

Be your own Food Network chef

Not quite like Mom's but not far off

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DINNERWORKS

Where: 102-1669 West 3rd Ave.,
Vancouver

Payment/reservations: Major credit
cards, 604-731-1185. www.dinnerworks.com

Drinks: Whatever you have at home

Hours: Wed.-Fri., three sessions at 11
a.m., 2 p.m. and 6 p.m., Sat.-Sun.,
two sessions at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.,
closed Mon. & Tues.

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I've always admired the food replicator on Star Trek. How nice it would be to say, "beef stew, 20 degrees centigrade, no mushrooms," and have a little door open and your meal sitting there, exactly to your specifications.

Now, I checked a few Star Trek websites where many Trekkies seem to think the technology and devices pictured on TV are just around the corner. But all seem to agree that the food replicator is not in our stars just yet, since disseminating and rearranging molecular structure makes sheep cloning look like a piece of cake.

So, until food replicators hit the appliance shelves next to the microwaves and coffee makers, I settled on this place where the idea is pre-assembly.

Now, this isn't my usual restaurant review, really a bit out of my territory but I've been sicker than someone who's heard too many Don Rickles jokes this week. So here's where the concept of DinnerWorks came in handy.

You simply book an appointment in one of the three daily sessions: morning, afternoon or evening and arrive to stake your claim at one of the eight spotless



CREDIT: Ric Ernst, The Province

Kerry Quinlan (right) prepares Mexican Lasagna in the peaceful surroundings of DinnerWorks on Third Avenue in Vancouver.

stainless steel workstations complete with refrigeration units and the ingredients, sauces and spices ready for assembly in foil trays and meats and veggies for certain dishes already sliced, diced and chopped for Ziploc bagging. Chandeliers hang overhead, soft-blue muted hues fill the room and there's a homey yet kitchen-efficient atmosphere -- kind of like something Martha Stewart might have dreamed up while she was willing away long hours playing ping-pong in prison.

The wonderful staff at this place, if you're unable to make it down for the experience yourself, will also do all the assembly for you and have your order waiting for pickup for a fee based on the number of dinners you order. Manning the helm of this conceptual kitchen is owner Chris Roscoe and, although similar ventures are running in the U.S., this is a first for Vancouver.

Each month offers a different menu with every entree making enough for four to six people at a cost of \$25, which works out to \$4 to \$5 per serving. Or for two people or a small family, you've got a meal in the fridge to last a few nights. Perfect for busy folk who don't have time to cook and want fresh food and top-notch ingredients instead of TV dinners or takeout.

I sampled the chicken cacciatore, the turkey meatloaf, Mexican lasagna and white-bean-and-chorizo rigatoni. The cacciatore was tasty, brimming with red and green peppers, fresh tomato and herbs, including whole sprigs of rosemary; the turkey meatloaf was even better with sundried tomatoes and a hint of cumin and great for sandwiches the next day; Mexican lasagna was a veggie parade of all the south-of-the-border flavours but the noodles got a little mushy on me; and the rigatoni with delectable chunks of chorizo was a standout.

The current menu also has chicken enchiladas with green tomatillo sauce, Sante Fe porkchops with corn salsa or a Swiss chicken-bake with a white-wine-and-mushroom sauce and stuffing. Yum!

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