

by Murray Brewcraft

Raising the Bar

Vancouver's casual dining scene gets bigger and better.

Casual restaurants opened by high-end chefs have been closing up the international food scene for some time. Daniel Boulud's DB Bistro Moderne in New York and Noah Ducarrie's Europe-to-Tokyo Spoons chain are but two examples. Now, Luscious chef Rob Pezalla throws his sugar into the ring with **Sugar's** (2164 St. Boulevard, 604-739-8282), slated to open in April next door to his original restaurant and bar. The modern-thrust bistro to late-night snacks—will feature bar favorites like mac and cheese, breaded short ribs on a baguette, as well as Sunday night steaks, fraser hamburgers and desserts (middle right) from party chef Marco Ruffin. A high-tech private room will seat groups of 25—or celebrity golfers like Brad Pitt and Robert Redford who, in the past, were catered to through Luscious's back door after closing.

• Less than a year after opening their packed North Shore bistro La Regale, French experts Diane and Brigitte Ruel opened La Belle Époque near Versailles was decorated with a Michelin star, had no choice but to expand, retaining it **La Regale's French Bistro and Wine Bar** (393-2232 Marine Dr., West Van., 604-923-2226). In the new wine bar, traditional French bar snacks like sandies, hard-boiled eggs and platters of cheese or oysters (\$6 to \$14) accompany weekly wine-tasting menus (French and B.C. bottles only) with several varieties—like three Pinot Noirs (\$12) or three Pinot Blancs (\$9). Save as a set.

• Justin Hill was working as a stockbroker in Japan when he decided he'd rather be trading in fish cakes and sake than Sony and Nintendo. He and Leo opened the sleek, contemporary **Haga Izakaya** (top and bottom, 1479 Robson St., 604-699-4272) to a hungry crowd in January. The couple worked in some of Tokyo's best izakaya (rough translation: eating and drinking places) where their gathered up plenty of good ideas—as well as a chef and kitchen crew. Bar snacks like sashimi-bacon melt, deep-fried lotus root with pork filling, and kara-belly with spring onions (\$6 to \$9) are meant for sharing. Try the Japanese vodka cocktails or premium draft sake served in a tall bamboo pitcher.

• Get ready for more sugar shakers. Brothers Jason and Damon Sugar (middle left) bring back their unique brand of party venue/art gallery/cocktail lounge to the reborn **Sugar and Sugar** (99 Powell St., 604-609-9939) in April. The multi-level 6,000-square-foot space already has a year's worth of bookings for art openings, and will also host urbanite wedding receptions (when the golf and country club just won't do) and movie wrap parties. Caterer The Lazy Gourmet has put together a tapas menu, but the emphasis here is on the lounge-y drinks card. Passed down from the original space are checkerboard floors, modern furniture and a baby grand piano. Play it again, Sam. ■

CITY DESK



Damon (left) and Jason Sugar of Sugar and Sugar



Cook and associate chef Marco Ruffin at Haga Izakaya

Damon (left) and Jason Sugar of Sugar and Sugar



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