed with roasted squash, leeks and chanterelles in a white wine beurre blanc. "Five cup duck and soy stained foie gras terrine" is simpler than it sounds, a thick pane of foie bisected with a band of confit and framed with (perhaps a touch too much) fat; it's good on its own, but divine when eaten with the accompanying mandarin marmalade. Mains are masterful. Decadent pieces of Niagara suckling pig—roasted chop, smoked leg, belly with ultra-crisp crackling—are set beside a gorgeous sauerkraut-based, smoked paprika-tinged goulash. (Downtown! In the financial district! Goulash!) Steh's take on Arctic char could hardly be improved: a thick, almost impossibly moist fillet is set on a beurre noisette made with blanched, chopped walnuts. A "porridge" of roasted chanterelles and cauliflower florets topped with a roasted lemon slice provide accompaniment. Very good desserts include crispin apple tart with toasted oat and pecan streusel (though the pastry is somewhat cakey), but curdistanis shouldn't miss the exceptional cheese menu: with more than 30 offerings (and nearly all of them in stock) from Cheese Boutique, it might well be the best in Canada. Wine service, from a smart list that includes more than 60 by the glass, is excellent. The room, long with a wavy ceiling and beige walls, still works after six years—but just barely. Though it's comfortable and unpretentious, it's just a couple ill-chosen tchotchkes away from homely. Closed Sunday. Mains \$27-\$39. 77 Adelaide St. W. (at Bay), 416-862-7337. ♻️ ♻️ ♻️