

missed manners

FINDING THE
RIGHT FORK:
THE GEORGIAN'S
FINE-DINING
ETIQUETTE CLASS
PICKS UP WHERE
MOM LEFT OFF

BY JESS THOMSON

GROWING UP IN BOISE, I thought “fancy” meant jeans without holes. Don’t get me wrong: Seattle is no New York. But as I cross the Fairmont Olympic Hotel’s elegant lobby, I catch a bellhop staring at my mittens. They’re tattered black-and-white things, appropriate for *Eloise*, perhaps, but they don’t exactly blend into the hotel’s graceful Italian Renaissance style. Pulling them off, I climb the stairs toward a three-course dinner class at the Georgian.

I take a throne-like seat in the restaurant’s private dining room between an eager Boeing exec and a pretty middle-aged mom, hoping I look slightly less panicked than Julia Roberts did in *Pretty*

Woman. We’re all here to take a class on fine-dining etiquette, I remind myself, which means no one at the table should be intimidated. But then in walks our instructor, Tony D’Agostino, the restaurant’s esteemed maître d’. Suddenly I’m unsure where my napkin goes.

At first, we’re all awkward. One woman drops her amuse-bouche spoon with a clatter. A man tips over a display of delicate lavash triangles. Turns out, the proper response to spilling, dropping, or breaking things in a hushed, high-end restaurant is to apologize, allow someone else to clean it up, then pretend it didn’t happen. (How great is that?)

I don’t perform much better. When the bread arrives, I literally start to sweat. The server presents me with a long roll—a series of little rolls stuck together, really. Questions reel through my mind: *Do I tear one off and risk sending poppy seeds flying? Or should I chow down the whole thing, starting at one end? Do I butter all at once, or with each bite? And is it okay to contaminate the*

regular butter with the brown truffle butter? (Phew, it's fine.) Tony paces the room. He is the kindest teacher. Still, I wonder what he'll do if he catches someone chewing with their mouth open.

For the next course, meat from two large lobster claws comes cuddled together in my squash soup. After panicking about whether to scoop the broth toward me or away from me, I opt to shovel the sweet meat into my mouth first—in two giant bites. Wrong choice, Tony says. Using a fork and a knife inside a soup bowl is totally acceptable, provided there are things inside that require cutting. (And the proper direction to scoop? Either way.)

As we relax over our entrées, he leads us through the nitty-gritty of dining etiquette, addressing the usual (and never-before-considered) questions and concerns: “What do we do with our forests of forks after using them?” (Set them on the side of the plate, never on the linen.) “Are women always served first?” (Usually, yes, unless the woman is the host; then she

is served last.) “Is it okay to honk your nose into a linen napkin?” (Absolutely not!)

A few weeks later, I go back to the Georgian with a friend for a pre-theater dinner. It's warmer this evening, so I skip the mittens. And when the bread arrives, I rip into it, disseminating seeds across the table. (That's what crumbs are for!) Tony stops by to chat. I balance my butter-smearred knife back on the bread plate, where it belongs, and rest my wrists delicately on the edge of the table. As he glides off to greet another table, I give myself a silent, smug congratulations for being just a little more polished than the gal who left Idaho a decade ago.

“Um, Jess?” my friend says quietly. “You have poppy seeds in your teeth.”

INFO The Fairmont Olympic Hotel's Fine Dining Etiquette Class (\$69, including dinner; reservations required; adult class Jun 5 and first Thu of every month, children's class May 4 for ages 8–20; 206/287-4059) is held in the Georgian restaurant (\$\$\$\$; 411 University St.; fairmont.com/seattle or 206/621-7889). ■

Re-mind your manners

More etiquette classes to help you brush up on a few basics:

1 SIP AND SWIRL LIKE THE EXPERTS
For beginner tips on how to swirl, sniff, sip, spit, and savor your wine with confidence, try the Local Vine wine bar's no-pressure Wine 101 class (May 11; \$55; reservations required; thelocalvine.com or 206/441-6000).

2 LEARN THE RULES OF THE ROAD
Cascade Bicycle Club's Downtown Lunch-Hour Bike Commute Seminar series offers free info on proper cycling protocol (May 7 and 21; cascade.org or 206/957-6623). For trail-courtesy tips, attend Backcountry Bicycle Trails Club's mountain bike boot camp (May 10, 14, 24; \$60; reservations required and kids welcome; bbtc.org or 206/524-2900).

3 TEACH AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS
Bring Bowzer to one of Seattle Dogworks' Real World Manners classes (May 7, 17, 25; \$125 for three classes; reservations required; seattledogs.com or 206/919-8105) to learn the approach that owner Cristine Dahl takes in her recent book, *Good Dog 101* (Sasquatch Books, 2007; \$19).