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Look for hedonism to greet healthy

ALEXANDRA GILL

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The Left Bank a new West End restaurant August 6, 2014 with a few of their appetizers Heirloom tomatoes with caramelized bocconcini, Spicy albacore tuna cone and tempura hairicot (green beans) frites. (John Lehmann/The Globe and Mail)

If 2014 was the year that Vancouver restaurants got back to basics with small, casual neighbourhood haunts slinging upscale comfort food, what will the next 12 months bring? According to our trends forecast, the culinary landscape will be an abundance of healthy eating and drinking.

Foraging Bust Foraging will continue to be one of the top food trends of 2015. But it's a risky pursuit. Every time a chef serves wild thimbleberries or clover flowers that he or she hand-plucked from the earth, local health codes are being violated. To pass inspections, restaurants keep food-safe-approved foraging companies

on the books. It's a murky grey area that's been largely overlooked. With the field-to-table culinary movement growing faster than chanterelles on a damp forest floor, there is bound to be a day of reckoning.

Fresh Crops Are green garbanzo beans the new kale? Chefs Ned Bell (Yew) and Vikram Vij (Vij's, My Shanti) are already promoting these bright, young (pre-dried) chickpeas on their menus. I'd wager that this is just the tipping legume. Canadian-grown pulses, seeds and special crops are the next farm-to-table foodie frontier. And thanks to groundbreaking distributors like GRAIN (eatgrain.ca), Vancouver is already spearheading a trend that's about to go supernova across the country.

Fancy Toast Roll your eyes if you must. The \$5 slice of artisan toast has already taken San Francisco and Portland by storm. This twee trend isn't just about caramelized banana and sea salt toppings or golden Maillard reactions. It's about showcasing locally grown, small-batch, fresh-milled flour (preferably whole grain). Matchstick Coffee Roasters in Chinatown already has its own toast bar. And places like the Grist Mill and Gardens in Keremeos are reviving heritage mills that haven't been used since the late 1800s.

Holistic Cocktails There isn't usually much common ground among hardcore boozers and hot-yoga devotees. Lately, however, hedonistic and healthy lifestyles have begun merging in the craft cocktail culture. At Exile Bistro, new-generation herbalists are mixing fresh-pressed yam juice with turmeric and bourbon. At Heirloom, the daiquiris are mixed with E3Live algae. And at Summerhill Pyramid Winery, they're vibrating hand-foraged cocktail syrups in Tibetan singing bowls. I wouldn't be surprised if we soon see greenmarket cocktails paired with dishes based on their nutritional properties, as is already being offered at Rouge Tomato in New York.

Fry Baskets Lest you think we're going overboard with the healthy eating trends, be reassured that fatty fried foods still have their place on local menus. In fact, mini fryer baskets are among the hottest serving vessels around. At Left Bank, the parchment-lined wire frames are filled with tempura-battered haricot verts. At My Shanti, they're used for samosas.

Mediterranean Oddly enough, the tasty new "Jew Food" hasn't hit Vancouver in a big way yet. These divine vegetable-focused Israeli dishes, promoted by the London-based chef and cookbook author Yotam Ottolenghi, were one of the dominant dining trends for 2014 in Toronto. I don't imagine we'll be far behind. In the meantime, you can get your fix of creamy hummus, long-braised lamb and za'atar sprinkled grains at Café Medina or Tamam.

Chains Reach Peak Luxury Vancouver does casual fine-dining better than any other city in North America. But there must be a limit to how high our local chain restaurants can fly. Cactus Club Coal Harbour now offers a Chefs Table, where private groups can dine on Canadian caviar "staircases" paired with Diebolt-Vallois Champagne Brut Rosé. Earls has been selling Wagyu burgers at its new test kitchen. And almost every steak on the Joey menu is USDA prime. What ever happened to fried zucchini sticks and chicken wings?

Farmed Salmon Gets Some Respect No, not the open net-pen salmon. We're talking about Kuterra, Canada's first land-raised commercial Atlantic salmon farm. The fish are raised by the 'Namgis First Nation in above-ground tanks on northern Vancouver Island. Fine dining chefs across Vancouver are smitten with mild, buttery taste of this groundbreaking sustainable product. You can order it at Hawksworth, Blue Water Café and the Bearfoot Bistro in Whistler. Expect to see more of it swimming out of kitchens next year.

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