

**REGIONAL QUALIFIER FOR THE CANADIAN  
CULINARY CHAMPIONSHIP**

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



### **David Vatcher of Best Coast Restaurant wins gold in St. John's**

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the best kitchen parties in the country happen in Newfoundland. The point was proven again last night in St. John's as we made merry with 150 old and new friends – a small group by our standards, but my goodness what fun we had! The luminous Heather Moyse was our emcee, injecting her own unique energy into the room; Neil Osborne of 54-40 and blues singer extraordinaire Kandle Osborne provided the music (and spellbinding repartee) while legendary NHL coach Claude Julien was guest of honour, spinning eloquent tales of life in the big leagues. And the bidding on our trips went through the roof! Which is excellent news for everyone in the rest of Canada who is travelling with the Great Kitchen Party next year: the St. John's contingent is always the heart and soul of every occasion.

From the gastronomical point of view we had a lovely diversity of dishes and found a worthy and unanimous winner. Our culinary judges were led, as always, by Roary Macpherson (father, husband, culinary ambassador, promotes all things Newfoundland !!) together with past winner Roger Andrews (Husband, Dad, Chef Instructor, Coach, Retired Competitor), Ron Delaney, (Tourism Director, Blogger, Critic, Radio Host, Life Student of Food), Angie Ryan (Wife, mother, cooked at the James Beard House 6 times, Culinary Olympian, operations manager School Lunch Association), and the 2019 St. John's gold medallist, Kyle Puddester, who thrilled the VIPs with a delectable canape of P.E.I. beef tartare with truffle aioli and a grating of miso-cured egg yolk. They were excellent company and we were all entirely in agreement about which chefs should step up onto the podium.

Our bronze medal went to Michael Wozney of Manuels River Catering, whose dish also won the People's Choice award. He entitled it "Sunday Supper at Nan's, Revisited... a stroll down memory lane with my Great Grandmother," blending two classic Newfoundland dishes – the famous Jiggs Dinner and the noble cod fish – in one refined construction. It began with slowly simmering salt beef for several hours, gradually adding diced turnip and carrot to the broth. Split yellow peas were cooked in the same pot then mixed into a batter and fried into a sturdy little cake which formed the base of the presentation. Set on top of it was a cylindrical roulade wrapped in green cabbage leaves that contained a juicy piece of poached cod surrounded by some of the pulled salt beef – a delicious combination. The diced roots were tumbled on top of the little tower which was capped by a spoonful of foam made from the pot liquor. Pearls of sweet-tangy beet gastrique were resonant with beet flavour and the final touch was half a teaspoon of honeyed mustard seeds. Chef's pairing was a delicious beer that he made in collaboration with local brewery Ninepenny Brewing – a refreshing sour beer flavoured with blueberry, blackberry and mint.

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The silver medal went to Daniel Butler of The Wilds at Salmonier. He used cod that he and his family caught and cured, turning it into a fish-and-potato cake, breadcrumb-crust and cooked at his station. It was a fine cake – moist and well balanced and nicely hot from the pan. A second protein came in the form of two slim slices of pork rillettes, rich but not too fatty, and carefully seasoned. Alternating with the rillettes were Chef's own sweet-tart bread-and-butter pickles – discs of cucumber with onion and peppers, all grown locally. A spiced beet coulis decorated the plate and brought another kind of rooty sweetness to the ensemble, equally welcome with the fishcake and the rillettes. Chef's matching wine was an excellent choice – Wayne Gretsky No. 99 2019 Riesling from Niagara, an off-dry number with enough acidity and apple-citrus fruit to stand up against the pickles.

David Vatcher, owner-chef of Best Coast Restaurant in Cornerbrook, NL, won the gold medal. His dish was one of the most ambitious I have encountered in this competition – four dishes in one, really – but Chef Vatcher made sure each element was beautifully executed, with its own undeniable integrity. Here was a perfectly seared scallop, cooked through but still juicy, with a tasty bronzed crust. It sat on a tablespoonful of buttery truffled hollandaise sauce. Nestled up against it was a small piece of tender pork belly with two sauces of its own, one a sweet-sour moment of hoisin, sesame and soy, the other a mound of curry aioli; a little partridgeberry compote was spooned on top. Next up was a two-bite-sized piece of gorgeous halibut cooked sous-vide with olive oil, garlic, lemon and parsley, and topped with a green chimichurri. The fourth component was a slice of potato and duck pavé made by curing the duck overnight with salt, garlic, herbs and citrus, slow-cooking it then pulling the meat apart, mixing it with goat cheese and sweet caramelized onion and baking it into the pavé. On top were some crispy parsnip shavings and beside it beads of bakeapple "caviar." How to find a wine that could work with everything on the plate? Chef chose wisely – the lightweight, racy, off-dry 2021 Riesling from Benjamin Bridge in Nova Scotia.

Who dares, wins! Congratulations to David Vatcher! We shall see him in Ottawa in February next year, at the Canadian Culinary Championship. Meanwhile we have only two events left in our campaign – in Saskatoon and Vancouver. Watch this space.