

avenue



BEST RESTAURANTS 2019

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Owner and restaurant director Leslie Echino at the entrance to Blink.



**BEST
OVERALL**

BLINK RESTAURANT & BAR

Blink is a contemporary restaurant, but its setting, a long, narrow room in a sandstone building on historic Stephen Avenue, is as “Old Calgary” as it gets. The space was originally built as a saddlery in the 19th century and, in 1923, saw Eddie King ride his horse through the building to mark the launch of the Calgary Stampede. Today you would be very unlikely to witness such a commotion in the room — indeed, the atmosphere is beautifully calm, the service assured and the food elegant.

The kitchen, led by executive chef Brian Diamond, seeks out local producers and creates seasonal dishes that focus on organic and regional ingredients. Owner and restaurant director Leslie Echino, the granddaughter of an Italian immigrant who made wine and grappa as a hobby, has applied a lifetime of knowledge and international travel to Blink’s remarkable wine list. The list features family-run wineries and distinctive grape varieties that pair perfectly with the menu and includes Echino’s own commercially sold wine, Conti-Mei, named after her two Italian grandmothers.

Since it opened in 2007, Blink has been a favourite spot for business lunches and the place to impress out-of-towners with masterfully executed Canadian cuisine. The dining room, with its soft lighting, dark wooden floors and spa-like touches (even the washrooms have squishy chairs and mirrors that make you look taller), is a downtown oasis — cool in summer and cozy in winter. It’s one of the few restaurants in town where quiet conversation is possible, and with food and wine like this, you’ll find plenty to talk about. —J.W.

FOOD Contemporary fine dining with a spotlight on organic and locally sourced ingredients.

VIBE Grown-up and serene.

DECOR A long, brick-walled room with an impressive wine rack, soft lighting and an open kitchen.

DISH Ling cod with hand-rolled macaroni and salsaify.

TIP Blink’s baby sister Bar Annabelle is right next door if you’re in the mood for excellent wine, whisky and tapas.

**BEST
DOWN-
TOWN**

BLINK RESTAURANT & BAR

Understated and elegant with a well-curated wine list, Blink is ideal for a business lunch or an evening date.

CHARCUT ROAST HOUSE

With its urban-rustic cuisine and buzzy vibe, Charcut has been a popular place to take out-of-towners (and locals) since it opened to much fanfare in 2010. The “lunch all at once” with a bag of warm cookies to go is a must.

Garden Affair cocktail at Klein / Harris.

KLEIN / HARRIS

A balance of light and dark, formal and casual, cocktails and cuisine, Klein / Harris is one of Calgary’s most versatile restaurants. It’s also one of the most proudly Canadian with “true north” takes on both food and drink.

TEATRO

From its beautiful bank building location to its contemporary Italian fine-dining menu, Teatro is the epitome of downtown refinement.

THE WEDNESDAY ROOM

This swanky lounge is a hit for its mid-century style, classic cocktails and creative, well-executed food. Head downstairs to fully appreciate the eclectic rumpus-room ambiance. —E.C.B. and J.H.





**BEST
OVERALL**

BREAD AND CIRCUS TRATTORIA

An ingenious use of a throwaway space, Bread and Circus is a Roman-style trattoria nestled between the Una Takeaway pizza counter and the backroom Frenchie Wine Bar on 17th Avenue S.W. The name references a poem by Roman poet Juvenal, interpreted here to mean “dinner and a show.” For dinner, you can choose from a small menu of boldly flavoured dishes created by chef Kayle Burns, including a charred-cucumber and salt-cod starter and a meltingly tender braised-lamb *ragu* lasagna. Nothing at Bread and Circus is called a “sharing plate,” but pretty much everything is shareable so you can sample a variety of dishes.

As for the show, it’s everywhere you look: chefs plating salads behind a marble bar, kitschy paintings, people squeezing past tables en route to Frenchie. It’s a loud, fun space that seats up to 39 diners, many of whom are tucked elbow-to-elbow at the bar.

All three establishments, along with Una Pizza + Wine next door, are owned by the BMeX Restaurant Group and share a basement kitchen, with Bread and Circus also operating a smaller designated kitchen of its own upstairs. It’s an eccentric set up, for sure, but it makes every meal at Bread and Circus feel like a magic trick. —J.W.



FOOD Roman trattoria-inspired dishes with bold flavours and a big Italian wine list.

VIBE Fun, noisy and clandestine.

DECOR Rustic-industrial with colourful paintings and chic bric-a-brac.

DISH The menu changes often but the carbonara is a fail-safe mainstay.

TIP Bread and Circus is a challenge to spot from the street, so look for the sandwich board on the sidewalk.

Cacio e Pepe pasta.



**BEST
OVERALL**

MODEL MILK

An instant winner when it opened in 2011, chef-partner Justin Leboe's 17th Avenue S.W. labour of love has become a Calgary institution. At Model Milk, the food is inventive and the service impeccable, but you can show up in jeans without feeling weird about it.

Model Milk's multi-level space was once a 1930s dairy (Leboe kept the name), and today diners sit in a high-ceilinged, multi-level room that once housed pasteurizing tanks. The restaurant, designed by Frank Architecture & Interiors, honours the building's industrial history with exposed brick walls, a concrete floor and steel beams, as well as playful touches like chandeliers made from milk bottles, massive barn pendant lights and an open kitchen that's elevated like a stage.

The Model Milk menu is a selection of clever dishes that apply international techniques to local, seasonal produce. The result is accomplished, eclectic comfort food that's as fun to share as it is to eat. The restaurant is famous for its fried chicken, but subtler dishes, such as roasted cauliflower with white miso and barbecue duck bun with fermented black bean, feed Model Milk's reputation for flawless creativity with a menu that is always evolving.

Since it opened, Model Milk has added Model Citizen, an upstairs cocktail lounge with a speakeasy vibe that can accommodate up to 50 people seated, or 80 people standing. —J.W.

Line-caught Atlantic cod.

FOOD Elevated Canadian comfort food designed for sharing.

VIBE Hip, airy and chatty.

DECOR Industrial-chic with a touch of nostalgia, including a vintage bathtub full of wine bottles.

DISH Line-caught Atlantic cod.

TIP Model Milk throws away the menu once a week for a family-style Sunday supper, served from 5 to 9:45 p.m.