

Everyone, chefs, musicians and the audience it seems was inspired by the historic Carlu event space, an absolute jewel of Art Moderne design, where we held this year's Toronto Kitchen Party. The chefs delivered some phenomenal dishes, the musicians delivered some blistering sets and that enthusiasm was felt by the audience who were on their feet and busting out their best moves before the night was over.

We judges, buoyed by the same energy, also had a great time tasting and rating each of the creations and can say with complete confidence that Toronto is back!

This is my first year as National Culinary Advisor, a position that the founder of the role, James Chatto, entrusted to me and, even more than usual, I felt the weight of that responsibility sitting at the table with him and the panel he created. Nonetheless, while I'm still growing into the job, James and the rest of the judges ensured that I was warmly welcomed, for which I am deeply appreciative.

My thanks also to the rest of the judging panel including legendary Globe and Mail food columnist and award-winning cookbook author, Lucy Waverman. The newly appointed Director of Indigenous Initiatives at George Brown College television show host/producer, and culinary consultant, David Wolfman. And, fresh from her jaunt across the country ranking Canada's Best New Restaurants for enRoute Magazine, Amy Rosen.

Finally, I was delighted to welcome our new head judge for Toronto, academy chair for the world's 50 best restaurants awards, the food and

lifestyle editor at Zoomer Magazine and someone whose appetite is matched only by her metabolism, Renee Suen.

From the moment the first plate hit the table, Lorenzo Lesoto's glorious arrangement of octopus with sticky rice and passion fruit paired with Westcott Vineyards Violette Brut, it was clear we were in for a great night. And things only got better from there.

Our second dish, and the one that would go on to win the night's silver medal, was Barberian's Steakhouse chef, Jesse Vallins' dreamlike savoury, potato enhanced sable dough tart shell layered with smoked sturgeon pate, lightly cured sturgeon tartare and crisp potato crumbs. Over top, an aerated, cumulonimbus of baked potato emulsion served as a jaunty and flavourful support for a great whack of Northern Divine caviar. Bringing some additional complexity and herbaceousness that partnered especially well with the citrus enhanced minerality of Charles Baker's 2020 Riesling, was an excellent dill and hemp seed pesto.

First time competitor and our bronze medal winner, a chef who we judges all expect great things from in the future, was Johnson Wu from the Islington Golf Club. His take on "East to West Surf and Turf" drew on his own background growing up in Taiwan and combined both the myriad influences from that country with exceptional Canadian ingredients. Built around furikake crusted octopus and a layered wedge of slow cooked pork belly, the dish was garnished with everything from cauliflower soubise, pickled mustard seeds and shimeji mushrooms to an octopus ink cracker and honey that comes straight from the golf club. Sweet, savoury, rich with umami and

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Inspired, perhaps, by his recent Michelin recognition, our gold medalist for the night was none other than Frank Parhizgar of FK Restaurant who took what was essentially steak and potatoes and transformed them into something utterly compelling, creative and unique. On the plate, a dark, rectangular slab of braised leg of Dexter Beef – a relatively small type of cattle originally from Ireland, but raised, in this case, in Lindsay Ontario – sauced with bone marrow enhanced sauce bordelaise. The tendon, braised to an almost gelatinous tenderness, was deep fried in a way that caused it to puff into a beefy voluminous chip. Adding more texture was a single puffed pomme souffle atop a wild leek sauce that brought out the vegetal elements in his earthy, almost chocolatey pairing of Closson Chase Vineyards' 2021 Pinot Noir.

Parhizgar likened his win to the culinary equivalent of a World Cup trophy and will be a force to be reckoned in Ottawa this February.

With only Saskatoon left to compete, we will soon have our complete lineup for chefs and thoughts are already turning to the Canadian Culinary Championship with what is sure to be an all-time great competition.