

**REGIONAL QUALIFIER FOR THE  
CANADIAN CULINARY CHAMPIONSHIP**

Ensuring young Canadians have equitable access to healthy food, music education and sport opportunities.



## **MONCTON 2024 CULINARY REPORT**

We're off and running! Canada's search for the next Canadian Culinary Champion began Friday night in Moncton and if the talent on display in that Maritime city is any indication we are in for a blockbuster year.

While the chefs gathered across two floors at the Aberdeen Cultural Center the judges assembled in a private boardroom ahead of the tasting. Tasked with finding our winner on this night was chef/instructor Evan Smith from the New Brunswick Community College. From Rossmount Inn, renowned chef and innkeeper, Chris Aerni was in place along with sommelier and executive director Food & Beverage Atlantic, Tammy Brideau.

We were also joined by Susan O'Keefe former co-chair of the World Wine & Food Expo, retired lawyer, home cook and all-around good sport. Matt Pennell, fresh from his triumph on Dragon's Den as one of the masterminds behind Sum Good hydrating freezies, was our returning VIP chef. And, of course, where would we be without our head Head Judge for Moncton, the excellent Emmanuel Charretier, chef Instructor of Hospitality and Tourism at New Brunswick Community College.

No sooner had our first plate been delivered than it seemed like we surely must have found the winner. Chef Niguel de Leon of Atelier Tony opened the competition with a stellar dish. His Story of the Scallop saw a plate defined by circles on circles on circles: sliced whole Nova Scotia scallops, crowned with rounds of pickled apples, topped with puffed quinoa all surrounding a bubbly pool of scallop foam. Adhering to his zero-waste philosophy, chef de Leon utilized every aspect of the scallop, curing the roe, roasting the skirt and the mantle to flavour the glaze and seasoning the entire dish with gratings of scallop bottarga. Tying everything together and bringing colour to the plate was a vibrant kombu and dulse vinaigrette built around deep green seaweed oil. More bubbles were evident in the wine pairing: Benjamin Bridge's 2018 Brut – a luscious, zesty sparkler with an obvious affinity for the umami backed salinity of the dish and a refreshing acidity that set the diner up for the next bite.

Our next presenting chef, Alyssa Dignard, traveled in from the Lone Oak Brewpub in PEI, but drew inspiration from even further afield with her chicken and tiger shrimp tsukune (a type of Japanese meatball). "This is the dish I would make if I had my own izakaya," she explained to the judges. In addition to the orange marmalade glazed tsukune itself chef Dignard had the inspired idea to incorporate crispy chicken skin in her house-made, seaweed inflected furikake seasoning. Most

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unexpectedly, her creamy dashi, miso and spinach sauce was underpinned by the nutty (both figuratively and flavour-wise) addition of gruyere. Acidity and heat were incorporated through the addition of pickled daikon and a peanut chili oil vinaigrette. In what was several of the judges' favourite pairing of the night, chef Dignard worked in collaboration with the brewmaster at Lone Oak, to create a bright, super dry saison l'acadie with a refreshing, palate cleansing crispness that further cemented the feeling of having been transported to a bustling Tokyo backstreet.

Our third dish of the night, yet another stunning plate, was provided by Phil Petrynko from Black Rabbit. As chef explained, when your restaurant has rabbit in the name, the natural thing is to serve carrots: "I think in the past five years we've done close to 100 different carrot dishes," he told us. This iteration saw the humble root vegetable baked in a salt crust and then finely diced, seasoned with ginger and coriander, studded with toasted almonds and pickled golden raisins and topped with a tender ribbon of smoked coffee pork belly. A bright green carrot top tuile garlanded the carrot tartare and a slick of inky black (from the literal inclusion of squid ink) sake and duck fat emulsion brought a saline richness. Local favourites, Magnetic Hill Winery, provided the pairing: a brand-new release created from St. Pepin, a grape virtually synonymous with Quebec, but grown for the first time in Atlantic Canada to great effect. The wine's floral elements are countered by a structured acidity that, when paired with this superb carrot dish, kept the judges moving from carrot to wine and back again.

Jaswinder Singh from Indian Delhi Bistro was up next, and little did we know, his dish would go on to become our People's Choice award winner for the night. Chef Singh's take on butter chicken roulade was a tribute to his hometown of Delhi, where the dish originates from, with updates that reflect the chef's experience and love of global cuisines. Consequently, in addition to some masterfully steamed basmati rice, there were also two bites of flavour-packed masala mashed potatoes. Similarly, what at first appears to be a classic French roulade surprised with the addition of spicy tandoori marinade flavouring its interior. Magnetic Hill once again provided the pairing, in this case through its bright and fruity rose built from Marquette grapes. The wine's freshness had enough complexity to match the rich, spiciness of the sauce and the two worked harmoniously together.

Our final dish of the night was prepared by Jordan Holden from Tony's Bistro who chose rabbit as his featured ingredient, preparing it three ways: roast loin, confit leg and rabbit mousseline. Assembled into a beautifully prepared ballotine, wrapped in house made bacon (to offset the natural leanness of the rabbit) the dish was served with 3 kinds of stone fruit: cherry espuma, compressed plum and apricot gel. A textbook rabbit jus, pellucid and deeply flavourful, along with

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gently smoked parsnip puree and a pair of parsnip tuiles finished the dish. Technically flawless and a lot of fun to eat, it was the unexpected pairing that ultimately put this dish over the top. Noaska Baker, a fruit wine co-operative based in Clair, New Brunswick, created a deep, dark red wine built entirely from haskap berries, a type of honeysuckle. The fruit's elongated purple berries offer up a complex juice that, when treated like a traditional red wine complete with oak aging, result in a beverage that drinks more like a rustic pinot noir or fresh Beaujolais. The wine's crisp acidity and soft leather aromas made for a thrilling pairing and ultimately, after all the scores were tallied, elevated chef Holden to first place on the night.

With our first winning chef decided our search continues. Tomorrow night we move on to Ottawa – a city that always provide strong competitors – where we will determine our second gold medal winner of the season. Stay tuned!

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