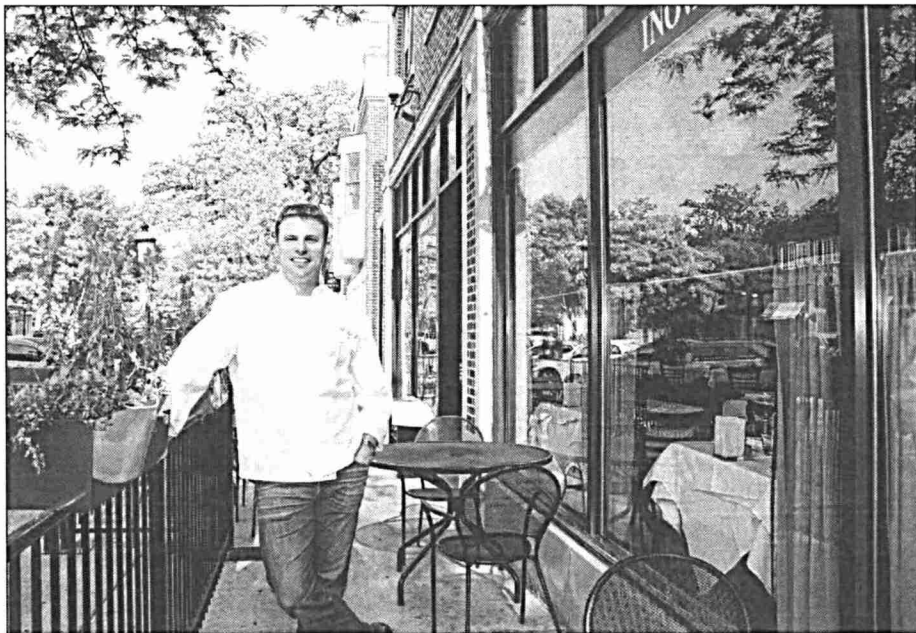


## TABLEHOPPING



**Chef John des Rosiers, the mercurial heart and soul of Lake Bluff restaurant Inovasi. Des Rosiers strives to bring creativity to the preparation of fare raised and grown locally.** | LEE A. LITAS-FOR SUN-TIMES MEDIA

# 'Recipes are useless'

## Inovasi

**Located:** 28 E Center Ave., Lake Bluff

**Hours:** lunch 11:30 a.m.–2 p.m., dinner 5:30–close Monday–Friday; dinner 5:30–close Saturdays. Closed Sunday

**Phone:** (847) 295-1000

**Web:** inovasi.us

BY LEE A. LITAS

Dining Columnist

"We cook by taste and touch and feel and emotion and all the things that really matter to food. Recipes are useless," So says Chef John des Rosiers of Inovasi in Lake Bluff.

There is a reason why people make the pilgrimage from the city to the northern suburbs to visit one of the

busiest restaurants on the North Shore — and it's not because its chef-owner toes the line.

"I don't like very many restaurants on the North Shore," said Inovasi's des Rosiers, the mercurial heart and soul of the restaurant. He readily admits that if he never sees another Cobb salad, it will be too soon. "People who live here are very well cultured but the restaurants don't reflect that."

Des Rosiers looked at 65 other spaces before choosing an establishment built in 1906. "It's important to remember history and foundation before you destroy it."

But though the foundation for his dishes is steeped in tradition, destroy it he does. The menu at Inovasi, a play on the word "innovation," changes not seasonally but

weekly based on the availability of just-ripened ingredients from neighboring farms.

Working closely with local purveyors to bring ingredients like sustainable free-range chicken from Indiana and beef farmed in Wisconsin to the table, des Rosiers and Inovasi's four main chefs approach each dish using all five of their senses to build on the foundationally-correct methods within the world of cuisine.

But this is where similarity to other restaurants ends. Inovasi's menu is not organized by the three pillars of "appetizer, dinner and dessert" but rather by the inspiration that created each dish: "music, dreams + thoughts," "childhood + family," or "the ingredient itself." Dishes are small plate, many invented on



the spot to create a fluid approach to consumption with no beginning and no end.

"You eat however you want to eat," says des Rosiers, referring to the experience an "open architecture." The hardest thing a guest has to do is simply to relinquish control and enjoy the ride.

The "Someone Else" menu suggestions included seared Becker Lane pork belly surrounded by traditional sauces like Escoffier and soubise tomatee in a psychedelic pallet of edible dots and flowers

(\$12). Pair with Riff from winegrower Alois Lageder (\$8). Each bite leaves the plate appearing painted by Marc Chagall and one's mind just as inspired.

Improvising on the tradition of cookery, des Rosiers placed a dollop of goat cheese topped with chervil, parsley and tarragon, topped it with a crispy chicken leg with duck confit atop white wine-sautéed arugula and aromatic summer truffles (\$13).

Desserts are chef-driven,

too, savory and quintessentially Inovasi. Try the aged Oolong tea and hibiscus flower sorbet with a hard coat of blanched and pureed spearmint. It makes for a simple and elegant ending to a quest of gastronomic proportions (\$7-\$10).

For anyone who finds all this freedom of choice intimidating, just tell your waiter to have John cook for you. "It's the best way for sure," said des Rosiers.