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Tools of
the trade



THE TOMATO TOP 100 2025

BEST THINGS TO EAT OR DRINK IN EDMONTON* 2025

NOMINATE 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:

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

Instagram: Use the hashtag **#Tomatotop100** and tag us **@tomatofooddrink**

Email: hello@thetomato.ca

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

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

NOMINATIONS OPEN MONDAY, JANUARY 6
NOMINATIONS CLOSE WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22



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Chef Winnie Chen, Fu's Repair Shop and her favourite kitchen tool.
Curtis Comeau Photography.

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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TOMATO TOP 100



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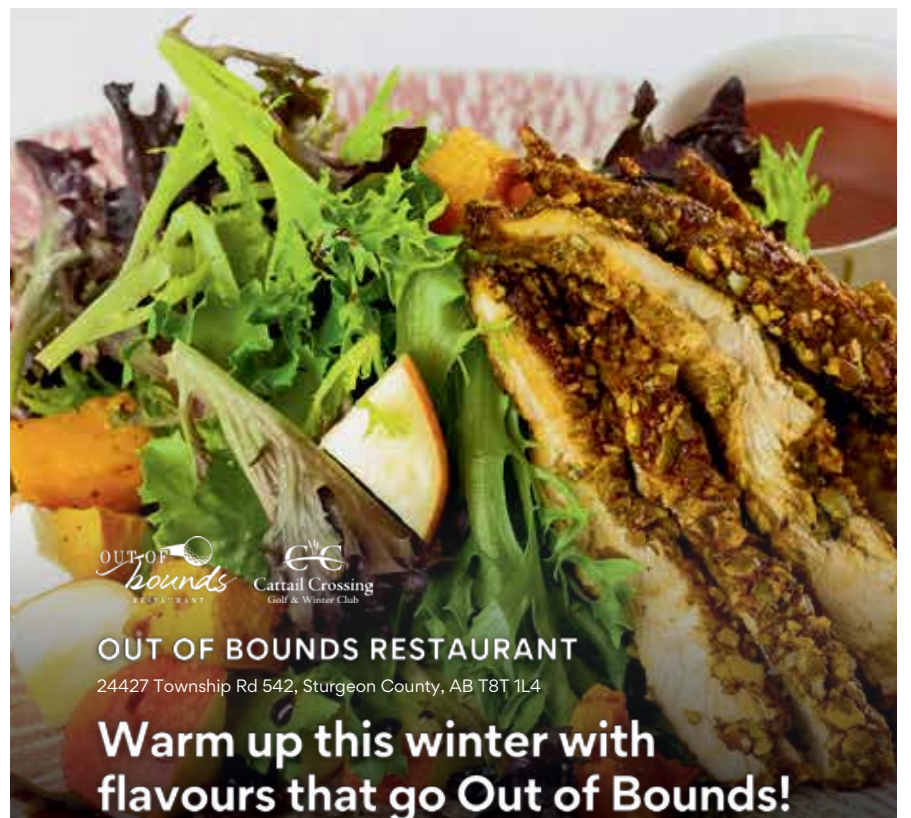
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Chef Julia Kundera's new winter menu is here! From the classic Harvest Chicken Salad to new favorites like Hungarian Goulash, it's all waiting for you at Out of Bounds!

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Lindon (L) and Luke of Beb's Bagels.

we just wanted to make a good bagel

Beb's Bagels started during the Pandemic. "We were sitting on our butts not playing music. I had always wanted to start a bagel shop and it seemed like the right time," says Lindon Carter, one half of Beb's Bagels; the other half is Luke Breiteneder. The bagels took off; and last summer they moved production to Mother Bakery in Nisku. What's next? "We're still two working musicians who make bagels, but we want Beb's to be an appetizing company, like Russ & Daughters (NYC), making foods that go with a really good bagel," says Lindon, "smoked and cured fish, different flavours of cream cheese." Pre-order for pick-up: bebsbagels.ca.

barbacoa opens barbaretta

Everybody's fave steak house in Spruce Grove is opening a new spot called Barbaretta. "It will be a moody, speakeasy-style bar, with small plates and a few entr  e-sized dishes," says exec chef Benjamin Perez who oversees both kitchens. General manager is Kayla Boyer, cocktails are by Ashley Sorochan. It will be the second spot by Tyler and Ashley Sorochan, who opened Barbacoa in April 2021. The steak house is lauded for its grass-fed, grain-finished Angus (and Wagyu cross) beef from North Country Meats. Most popular? The shareable whole rib loin and tomahawk cuts as well as the best-selling strip loin. Ellen Elton manages the busy 74 seats with a 28-seat patio in the summer. The wine list, with consultant Lindsay Sieviewright's help, is outstanding.



coffee and cocktails in chinatown

Chef Winnie Chen just opened a new spot in Chinatown, Boa & Hare, along with her brother William and his best friend Wilson Wong. The chef is their uncle Tommy Chung. The menu is modern with Chinese, Japanese and European influences. "Tommy's experience is in Japanese cuisine. Everyone associates me with Chinese food, but my training is more European," says Winnie, exec chef and partner at Fu's Repair Shop. Curious about the name? William and Wilson's zodiac signs. We love these signs of renewal in Chinatown—Little Bon Bon, now Boa & Hare. May it continue. Boa & Hare (Coffee and Cocktails), 10520 97 Street, open 9am-3pm and 5pm-11pm.

mark your calendars for chocofest

Why a chocolate festival? "Chocolate always means pleasure, our first memories are of chocolate—Easter eggs, Smarties. Remember 'when you eat your smarties do you eat the red ones last?'" says festival founder and director J'Anne Monteleone. "There was no event specifically for chocolate anywhere in Western Canada. I thought I'd start one.

"Expect a carnival atmosphere," says J'Anne. "There will be live entertainment, live music, lots of things for kids. It's going to be fun, but we are serious about chocolate." ChocoFest is April 25-26, at Millennium Place

main street moxie

Chef Daniel Costa's trio of main floor restaurants at the Citizen on Jasper is now complete. Mimi opens at 6pm for cocktails and sophisticated bar snacks in a sultry and luxurious atmosphere, with a jazz combo Sunday nights (chef Daniel Costa occasionally spins vinyl on Thursdays). New at Va is Pizza Night on Friday and Saturday: pre-order a large format pizza until 9pm (for now). Olia opened with a bang last fall and continues to surprise and delight with its effortless service and inspired cooking. Meanwhile, downtown: Bar Henry's excellent aperitivi/happy hour has a new menu and an expanded selection of wines by the glass. The intimate space in the Ice District now opens at 3pm. Renovations continue at Uccellino, next door to Bar Bricco on Jasper and 103 Street. Expect a



The classic cocktail at luxurious Mimi. rotation of house-made pastas, simpler dishes with bright flavours and a quicker service style in the new restaurant. "It will be pasta-centric, but more the pasta Italians eat every day, simpler, less decadent, something families can enjoy," says Daniel. Less butter and truffle, same integrity and precision that the Corso 32 Group is known for. The name and who helms the kitchen are TBA, opening early spring. And, expect another TOC TOC, the party at Bar Bricco, in February.

filistix says so long to downtown

"It's been a somber few months," says Ariel del Rosario, of the excellent downtown restaurant Filistix, which closed at the end of 2024. (The campus locations of Filistix remain open.) "We chose that spot because of all those office workers. Pre-pandemic we had lines out the door at lunch; 10 months later that was completely on its head. We hear there's a push to get people back to the office, but the reality is much different."

Instead, Ariel and co-owner Roel Canafranca plan a catering kitchen and pop-up and event spot. "Yes, we are doing yet another pivot. The catering arm is called The Flavour Agency: Purveyor of all Things Delicious and we are relaunching in-house delivery. Roel and Ariel are best



known for exceptional Filipino and South Asian dishes, but they will offer a broader menu for catering and events. "We had built something that's unique, an elevated Filipino dining experience and we kept the lights on during the pandemic with an in-house delivery service. Now we will expand our offerings." These are two accomplished and super resourceful chefs who specialize in flavour—if anyone can do it, they can. Expect the new website to be fully operational mid-January, flavouragency.ca. 🍷

Citrus Season



The refreshing waft of citrus aromas; the tangy hit on the tongue. We want this in the winter, especially after the rich and heavy food of the holidays. Lucky for us, this is when the stores flood with in-season (in California and Texas at least) Navels, Cara Cara, Texas Ruby Reds, Meyer lemons and, if we're lucky, Mexican limes. A lemon dressing for bitter greens, a squeeze of lime to wake up a bland dish—we are accustomed to citrus playing the supporting role. These recipes showcase main character energy.

Fennel Salad with Orange and Black Olives

An easy and delicious winter salad. Omit the olives if you don't like them, but they do provide a deliciously salty tang.

- 1 med fennel bulbi
- 1 sm orange
- 1 T lemon juice
- ½ c black olives, pitted and halved
- 4 T extra virgin olive oil (the best you have)
- arugula or mixed greens (escarole is nice here)
- large flake salt and fresh-cracked black pepper

Slice fennel into approx. ¼-inch slices, except for the woody core. Save some fronds for garnish and place in a bowl. Place the orange in a shallow dish (to catch the drips) and use a knife to slice off the skin, trim all the pith as well. Slice into approx ¼-inch slices and reserve. Mix the reserved orange juice, lemon juice and olive oil, season lightly and pour half over the fennel. Toss with tongs to mix.

Place washed greens on a large platter or shallow bowl. Follow with the fennel slices, orange slices and olives. Garnish with fennel fronds and drizzle the rest of the dressing over. Sprinkle some large flake salt, like Maldon, and a few cracks of pepper if desired.

Serves 4-6.

Vermicelli Salad with Wild Shrimp and Grapefruit

This aromatic salad is a tonic on a dreary day. Find frozen wild Argentine shrimp at Save-On or other grocery stores.

- 200 g thin rice noodle (vermicelli)
- 12 wild Argentine shrimp
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 pink grapefruit
- 3 green onion, thinly sliced
- handful mint leaves, rough chopped
- handful coriander leaves, rough chopped

Soak the vermicelli in hot water for about 10 minutes to soften. Drain, then rinse under cold running water.

Reserve and allow to drain thoroughly.

Poach shrimp with the bay leaf for about 5 minutes until they are opaque. Stop the cooking with an ice bath, or in very cold water. Reserve in the fridge.

Slice the ends off the grapefruit and stand on a plate or shallow dish (to catch the juice). Use a knife to remove the skin and the pith. Slice down between the segments to separate them, and trim off any pith left behind. Reserve juice for the dressing and the segments for the salad.

Dressing

- 12 cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 t fish sauce
- juice of 1 lime

- 2 t brown sugar
- 1 lg red chile, ½ diced, ½ sliced
- ½ English cucumber, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 med carrot, julienned or ribboned

Lightly squash the cherry tomatoes and whisk in the fish sauce, grapefruit juice, lime juice, sugar and diced chilli. Taste and adjust, if necessary, with more juice or fish sauce.

Toss the noodles in the dressing, then add everything else, except the sliced chile. Divide the noodle salad between plates and top with the sliced chile.

Serves 4 as a starter, 2 as a main course.

Carrot Salad with Lime and Cranberry

This lively salad is adapted from a recipe in Pucker, the wonderful citrus-themed cookbook by Calgarian Gwendolyn Richards.

- 3-4 smallish carrots
- ¼ c pistachios or pine nuts
- ¼ c dried cranberries
- 2 t lime juice (about 1 small lime)
- ½ t sugar
- kosher salt and fresh cracked black pepper
- 3 t extra virgin olive oil

Shave the carrots in ribbons using a peeler. Mix the carrots, nuts and cranberries together in a bowl. Whisk the dressing ingredients together (or shake in a jar). Taste for seasoning and drizzle a spoonful or two over the carrot mixture, adding more dressing if desired.

Serves 2-4.

Greek Lemon Potatoes

Just like those crispy and lemony potatoes served with souvlaki at Greek restaurants.

- 4 med baking potatoes (such as Russets)
- 4-6 cloves garlic
- lg pinch dried Greek oregano
- ¼ c extra virgin olive oil
- ½ c freshly-squeezed lemon juice
- ½ c water
- kosher salt and fresh-cracked black pepper

Preheat the oven to 475°F.

Peel potatoes and cut lengthwise into quarters. Lay in a single layer in a baking dish with the garlic and sprinkle with dried oregano. Combine oil, lemon juice, water and the salt and pour over the potatoes.

Bake in the hot oven for 25 minutes, then turn each potato slice over carefully. Add a bit more water to the pan if all the liquid has been absorbed and return

to the oven for another 25 minutes. The potatoes should now be golden brown with crispy edges, and the garlic caramelized. Remove the potatoes carefully and serve with lamb, roast chicken or fish.

Serves 4-6.

Lemon Rice and Clams with Dill Oil

Clams can be hard to find, but when you can, make this dish. Note: frozen clams usually come purged (cleaned) already.

- 2 T extra virgin olive oil
- 1 white onion, thinly sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 300 g medium-grain rice, rinsed
- zest and juice of 1 lemon
- ½ c white wine
- 2½ c fish stock
- 500 g clams, purged

Heat the oil in a large saucepan with a lid over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic, and cook, stirring occasionally, until onion has softened (about 7 minutes). Stir in the rice and half the lemon zest and cook until the rice is coated. Add the wine and cook until reduced by half. Add the stock. Cover and cook until the rice is tender, about 15 minutes.

Remove the lid, add the lemon juice, the rest of the zest and the clams to the pan. Cover and cook until the clams open and rice is cooked (about 20 minutes). Discard any unopened clams.

To serve, divide the rice and clams between bowls and spoon the dill oil over.

Serves 4-6 as a starter, 2-3 as a main course.

Dill Oil

- ¼ c (loosely packed) dill leaves, finely chopped
- ¼ preserved lemon, rind finely chopped
- ¼ c extra virgin olive oil

Combine ingredients in a small bowl, season to taste and stir to combine.

Lemon Chicken Tray Bake

This Greek-adjacent tray bake is easy and full of flavour, ideal for a quick dinner and makes for delicious leftovers.

- 4-6 bone-in chicken thighs
- 3 Russet potatoes, peeled and quartered
- ½ c white wine
- ½ c fresh lemon juice
- ⅓ c extra virgin olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 T dried oregano
- 1 t dried rosemary
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper
- 1 T salt
- 1 t pepper
- 1 c chicken stock, divided
- 1 lg red pepper, cut in large strips or chunks
- 1 t chopped fresh oregano or parsley, for garnish

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Oil a large baking dish or cookie tin. Mix the chicken, potatoes, lemon juice, wine, oil, garlic, dried spices, cayenne, salt and pepper in a bowl until well-coated, then arrange the chicken skin side down in the pan. Nestle the potatoes in and around the chicken pieces. Pour ⅔-cup stock over and roast for 20 minutes. Turn the chicken and potatoes and add the peppers. Continue to roast until the chicken is golden and thoroughly cooked, around 25 minutes more.

Remove the chicken and peppers and keep warm. Toss the potatoes in the juices in the pan, then put under the broiler. Broil until the potatoes are crispy, about 3 minutes.

Set the roasting pan on two burners on top of the stove. Remove the potatoes and put with the chicken and peppers on a platter and keep warm. Add the remaining stock and cook for about 2 minutes to concentrate flavours and scrape up all the roasted bits in the pan. Pour over the chicken and vegetables. Finish with parsley or fresh oregano (if using).

Serve 4-6.

Martha Stewart’s Lemon Squares (and a Grapefruit Variation)

There are many many recipes for lemon squares out there, but nothing beats Martha Stewart’s for ease of preparation and sheer lemonyness. They are a classic, just like your mother’s.

Crust

- ¾ c (1½ sticks) unsalted butter, frozen, plus more to coat the dish
- 1 ¾ c flour
- ¾ c icing sugar
- ¾ t coarse salt

Preheat oven to 350°F. Butter a 9x13-inch baking dish and line with parchment paper. Set aside. Grate frozen butter on a cheese grater with large holes; set aside. Whisk together flour, icing sugar, and salt in a large bowl. Add butter and stir until combined (mixture will look crumbly). Transfer to the prepared dish and press evenly onto the bottom. Freeze crust for 15 minutes, then bake until slightly golden, about 16-18 minutes. Leave oven on.

Meanwhile, make the top layer.

Lemon Filling

- 4 lg eggs, lightly beaten
- 1⅓ c sugar
- 3 T flour
- ¼ t coarse salt
- ¾ c fresh lemon juice (roughly 5 lemons)
- ¼ c whole milk
- icing sugar, for dusting

Whisk together eggs, granulated sugar, flour and salt in a bowl until smooth. Stir in lemon juice and milk.

Variation: Grapefruit Filling

- 1½ c sugar
- ¼ c flour
- 4 lg eggs
- 1 T grapefruit zest
- ¾ c grapefruit juice (about 1 large Ruby Red grapefruit)

Whisk the sugar and flour together in

a bowl. Add each egg, one at a time, whisking well after each addition. Then whisk in the zest and juice.

Either filling:

Pour the filling over the warm crust.

Reduce oven temperature to 325°F and bake until the filling is set and edges are slightly golden brown, about 18 minutes. Let cool slightly on a wire rack. Lift out; let cool completely on a wire rack before cutting into 2-inch squares. Dust with the icing sugar. Makes about two dozen.

Lime Pistachio Shortbread

Another great recipe from Pucker to add to your shortbread repertoire.

- 1 c flour
- ½ t salt
- ½ c unsalted butter
- ⅓ c sugar
- zest of two limes
- ⅓ c roasted unsalted pistachios, chopped finely

Whisk together flour and salt and reserve. Beat the butter and sugar together until fluffy, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the lime zest, and beat again until well-mixed, scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed. Add the flour mixture, and mix on low speed, scraping the sides if necessary, until the dough comes together. It may be a bit crumbly, but do not overmix.

Layout a large piece of plastic wrap and turn out the dough. Form into a log, about an inch and a half in diameter, and wrap tightly, smoothing and rolling it in the plastic to make a uniform shape. Refrigerate until well-chilled, up to overnight.

When ready to bake, preheat the oven to 350°F and line a baking sheet with parchment. Slice the dough into ¼-inch thick rounds. The bottom edge of the cookies may crumble, just squish back into place before placing on the cookie sheet. Bake until just golden, 8-10 minutes. Let cool slightly, then move to a wire rack to cool completely.

Makes 18-20 cookies. 🍪

The Italian Centre Shops generally have the widest array of citrus fruit, including pomelo and Seville oranges (for marmalade).



TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Photo essay by Curtis Comeau

I AM A CURIOUS PERSON WITH A KNACK FOR ASKING UNUSUAL QUESTIONS.

I love seeking answers, mainly through my photography. We know surgeons use scalpels, plumbers use wrenches, lawyers use pens, and chefs use knives.

I wondered ‘What tools do chefs use daily beyond the knife?’ To find out, I reached out to a handful of chefs in Edmonton who shared fascinating insights. For instance, they emphasized the importance of specialized cooking tools for regional dishes or noted a preference for wooden spoons over metal ones. Here are a few tools used by talented chefs who consistently create exceptional food in the city.

▼ STEPHEN HLUSHAK, VA

Va Caffè by the Corso 32 Group, introduced the Roman-style rectangular pizza with a thin, crispy crust called *al taglio* to Edmonton. Chef Stephen tells me his al taglio pans are his daily go-to. “These pans are very thin and lightweight but can hold high heat, which is needed for this style of pizza.” I noticed that Stephen always had a secondary tool—standard pliers from Home Depot.

“Ah, yes, these pliers are always with me. I use them because the dough is pressed right to the edge of the pan, you need a good grip, and when it is ready, oven mitts aren’t practical, so the pliers are perfect.”





◀ JULIA KUNDERA, OUT OF BOUNDS

Julia Kundera has been cooking in Edmonton for almost 40 years, from Café Mosaics in 1986 (the first restaurant she and her sister Zofia owned) to Out of Bounds Restaurant at Cattail Crossing. “I have used wooden spoons since I started my career. It wasn’t taught, they were always there. Even back in Poland when I was a child, all I knew was cooking with wooden utensils.” Julia prefers wood over metal because “wood is antibacterial, the handles never get hot when you leave them in a pot, and they don’t damage your cookware when used to scrape.” Julia even defaults to a wooden flipper for her eggs and omelettes.

▲ ERIC HANSON, THE MARC

When you have generations of chefs in your family dating back to WWI, it makes sense to choose your great-grandmother’s plating spoon as a daily tool when finishing his French-inspired dishes at The Marc. “My great-grandmother Glad Day Kemp used this spoon in 1939 when she cooked for King George VI and Elizabeth in Victoria, and I continue to use it to this day. The spoon is by Wm. Rogers & Son and is over 150 years old. Wm. Rogers spoons may be a dime a dozen now, but this one, to me, is priceless,” says chef Hanson.

◀ DOREEN PREI, GLENORA PARK

Doreen Prei chose her Bron stainless steel mandolin. “I like using the mandolin because you need to be focused when using it; in a way, it connects you more to the dish. I use it mainly for vegetables, I like the precision it offers,” she says. “I spent a lot of time in my youth learning precision cutting, so when I discovered the mandolin, I realized it isn’t a substitute for knife skills, but the mandolin makes some things easier.” Since chef Prei works in an exclusive private residence, the public can connect with her food at charity events, competitions like the Great Canadian Kitchen Party (where she took the gold medal) and on *CBC 740 AM Radio* Thursdays at 4:40pm.



Please see “Tools of the Trade” on following page.

Tools of the Trade

Continued from previous page

▼ PAUL SHUFELT, HAYLOFT STEAK + FISH

Paul Shufelt’s consistent tool is the Dry Ager at his steakhouse Hayloft. Purchasing an entire cow locally allows Paul to age his own steaks in-house. Dry aging creates a more tender, flavourful steak; the difference is noticeable. “Everything served in the restaurant is aged a minimum of 30 days,” says Paul. “Ribeye steaks often are aged 65 days. Our rare 120-day aged cuts have become quite sought after by steak aficionados in the city.” The Dry Ager is on full display in Hayloft’s dining room; it’s not uncommon for guests to see chef pulling perfectly-aged beef from it, and re-stocking regularly.





◀ WINNIE CHEN, FU'S REPAIR SHOP

Chef Winnie uses carbon steel woks daily to make modern Chinese food at Fu's. "They are designed for quick frying and sautéing and are so versatile, but using these woks for the first time was a learning experience. The most unique thing about cooking commercially with a wok is that the flame on a wok stove comes out like a jet engine—the flames are direct and concentrated. The wok master needs to work quickly, often with both hands, and you control the flame with valves by your knees. On a busy night, we have four woks on the go, it's fast-paced and an enjoyable way to cook."

◀ LINO OLIVEIRA, SABOR

It's no surprise that chef Lino likes to use a *cataplana* when cooking seafood, he's from Portugal after all. A *cataplana* is a Portuguese copper pot shaped like a hinged clamshell. "It's more of a cooking vessel than a pot," says Lino. Cataplanas, which are from the Algarve region, are essentially pressure cookers that lock in all the tastes, aromas and juices of the ingredients for an unforgettably rich flavour. Lino uses it to make various dishes, like a seafood stew, and often serves the dish right in the bottom half of the *cataplana*.

▲ TAMARA SOLON, CHARTIER AND MOTHER BAKERY

It's fitting that Chartier chef Tamara chose French onion soup bowls as her go-to tool. "I love the bowls, I find them at flea markets and customers give them to me. The deep bowls keep the soup hot before we put them under the salamander (commercial broiler) and bake the cheese on top." Most people think that the handle of this traditional bowl is just for the cook to take the hot bowl out of the salamander, but it's also used by the diner to hold the bowl steady. "Our French onion soup recipe uses three different kinds of cheese—swiss, provolone and locally sourced Lakeside Dairy Alberta Butter cheese. Therefore, one needs a sturdy handle to deal with the load of cheesy goodness, just make sure the handle isn't too hot." 🍷

Curtis Comeau, a prominent figure in Edmonton's photography scene for 24 years, and has been a valued contributor to The Tomato. His passion for the culinary world is evident in his work, where he captures the essence of restaurants, tells stories from the industry and shoots photos of chefs and food. Beyond food photography, Curtis' diverse portfolio includes commercial works, NHL hockey players and well-known Canadians. His favourite kitchen tool? Robust copper cookware from E. Dehillerin, Paris.



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The Proust Culinary Questionnaire

Spilt Bar

In the late nineteenth century, French novelist Marcel Proust answered a questionnaire about himself in a friend's Confession Album—the Facebook of his era.

Many have used the questionnaire for their own devices. The Tomato gives it a culinary twist.

Spilt is a zero-alcohol proof bar on Jasper Avenue, founded by Keenan Pascal, JoAnne Pearce and Andrew Paul. It's the culmination of three years of what JoAnne calls obsessive creativity, the first and only bar of its kind in Edmonton. "First it was Mock-up Mocktails, then two years working with (Keenan's company) Token Bitters to create the Temperance mocktail line," says JoAnne, the operating partner. "The bar felt like the next step. We understood the value of being the first bar; we wanted to set the tone," she says.

The bar team roster includes Calliope Draper, recent winner of the World 50 Best Bars Roku Scholarship and the first non-binary person to win it.

"She came to me for a job, despite being able to work anywhere. Not being from the bar culture, as I approach flavours from a culinary perspective in the kitchen, I was worried she would think we were a bunch of hacks and amateurs. But she has an inclusive nature and has helped to build a strong clientele. We're noticing that queer folks seem to feel more comfortable at Spilt, as do the neurodivergent, since regular bars with the screens and loud music are too stimulating."

Even if you aren't sober curious, Spilt is a fun spot to hang for an hour or two, with delicious drinks and a great vibe too.

JoAnne Pearce answers the Proust Culinary Questionnaire.

Hometown?

We are all from Edmonton.

Your favourite food and drink?

My favourite drink at the moment is a pear and cardamom horchata with

birdseye chili shrub and ginger syrup. Any kind of noodle or dumpling.

What would you be doing if you weren't creating amazing cocktails?

I really like having something to do with my hands—infusing, foraging and gardening. I'd be crafter-nooning under a blanket with a dog next to me.

What do you most appreciate in your friends?

Curiosity, kindness and empathy.

Your favourite qualities in a drink?

Intense flavour! Curiosity! Something surprising and creative. Drinks that emulate a food experience.

Who would be at your dream dinner table?

Jamie Lee Curtis, Tom Waits, Elizabeth Gilbert, Oliver Sacks, Stanley Tucci, Jordan Peele, Ali Wong, John Ronson, Jann Arden. What a conversation.

Who would cook?

My boyfriend (and Spilt partner)

Andrew. He would just want to eavesdrop from the kitchen, and probably make a podcast episode about it.

Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

I start talking like Ned Flanders—gosh darn, okey dokey—when I'm stressed. It always makes my team laugh.

Current culinary obsession/exploration?

Andrew and I are making our own vermouths and amaros using an immersion circulator. We are excited about one called Prairie Berry which uses unsung Alberta berries—chokecherries, low bush cranberries as well as haskaps and dandelion root.

Meaningful/crazy cooking experience?

Getting Spilt open. We went on a research trip to Chicago this summer, and mocktails were the bridge into a lively community of cocktail innovation. We met so many fun-loving people, and created a drink based on the Dave Matthews tour bus incident of 2004.

Best mocktail thing that ever happened to you?

Quitting drinking. It's changed my life

more than any other thing and took all of our lives in a different direction. My life is infinitely more interesting now.

Mentors?

I have beautiful mother figures in my life—my mom, a strong single mother, and her best friend Jan. Diana from the Art of Charcuterie has shared a lot of beautiful wisdom with me. She helps me roll with the punches and let go of my mistakes. Calliope, only 26, has taught us so much about technique and is so down to earth, not snooty, so gracious, no judgement.

Philosophy?

Overall, flavour is the utmost priority. Not drinking is not a deprivation; we make it joyful. Our goal is to build a space that appeals to all, whether or not they drink alcohol, because we are always up to something new.

What's next?

Expanding the educational and catering sides of the business. We do off-site gigs from 10-1100 people. And the Spilt Cookbook.

Spilt, 11909 Jasper Avenue, Wednesday to Saturday. Visit spilt.ca to book classes, events or catering. 🍷



A new festive season

In their own way, these post-Christmas months are as exciting as the recently-departed festive season was, or ever will be.

Let's call it chocolate season. It's a triple threat: the romance of Valentine's Day, followed by the springtime whimsy of Easter (bunnies, eggs, chickens) and finishing with big wind-up over Mother's Day.

It's all so darkly, sweetly mysterious.

Although the beginning of chocolate season may not be the best time to admit it, I am not what you'd call a true chocoholic. I can go days without it, no problem.

But then will come the winter blahs... the emotional quagmire of slip-on-the-ice misery. (And I ask myself: is this raspy little cough about to become pneumonia?)

On such a day, there's only one sure cure, and its name is chocolate. Hot chocolate. The best, if not the only answer. Thick enough to coat your spoon (maybe a whisker of cornstarch in the mix?) deeply dark, smooth as velvet, with just a hint of something else (cardamom? espresso?).

It arrives in a mug you can trust, heavy and hot enough to warm your hands on a cold night, best consumed in a corner lit by a single candle. A puff of whipped cream rests on the surface; a pillow of edible swan's down, neither aerated nor shot at warp speed out of a tin can. Just enough cream, but not so much that chocolate overflows. Sweet hot comfort in a mug. I feel better already.

That said, there are a couple of chocolate desserts for which I'd walk over hot coals. One is the chocolate pudding my Mom made every January, a simple little cornstarch-based dish. I loved the chewy skin that formed as it cooled. Yes, there are ways of preventing that skin, but why would you spoil the best thing about chocolate pudding?

The second one is the hot chocolate soufflé invented by David Lebovitz, an American chef currently living in Paris. His soufflé is perfection. A dark, fluffy cloud baked under a fragile crust. Talk about seductive dishes, if this one doesn't work, it's all over. (Lebovitz has published two recipes for chocolate soufflé, both available online. Use the one with cornstarch, it gets even

better as it rests out of the oven for a few minutes. If someone stays over, you can eat it for breakfast.)

The truth? Chocolate is all about romance. Especially now, all tidied up in a fancy heart-shaped box, beruffled and beribboned. Part of romance is mystery, evoked by the darkness of chocolate itself. Isn't that why we need a map with that box of Jacek? Otherwise we resort to sneaky methods: squeeze the mysterious bonbon just enough to crack the couverture, the better to see what's what. Is it coffee cream? Could it be mint, or some sort of ersatz fruit gum that doesn't belong in a chocolate? Or the white sugary goop that surrounds a maraschino cherry? Lacking a map, the only one I really trust is the reliably square chocolate with the rippled surface. Yay, a caramel.

And oh, the cakes. Devil's food cake, three layers, with waves of seven-minute seafoam icing rolling across the top. German chocolate cake, crusted with coconut, pebbled with walnuts. And brownies, delicious downfall of the formerly svelte.

Still, we persist in fixing what isn't broken. Black cocoa is trending. But why? Black cocoa (not just dark, but black) I can do without. Apologies to your classic Oreo, but black cocoa leaves residual grit in the bottom of my milk after dipping. A solid no to that one. Nor do I find much appeal in heavily-spiced Mexican chocolate featuring everything from dried rosebuds to aniseed and chili peppers.

There's a message here. Cherish the good stuff and let it bask in solitary splendour.

Remember that guy who said; 'don't mess with perfection?' He was talking about chocolate.

We're just in time for the launch of Western Canada's first and only chocolate festival, upcoming April 25 and 26 at Millennium Place in Sherwood Park. The Chocofest promises two days of tastings and competitions (bakers, start your ovens). Yes, there'll be a hot chocolate bar. Watch for it! ☘

Judy is a writer, a gardener and a passionate cook who loves music and dogs. She's also a dedicated omnivore who collects cookbooks and is mad at the fates over her shellfish allergy.



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The Smos at Home

Leanne Smoliak

A wedding in Poland

Our son's best friends were getting married in Pulawy, Poland and we were invited. We decided to make it a road trip with our son and daughter-in-law and her mum.

First stop Krakow. The central square is magnificent. Beautiful historic buildings surround a glorious market, chock-full of artisanal crafts, cheeses, meats to take home or to eat there, everything beautifully presented. Of course, we had all the various sausages and accoutrements.

Eating at a *bar mleczny* (milk bar) was high on our list.

Some are in handsome old structures with ornate chandeliers, and some are cafeterias. They are a holdover from the communist era when the government subsidized the food for workers. The tradition continues. Today Poland still foots the bill for most of your milk bar meal. We enjoyed traditional foods like borscht, cabbage salads, soups, fried porkchops and pierogi. All told, we visited three milk bars and spent, on average, \$7 per person at each. Thank you, Poland.

We also visited modern contemporary restaurants, and we found the food to be delicious and super seasonal. In September, pork was the protein of

choice and mushrooms were everywhere. We had some of the best mushroom soups, always with pencil-thin handmade noodles.

And in Lublin, where my grandmother was born, we saw *lody* (ice cream carts) everywhere. Apparently, lody is the first word children learn.

The wedding: Oh, what a wedding. The ceremony took place in a 300-year-old church and the reception in the Czartoryski Palace (dating from 1671) complete with peacocks roaming the grounds. The wedding began at 5 in the evening and ended around 3 in the morning.

First, we had a four-course dinner, followed by a dance break; then another full dinner, this time three courses, followed by, you guessed it, dancing. After the cutting of the cake, an entire smoked pig was presented, doused in vodka, then set on fire. After the flames died down, it was served with two more courses. The last full buffet was more beautiful savouries and desserts. Did I mention there were two bottles of vodka on each table? The band performed eight sets with five outfit changes and played everything from traditional music to Pink to Van Halen. Everybody danced, including all the *babcia*.

It was, hands down, the most exquisite,



Mushroom soup from the Tatra Mountains guesthouse.

spectacular wedding we have ever attended. Not to mention, the bride and groom are a wonderful couple.

We ate some of the best food of our trip at a small guest house in the brooding Tatra Mountains. The husband was the chef, his wife the server and their mushroom soup recipe is below.

The food is always something we are most interested in, but, being in this country with its centuries of history was profound. The Jewish quarter in Krakow, and Auschwitz-Birkenau, where we walked with heavy hearts thinking about the atrocities that occurred here 80 years ago. I came home with a menorah to serve as a reminder.

We can't wait to go back to Poland. We have so much more to explore. Warsaw, Gdansk, the salt mines. We have yet to eat a pork knuckle, and we want more rye soup, sauerkraut soup, pork in any variation, duck, short ribs, mushrooms, borscht, pierogies, beer and local ciders.

It was our first time in this wonderful country, but it won't be our last.

Zupa Grzybowa
(Wild Mushroom Soup)

We found delicious wild mushroom soup on so many menus. This recipe is adapted from one we enjoyed at a guest house near Zakopane in the Tatra Mountains.

- 1-2 oz dried wild mushrooms (porcini, morels or what you have in your pantry)
- 10-12 cremini mushrooms sliced
- 1 med onion, medium dice
- 1 med carrot, medium dice

- 1 rib celery, medium dice
- 2 T butter
- 2 T flour
- 8 c chicken (or vegetable) stock
- 2 T chopped fresh dill
- salt and pepper
- 1c crème fraiche or sour cream
- 1 c cooked thin soup noodles

The night before you plan to make the soup add the wild mushrooms to 1 cup of hot water and let sit overnight. In the morning, drain the water, rinse the mushrooms, and add a fresh cup of hot water to the mushrooms. Soak for 4-6 hours.

In a medium to large pot melt the butter and add the cremini mushrooms, onion, carrot and celery. Sauté until the onion is translucent. Add the flour and stir until the butter has absorbed the flour. Add stock and bring to a simmer.

Drain the wild mushrooms and add the mushroom water to the soup. Chop the drained mushrooms into medium pieces and add to the soup. Simmer at least one hour. Season.

Stir in the dill and ½ c of the crème fraiche or sour cream. Divide the cooked noodles between 4 bowls. Ladle the soup over and finish with a dollop of crème fraiche or sour cream.

Serves 4. 🍷

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."



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TOMATO bite



Veronika Kazimiera (Out of Bounds Restaurant) Federica Mascheroni (Volpaia) and Tara Smith (roving somm) after a tasting a RGE RD.

Federica Mascheroni was here last fall

for dinners and tastings of her family’s estate, Castello di Volpaia. It’s in the Radda subzone, the heart of Chianti Classico and one of the highest parcels in the region. The wines are biodynamic, certified organic since 2003.

She talked about life there, governed by tradition, culture, the rhythm of agriculture, geography and Italian wine law. “It’s about a family,” says Federica; my mother is the boss, my brother and me. We have 45 ha of vineyards. We plan to grow more—we just cleared some old fields above 700 metres. Right now, that is too high for Chianti Classico, the wines will be IGT, but with the changing climate we are looking for more freshness. Also, when we say we are doing something, it’s at least seven years before you see anything. It’s slow work in agriculture.”

Italian wine law governs how they grow vines, how they age the wines and what they can call it when it’s ready for the market. In Chianti Classico it’s a constant striving for higher quality.

“In the ’80s our region made a lot of mistakes. It was sending out some not really good wines. The good producers started saying ‘our land is different’ and created the super Tuscan. This helped us incredibly and helped change the rules in Chianti Classico.”

Chianti Classico and Chianti Classico Riserva are required to be at least 80 per cent Sangiovese with no white grapes allowed (anymore). Classico ages at least one year in barrel, Riserva at least two years, plus three months in bottle. Volpaia’s location means the wines have great aging potential, even Chianti Classico.

“I just tasted the 1990 CC in magnum and wish we could sell only magnums,” says Federica, “it’s the perfect size for aging, it’s about the proportion of cork to bottle.”

Then there is Gran Selezione. “This is a single vineyard wine, all your own grapes with 30-months aging. Our Gran Selezione Coltassala was born a *vino de tavola*, then it was an IGT, then a Chianti Classico Riserva, then a Gran Selezione in 2010 when they brought in the new designation. Nothing changed in the wine, just the rules.

“Freshness is a signature of the wines of Volpaia. It’s not just elevation, it’s the forests and the hills with natural shade. The elegance and minerality comes from elevation and the soil, water comes from the soil not the sky.”

More and more wine producers are speaking about the role wine plays in the culture, and Federica puts it poetically. “When I was a child we would have on our break a slice of bread with some wine and a spoonful of sugar. It wasn’t to make the children

drunk, it was part of the culture, what we made on our land, our way of living. It’s not the culture now, but wine cannot be compared to alcohol. Wine is to be drunk in the right way, with food and in the right proportion.”

2021 Chianti Classico DOCG

Fresh, elegant, ageable, a best buy for the money. Such quality for the money. Volpaia uses some Merlot in the blend to make it easier to drink earlier. “2021 is an interesting vintage,” says Federica; “with power and elegance, freshness and very nice fruit.” Drink with tomato-sauced pastas, burgers, grilled vegetables.

2020 Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG

“Still a baby. The full personality of this wine is made by the food,” according to Federica. Fresh, elegant, 100 per cent Sangiovese. Drink with roast meats, especially wild boar, pastas.

2020 Coltassala DOCG

The five per cent Mammolo in the blend contributes compelling aromas of violets, red fruits and the lovely colour. The oak and tannin are well-integrated in this complex, well-structured wine. Drink with your best steaks, Korean ribs.

2020 Balifico Toscano IGT

Juicy red fruit, with tremendous structure due to the upfront tannins. “Balifico goes to the gym,” says Federica, commenting on the structure. Much darker in colour due to the 35 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon. “The Cab keeps it more fruit forward as well,” says Federica.

2018 Vin Santo del Chianti Classico

Trebbiano and Malvasia used to go into the red wines, but now they are reserved for the classic sweet white wine of the region, Vin Santo. The grapes are picked early to ensure high acidity, hung to dry, packed away in barrels that contained last year’s wine (and all the flora) then left to ferment for months. The result? A fully oxidised, lusciously complex sweet wine, meant to be drunk in small quantities with cheeses, foie gras, nuts. A treat.

Martin Ray was a protégé of Paul Masson and founded a wine company in 1943.

He was a wine revolutionary too. In the dark days of Hearty Burgundy and California Chablis, Martin Ray popularized varietal labelling, that is, naming the wine after the principal grape variety. Fast forward: In 1990, Courtney Benham discovered some Martin Ray wines tucked away in a warehouse and revitalized the brand. Today Martin Ray and its sister label, Angeline, work primarily with selected growers in cooler climate sites such as Santa Cruz and Sonoma. “We seek out vineyards close to the ocean. We farm in the Russian River and we have long term contracts with growers,” says Henry Cilek, director of global export, Martin Ray Vineyards & Winery. “It’s a collaborative process, we call our own pick dates, for example.” The wine making team, headed by Leslie Renaud (a Pinot Noir specialist, with over 30 vintages in hand), is primarily female. The wines are tremendous value, especially for California, Angeline being in the \$25-\$30 range, Martin Ray around \$50. “The big differentiating factor at the Angeline price point is that the wines are on the dryer side and are 100 per cent what it says on the label,” says Henry. Interesting too, all the wines are spontaneously fermented with native flora. “We don’t struggle with fermentations—we make wine in a building that has been producing continuously since 1881; we have our own flora.”

2023 Angeline Sauvignon Blanc (California, USA)

A great example of straight up Cali Sauv Blanc, not too gooseberry, not too eucalyptus, just great flavours and textures, balanced, accessible and delicious.



2022 Angeline Pinot Noir (California, USA)

Fans of the heartbreak grape watch helplessly as their favourite wines become more and more expensive. Here is hope—the Angeline is a gem and affordable too. Nicely realized, with balanced acidity, complexity and lots of flavour. Drink with grilled salmon, duck dishes, roast chicken.

2022 Angeline Cabernet Sauvignon (California, USA)

Super approachable, a little crunchy, with lively red fruits, well-integrated wood and mellow tannins. Drink with burgers, casual meals, popcorn.

2023 Martin Ray Concrete Chardonnay (Russian River Valley, USA)

Giddy-up Chardonnay lovers, this is fantastic. More linear than some, more Chablis-like perhaps, with concentration in spades, lovely texture (thank you concrete eggs) and a luxuriant mid-palate. Absolutely delicious. From the Mill Station Vineyard, Dutton Ranch. Drink with roast chicken, pork dishes, creamy pastas.

2022 Martin Ray Sonoma Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma Valley, USA)

A lovely, brambly nose with dark cherry and berries, followed by juicy red fruit, integrated tannins around a well-balanced core with an attractive depth of flavours and lingering finish. From vineyards in the Alexander and Dry Creek Valleys. Drink now with grilled meats, wild game or mushroom dishes, or cellar two-three years.

Rania Burns wanted to create a wine that reflected her love of the Prairies.

Rania's extensive experience in wine (she possesses a Masters of Wine Marketing and Management from INSEEC in Bordeaux, was marketing director at the Okanagan's Quail's Gate and associate export director at California's Francis Ford Coppola) helped her decide what she wanted Prairie Souls to be—classic California varieties, approachable and delicious, juicy and aromatic, in the \$25 range.

"This is a passion project; I'm leading from the heart. I want it to be something dear to me. My family had an outfitting business, and being in the outdoors was a big part of my upbringing. These are the people I had in mind, people enjoying being around the table with each other."

She also wanted the label to reflect the beauty of the Prairies and the sense of community she has always found here. She fell in love with Peace Country artist Suzanne Sandboe's depictions of Prairie life. "We chose compelling symbols of rural community—the grain elevator and the windmill. Suzanne is an amazing human being as well as an incredible artist."

Rania plans two more wines with art by Suzanne, coming this summer. The wines are made by the Scotto family in Lodi, southern California.

She wanted to make sure that the wines are available around the province and she has spent considerable time finding all the good spots in rural Alberta (the hidden gems she calls them) like Marrow Restaurant and the Burrow Market Bistro, Camrose, 1906 Bistro, Didsbury and the Pommery Hotel in Grande Prairie. Find in Edmonton at Color de Vino, Vine Arts and Wine & Beyond.

2022 Prairie Souls Chardonnay (Lodi, USA)

A Breezy Day possesses warm citrus and tropical white flower aromas, followed by fresh green apple and pear flavours; full-bodied with a lingering finish. Drink with glazed ham, chicken dishes.

2021 Prairie Souls Cabernet Sauvignon (Lodi, USA)

An Old Friend has ripe black fruit, full bodied, with rich, mellow tannins and some herbaceousness on the finish. Drink with friends.



Kelsey Roos (Color de Vino) with Mary Taylor at dinner at La Petite Iza.

Mary Taylor is a modern négociant, committed to delicious wine at great prices.

Her goal? To make small production wine made in small villages accessible to all. Her idea, honed after spending much time working in wine in France, was to help wine lovers cut through European terminology, the appellation system (AOC, AC, DO, DOC and so on) which identifies wine by where it's grown rather than by grape variety. That terminology, so incredibly helpful if you know it, can seem incomprehensible if you don't. Instead, she sought out family businesses, small growers, many of whom she had known for years—most of whom are growing organically, if not biodynamically, and using minimal technique in the cellar—and called the wines Mary Taylor White Label. Where they originated (so central to the European system and to quality) and the grower/winemaker is still on the label, but savvy shoppers—those who look for quality at a great price—can see the cleanly-designed white label and pick up the wines with confidence, no matter the provenance. These wines are like the perfect white shirt in your wardrobe—indispensable. Mary Taylor also works in Spain and Portugal, just look for the white labels.



2022 Rosé Christophe Avi Agenais IGP (Southwest France)

Wafting strawberry cut with limey citrus aromas, not simple, beautifully fresh. A blend of Cab Sauv and Cab Franc, drink with shellfish, charcuterie, roasted nuts.

2022 Anjou Blanc AC (Loire Valley, France)

This Chenin Blanc has a gorgeous texture, well-balanced acidity and a sprightly finish. Love the subtle salinity. Delicious and lovely with fish.

2022 Valencay Sophie Siadou AC (Loire Valley, France)

This blend of Gamay, Cot (Malbec) and Pinot Noir is so engaging—expressive and gentle. Savoury aromas of late summer herbs and red fruit, tannins with enough grip to keep it interesting and a long finish with pleasing minerality. Not heavy, not clunky, rather fresh, easy on the system. Drink with grilled meats, mushroom dishes. 🍷



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Feeding People

A cherished recipe or a disaster in the making?

My anticipation was building. The haphazard pile of pots and pans along with the assorted splatters and spills that had recently invaded my kitchen had been miraculously tamed. A tantalizing aroma that teased of good things to come swirled enticingly through the air. And a big pot of soup, the star of the day, bubbled away happily on the stove.

My surprise was ready. I was ready.

The whirl announcing the opening of the garage door cut through the air, followed shortly afterwards by the appearance of my husband. I couldn't contain my grin or my excitement—even before a 'hi' had escaped from my mouth, I was gesturing enthusiastically toward the pot.

He dutifully lifted the lid. Silence. A look. A look I was not anticipating. A look that was not brimming with excitement.

The words 'you made cabbage soup?' escaped shakily from his mouth, his strained voice matching his pained look.

The 'uh-huh' that squeaked out of my mouth was both deflated and bewildered. He loved cabbage soup?

A visit to his mom's had always meant opening the door and being greeted by the hearty, slightly sweet, slightly pungent aroma of a pot of cabbage soup bubbling away on the stove. In the kitchen we would find my future mother-in-law, planted by the stove, apron on and wooden spoon in hand, lovingly attending to the massive red ceramic soup pot in front of her.

Before small talk, before hugs, heck, even before sitting down, an almost-overflowing bowlful would be ladled out and plunked on the table. A gentle but assertive push would guide my husband into place and heads-down, enthusiastic consumption (slurping included) would ensue. Only after the bowl was completely devoid of all remnants of soup would the real visit start.

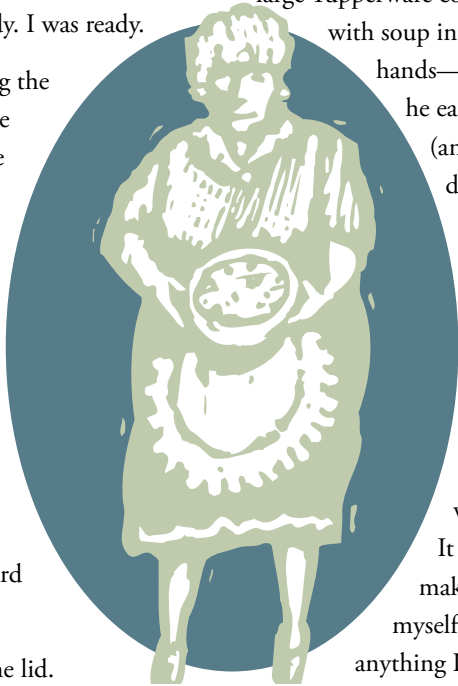
Later, as we made our way to the door, my mother-in-law would press a large Tupperware container brimming with soup into my husband's hands—a container he eagerly accepted (and subsequently devoured).

While I was often around when bits and pieces of the soup were being put together, I never paid much attention. After all, why would I need to? It wasn't like I would make the soup for myself (I wasn't a fan), and anything I made could never compete with my mother-in-law's efforts, anyway.

But time marched on, and my mother-in-law got older. The distinctive smell of cabbage soup greeted us at the door less and less often, and our visits never seemed quite the same.

It took a few years, but I eventually came up with what I thought was a brilliant idea: I would make cabbage soup. As a surprise.

I couldn't just consult a recipe, though. Like many cherished family recipes, this one wasn't written down. It simply lived inside my mother-in-law's head. She was beyond happy to share her expertise, though, and we spent a top-secret afternoon together, chopping and stirring and tasting and visiting.



I went home and carefully tucked the recipe away.

A day was picked, and my planning began.

The big day arrived and, well, we all know what happened. That was the day the 'you made cabbage soup!?' comment escaped from my husband's mouth. All before he had even tasted it.

After an onslaught of interrogation, my husband reluctantly admitted that no, he didn't really like cabbage soup. At all. Years ago, perhaps, but his tastes had changed. It all came down to obligation. He didn't want to disappoint his mom—something he hadn't shared with me. It didn't explain his eager consumption of leftovers, though, which always took place firmly removed from his mother's watchful eye. But, whatever.

It took a lot to get that out of him. Monumental flop doesn't even begin to describe the day.

Cabbage soup won't ever be on the menu again, but one glance at the recipe brings back a flood of memories. Overwhelmingly good ones, for the large part. And even the incident brings a smile to my face. Now.

But, quite honestly, cabbage soup is an outlier in the whole family recipe category. Most family recipes bring with them a wave of fond memories and warm emotions. There's a reason they're called cherished recipes.

I wish I had paid more attention with my own family's recipes. My mom is no longer with us, but I am thankful her wooden recipe box stuffed full of tried-and-true recipes is. On tattered and stained recipe cards, on assorted scraps of paper sporting my mother's distinctive scrawl. Some of them aren't in the recipe box at all; they are firmly etched in my or my siblings' heads, or already copied and filed in our own recipe boxes years ago.

But there are recipes that she used to make that are nowhere to be found. Recipes we grew to love but didn't make often enough just to know. Special occasion recipes. Like our beloved

chocolate fingers, squares made from a combination of sugar, butter, cocoa, marshmallows, walnuts and graham wafer pieces. The simplest ingredients ever, but the execution has stumped me and my siblings. My sister, one of the greatest recipe sleuths of all time, has tried countless recipes and endless variations, to no avail.

Every Christmas, we still crave them desperately.

So pay attention to those family recipes. Cherish them. Write them down. Each and every one comes with its own memories and occupies a place in our hearts. Even a recipe like cabbage soup.

My Mother-in-Law's Cabbage Soup

2 lbs	pork side ribs
8-10 c	water
1 t	salt
1 t	sugar
¼ t	crushed red pepper
2	bay leaves
1 lg	onion, chopped (or 3-4 small shallots)
1-2 jars	wine sauerkraut, rinsed
½ c	carrots, finely chopped
2 T	condensed tomato soup

Put the ribs in a pot with water. Bring to a boil and reduce heat. Skim the foam off the top. Simmer for one hour. Add salt, sugar, crushed red pepper, bay leaves and chopped onion. Simmer for another hour. Take the ribs out and strain the liquid. Put the ribs and the liquid back in the pot and add 3-4 cups sauerkraut. Simmer another half hour. Add carrots. Simmer 15 minutes or until the carrots are done. Add the condensed tomato soup, stir and serve in big bowls with lots of napkins!

Serves 6-8. 🍷

Jan Hostyn is still not a cabbage soup fan, but she did find herself craving sauerkraut while writing this article. She now has a tub that lives in her fridge, thanks to the farmers' market.



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Tomato Travel

Mary and Juanita's excellent Banff Springs adventure

We set off in the first proper blizzard of the season, with the semis carving whiteouts as we creep by the pick-ups in the ditch. No Carstairs-Cremona-Cochrane route today.

The storm cleared west of Calgary and we soared into the Rockies. Almost a blue bird day.

I had received an invite to the Tree Lighting Ceremony, the kick-off event to Christmas at the Castle at the Banff Springs. Who better to go with me than Juanita Roos of Color de Vino. We had gone on an excellent adventure to London a few years back, why not the same to Banff?

The hotel was bustling, front desk staff efficient and welcoming. Luggage stored and with an hour or so to kill before actual check in, it's time to hit the Rundle bar.

Our poor server! Confronted with two women fresh off a four-hour road trip and in need of some refreshment. The mood? Festive. That large and comfortable room was filled with family celebrations (one was at least three generations, if not four), Christmas partygoers starting the revelry early, a few folks just off the slopes. Exactly what you want to see in a winter resort bar. Not quite the après ski of decades ago (chips, beers, dancing in ski boots). That's ok. Now, it's Plymouth martinis.

Christmas officially starts at the Springs with the lighting of the majestic tree in Mt. Stephen Hall. Edmonton's Cory Christopher was on hand to zhush it up. Besides the designing and the planning and the procurement of all the lovely decorations, it took eight people a full day to transform the 20-foot tall fir into a vintage railway travel-themed fantasy.

Magical. Santa joking, kids dancing, band singing Mariah Carey. The most cynical Christmas holiday-hater would have been charmed.

The buffet was magnificent, a hearty mountain repast (with an adorable toy train weaving among the various dishes). It was look, don't eat though, as we were on our way to dinner at Castello.

Dinner at Castello Italiana

How have I never been here before? Is this Banff's best kept secret, or am I clueless? Take your pick. Now that I have found it, I'm not letting go. Our server Rudy, originally from Lloydminster, is a long time Banffian and a total gem. Friendly, unobtrusive, moved us along with just the right amount of conversation. As I watched him tend to other guests, I became convinced that Rudy needs to do a master class in restaurant service. He made it look effortless.

We had a starter to split, then superbly-prepared, house-made pasta. Daniel Costa good. Not a large menu, concise, well-chosen wine list, a terrific experience.

To the clouds

When we got to our room overlooking the Bow Valley, Juanita took one look at the cute twin beds, yelled 'cloud,' then belly-flopped onto hers. The most confirmed insomniac would not have any trouble sleeping here.

We woke up to room service coffee and croissant. Do hotel rooms no longer have in-room coffee? Yes, they do. Our coffee service, complete with Nespresso, a full range of teas and a kettle, was tucked into a drawer which we discovered Monday morning, right before we checked out. Note to self, always explore the room before dialing room service.



Festive Holiday Brunch in The Vermillion Room

It may surprise some to know that I am not actually a huge fan of brunch. I like making brunch dishes, at home, but going for brunch? Meh. But I reserve the right to change my mind.

This brunch was revelatory—fresh, lavish, replenished often, with seafood stations, numerous eggs dishes, breakfast meats, a good-looking bread station, cheeses and desserts. And grapefruit mimosas.

The Vermillion Room, the Springs' French brasserie, takes full advantage of the views across to the Fairholme Range. We saw a family dining in one of the 360 Domes on the terrace—magical with the snow falling all around. Breakfast the next day? Even more successful, a perfectly turned and fluffy French omelette along with the signature oatmeal.

But the best part of The Vermillion Room has to be the amazing Annie, the resourceful and calm maitre'd who works the room, tablet in hand, with joyful equanimity.

Can't go to Banff and not have fondue

A big part of the enormous appeal of the Alpine stube-style Waldhaus, is that it's deep in the woods near the river. You navigate several sets of stairs to get there, which makes it a bit of a quest, and helps work off all that cheese. We live in hope.

The main room was being refurbished. Instead we went downstairs to the rustic pub for fondue. You could order something else, but why would you?

Lest you think all we did this weekend is eat and drink and splash about in the spa, we did spend a lot of time outside. That is the true luxury of the Banff Springs, one moment, sybaritic pleasures, next, forest bathing.

Christmas at the Castle is a sparkling way to kick off the holidays, but don't wait 'til next season. Winter remains my favourite time to visit, less crowded, more affordable and always magical. 🍷

Mary Bailey is the editor of The Tomato. Find Mary and Juanita's Excellent London Adventure at thetomato.ca.

Facing page: first glimpse of the Fairholme Range mountains. This page counterclockwise from top: Juanita with oysters and bubbles at Rundle Bar; The Vermillion Room's executive chef Garrett at brunch and maitre'd, Annie.





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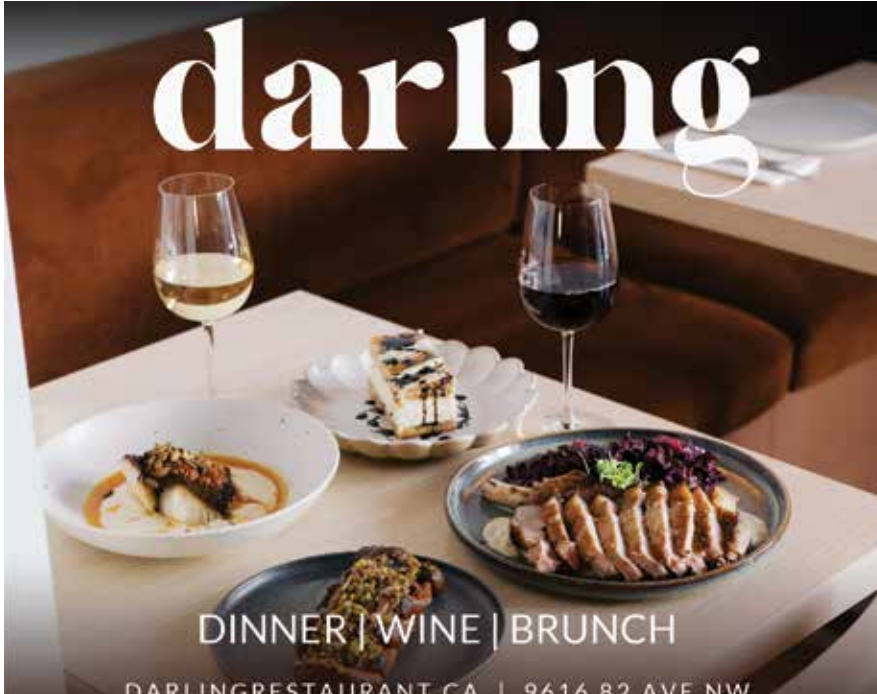
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Kitchen Sink

What's new and notable

wine tastings happenings and events

At **Three Vikings** (10713 124 Street) this winter: the **Torskeklubben** (Norwegian Club) is having a *smørbrød* (open-faced sandwich) dinner on Tuesday, January 14. Love beer? Enjoy Happy Beer Street's takeover, **For The Love of Beer** on Valentine's Day, and the **Dead Vinyl Society** has a buy-sell-trade on Sunday, March 2 from 3-6pm.

The **Marc's** first **Sunday Supper** of the year is on January 26. The theme is Iberian—three courses plus reception and dessert, paired with five tasty Spanish and Portuguese wines. Call 780-429-2828 or book at themarc.ca.

product news

From January 2-January 14, Christmas is 50 per cent off **Heart of the Home**. Le Creuset is on sale at 20 per cent off from January 14-19, in-store only. February's promo is 15 per cent off fondues and raclette sets.

Isabelle Ortiz Martinez, owner of **Olive Me** and producer of those delicious stuffed olives, celebrates 25 years in business. Find them at **Bibo**, **Community Natural Foods**, **Euro Deli** (Bountiful Market) all **Italian Centre Shops**, **Mercato**, the **Old Strathcona** and **St Albert Farmers' Markets**, all **Ribeye Butchers** and **Tesoro**.

Amaranth Whole Foods has introduced new ground chicken, turkey bison, beef, and elk called **Primal Blends**. Each frozen 500-gram packet contains up to 20 per cent organ meat. "This is an easy way to get the nutritional benefits of organs—essential minerals like selenium, magnesium, iron and vitamins like B12 and niacin," says Tim Wong, marketing manager at Amaranth. Suppliers include Winter's Turkey in Dalemead, Alberta beef, plus chicken, elk and bison from farms in Western Canada.

restaurant buzz

Out of Bounds (24427 Township Rd 542, outofboundsrestaurant.ca) has a new menu featuring sturdy winter dishes such as a Hungarian goulash as well as the harvest chicken salad, winter beet salad and salmon potato cakes. Check it out!

Think of the **Riverbank Bistro** in St. Albert for Valentine's Day. Menus and bookings available soon at riverbankbistro.ca

openings

Frank's Community Pub (8815 99 Street) opened in December, serving beers and grilled cheese sandwiches. **Bodega's** seventh location is opening soon at 10314 Whyte Avenue. **Fox Burger** now has a third location in Westmount (11003 124 Street). New to Old Strathcona is **Taqueria El Chingon** (8116 101 Street), a sister resto to Three Amigos, haven't checked it out yet, but will soon. We love tacos! There is a new member of Happy Beer Street, **Southbound Brewing** (9943 69 Avenue) helmed by Sue Kiernan, who many will remember from the Empress Ale House on Whyte Ave. Congrats! **Johnny's Namao** (24400 AB-37, #9), an over 100-year-old neighbourhood grocery store in Namao has been brought back to life by a fourth-generation member of the same family. Check it out! **Nuestra Coffee Shop** (7601 112 Avenue) across from Borden Park, is now open daily 7am-4pm. **Candid Coffee** has opened in the Highlands (6752 75 Street). We're especially excited about Candid because they will serve Beb's Bagels. Open daily. **Paper Birch Books** in the Piazza (10825 95 Street) now has a coffee bar, open 10am-6pm every day except Sunday, when it will close at 5pm. **Transcend Coffee** (12332 106 Avenue) is open from 8am-3pm every day.

closings

Three significant pillars of the YEG food scene closed in 2024. **Meuwly's** has shuttered the Secret Meat Club subscription service along with the store and daily food service. They remain open for catering, special events and pop-ups. **Filistix's** downtown location closed at the end of the year. The campus location in **SUB** (8900 114 Street) as well as **Takam Market** at MacEwan University are still going strong. **Biera** and the onsite brewery in the **Ritchie Market** (99570 76 Avenue), have ceased operations. Other parts of **Blind Enthusiasm** thrive—Biera Market plans expansion and the Monolith (9919 78 Avenue) continues with its barreled beer program. 🍷

Send interesting food and drink news for Kitchen Sink to hello@thetomato.ca.

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