

**REGIONAL QUALIFIER FOR THE CANADIAN
CULINARY CHAMPIONSHIP**

Providing young Canadians the opportunity to be extraordinary through sport, music and food.



Scott Redekopp of Yellow Door Bistro wins Kitchen Party gold in Calgary

In we flew from Toronto, mist-shrouded, eternally autumnal, a very Rivendell if you know the routes through the warm ravines, to winter's stone-cold grip on snow-smothered Calgary – where only an epic Kitchen Party could warm the cockles of 400 grateful hearts. Which is just what happened. What a privilege to hear so many superb musicians – Jim Cuddy, Geoffrey Kelly and Anne Lindsay, Devin Cuddy and Sam Polley – not to mention Dustin Bentall and Barney Bentall, on tour with his band The Cariboo Express, who all joined the orchestra on stage – Trixie Berkel on accordion, Stephanie Cadman on fiddle, Geoff Hicks on drums, Rob Becker on bass and Scott Smith on guitar. Altogether, this was surely the biggest line-up we've ever had at a kitchen party! From the first bars of Home for a Rest, the crowd was on its feet, dancing up a storm. In between musical sets, the great Curt Harnett (our eloquent emcee) introduced us to some of Canada's most renowned Olympians – Chandra Crawford, Helen Upperton, Jesse Lumsden and Beckie Scott, the last of whom brought her own inspiration to the evening as founder of Spirit North. Yes, amigos, it was a stellar ensemble.

Nor did anyone go hungry. There was a great deal of beef in the room – from five of the eight competing chefs – and culinary standards set last week in Edmonton were joyfully sustained. The people's choice award went to Chef Lam Pham of Pure Modern Asian Cuisine who paired a meltingly tender beef short rib with a bright and zingy Dungeness crab salad, full of exciting flavours.

By that time, the culinary judges had made their own decisions. Alas, Calgary's Senior Judge, John Gilchrist, came down with a cold and was not present but Chef Duncan Ly, a former Kitchen Party champion, stepped nobly into his shoes at two hours' notice. Beside us sat Michael Allemeier (cook, Master Chef, dishwasher, climber and always up for an adventure!); Jamie Herbison (retired broadcaster. wine educator. WSET Level 3, professional and passionate omnivore); Jinhee Lee (Chef-owner of Jinbar, Canadian Culinary Champion emeritus) and the 2019 Calgary gold medallist, Jenny M. Kang of Orchard.

We awarded our bronze medal to Sterling Cummings of Bridgette Bar. He chose to work with Nova Scotia lobster, cooking the briefly steamed tails sous vide with butter until they were at the point of tenderness. He cut them into large chunks, separated on the plate by slices of tangy hakurei turnip, braised as a barigoule with vegetables, herbs, white wine, vinegar and oil, then finished sous vide in a liquified version of the braise. The lobster bodies became a rich, creamy sauce

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flavoured with curry spices, saffron and vermouth, drizzled with two oils – a green herbal infusion and a red one of lobster and chili. Buttery fried brioche croutons, tossed in an aromatic butter, were perfect for mopping up the generous serving of sauce. The finishing garnish was a colourful riot of flower petals, baby nasturtium leaves, and lightly pickled fresh turnip. Chef's wine was the stellar 2019 Niagara Riesling Charles Baker makes from Marc Picone's vineyard, its crisp acidity backed up by enough richness and fruit to handle the dish very well.

Jason Barton-Browne of Deane House won the silver medal with a respectful and delectable treatise on an Alberta Top Grass ribeye steak. He had isolated the "cap" of the steak – that highly desirable little muscle – and fried it in beef tallow. Beside it were other marbled, medium-rare slices from the rest of the steak, cooked with just the right amount of textural chew. A dainty block of painstakingly made potato pavé, cooked with butter and a dusting of grana padano cheese, had also been briefly crisped around the edges by frying in beef fat, while a long wand of king oyster mushroom was braised in a complex barigoule spiked with star anise and other exotic spices. Dots of celeriac purée introduced an earthy moment and three sauces almost stole the show from the sublime steak. The first was a play on a Bordelaise – thick pink moments of whipped bone-marrow that had been marinated in gremolata and were the quintessence of richness. The second was a purée of saskatoon berries and tamarind with a refreshing acidity. The third was an opulent red wine jus. Chef's wine match was excellent – the 2018 Syrah from Blasted Heath in the Okanagan, a big, intense red with a refreshing acidic backbone.

Our gold medallist was Scott Redekopp of Yellow Door Bistro, proudly making use of every part of some superb Alberta rabbits. Here was a thick slice of the tender, flavourful loin wrapped in house-made ham. A crispy fried croquette was filled with a farce made from the rabbit leg mixed with smoked bacon and with a smooth dark mushroom purée that looked like chocolate sauce. Two tiny frenched rabbit rib chops were breaded and fried and gone in a single careful bite. At the centre of the dish lay a perfect sunchoke and potato pavé moistened with a smoked cream that Chef flavoured with white truffle and topped with crispy sunchoke dimes. A swoop of carrot and hazelnut purée brought an earthy tang to the dish, which was finished with a rich but not too heavy jus made from the rabbit bones. Chef's wine choice was the 2020 Hush Red from Dirty Laundry in the Okanagan – a medium-bodied blend of Merlot, Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon, unburdened by too much tannin.

Chef Redekopp will be coming to Ottawa in February for the Canadian Culinary Challenge, representing Calgary and supported by the good wishes of everyone who was with us last night. In two hours we will find our Winnipeg champion... Truly, the fun never stops.