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Out of sight: Toronto's first blind dining restaurant leaves guests in the dark

Though it's been [done to death](#) in other cities, the "blind dining" trend is finally coming to Toronto. [O. Noir](#), which already has a location in Montreal, will open June 24 at 620 Church Street, in the basement of the [Town Inn Suites](#). All light will be shut out of the 85-seat dining room, and customers will be waited on by a team of visually impaired servers (in this case recruited by the [Canadian National Institute for the Blind](#)).

Co-owner **Ian Martinez** tells us that the restaurant isn't completely shrouded in darkness. Initially, guests step into a lit bar, where a host hands out menus. Once the order is taken, diners are led by a server into the unlit dining room, clutching the shoulder of the person in front of them. Once everyone is seated, the waiter explains where everything is placed on the table, and the two-hour dinner service begins. "When you eat food in the dark, your remaining senses are heightened to savour the smell and taste of food," says O. Noir founder **Moe Alameddine**, though it remains to be seen if the savings on electricity are reinvested in the food.

The \$39 three-course menu is prepared by chef **Assad Chowdhury**, who comes to Toronto from the Montreal location. Dishes include such starters as grilled octopus and arugula salad with mushrooms (soups, apparently, are best eaten with the lights on), as well as such mains as filet mignon, veal and marinated shrimp. For dessert, it's fruit sorbet, dark chocolate mousse or chocolate cake with ice cream. There are also "surprise" options, says Alameddine: "They're like daily specials, but we don't tell customers what they're going to get. We tell them at the end what it is, so we've had people think they were eating potatoes when they were really eating carrots."

Novelty restaurants do not revolutionize a city's dining scene ([Conviction](#), Medieval Times and that creepy [iMaid Café](#) come to mind), but Martinez brushes off the one-trick pony label. He points out that the Montreal location will be celebrating its third anniversary in September. "People come for their birthdays and special occasions, so they are always coming back—maybe not as often as a regular restaurant, but they like sharing the experience with others," he says. "I think our concept is strong enough to outlast the recession. People are still going out to have fun."

As any self-respecting traveller knows, dine-in-the-dark restaurants have been popping up in other cities for over a decade. The first—[Blinde Kuh](#), which means "blind cow"—opened in Zurich in 1999. By 2002, clones had emerged in Cologne and Berlin, followed by [Dans le Noir](#) two years later, with franchises in London, Paris and Moscow. In the States, there's the [Opaque](#) chain operating in L.A., San Diego and San Francisco. Like its European counterparts, O. Noir's Montreal outlet donates part of its proceeds to support local organizations for the visually impaired.