

CANLIS

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*Seattle's*  
**CANLIS**  
Towers Over Lake Union—  
&  
NORTHWEST  
*Cuisine*

By Pat Terry

# INARY DELIGHT

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**C**anlis' location is stunning, a hilltop north of Seattle with sweeping views of Lake Union and the Cascade Mountains. Directed by a Master Sommelier, its extensive wine cellar has received *Wine Spectator* magazine's coveted Grand Award for nine straight years. And it is the birthplace of Northwest Cuisine, showcasing seasonal foods and wines of the region to great applause.

But the most important ingredient in Canlis' success is more elusive.

"We take care of people better than other restaurants," says Mark Canlis, managing owner. "That's really what it comes down to.



This is not a business about food or fancy views or high-powered chefs or restaurant owners or service. We're trying to earn someone's trust and build a relationship."

And it obviously works.

"I have guests that have dined here every weekend since 1950 when the restaurant opened, guests that have celebrated every anniversary here for 30 years," says Mark (31). About 90 percent of diners, though, are newcomers lured by word of mouth, media write-ups and [www.canlis.com](http://www.canlis.com).

Myriad Canlis awards also generate buzz—regional honors, the *Wine Spectator*, *Saveur Magazine* ("the Canlis Salad," "Top 100 Dishes")



Photo by Brian Canlis

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Below: Photo by John Granen.



and *Gourmet* magazine (“America’s top 50 restaurants”). DiRoNA lists Canlis in “Distinguished Restaurants of America,” the James Beard Foundation honored Chef Aaron Wright and *GQ Magazine* has honored Master Sommelier Shayn Bjornholm.

Media, too, are quite taken with Canlis. An April *New York Times* feature reported, “As recently as the late ‘70s, almost no oysters were served on their own half shells in Seattle except at Canlis, then as now one of the city’s premier restaurants.” *gayot.com* observed: “Filled with Northwest art, stone, wood and plush upholstery, and blessed with one of the most breathtaking views in the city, the atmosphere oozes sophistication and quiet elegance....It attracts local luminaries and the occasional national celebrity, but mostly it caters to a moneyed crowd celebrating everything from anniversaries to IPOs...”

The Canlis dining experience is welcoming from the moment the valet greets you until your car mysteriously reappears—there are no claim checks—when you’re ready to leave.

Inside the Japanese Kura doors, stress peels away amidst natural materials, romantic lighting, Northwest art

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*Below: Photo by Brian Canlis.*





Photo by Brian Canlis.



and the great stone fireplace. A 2005 Zen-like redesign by Doug Rasar, utilizing handmade organic wallcoverings, helps bring the outdoors inside. Near the entrance, founder Nicholas “Peter” Canlis—Mark’s grandfather—used to oversee operations, inviting people to join him, including John Wayne.

In 1977, when Peter got cancer, he did not want the restaurant sold. “So my parents, Chris and Alice, took over,” says Mark, “though it was not something they had ever wanted to do. Dad was a Navy pilot and a Stanford

MBA graduate, and he was already working in the banking world.” Under “Mr. and Mrs. C,” as staff calls them, the Seattle classic was refurbished, the menu reinvented and the kimono-clad waitresses replaced with male and female servers in contemporary garb. Today, Mr. and Mrs. C have stepped back a bit, in favor of the third generation.

“Unlike our parents, we loved growing up in the restaurant,” says Mark, who studied hospitality business management at Cornell on a ROTC Air Force scholarship. After graduation, he was commissioned and spent time in Air Force special operations. Mark then worked at various restaurants, including a stint with well-known New York restaurateur Danny Meyer. In 2003, he returned to Seattle and, six months ago, hired brother, Brian (28), who had followed Mark’s path through ROTC and Cornell. After graduation, Brian was posted to Anchorage, then



Photo by John Granen.

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Above and Right: Photo by John Granen.

Washington D.C., where he essentially managed Air Force One, greeting dignitaries who arrived at Andrews Air Force Base.

“We stole him away,” says Mark delightedly. “His job is Department of Adventure. (Really.) “He’s doing all the new things I don’t have time for, like launching our Wine & Whisky Society.”

The Society’s catalyst was oldest brother Matt (34), a pastor in Scotland. “Matt knows every distillery manager in the country, and we have about 90 of the rarest bottles of single malt scotch in our family collection,” explains Mark. Society members will share that collection on special nights.

Canlis’ renowned wine cellar boasts 18,000 bottles and 2,200 selections, ranging from \$21 to a \$12,500 Domaine de la Romanée. Local wines represent about 30 percent of the Canlis wine list, particularly Oregon pinot noirs, increasingly popular since the movie, ‘Sideways.’ Washington wines also are growing rapidly. Wine Director Shayn Bjornholm, one of only 73 North Americans to earn the Master Sommelier designation—a recipient of the prestigious Krug Cup—has made Canlis a destination for wine lovers.



Photo by John Granen.

Food, particularly Northwest Cuisine, plays a starring role at Canlis. “Fine dining used to be flying in a lobster from Australia,” says Mark, whose grandfather, used to sneak mahi mahi onto commercial airlines from Hawaii to get fresh fish. “That’s totally turned upside down. Now the

specialness is, ‘I grew this tomato personally in my back yard, 500 steps away, and here it is on your plate.’”

Chef Aaron Wright, who joined Canlis in 2000, presents the best of the past and the present in contemporary stylings. But he’s not just concerned about pleasing the palate. After losing his parents to cancer and overcoming cancer himself at 24, Aaron takes a holistic approach to healthful cuisine. Chef de Cuisine Jeff Taton, a 24-year veteran, has established himself as the engineer of the Canlis kitchen.

The innovative Tasting Menu, \$80 Prix Fixe, changes monthly but could begin with marinated beets, mache and shaved onions with feta cheese; followed by Maine lobster, green tea & lavender ice, then Misty Isle Tenderloin, topped off with Blood Orange Valrhona Chocolate Cheesecake.

On the regular menu, warm first and second courses include the signature Peter Canlis Prawns with dry vermouth, garlic, red chilies and lime, and calamari with spiced crust with a caper and herb coulis. Chilled delights range from Ahi & Kona Kampachi Sashimi diced with fresh cucumber and soy-grapefruit vinaigrette to, of course, oysters on the half-shell.

Main courses may be Wild Pacific King Salmon,



Photo by Brian Canlis.

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*Below: Photo by Brian Canlis.*



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Dungeness Crab Cakes, Misty Isle Farms Steaks and Wagyu Tenderloin, a Kobe-style beef. “To die for” desserts: Grand Marnier Soufflé, Chocolate Lava Cake, Peanut Butter Mousse.

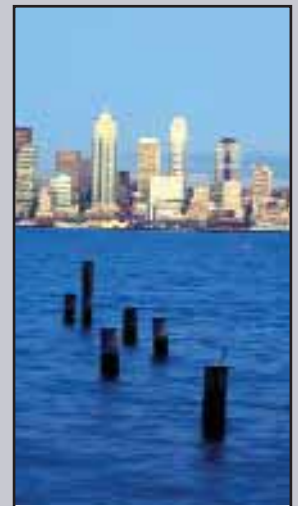
Food has been a family passion since Mark’s Greek great grandfather, Nick Kanlis (cq.) was born under the Ottoman Empire (1881). Nick landed work at Cairo’s famed Mena hotel, where President Theodore Roosevelt later stayed, preparing for an African safari. Since Nick could cook and spoke fluent Arabic, Roosevelt hired him. Nick eventually made his way to America via Ellis Island, opening a small California café in the 1920s, with son, Peter, as a reluctant apprentice. Striking out on his own, Peter ended up in Hawaii managing the USO’s Honolulu food service operations before opening a small restaurant.

In 1950, Peter moved to Seattle and picked the stunning hilltop two miles north of downtown for his restaurant. Roland Terry, later the dean of Northwest architecture, designed Canlis as a sweeping, timeless nod to Frank Lloyd Wright.

No matter who you are, Canlis staff work hard to ensure the success of your evening.

Ego is just not allowed. “Look, we’ve got fantastic service, sure, and a great wine program, and the food is stellar.’ And, yes, we helped create Northwest cuisine. But nothing is more important than the guests,” says Mark.

In addition to its regular diners, newcomers and celebrants, Canlis hosts many





# The Canlis Salad

(serves 4 to 6)

**Salad**

- 1 large head Romaine lettuce  
(Wash individual leaves in warm water, drain and dry in colander then chill in refrigerator. Don't ever, ever toss a Canlis Salad with warm wet leaves!!)
- 1 to 2 peeled ripe tomatoes
- 1/2 cup chopped green onion
- 3/4 cup freshly grated Romano cheese
- 1/2 cup very well done chopped bacon
- 4 tablespoons chopped fresh mint\*
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup croutons\*

**Dressing**

- 1/2 cup olive oil\*
- The juice of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon fresh ground pepper
- 1 coddled egg\*

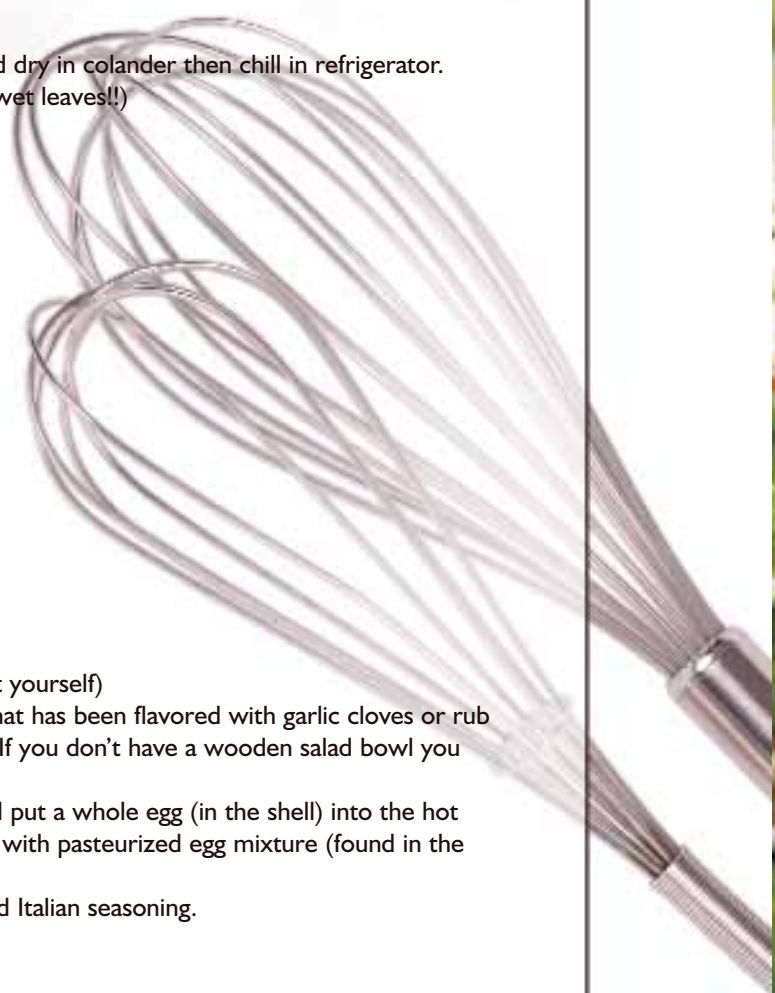
**Ingredient notes:**

Mint - you can't use too much mint (experiment yourself)  
 Olive Oil - The best Canlis salads use olive oil that has been flavored with garlic cloves or rub the inside of a wooden bowl with garlic cloves (If you don't have a wooden salad bowl you could add garlic powder to the dressing mix).  
 Coddled Egg - Pour boiling water into a cup and put a whole egg (in the shell) into the hot water, let sit for 2 minutes. You may substitute with pasteurized egg mixture (found in the dairy section in cartons).  
 Croutons - Make your own croutons. Butter and Italian seasoning.

**Directions:**

Into a large bowl place the tomatoes, cut into eighths. Add the Romaine lettuce, sliced into one inch squares. Then add green onions, cheese (save some of the cheese to sprinkle over top of salad), bacon, oregano and 1/2 of the mint.

To make the dressing, combine lemon juice, pepper and coddled egg in a bowl. Whisk together. Then slowly add olive oil, whisking constantly and tasting as you do. Pour over salad and toss thoroughly. Add croutons and a sprinkle of Romano cheese last.



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## CREL'S Gourmet Corner

### TYPES OF OIL

Similar to fine wine, an olive oil's individual characteristics - processing, acidity levels, soil and climate conditions - differ from region to region ultimately varying the flavors, colors and aromas. Colors can range from light yellow to emerald green, flavors can range from mild (delicate, light or buttery); semi-fruity (stronger with a more pronounced olive flavor) to fruity (strong olive taste).

Some oils have a spectrum of secondary fruit flavors like lemon, apple, almond, etc. However, olive oil experts and connoisseurs agree that Extra Virgin olive oils should have a fresh olive, fresh green grass taste, a slightly peppery finish to them and greenish in color.

Extra "Virgin" Olive Oil - The highest grade. Extracted from olives that are crushed in their first pressing with absolutely perfect taste and aroma. They must have an acidity level no greater than 1%.

"Virgin" Olive Oil - The same as Extra Virgin, slightly higher acidity level, but no greater than 1.5%.

"Ordinary" Olive Oil - Often made by the second or third pressing, refined, odorless, tasteless and commonly blended with extra virgin olive oil to give it flavor. Acidity levels no greater than 3.3%.

OLIVE OIL

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VIPs. But it was less-known real estate investors, one from Hong Kong, who recently celebrated with one of Canlis' more expensive wines, a 1996 Domaine de la Romanée for \$3,100."Because they've just sold a home, a building or a chunk of land, they have this huge influx of money so they take their team out and celebrate," says Mark.



"During the 2004 presidential campaign, John and Teresa Kerry celebrated their wedding anniversary in a romantic private room for two to four people—but their 11 bodyguards stayed outside," Mark laughs. "Neil

Diamond has also booked the room." Canlis has also welcomed artist Dale Chihuly, Canlis family artists, cast from "Desperate Housewives" and several area billionaires—think Starbucks, Boeing and Microsoft. Paccar executives enjoy the dining experience so much, they wanted to offer "Canlis service" on their 130-foot yacht, so Canlis provided training. "Now, every time the boat sails by, they give us a honk," Mark laughs. "The diners love it."

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