Calgary Culinary Report 2026

To Calgary and a sold-out crowd at the Telus Convention Center where 8 of the city's finest chefs had gathered for a competition that promised to be as closely contested as any this season.

With so much talent in the room, it made for a delicious, but challenging evening for the judges. Fortunately, the assembled group was more than up to the task and relished in the opportunity to judge blind. Joining me in the endeavour were Elizabeth Chorney-Booth, freelance food and travel writer, Calgary Herald restaurant columnist and CBC radio columnist, and John Gilchrist renowned radio and print restaurant critic and host of the award-winning series Cuisine of the Rockies as well as Carmen Cheng, a Calgary food writer whose work appears on CBC and in Avenue Magazine. Our Chef of Distinction was Duncan Ly, co-founder of C'est Chouette Hospitality, 2013 Calgary Gold Medalist and 2014 Canadian Culinary Championship Silver Medalist along with Calgary's illustrious head judge, Michael Allemeier, Master Chef and instructor of culinary arts at SAIT Polytechnic.

Seafood was the big theme of the night and the chefs drew on all their experience and history for their dishes. Matthias Fong turned a childhood memory of smoky, chilled campfire crab into a dish of charcoal-roasted Dungeness and shrimp terrine, kabocha roasted in embers and a tomalley and monkfish liver mousse. Lacto-fermented Okanagan apricot and crisp pear added brightness, and sea grapes replaced micro greens. Rosehall Run's 2022 JCR Chardonnay from Prince Edward County echoed the smoke and stonefruit.

JP Dublado's Tropical Opulence gave us a taste of the tropics with a dish that began with a uni flan, inspired by chawanmushi and finished with house-cured uni bottarga and caviar. A mango tartelette of foie gras mousse, a scallop and leek terrine with scallop XO, and Dungeness crab dressed in calamansi and crab fat followed. A

tamarind nam jim jaew pulled it together. Phantom Creek Estates Rosé cut the richness with acidity and mineral lift, letting neither dish nor wine take centre stage.

Dean Fast of Westin Airport Botanicus created an elevated shore lunch in Manitoba Pickerel & Prairie Soul. Pickerel mousseline was layered with porcini and black truffle, beside a radicchio-wrapped parcel of wild rice, a prairie seed shard and a potato croquette that reversed the traditional breading. Saffron-scented golden beet bridged the dish to the aged Stratus 2007 White.

Matthew Batey of Teatro Group offered a love letter to Canada. Golden Eagle black cod, raised with the Kyuquot-Checleseht First Nation, was lightly cold smoked and joined by foraged chanterelles, pine mushrooms and lobster mushrooms. A leek pithivier made with Manitoba flour and Alberta butter, a tarragon sauce and pickled Saskatchewan mustard seed completed the plate, while CheckMate Artisanal Winery's Queen Taken's 2022 Dekleva Chardonnay matched its oak and texture to the heft and weight of the dish.

Sage Restaurant's Scott Redekopp riffed on the season with his "Autumn and the Transformation of Apples", a nose-to-tail tribute to EH Farms Mangalitsa pork. A pistachio and pig's ear farce wrapped the loin, while blood sausage filled an apple bouchon, a wink at a wine cork. The showpiece was an apple "pie" in lard pastry, layered with pork liver parfait and a black apple gelée aged three months at 62°C. Meyer Family's 2025 Okanagan Pinot Noir brought freshness to the richness.

In the final analysis, our Bronze Medal ultimately went to Dave Bohati of Pasta Il Banco who made agnolotti del plin, a technique he first learned in 2010. Taber corn and mascarpone were wrapped in nori pasta, with Quebec snow crab warmed in binchotan-infused butter and a Chenin Blanc emulsion with white shoyu and kombu. Quails' Gate Clone 220 Chenin Blanc was in both the glass and the sauce.

Silver went to Jenny Kang of Orchard balanced luxury and local character with Alberta bison tartare on kataifi (a Greek shredded phylo pastry) with Quebec foie gras mousse and BC ambrosia apple. A second bite of foie gras mousse and Saskatchewan

haskap jam on brioche carried it to a dessert-like finish. Annapolis Valley Pomme d'Or ice cider, with its Sauternes-like notes, cleansed the palate.

Rupert Garcia of Post Hotel and Spa would ultimately take home the Gold thanks to his seafood mi cuit, featuring yellowtail flounder, Atlantic scallop and lobster from the east coast paired with B.C pear and celeriac from the west. His flounder and scallop roulade was layered with nori ash and a green mousseline, beside a lobster hemisphere and pear in several forms. The dish was reverse-engineered from the wine, Lake Breeze Ehrenfelser, whose tree fruit and acidity answered the pear and the sauce.