Edmonton 2026 Culinary Report

Always one of the biggest and most exciting events in the Country, Edmonton's All-Star Invitational brought out the best from this incredible selection of the city's finest chefs.

It was a night of great eating for myself and the rest of the judging panel. Head Judge Mary Bailey, writer, publisher and editor of *The Tomato* food and drink magazine, said it was as strong a showing from the city as she'd seen in years. 20th Anniversary Chef of Distinction Ryan O'Flynn, who returned from London, England joined us as did the always insightful Chris Wood who brings more than forty years of experience as a chef to the table. We were also joined by 2022 gold medalist and a Canadian Culinary Championship bronze medalist, Serge Belair, Executive Chef at the Edmonton Convention Centre. We also welcomed two new judges: Kalein Whittaker who trained at Ireland's Ballymaloe cooking school and runs AWN Kitchen, and Kelsey Johnson an award-winning chef and now a culinary instructor at NAIT.

Highlights from the evening's culinary offerings include Scott Downey of The Butternut Tree and The Marc' fall dish of veal tenderloin stuffed with chestnuts and sweetbread mousseline and wrapped in caul fat. It came with confit cipollini, chanterelles and a sage pomme soufflé, with each medallion brushed with herb-infused roasted bone marrow. The dish was built around the 2022 Nichol Pinot Noir 280M from Naramata Bench, made from a small, hand-harvested, 26-year-old vineyard planted in granite soils. Its soft savoury tannins and earthy character guided every element, from the velvety veal jus to the chard purée and fava leaf that added freshness and gentle bitterness.

Nathin Bye of St. Joseph Culinary Arts worked backwards from the wine, the 2025 Intrigue Wines Rotberger from the Okanagan. The grape is a rare German crossing of Trollinger and Riesling, with ripe strawberry character and bright acidity. Bye's charcoal-finished Alberta pork collar came with strawberries pickled in the wine itself, pink grapefruit kosho and a charred tomato-saffron jus, while puffed barley and pickled mustard seed added a Prairie note. His goal was for the wine to taste different after each bite and for each bite of food to alter the profile of the wine.

Winnie Chen of Fu's Repair Shop presented "The Other Surf and Turf," an ode to lesser-celebrated ingredients from land and sea. Her snow crab and prawn spring roll used a folding technique to trap an air bubble in the wrapper, which expands as it cooks. Beside it sat a hybrid of Chinese zongzi and Mesoamerican tamale, filled with mangalitsa green chorizo and scented with seafood broth. She paired it with the 2025 Grand Pre Muscat from Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley, whose ginger, lychee and pink grapefruit notes suited the dish's bold yet light flavours.

Paul Shufelt's "Time + Place" was grown almost entirely by the chef himself over a single Edmonton season, from rhubarb vinegar made in spring to beets, Evans cherries and raspberries gathered through summer and fall. Beets appeared as braised golden medallions, quick pickles, a raspberry-beet fluid gel, a crisp "crackling" and a dust made from juicing pulp, with only the peels left behind. His pairing was a cocktail rather than a wine: gin infused for twenty days with rhubarb, raspberry and foraged flowers, finished with Benjamin Bridge Nova 7. Shufelt said the dish could be replicated but never duplicated, since the next year's harvest would taste different.

TJ Wright of The Old Red Barn, our eventual bronze medalist, presented "Duck, Duck, Goose," a three-part dish that played on the childhood game. The first "duck" was a Holden Farms dry-aged breast with a barley miso jus. The second was a confit duck rillette topped with beet pastrami, toasted barley and crispy skin. The "goose" was a cherry-shaped shell of goose foie gras and Alberta Evans cherries, a surprise ending. Wright paired the dish with the 2020 Lake Breeze Meritage from the Okanagan, whose dark fruit and structure suited both the richness of the duck and the cherry.

Jason Greene of Braven Restaurant earned silver with "A Walk on the Farm," an all-Alberta creation built around Hogs and Horns Farmstead, which raises heritage pigs at risk of disappearing. Greene butchered whole pigs himself and used the animal nose to tail. The plate featured seared loin draped in cured back fat, a smoked hock presse, spiced crab apple gathered from a neighbour's trees, and a brown butter crumb made from fried skin. A pork jus reduced over three days and an oil infused with toasted farm hay completed it. He chose the 2022 Haywire Pinot Noir from British Columbia and called the dish a "love letter" to Alberta farmers and BC winemakers.

It was Blair Lebsack of Rouge Road who took home gold with "Flora & Fauna," a dish inspired by the shoulder season, when root vegetables turn sweeter and foraging is still at its peak. Its centrepiece was dry-aged North Country beef petite tender from Woodlands County, served with a jus gras. Alongside it came organic celeriac purée, lacto-fermented wild chanterelles, and caribou moss soaked in black currant juice. A celeriac "flower" wrapped around confit potato and smoked pork jowl completed the plate. Lebsack paired his dish with the 2021 Rosehall Run JCR Pinot Noir from Prince Edward County, Ontario, whose red fruit, bright acidity and limestone minerality echoed the black currant gel and earthy elements of the dish.

Lebsack and O'Flynn have known each other for years and are sure to make a formidable team at this year's Canadian Culinary Championship. Congratulations to them and everyone who competed and made this year's Edmonton Qualifier one of the all-time greats!