

# MartiniBoys.com

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## Cowbell

While many restaurants are now using organic or naturally raised produce, meats and seafoods, a new Parkdale eatery reaches new heights for the city's purists (catering to not just hippies anymore). The intimate 30-seat French-Bistro styled restaurant, conceived by quintessential Parkdadians (that share a love for the local), aims to provide "an ever-changing chalkboard menu created with naturally-raised, organic meats and produce." The chef is angling to work almost exclusively with local farmers to obtain hormone- and antibiotic-free meats and produce (though doping in the Bovine breed is still nearly impossible to detect). But who, might you ask, is up to the challenge of purveying the purest form of beef available?



Enter Chef/Owner Mark Cutrara. After a lengthy stint in the hospitality industry working as a chef at noteworthy spots Silver Spoon and more recently opening Globe Bistro, Cutrara has expanded his chef-worthy credentials to now include butcher on his CV.

This past winter, he cut his teeth as a main meat man at the Healthy Butcher, also on Queen West. This newly-acquired talent allows him to smoke and cure fresh meats right on the premises in his specially designed prep-kitchen. Needless to say, after he's finished slicing, dicing, and smoking prime cuts of beef, the cowbell will be the only inedible evidence remaining of the animal as the chef plans to use every piece of the cow in the resto's various dishes. While the focus appears to be more geared toward carnivores, Cutrara says there will be daily vegetarian options available for the amounting number of Parkdale vegheads.

Cutrara's Cowbell (perhaps more aptly titled *Sonnaille*, the French translation of the word) is a unique dining opportunity (more of an anomaly really) - a little showcase for him to spoon out pleasure with a master's hand. Passionately aware of the need for a local community atmosphere (that doesn't involve sharing drug paraphernalia), the father of two decided to launch Cowbell as a means of providing a livelihood not only to his family, but also for many local suppliers of food, beverage and even furniture. And yes, he does answer to Saint Mark.

The cozy ambiance is undeniable when first entering the restaurant. An aura of country hospitality is noticeably enhanced by the design and décor created by interior designer Ron Nuhn. As for said furniture, the restaurant has been outfitted with finds from nearby antique stores (that nicely side-steps the Restaurant Makeover aesthetic that is currently plaguing the city), including old mosaic tile flooring and antique wall sconces. Heavy wood tables (reclaimed from a Woodstock Presbyterian church dating back to the 1880s) fill the majority of the room, paired up with cushioned pews.

With life/business partner Karin Culliton, the duo has set out to create "an atmosphere of comfort, originality and fun in their own neighbourhood" (which coincidentally sounds similar to The Drake's and Gladstone Hotel's mandate but most definitely lacks the gentrification). The wood-top service bar is nicely stocked with a wide assortment of international wines, local draft beer, and an array of liquors to quench all palates. The sounds of Massive Attack complement the home-gown dining experience with a soothing vibe.

From the outset, his dishes are fresh, exciting and in every way worthy of the top-quality ingredients he's working with. For example, his appetizer of Bresaola - air-dried salted beef eye of round - is served up with polenta fries and chipotle mayo. A Pickled Yellow perch is straightforward enough, plated with capers and onions, but the sweet & sour pork are awesomely rich and meaty, gently wrapped in phyllo.

Rather than offering a printed menu, Cutrara re-creates his offerings on a daily basis, informing his floor staff, manned by Neal Murphy, what's on tap that particular day. Keep your eye on the chalkboard menu, as one day entrées such as the Ballotine Chicken breasts served with fava beans (\$23.00) or a pork chop served with celery root and apple (\$23.00) could make the cut. Other days, the board could reveal a veal blade steak with ratatouille (\$26.00) or a wild sockeye salmon with mushrooms and barley (22.00). A notable dish to keep your eye out for

would be Culrara's beef pot pie with Frisse salad (\$18.00).

There are plans to have Farmers Nights starting up in the fall whereby a set menu will be created using ingredients from one farm, and the farmer who laboured to grow your greens will be invited in to chat with the diners. Unfortunately this event will come to an end in the winter because, lets face it, we all grow snow come January (Canadian farmers are not excluded from Mother Nature's seasonal love).

"It will give customers a chance to connect with their food and the people who provide it", say Culrara. It's a nice community touch, even if the farmer has to be shipped in all the way from Markham (wait - do they still have farms out there?)!

Culliton has her eyes open for local artists who may be interested in having their work adorn the soothing cream coloured walls. Seeing as this is Parkdale, where practically tripping over artists on the street is a daily occurrence, this should be easy peasy. I'm sure those crafty folk have already started to camp overnight in line for an exhibition opportunity.

Look for the foldaway French Bistro awning and the red Cowbell sign and you'll know you've found the place. There is a tiny front patio, but the atmosphere is most definitely created inside. For those in the area that need an extra reminder when dinner's on, perhaps you can work a deal with Culliton to ring the cowbell at 6pm. -B.D.

Martini Boy's Rating: 

**Location:** 1564 Queen Street West, Toronto, Ontario

**Phone:** 416 849-1095

**Area:** Parkdale

**Cuisine:** Contemporary

**Cost:** \$\$\$

**Hours:** Tue. to Thu.: 5:00pm-10:00pm; Fri. & Sat.: 5:00pm-11:00pm

**Payment Info:** Visa, Master Card, American Express