


Ping's Café

2702 Main St., Vancouver, B.C.

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BC  Japanese cuisine has such range in Vancouver: ultra-fresh sushi, late-night izakaya, ramen and bento box lunch spots. But humble *yoshoku* fare, a Japanese take on Western comfort foods, is just now catching on.

For these hip but decidedly home-style dishes, stop in at Ping's Café. Overlook its unassuming storefront: the interior is gallery-like, with sleek pleated fabrics, a cut-out wall studded with wine bottles and hand-thrown pottery.

Run by artist Josh Olson and his aunt, Hiroko Yamamoto, Ping's features stick-to-your-ribs Japanese snacks and entrées such as succulent tonkatsu (panko-breaded pork tenderloin) and hambagoo frites (hamburger with Yoshoku sauce and sides of fries, salad, and rice). Dishes are mostly deep-fried (in canola oil, later recycled into biodiesel) but not greasy.

Ping's poutine is a lighter, Indian-influenced version of Canada's national dish, with curry rather than gravy coating the fries, and topped with paneer cubes instead of cheese curds. The "Ping Dog," a grilled, bun-less bratwurst with pick-

led ginger beets and ponzu sauce, gives the Japadogs served at downtown Vancouver carts a run for their money.

For vegetarians, there are several options. The refreshing but tiny kinpira salad—julienned burdock root and carrot cooked in mirin and soy sauce—whets your appetite for the tofu steak entrée, pan-fried medium-firm tofu with miso-teri sauce, served with baked kabocha, broccoli, and rice.

Ping's lacks a full bar. Instead, try one of the aromatic kirs: lychee, melon, or umeshu plum liquor with Chardonnay. The wine list is short, but Olson says more biodynamic, European selections will appear in the future.

Likewise, the dessert menu is thin, but Olson promises his sister, a pastry chef in Paris, will improve it when she joins the staff.

Like a piece of installation art, Ping's is a work in progress, worth watching as it takes shape.

Open Tuesday–Thursday from 5–10:30pm; till midnight on Friday and Saturday.

—Laura McCandlish



LAURA MCCANDLISH PHOTO