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## Calgary Culinary Report 2025

Calgary's qualifying round for the 2025 Canadian Culinary Championship proved once again that the city is a powerful force in the nation's culinary scene. A packed crowd gathered to watch seven of the city's most talented chefs present dishes that reflected not just technical excellence, but their own personal and professional journeys. Across the evening, themes of heritage, local ingredients, and creative balance ran through the plates, offering a snapshot of Calgary's evolving culinary scene.

It would take the combined efforts of a super panel of culinary experts to determine the evening's winners. Fortunately, we have exactly such a group including none other than the likes of John Gilchrist: CBC Radio restaurant reviewer whose most recent television program *Cuisine of the Rockies* is now streaming on all the best platforms. Freelance food and travel writer and Calgary Herald restaurant columnist, Elizabeth Chorney-Booth. Two-time Canadian Culinary Champion and chef/owner of Bar Chouette, Takori, Concept Catering and Green Fish Sushi: Duncan Ly as well as 2009 Canadian Culinary Champion, Hayato Okamitsu. Journalist and food writer, Carmen Cheng. Master chef and Calgary's Head Judge, Michael Allemeier was instrumental in assembling our slate of competitors. Finally, we were also honoured to have your 2025 Calgary Gold Medalist from Fox Trot at Spruce Meadows joining us as our VIP guest chef judge: Chef Matthias Fong.

The competition began in earnest with chef Joshua Dyer's, *Atlantic Cod Ceviche with Pawpaw, Corn, Sweet Potato, and Leek Ash*. The dish drew on his time at the world-renowned Mado restaurant in Lima, Peru, blending South American technique with Canadian ingredients. The Atlantic cod represented his roots, the Ontario-grown pawpaw his childhood, and the Taber corn his present in Alberta. The *Upper Bench 2022 Chardonnay* provided a well-judged pairing, matching the ceviche's acidity with crisp freshness.

Errin Massolin took a bold approach with "*Roots and Reflections*", a savoury reimagining of tiramisu. His chicken liver mousse, made with mascarpone and vanilla, played against a tart pickled strawberry compote and pistachio-black garlic crumble. The dish showcased his skill in bridging sweet and savoury elements while maintaining balance. Paired with *Martin's Lane 'Simes Vineyard' Pinot Noir 2020*, the result was both unexpected and cohesive — a creative highlight of the evening.

Jenny Kang presented an *Alberta Beef Pithivier* that combined French pastry technique with Korean flavours. Inside the flaky crust were layers of tteok-galbi, beef striploin, miso-marinated foie gras, and chicken mousseline binding bibimbap vegetables. Sides of chanterelle mushroom, pickled



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radish kimchi relish, and parsnip reinforced the theme of heritage meeting refinement. The *Black Hills 2022 Nota Bene* blended red fruits and soft tannins to complement the dish's depth and richness. Kang's plate stood out for its precision and its connection to personal memory.

Tracy Little's "Mon Coeur Sauvage" (My Wild Heart) brought a strong emotional component to the evening. Her bison heart black pudding with foie gras and black walnut pâté was inspired by a story from her daughter's favourite book. Wild herbs, sweetgrass, and black currant added layers of aroma and complexity while the *Stratus 2021 Cabernet Franc* reflected the dish's earthy depth and subtle smokiness. It was a thoughtful and confident plate, grounded in both place and purpose.

First time competitor, Mackenzie Pavka, offered one of the most striking visual and thematic dishes of the night with his *Alberta Golden Beet Borscht with Smoked Trout and Toasted Peanut*. The golden beets came from her own farm, paired with smoked trout from Allen's Trout Farm, linking land and water through Alberta ingredients. Inspired by his grandmother's borscht and Thai Tom Kha Gai, the broth balanced sweetness, acidity, and spice. The *Tantalus 2023 Riesling* completed the pairing, highlighting the freshness of the herbs and the subtle heat. Pavka's presentation reflected the next generation of prairie cuisine — rooted in local sourcing but global in perspective.

Eden Hrabec's "Snap | Crackle | Cod" combined technical polish with personal storytelling. Wild-caught BC ling cod was crusted in Manitoba-harvested wild rice and set in a fragrant coconut, clam, and lemongrass broth. A prawn salsa with curry leaves and mustard seeds brought heat and texture, while Thai basil and fish-skin chicharron added brightness. The *Tawse 2022 Quarry Road Riesling* matched the dish's acidity and tropical notes, creating balance across every component. Hrabec's combination of prairie roots and international influence made her plate one of the most memorable of the evening and earned her the bronze medal.

Jun Young Park impressed both judges and audience members with his *Brant Lake Wagyu Tenderloin in Autumn Balance*. The dish showcased precision, restraint, and technical excellence. The wagyu tenderloin was seared over binchotan charcoal, paired with a white miso foie gras custard and umeboshi espuma. Quinoa prepared three ways and a pine nut crumble provided texture, while wasabi-pickled asparagus and lotus root chips added brightness. The *Dirty Laundry 2021 "Bordello"* Bordeaux blend provided structure and depth to the pairing. The presentation and flavour balance earned Park not only the silver medal but also the People's Choice Award, voted by guests.



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Finally, Dean Fast brought the evening full circle with a dish that was both rustic and elegant. His *Mangalitsa Pork Belly Wrapped Rabbit Loin* was stuffed with wild mushrooms and paired with parsnip and tonka bean purée, a Grizzly Gouda gougère, and a pear and wild rose tea gel. Incredible technique, exquisitely balanced seasoning and exceptional presentation earned Fast the evening's gold meda. The *Cloudsley Cellars 2022 Pinot Noir* matched the dish's warmth and autumnal character. Fast's approach was rooted in Alberta's landscape — rich, seasonal, and full of quiet confidence.

Once again, the standard in Calgary was exceptionally high, and each chef brought a unique perspective to what Canadian cuisine means today.