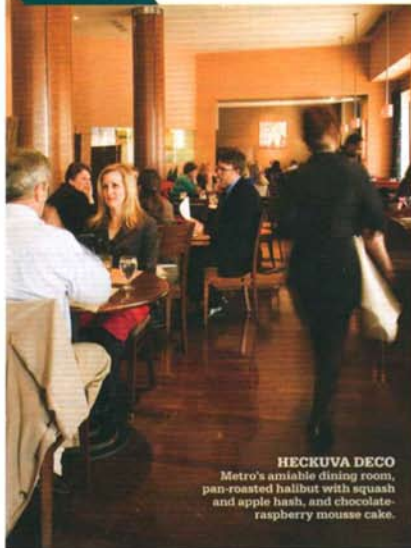


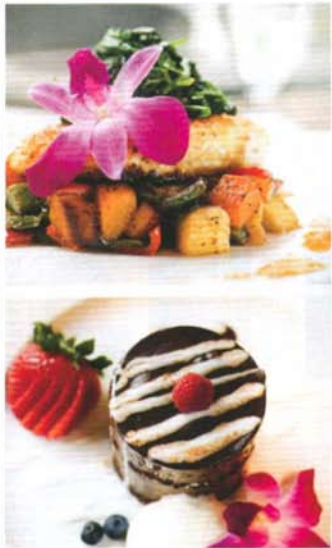
DINING

Written & edited by Ann Christenson



HECKUVA DECO

Metro's amiable dining room, pan-roasted halibut with squash and apple hash, and chocolate-raspberry mousse cake.



Metro Redux

Hotel Metro's restaurant was a force when it opened in the late '90s. But in recent years, not so much. Does a new chef herald better days?

The dining room's fireside-like warmth is the antidote to the dreary outdoor chill. I grip my cup of tea, letting the steam rise to my still-cold cheeks. Steps away in the lounge, a jazz singer is warming up her voice. At a nearby table, voices have joined in a rendition of "Happy Birthday." It's a lively Saturday night at **Hotel Metro Bar & Café**, which anchors the Downtown corner of Milwaukee and Mason streets.

It's strange to think that a dozen years ago — long before the "Restaurant Row" of venues like Cubanitas, Zarletti and Carnevor — there was nothing very posh about Milwaukee Street. Then came Hotel Metro in 1998, deemed the city's first "boutique inn" by then-*Journal Sentinel* architecture critic Whitney Gould. The hotel — a recycled, six-story 1937 building — bears the formidable interior design touch of the late Madame Liane Kuony,

the Fond du Lac restaurant and cooking school founder who was known for her refined, exacting influence and passion for organic cuisine.

Hotel Metro's creation helped ignite an entrepreneurial fire on the street, which was composed largely of vacant storefronts. In the beginning, the hotel's restaurant served food as elegant as the rose-colored sofas in the dining room. But as the years passed and the street drew more attention for its other dining destinations, things changed, including the kitchen staff. The menu, which at its peak had a clear focus — organic sources, simple-but-nimble preparation — had become cloudy. The timing couldn't have been better for a new executive chef, someone with a vision.

Jerry Garcia, who signed on as executive

