

**REGIONAL QUALIFIER FOR THE CANADIAN
CULINARY CHAMPIONSHIP**

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



Serge Belair of Edmonton Convention Centre wins Edmonton's Great Kitchen Party 2022

Staging our Great Kitchen Party in Edmonton invariably feels like coming home: the city has always welcomed us so warmly, packed the house and supported our beneficiaries with tireless generosity. After far too long an absence, last night's event was even more fabulous than usual. The sun was setting over the city, gilding the North Saskatchewan river and illuminating some of the chefs' stations at our event as the guests arrived. Our dazzling emcee, double-gold Olympian Heather Moyse, charmed the sold-out crowd of 550, as did another champion athlete, Beckie Scott, who also happens to be CEO of Spirit North, one of the new organisations that Kitchen Party supports. The entertainment was simply stellar, led by Bill Henderson and the entirety of Chilliwack in its rockin' glory, alongside the legendary Barney Bentall, the magnificent Geoffrey Kelly from Spirit of the West, and the sensational Terra Lightfoot, each one of them contriving to steal the show.

Edmonton's finest chefs were out in force, bringing their A-games to the gathering, thrilling our guests. One of the longest-serving committee members came up to me and said he thought this was the best food at an Edmonton Kitchen Party for the last ten years. I would have said, best ever! Dishes were adventurous and original, often technically flawless... It all posed a most engaging challenge for the judges, but we responded with alacrity and, after a relatively swift deliberation, emerged blinking from our cavernous chamber with a fistful of medals to hand out. Let me name the jury. Sitting beside me was our Senior Judge for Edmonton, Mary Bailey (wine and food writer, editor of The Tomato food & drink magazine, podcaster, lover of bubbles (in wine, that is)); Clayton Folkers (World Association of Chefs' Societies certified judge and international competitions committee member); Chris Wood (an experienced chef for over 40 years, always impressed with new creative talent); Brad Smoliak (VAD-powered, happy husband, proud father, chef, grateful, passionate yet forgetful lover) Twyla Campbell (food and travel writer, CBC Edmonton food columnist, author, serial road tripper); and JP Dublado, of Red Deer Resort & Casino, Edmonton's 2019 Gold Medalist, who enchanted the VIPs with a canapé that consciously reflected his winning dish from 2019 – a tartlet of foie gras mousse, chanterelle, whipped chevre, caramelized onion jam and pickled ramp, finished with a shaving from a massive white truffle.

Before I brought our medallists to the podium, the People's Choice was awarded to Chef Doreen Prei of Glasshouse Kitchen/Bar who prepared a wonderful plate "in honour of local farmers" of poached cod cheeks, braised beef short ribs and grilled oyster mushroom ragout.

The judges awarded their bronze medal to Edmonton-born indigenous chef Holly Holt, owner-chef of SheCooks. She used Alberta bison to create something quite extraordinary – a cross between rillettes and pemmican. First the bison was lightly cured with juniper, briefly smoked over applewood, then confited, "submerged" in beef tallow. Then the forked meat was mixed with dried saskatoon berries and a saskatoon honey jelly. The texture of the little slice she plated for us was simultaneously chewy and creamy and the flavour of the bison emerged loud and clear. As complements, we found some

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chunks of pickled oyster mushrooms, a hearty butternut squash purée, while a variety of microgreens and petals decorated the plate. Sticking up like a fin was a black crisp made from ground porcini and wild rice, bringing a powerful, earthy umami to the experience. Chef paired it with a simple gin and tonic made with Hawke Prohibition Sir Periwinkle gin, a delicate floral local product from a female-indigenous-owned distillery. It was a beautiful pairing, the juniper in the gin reaching into the rillettes in search of its kin.

Lindsay Porter of The Common won the silver medal, though one or two of the judges placed her more highly. At the heart of her dish was an ethereally fragile tube of *feuille de brick* pastry, like God's own crispy canoli, filled with a custardy confection of soft egg yolk "omelette" speckled with black truffle dust. Beside this was a single shelled Selva shrimp the size of my thumb, its flesh juicy and toothsome from the briefest of poachings in a broth made from lion's mane and chanterelle mushrooms. More 'shrooms lay alongside – a *sapid ragout* of chopped lion's mane, chanterelle and king oyster mushrooms, cleverly mixing up different sizes and textures. Chef finished the dish with a rainbow of flower petals and a fine, subtle dust made from 30-day fermented mushroom and orange zest. This proved a superb entrée into the wine – an Orange Schonberger called L'Orange from 40 Knots winery in Comstock, on BC's Vancouver Island. With a nose like the scent of an orange and a delicate but complex flavour, it was a very sensitive pairing.

Our gold medal went to Serge Belair, chef of the Edmonton Convention Centre. He took the very bold and highly unusual step of presenting an entremet – a dessert collation based around pears that his wife had picked from the pear tree in their garden. Words really cannot do justice to the many harmonies and harmonics on the plate; every element was flawless – and flawlessly interconnected. At the centre of the presentation was a simple piece of poached pear, cooked *sous-vide* to intensify its flavour and sprinkled with just a few grains of Maldon salt. Above this was an individual warm chocolate and almond cake using Valrhona chocolate, no bigger than a golf ball, with a decadently moist texture. Here was a classic white wine *sabayon* that served as a sauce for the cake, and there a perfect little macaron that tasted intensely of pear and lemon. Chef's final gesture was to crown an elegant little almond *sablé* biscuit with a spoonful of ice cream flavoured with roasted pear and gorgonzola cheese; it began like an intense pear custard before the hint of blue cheese gradually emerged on the tongue. Even the single sorrel leaf garnish contributed its own tangy little moment to the symphony. And here was yet another sensationally good beverage match – Henry of Pelham's 2019 Select Late Harvest Vidal from Niagara – a wine with the precise balance of weight, fruitiness and acidity to support the dish, not overwhelm it. Could we really give gold to a dessert? It was impossible not to.

Serge Belair will bring his passion and energy to Ottawa in February for the Canadian Culinary Championship. I can't wait to see what he does there!