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Edmonton's  
Kitchen Party Chefs

# Introducing Edmonton's Kitchen Party Chefs

Eight Edmonton and area chefs compete with their best dish, Thursday, October 10 at the Edmonton Convention Centre. The winner goes on to the Canadian Culinary Championships (CCC) this winter in Ottawa. We asked the chefs for their thoughts on the competition and a few hints on what they were cooking.



**Tamara Solon**  
 Chartier and Mother Bakery

"I have my prep list ready," says chef Tamara Solon (Chartier). "I'm nervous and excited, I love this competition, but this is my first time leading a team."

"Super excited to get to participate. I've had a few conversations with other competitors. It's a really fun event."

Chef understands the key role mentorship plays in the education of a cook. "I have a dynamite team. Everyone is absolutely ecstatic to be doing this. We don't have a lot of opportunities for events like this, being in Beaumont. They are 100 per cent on board. We have seven apprentices on staff right now; if we can help them get fired up by things like this

competition, it inspires them to think about doing this as a career."

What about the dish?

"We are going the bison route, it's near and dear to our hearts. The preparation will showcase our team's skills in knifework and plating. We are pairing with Frind Estate Winery, but we haven't made the final choice yet."



**Doreen Prei**  
 Riverview at Glenora Park

Chef Doreen Prei (Riverview at Glenora Park) is a seasoned competitor at Kitchen Party. The popular chef has podiumed several times and is often the People's Choice. Why another round? To show us that cooking in a retirement home doesn't mean terrible food. "I am so proud to be representing a retirement

home, first time in the entire country. We are changing the perception of food for seniors. Our clients have refined palates, they are open to all sorts of dishes and flavours. We are making a path to the future."

What is chef cooking this year? "I always did a hot dish but thought maybe I should come with a cold dish this time, and show my love of kaffir lime and lemongrass, the sweet/sour Asian component, but also the Baltic Sea of my childhood, a little bit of the saltiness. The wine is A Noble Blend from JoieFarm Winery. I love its texture, so great with food."



**Eric Hanson**  
 The Marc

Eric Hanson (The Marc) is back for another podium shot (he won in 2016 and was the bronze medallist at CCC). Eric is known for his freewheeling style

and engaging juxtapositions on the plate. "I'm leaning savoury but with ingredients that aren't usually thought of as savoury," he says; "thinking foie, white truffle and white chocolate. I want to have a dish that's fun and surprising." Having just taken over The Marc kitchen earlier this summer, Eric has not had a lot of time to settle in. "Things are not completely dialed in yet. I've asked for some samples from Summerhill but haven't made a final decision on the wine. "When I have a good wine, I'll build the dish around it. I'm really looking forward to competing again."



**Joseph Vuong**  
 Café Bicyclette

Joseph Vuong's (Café Bicyclette) dish is all worked out.

“My dish is a reflection on my upbringing, all the influences from my Chinese ethnic background—both north and south. The beef shank and brisket from Chatsworth Farm will incorporate northern Chinese-style braising; the southern Chinese element is fruit forward, more Cantonese style—the kind of dish that you would have to speak Cantonese to order in a restaurant—along with a poached prawn. It’s a take on chili crab, or a north south version of *escabeche*—kind of the history of China on the plate. The wine is Henry of Pelham Baco Noir.”

He’s confident his dish is well thought out, but he remains a little nervous about the night of. “I’m excited, it’s my first time being in a competition like this. But we are busy and not a big staff. We have weddings and events booked every night through the fall. We will need to be able to work with the NAIT students.”



**Naga Singh**  
Belgravia Hub

Chef Naga Singh (Belgravia Hub) is new to Kitchen Party. “I’ve had so many thoughts going around in my head on what to do but I’ve settled on a dish that tells my story—where I came from, where I’ve been and where I’m going. My father was in the army. We moved around a lot, he was stationed in north-east India when I was born. There is a lot of hunting and Asian influences in the food in that region. When I worked at River Cree, I came to understand a lot of the influences were similar, especially the importance of nature. The idea is to

feature bison and put together east and west flavours using the techniques I’ve learned working with so many chefs.”

The beverage pairing is still up in the air, but “the team is pretty much ready,” he says. “We have enough staff and we have been training on every aspect of what we’re doing, to be comfortable with the dish and the competition. Everybody knows what they need to do.”



**Max Straczek**  
Pryo Wood-Fired Grill & Kitchen

I’m excited,” says Max Straczek (Pyro). “It’s been a while since I’ve competed and it’s my first time at Kitchen Party.” Max is impressed with the sense of community he has found already. “I reached out to both Roger Ma and Alex Chen (previous Canadian Culinary champs),” he says. Both had time for me and they shared really good tips.”

Asking a chef about their favourite ingredient is like asking a parent which is their favourite child. They love them all, for different reasons.

“Since we started this project (L’oca) last year, I’ve fallen in love with North Country beef,” say Max; “but it could have just as easily been pork, we have so many great Alberta proteins available.”

Max was cagey about his dish, not wanting to get boxed in, but he says he’s leaning towards aged beef, maybe raw, with Japanese influences. “I am a big fan of acid and temperature changes in a dish, and tartare is a big thing for us. I’m very comfortable with it, a throwback to

my training in Poland,” he says. No word yet on the wine, we’ll just have to wait until October 10.



**Jason Greene**  
Braven, JW Marriott

“I am fairly new to Edmonton, I didn’t grow up here, but I have grown to love it and love what people here are capable of,” says Jason Greene (Braven). “They have a nitty gritty, in the trenches work attitude and they geek out about stuff, like the Trial & Ale people. I like their mindset, sort of cowboy, or pirate—kind of disruptive. I fell in love with one of their beers, a bottle-conditioned specialty release in a 750 ml bottle, made with a similar process a winemaker would use. The flavours of a beer aged in a wine barrel are so effervescent and pop so much, you can build complexity in the dish like you would in a wine pairing.”

What about the dish?

“What I enjoy about food is linked to memories and feeling. Not Cordon Bleu, less scientific, more intuitive. I’m looking to create a dish based on two food memories —my first real taco experience in Edmonton, and my first misunderstanding with a chef, which led to an interesting conversation on sandwiches and how they are built.

“I had a more traditional route to learning in the kitchen. I didn’t go to cooking school, and I checked off all the tropes of a classic line cook, kind of a grunt, kind of a dirtbag in the kitchen. That was all I was. But I was grasping any morsel of knowledge anyone would

share and I had a strong propensity for work. Then I met Ryan O’Flynn (Gold, CCC 2015) and worked with him at the Westin Edmonton and at The Guild in Calgary. That started a different chapter.”

“This means a lot. I’m excited and really pumped about it. My corporate chefs, giants in the culinary scene, John Horne and Anthony Walsh (Oliver & Bonacini) recommended me. Competing was not something I had thought about. I just wanted to build cool teams and make tasty foods. Kitchen Party came along at just the right time.”



**Julia Kundera**  
Out of Bounds Restaurant

“My staff and my kids said do it,” says Julia Kundera (Out of Bounds Restaurant). “Excited, you know, but I haven’t really had a lot of time to think about it. August is our busiest time of the year.” Julia’s restaurant career started with Café Mosaics on Whyte Avenue with her sister Zofia Trebaczkiewicz (the Kitchen at EPL; both are accomplished cooks and flavour mavens) followed by Two Rooms and Flavours. She remembers the tough times for restos in the 2010s, “it was very hard to get good people.” It’s a different story now, where the seasonality of a golf and winter club restaurant means a large staff to execute multiple events, weddings, private parties and banquets.

“A lot of our staff have been with me for years, really good and can get things done.” Her dish? Nothing is decided yet. “Exploring different things, try some things and see. I’m talking with Marius at Four Whistle Farm, thinking duck or goose.” 🍷