

FOOD

DINING OUT ANNE DESBRISAY

Mainly because of the meat

Aylmer steak house offers unlimited beefy, Brazilian barbecue

Ekko is a new, Brazilian-style steak house — a large, dark, semi-subterranean room tucked near the golf pro shop at the Château Cartier in Aylmer.

The room is packed this Saturday night, and loud with fiesta music, and with couples, families, bridal parties — long tables of people celebrating this or that. It seats about 250. The chairs are indulgently padded and the tables are all clothed in white. The dominant colours are red and black and, depending on your take on these things, reminiscent of a Senators fan club dinner hall or a bordello. The chandeliers hung from the crimson-silk draped ceiling, and the gyrating dancers rather incline me toward the latter. The long banquet tables with the grannies and the babies and the teenage boys focusing on their meaty plates (and occasionally on the gyrating dancers) make me think of raucously fun weddings.

At one end of the room, the sea of smiling, chewing faces is interrupted by a large oval of salads, cold cuts, crudités, soup, roast potatoes, greying vegetables and reddened rice, roast salmon and a lamb stew, around which diners make painstakingly slow laps in search of the things they will be eating when they are not eating barbecued meats. Which is more the point of this place. Ekko is a Brazilian-style churrascaria — a steak house where barbecued beef rules.

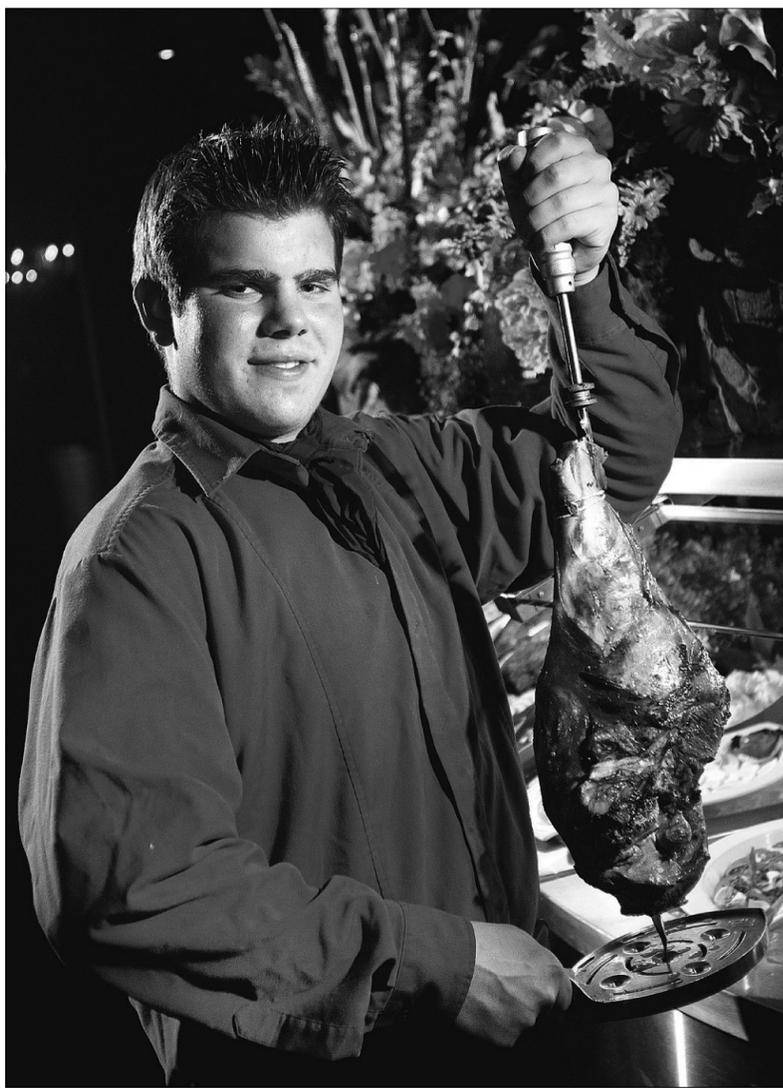
The meats are carried by a parade of *passadores* — young men in blue shirts who wander this room with sword-length skewers and large, white-handled knives,

dispensing marinated, charcoal-roasted meat, leaning over your table so they can hear you over the din of chatter and music. If you want them to keep coming, you leave the round Ekko coaster turned to the green side. Green means Keep It Coming. Red means Stop.

Most of the women who work here are greeters or dancers (or both). The latter show up on weekends when the Latin music gets turned up, in costume, skin-tight and revealing in a parental guidance sort of way. If you want a closer view of them, you need to ask for a table next to the small stage.

This is my second experience at a churrascaria. The first was in Montreal, in the company of my sons and husband. It was a giggle — a smaller space than this Aylmer version, hotter, sweeter. The waiters all wore the yellow jerseys of the Brazilian soccer side and the men and women (both) who scampered out of the back were also extremely loyal to national dress and customs, clapping, hooting, blowing whistles and making sure anyone who was so inclined got up from their chairs to join in Brazil's other national pastime of dancing while showing off their assets. The food as I recall was very tasty, the sides (big bowls of salad, rice, roast potatoes) were delivered by hand, the meat was beautifully done, and everyone got out alive, happy and reaching for the Tums.

Ekko de Brasil accomplishes much the same. The big difference (and greatest weakness) is the cruise ship-style salad bar. I'd tell you what was on it, but you likely already know — a blend of



BRUNO SCHLUMBERGER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

At Ekko de Brasil in Gatineau, Nicolas Laurin is a *passadore*, one of a team of young men in blue shirts who wander the room with sword-length skewers and large, white-handled knives, dispensing marinated, charcoal-roasted meat. Here he holds a *Gigot d'Agneau*.

mayo-based cold dishes, hot steam-table stuff — some of it not bad (I liked the potato salad and the salmon was moist, the lamb stew tasty)

but none of it memorable. And the lineup — at least on our night — can be a bit discouraging, as folk wait for the lettuce to be replenished.

The meats are the memorable part — salted and grilled in an authentic (we are told) rotisserie over special charcoal imported from Brazil

Ekko de Brasil

Château Cartier, 1170 Aylmer Rd., Gatineau
819-776-7969
www.ekkodebrasil.com
Open Tuesday to Saturday, from 5:30 p.m.
Price: \$37.50 (Tues.-Thurs.); \$42.50 (Fri.-Sat.); kids under 12 half price, kids under 5 free. Salad bar only \$27.50/\$32.50 Fully accessible

(we are told). The beef, available rare or well done depending on your penchant, is crisp-skinned and well seasoned. There's *picanha* (essentially the rear of the steer, and the most coveted cut in Brazil), rib eye, sirloin, plus leg of lamb, pork sausage, chicken drums and bacon-wrapped breasts. Some of it was a bit starchy-flavoured (the sirloin) and some of it uncomfortably salty (the sausage, say) but mostly it was a delicious and endless meatfest.

For dessert, cinnamon-coated grilled pineapple is a juicy relief.

Go on a Saturday night and you will be guaranteed an evening of people watching, music and dancing. You will spend it speaking over the insistent thrum of Latin rhythms filtered through a Las Vegas-fired amplifier, and the constant eruption of laughter from the meat-littered banquet tables around you. This isn't serious dining at Ekko. But it is serious eating. Round up some teenage boys — the high-school rugby team, say — to really get your money's worth.

Look for **Anne DesBrisay's** guide book, *Capital Dining 2011*, at bookstores across the region. E-mail her at anne@capitaldining.ca

Simple menu has dinner wrapped up

BY LINDA GASSENHEIMER

No need to turn on the stove for this quick meal of Tex-Mex Avocado Wrap with Red Bean Salad. Tomato salsa, avocado and sliced smoked turkey

key wrapped in a flour tortilla create a simple dinner.

The secret to a good wrap is to moisten the tortilla with a spread or oil.

For this recipe, I sprayed the tortillas with olive oil

spray. The spray adds flavour without too much fat.

Flavoured tortillas would be perfect for this particular recipe.

MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE NEWS

Tex-Mex Avocado Wrap

Makes: 2 servings

- 4 6-inch flour tortillas
- Olive oil spray
- 6 ounces (180 g) sliced smoked turkey breast
- ½ small ripe avocado (½ cup/125 mL) cubed
- ½ cup (125 mL) tomato salsa, drained
- Several lettuce leaves of iceberg lettuce

1. Spread tortillas on a work surface and spray with olive oil spray.

Divide turkey among tortillas. Peel, seed and cube avocado; spoon over turkey.

2. Drain salsa and add. Place lettuce on top. Roll up the wraps and cut in half on the diagonal.

Per serving: 378 calories (29 percent from fat), 12.1 g fat (2.3 g saturated, 6.8 g monounsaturated), 54 mg cholesterol, 27.8 g protein, 39.2 g carbohydrates, 5.5 g fiber, 697 mg sodium



Tex-Mex Avocado Wrap with Red Bean Salad is a simple dinner.

Red Bean Salad

Makes: 2 servings

- 1 tablespoon (15 mL) fresh lime juice
- 2 teaspoons (10 mL) olive oil
- 2 tablespoons (25 mL) diced red onion
- 1 ½ cups (375 mL) rinsed and drained canned red kidney beans
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Several iceberg lettuce leaves

1. Mix lime juice and olive oil together in a medium-size bowl. Add the onion and red beans. Add salt and pepper to taste. Toss well. Place lettuce on a serving plate and spoon beans and dressing on top.

Per serving: 211 calories (22 percent from fat), 5.2 g fat (0.8 g saturated, 3.7 g monounsaturated), no cholesterol, 10.5 g protein, 32.2 g carbohydrates, 11.1 g fibre, 300 mg sodium

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