

citylife

Parties, Culture & Society



Barry Cooper and Timothy Hamilton.



John Cordeau, Perry Spitznagel, Salon Speaker Series guest of honour Bob Woodward and Michael Lang.

Salon Speaker Series at Teatro

Bob Woodward: 'chronicler of our time'



JESSICA DEMELLO

Last week, Calgary's cultural elite and intelligentsia gathered at Teatro Restaurant for the last of the season's Salon Speaker Series. Famed investigative journalist **Bob Woodward** was the guest of honour; he spoke on "The Race to the White House and Beyond."

Renowned for uncovering the Watergate scandal, and introduced by **Rudyard Griffiths** as a "chronicler of our time," Woodward focused his remarks on the role of journalism in a democracy and his personal recollections of the Bush administration. But he began with a different race to the Oval Office — to when Al Gore was a contender.

"Having dinner with Al Gore is unpleasant," Woodward said dryly. There was laughter and the clink of glasses as the audience took another swig of Tegrino Vin Santo. "There is not one pleasant thing about it," he confirmed. "It is taxing. He is absolutely sure he knows everything about every subject." Yet, there was some wisdom Woodward did accept at face value: Gore told him that only about 1% of what goes on in the White House becomes public knowledge. Years later, it was clear that little more than that became even executive knowledge, when George W. Bush told him he did not attend many of the early meetings on the Iraq war.

"We've seen a staggering increase in the level of violence in Iraq — almost incomprehensible — and George Bush was out there asking if we were winning, not for months but for years!" Woodward charged. "The idea that the commander-in-chief would absent himself from those meetings ... I felt sick, sick for my country. The president had lost control. He didn't know what was real; he didn't have a grasp on it."

And thus began his treatise on the role of the press in a liberal democracy, complete with a *mea culpa* on the coverage of the Iraq war. "Media drives them toward accountability," he said.

The questions ranged from ironic — **Tom Flanagan** asking about barriers to accessing Canadian politicians — to the cheeky — **Carlo Belusci** asked, "Isn't it true that if governments weren't so secretive, you'd be out of a job? And don't people want to just kind of tune all this out and go to the cottage?"

Woodward took it all in stride, concluding on a truly diplomatic note: "Obama thinks he's restored moral authority to the White House, just as Bush thought he'd restored dignity. I say, we'll see. You can be so sure of something, then time passes, you do your homework, and things look very different."

Guests dined on Alberta beef tenderloin, preserved-lemon risotto and a dainty selection of pastries. Among those who attended were **Murray Edwards**, University of Calgary's **Barry Cooper**, **Greg Forrest**, **John Cordeau** of Bennett Jones, **Randy Pettipas** of Global Public Affairs, **Dina** and **George Honke**, energy analyst **Wilf Gobert**, and **Timothy Hamilton**, managing partner of Hamilton Hall Soles/ Ray & Berndtson Inc.

The Salon Speaker Series at Teatro will resume in the fall.

Weekend Post

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Timothy Stinson with Bettina and Leib Zeisler.



Katie Santala, Randy Pettipas and Daniel Ouimet.



Eric Tremblay, Wilf Gobert, Claudia Cattaneo and Tom Gleave.



Dina and George Honke with Colin MacDonald.



Jeff Angel, Gregory Forrest, Salon Speaker Series guest of honour Bob Woodward of The Washington Post, Bob Booth and Jim D'Andrea.



Marianne Flanagan, Salon Speaker Series co-founder Patrick Luciani and Tom Flanagan.



Marj Tourigny and Tim Olafson.



David MacInnis, Salon Speaker Series co-founder Rudyard Griffiths and Glenn Herchak.