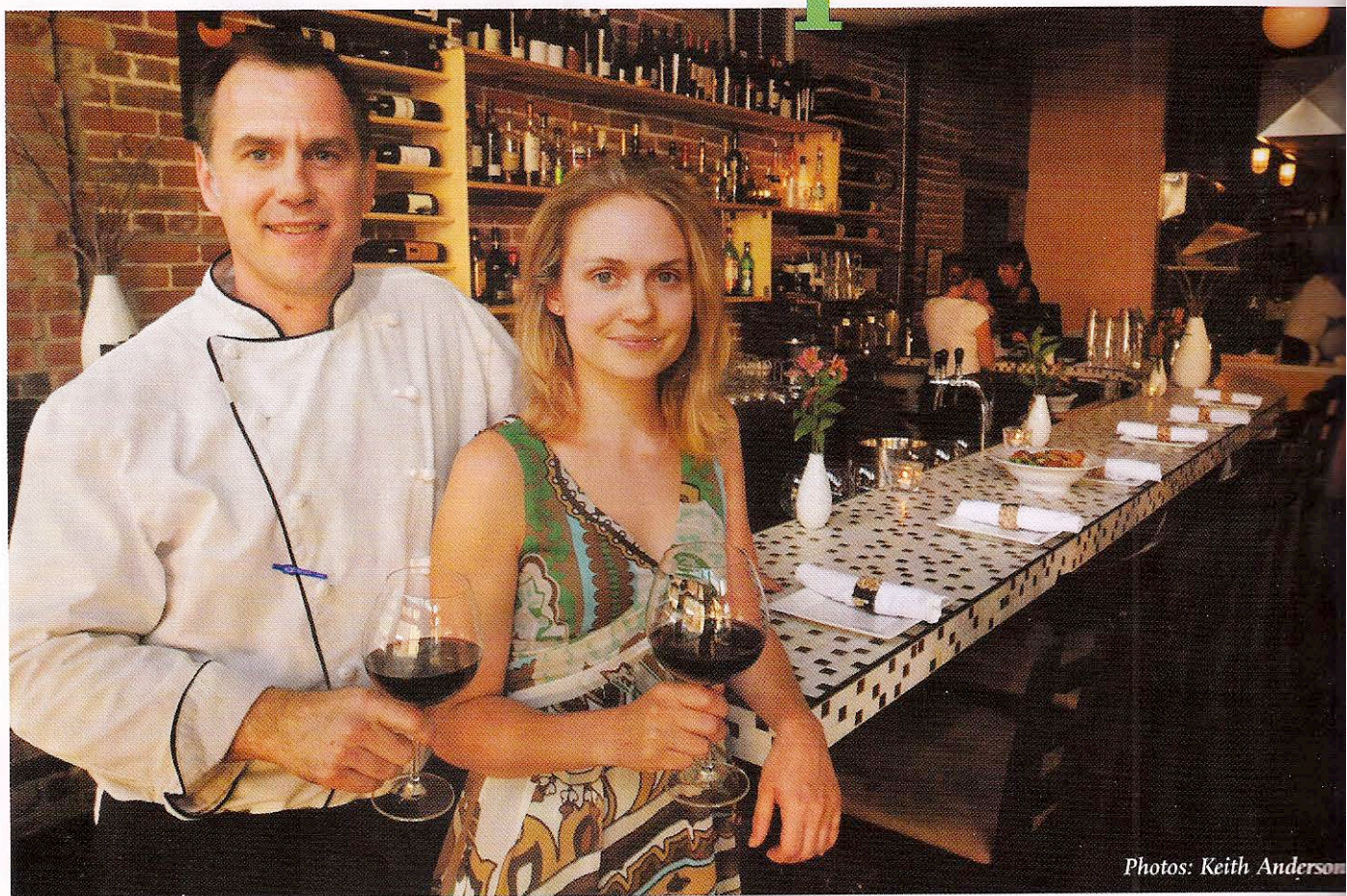


Kitchen Accomplished



Photos: Keith Anderson

Felix on 4th owners Andrew Adam and Ericka Blechingberg used salvaged materials to create the distinctive bar that serves as a centerpiece in the décor.

By Shannon Linden

If indeed the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, then perhaps it's no surprise love blossomed over the table for Andrew Adam — or, rather, tables. Many tables.

The Vancouver-born chef has prepared thousands of sumptuous meals for patrons everywhere from the Gatsby Mansion in Victoria, to La Caille on the Bow in Calgary, to Tango in Winnipeg, but it was working in a restaurant right here in Kamloops that best served his future.

Through the industry, he met Ericka Blechingberg, whose specialty is managing front of house

operations, floor service and staff. And what started as friendship and a mutual respect for one another's talents simmered, slowly, like a sauce thickening before it boils, until the two realized they'd make more than good business partners.

When they welcomed baby Elliot nine months ago, they became parents; when they opened their restaurant, Felix on 4th a week later, they became entrepreneurs.

Determined and hard working, the couple long aspired to own and operate their own restaurant and early in 2008, serendipity stepped in to help make

their dream come true.

They were living in Kelowna when a call from family brought them home.

"My mom phoned," Blechingberg explains, "To say this building had just become available."

That building turned out to be an absolutely fabulous find. Located south of Victoria Street at 260 4th Ave., the structure was built in 1912 as the Thomas Bullman Fur Trading Company. It was home to Kamloops Travel World when Blechingberg and Adam came along.

"We rushed back to view the building," Blechingberg says. With its fantastic location and unique potential, the couple lost no time making a decision: they bought it that same day and, less than a year later, two babies were born.

"This little guy surprised us, arriving three weeks early, days before we opened," Blechingberg smiles at her son as he crawls across the dining room's polished wood floor with hereditary heart, determined to reach his destination.

As for the restaurant, it also took nine months of backbreaking work, grinning through the grit that comes with massive renovations, along with the angst of major decision-making.

"It was easier to name Elliot," Blechingberg laughs. "It took us months to come up with the right name for our restaurant!"

After tossing around different options, the couple selected Felix on 4th. The alliteration sounded good, but there was also deeper meaning in the moniker: Felix is Latin for good fortune.

A little good luck and a lot of hard work paid off for the couple as they salvaged materials from the old building, working them into the modern design.

"We went through three layers of material to get to the brick walls," Blechingberg says, noting that she and Adam did most of the grunt work themselves.

"We had engineers and an architectural firm help us with the structure, but the interior is all our own."

Boasting a beautiful bar finished in paneling recovered from the original ceiling, wrapped with pounded copper, and topped with glass mosaic tiling, cozy seating by candlelight, and rich brick walls that consciously combine interesting elements of old with the refurbished funk of new, the restaurant blends classic with cutting-edge. But perhaps the most contemporary call came in creating an open kitchen.

"The cooking staff enjoys working in natural light and patrons like to see the kitchen for quality assurance," Adam explains.

"It's a point of interest."

And the chef appreciates the ability to see what's happening in the restaurant.

"I like to control pace, see how tables are moving," he says.

A culinary creative, the chef is also a capable carpenter.

"Andrew built the booth," Blechingberg says, motioning to the very comfortable seating running the length of one of the two opposing brick walls.

"When we stripped the old building, Ericka used the copper wiring we pulled to create the light shades," Adam adds, pointing proudly to the ceiling, where each light is encased in a fabulous fixture of twisted copper wire.



Top: Fresh renovations put an uptown new face on the downtown heritage building.

Above: Chef Andrew Adam and sous chef Dan Grunert at work in Felix's open kitchen.

But the couple admits it took more than their collective creativity and strong work ethic to bring their dream to fruition.

"We had help. My mom's expertise in design and project management was huge," Blechingberg says, referring to her mother, Sandra Casol, of Casol Designs and Contracting.

Their success also stems, at least in part, from sticking to what they know, with a willingness to

delegate what they don't.

"A lot of people try to do it all," Adam comments. "But the truth is, if you're going to run a successful business, you have to rely on other people. It's a team effort—everything from your kitchen, wait and front-end staff, to accountants, lawyers, and money managers. They all play a part."

Acknowledging his talents are best served at the stove, Adam continues, "We let other experts take care of their jobs. We know how to run a restaurant. We focus on food. That's what we love to do."

"It's known as the four walls theory," he continues. "What's happening inside the four walls determines your success. You can't blame external factors. Every night we stay focused inside this building."

And a bite of the bruschetta along with a sip of say, some Chardonnay, confirms this chef's energies are well directed.

"A lot of people presume our restaurant is very fine (as in expensive) dining. But it's not. It's Bistro style, which is traditional, working class, French food. It's actually peasant food," Adam smiles.

Perhaps, but a sample of the sumptuous steak served with perfectly seasoned, sautéed mushrooms or the tantalizing tuna dished up with a delectable risotto, will have patrons eating like royalty.

The food is generously served at affordable prices, so if for a starter, you fancy some frites (thinly cut, seasoned fries) served with aioli dip, you'll pay only \$5. Ditto on the wine to go with it. Glasses start at \$5 and go up \$9, making the selection of different wines to complement each course of your meal a very affordable option.

"Our restaurant is casual, yet with a sophisticated atmosphere," Blechingberg says. There are no tablecloths, no fussy formalities: just good food for good value.

Appealing to small parties and group meetings, Felix on 4th also offers a private room upstairs, where the décor is reminiscent of the downstairs dining experience. A sizeable area with big, bright windows, a small bar, and an adjoining outdoor patio, the section is warm and intimate for seated dinners, but practical for business meetings with its quieter setting and large screen for multimedia presentations.

But don't try to book breakfast. Felix on 4th only does dinner. "We do one thing and we do it well," Adam says. "We won't

Molten Chocolate Cakes

For a taste of temptation at home, try chef Adam's recipe for one of Felix's fine desserts.

Ingredients:

454 g - 1 lb. - unsalted butter

454 g - 1 lb. - dark chocolate

8 whole eggs

8 egg yolks

250 ml - 1 cup - sugar

60 ml - ¼ cup - sifted flour

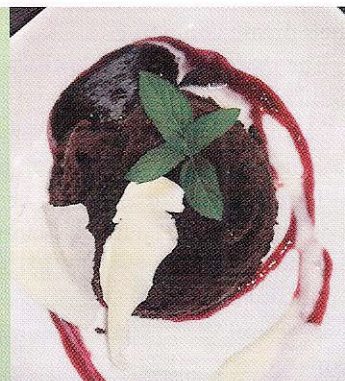
Method:

Butter and flour 26 two-ounce ramekins or individual baking dishes. (For larger portions, use 12 5-ounce ramekins and increase the cooking time accordingly.) Melt chocolate and butter over bain-marie (water bath). Beat eggs, yolks and sugar in mixer. Fold one-third of the chocolate into the egg mixture, followed by one-third of the flour; repeat until all combined.

Portion mixture into ramekins and keep chilled until needed.

Bake at 450 degrees for 8-10 minutes.

Carefully unmold on dessert plates and garnish with berries and whipped cream.



compromise our vision. We didn't just build a restaurant that would be good for Kamloops; our goal was to establish a restaurant that would be great anywhere."

"There's nothing better than a patron who comes up to the kitchen after a meal and says thank-you," Adam says. "That's mission accomplished."

Less than a year after opening, Felix on 4th has added charm and ambiance to the downtown core as one of this city's finest eateries — and that's kitchen accomplished. ●

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