

<tidbits>

Although early January is traditionally a better time for making diet resolutions than dinner reservations, you don't have to stop eating out. The good news is that your body needs more carbohydrates in cold weather, and metabolizes them and their pesky calories more energetically now than during the body-baring months. Nutritionists estimate that about 100 to 200 more calories are consumed in the body's daily effort to keep warm than in its attempts to cool down. We've looked up the carb counts of alcoholic beverages, and some are free passes. The whiskeys, gins, vodkas, rums, and scotches carry only "traces" of carbs per serving; dry red wines typically have half a gram; and dry whites tally a single gram. More good news: you can go to two big wine events, the **Spinazzola Gala** on January 27 and the **Boston Wine Expo** on January 28 and 29. And for other non-carb zones, stay tuned to the wine dinners coming up as January progresses (you'll read about them here). For example, you might want to check out the new Wednesday Wine dinners at **L'Espalier** starting in mid January; visit www.lespalier.com. . . . In fact, January is a great month for food events all over Boston. On January 9 at 6:30 p.m., the **Culinary Guild of New England** hosts a cooking demonstration by chef Tara Deshpande. She has had the lead in several Bollywood films; hosted a PBS show, *Great Chocolate Cooking*; and is the author of a forthcoming cookbook and memoir, *Sense and Spice*. She'll be presiding over the demo kitchens of Nuestra Culinary Ventures in Jamaica Plain. For more information, visit www.ncvkitchen.org, or call 781.431.1470.

— Louisa Kasdon



Cambridge's OM (photo by Michael Diskin)

STUFF
@night

No place like OM

A niche of nirvana opens in Harvard Square

BY LOUISA KASDON

Take a deep breath: here comes OM, a little niche of nirvana in Harvard Square. The new late-night lounge and fusion restaurant will leave you as breathless as a perfect martini would. A beautifully lit and stunning new space, it's a meld of modern and Asian, stocked with enough Nepalese art by owners Bik Yonjan and his wife and partner, Solmon Chowdhury, to endow a good-size museum. (Yonjan's father belongs to a guild of gifted Tibetan painters practicing in Nepal.) Yonjan and Chowdhury are native Nepalis who came to Boston in the late '80s to study. MIT types, they are professional techies, not restaurateurs, but, says Yonjan, "[I] always assumed I'd have a restaurant, just like all my relatives do in London."

OM's environment is a jolt of pure Himalayan mountain air whooshing into Harvard Square. It's Asian in its accents, but so hip that it's a shock to see Cambridge-y people in backpacks and down jackets walking in the door. Then again, the world outside won't matter much after an aromatherapy martini or two, blended by bar manager Cliff Travers, formerly of Cuchi Cuchi. (OM's martinis are made with essential oils; the jasmine one will make you happy, happy, happy.) Whether you lose your train of thought contemplating the tangerine-lit Buddha over the bar or trying to deconstruct the painting of Buddha that dominates the opposite wall, after just a few minutes at OM, you'll be in a different state of mind, even before you mount the stairs to the dining room. (Careful when you look back over your shoulder to appreciate the two life-size carved Nepali figures that grace the stairway.) And we haven't even started talking about chef Rachel Klein and her whimsical food.

Despite all its Buddhist calm, you'd be wrong to assume that OM is another Cambridge ethnic restaurant serving Tibetan, Nepali, or Indian food. Klein's menu is as eclectic as any in Boston. How about a Muscovy duck breast and a duck confit, wrapped in a Moroccan-style bisteeya crust, served with medjool dates and mustard greens? Instead of the traditional Nepali meal of beans and rice — dhal bhat — at OM you'll be sucking down a duet of pork loin and pork belly with sweet-and-sour cabbage, apple moustarda, fingerling frites, and Chinese hot mustard. Or, go for the platter of "East Coast vs. West Coast oysters," featuring Kumamoto oysters served with wasabi and a juniper-and-apple mignonette competing for pride of place with Blue Point oysters from Long Island garnished with lemon confit and horseradish. Oh, yes, there's steak and eggs too — except here it's not like at Denny's. Klein's dish features filet mignon with potato purée, fried truffle egg, and a bordelaise sauce — it's one of her signature dishes from her previous position at Lot 401 in Providence, where she was named by *Esquire* magazine as one of America's wonder chefs in the 2004 "best new restaurants" issue. "I like to play with food," Klein says. "I take food seriously and I love the classics, but I find the humor in the classic dishes, twist them a little, deconstruct them, and reassemble them in ways that are fun and bright."

Here's one such twist: instead of the basic breadbasket, Klein will serve truffled parmesan popcorn to diners waiting for their meal to arrive. "I'm really into popcorn's texture," she explains. The bar food also looks like fun — a deconstructed Caesar salad, crispy Israeli artichokes, and a tomato consommé served with a grilled-cheese sandwich that sounds as soothing as a skier's lunch, but isn't: at OM, the tomato soup is spunked up with Thai bird chilies and the cheese is a farmhouse smoked cheddar.

Klein is a 32-year-old New Yorker who grew up glued to *The Frugal Gourmet* and Julia Child instead of after-school specials. After graduating from the Art Institute of New York, she began to use food as a canvas on which to hone her creative talents. "Food is the purest form of art because it appeals to all the senses," Klein says. In Manhattan, she had stints working with several of the city's top chefs, including Peter Hoffman of Savoy, Mark Spangenthal of the Screening Room, and Anita Lo of Anissa. "I really became a 'chef' in Rhode Island," Klein says. Like other Boston imports, Klein feels that New England, and Boston in particular, is a fertile staging area for her talent. "I love New York, but it's almost impossible to get noticed. I was lucky to work for amazing mentors, but I was a cook there. In Providence, I had room to take a few risks and grow into a creative chef."

Klein, who moved to Boston in September, is excited about becoming part of the city's community of chefs. She cooked with Restaurant L's Pino Maffeo before moving to Boston, and she sings his praises. "Pino is amazing," Klein says. "He's got that whole food-chemistry thing happening." Now Klein has started to make the rounds, getting to know other local chefs.

Klein is also excited about her OM team; in addition to Travers, there's pastry chef Cristina Valente, another New York transplant, who worked at David Burke & Donatella. Prices at OM are high but show a little Cambridge restraint, with entrées ranging from \$18 to \$36, and apps and small plates starting in the single digits. OM aspires to bring a late-night edge to the Cambridge side of the river: the main kitchen will be open till 11 p.m., and the lounge will serve until 1 a.m. That's a good thing, because you'll want to come early and stay late. You'll be happy, safe, and very well fed. After all, Buddha will be watching.