

# WEEKEND POST

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## PEOPLE



PETER REDMAN / NATIONAL POST

DATE WITH · *Matthew Corrin*

## Winnipeg boy turns over new leaf



REBECCA ECKLER

Matthew Corrin and I meet for dinner at 5:30 on a Saturday evening, ridiculously early by most people's standards, and yet there are already couples dining at Morton's Steak House. I notice

that while we're not the first to arrive for a meaty meal, we're certainly the youngest.

At least I assume so, but Corrin refuses to divulge his age. "I'm in my early 20s," he says. "I don't want anyone to know my age because I don't want anyone to step on me."

My date tells me he relocated from Manhattan to Toronto to open Lettuce Eatery, the city's first custom-made salad bar, in the TD Centre. Because he spends his days among veggies, we've decided a steak house would make a pretty good venue for our date.

He tells me that several salad-focused restaurants in New York — Chopped and Tossed, to name just two — have done amazingly well. He has similar hopes for his

venture. "I would go to Chopped every day and watch the lineups," he says. "And I was working in fashion so everybody was addicted to salad. It didn't matter if I was on the Upper East Side, the Lower West Side, everyone was lining up for their custom-made salad."

But on this evening, shortly after Lettuce Eatery opened, he's certainly enthusiastic about putting away some pure protein. "Ooh, I love a good steak," he says. "I've been eating nothing but salad, two meals a day, for the last 10 days," he says. "I think I've lost about 10 pounds. I've never been so lean in my life."

The waiter takes our order. I ask for the New York strip loin, medium-rare, and a Caesar salad.

Corrin chooses the filet, blood-red, and the house salad. "Is it iceberg lettuce or romaine lettuce?" he asks.

Of course, Corrin needs to check out the lettuce. I make a joke about how lettuce must be the new black, and he agrees. "Everyone really cares these days about what kind of lettuce they're eating," he says with obvious sincerity.

Corrin is Canadian, born and raised in Winnipeg. While studying Media in Technology at the University of Western Ontario, he spent summers working in New York, a city he felt was "the be-all and end-all." One summer he was one of 18 interns working on the *David Letterman Show*. "I was the 'talent intern,' and had to do the

most menial tasks," he says. "Like hold the door open every day for David Letterman. Like setting up the green room." Letterman, he says, mostly grunted hello to him. Corrin says the biggest thing he learned on the job was that rap stars can get away with pretty much anything.

After he graduated from Western, he and his girlfriend moved to New York full time. Soon he had a job in press relations for Oscar de la Renta. "I was a celebrity stylist. It was superficial and glamorous and I loved it." When he decided to leave New York for Toronto, he told "Oscar" he "was leaving the job because my girlfriend was moving back here. He said, 'That is the stupidest reason I've ever heard! I didn't want to tell him the real reason. I didn't want to jinx myself!'"

The real reason, of course, was that he had become obsessed with the idea of selling salads. A health fanatic (he loves his spin classes), he wondered whether a concept that had proved so popular in New York would work in Toronto. He found investors, secured a location and hired people.

"I'm like Rocco Di Spirito of *The Restaurant*," he says jokingly. "Already, I've fired two people and two people have quit."

Corrin wants to talk about his concept restaurant. He designed the 12 "chef-designed salads" offered on the menu, and there are dozens of ingredients for customers to compose their own creations, including, naturally, five kinds of lettuce (they ran out of romaine on the first day and iceberg on the second). Plus, there are 20 types of dressing.

Time will tell if Lettuce Eatery will work in Canada. (One of my spies complained about the price: "I'm willing to spend \$12 on a salad, but how many people are?")

Corrin, as one might expect, is optimistic. He's hoping to open other Toronto locations, then acquaint the rest of Canada with the virtues of salad. "I'm not going to stop until I open a custom-made salad place in Winnipeg," he says. I believe him.

After we eat, Corrin heads off to meet friends for a second dinner. The next day I get this e-mail: "Thanks for meeting me. I actually ended up having a second steak dinner." Not bad, for a lettuce lover.

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