



**REGIONAL QUALIFIER FOR THE CANADIAN
CULINARY CHAMPIONSHIP**

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



Ottawa 2025 Culinary Report

Our quest for the next Canadian Culinary Champion kicked off in earnest Monday night in Ottawa. Last year's Gold Medalist, Lizardo Beccera opened his beautiful restaurant, Rafael Peruvian Cuisine, to our guests and five competitors for our first competition of the season. If the quality of dishes presented on offer was any indication of what we can expect across the country this year, we are in for a treat.

This year we offered all of our guests the opportunity to score the chefs alongside the judges, providing them with the same score sheets we use, breaking the scoring down into categories including Presentation (20), Texture (10), Taste (40), Technique (10), Wine Pairing/Beverage Compatibility (10) and Wow Factor (10). The audience scores would result in the People's Choice Winner and everyone was eager to see if their scores aligned with those of our illustrious judging panel.

As home to the Canadian Culinary Championship, Ottawa has a particularly distinguished lineup of judges including Taste & Travel publisher, culinary historian, world traveler and global eater: Janet Boileau. Writer and editorial consultant for edible Ottawa, edible Vancouver, Sage Magazine and Editor of Diplomat Magazine, Jennifer Campbell. 2023 Canadian Culinary champion and chef of Canada's most anticipated restaurant, Antheia, Briana Kim also joins us as does two-time Canadian Culinary Champion and chef of Atelier, Marc Lepine. Ottawa's head judge, Cory Haskins, when he's not assembling incredible lineups of chefs for the Ottawa regional competition, is Business and hospitality dean at Algonquin College. Our core group of local judges were also honoured to welcome last year's Ottawa gold medal winner, Chef Lizardo Becerra to our table.

The very first dish of the night set the tone: Gitanes chef, Mitch Lacombe, treated us to a delicate and brilliantly executed seafood roulade in a vibrant Acadian sturgeon caviar sauce pastis, it's emerald green hue enhanced with paisleys of dark green lovage oil. The ingenious sauce served as a thrilling vehicle for the roulade, a flawless combination of the freshest BC halibut joined by a light, almost foamy scallop and vermouth mousseline, the pair wrapped together with delicate, almost translucent squash blossom petals. In keeping with the fresh, coastal vibrancy of the dish, Lightfoot & Wolfville's 2024 Tidal Bay from the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia, brought citrus notes along with a crisp minerality that bound the whole dish together into a tight, clean finish.

The bar was set, and it would take some very accomplished cooking for our remaining chefs to follow Lacombe's performance and, to the audience and judge's delight, they did.



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InHaus Cooking's Michael Hauschild delivered a glistening, jewel-like cured and cold smoked salmon terrine, precisely squared, half covering a circle of black garlic shellfish vinaigrette imbued with a deep savoury richness. A lacy, herb dusted tuille rested atop a scallop edged tartelette and offered a glimpse of the sweet kernels of corn below. Cuvée Krystyna 2020 Chardonnay, one of The Organized Crime winery's most accomplished and sophisticated wines, proved to be a luscious and carefully considered pairing for this elegant dish.

In an amusing and delicious twist, two first time competitors, both named Simon and both from Quebec, both decided, unbeknownst to one another, to prepare lamb as their competition dish. Simon Beaudry from Les Fougères in Chelsea, Quebec presented a tightly rolled and ultra-savory lamb loin roulade alongside a crisply charred slice of lamb belly, glazed with black garlic paste and skewered on a rosemary branch, the cut's inherent lushness rendered smoky, herbal and superb from the fire. He infused the rich sauce for the dish with spruce tips and red currants, giving it an almost resinous quality that gave it a thrilling and unexpected kick. Hidden Bench's 2022 Gamay, with its ripe berry flavours and cherry aromas captured all of the nuance's chef Beaudry incorporated into his dish.

Simon Laroche from Restaurant Caméline in Gatineau, drew inspiration for his dish from one of his most cherished supplier, Ferme Laronde who specialize in lamb, as well as haskap berries – a fascinating, tangy sweet and intense berry that I'm happy to see showing up on more menus. Chef Laroche, in keeping with his Italian training, turned his exceptional lamb into porchetta by using a combination of belly and loin seasoned with rosemary, labrador tea and juniper berries. Alongside rested a culurgiones, a type of Sardinian pasta filled with potato mint and leeks that looks a bit like a cross between a pierogi and a gyoza. By infusing the tender pasta dough with haskap berry juice he gave it a distinctly Canadian feel. Clos des Cigales, a small Quebec vineyard located in Montérégie, was chosen to provide the pairing and offered a bold, intensity that underscored the dish's savoury elements.

When it came time to announce the winner, everyone, judges, guests and chefs, were curious to see, not only who would take the top prize, but also if there would be consent between the judges and the guests. In a rare instance of both judges and audience agreeing chef Sawision took both people's choice award and the gold medal with his playful, complex and captivating dish. On the plate: two plump scallops dripping from their caramelized sear, were enmeshed amid a playful jumble of taro aji Amarillo fritters, almond pudding, green tomato and mango salsa, and chorizo shrimp toasts. Servers poured a luxurious and deeply aromatic poblano pepper sauce alongside to marry all the elements together. Chef's display of thorough technique and command of explosive



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flavours, alongside a refreshingly crisp, De Simone 2021 Motivation Fume Blanc from Four Mile Creek in Niagara, lifted his dish to gold.

With Ottawa coming out of the gate so strongly, I'm more excited than ever to see what the rest of the country has in store and looking forward to our next stop in Moncton a small city that delivered in a big way last year, providing us with our Canadian Culinary Champion silver medalist for 2025.

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