

while she belted out "Every-thing's Coming Up Roses." Or spending an afternoon in a museum filled with nothing but Elvis paintings on velvet. But one look, and a single taste, and you know owners Joe O'Brien and Ray Granda put their hearts and souls into these gleefully Baroque works of edible art. Each torte is four layers of super-moist cake layered with fruit fillings and finished with rich buttercream frostings. An 8-inch cake feeds 16 and runs \$25.50; the largest, a 14-incher, is \$80, and it'll serve a small army. But would you like such craftsmanship?



In this year's Minneapolis mayoral campaign, challenger R.T. Rybak frequently cited his role in luring **Chez Ba-**

nanas to the Warehouse District in the late 1980s as a high point of his tenure with the Minneapolis Downtown Council. Incumbent Sharon Sayles Belton routinely met this small-potatoes résumé line-item with sarcasm. OK, so their discourse wasn't exactly the Federalist Papers, but hopefully a positive outcome of all this political hot air was to put the low-profile restaurant back on the voting public's radar screen. The eclectic, hot-hotter-hottest Caribbean fare remains surprisingly afford-

able parents' rambler, circa 1971. Much of the menu seems geared toward tame *Mini-soh-tah* tastes. But if you're in the mood for lamb, Emily's is the place, serving what feels like a pound of juicy, subtly seasoned meat on a skewer — with bread and a tangy tabbouleh — for just \$10.



The year's most welcome restaurant trend wasn't cell-phone bans, the resurgence of comfort food or the proliferation of cheap, readily available sushi. No, it was the user-friendly cafes popping up in restaurant-starved Minneapolis neighborhoods. Walking to dinner, enjoying a decent meal and a glass of wine and even getting change back from your \$20 is actually possible at low-key gems such as **First Course**, 3 Muses, n e thyme and Marimar.



Tuesday is the night in northeast Minneapolis. It's when **Jim and Patty Grell**, owners of the Modern Cafe, throw common sense out the window and

slash the price of every bottle on their unusually compelling wine list in half. Yeah, 50 percent, so that 1999 Marinelli Reserve pinot noir — for just one tasteful example — is only \$37.50.



Remodeling can be so iffy. Remember how cool the Guthrie used to look? But Dave Burley and Stephanie

Shimp have a firm handle on makeover matters. They're the restaurateurs who turned a dumpy old Lotus Restaurant into the way-cool Edina Grill. This year they finally got their **Highland Grill** (in St. Paul's Highland Village) in sync, reworking the dining room to match the kitchen's amiable twists on standard-issue diner fare. Vivid tomato-red and tomatillo-green walls have replaced the tired, this-used-to-be-a-Häagen-Dazs-franchise look, a restroom visit no longer requires an uncomfortable pass through the kitchen, and the place just feels roomier and more comfortable. Maybe Shimp and Burley ought to be the folks to take on City Center, the downtown Minneapolis monolith that screams "renovate me" from every angle.