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food & drink

Riccardo Baldini,
Strathcona Microgreens

A Weekend in Banff

Recipes for the
Coldest Season





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On the cover: Riccardo Baldini of Strathcona Microgreens, see story page 8. Curtis Comeau Photography.

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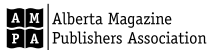
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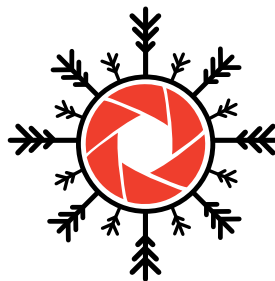
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new exec chef at the marc

Cara Lazarevich is the new executive chef at the Marc. Cara has years of experience in some of the city's most interesting kitchens (she opened Uccellino with Christopher Hyde and has done stints at La Petite Iza, among others) but this is her first executive chef position.

"I'm really excited," says Cara. "I just want to do a good job and make food that people like."

What can we expect? "Change is scary," says Patrick Saurette, co-owner with his wife Doris. "We had survived Covid, but maybe we were getting a little too comfortable. Now, we're thinking, this is great."

It's a refresh. We are excited to move on to the next chapter." The Marc's former exec of several years, chef Spencer Thompson, is moving into a more corporate position with a national company.

"I learned so much with Patrick and Doris—reimagining classic flavours, how we sourced product and how we designed dishes as a team. They feel like family to me." Good luck to all!



Allie Saurette photo

ice cream for the kind people of oliver

Kind Ice Cream is opening their third location soon. Joining their existing ice cream shops in Ritchie and Highlands will be a new shop in the Oliver Exchange II Building (OEX 2) just east of the current Oliver Exchange Building. No word yet on who will be joining them.

let them eat cake

The wonderful Julie Van Rosendaal has a new book out and it's terrific. Julie's recipes are easy to follow, well-tested, well-written and, of course, delicious. A poem written mid-pandemic inspired this collection—Julie's 13th cookbook. Yes, we are human and we do need cake. Find at independent bookshops like Audrey's or at dinnerwithjulie.com.



Mary Bailey photo

bonjour bakery moves to whyte

The fabulous Bonjour Boulangerie on 99 Street is moving a few blocks north to Whyte Avenue (9913 82 Avenue). In the new bigger location, expect an expanded selection of breads, pastry and cheeses as well as a sandwich lineup. Check it out!

chef serge belair heads to ottawa for canadian culinary championships

Edmonton's Great Kitchen Party held last fall at the Edmonton Convention Centre sported a sold-out crowd sampling delicious food and wines. Chef Doreen Prei's (Glasshouse Kitchen+Bar) new wave surf and turf took the People's Choice; Holly Holt's (SheCooks) exceptional smoked bison dish garnered third place; Lindsay Porter's (The Common) second place mushroom spring roll was inspired by an omelette she had in Vancouver's Chinatown.

The gold medal winner? Chef Serge Belair (Edmonton Convention Centre) with an exquisite and surprising dessert based on the pears from his backyard. Chef Belair is representing Edmonton at the Canadian Culinary Championships in Ottawa February 3-5. Kitchen Party raises money for youth (\$17 million in the past 16 years) including Spirit North, an organization that supports the health and well-being of Indigenous youth, and E4C. Congratulations chefs!

the best thing you ate last year?

Was it a dish in a resto? A local craft beer or spirit? Something from a farmers' market? Let us know! Nominate the best thing you ate or drank last year for the Tomato Top100. Nominations open Friday, January 6 and close Friday, January 27. Visit thetomato.ca for all the deets.



From the top: chefs Spencer Thompson and Cara Lazarevich; Julie's new cookbook; chef Serge Belair on the Edmonton podium, flanked by chefs Holly Hunt (L) and Lindsay Porter (R); Bonjour's new Whyte Avenue location; the planned piazza in Little Italy.

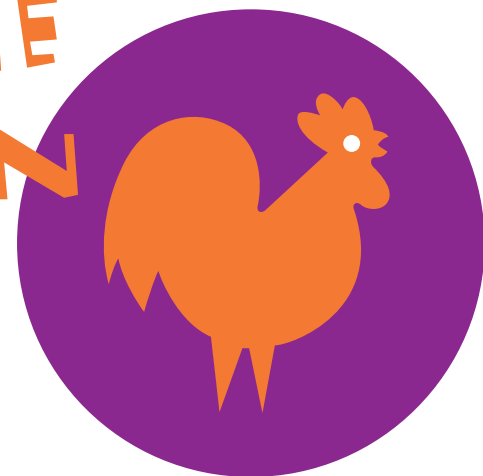
culina opening in the piazza in little italy

Culina has snagged the corner location of The Piazza, on 95 Street and 108 Avenue. "We are really happy to be in the neighbourhood. We will be using it as a commissary kitchen for our other locations and for catering," says Brad Lazarenko, owner and executive chef of Culina. In the works for the Little Italy location are Culina to Go Saturdays, family dinners, indigenous dinners, popups and brunches. And, Culina opens Bibo Wine Bar in the Strathcona Hotel in early spring. Many remember the bijou wine bar just off 99 Street, tucked in behind the IGA. That building is long gone; the new incarnation is a 50-seat café by day, wine bar by night.

It connects to the Back Street Alley, the walkable, shoppable area transformed by the Strathcona Back Street Project. 🍷

CHEAP AND CHEERFUL RECIPES FOR THE COLDEST SEASON

Frugality is in. Recipes to make with pantry ingredients, local chicken and pork, in-season veg and things preserved from the summer.



Confit Garlic Bean Dip

“This bean dip is full of flavour, protein and vitamins. Spread it on toast or dip your favorite seasonal vegetables in it. You can also thin it out with some oat milk and use it as a plant-based pasta sauce. I’ve used home canned beans, but store bought are just fine. I also used an Aji Amarillo pepper I grew this summer and dehydrated, but store-bought chilli flakes work as well.”—Holly Holt, *SheCooks, Bronze medal Canada’s Great Kitchen Party, Edmonton.*

- 2 c canned great northern beans (large white beans), rinsed well
- 2 heads garlic, peeled
- 1 c canola or olive oil
- 1 T white vinegar
- 1 dried aji amarillo, minced (or substitute 1 t chilli flakes)
- kosher salt and pepper to taste
- ½ c water (if needed)

Place garlic and oil into a small, heavy bottomed pot with a lid. Gently heat on the stovetop at very low heat for about 30 minutes, or until soft and tender. The garlic must be fully submerged in oil at all times while cooking. Be cautious not to burn your garlic. Let cool to room temperature, remove the garlic cloves and reserve oil.

In a food processor, add the beans, vinegar, chilli and cooked garlic. Blitz until smooth. While keeping the food processor running, add the oil used to cook the garlic, slowly. If it seems too thick, just add the ½ cup water.

Makes about 3 cups, or 4-6 servings.

Ivan’s Lentil Soup

Kaelin Whittaker, Awn Kitchen

- 1 med onion, finely chopped
- 3 carrots, finely chopped
- 1 lg potato, cut into 1 cm cubes
- 2 T butter
- 1 c red lentils
- 6-7 c homemade vegetable stock
- salt and pepper, to taste
- cilantro for garnish

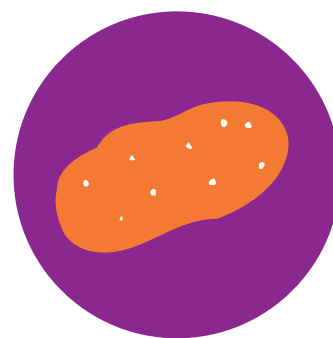
Melt the butter in a medium saucepan, add the vegetables, season with salt and pepper. Sweat for 5-8 minutes until the veg are beginning to soften but not colour. Add the lentils and the stock, bring to the boil, reduce to a simmer and cook for about 45 minutes until the lentils are tender, checking to see if you need to add more liquid every so often. Blitz with a blender, taste and adjust the seasoning. Garnish with chopped cilantro.

Serves 6-8.

Beer Cheese Dip

“This cheesy dip is a good way to use up leftover cheese, wine and beer from a party.”—Chef Lindsay Porter, *silver medal Canada’s Great Kitchen Party, Edmonton.*

- ¼ c flour
- ¼ c butter
- 1 onion diced
- 2 t mustard
- 1 lg bottle stout (750 ml)
- ½ bottle white wine
- 1 c beer cheese
- ½ c alpine cheese
- ½ c curds
- ¾ c cream



In a heavy-bottomed pot, add the butter and sauté the onions. Add the flour to make a roux. Add the stout and white wine and cook for five minutes. Add the cream and cook for 15-20 minutes on medium low. Take off the heat and stir in the cheeses. Serve with warm crostini, pretzels, pita or vegetables.

Makes about 4 cups.

Winter Squash Risotto

“Notes on risotto: Your finished risotto should be saucy, not overly thick, but not soupy either. Most risottos start with a soffrito of onion or shallot sweated in oil or butter, or both. You can also start with diced pancetta, or chorizo, rendering off the fat, before you add the onion or shallot. Your rice should always be stirred into the hot soffrito, so that it is nicely coated. Stock should be added a ladleful at a time, after you add the wine. It should be gently simmering as you add it. Risotto is usually finished with Parmesan and cold diced butter. A good risotto should be al dente—the rice should have a little bite. Remember that it will keep cooking as it rests. For a vegan alternative, omit the butter and substitute ¼ cup white miso for the parmesan in the recipe.”—Kathryn Joel, *Get Cooking.*

- 2 c risotto (Carnaroli or Vialone Nano) rice
- 8 c stock, chicken or vegetable, or as needed
- 1 glass white wine
- 2-3 T olive oil

- 2 shallots, finely diced
- 1½ c winter squash (kabocha or hubbard) peeled, seeded and diced into ¼-inch pieces
- 100 g Parmesan cheese, grated
- 50 g unsalted butter, diced and chilled
- small handful sage leaves, chopped

Place the stock in a large pot and bring to a gentle simmer. In a separate pan, add oil, then add the shallots and cook until translucent, seasoning with salt. Turn up the heat to medium-high and add the rice, squash and sage. Stir until well coated in oil, about 1-2 minutes.

Add the wine and stir until absorbed. Begin to add the hot stock, 1 ladle at a time, stirring briskly until completely absorbed before adding more stock. Continue adding stock and stirring briskly and constantly, keeping the risotto at a simmering point, for 18-20 minutes until the rice is creamy and just al dente. Check for seasoning and add salt if needed (remember the cheese is salty too). Once the rice is al dente, stir in the cheese and cold butter, season to taste with salt and pepper. Your risotto should be loose and creamy and not too thick. Cover and remove from the heat. Rest for a couple of minutes, then serve in warm bowls, garnished with chopped sage.

Serves 4-6.



Stuffed Pork Loin with Potato Purée and Winter Greens

“Alberta pork is the least expensive of the meats and it is beautiful. With pork loin there is no wastage. Whatever leftovers you have can be repurposed into a sandwich or a salad.” –Doreen Prie, private chef, CBC Radio Active food columnist.

- 1 pork loin, cleaned, butterflied
- salt and pepper to taste
- 3 bunches green onions, grilled
- 1 T fennel seeds, toasted and ground
- 3 T Dijon mustard
- 100 gr shredded smoked cheese (cheddar or mozzarella)
- 2 T grape seed oil

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Place the butterflied pork loin on your cutting board and season with salt and pepper and the fennel. Spread the Dijon mustard on the inside of the pork loin. Add the cheese and green onions and roll into a roulade. Use butcher twine to keep the roulade together.

Heat up a large frying pan and add the grape seed oil. Fry the pork loin on all sides until nicely caramelized and place on a tray with parchment paper and cook in the oven for about 20 minutes (or

longer depending on size). It should be medium to medium well, no more.

Potato Purée

- 5 russet potatoes, peeled, washed and diced
- 1 stick butter
- $\frac{7}{8}$ c whipping cream
- salt to taste
- pinch nutmeg

Place cream and butter in a pot and heat up. You want to add a hot liquid to your cooked potatoes. Cook the potatoes in salted water until soft. Once soft, drain them. Cover the potatoes with a kitchen towel, allow some space to steam the water out, for about 2-3 minutes. This method will make your mash less runny. Push the potatoes through a ricer and pour in the heated cream and butter liquid slowly. Don't add all at once. You might not need the whole mix. Season with salt and add a pinch of nutmeg.

Seared Brassicas

- winter greens (chard, black kale or broccolini)
- olive oil
- lemon juice, to taste
- sea salt to taste

In a sauté pan, heat the oil over a med-high heat and sear the greens, adding lemon juice and salt to taste, and stirring constantly, until wilted. Serve immediately.

Serves 4-6 depending on size of loin.

HOW TO MAKE ONE CHICKEN LAST FIVE MEALS

“There are several excellent chicken farms near Edmonton. The birds are organic, humanely raised, much larger than a supermarket chicken (they don't shrink like a supermarket chicken either) and can be pricy. But if you think cost per meal, they become the most economical choice. With these big birds, even after feeding four or six people, there will be lots of meat, including breast meat, left. The large ones can take a day or two to defrost (if you buy frozen) so keep that in mind.

This is what I do. I make a roast chicken dinner, then I'll take all the remaining meat off the bones and store in the fridge. The next day I'll make sandwiches from the best bits of meat and stock from the bones. The rest of the meat goes into chicken pot pies, chicken soup, chicken and mushroom pasta or a casserole. I use some of the stock to make these dishes and freeze the rest in half cup containers. Remember, it's super concentrated.

Having stock in your freezer is money in the bank.” –Mary Bailey, editor of *The Tomato*.

Roast Chicken

Place a few bits of lemon in the cavity and cover the bird generously with salt and pepper and a bit of olive oil or butter. You can cut up a few carrots and onions and put in the bottom of the roaster if you like. Preheat the oven to 425°F.

Put the chicken breast side down in the pan and roast until the chicken is nicely browned and cooked through, checking for doneness after about 1 hour, when your kitchen starts to smell amazing. Poke a meat thermometer into the biggest part of the thigh (it should register 160°F) or twist a thigh, if the juices run clear, it is cooked.

Please see “Cheerful” on page 11



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From a Masters in Forestry to a business in microgreens, Riccardo Baldini found a way to follow his heart and ambition in the face of something that would derail most people.

Riccardo Baldini, Strathcona Microgreens

Daniela Zenari with photos by Curtis Comeau

In 2019, Riccardo Baldini, an avid gardener and trained concert pianist, was paralyzed overnight by a spinal cavernoma, a cluster of abnormal blood vessels on the spine. Suddenly, he was thrust into an existence without access to the things he loved, plants and piano. After years of working to find the balance of normal in his new life, he began searching for ways to rekindle his passions.

For the piano it would take more time, but for plants, the answer was microgreens. They don't require a lot of space and can be set up almost anywhere, making them perfectly accessible for someone who needs things to be within reach. ►

My first introduction to Riccardo and his business, Strathcona Microgreens, was through my sister, Elisa Zenari, co-owner of Dalla Tavola Zenari. She had been raving for weeks about her new microgreen producer and how incredible he and his product were. As a restaurateur she knew good microgreens aren't a bonus, they're a requirement.

But it wasn't just his interesting story, or that he was born and raised in Italy that piqued her interest. What he's doing with Strathcona Microgreens would make anyone pay attention.

Elisa set up a time for us to meet and take a tour of Riccardo's microgreen facility. The 2000-square foot space glowed under the full-spectrum LED lights, the rich greens and vibrant pinks of the microgreens at centre stage. Riccardo was already talking animatedly with my sister and my niblings (niece and nephew), explaining how his operation works. He popped his lightweight carbon fibre wheelchair over the cables of the humidifiers in the middle of the small bright warehouse as he explained the humidity sensors connected to his phone. If there is even a slight change in levels, he is alerted. He talks about his crops with an intimate knowledge of what they need to encourage all their unique flavours and qualities to flourish. "We just actually tweaked some of the growth procedure for pea shoots and I think we nailed it," he says. "Two of the tweaks—we shortened the duration and increased the intensity of the light."

What makes a good microgreen? When it comes to pea shoots, it's size. "We never go more than five inches." This stops the stem from getting fibrous and chewy. The result? "They're crunchy and juicy. And you have large leaves, and you have that taste of pea shoots, of sweet pea," says Riccardo.

Riccardo has fine-tuned every variable to bring out the best in each species—bold flavours, big blades, stark veins or short stalks—all the attributes that lift the microgreen from a garnish to an essential part of the dish.

Riccardo started experimenting in February 2021, in the spare room of his apartment, with one metro rack holding four trays of a few different crops. Now they produce 200 trays a week, cycling over 30 different crops.

Although he developed the product and started the business, Riccardo doesn't do it alone. Part-owner Michelle Moawad has been working with Riccardo from the start. With a background in agriculture, and currently working on her PhD in mycology, she is the perfect partner. "Michelle has been fundamental for the growth [of the business]," says Riccardo.

There has been a lot of growth the past year. "November 15, 2021 is our unofficial anniversary," says Riccardo. That's when he gave up selling at farmers' markets and started approaching restaurants directly, a model that agreed with his environmental values. There is very little waste—everything he produces is on order. This keeps price points stable, even in the face of historically high inflation rates. Harvested on Mondays, delivered on Tuesdays and available year-round, it's a perfect product for the Edmonton market.

Every aspect of Strathcona Microgreens has been carefully thought out to minimise its environmental impact. From composting the soil and roots after harvest with Green and Gold Community Garden, to compostable packaging, to sourcing (mostly) Canadian seeds, they are always looking at ways to improve. Unlike the product you get through a traditional supply chain, these microgreens are fresh, locally grown and bursting with flavour, colour and nutrients.

Strathcona Microgreens are already a staple on many Edmonton menus, supplying over 50 restaurants in the area. Riccardo works closely with chefs to match the microgreen to each dish. "I love chefs because they're so creative. I'm an artist as well and culinary is an art. You can really experiment with food and colours and flavour and scent," says Riccardo.

Chef Paul Shufelt of Hayloft is one such chef. "I have really come to enjoy the quality and reliability of their microgreens. They provide a pop of colour and complimentary flavour to several of our dishes at Hayloft. My personal favourite is the addition of the micro fennel to our sablefish crudo. It is the perfect complement to the fatty fish and the fresh citrus, really adding to the overall flavour of the dish."

Please see "Greens" on next page

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Greens

Continued from previous page

Producing flavours that explode in your mouth with every bite, and striking colours that grab your eyes, Strathcona Microgreens are bringing a growing number of chefs into the fold. Six of the eight chefs who competed in the Great Canadian Kitchen Party worked with Riccardo's microgreens for their dishes (including the three chefs on the podium). "I'm so happy to bring them something they can be creative with. That's what I love," says Riccardo. "Microgreens are not just a small garnish you put on the dish right? It has to add to the flavour profile."

But it's more than just the flavour, says Andrew Fung of XIX Nineteen. "The flavours work for the dishes, but it's not just a garnish. At the end of the day, it's him—it's his passion that makes his product great. It's how he grows it and the work he puts into it. The product lives through him and it shows."

My sister agrees. "Riccardo's passion for his product and process is contagious. It's such a joy to work with him. I want to put his microgreens in everything," she says. "On one hand he's an artist in the purest sense. On the other hand, he's

pragmatic and practical. He understands business and the needs of restaurateurs and chefs. It's a fine balance that not many people can maintain. He does it effortlessly."

While the majority of Strathcona Microgreens' business comes from selling to restaurants, they also offer free home delivery and have a devoted fan base of

kids and adults alike. "I love hearing moms say stuff like, 'finally my kids are eating greens again.' That's so satisfying, you know?" says Riccardo.

It's no wonder they are a hit with parents; not only are microgreens packed with nutrition (broccoli microgreens have 40 times the nutrients of regular broccoli), but the kids like them!

I wouldn't have believed that if I hadn't witnessed it during our visit, where my nibblings (who won't eat anything with colour), were tasting all the varieties that Riccardo handed them, and even liked some of them (something the kids assured us wouldn't happen).

Riccardo is a self-proclaimed perfectionist and will continue to fine tune his product. One thing everyone can agree on, Strathcona Microgreens proves that a microgreen is much more than just a garnish.

As for his other passion, piano. Working with a friend, Riccardo applied his ingenuity and creativity and developed a device that allows him to press the pedals of the piano using a mouthpiece. In October 2022 he performed in his first concert since 2019.

For more info on Strathcona Microgreens: strathconamicrogreens.ca

For more info on spinal cavernomas: <https://cavernoma.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Cavernoma-Spinal-booklet.pdf>

Daniela Zenari grew up in her family's restaurant Zenari's. She writes about food, foraging and family. Her favourite Strathcona Microgreen is the arugula because it tastes just like it does in Italy.

Red Veined Sorrel (below) and Riccardo (bottom) with Amaranth microgreens (left) and sunflower shoots (right).



Cheerful

Continued from page 7

If not, continue to roast, checking every 10 minutes or so, until juices run clear. Times are approximate, let your nose and a meat thermometer be the judge. Smaller chickens take less time. Let the chicken rest for at least 15 minutes before you start carving.

Chicken Stock

Take the rest of the meat off the bones and refrigerate. Toss the bones into a stock pot (very large pot) with a few bay leaves and simmer for at least six hours or overnight. I cook at a low simmer for about five hours, then uncover, until about 20-30 per cent of the volume is lost. This makes a concentrated stock. Do not salt. Strain the liquid, cool and put in the fridge.

Chicken Pot Pie

This is a basic chicken pot pie recipe, which you can customize with chopped greens and diced potatoes if you like, but always onion, celery, carrots and frozen peas. Otherwise, it's not a chicken pot pie. Top with your favourite pie crust, puff pastry, biscuits, or even mashed potatoes.

5 T	butter
1 med	yellow onion
2 cloves	garlic, minced
1 c	chopped carrot
1 c	chopped celery
¼ c	dry sherry or brandy
¾ c	milk
3 T	cornstarch
2 c	chicken stock
2 c	water
1 c	frozen peas
	kosher salt and fresh-cracked pepper
2 c	shredded cooked chicken
⅓ c	fresh parsley, chopped

Preheat oven to 375°F.

In a large pan, melt the butter over medium-high. Add the onion and garlic, cook for a few minutes, then add carrot and celery and cook until softened, 8 minutes. Deglaze the pan with the sherry, scooping up any browned bits. Dissolve the corn starch in the milk, whisking away any lumps. Stir in the milk cornstarch mixture. Slowly add stock, whisking constantly. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer until thickened, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in peas. Season, then add chicken and parsley. Check

for seasoning. (Can be frozen up to this point). Pour into a 2-quart baking dish or into 6 individual dishes.

Bake individual pies for 15-20 minutes, large for 45-50 minutes, until the filling is bubbling and pastry is golden. Rest for 10 minutes before serving.

Serve 4-6.

Khao Soi-ish Chicken Soup

This is an easy recipe inspired by khao soi, the northern Thai noodle soup. The garnishes are key—fresh, bright, crunchy things to contrast the richness of the soup.

2 t	canola oil
4 cloves	garlic, finely sliced
3 T	Thai red curry paste or to taste
2 t	ground turmeric
	leftover chicken, about 2 cups
2 c	chicken stock
1 tin	full-fat coconut milk
1	fish sauce, or to taste
½ t	soft brown sugar
	flat egg noodles, or lo mein noodles

Garnishes

spring onions, trimmed and thinly sliced
handful bean sprouts
small bunch cilantro, roughly chopped
small bunch mint, roughly chopped
salted peanuts or cashews, roughly chopped
lime wedges
fresh green or red chilli, thinly sliced, or chilli flakes or chilli oil, to taste

In a pan over a moderate heat, add the oil and fry the garlic for about 30 seconds, until fragrant. Add the curry paste and turmeric, and cook up to a minute, stirring all the while. Add the chicken stock, coconut milk, fish sauce and the sugar. Bring the pan to the boil, then lower the heat and simmer uncovered for about 20 minutes. Add the cooked chicken and simmer for another 10 minutes or so. Taste and adjust seasoning, adding more fish sauce if needed. Remove from the heat.

In a separate pan, cook the noodles according to the instructions on the packet. Drain and divide the noodles between four serving bowls. To serve, ladle soup over the noodles and garnish with toppings.

Serves 4. 🍴

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Dana Rajotte (Roy + Co Selections) and Augustin Letondot (Meukow Cognac) at the Marc.

“Cognac is about sharing,” says Augustin Letondot from Meukow Cognac.

A quick refresher—Cognac is a spirit, double distilled in copper pot stills, then aged in specific oak barrels for a minimum of two years. The production is limited to 80,000 hectares in six cru—Bois Ordinaires, Fin Bois, Bon Bois, Petite Champagne, Grande Champagne and the Borderies (the smallest cru)—surrounding the town of Cognac. The traditional and historic rules regarding Cognac production are key to the quality and viability of the region. The final Cognac blends, of eaux de vie from different cru and of varying ages, depend on the skill and experience of the cellar master. Meukow’s is Anne Sarteaux, the only female (for now) cellar master in Cognac.

“In France we say the best time to taste Cognac is at 11am,” says Augustin as we sample through the range. We’re not far off as we tuck into lunch at the Marc while Augustin talks about Meukow (pronounced moo-koff). “Did you know that Finland has the highest per capita consumption of Cognac in the world?” he asks. “We are number one there.” Meukow was founded by two brothers from Silesia in 1862. It was bought in 1979 by the Coste family with the aim of producing elegant and powerful Cognac. The award-winning bottle design was created in 1993.

The VS, sourced from Fin Bois and Bon Bois, is a fresh and fruity young Cognac with a fine balance between freshness and power. It’s mouth filling, not spiritous—love the powdered ginger and citrus aromas and the full and round mid palate, not always found in young Cognac.

VSOP Meukow Superior possesses complex flavours and aromas, a hint of orange and a haunting sweet note like marshmallows on the long finish. It’s Augustin’s favourite. “The VSOP has a nice maturity with some nice spice, well-balanced and fun to play with.”

The XO is fireplace, après-ski, contemplative, it needs time to make and to enjoy. It would be way too easy to drink way too much, it’s less spiritous, yet powerful, with a hint of chocolate on the finish. Beautifully made, subtle and elegant.

“In France cognac is part of the culture,” says Augustin. “And now the demand is coming from the cocktail menu. You can treat it like a whiskey, make an Old Fashioned or a Sazerac.”

What makes a great cognac? Alluring aromas, elegance, complexity, long finish, personality. Meukow Cognac have that in spades. Some Cognac can be harsh and spiritous, especially in the VS range. Meukow is seamless. From VS to XO, there is beautiful flow across the palate, refined, with no harsh edges.



Girolamo Russo 'a Rina Etna Rosso, Sicily, Italy.

This bottling from Girolamo Russo elevates Nerello Mascalese to something for contemplation—a beautiful wine with power and elegance, tasting of luscious red tree fruits, backed by velvety tannins and balanced acidity. This could be this winter’s red.

From the website: “a wine that carries the breath of the volcano: a blend of smoke and ashes and ripe, fragrant fruit.” Wish I’d said that. Not much of this lovely volcanic wine is made, so if you see it, grab it!

We are tasting Rioja wines with Jose Luis Navarro, export manager for La Rioja Alta.

The company, based in Haro, has four wineries—in Galicia, Ribera del Duero and two in Rioja, one in Alavesa and one in Alta. Wines from Spain are generally a bargain and these are no exception, a lot of wine for the money. The **Finca San**

Martin (Alavesa, 100 per cent Tempranillo) is the only Crianza (aged for a minimum of two years) we tasted. It’s deliciously fruity, tasting of ripe plum, coffee and black spices. Enjoy by the glass at Bodega Downtown. The **Finca Martelo Reserva**

(85 per cent Tempranillo, with Mazuelo, Garnacha, and the white grape Viura) is juicy and delicious, with silky tannins. The **Viña Alberdi Reserve** (100 per cent Tempranillo)

is drinking well right now, have with roast pork or Christmas turkey. The flagship is the **Viña Ardanza Reserve** (80 per cent Tempranillo with Garnacha), full-bodied and graceful with silky tannins, gorgeous restraint and power.





Here is a unique way to celebrate Chinese New Year, with Wu Liang Ye or Flamma.

Baijiu, China's national spirit, has a centuries-long history. It's made from fermented grains such as sorghum, corn, wheat, glutinous rice and rice. Long brewed, fermented, distilled and aged in underground terra cotta. Wu Liang Ye has China's oldest fermentation pits (or crypts), dating from the Ming Dynasty. There are five categories—Strong, Sauce, Light, Rice and Mixed Aromas, depending on where it's made, the base grains



and length of aging. **Wu Liang Ye** is a strong aroma baijiu made in southwestern Sichuan in the south west. It's made from millet, corn, glutinous rice, long grain rice and wheat.

Historically, baijiu is drunk neat at room temp as a small shot, with several rules of etiquette. It's drunk as a toast, all together and never before the host. And, it's not drunk alone. Now however, baijiu is showing up in cocktails and drunk more casually. The **Flamma** is designed to fit in a pocket.

The smaller size is less expensive too, making it popular with younger drinkers in China.

The flavours are really different for someone accustomed to wine or whisky. Earthy, pungent and savoury, with lots of umami—think soy sauce and you are on the right track. Tropical fruit and citrus play a role as do mushrooms, caramel and herbaceous notes such as fennel.



It's fun to find an Alberta-made, non-alcoholic cocktail that tastes great.

Calgary's Dalia Kohen created **Wild Folk** out of her love of gardening, foraging and the Prairies. She uses hand-harvested organic herbs to create the drinks, based on popular cocktails—Bee's Knees (fresh notes of clover, lemon and honey); Sparkling Negroni (zesty star anise, rhubarb and hint of grapefruit) and the Vermouth Spritz (calming chamomile, ginger, coriander). There is another botanical cocktail on the way this spring. We love the not-too-sweet, complex flavours, \$22/four pack, at drinkwildfolk.com, Color de Vino, Sherbrooke and Biera. 🍷

Find these wines and spirits at better wine shops.

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A WEEKEND IN

Trips to the Rockies in the winter used to be about the skiing. Banff was a place to have dinner and crash, to get ready for the slopes the next day. What does a trip to Banff look like without the lure of the mountain top? A lot of fun actually. And so much great food and drink. It's time to explore Banff on foot.

Mary Bailey story and photos

Weekend travelling companions at the Banff sign on Mount Norquay Road.



BUT FIRST, BREAKFAST.

Brazen, the new restaurant in the venerable Mount Royal Hotel plays with the wild history of Banff. It leans into the romantic hardscrabble view of Banff's early days—of adventurers and remittance men, of explorers and mountain guides. It celebrates the characters that built Banff with historical photography and a straightforward, no-frillery look to honour their spirit.

It works. Staff are dressed in hardworking denim with suspenders—they could be off roping something or rafting down the river.



Breakfast at Brazen.

Brazen also has very good food. Classic Canadiana—local meats, west coast fish, delicious local mushrooms and solid plant-based offerings. For breakfast—plentiful bacon and eggs, steak and eggs, house-made granola parfait and good coffee.

Brazen is the last piece of the puzzle for the Mount Royal Hotel, a key Banff property since 1908. Since then, the hotel had undergone several owners, additions, expansions and two devastating fires. The last one, in 2016, brought about a change in ownership (it's now part of the

Pursuit Banff Jasper Collection) and this new and best iteration. It's a thoughtful and intelligent renovation, with historic photos and signs on each guest floor bringing the past alive.

At dinner, Brazen's smoked beef tartare is a standout as is southern Alberta's Red Fox Funghi with sherry cream on sourdough. The ginger beef is made with hangar steak and blistered shishito peppers and the ribs are a riff on smoky Korean ribs with a saskatoon chili glaze. "We have staff from all over the world," says Darren Fabian, director of beverage and bars, Pursuit Banff Jasper Collection. "We want our menus to reflect that and where we are through the ingredients we use."

I asked Darren how you incorporate the needs of the modern diner in a historic property. "We embrace our surroundings," he says. "We respect that we are in a national park, it's unforgettable and iconic. We know people come here to collect memories. We want to be the best part of what could be the vacation of a lifetime."

TIME FOR A WALK.

Walk up Buffalo Street past historic homes like the Senator Forget and the

1920 Park's Superintendent's residence, the Old Banff Graveyard (1888) and up the hill to the Banff Centre. Mountain culture fans will not want to miss a peek at Mary Schäffer's home on Grizzly Street, built in 1913, by her second husband Billy Warren.

Or, walk to Bow Falls, pretty in the winter too. After navigating several sets of snowy stairs on the way to Bow Falls, you may feel that you deserve a stein and a pretzel at the Waldhaus Pub. You would be correct.

If you are wanting a shorter walk (you have a reso at Lupo for Italian Happy Hour, let's say), cross the pedestrian bridge but go right and keep to the path, then cross back to the downtown side over the brand-new Nancy Pauw pedestrian bridge, named after the Banff resident and philanthropist. It makes for the perfect loop, enough time to get some fresh air and enjoy nature.

At the other end of Banff Avenue on the way to Tunnel Mountain is Farm & Fire in the Elk and Avenue Hotel (another notable Pursuit property). It's a great spot for kids or for a larger group. Pretty much everything is served family style—heaping plates of roast chicken

or striploin and outstanding wood-fired pizza, the Salty Pig being our favourite and of course, the Margarita. If the pizza with the potato chips is on the menu when you are there, do not hesitate to order it. And the deep-fried gratin potatoes. Stellar! We loved the veg-based dishes and the bison and bannock. There were some gems on the wine list too, strong in Canadian selections and well-priced.



Farm & Fire's deep-fried gratin potatoes.

Which brings us to cocktails. Banff is becoming a cocktail town, no doubt about that. Local distillers Park, Wild Life and Turner Valley's Eau Claire, are well represented on the Banff scene. "Brown spirits are the key at Brazen," says Darren; "the Whiskey Creek cocktail with Eau Claire's Rupert's Whisky, walnut bitters, lime and egg white and the JG Julep, made with Park Glacier Rye."

His fave right now at Farm & Fire? "The Kickboxer, gin-based with lemon grass and ginger, super refreshing."

TIME TO GET HIGH: BANFF GONDOLA ON A BLUEBIRD DAY.

Can you go to the mountains and not get on top of a mountain? Nah, not possible. I recall a steep and rugged hike up Sulphur Mountain with my Dad and one of my brothers a long time ago. Knowing my family's penchant for off-piste escapades and not spending money when you don't have to, it was a free and only slightly terrifying way to get there. (It probably wasn't even the actual hiking trail, but a goat track.) Both being science geeks, they were fascinated by the Cosmic Ray Station built for the 1958 International Geophysical Year and disappointed it had been dismantled in the '80s.



Rundle (Minihapa, Cree) and Cascade (Waskahigan Watchi, Stoney Nakoda) Mountains dominate the Banff skyline.

Please see "Banff" on next page.

Banff

Continued from previous page.

Now, especially in the winter, the gondola is the way to go. Once you are up there, take the boardwalk to the remains of the station before lunch. The views? Outstanding. Don't forget the sunscreen, hats, scarves and mittens as it's windy and those cosmic rays are still beaming down.

What could be equal to the views on a sunny day? Nightrise, the immersive, multi-media after dark experience created in collaboration with the Stoney Nakoda Nation. It's a don't miss—mystical, beautiful and full of wonder.

Expect warming hearty plates at the Sky Bistro—seafood chowder and a delicious Three Sisters salad with roasted acorn squash, corn and beans, crispy Arctic char and a standout beef brisket burger.



The beef brisket burger at Sky Bistro.

BACK IN BANFF

Walk around town, do a bit of shopping, check out the galleries, don't miss the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, pop into Evelyn's for coffee (and pie). You could load the Banff Walking Tour app, or just wander, delighting in



Damn fine pie and coffee at Evelyn's.



Jolene's Tea House in the Old Crag Cabin.

discoveries around each corner. Like the Bison Courtyard, home to the Wild Flour Bakery and Jolene's Tea House in the Old Crag Cabin. This quaint cabin, built in the late 1800s, was home to the Crag & Canyon newspaper, a funeral home and a real estate office until being moved to the Courtyard.



A little taste of Italy at Lupo.

Close by is Lupo, on the second level of a well-designed new build on Wolf Street (yes, *lupo* is wolf in Italian). It has a New York Italian trattoria feel, or maybe that was the Frank Sinatra and show tunes playing during the Sunday Italian Happy Hour. A well-made Caesar salad and grilled shrimp along with a glass of Greco di Tufo took the chill off. The winter menu moves through some outstanding and savoury pastas (carbonara and a deliciously spicy rigatoni) pizzas and Italian-inspired mains such as roasted halibut with mint and veal parm, as

well as an excellent grouping of *contorni* (vegetable side dishes). Open kitchen, great flavours, a terrific spot to check out.



Could the Bluebird be anywhere but Banff? The luxe casual interior is a modern interpretation of the decades-old watering hole Melissa's MisSteak (which moved to Banff Avenue). The building itself started life as a temperance hotel called the Homestead Inn. Sunday night means Sunday roast, a reasonable cut of perfectly-roasted prime rib, with horseradish cream, potato mash and roasted root veg. Leave room for the Key Lime Pie.

Bluebird, at breakfast and at dinner, has the tinkly vibe of people having fun, which is a very nice vibe indeed. The brunch menu has tons of variety and the French omelette was perfection. It takes good technique to pull that off. Brava to the Bluebird kitchen.



The French omelette at Bluebird.

A trip to Banff now always involves a visit to Jolene's. I ask Jolene what's special about Banff. "The mountains," she says; "but also the community—it's incredible, a lot of passionate locals. If you are living in Banff, you are fighting hard to be there. We are like one of those trees growing out of a bit of rock on the side of the cliff. You have to work hard to make it work long-term in a sustainable way."

TOO COLD AND SNOWY TO BE OUTSIDE?

Book a yoga class at Flow State; power it out at Summit Lifestyle; visit Sally Borden Fitness in the Banff Centre, enjoy the pools and fitness centre at the Banff Springs, or have family fun at Fenlands, Banff's community recreation facility.

Go for a soak at the Upper Hot Springs. Go to a movie at the Lux on Bear Street.

Visit the Buffalo Nations Luxton Museum, it may look old fashioned and kitschy, but there is history here of the intersection of cultures, as well as a fun gift shop.

WHERE TO STAY Mount Royal Hotel

The historic brick hotel has comfortable rooms and a parking lot. The top floor has an intimate lounge for guests with hot tubs outside, and the location cannot be beat, right on the corner of Caribou Street and Banff Avenue.

Peaks Hotel and Suites

Chic accommodations on one of Banff's quieter streets.

The Juniper

Outside of town on the road to Norquay, has been well refurbished, rustic and comfortable, with stellar views. 🍷

Mary Bailey is editor of The Tomato.

Hunkering down with our big ol' orange Le Creuset pot

For those that live in the northern hemisphere, there is nothing better than Sunday dinner that has been stewed or braised.

On a cold winter's Sunday, you can guarantee our big ol' orange Le Creuset pot is bubbling on our cooktop or tucked in our oven with something that is sure to warm our grumbling tummies and make the house smell like the kind of heaven the Smos want to go to.

This is the season to enjoy those offcuts, the root vegetables you have been saving, the tomatoes you have canned and the hardy herbs you have dried. Some favourites of ours are goulash, rouladen, braised pork shoulder, Italian Sunday gravy and bigos, which we are sharing the recipe with you.

Many of you have moved on to Instapots, and some have invested in Thermomixes. Good for you we say, but not the Smos, we are still old school pots and pans people. If you have well-seasoned pans and a few good pots, you can make anything.

When I was little, my mom would ladle stews, soups and other goodies out of a big orange Le Creuset pot, the biggest one Le Creuset made. That pot was magical. Like most young homemakers, when Brad and I started out we had average kitchen equipment, certainly not a Creuset Dutch oven. That would have to wait.

On a bike ride some years ago, I came on a garage sale. Low and behold, out of the corner of my eye what do I see—what could have been my mom's pot. A circa 1960s, well-worn orange Le Creuset pot. I almost peed my pants, I was so excited. I saw the sticker with 50 on it. It was worn in spots, so I thought \$50 was a bit steep. I put on my negotiator's hat and asked the gal (who was about my age) if she could come down on the price. She gave me the weirdest look and responded, 'really, you won't give me 50 cents for my mom's old bean pot?' I was shocked and embarrassed. I told her I needed to cycle home quickly to get the car and money. I came back with a loonie and told her

to keep the change. I am kinda sorry I didn't tell her to keep her mother's bean pot. She obviously didn't know how important it was, or how good those beans her mom made probably were. On the other hand, the Smos have given that beat-up pot another life. That old Creuset has been the focal point of many of our Sunday dinners. When the lid of that big orange pot comes off our home is filled with the smell of happy.

Bigos

Inspired by Aniela Tobias, our sister-in-law's late mom.

- 2 T neutral oil
- 1 lg onion, julienned
- 1 lb any of the following, or mixture: cubed pork, sausage cut in 1-inch pieces, pork ribs. If you wish to add more meat to the dish you can add up to 2 lbs without changing any other ingredients
- 2 T crushed garlic
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 T Hungarian paprika
- 6 c well-drained sauerkraut
- 1 lg head of cabbage medium-shredded
- ½ c chicken stock

In a large Dutch oven with a tight-fitting lid, heat the oil on the cooktop. Add onion and garlic and sauté until translucent. Add the meat and brown for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add all the other ingredients and give everything a good mix. Place in a preheated 300°F oven with the lid on. After 2 hours remove the lid and cook another 30-45 minutes until the liquid is absorbed. Check seasonings.

When eating bigos keep it simple, crusty bread and butter is all that's really needed, oh, and of course some good mustard for the pork or sausage.

Serves 6-8. 🍷

Leanne Smoliak's greatest compliment came from her father-in-law: "She's the perfect Ukrainian wife, she keeps a full fridge and a well-stocked bar."

PRO TIPS FOR BEING A
COOL NEIGHBOUR



1. Introduce yourself! If you can't name your neighbours, you've got some work to do. Knowing who you live next to is a great way to build a strong community.



2. Roll up your sleeves! If you see your neighbour out in their yard doing spring cleaning, head over and offer to lend a hand. You may even get to share a tasty beverage with a new friend.



3. Find out your neighbour's favourite beverage. That way, you can stock up at Sherbrooke before inviting them over.



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Malt and Mountains

“A person should have wings to carry them where their dreams go, but sometimes a pair of skis makes a good substitute.” –Hans Gmoser

Hans Gmoser was Canada's mountain king, emigrating from Austria to Edmonton in 1951, before moving to the mountains and settling in Harvie Heights, just outside Canmore. Gmoser became a leading mountaineer and guide in the 1950s, pioneering ascents of mounts Alberta, Logan, Robson and Yamnuska. With his first film in 1958, *With Skis and Rope*, Gmoser added filmmaker and lecturer to his resume. In 1959 he founded his guiding company, which became CMH (Canadian Mountain Holidays). Gmoser pioneered heli-skiing, in 1965 running the first commercial heli-skiing trips in BC's Bugaboo Mountains. By 1991 CMH was operating nine heli-skiing areas, serving thousands of winter skiers and summer hikers.

Hans Gmoser popularized mountain pursuits like climbing, hiking and backcountry skiing, the Canadian mountains and Canmore too. Gmoser had a hand in the transformation of Canmore from a hardscrabble coal mining town to the hip mountain playground of today.

When my parents moved to Canmore in the '80s, heading out for an après-ski beer meant either the Legion, the Drake or Canmore Hotel.

Things changed in Canmore with the opening of Grizzly Paw Brewing in 1996, Canmore Brewing in 2016 and Sheepdog in 2019.

I stopped into Sheepdog in November after a ski at the Canmore Nordic Centre, meeting up with family and friends who had been backcountry skiing at Bow Summit. The place was packed, upstairs and downstairs, with

what felt like folks from the other Canmore—the locals and hardcore mountain enthusiasts.

According to David Gauvreau, one of Sheepdog's three founders (with Josh Forster and Allan Russell), this locals vibe was intentional; “We built Sheepdog around the idea of drinking in your buddy's garage, because that's what we love to do. Locals helped with the build, locals tested the beers and we started the brewery with all our friends. You can't go to Sheepdog without running into someone you know.”

Gauvreau told me that they located Sheepdog off the beaten path, in the Elk Run industrial park, on purpose.

“We aren't on Main Street, but we're close to some awesome biking and hiking trails.

Pull up a stool, and you're bound to hear locals swapping stories about those trails. You might even get some good intel on secret spots.”

The Sheepdog name comes from the founders' day jobs:

Gauvreau and Forster are

Canmore firefighters, Russell is a veteran and a former Edmonton Police officer. A sheepdog refers to members of the first responder community. Gauvreau says the name fits their vision of serving the community, creating a gathering place that feels like a ski lodge or backcountry hut; “a cozy place in the winter and the perfect après-ski, snowboard, sledding and skating destination.”

Hans Gmoser passed on in 2006, but I imagine he would approve of Sheepdog, a place where mountain people can tell stories of alpine adventures over a pint or two. Indeed, Gmoser's son Conrad opened his own brewery and tasting room, Vancouver's Brassneck Brewery in 2013.

As always, it isn't about the beer or the mountains, it's about the people and the memories we make together.



Hans Gmoser, Whyre Museum of the Canadian Rockies

Ski Beer Six Pack

Six great beers to keep you schussing or to power your après-ski. Get your skis waxed up, grab a pack of craft beer, the taste is going to move you. Find them at the breweries or better beer stores.

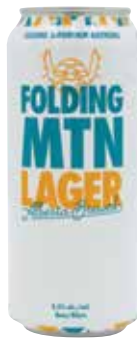


70 Acre Firehouse Kölsch, Sherwood Park

The mountains are calling but they're hours away. Local hills like Sunridge or Snow Valley are great for learning or tuning up for downhill skiing, while Edmonton area spots are perfect for cross country skiing. Stop in at 70 Acre for a bite and a pint of their refreshing Kölsch after hitting the trails at the Strathcona Wilderness Centre or the Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Area.

Folding Mountain Brewing Lager, Hinton

The opening of Jasper Brewing in 2005 was a game-changer, while Folding Mountain near Hinton makes the long drive to Marmot bearable. This quaffable lager won Gold as top Pilsner and Silver for Best of Show at the 2022 Alberta Beer Awards.



Eighty-Eight Brewing Yard Sale New Zealand Pilsner, Calgary

Edmontonians may find Calgary's obsession with the 1988 Olympics a little odd, even a little sad. But Eighty-Eight Brewing lovingly keeps the spirit of '88 alive in all its neon Sunice glory. Enjoy this 'crisp little brew that brings the après' after hitting the slopes at Olympic venues Nakiska or Canada Olympic Park.

Banff Brewing Banff Ave Black Pil, Banff

The Big Three resorts—Sunshine, Louise and Norquay—each have their unique charms, their own pros and cons, all of which skiers and snowboarders can debate over a beer or two at Banff Ave Brewing's spacious, two-story brewpub. The Black Pil is an easy-drinking *schwarzbier* made with roasted German malts.



Sheepdog Brewing Kelsey's West Coast IPA, Canmore

Sheepdog's David Gauvreau says their niche, in a town with two other excellent breweries, is always offering something new. They have 11 rotating open taps plus five for their core beers, including this classic West Coast-style American IPA, heavily hopped with old school hops for citrus and pine aromas and flavours.

Wild Winds Brewery Snow Eater Stout, Pincher Creek

Every ski season I vow to visit Castle Mountain Resort, Alberta's deep-south mountain resort. Maybe this year? In the meantime, we can enjoy beers from this brand-new brewery in Pincher Creek, up the road from Castle. Named after a record-breaking chinook in 1962, this pitch black, smooth stout tastes of coffee and chocolate. ☘



Peter Bailey can't find his wineskin. He's @Libarbarian on Twitter and Instagram.

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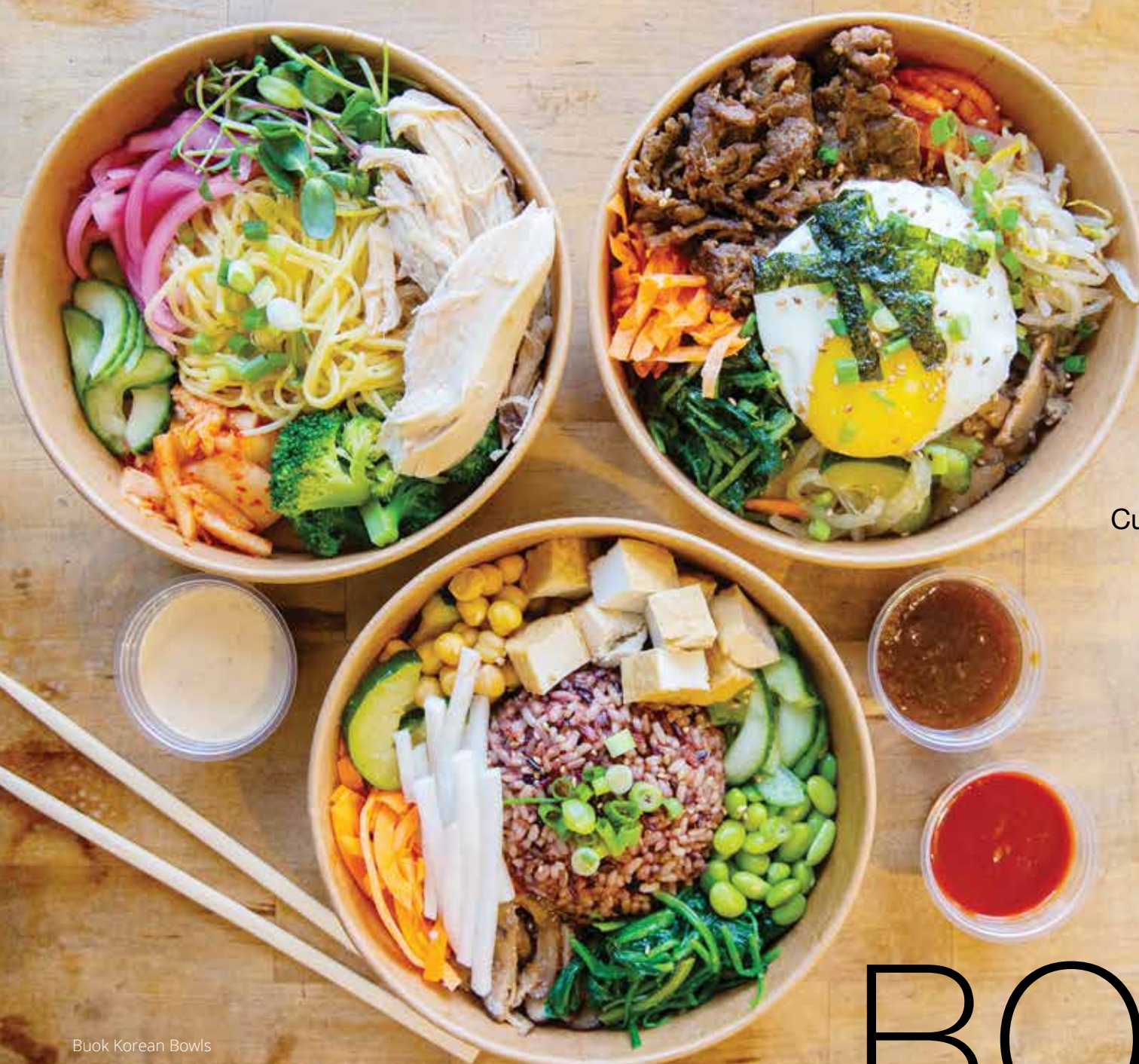
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Curtis Comeau photo essay

The Art of the BOWL

Buok Korean Bowls



Hawaiian-style poke at Hawaiian Poke & More

I love eating food in a bowl.

This may be my education in the study of humanities speaking here, but physical bowls are part of our cultural fabric. The earliest bowl ever found is 18,000 years old. Since then, various bowl designs have been discovered from sites from ancient China, Greece, Mesopotamia, Europe and several North American Indigenous cultures.

The bowl is a perfect vessel for a chef to combine flavours and fully express their culture or themselves creatively. Eating a well-balanced mixed bowl is pleasing to the eye, and when created with fresh ingredients, well-balanced protein provides exceptional value and is tasty and comforting. This past fall, I ventured into Edmonton's restaurant scene and discovered various bowls that speak to value and cultural expression.

Buok Korean Bowls

Owner Henry Song created Buok to pay homage to the food he ate growing up. "Many people think most Korean food is fried, but only a small portion of it is, most Korean food consists of fresh and pickled ingredients." They offer several Korean-inspired bowls like the Buok classic, the Bibimbap and Buddha Bowl. "A lot of people have a Buddha bowl on their menu because it's a healthy option, but ours comes with my auntie's Buddha rice, which is very high in protein and the bowl also has vegan kimchi." Most people forget that traditional kimchi is not vegan. "Our kimchi is house-made, and we are proud of it. My mom still comes by and ensures we are making the kimchi properly," laughs Song. They also offer a build-your-bowl option so that you can get creative.



Central Social Hall Breakfast Bowl

Hawaiian Poke & More Poke Bowls

My hat goes off to any restaurant that opened during the pandemic, let alone a small mom-and-pop shop wanting to open a tiny traditional Hawaiian restaurant. Most of us know poke as flavoured tuna in a bowl topped off with the ingredients you want. Traditional Hawaiian Ahi poke is a bit different. It is still flavoured crosscut yellow fin tuna, but it is served alone in a bowl with rice on the side.

“We are a traditional Hawaiian restaurant, so serving Ahi poke the island way is important to us,” says Ana Maria De Leon, owner of Hawaiian Poke & More in Terrace Heights. In Hawaii, tuna and its flavour are the heroes of poke, so they don’t want to mix it with other ingredients. “If two guests come in for the first time, I always recommend ordering two poke flavours so they can share and try both.” The restaurant serves both salmon and tuna poke and has a range of options, including Sweet and Spicy, Wasabi, Spicy Mayo, Oyster and Kimchi.

Central Social Hall Breakfast Bowls

North Americans love brunch, so what better way to express our late wake-up Sunday tradition than with a Brunch Bowl? Central Hall’s brunch bowl combines all the classic brunch items; crispy potatoes, avocado, greens, sausage and two poached eggs with hollandaise sauce. “We took everything people love from brunch and combined it. It’s the perfect winter brunch bowl,” says owner Jesse Kupina. Stroll in on a Sunday to experience it for yourself.

Tien Tuyen Vermicelli Bowls

You would be hard-pressed to find a better take-out bowl than one of the staples of Vietnamese cuisine, *bún tô*, (vermicelli bowl) at Tien Tuyen in southeast Edmonton. These tasty bowls come in a wide assortment of toppings. Generally, they include Asian vermicelli, crunchy vegetables, basil and mint accompanied by a nuoc cham dressing, made with lime juice, fish sauce, sugar and chillies. What separates a great *bún tô* from an excellent *bún tô* is the quality of grilled meats. The Tien Tuyen #29 (*bún 4 màu*) offers up some of the best Vietnamese BBQ pork and beef I have ever tasted, and they add a spring roll for good measure.

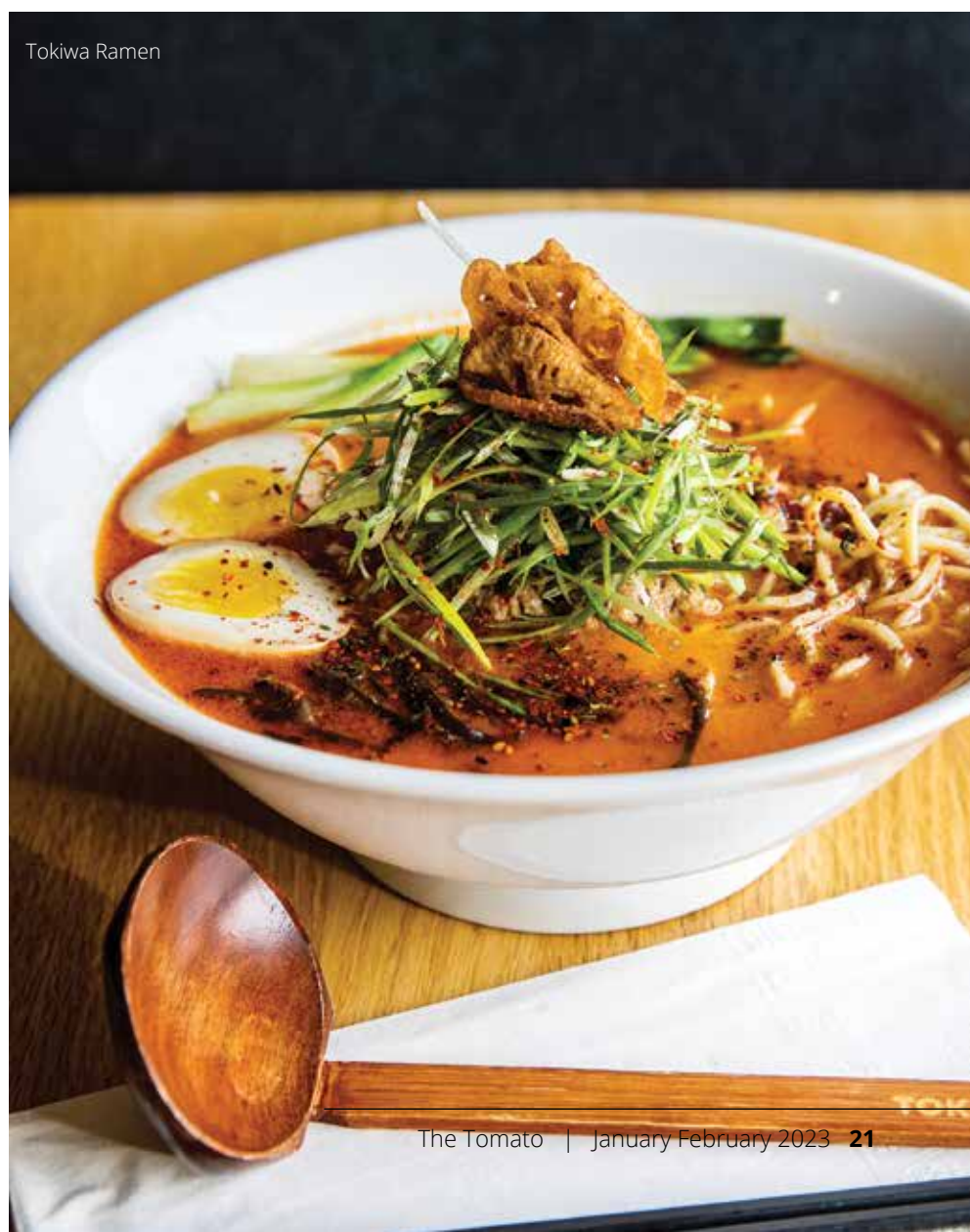
Tokiwa Ramen Bowls

The charming and hilarious episode from *Seinfeld: The Soup* (No soup for you!) comes to mind when I think of Tokiwa Ramen. Why? The NO-SOUP sign! You see, Tokiwa prepares soups daily, and there is a limited batch, so be sure to roll up for lunch as soon as they open at 11 am, or else you risk hearing the words ‘no more soup’. Another interesting fact is they do not offer take-out ramen. The owners believe that ramen is best eaten fresh, so it can be presented properly to the paying customer, which makes it impossible to take out. I appreciate an artisan’s unwavering commitment to their craft, but it is even better when that artisan creates some of the best ramen this city has to offer. 🍜

Curtis Comeau has contributed photography to The Tomato since the beginning.



Tien Tuyen Vermicelli



Tokiwa Ramen

A rumination on low and slow: braised bison cheeks

Cooking in Alberta follows the seasons; in the warmer months, of which there are three, we usually cook out-of-doors.

But come winter we move indoors. It is deeply satisfying, cave like, to smell supper in the oven, slowly cooking and warming up the house. The following recipe is in this tradition. It uses a unique cut of meat for a long slow braise that once in the oven will cook right through the afternoon and into the hockey game.

The classic braise exists in nearly every meat-eating culture and each one has its own secret that makes it their very own. In this case our secret ingredient is Alberta bison, native to the Prairies, grass fed, without the excessive influence of big pharma. The Latin name for bison is *Bison bison*. It's a natural mnemonic. Wood Bison, native to Alberta's parkland habitat, are called (*Bison bison athabascae*). These Latin names help to distinguish bison from true buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*). But if you like the traditional name, buffalo, then call them that. Or you might prefer the Cree name, *paskwâwimostos*. Regardless what you call it, it will still taste great.

Offal has become a slippery issue, related to geography, culture and economics. As Jennifer McLagan explains in her excellent book, *Odd Bits: How to Cook the Rest of the Animal*, the root of the word is Dutch, *afval*, (off fall) referring to those parts of the animal that fell off during the butchering of the carcass, specifically the entrails. Animal cheeks are a muscle firmly attached to the outside of the jawbone, and they don't fall off. In fact, like every other cut of meat, they must be purposely removed by a skilled butcher. In Canada, with the exception of Quebec where they are a staple in high-end restaurants, cheeks became tertiary cuts mainly because the meat packing industry focuses its time and effort on those parts of the animal most suited to grilling, those that yield multiple cuts (such as T-bones) and command a higher price. That, and the other fact that there are only two

of them per animal, has helped make cheeks harder to find.

Bison is growing in popularity in Alberta, but is not regularly carried in all butcher shops, particularly cheeks. You may have to ask your butcher to order them in, but consider doing so as it's the perfect opportunity to have a conversation with your butcher.

Waste not, want not was always common practice in agriculture. But somewhere along the way that logic and economy got waylaid. In the 1950s many households (i.e. mothers) regularly cooked liver, kidney, tongue, ox-tail, pig's feet, the whole smorgasbord.

With the rise of industrial food production, and international meat packing plants that supply large supermarket chains and the fast food conglomerates, consumers' options were restricted.

By the late 1960s, tertiary cuts became harder to find. In the 1970s pushback started with farm to fork and eat local movements. (Thank you Alice Waters). Continuing in the 1980s, two more initiatives signaled discontent—nose to tail and slow food. All four movements were objections to food as a mere commodity. Independent butchers were supportive, seeing these trends as a return to the tradition that they and small farmers never really left behind—the practice of using the whole animal. Together they helped improved consumer choice with a greater range of foods and flavours.

This history offers context for the cheek, a very particular cut of meat. Cheeks are the muscles on either side of the

mouth that ruminants use to chew grass. Bison do this for hours on end making the cheek scrumptious. Low and slow will break down the collagen in the cheek. The best way to cook them is very slowly (for about three to four hours) at a low temperature, 300°F to 325°F.

Besides braising, bison cheeks can be cooked in other ways—smoked, slow-cooker or cured. Once cooked, they can be used in tacos, pasta, risotto or sandwiches. In France, they cut the cheek into cubes to make a *daube* (stew). Yes, cutting the cheek into smaller cubes

will reduce the cooking time, but, cooking the cheek whole results in better texture and flavour.

You decide if and when time is an issue.

There are other shortcuts. For example, you can skip marinating; after four hours in the oven, or all day in a crockpot, any advantage is lost. Some cooks have also stopped

browning; collagen needs time, not high heat. One more tip; use an everyday wine in the recipe. Save that bougie Cab to drink with the finished dish. But again, you decide. And please keep in mind that alcohol boils at a much lower temperature than water, 173°F. By the end of the approximately four hours of cooking, there will be no alcohol left in the pot.

Braised Bison Cheeks

- 2 bison cheeks (each cheek weighs just under a pound)
- 3 T (45ml) cooking oil, your choice
- 1 lg onion, chopped

- 2 carrots, chopped (or parsnips)
- 1 c chopped celery with some leaf
- 2 cloves garlic, lightly bruised
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 T rosemary, finely chopped
- 2 T fresh parsley, finely chopped
- ¼ t ground cumin
- 2 T salt
- 1 t black pepper
- 1 can (398 ml) tomatoes, drained
- 1 c red wine
- 1 c beef stock
- 2 sm square dark chocolate (about 2 oz, optional)
- 1 T miso (optional)

Rub half the salt and pepper into the meat. If you plan to sear the cheeks, add half the oil to the pot and brown the meat on all sides, about five minutes. Remove and set aside.

In the same pot, sauté the onions, celery and garlic for several minutes, then add the herbs and cumin. Stir well.

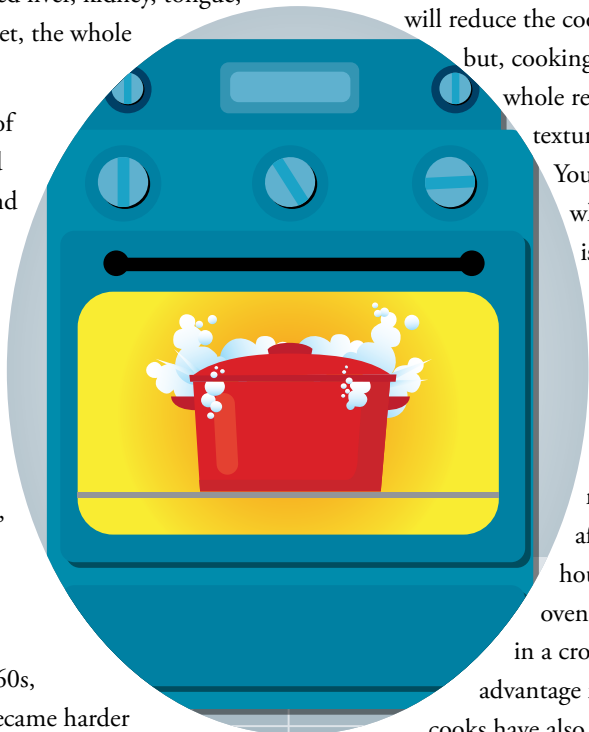
When the onions just start to brown, add the wine. Using a wooden spoon, scrape any brown bits off the bottom of the pot and then add the drained tomatoes and stock.

Stir in the chocolate and miso (if using) and place the bison cheeks on top of the vegetables. At least half the meat should be above the liquid. After an hour or so, check to make sure that the meat is in enough liquid, but not completely submerged. Braise for four hours at 300°F, or three and a half hours at 325°F.

Serves three.

Check with your favourite butcher to order bison cheeks. Popowich Meat Co. and Acme Meats carry Alberta bison. St. Albert's Meat Direct Inc. stocks their very own farmed bison. For a good overview of bison in general, visit the Canadian Bison Association, canadianbison.ca.-ML

Morris lives in the great city of Edmonton. He worked in the wine trade for years before retiring to his garden and writing. In researching this article he learned that bison have more ribs than cows. Seriously, they have an extra rib.





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THE TOMATO TOP 100

BEST THINGS TO EAT OR DRINK IN EDMONTON

WHAT WAS THE BEST THING YOU ATE LAST YEAR?


A dish at a restaurant? Something from a farmers' market?
A local craft beer or spirit? Let us know! Nominate the best thing
you ate or drank last year for the Tomato Top100.

HERE'S HOW TO ENTER:

On Our Website:

Visit thetomato.ca and click on
Top100 best things to eat.

Social Media:

 Tag your photo:
[@tomatofooddrink](https://www.instagram.com/tomatofooddrink)

 [facebook.com/
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Email us:

hello@thetomato.ca

Mail us a letter:

9833 84 Avenue,
Edmonton, T6E 2G1

The Top100 Best Things to Eat and
Drink will be featured in the March
April issue of *The Tomato food & drink.*

NOMINATIONS OPEN FRIDAY, JANUARY 6
NOMINATIONS CLOSE FRIDAY, JANUARY 27

*For the purposes of this competition, Edmonton includes
Sherwood Park, St. Albert and surrounding communities—we'll drive for food!