



Taboo Resort, Golf and Spa

COTTAGE LIVING WITH CITY STYLE

By Michele Peterson

“Warm sake is just a cover-up for bad sake,” says chef Michael Pataran as he pours a chilled shot into each of the glasses lined up along the sleek bar.

“This one is layered and complex as it strikes the palate,” he explains, offering some rare Indigo Wind sparkling sake.

“Watch for hints of lemonade, melon and pepper in this one,” he says, pouring some Sato No Homare. But before he can get to the next bottle, he is jostled out of center stage by chef Jay Scaife who wants to demonstrate his creation, wagyu beef and Japanese dumplings, the next experience on the tasting menu.

Although the action could be happening at a swank urban eatery in downtown Toronto, the scene actually takes place in laidback cottage country. The class “Tasting and Serving Sake” is just one of the options at Taboo Resort’s Culinary Theatre, a 30-seat bar located within Elements, the main dining area. It’s a chance to get up close and personal with celebrity chefs and it’s at the heart of an \$8.3 million renovation that promises to transform the cottage country experience.

Set on the shores of Muskoka Lake, Taboo Resort (formerly Muskoka

Sands) has been attracting serenity seekers for almost a century. They come for the lakefront seclusion, the stunning views, and the abundance of nature-based activities at the resort’s doorstep. Now, in a bold step that breaks the boundaries of tradition, a new vision has taken this natural setting and infused it with an urban style that renews, inspires and sets a new benchmark for luxury.

“At the heart of the evolution of Taboo was our desire to create a culinary destination,” explains Norman Reisman, principal of The Great Gulf Group which acquired the property in 1984. Dining options abound. There’s Elements for formal dining, The Lounge for “Small Plates” and the open-concept Culinary Theatre featuring chefs who hail from upscale eateries such as Rain, Zoom and Canoe. Casual fare is offered waterfront at The Boat-house and poolside at the Patio Bar. For wine lovers, sommelier Michael Sullivan has assembled an extensive collection of rare and carefully chosen vintages.

Taboo’s dining transformation coincides with the 2005 launch of Savour Muskoka, a program bringing local food growers and

restaurateurs together to create menus that highlight locally grown ingredients. “We enjoy seeking out the best regional ingredients, such as artisan cheese, quail, wild mushrooms or game and creating something new,” says Chef Pataran, 2004 Conference-centre Chef of the Year. “We have expanded our organic garden and are even considering hiring a forager,” he adds. For the uninitiated, a forager is someone who seeks out and hand-selects high quality, all-natural crops in the wild.

Taboo Resort has been attracting serenity seekers for almost a century

The resort’s redesign meant it was out with the wall-mounted trophies and folksy wood paneling. Instead, Reisman called on Munge/Leung Design Associates, an international firm known for sophisticated urban designs in venues such as The

Government + Koolhaus nightclub, and luxury condominiums such as Water-Park City. “Their signature look is sleek and modern,” says Reisman. “And that’s unique to cottage country.”

Taboo’s lobby is now a cosmopolitan social hub, with an Italian marble bar, Roche Bobois sculpture, cool tunes and low-rise furniture. A series of plasma TVs and a 25-ft-long stone fireplace promise inviting winter lounge space.

But it’s all a backdrop to the natural beauty of the sunsets that unfold beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows.

Local ingredients also appear on the menu at

