

Toro's Ken Oringer Celebrates New Year's and a Two-Star *Times* Review With Champagne and Caviar

1/3/14 at 08:40 AM | [5 Comments](#)



Oringer frequents EN Japanese Brasserie — "a little oasis."
Photo: Melissa Hom

"I won't have a week the rest of the year that will be like this past week," says Ken Oringer, the Boston-based chef and restaurateur who now has a [bona fide hit](#) in New York. On December 31, Pete Wells dropped a [glowing review](#) of Toro, writing, "How can a menu this big have so many excellent dishes, and so few disappointments?" Oringer had even more reasons to celebrate this week: New Year's, time off work to spend with his family, a coveted reservation at Sushi Nakazawa — and his first-ever meal at Keens. Read all about it, straight ahead.

GRUB STREET

Friday, December 27

I was at my in-law's house in Atlantic Beach, dealing with Christmas leftovers. We tried to have some nutritious stuff because we had eaten so much crap: more steak than you can ever imagine, 40-day-dry-aged rib eyes, foie gras, duck. But we had some healthy things kicking around: I cooked freekeh, an Egyptian grain, for breakfast, and I also had some leftover smoked-eggplant dip with pomegranate molasses, and yogurt, and fresh hummus with peeled carrots. I was trying to eat relatively healthy after gorging myself for the holidays.

I jumped on a train and headed to the city to go back to work. That afternoon, on the way to work, I popped into a Vietnamese restaurant called [Co Ba](#) on Ninth Avenue. I grabbed pan-fried whitefish that was marinated with dill and turmeric. I had that with cilantro, carrots, mint, bean sprouts, lettuce, fish sauce, and lime. And I had some fresh spring rolls served warm with mushrooms, vegetables, and a peanut-plum sauce.

When I'm working, I try not to eat much. I taste things here and there, but all I had that night was a green apple. I try to have an apple at the end of the night instead of crap.

Saturday, December 28

My wife, kids, brother-in-law, and sister-in-law were all in town. We went to one of my favorite places, [EN Japanese Brasserie](#). It's a little oasis. My daughter's almost 5 and she likes what she likes; my son is 2 and he eats almost anything. I ordered a bunch of stuff for them to eat: eggs with Kurobuta sausage and some Japanese fried chicken to dip into the egg yolk. I got myself cold soba noodles with uni and dashi, salmon roe, a hijiki-seaweed salad, a shiitake-mushroom salad, and fresh-made tofu. I was super psyched because my son was eating my salmon roe like it was going out of style. I also shared the soba noodles with my kids, telling them it was Japanese spaghetti. I like to expose them to something a little different when we go out to eat.

I had a vegetable juice from [Organic Avenue](#) at 4:30 p.m. Jamie [Bissonnette] made an old-school chicken galantine with blood sausage, and I had a handful of Brussels sprouts. One of my sous-chefs from Israel made some baba ghanoush on bread. Our partners also own a restaurant called [Willow Road](#), and one of them brought over fried chicken. I had a little bit of that, and then I had a green apple on the way out.

Sunday, December 29

In the morning, I had a spinach-and-kale smoothie from Equinox. Then my family and I went to [RedFarm](#). We had a dim-sum brunch: peanut-and-vegetable dumplings, crab-and-pork soup dumplings, pea-sprout dumplings, shrimp dumplings, vegetable-and-mushroom spring rolls, pan-fried roasted duck noodles, and sautéed pea sprouts. I always joke: RedFarm's for people who want to go to Chinatown, but are afraid of what they're going to see there. It's a great restaurant.

In the afternoon, I watched a Patriots game with my father-in-law. We had beers at [Riviera](#) in the West Village and an order of fries. I popped into [Fedora](#) for a quick cocktail before dinner at [Sushi Nakazawa](#), which I luckily booked a couple months before the reviews came out. I took my wife and my sister-in-law, and we did the whole omakase. The quality of the fish is phenomenal. And I'm not a big salmon lover, but the hay-smoked salmon was incredible. I had a great bottle of junmai-daiginjo sake, too. Simple, delicious, nice.

Monday, December 30

My kids and I went to [Murray's Bagels](#). I got a bagel with lox, cream cheese, tomato, and smoked sable. Devoured that thing. Normally, I'll do a vegetable juice in the morning, but I was craving some carbs and food-food after eating raw fish the night before.

I brought my kids to my parents' house in New Jersey, came back into the city, and had the day off with my wife. We sat in [Whynot](#) in the West Village and ate almond and chocolate croissants. We played backgammon and just chilled out. Then, we went over to this new German beer house on Bowery called [Paulaner Brauhaus](#). They make all the beer in-house. We had a housemade lager with hot homemade pretzels with honey-mustard.

I stopped by Toro to say hello to friends, and I had an order of shishito peppers and mezcal on the rocks. Then, I had a business meeting with Jamie and my partners at [Keens Steakhouse](#). I had never been before, so I was psyched. I had a Tito's martini with the boys to start it off. Once you get a couple of chefs in a place like that, you can't stop ordering: We had a chopped salad, Caesar salad, oysters Rockefeller, baked clams, a shellfish platter, slabs of bacon, the [mutton chop](#), porterhouse for three, creamed spinach, and hash browns. We brought a couple of bottles of '97 Brunello and a bottle of Champagne, and we had grappa and Fernet after dinner. We knew the review was going to drop the next day, so we were nervously anticipating it and trying to stay positive.

Tuesday, December 31

I was pretty nervous about the review and I didn't have much of an appetite. I had a [Juice Generation](#) kale-colada smoothie, and then I figured it'd be good for my stomach to eat some real food. I was getting ready to head into the restaurant and decided to go to this Vietnamese Lao place in Tribeca called [Mangez Avec Moi](#) with my wife. We had a chicken-rice-noodle salad with lemongrass and chilies, a bamboo-and-mushroom stew with Lao herbs, and crispy tofu with Thai basil.

My wife suggested that we get a quick coffee, and we went to [Locanda Verde](#). I had my phone in front of me and refreshed it a thousand times. We ordered some pastries and a coffee, and then I got a call from my publicist that the review came out. It wasn't even 3 p.m. — earlier than we expected! I read the review and I was so psyched. I didn't even eat the pastries! I ran out, jumped into a cab to the restaurant, and had some Pol Roger Champagne. We toasted everyone in the restaurant.

Then we started to prep for New Year's Eve dinner. Tough to do when everyone's in celebratory mode! I grabbed a dry-aged burger from the kitchen. My wife made caviar and bellini pancakes for the staff. It was a pretty fun New Year's celebration.

Wednesday, January 1

I woke up nice and late, and my in-laws were all at [ABC Kitchen](#). Of course, I ran over to meet them. I love that restaurant. I had squash and crab toasts, and Dan [Kluger] sent out a truffle-egg pizza and lobster-truffle fettuccine, which were awesome. I also had hake with cabbage and seaweed, some French fries, and a salted-caramel ice-cream sundae with popcorn.

Before I went to see *The Wolf of Wall Street*, I hung out in the lobby of the [Ace Hotel](#). I ordered a Bloody Mary, but they had run out of mix. I couldn't keep my New Year's Day tradition, unfortunately.

After the movie, I went out to a Southern Indian restaurant called [Tiffin Wallah](#). I had something that looked like samosa nachos with tamarind sauce, yogurt, and mint. Really freaking good. I also had black chickpeas with mustard seeds, yellow mung beans and split peas with curry leaves, lentils with Indian spices, cauliflower with tomato and curry leaves, saag paneer, and whole-wheat paratha bread. Chowd down on all that stuff. On the way out, I looked in the window and realized it was actually a kosher-vegetarian Indian restaurant. I could've never imagined in a million years that there would be such a thing.

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