MENU

CANADA'S FOODSERVICE MAGAZINE

RC Show
Restaurants Canada
2025 PREVIEW

SPOTLIGHT:
TRENDS &
TECHNOLOGY

IDEAS AND INNOVATION FOR 2025.

THE DOUBLE BIND:

HOW RACE & GENDER SHAPE BLACK WOMEN'S CAREERS IN FOODSERVICE.

The Conversation:

UP CLOSE WITH
McDONALD'S CANADA'S FIRST WOMAN CEO, MICHÈLE BOUDRIA.



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-AT-LARGE

Dear Readers,

At the time of this writing, the Canadian foodservice and hospitality industry is navigating yet another new and challenging chapter in our tumultuous journey. As the familiar gremlins of rising costs, shifting consumer expectations, and persistent labour shortages continue to attack our bottom lines, a new priority has ascended to the top of our list: **we must come together to reshape and fortify Canada's food system and supply chain for long-term resilience**.

There's never been a more critical time to come together—to connect, collaborate, and lay the groundwork for the future of our industry. And there's no better place to do that than **RC Show**. This year's event isn't just about showcasing what's next—it's about taking action, forging partnerships, and finding solutions that will fuel thoughtful change and long-term success. If you haven't already made plans to do so, I encourage you attend. **RC Show is the best place to find the insights, expert ideas, and solutions Canadian foodservice needs now**.

This issue also highlights the changemakers pushing the industry forward. With **International Women's Day** on the horizon, we sit down with **Michèle Boudria, CEO of McDonald's Canada**, to talk about leadership, resilience, and her vision for the future of one of the country's most recognizable brands. Her story is a testament to the power of perseverance, the impact of mentorship, and the need to continue breaking barriers for women in foodservice.

Black History Month serves as an important moment to reflect, learn, and take meaningful action. This year, we're spotlighting new research from **The Re-Seasoning Coalition**, which examines the **intersectionality of race and gender in foodservice**, with a focus on the experiences of Black women. Their experiences are a wake-up call—shedding light on systemic challenges while offering tangible solutions for fostering more inclusive workplaces. Change starts with awareness, but it's action that moves us forward.

We also connect with **RC Show Culinary keynote Chef Tuệ Nguyễn (aka @twaydabae)** to hear the story behind the scenes of her meteoric rise from content creator to restaurateur and best-selling cookbook author.

Looking ahead, the future of foodservice is being shaped by bold ideas and breakthrough technologies. We learn more about **Earls' bold shift** that's challenging expectations of what a "chain restaurant" can be. MENU's **Spotlight on Trends & Technology** takes you inside the innovations redefining the industry—from the **integration of AI to accelerate human resource administration to what's on the horizon for sustainability priorities** in foodservice. As we examine **the trends redefining digital ordering, what's next for the bar experience in 2025**, and the **smart tech that's fueling the next era in hospitality**, what's clear is the pace of change is accelerating, and staying ahead isn't optional—it's essential.

Let's build a stronger, smarter, and more resilient industry—together.



Kelly Higginson
President & CEO

Winter 2025
Volume 10 Number 1

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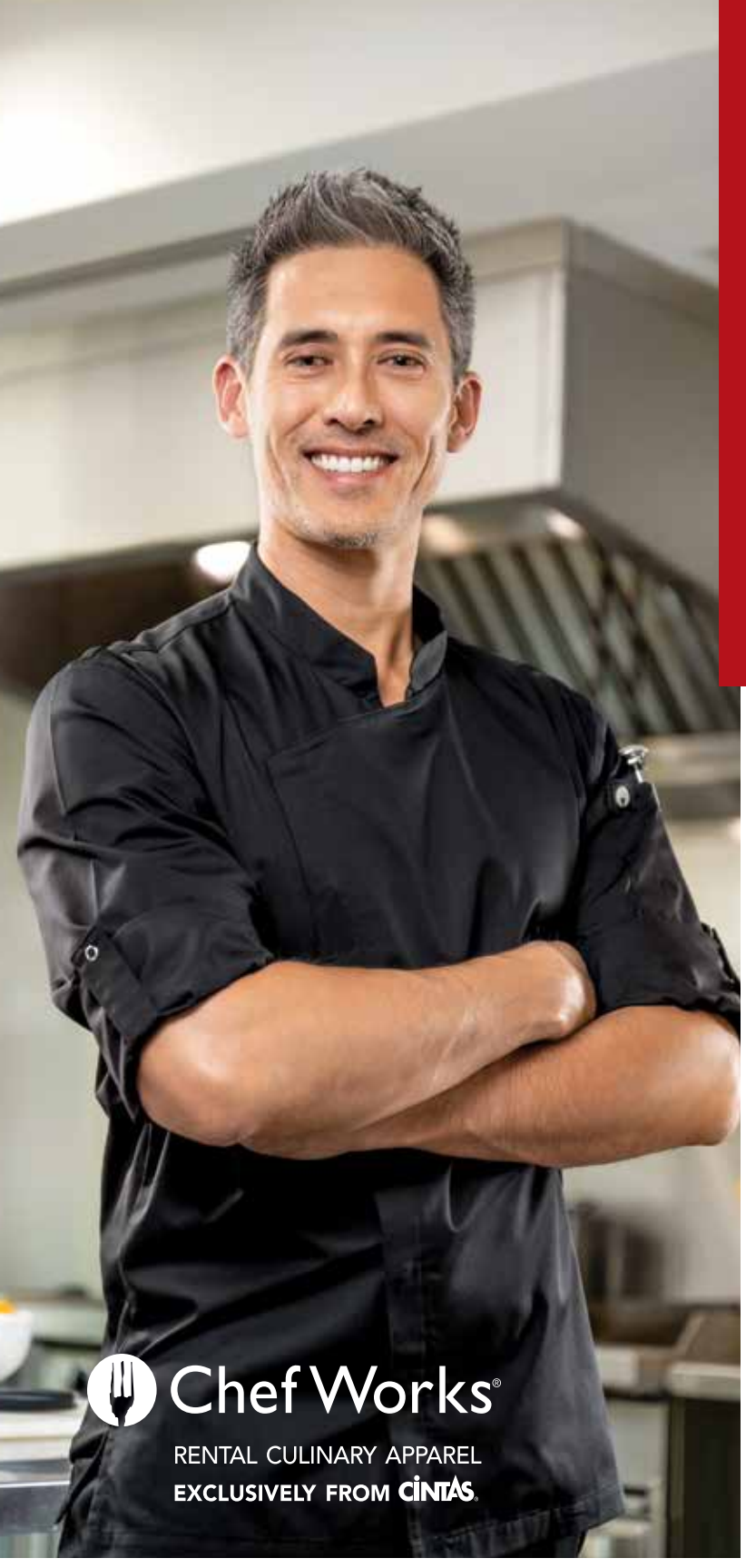
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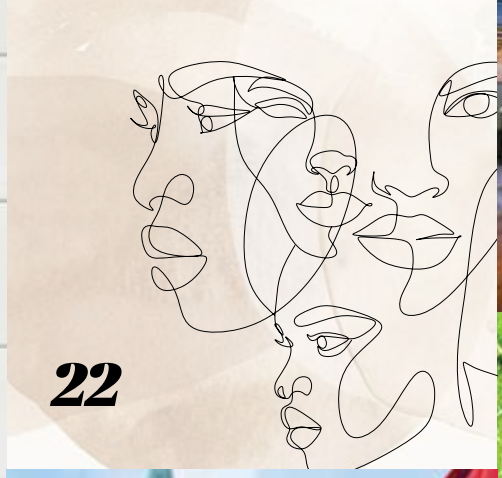


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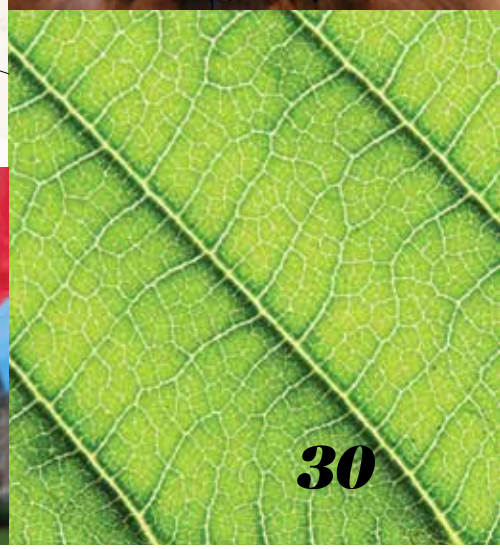
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dish. is a bold new event and content series from Restaurants Canada designed to connect, support and promote women hospitality leaders and those who aspire to lead.

Why women? Why now? Because the future of this industry depends on it. Research shows that companies with diverse leadership outperform their competitors, attract top talent, and create workplaces where people connect, grow and thrive. Elevating women isn't just about fairness—it's about building a more innovative, resilient, and profitable industry. Restaurants Canada is committed to making that happen, driving real change by supporting and accelerating women into leadership roles.

***dish.* launches in March 2025, to coincide with International Women's Day. Look for *dish.* content in this magazine and online at menumag.ca soon!**

To learn more about sponsorship and activation opportunities, please contact: sales@restaurantscanada.org



THE QUARTERLY CANADIAN RESTAURANT INTELLIGENCE REPORT: Q4/24 AVAILABLE NOW!

Presented by Restaurants Canada, with support from Uber Eats.

Restaurants Canada's industry research team has released the Q4/24 edition of the Quarterly Canadian Restaurant Intelligence Report—the final issue of 2024—offering operators key insights into the shifting landscape as they navigate the road ahead into 2025

Scan the code to download The Quarterly



December 6, 2024, the Fairmont Royal York hosted the 35th edition of KML's Pinnacle Awards in Toronto. Restaurants Canada members taking home honours included **Redberry Restaurants** recognized as **Company of the Year**, and **Chef Nuit Regular** of **Pai**, celebrated as **Chef of the Year**. Restaurants Canada Partner, **La Tablée des Chefs** was awarded **Supplier of the Year**. Congratulations to all, and much deserved!

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Managing the Impact of U.S. Tariffs on Canadian Foodservice

Hosted by Kelly Higginson, President and CEO, Restaurants Canada, with Ann Penner, Director, Trade Practice, Wellington Advocacy; Chad Moutray, Ph.D, CBE, Vice-President, Research and Knowledge, National Restaurant Association and Chris Elliott, Chief Economist and Vice-President, Research, Restaurants Canada.

Immigration Cuts & What It Means for Canada's Foodservice Industry

with Diana Palmerin-Velasco, Senior Director, Future of Work, Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and Daniel Hirschkorn, Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant, IRB Director, Saskatoon Immigration & Employment Consulting Services Inc.

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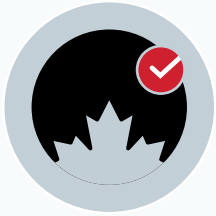
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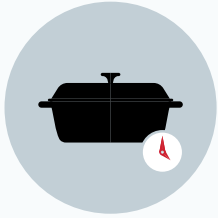


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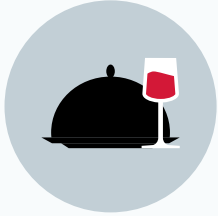


Module 7: Prepping & Cooking



Front of House Modules

Module 8: Serving & Pairing



Learn More

Canada Beef is the national industry association that promotes beef on behalf of Canadian cattle producers. To learn more about the **Certified Canadian Beef Training Program - Foodservice** contact:

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THE CONVERSATION:
MICHÈLE BOUDRIA

President and CEO of McDonald's Canada

The journey from a high school cashier to the corner office is seldom straightforward, yet Michèle Boudria's path to becoming McDonald's Canada's first female CEO reads like a modern parable of grit, growth and passion for hospitality. Starting in 1984 behind the counter at her neighbourhood McDonald's in Aylmer, Quebec, Michèle could hardly have imagined that four decades later, she would lead the Canadian division of the company she once joined for pocket money and camaraderie.

In a candid conversation with MENU Magazine, Michèle recounts the milestones and challenges that defined her rise—from juggling motherhood with managing a bustling restaurant to navigating McDonald's operations on a global scale. Her reflections illuminate how adaptability, curiosity, and the willingness to embrace change forged her leadership style. With a firm eye on sustainability, inclusivity, and innovation, Michèle offers a peek behind the curtain of the enduring magic of the Golden Arches and the community and ideas that power its legacy.

If the legend is to be believed, you began your McDonald's journey in Aylmer, Quebec in 1984. What attracted you to the restaurant and what were your first impressions upon starting?

Michéle Boudria: *I started behind the counter as a cashier at the local McDonald's in my hometown, Aylmer, Quebec. I was in high school at the time. Lots of my friends worked there, so that was my main motivation to work there. That, and to earn a little bit of pocket money.*

As I worked my way through high school, I really fell in love with the brand and the broader idea of running a business. Then, while studying Journalism at Algonquin College, I realized I really wanted to pursue a career with McDonald's.

That's a radical shift...

MB: *Yes. I spent the majority of my early career in Ottawa. Initially, I took on various roles, including what we call "field service", where you support local owner-operators, I worked on the operations side of our business. I worked in training and, as I grew through the organization, I took on more senior roles and worked nationally for McDonald's Canada. From there, I had the opportunity to take on some global roles. So, with McDonald's I've had the chance to live in Toronto, Vancouver and then Chicago along the way. I even had the opportunity to work internationally as the Managing Director for McDonald's Netherlands.*

In 2022, I came back to Canada and became the President and CEO, which was a really exciting moment.

What aspects of your personality and the McDonald's brand do you feel led you to make the decisions you did?

MB: *I'm very, very comfortable with change and, in some ways, that's really defined my journey. I'm very comfortable with taking bold risks and seizing the opportunities—and McDonald's is absolutely full of them.*

I was always very curious as a child, and I have a love of learning. To be perfectly honest, I've been a lifetime student of the McDonald's business and of business overall. I have always been open to change and to taking risks and trying new things, and I think those character traits have helped me grasp all of the opportunities McDonald's has provided me.

> "Fairly early on in my career, I was able to see the potential, but I have to be honest—never in a million years did I think I'd become the CEO."

McDonald's has made significant efforts and investments in enhancing the visibility of the potential growth opportunities for all employees, including hourly and entry-level employees. Was that potential clear to you—or even relevant—when you started?

MB: *When people come to McDonald's they'll hear, "You can join for a year or for a career." That's very clear from the beginning, and McDonald's also very much encourages us to pursue our education and to follow through on our post-secondary education because all of those learnings and those skills certainly are assets—particularly if an individual wants to be a leader in the McDonald's business in the future.*

I saw the opportunity and the potential early on in my career, and the good news is that leadership saw it in me as well. They were willing to invest, and I also was willing to invest in the business and my own development and learning. There are so many opportunities to learn and develop yourself in our business, and more tools than you can probably imagine. That really appealed to me. And so, fairly early on in my career, I was able to see the potential, but I have to be honest—never in a million years did I think I'd become the CEO.

Looking back, can you identify clear challenges, opportunities and decision points that chapter your career history?

MB: *Becoming a mom while I was working in our restaurants was definitely a defining moment in my career. At the time, I was a restaurant manager in Ottawa, and I had a team of about 70 to 80 crew and a management team of ten. That experience has allowed me to become a better leader and to look for ways to create an environment that supports women in operations and other areas of our business and find ways we can address the challenges working mothers face, because I went through it.*

I had many people supporting me then, so I know it can be done—but it can't be done alone.

How has your experience translated into your leadership style and priorities?

MB: *A big part has been about sharing how I was able to continue to pursue my career, having the support to continue to grow and be a great mom, supported by my village.*

I think that for a lot of women, seeing one of us grow and ascend to the heights of leadership is a real inspiration. Being the first woman in this role, and a mother, I realized the responsibility it comes with and the importance of being able to show that this path can be taken—that you can be a mom, and the work will still get done.

I was one of the founding members of the Women's Leadership Network in Canada. That was almost 18 years ago. Back then, we spent a lot of time just trying to create a network where we could share tips and tricks and find ways to support one another so we could grow our careers and our families at the same time, without the latter being perceived as a barrier to career progression.

MM How have your early professional experiences informed your leadership style?

MB: *My leadership style has evolved and changed over the years, along with the community and people I've worked with.*

As a leader, I think it's incredibly important that you're adaptive and that you're able to learn new skills and ways of doing things, and that you understand the needs of the people you're working with. That's been really important to me, and my experience working in our restaurants has been invaluable. Early on, I was able to see the impact decisions made by people doing the job I'm in today can have on our restaurant teams as well as on our guests. That has really helped shape me as a leader today, because I'm always asking the question, "What will that look like for our restaurant teams?" or "How will that feel to a guest," or "How might an owner-operator react to something like this?", because I've had the chance to play most of those roles and I want to make sure I'm asking questions on behalf of all of those folks.

I also would note that things have changed and evolved exponentially in McDonald's since I've worked behind the counter. So, throughout the year, I make sure that I spend time in our restaurants across the country with crew and with operators and that I also interact with our guests. I want to hear directly from people who bring all of our strategies and ideas to life in our restaurants. I think this connection helps me to stay grounded in today's realities.

MM Is moving people forward through the organization, from the bottom to the top, the ideal strategy for McDonald's?

MB: *Over the years, the business has changed drastically so you will find a lot of people in our business who have the same amount of tenure as I do, but equally a lot of talent with various experiences across all kinds of other businesses. You'll also find many people fresh out of school who come with a ton of energy, new ways of looking at things, and new tools and abilities that help us all learn.*

MM We've touched on your experience as a woman growing her family while moving up in the company, but would you say it was a challenge rising to where you are as a woman?

MB: *Were there challenges? For sure, but I've been in this business for 40 years, and I feel very blessed to have been surrounded with as many men who were allies back in the day as there are today in the business. It certainly made me much more aware of the role that I have to play to create an environment where everyone feels like they can bring their best self to work and that they can be who they are, and who they want to be in the workplace.*

It's also why I spend a lot of time with my team investing in our employee business networks making sure that we're creating opportunities for everyone. One of our five organizational values is inclusion, and we believe that a diverse workforce is critical to the success of our business. Not only do we strive to represent the diverse communities in which we operate, but also to foster an inclusive culture that empowers everyone to reach their true potential.

UP CLOSE WITH MICHÈLE BOUDRIA

Your idea of perfect happiness?
Spending time with my family and my dog, Bella.

Your greatest fear?
Heights.

The quality you most admire in people?
Grit. The ability to persevere in the face of challenges and go after long-term goals.

Your greatest extravagance?
Sneakers. Can't go wrong with a bold pair of Nike Air Maxes.

The McDonald's character you most identify with?
Birdie.

Your go-to McDonald's order?
Egg McMuffin + Medium Premium Roast Coffee

Your greatest leadership achievement?
Developing people and helping them reach their potential. I've had strong mentors and champions throughout my career, and I always strive to pay it forward by lifting others up. I'm most proud of seeing our people take on new challenges and reach new heights in their careers.

The business legacy you would like to leave?
To have helped people thrive.

I'm proud to say that more than 50 per cent of our Canadian management team are women. While there's still a ton of work to do in this area, we have made some tremendous progress from the time when I started to grow within the organization.

> **I think that for a lot of women, seeing one of us grow and ascend to the heights of leadership is a real inspiration. Being the first woman in this role, and a mother, I realized the responsibility it comes with and the importance of being able to show that this path can be taken—that you can be a mom, and the work will still get done."**

In your view, how has this success changed the company?

MB: *I think it's made us a more attractive employer. These initiatives are truly great programs and help make people more comfortable—they can see we've invested a lot of our time and energy. We will always have opportunities to get better, but I would say this is probably one of the areas where I think new employees can see the work we're doing and may be part of the reason they chose to join the organization.*

McDonald's Canada is committed to sourcing 100% of its primary guest packaging from renewable, recycled, or certified sources by the end of 2025. What steps are being taken to achieve this goal, and how do you plan to engage stakeholders in this sustainability journey?

MB: *We are very committed to driving positive impact on the planet across our entire business and our supply chain. We source ingredients like eggs, potatoes, dairy and beef from nearly 50,000 Canadian farms and we're proud to invest in the Canadian agriculture sector. To us, sourcing great quality food products is incredibly important and doing it domestically is as important. We also know that's what our guests expect of us. That's a commitment we're not going to waiver on.*

Globally we have pledged to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. In order to achieve that, we've got to collaborate across the entire value chain on programs that reduce emissions and that support the long-term environmental—but also economic—resiliency of the agriculture industry in Canada.

Would you say a restaurant giant like McDonald's choosing to commit to local sourcing and broader sustainability goals has had a positive, knock-on effect on other industry players?

Working with 50,000 farms is a pretty broad impact on the agriculture industry in Canada and our commitment is unwavering. There are many different ways that you can partner with the industry, and so we were one of the founding members of the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, a group that is focused on championing responsible and sustainable beef practices, but is also committed to driving positive economic, environmental and animal welfare outcomes for the industry. That is very meaningful to both businesses and the agriculture sector in Canada.

We're in an industry that's incredibly complex. It's rapidly evolving, and it can be challenging at times—even for us as a bigger player. If you think about our independent restaurants and the smaller businesses, it has to be even more challenging at times to manage and make the right investments. It's particularly important right now for us to come together and work together as an industry to make progress, and this is where Restaurants Canada and the leadership they provide can really be helpful to businesses of all sizes within our industry.

As takeout and delivery continue to grow in popularity, sustainable packaging solutions become an ever more pressing issue, particularly so for quick-service restaurants. As a sector leader, how is McDonald's working with suppliers to further address this challenge?

MB: *Our objective is to source 100 per cent of our primary guest packaging from renewable, recyclable and certified sources by the end of 2025. So, we have a very aggressive goal, and it's one we continue to be very committed to. We've been working toward our goal for several years, and the good news is we're on track to reach it.*

As you can imagine, we rely heavily on innovation from our supply chain partners to help us reduce our impact. As an example, we rolled out our four-flap McFlurry® cup this year, which has eliminated the traditional plastic lid. Just that one change will eliminate approximately 75 metric tonnes of single-use plastic from our System. Also, we made the incredibly impactful decision to remove the plastic McFlurry mixing spindle two years ago, which had also served as the spoon, and replaced it with a wooden spoon. Over the past few years, we've removed other single-use plastic components like cutlery, stir sticks and straws and have reduced the amount of paper fiber in our McCafé® hot cups. So, lots of work has been done, and there's lots still to be done.

For what it's worth, we're fans of the new McFlurry cup.

MB: *Me too. Every time I have a McFlurry—and I admit I had one today—it always makes me smile because I'm glad we were able to make that move.*





MM McDonald's has been at the forefront of new and fresh marketing initiatives, including collaborations with BTS, Peace Collective, Crocs, and WcDonald's, not to mention the shift in strategy for the design and production of Happy Meal toys. How important are these initiatives to the overall brand and business strategy?

MB: *McDonald's is fan-led. That's at our core, and central to the way we approach our menu and our marketing.*

We have been building lifelong fandom, and part of that is entrenching ourselves in the ways that our fans across various generations and geographies around the globe experience the world. We're part of some of the biggest moments in culture, and that culture-focused approach leans into the magic of our brand to delight fans, but in their creative universe.

I hope you saw our holiday advertising with the Grinch—it was spectacular. The reaction from our customers was phenomenal. There were so many layers to it, touching everyone across generations, and consumers really reacted to it in a special way.



The other example I would highlight is the WcDonald's anime campaign we did in 2024, which was a little outside of our typical campaign, but certainly resonated with a different group of consumers and did quite well.

We also actively embrace our role in culture. Our Crocs collaboration offered really fun ways to connect with our fans and their love for our McDonaldland characters as well as Crocs. These are great examples of how being fan-led and truly embracing and intersecting with cultural moments is working for us.

MM What's really unique about McDonald's, from a marketing perspective, is the brand's ability and commitment to having conversations with customers across the demographic spectrum. If you were born in the 70s, 80s or 90s, the brand is still speaking to you as you move through the stages of your life. So, the childhood expectation of "surprise and delight" matures into a deep nostalgia. This is something McDonald's has not only done exceptionally well but has defined as a brand strategy that is successful in making consumers feel like collaborative stakeholders.

MB: *Again, it's about being fan-led. If you allow yourself to be led by your fans, you will rarely go wrong.*

MM One of the top trends for 2025 and beyond is the emergence of the more health-conscious and clean-label aware consumer. How is McDonald's Canada addressing evolving consumer preferences, particularly regarding health-conscious choices and dietary needs?

MB: *We always want to be a brand that connects with everyone, and we're always looking at ways that we can evolve, whether it's our core menu or bringing new items or flavours to our guests that address their needs.*

Recent examples of menu innovation I would point to would be our McCrispy, our McWraps, or our Breakfast Wraps that also include a non-meat option.

It's also about leaning into our fan-led approach, which is why we've launched fan-inspired items inspired by the most popular fan hacks. Our Menu Song Remix campaign is a recent example, which featured a song with Lil Yachty, a previous McDonald's crew member, and Mike Clay. We offered fan-hack menu items like a Surf N' Turf burger and a Sweet Chili Junior Chicken Burger. In fact, the Sweet Chili Junior Chicken became a permanent item following that campaign, so really, it's all about listening to our fans and responding accordingly.

So, you're not so much focused on chasing consumer behaviour trends, as you are on following what fans want, and delivering on those insights?

MB: *Exactly.*

McDonald's Canada has a longstanding commitment to community involvement, including support for Ronald McDonald House Charities. The company announced a renewal and expansion of community support in July 2022, including new commitments to supporting families, addressing food insecurity, and helping communities in times of crisis. Can you please share your progress and plans for the next few years?

MB: *In order for us to be truly connected to communities, we have to go beyond the food we serve. And so, we're very committed to living our purpose to feed and foster communities through absolutely everything that we do.*

Part of that is supporting families with sick children when they need it most, in moments where their families need to be together. That's why we're so proud to be the founding and forever partner of RMHC Canada.

In 2024, we celebrated some pretty significant milestones. On our 30th McHappy Day, we raised a record-breaking $8.9 million dollars in just one day. That allowed us to surpass over $100 million raised since the very first McHappy Day.

Last year, we also celebrated 20 years of our Happy Meal® program, wherein $0.10 from every Happy Meal we sell every day are donated to RMHC. In 20 years of running this program in Canada, we've raised more than $100 million dollars through just this program alone.

That doesn't even cover all of the different ways our corporate staff, owner-operators and restaurant staff activate throughout the entire year to support communities across Canada.

We also help people in need and in times of crisis through partnerships like the ones we have with Food Banks Canada, as well as the Canadian Red Cross.

For example, as part of our holiday Grinch campaign in 2024, we donated 500,000 meals to Food Banks Canada.

And lastly, together with our entire System, we help communities thrive because we're providing opportunities for employment and for career development.

In closing, I'd like to touch on technology in the foodservice and hospitality space. As automation and digitization play increasingly prominent roles in the foodservice industry, what aspects of the McDonald's customer experience do you feel are sacred and untouchable human elements?

MB: *At our core, McDonald's is a people business. At the same time, we can't deny the role of automation and digitization in making our restaurants more efficient as well as helping us connect to our guests.*



Technology plays a really important role in how we continue to evolve—in how we serve customers better, how we make our restaurant experience easier and how we make the experience more rewarding for our crew and our managers.

Technology is never going to replace our people and the importance of the hospitality we provide to our guests. One of the things about McDonald's is, no matter where you are in the world, the Golden Arches are a home away from home—they serve as a beacon, offering familiarity and comfort. For us, that will always be important, and although technology can augment that to make it better, it won't replace the human element.



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FROM CRISIS TO OPPORTUNITY:

Inside Restaurants Canada's Advocacy Playbook

In recent years, Restaurants Canada has stepped up its advocacy game to navigate a heavy cocktail of legacy and new challenges for the foodservice industry. At the helm of this transformation are Kelly Higginson, President and CEO, and Richard Alexander, Executive Vice President of Government Relations and Public Affairs.

Together, they have led a strategic shift in how the association represents and champions the industry on issues ranging from cost relief and labour shortages to sustainability and consumer affordability, and their vision is returning undeniable results.

In this candid interview with MENU, Kelly and Richard discuss how and why their advocacy approach has evolved, the challenges faced by operators, and their vision to unify the industry and create lasting, meaningful change to counter the headwinds facing Canadian operators.



Kelly Higginson,
President & CEO,
Restaurants Canada



Richard Alexander,
Executive Vice-President,
Government Relations
& Public Affairs

MM Over the past few years, Restaurants Canada has significantly and noticeably transformed the strategy behind its advocacy efforts on behalf of the Canadian foodservice industry. Can you share your vision behind the new style and approach? Has it been working?

Kelly Higginson: *A lot of the groundwork, conversations and initiatives we've undertaken have really amplified our effectiveness in the advocacy space, but one aspect really stands out for me, and that's relationships. We've stayed focused on building close, strategic relationships with people who have real influence and who are true champions of our industry.*

Previously, we didn't have those champions or representation at the federal level. Now, we've established productive connections in finance, at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), and with the current Minister of Tourism, among others.

Richard Alexander: *For example, the recent GST/HST Holiday wasn't an issue we reacted to; it was an issue we drove for the industry. With CEBA (Canada Emergency Business Account), we were reacting to policy, but with this initiative, we were at the forefront. Organizations often fall into the trap of only reacting to what the government does. Instead, we've taken the approach of identifying something we can improve, even if no one else is talking about it yet. We are asking, "What has potential, and how can we drive it forward?"*

MM Where did the idea for the GST/HST Holiday come from?

KH: *The tax holiday was not a Restaurants Canada idea. We had been doing campaigns around affordability and how it has been impacting our industry. So again, the drop in traffic attributed to less discretionary consumer spending power. One of the campaigns we ran was about the EI payroll taxes, called "Lift the Strain on Small Business." It wasn't just about payroll tax; it was about the bigger and broader idea that cutting payroll taxes will help employees have more money in their pocket—in all sectors. Everyone is feeling the paycheque pinch and has little money left over to pursue a little pleasure or self-care, and this makes voters less happy in their day-to-day life.*

Strategically, we stay informed about government priorities and look for opportunities to align them with the interests of our industry. Affordability is a prime example of a shared priority that resonated with both the government and the foodservice sector.

We did public polling around affordability, and it came up as one of the top issues for the

MM:

public, though not necessarily for every segment in our industry. It was, though, one of the top reasons cited as to why people were not going to restaurants.

***RA:** It's a big part of the reason Premier Doug Ford handed out $200 cheques. Overall, we've mobilized our whole team to tackle the cost burden in our industry, tying it directly to affordability. This is what government is deeply concerned about. We've mounted four campaigns and are actively pushing the issue, to ensure it stays on the agenda. We're not going away, and that persistence is helping us gain ground.*

***KH:** If you take a bird's eye view of what the industry has been through over the last five years, operators have seen their bottom line just decimated. If I think about what my P&Ls looked like five years ago as an operator compared with what they looked like two years ago as I was leaving, it's painful. The two years since then have been even worse.*

As operators, we can be very reactive. If my labour cost is too high, I might cut staff instead of thinking long-term and looking at volume to really understand the flow of business in order to properly schedule my team. Because it has been such a rat race and hamster wheel for our industry, it is very difficult to get out of that reactive mode. Operators have to pay bills, schedule staff, and place orders to get through the next day. When you're just breaking even, you don't have the luxury of waiting two months to see the benefit of a GST cut. This is the effect of what they've been through over the past five years.

***RA:** When I speak with operators, it's not always clear to them how a tax cut will increase demand. Some say, "Okay, I think this is something, but it's just 15 per cent." Maybe the economics of demand elasticity doesn't resonate with them, but a cheque for six or seven thousand dollars would. The value can sometimes be tough to see in the abstract, particularly when morale is so low in the industry.*

They're looking for a silver bullet to fix all of the problems, like hitting a baseball and trying to get to home plate. I explain it conversationally as, "We hit the baseball, and we got to second base. That's pretty good—that's $1.5 billion—and now we're going to try and steal third and get to home." That resonates.

***KH:** When we looked at our recent member surveys—which are so important—three strategic priorities emerged from our members' feedback: cost relief and foot traffic—top line and bottom line, workforce and access to labour, and sustainability.*

There is no silver bullet to fix the cratering of the bottom line that operators have experienced over the last five years. It's not reality. So, our team designed a strategy focused on delivering progress on multiple margin-building fronts for restaurants. It's going to be wholesale liquor pricing for restaurants, a little bit off WSIB rates, health claims and other insurance areas, a little bit off payroll taxes, and supporting efforts that put more discretionary income in consumers' pockets that they can spend in our restaurants. It's a little bit here, there, and everywhere to try and shave off a few percentage points on each line of that income statement to bring a little more down to the bottom line.

MM So, you're shaking many trees to optimize the total harvest, rather than making a few big asks...?

***KH:** Yes.*

RESTAURANTS CANADA'S ADVOCACY STRATEGY

SET THE AGENDA: Restaurants Canada has shifted from reacting to government policies to proactively helping shape the conversation.

RESULT: Rather than waiting and hoping the foodservice industry is recognized and included in government policy and investment, Restaurants Canada is working alongside policy makers to drive informed solutions.

NURTURE CONNECTIONS: Advocacy focuses on policies, but it's ultimately about people. By forging deep, strategic relationships with local, provincial and federal champions and their team members, Restaurants Canada is positioning itself as an indispensable voice for an industry that touches every corner of the economy and Canadian life.

RESULT: Stronger ties, greater influence and a more respected voice at the table.

THINK LIKE AN ECONOMIST: Sweeping reforms are rare, but by embracing a pragmatic, multi-pronged approach —cutting payroll taxes here, lowering liquor costs there—the association can chip away at systemic costs and legislative burdens in a smart, fair and realistic way.

RESULT: A steady march toward relief that resonates on operators' balance sheets.





In spite of the progress that has been made to date, the sector is still suffering. What are you saying to operators who are having really tough times?

KH: *Acknowledging that we understand where the challenges are and letting our members know they are not alone are top priorities in the conversations we're having. When we put out tough information like our bankruptcy report, the Quarterly Canadian Restaurant Intelligence Report, or trend reports, we know we're often bringing bad news to the fore, but even difficult information can provide useful and important perspective.*

When we started noticing the drop in foot traffic early last summer when the patio season returns were not as strong as they should have been, we got on the phone to verify and find out what operators were experiencing in different regions. B.C., for example, has the highest household debt and, because of the big mortgages out there and the rising interest rates, those operators were first to feel the dip. We were able to watch the trend creep across the country as discretionary spending dwindled. This validated our expectation that high levels of household debt strongly correlate with a decline in foot traffic.

Being able to show the industry some of these trends, backed by our data, helped because it showed operators the decline in business was not their fault. Of course, that doesn't help pay the bills, but it shows people they're not alone. Knowing the 'why' has also immeasurably helped us have those critical advocacy conversations. We provide our quarterly reports to government representatives nationwide, offering them a data-driven understanding of the industry's performance in the current economy, which can help strengthen and ideally expedite our advocacy efforts.

KH: *We also created our Restaurant Impact Report to make sure every level of government had an accurate picture of the size, scope and importance of our industry and our overall contribution to the local, provincial and national economy and culture. We've been able to make the connection that restaurants are an early indicator of Canada's national economic health and demonstrate to elected officials that their constituents are feeling the pinch. They have less money in their pocket. They're not able to go out for dinner or stop for a sandwich on their way to work. We've made it clear that the trickle-down effect of declining spending in restaurants is going to impact the GDP and the success of elected officials at all levels of government. That's been an effective message for Restaurants Canada.*

So, you're using the role of restaurants as early economic indicators to pull the relief lever and attach it to government priorities or performance to bolster the effectiveness of your advocacy tactics…?

KH: *Yes, and because there were so many conversations around affordability, government has become so much more aware of how vulnerable our industry is to debt and bankruptcy as direct results of decreases in discretionary consumer spending power. If you've got 53 per cent of operators operating at a loss or barely breaking even, we start to see the affordability issue expand. As a sector, restaurants impact every community across the country. It's not like other industries, where sector performance has a more contained, localized effect. We have a presence and direct impact on communities and infrastructure. We're the fourth-largest private sector employer in Canada, so when restaurants fail, there is exponential job loss, which directly affects the local and national economies. Making that connection has demonstrably changed the quality and effectiveness of the conversations we're having on behalf of the industry.*

RA: *The government knows it's vulnerable on affordability because of all the cost increases and inflation. They wanted to do something, so we proposed the payroll tax relief. The PMO jumped on it. They loved it, but they weren't the division of government to drive it forward, so they included our industry in the GST/HST tax holiday. They didn't have to, and they weren't initially going to.*

Because we had those champions in place and the conversations we've had and the campaigns around affordability we've produced, they understood how our industry's inclusion helped them deliver.

KH: *We're top of mind right now, and we need to maintain that. Before the holidays, we were in Ottawa for a long string of meetings capped off with an evening event. We were tired, but we knew we had to show up and connect. It's about always being present.*

RA: *We make ourselves available, which keeps our industry front and centre all the time.*

Do you feel that presence has changed the effectiveness of Restaurants Canada's advocacy efforts over the past two years?

KH: *In the past, some key relationships were fractured. During the pandemic, things got incredibly intense, and understandably so. I don't hold anyone in this building responsible for that. It was a very difficult time.*

There had also been a fair amount of turnover at Restaurants Canada, which made it hard to build long-standing, consistent relationships. Having a level of stability within a national

advocacy association is really important. All of the relationships are important and need to be developed, from the Ministers to their staffers, policy advisors, and teams. Making sure we have stability is really important to me. We are continuing to invest in all of those relationships.

We are national, and unlike many other associations, we are provincially focused as well. Over the last year, we have developed great relationships at Queen's Park. If there is a change in government, we know there will be a movement of many of those staffers to Ottawa. Making sure we treat those relationships and those people with respect is so important. We've been told a number of times that we're known for our "respectful" advocacy. If we're going to respond to a policy proposal or decision in the press, we always give them a heads-up, and we only resort to a higher frequency when government has given us no choice. We also let them know when we're going to move with the times and change direction to better serve our members.

Initially, we were having conversations about the carbon tax behind closed doors, but we got to the point where we needed to bring that discussion into the open. We knew they were vulnerable, but we had no choice. When you maintain open lines of communication, it's much easier to preserve relationships.

MM With such a large and diverse industry under Restaurants Canada's umbrella, how do you engage operators to take part in advocacy efforts, and what impact can collective action have on advancing your policy goals?

KH: *We have 1.2 million employees and 100,000 brick-and-mortar restaurants across the country. When we harness the power of our representation to send letters to government, they have to respond.*

There isn't an operator in this country who isn't saying their labour costs are killing them. The ask may only be for a few percentage points of relief, but we're a labour-intensive industry, so that really matters. Those points are huge in aggregate. It only takes two minutes to hit send to add your voice to this issue, yet we only received 700 letters after begging for weeks. If we ask operators to do this, it's because we see a significant opportunity to advance our case. The power of those letters is immense. When you hit send on a campaign page on restaurantscanada.org, your letter is instantly delivered to a Minister, Premier, or Prime Minister's inbox and your local MP's inbox. If your local MP got 5,000 letters, you'd see action. Staffers will identify the influx of letters as a trend and brief their officials, who will put pressure on the Minister.

This is impactful, and we are very strategic. We don't overuse or abuse this power to ensure that when we do use it, it spurs action.

RA: *Things have been very tough over the past five years, and the frustration is palpable. Sometimes though, we tear each other down on public platforms. I understand that people are under enormous pressure, but we need to stay united and respond to incremental industry wins with grace to continue to move the conversation forward with government.*

When segments from other sectors like EV batteries earn investment from government, you'll notice that the rest of the manufacturing sector does not publicly tear down the announcement, because it's understood that "a rising tide lifts all boats." The proven strategy is for that industry to respond with positivity, knowing that a win for part of that industry is still progress, and is not the end of the conversation and ongoing push for further commitments that benefit the broader industry.

We do want to hear these candid opinions and observations from operators directly, and the best place to share that is by responding to our surveys. Of course, members are also always welcome to give us a call or meet us face to face in their region. These first-person perspectives enrich and personalize our discussions with government and make our advocacy work more effective.

Quantifying the experience, needs and performance of our industry has been a significant effort we need everyone to participate in. Look how many individual restaurants we have in this country... If we could mobilize this industry and advocate together, we could move mountains.



SHOW ME THE MONEY:

Restaurants Canada's National Advocacy Wins in 2024

$ Increase in Pizza Cheese Discount from 13.5 to 15% saving small pizza chains $100,000 annually.

$ Three-year freeze on Federal Alcohol Excise Tax at 2% $10,000 annual savings for average-sized restaurant.

$ Simplified carbon tax rebate program approx. $4,000.

BRITISH COLUMBIA:

- $14,628 - Employee health tax increase exemption.
- $400 - BC Electricity Affordability Credit.
- $3,000 - Small Business Rebate Program.

ALBERTA:

- 622 members - Alberta Advantage Immigration Program.
- Freezing 2024 minimum wage at $15.
- Removal of VLT cap and improved VLT advertising policies.

SASKATCHEWAN:

- Verbal commitment from Premier Mo to move to wholesale liquor pricing.

MANITOBA:

- $300 - Security equipment rebate and other measures targeting crime.

ONTARIO:

- $10,000 - Two-year freeze on Ontario alcohol escalator tax.
- $2,450 per hire - Hiring and training grant.
- $10,400 - Stopped owners cover transaction costs on tips.

QUEBEC:

- Extension for MEV-Web QC.
- New mandate for the SAQ to work on increasing their revenues.

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR:

- $2,500 to $5,000 - $2M minimum wage transition program.

Restaurants Canada

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires



THE DOUBLE BIND:

How Race and Gender Shape Black Women's Careers in Foodservice

Intersectionality isn't just a buzzword—it's a reality that shapes workplace experiences in ways many don't see. Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept explains how overlapping identities—like race and gender—create unique barriers. For Black women in the workplace, this means navigating both racial and gender bias, often leading to fewer opportunities, slower career advancement, and a higher likelihood of workplace discrimination.

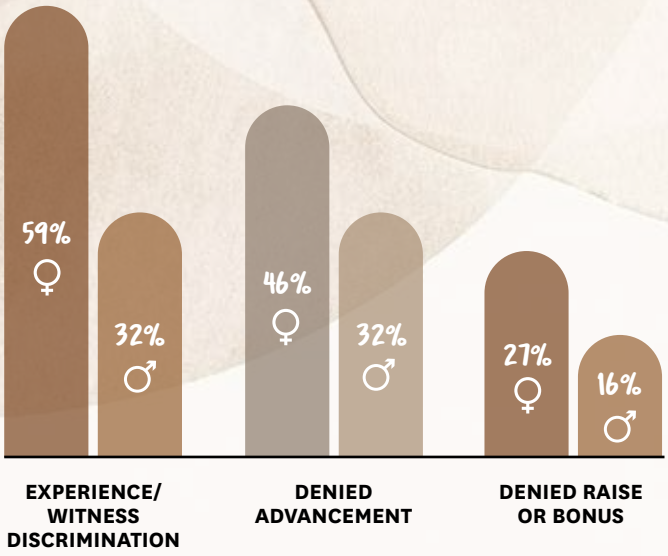
This double bind forces Black women to constantly navigate workplace politics in ways their peers don't. This extra layer of stress contributes to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and high turnover rates. It's not just about fixing one issue at a time; real change requires acknowledging how these challenges compound—and taking action to dismantle them.

"That Black woman who's working for you is doing the work of 10 people. I know that I'm capable of doing my job because it gets done, but at the same time, do you understand the value?"



THE FORK IN THE ROAD:

Black women report being denied, isolated and left behind in the workplace significantly more often than Black men.



Technomic and Ignite. Custom Report: *Summary of Key Findings on Labour Participation and Discrimination in Foodservice*. Prepared for The Re-Seasoning Coalition, February 2024.



"You can't hide the fact that you're a Black woman and almost off the rip, people have this idea that they have to combat your presence and bring you down. Just by existing and having confidence, automatically, people are really standoffish, especially when you kind of know what you're doing in the kitchen. I feel like sometimes you have to dumb yourself down in order to be accepted in different spaces and environments."



"I feel like as a Black woman, there's even a thicker glass ceiling and I feel like we don't see anyone that looks like us. Starting out my career in food, the corporate side of foodservice, it can kind of feel like, you know, 'how do I kind of get to that director role or that management role from where I'm at right now? I've no one up there who looks like me and there's no actual runway for that."



"In a corporate setting, you'll definitely get access to mentorship. Typically everyone gets it, but that doesn't mean that your mentor actually understands your specific needs and your impact."

Support the Success of Black Women in The Workplace

ACKNOWLEDGE THE DOUBLE BURDEN AND GET COMFORTABLE WITH BEING UNCOMFORTABLE. Passive leadership is a significant influence on perpetuating toxic environments. Focus group participants observed that managers often ignored problematic behaviour, allowing discriminatory practices to persist.

NORMALIZE MENTAL HEALTH AND REDUCE EMOTIONAL LABOUR. Black women in particular need mental health support at work, including regular check-ins with empathetic managers and easily accessible professional development programs. Focus group participants stressed that financial incentives alone (e.g., raises) are insufficient to address deeper, systemic issues that are often driven by unconscious biases.

ACCEPT THAT AWARENESS IS NOT THE SAME AS COMPETENCE. Comprehensive management training and how to effectively lead diverse teams is urgently required in the foodservice industry. Focus group participants criticized the prevalence of inexperienced managers who fail to foster an inclusive work environment.

VALUE CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS. Embrace and explore foods and traditions from diverse backgrounds and create opportunities for your employees to share their knowledge and cultural know-how.

CHECK IN OFTEN. Proactively connect with employees to openly air—and actively address—concerns and manage interpersonal conflicts at work. Passive, "open-door" policies place the burden on employees to come forward, and is likely to result in higher attrition.

According to data derived from a research base of 131 Black women who have worked in foodservice conducted by Technomic and Ignite on behalf of The Re-Seasoning Coalition:

- 1 of 5 Black women in foodservice roles report working with no other Black women. 11% of these women report their experience as "horrible" and are 76% more likely to leave the industry.
- There is nearly a 10-point satisfaction advantage (32% to 23%) when Black women work with other Black women and a 17-point retention advantage (59% attrition if working with peers vs. 76% if working alone).
- The vast majority of Black women are at risk for turnover. Only 14% report advancing quickly and seeing themselves staying in their current foodservice role for the long term.

Join the waitlist for TRSC's foodservice specific e-learning program to learn how to integrate equity into your business model to create stronger teams and drive better outcomes.

thereseasoning.org

THE RE-SEASONING COALITION

This program has been funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada.

Women and Gender Equality Canada | Femmes et Égalité des genres Canada

Canada

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Visit The Black Experience Pavilion at RC Show 2025 to meet Black foodservice professionals, chefs and entrepreneurs who can help accelerate your business.

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Earls



UNCHAINING THE CHAIN:

HOW EARLS IS REDEFINING THE RESTAURANT EXPERIENCE ON KING STREET WEST IN TORONTO

Earls has been a staple of the Canadian dining scene for decades. Founded in 1982 by Leroy "Bus" Fuller in Edmonton, Alberta, the brand quickly grew from a single casual eatery into a widely recognized North American restaurant group. Known for its emphasis on fresh ingredients, globally inspired menus, and warm hospitality, Earls expanded across Canada and into the U.S., consistently evolving to meet changing customer expectations. Despite its growth to over 70 locations, Earls has maintained a commitment to quality, innovation, and sustainability, making it one of the most enduring and adaptable brands in the industry.

However, for a well-established brand like Earls, navigating the fine line between reinvention and tradition poses a unique challenge. Restaurants, especially those with deep customer loyalty, must strike a careful balance between maintaining the elements that define their brand while embracing new design, new neighbourhoods, and new flows and features within their spaces. Reinvention must be intentional, preserving what works while fearlessly innovating to remain relevant.

The Balancing Act of Brand Evolution

When a restaurant group builds a strong identity over decades, changing public perception can be incredibly difficult. Customers form habits, expectations and nostalgia for what they've known, and that familiarity can be both an asset and a challenge. Reinvention could alienate longtime patrons because that secret sauce that makes a location a favourite spot isn't necessarily the same for everyone. It also means that, to a certain extent, established chains are trading in some of that magical consistency and reintroducing themselves to customers. Will guests be delighted or disappointed?

Sanjay Venu, Vice President of Operations at Earls, has seen this evolution firsthand. "I've been with Earls since I was 14 years old, starting as a busser in North Vancouver," he recalls. "I worked my way through the kitchen, into management, and eventually into operations at a national level. So, when I talk about reinvention, I don't just mean from a corporate

standpoint—I've lived it personally. And I think what we've learned over the years is that while change is inevitable, it has to be meaningful."

That commitment to meaningful change is what led to Earls' strategy of "unchaining the chain." Rather than relying on a rigid, standardized model, each location is designed to feel uniquely connected to the community it serves. "We know we're a chain," Venu acknowledges, "but we don't want to feel like one. We want each location to feel like it belongs to the neighbourhood it's in—to have its own personality, its own rhythm, its own sense of place. That's how you stay relevant without losing what makes you, you."

This approach offers distinct business advantages. By tailoring each space to the local dining scene, Earls optimizes guest experience, integrates into the culture of the city, and maximizes revenue potential. While the design, features and vibe may differ greatly from place to place, the core menu and the service standard are rock solid. The goal is to create a dining experience that feels fresh and personal while still embodying the brand's signature features and high standards.

Beyond aesthetics, Earls has taken significant steps toward its sustainability goals, focusing on eco-friendly sourcing, energy efficiency, and waste reduction. "Sustainability isn't just about food sourcing—it's about every decision we make in our restaurants," Venu says. "From our lighting choices to our furniture materials to how we manage waste, we are always thinking about long-term impact."

The company has pledged to use 100 per cent cage-free eggs and certified sustainable seafood across all locations. But sustainability also extends to how Earls interacts with its communities. "We've always believed in listening to the communities we serve," Venu adds. "That means creating spaces that reflect the neighbourhood's culture and energy while maintaining a commitment to sustainability. It's about making choices that benefit both our guests and the cities we're in."

The King West Evolution

The culmination of these efforts can be seen in Earls King West. King Street West in Toronto is a vibrant culinary and entertainment hub known for its eclectic mix of upscale restaurants, trendy cocktail bars, and late-night hotspots. The neighbourhood has evolved into a destination for food lovers, offering everything from globally inspired fine dining to casual, chef-driven concepts. With its bustling patios, chic interiors, and a clientele that blends business professionals, creatives, tourists and nightlife enthusiasts, King West has set itself apart as one of the city's most dynamic districts. For restaurant operators, it is a place of high competition, with restaurateurs constantly pushing boundaries to stay ahead of Toronto's ever evolving and occasionally fickle food scene.

Earls' decision to plant its flag in the King West shark tank was a bold one. "King West is an entertainment street," Venu explains. "You can't just show up—you have to stand out." The risk laid in whether a well-known restaurant group could successfully adapt to the pace and convert the haters. Well, the enthusiastic reception to the new Earls location proves that with thoughtful design, hyper-localized experiences, and a deep understanding of the community, even an established brand can reinvent itself and resonate.

The King West location's design choices were influenced by both the building's history and the modern urban aesthetic. The restaurant is housed in a heritage building, preserving key architectural elements while integrating contemporary materials and layouts that make the space feel both fresh and authentic. The Earls in-house design team paid careful attention to lighting, furniture, and artwork—ensuring that the space not only looks stunning but also feels like a seamless extension of the King West atmosphere. "We wanted to create a space that could offer multiple experiences, that could serve different needs at different times of day," says Venu. "That differentiation starts with design. The first thing you notice about King West is the energy—it's got this incredible pulse, this mix of old and new. That's what we wanted to capture. We took this stunning heritage building with all its original brick and woodwork and layered in elements that make it feel modern, sleek, and alive. We wanted guests to walk in and immediately feel a sense of place, but also a sense of discovery."

But it's more than just aesthetics. The space has been designed to offer multiple experiences under one roof. "We want guests to be able to come in for a business lunch on Monday, a date night on Wednesday, and a fun night out with friends on Friday," Venu explains. "And we don't want those experiences to feel the same. The way we've structured the restaurant allows them to flow naturally from one to another."

While the main menu is anchored by the classic seasonal and globally inspired favourites regulars expect from Earls, the happy hour and cocktail programs at Earls King West are specially designed to fit the specific rhythm of the neighbourhood clientele, who prioritize a more social, experience-driven atmosphere over a





traditional after-work rush. “At this location, we really pushed the happy hour concept,” Venu shares. “It’s different from our Earls Financial District store, where people are more focused on a quick bite after work. Here, it’s about settling in, spending time with friends, and making the night out feel like an event in itself. That’s why our happy hour is broader—it’s about offering flexibility to our guests who want to enjoy great food and drinks without feeling rushed.”

The location’s bar program has also evolved, leaning heavily into cocktails, premium wines and a more integrated and refined approach to beverage selection and service. “The bar is the centrepiece of this location. We knew we had to deliver something special, so we really elevated the cocktail experience. Our drink program includes a mix of classics and fresh, innovative cocktails that match the vibe of the neighbourhood. We also introduced bottle service here—something we don’t offer at every Earls—but for King West, it made total sense. It’s part of creating that layered experience where you don’t have to hop from place to place. You can start your night with dinner, transition to drinks, and stay for the energy.”

The “energy” comes from the Earls’ team’s deep understanding of what today’s guests really want: a location that offers a multiverse of potential experiences. It’s not just about the food anymore. They want to move through a space and encounter different spaces and opportunities to engage with the surroundings and their community. “The rooftop at King West is something we really leaned into because we knew it had to be more than just an add-on—it had to be an experience in itself,” Venu explains. “King West is one of those places where rooftops matter. People want that open-air feeling without sacrificing the energy of the restaurant. So, we designed it to give guests the best of both worlds—elevated, dynamic, and effortlessly connected to the vibe downstairs.”

Another popular feature has been the added element of live music, with regular DJs amping up the transition from the dinner to the night crowd. “Thursday through Sunday, we bring in DJs who really understand the energy of King West,” Venu explains. ”It’s not just about playing music—it’s about setting a tone, creating an experience that transitions seamlessly from dinner service into a late-night lounge vibe. We’ve been really intentional about curating the sound here, making sure it complements the space and the type of guests we’re drawing in. The goal is for people to come in for a great meal and naturally ease into an evening out without having to leave the space.”

Opening a new concept in a competitive market like King West was a risk, but the response has been overwhelmingly positive. “I hear people walk in and say, ‘I can’t believe this is an Earls,’” says Venu. “That’s exactly what we want.”

Venu also points out that Earls King West is already influencing other restaurants in the area, with neighbouring venues looking to add rooftop spaces and revamp their interiors. “Imitation is the biggest form of flattery,” he says. “It means we’re doing something right. We’ve gone from five locations in Ontario to nine in just a few years, so we’re no longer the new kid—we have legacy here now. And we’re just getting started.”

RC Show Restaurants Canada

Earls King West is not just setting new standards for restaurant design and experience—it’s also the chosen host for **Industry Night Out**, RC Show’s off-site celebration for the people who FUEL the industry.

INDUSTRY NIGHT OUT at EARLS KING WEST
Tuesday, April 8 | 8 PM – 1 AM
601 King Street West, Toronto

This epic industry gathering, features a multi-level experience with two food stations showcasing Earls’ new seafood and sushi program, a margarita bar, and a rooftop DJ setting the vibe for a high-energy night. Guests can enjoy signature spritz towers, espresso martinis, and margaritas, including non-alcoholic options, while enjoying Earls’ classic menu favorites. Plus, with an expertly crafted beverage menu and an inviting hospitality and foodservice-only social atmosphere, it’s the perfect place to raise a glass with industry friends. This exclusive event will bring the hospitality industry together for an evening of networking, entertainment, and culinary excellence. With its multi-dimensional design, elevated menu, and vibrant energy, Earls King West provides the perfect backdrop for an unforgettable night.

Industry Night Out at Earls King West is the must-attend event of the season, where the industry comes together to celebrate, connect, and inspire the future of dining.

Don’t miss out—secure your ticket now!

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WHAT WILL THRIVE IN 2025

TECHNOMIC'S 2025 CANADIAN FOODSERVICE EXPERT PREDICTIONS.

The Canadian foodservice industry is poised for an exciting rebound, driven by the easing of economic pressures on the consumer. Overall foodservice performance is expected to exceed that of 2024, with national and regional restaurant chains leading this growth. And, as consumers return to their favourite restaurants in greater numbers, they will be welcomed back with less-conventional foods and beverages on the menu.

CONFIDENCE RETURNS TO FOODSERVICE

There's promising news for Canada's foodservice industry. Macro-economic and foodservice-specific conditions are showing positive trend lines that will continue through next year. After enduring near-record lows in consumer confidence—due to high interest rates, soaring housing costs and political uncertainty, among other things—the outlook is beginning to brighten. As financial pressures ease and menu inflation returns to historical norms, consumers will feel empowered to spend discretionary income at restaurants. By the middle of 2025, expect foodservice to experience greater stability and positive, more predictable customer traffic.

A GREATER DIVIDE

The gap between independents and chains is set to widen. While independent operators continue to face profitability challenges and resource constraints, they will find a measure of stability in 2025. Chains, however, emerged from the pandemic with their customer bases and balance sheets intact, positioning them as now ready to make investments in menu innovation, off-premises programs, technology and elevated service experiences. This divergency will lead to a more pronounced disparity in performance between the two segments over the near term.







RESTAURANTS TO THE RESCUE

Canadians will turn to restaurants as an escape from everyday pressures in the year ahead. Dining out provides a more affordable way to unwind and indulge, and rising consumer confidence and disposable income will encourage more guests to turn to restaurants as a welcome retreat from cautious spending. This uptick in restaurant visitation will especially be true for weekend occasions, when guests are eager to splurge on culinary experiences. In response, expect chain restaurant operators to invest in dining room upgrades and exceptional hospitality, particularly robust staff training to enhance service quality and the in-store experience overall.



COURTING CONTROVERSY

Operators will increasingly lean into chaos cookery to differentiate from competitors and capture consumer interest, especially via social media-friendly limited-time offers. Expect to see more buzzworthy yet potentially polarizing items, such as olive oil coffees or 4/20-inspired offerings. Shock-factor (some even seemingly inedible) ingredient callouts will abound on menus, especially at independents, including MSG, acid (such as lactic acid or acid phosphate), and animal entrails and other unconventional parts. And finally, operators will turn to more over-the-top, indulgent mashups (think a s'mores burger or turducken-style protein pairings) to attract culinary adventure-seekers.



UMAMI TSUNAMI

Novel and nontraditional umami elements will proliferate on menus. Umami is one of the five basic tastes, used to describe savoury or mouthwatering items, and is a key component in many global cuisines. As such, we'll see more traditional global umami bombs such as miso, soy sauce and gochujang continue to find momentum in radical ways, while new umami-focused international condiments will also flourish, including Thai fish-and-chile sauce nam jim jaew and Korean fermented soybean paste doenjang. And look for more common and comforting umami ingredients, such as mushrooms and tomatoes, to show up in increasingly interesting and unorthodox ways, including unique preparations (think tomato raisins), quirky infusions (including mushroom sodas and tomato water) and as plant-based alternatives (such as Kentucky-fried maitake mushrooms).

Technomic.

ABOUT TECHNOMIC:

Technomic Inc. was founded as a management consulting firm in 1966. Since then, Technomic's services have grown to encompass cloud-based B2B research tools, consumer and menu trend tracking and other leading strategic research and analytic capabilities, to prioritize and size business opportunities. Our clients include food manufacturers and distributors, restaurants, retailers and multiple other business verticals aligned with the food industry that are looking to make informed decisions to support their business growth.

Find out more about Technomic at Technomic.com.

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Informa is a leading international B2B markets, live and on-demand events and digital services group. They connect businesses and professionals in 30+ industries with the knowledge they need to learn more, know more and do more. Informa has hundreds of global brands, products and services and employs 11,000 employees in ~30 countries worldwide.

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SUSTAINABILITY IN 2025:

It's Not About Trendlines. It's About the Horizon.



BY JILLIAN RODAK,
VICE-PRESIDENT SUSTAINABILITY,
RESTAURANTS CANADA

TRENDS ARE IDEAS, passions and fashions that come and go. By definition, they live in the short-term, capturing public consciousness, gaining traction, and then, just as quickly, are replaced by new diversions. Sustainability, however, doesn't fit that pattern. I've often been asked to weigh in on sustainability trends and, while I appreciate the interest behind the question, sustainability does not follow trends.

While there's little doubt the topic of sustainability rises and falls on the annual list of priorities for both consumers and CEOs, it's actually more of a scorecard that measures how well we are balancing the human desire to consume and expend resources with the ability of the planet to provide and replenish. If we tip the scales too far, the correction will be delivered at the whim of nature, in ways we can only partially anticipate, but certainly don't want to endure.

The hard push for sustainable practices in foodservice has been largely shaped by the forces of legislation, corporate policy, consumer demand and reality. Governments worldwide are beginning to demand accountability, implementing policies that require businesses to reduce waste, limit carbon emissions, and rethink their supply chains. At the same time, the natural world is issuing its own mandates—rising temperatures, volatile weather patterns, and increasingly unpredictable supply chains—leaving businesses in the food ecosystem with little option but to adapt. Businesses that rely on a steady and affordable supply of food are among the first to feel the effects, and the largest of these, along with most restaurants, are already into the hard work of transforming their businesses to ensure resilience, mitigate risks and future-proof their operations against climate volatility, resource scarcity and shifting regulatory landscapes.

Despite some reports of declining investment in ESG and sustainability, for our industry the reality is far more nuanced. In foodservice, the focus isn't shifting—because it can't. We have no choice but to find ways to build resilience into the food system supply chain and make better, more sustainable decisions to ensure the long-term viability of our food system and our businesses.

If I had to summarize the three big themes underlying the sustainability conversation for the food and foodservice industry, they would be **local sourcing and supply chain resilience, waste reduction and circular economy development, and inter-industry collaboration.**

LOCAL SOURCING & SUPPLY CHAIN RESILIENCE

For a long time, "local food" was perceived as a type of cuisine and associated with culinary tourism and farm-to-table dining, evoking images of rustic bistros boasting heirloom vegetables and grass-fed beef. But today, local isn't just about aesthetic appeal or artisanal branding—it's about survival. As global supply chains, once celebrated for their efficiency, have become increasingly fragile, all foodservice operators have had to rethink their dependencies and shift their sourcing strategies. The benefits of sourcing locally are not only about customer experience, they are increasingly about reliability. When global shortages cause delays, restaurants that have cultivated relationships with regional suppliers find themselves in a far stronger position. And for consumers, while cost and convenience still drive the majority of purchasing decisions, there's a growing awareness that locally sourced food is often fresher, more traceable, and more available.

By focusing on ingredients grown and raised nearby—or even producing their own—restaurants are reducing transportation emissions, supporting local economies, and offering diners the richness of regional



flavours. This approach not only strengthens relationships with farmers, fishers, and artisanal producers but also fosters innovation in menu design, showcasing hyper-seasonal dishes that tell a uniquely Canadian story. In today's competitive market, local sourcing has evolved beyond being a nod to sustainability—it's now a strategy for resilience, culinary tourism, and distinctive storytelling.

Opportunities:

Hyperlocal & Seasonal Menus: Restaurants growing their own ingredients through rooftop gardens, greenhouses, or urban farms.

Farm-to-Table Experiences: Partnerships with local farms to host on-site dining events or culinary tours and reintroducing traditional preservation methods, such as canning, fermentation and pickling, to feature local ingredients on the menu year-round.

Consumer Education: Hosting workshops or dinner events to teach diners about local food systems and sustainability practices.

Local Branding & Carbon Labelling on Menus: Restaurants showcasing their commitment to Canadian ingredients through marketing and storytelling, incorporating supplier profiles and even identifying the carbon footprint of menu items.

WASTE REDUCTION & CIRCULARITY

If there is one area where foodservice sustainability is making the most tangible progress, it's in food waste reduction.

Yet, despite widespread acknowledgement of the issue, Second Harvest, Canada's largest food rescue organization reports that 46.5 per cent of all food is wasted annually, yet 41.7 per cent of this food is edible and capable of being redirected to support Canadians, amounting to an estimated $58 billion in avoidable food waste each year.[1] Restaurants continue to make great strides in addressing waste by implementing ever more stringent ingredient and margin-conscious inventory management processes, and new technology and food redistribution efforts are accelerating further solutions.

Food rescue organizations like Second Harvest and food redistribution platforms like Too Good To Go are becoming an integral part of many restaurant operations, seamlessly incorporating food redirection into daily workflows. Meanwhile, larger institutions—hotels, schools and conference centres—are investing in biodigesters and collaborating with municipalities to enhance composting programs, creating a more sustainable approach to food waste management.

Efforts to curb food waste are evolving, but they're just one piece of a much larger sustainability puzzle. Beyond food itself, the industry is also reckoning with another pressing issue—packaging waste. The takeout boom of the past decade has revealed an inconvenient truth: the convenience economy generates an overwhelming amount of disposable packaging. But there's a palpable shift on the horizon—a growing commitment to a more circular takeout economy, where reusables are finding a successful route into the mainstream.

Companies like Friendlier, Suppli, and Reusables are leading the charge, designing systems where customers borrow and return takeout containers rather than tossing them in the trash. These models have gained initial traction in dense urban centres and have shown success and potential to scale in smaller communities. As reusable packaging systems scale, they will fundamentally change the landscape and culture of food delivery and takeout. The real challenge to adoption isn't customer willingness—it's making sustainability the default. The businesses leading the charge aren't waiting for consumers to opt in; they're designing solutions that are seamless, cost-competitive, and baked into the experience. When the responsible choice is the easiest and most affordable one, real change happens.



Beyond regulatory compliance, Canadian restaurants are taking sustainability a step further, finding ways to embrace waste reduction principles and implement circular economy models across the value chain, prioritizing solutions that serve the health of the planet and their bottom line.

Opportunities:

Whole-Ingredient Cooking: Elevating root-to-stem and whole-animal cuisine, where every part of an ingredient is utilised, creating dishes that are both inventive and waste-conscious.

Food Redistribution Programs: Collaborating with organizations like Second Harvest or community food banks to redirect good, surplus food to those in need, addressing both waste and food insecurity or Too Good To Go, using their app to offer surplus food at a discount to local customers.

Upcycled Food: Incorporating products like spent grains, coffee grounds, and surplus produce that are repurposed into high-quality ingredients and even branded merchandise.

Reusable Packaging: Partnering with reusable container systems, such as Reusables and ShareWares (Vancouver, BC), Suppli (Toronto) and Friendlier (Ontario), to tackle the growing demand for sustainable, circular takeout container solutions.

Sustainable, Minimalist & Edible Packaging: Adopting materials such as plant-based plastics, compostable fibre containers, and biodegradable utensils that break down naturally without harming the environment or finding ways to eliminate

[1] ***Second Harvest and Value Chain Management International.*** *(2024). The Avoidable Crisis of Food Waste: Update.*



excess takeout packaging including complimentary items like condiment packets, pizza savers and cutlery cuts down waste, and saves a little money. Experimenting with edible packaging options like seaweed wraps and edible bowls can also add a creative element to the dining experience.

Operational Innovation: Conducting waste audits to refine purchasing, storage, and preparation processes, improving efficiency and cutting costs.

INTER-INDUSTRY COLLABORATION

Perhaps the most significant shift in 2025 won't be in individual restaurant practices, but in collective action. It's not enough for one restaurant to implement best practices; the entire ecosystem needs to evolve toward systemic change. Major brands like McDonald's are leveraging their purchasing power to encourage suppliers to adopt sustainable innovations, creating ripple effects that influence entire supply chains. Small and mid-sized businesses, meanwhile, are forming coalitions to share best practices, negotiate better sustainability-focused contracts, and advocate for a whole-industry approach.

The food system is not a passive entity—it is an interconnected ecosystem of farmers, distributors, processors, retailers, restaurants, and consumers, all of whom play an integral role in shaping sustainability outcomes. As stewards of food production and distribution, industry players bear the responsibility of ensuring that food is grown, sourced, prepared, and served in a way that minimizes harm to the environment while supporting human and economic well-being.

Opportunities:

Regenerative Agriculture Partnerships: Collaborating with farms that use carbon-sequestering practices to further reduce environmental impact.

Local Food Collaborations: Restaurants and local agricultural producers teaming up for joint promotions, pop-ups, integrated food experiences, or local product launches.

Closed-Loop Supply Chains & Recycling: Collaborating with recycling companies to ensure packaging waste is repurposed into new products or that organic waste becomes input for other industries, like animal feed or biofuels. Creating a local composting alliance to transform food scraps into nutrient-rich soil, closing the loop between farm and table.

Community Engagement & Education: Collaborating with food system partners to offer workshops and promote minimal-waste menus and initiatives, food redistribution successes, sustainable packaging choices, and the environmental impact of local food partners' actions to inspire diners to adopt waste-reducing practices at home.

Supplier Collaboration: Working with suppliers to source eco-friendly packaging materials and minimize excess packaging in deliveries.

For some industries, participation in sustainability initiatives may still feel like a choice, but for foodservice, it's an imperative. The food sector is inherently tied to the natural world. Agricultural production is dependent on soil health, water availability, and climate stability—factors that are increasingly at risk.

The way food is sourced, transported, and consumed has a direct impact on climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion. As such, sustainability is not a separate initiative; it is embedded in the very nature of food production and service. Foodservice must remain agile and adaptable. Forward-thinking businesses understand that reducing waste, lowering emissions, and supporting ethical sourcing are not just about compliance but about future-proofing their operations against supply chain disruptions, extreme weather events, and shifting consumer expectations.

As 2025 unfolds, legislative changes loom on the horizon. Political shifts in both Canada and the U.S. could bring new regulations—or rollbacks—that impact the foodservice industry's sustainability trajectory. Regardless of what the future holds, one truth remains: foodservice will continue to make incremental progress and plan for the future, because sustainability is part of our everyday business.

RC Show Restaurants Canada

Farm-Centric Dining with Down Home
With Chef Joel Gray and wine connoisseur Hannah Harradine
Tuesday, April 8 | 1:45-2:45 PM | Chef's Table

Don't miss Farm-Centric Dining with Down Home, part of the new Success Stories series at RC Show.

Scan the code to **REGISTER NOW.**

Case Stories:



Sustainability in Action in Canadian Foodservice



Across Canada, the foodservice industry is undergoing a transformation, with operators finding innovative ways to protect the environment while continuing to deliver exceptional dining experiences. The examples here are just a small sample of the enormous work being done across the country to integrate sustainability into every aspect of foodservice. From hyperlocal sourcing and plant-based menus to cutting-edge waste reduction technologies, these trailblazers exemplify the ingenuity and commitment driving change in the industry.

RIVER CAFÉ
PRINCE'S ISLAND PARK

RIVER CAFÉ | CALGARY, ALBERTA

Sustainability at the heart of the restaurant experience.

@rivercafeyyc

Nestled on Calgary's scenic Prince's Island Park, River Café is a model of what modern sustainability can look like in the restaurant world. A LEAF-certified icon, the café doesn't just adhere to eco-friendly ideals—it cultivates them. Its on-site edible container garden overflows with fresh greens, berries, herbs, and flowers, harvested daily to craft dishes that sing with the distinct flavours of Alberta. Complementing this hyperlocal focus is a commitment to ethical seafood sourcing, working hand-in-hand with Ocean Wise and responsible fishers to align every menu item with their deeply rooted sustainability ethos.

The café has banished bottled water, replacing it with a thoughtful approach to hydration, and runs entirely on green energy—sourced from wind and biogas. This dedication extends to its staff, who participate in a hands-on 'garden apprentice' program at Highwood Crossing Organic Farm, learning the intricacies of organic agriculture. Robust recycling and composting systems underscore their near-zero waste operation, a testament to their meticulous attention to detail.

River Café doesn't just serve meals; it crafts an experience where sustainability and sophistication coexist seamlessly. With each carefully plated dish, the café weaves a narrative of environmental stewardship and culinary excellence—one that is as conscientious as it is elegant.





LILA RESTAURANT | VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Shared social values and sustainability philosophy come together for "divine play."

@lilavancouver

In the heart of Vancouver's Main Street, Lila is a testament to the power of collaboration and shared values. Named one of *Air Canada's Best New Restaurants*, Lila is the product of a long-standing friendship between Chef Meeru Dhalwala (Vij's) and restaurateur Shira Blustein (The Acorn). Together, they've crafted a restaurant that reflects a holistic vision of sustainability, where environmental responsibility intersects with community and playful creativity.

Lila's menu is unapologetically plant-forward, drawing on Dhalwala's expertise in contemporary Indian cuisine to highlight vegetarian and vegan dishes made from local, seasonal and organic ingredients. The operators shared commitment to thoughtful sourcing supports regional producers while keeping the restaurant's environmental footprint in check. The setting, too, mirrors their ethos. With its biophilic design and a verdant "not-so-secret" garden patio, Lila invites diners to connect with nature in a space that feels both intentional and restorative.

But the story of Lila is also about relationships—between two women whose partnership speaks to sustainability in the form of trust, mutual respect and shared purpose. By weaving their complementary talents into a unified vision, Dhalwala and Blustein have created something enduring, where culinary innovation and ethical responsibility thrive side by side, offering something deeply personal and profoundly impactful.

A&W CANADA

Digging in on the Shift Toward Sustainable Alternatives.

@awcanada

Quick-service burger chains face a unique challenge: how to expand sustainable menu offerings while satisfying customers' cravings for flavour, convenience and indulgence. A&W Canada has not only embraced this challenge but is redefining what sustainability can look like in the fast-food space. By introducing plant-based and vegetarian menu options that appeal to evolving consumer tastes, the brand has managed to push the envelope while staying true to its identity.

The launch of the Beyond Meat Burger in 2018 was a game-changer, offering a plant-based patty with the taste and texture of traditional beef. A&W followed this success with the Beyond Meat Sausage & Egger, giving breakfast lovers a more sustainable way to enjoy an iconic menu item. However, the real breakthrough came in fall 2024 with the Masala Veggie Burger. Initially introduced as a limited-time offering in Ontario, the burger combines South Asian-inspired flavours with a crispy vegetable-and-paneer patty, spicy piri-piri sauce, and fresh toppings. The record-breaking demand prompted a limited-time, nationwide rollout.

A&W's strategy demonstrates that sustainability in the quick-service industry isn't just about reducing environmental impact—it's about innovation that bridges the gap between responsibility and the enjoyment customers expect. Simply offering sustainable versions of core and beloved menu options isn't enough. To shift customer preferences, brands must create products that are not only eco-conscious but also exciting and in tune with food trends in their own right. By crafting a burger that delivers bold flavours and a unique culinary experience, A&W has turned a sustainable choice into an irresistible urge, proving that sustainability and indulgence can coexist, and open the door for even the most devout meat lovers to explore alternatives.



DOWN HOME FARMHOUSE RESTAURANT | MARKDALE, ONTARIO

Local food pioneers fuse their lifestyle and culinary philosophy into an incredible, hyper local experience.

@downhomerestaurant



Set in the rolling hills of Grey County, Down Home offers a dining experience rooted in sustainability and a deep connection to place. Run from the home and property of Chef Joel Gray and Hannah Harradine (previous operators of Sumac & Salt), the Feast On-certified restaurant combines intimate hospitality with a commitment to local and seasonal cooking, recently earning recognition from the *Michelin Guide*.

The 10-course tasting-style menu reflects the changing seasons, with ingredients sourced from the couple's gardens and nearby regenerative farms. Their decision to operate out of their home is both practical and sustainable, reducing the environmental footprint of a larger commercial space while fostering a closer connection to their rural community. Traditional preservation techniques like curing, pickling and fermenting ensure that every harvest is used to its fullest, minimizing waste and celebrating Ontario's natural abundance.

The carefully curated drink menu features Ontario wines and spirits, reinforcing the restaurant's emphasis on local sourcing. Down Home integrates sustainability into every aspect of its operations, offering a thoughtful, grounded approach to fine dining that feels both innovative and timeless.

ALGONQUIN COLLEGE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION | OTTAWA, ONTARIO

Investment in Power Knot biodigester virtually eliminates food waste in the college's restaurants and foodservice operations.

powerknot.com

In 2022, the Algonquin College Students' Association took a bold step toward sustainability by introducing Power Knot's LFC-200 biodigester, a cutting-edge, green technology to address the food waste generated by the college's bustling restaurant and dining operations.

The biodigester uses microorganisms, heat and oxygen to break down organic waste, converting it into grey water that can be safely discharged into the sewage system. This process not only eliminates the need to send food waste to landfills but also reduces methane emissions and overall environmental impact.



With multiple restaurants and food outlets on campus, the biodigester is a critical part of Algonquin College's waste management strategy. It can process up to 200 kilograms of food waste daily, handling everything from kitchen scraps to plate waste generated by the college's dining operations. This integration ensures that the campus restaurants run more sustainably while also educating students and staff on the importance of environmental stewardship.

The adoption of the LFC-200 biodigester aligns with the college's broader commitment to sustainability and provides a real-world example of how innovative technology can support greener practices in the foodservice industry. By addressing waste at the source, this technology can be seamlessly woven into the fabric of daily operations, setting a precedent for large venues, hotels and institutions across Canada.

The Future of Bars: Evelyn Chick & Christina Veira

Tap into the best bets for bar success in 2025



THE BAR INDUSTRY IS UNDERGOING A SEISMIC SHIFT. Consumers are demanding more immersive experiences, economic pressures are reshaping pricing strategies, and technology is redefining hospitality. In 2025, reinvention isn't optional—it's essential. The days of simply slinging drinks are over. To thrive, bars must curate unforgettable moments, deliver value-driven luxury, and stay ahead in an increasingly competitive landscape.

Going out is no longer just about routine nights—it's about intentional, high-impact experiences. With rising costs and shifting consumer behavior, patrons are going out less frequently but expecting more when they do. This shift has forced bars to step up, offering not just exceptional drinks but captivating atmospheres, elevated service, and memorable experiences that turn every visit into an event.

Instead of relying on regulars dropping in for a casual drink, modern bars are positioning themselves as destinations, leveraging curated programming, innovative beverage offerings, and immersive design to justify the visit. In 2025, a successful bar isn't just a neighborhood staple—it's a space that feels worth the effort, the expense, and the heightened expectations.

To get an insider's take on where the industry is headed, MENU magazine connected with **Evelyn Chick** and **Christina Veira**—bar experts, educators and entrepreneurs, and the visionaries behind the Bar & Beverage Stage and Beyond the Rail Cocktail Competition at RC Show as well as their own trend-setting concepts. Their insights did not disappoint. Here's their take on what's shaking up the bar industry in 2025—how the best operators are adapting, where the biggest opportunities lie, and what's defining the next era of nightlife...



1. BUDGETED PREMIUMIZATION & THE LUXE-FOR-LESS MOVEMENT

Consumers are more selective with their spending, but that doesn't mean they're settling for less. Instead of discounting across the board, bars are reframing luxury as accessible indulgence—offering high-end touches at competitive prices. Think caviar service paired with a top-shelf martini at near-cost pricing, creating a sense of opulence while driving higher check averages.

It's a strategic pivot: rather than slashing prices, bars are stacking value, layering experiences, and curating moments that feel worth it, proving that luxury and affordability can coexist in the same space.

2. IMMERSIVE & MULTI-SENSORY EXPERIENCES

The modern bar is no longer just a watering hole—it's an entertainment hub. Guests expect more than a drink; they want a full-fledged experience that blends cocktails, food, music, and interactive elements. By creating layered entertainment experiences, bars are transforming into destinations where guests linger longer—and spend more.

What's trending:

- Live music residencies featuring up-and-coming artists.
- Themed pop-ups and supper club vibes.
- Karaoke rooms with full-service food and drink menus.
- Cocktail pairing experiences that rival fine dining menus.



3. THE RISE OF SNACK CULTURE & FLEXIBLE DINING

Food programs are no longer an afterthought in the bar space, and small, shareable plates are dominating bar menus. With the line between bar and restaurant increasingly blurring, snackable gourmet menus are now a key draw.

Some bars are outsourcing food programs entirely, renting out kitchen space to independent chefs in a barbershop-style model, where resident chefs rotate through, offering creative, high-quality menus without bars taking on full kitchen overhead. It's an innovative way to keep offerings fresh and costs controlled.



4. COCKTAIL TASTING MENUS & LOW-ABV INNOVATION

With the rise of mindful drinking, bars are moving beyond high-proof cocktails to low-ABV, tasting-style offerings. The traditional cocktail experience is evolving into curated miniature cocktails, progressive tasting flights, and omakase-style presentations—designed to enhance food pairings while maintaining a sessionable pace.

Up-and-coming concepts:

- Using vermouth, sherry, sake and bitters as low-ABV base spirits.
- Incorporating ferments, teas and herbal infusions.
- Designing cocktail flights with progressive flavour profiles.
- Expanding non-alcoholic and zero-proof selections with depth and complexity.

5. WHITE LABELLING & SIGNATURE PRODUCTS

The era of custom bar-branded spirits, mixers, and proprietary menu items is here. Bars are forging deeper partnerships with distilleries and breweries to create exclusive, house-branded products, strengthening their brand identity and unlocking new retail revenue streams.

Think private-label gins, signature bitters, and small-batch aged cocktails bottled for in-house use and retail sales. The goal? Scale house-made specialties beyond the bar to offer new guests a unique, portable bar-exclusive experience they can't get anywhere else.

6. BUILDING CULTURE TO CLOSE LABOUR GAPS

The labour crisis is reshaping the way operators approach employee culture and experience. The bottom-line priority of retaining top bar talent is compelling leaders to take a hard look at their total employee



value proposition and ushering in new and meaningful incentives, a renewed focus on workplace culture and flexible scheduling. The most forward-looking employers are investing in staff benefits, training and mental health support and valuable mentorship programs to transform traditional service jobs into sustainable and fulfilling career paths.

What's working:

- Offering health benefits for staff working full-time or permanent part-time schedules.
- Providing schedule flexibility to accommodate work-life balance.
- Implementing clear and fair tip structures.
- Creating professional development and mentorship opportunities for long-term retention.

7. CREATING AESTHETIC-FORWARD MOMENTS

Bars are no longer just brick-and-mortar spaces—they're digital brands. The TikTok effect means a single viral video can drive massive foot traffic, but the key is making sure the in-person experience lives up to the online hype.

Bars that win on social media aren't just relying on one-off influencer partnerships; they're designing repeatable, visually captivating experiences that add value to guest experience and encourage sharing. That means building layered visual and experiential features throughout the space— from crafting aesthetic-forward cocktails, hosting limited-time pop-ups and designing ultra-immersive themes that encourage and inspire user-generated content.



EVELYN CHICK
Entrepreneur, TV Personality, Beverage Expert

Evelyn is a highly accredited specialist in the world of wine, spirits, and bar and beverage. She is a serial entrepreneur, hospitality mentor and consultant, developing efficient, acclaimed and cutting-edge bar programs for media outlets, multimillion dollar venues and notable brands. Under her hospitality company, Evelyn Chick Projects, is Ahma, a dynamic event and incubator space, LOC (Love of Cocktails), an experiential events company and SIMPL THINGS, an award-winning cocktail and snack bar included in Canada's 50, and the 'One to Watch' on North America's 50 Best Bars in 2024. Her cocktail book, *For the Love of Cocktails*, is available across all major bookstores in North America, and she's excited to have launched her inaugural Sip & Snack Festival 'Feastie', championing local, BIPOC and female-owned businesses. As a resident drink expert on the CTV's *The Good Stuff* and *The Social*, she is thrilled to be a catalyst in the rapid growth of Canada's vibrant food and beverage culture.

@evelynchick



CHRISTINA VEIRA
Certified Beverage & Hospitality Expert, Educator

Christina Veira is a leading force in hospitality and beverage education. As co-owner of Bar Mordecai, she has helped shape one of Toronto's most celebrated bars, recognized among North America's 50 Best and Canada's 100 Best. Opened just before the COVID-19 lockdowns, Bar Mordecai has since thrived, offering inventive cocktails, tapas, live music, DJs, and artist collaborations in a Wes Anderson-inspired space with four immersive karaoke rooms.Beyond the bar, Christina is the founder of STAVE, a platform for beverage certifications, hospitality training, and curated tasting experiences. She has played key leadership roles as Bar & Beverage Curator for the Restaurants Canada Show, National Coordinator for Speed Rack Canada, and Director of Programming for Toronto Cocktail Week. A WSET-certified spirits and wine educator and an Awamori Jinbner, she is dedicated to education and mentorship in the industry. Her accolades include Bartender of the Year (*Canada's 100 Best*, 2023), a top ranking on Drinks International's Bar World 100, and recognition as the World's 50 Best Bars' North America Roku Industry Icon (2022). Named a *Foodism* 40 Champion of DEI and a WSET and IWSC Future 50 Under 40 honouree, Christina is a champion of equity and inclusion and an avid fundraiser and organizer within the hospitality community.

@christinaveira

RC Show Restaurants Canada

Register for RC Show 2025 and make your way to the Bar & Beverage Stage for an unmissable lineup of industry insights, expert-led sessions, and the latest trends reshaping the bar world.

Don't miss the **Beyond the Rail Cocktail Competition**, on Wednesday, April 8 from 11 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., where Canada's top bar talent goes head-to-head for cash and prizes—proving that great cocktails don't just elevate the experience, they drive demand and boost profits.

Scan the code to **REGISTER NOW.**

Menu to Mobile: Digital Ordering Trends in Foodservice

The pandemic sparked a digital revolution in Canadian foodservice. Despite expectations to take over the industry, digital orders (placed via mobile app, computer, or text) have leveled at around 14% of commercial foodservice visits. This represents 1.1B visits, three times the level in 2019.
To succeed in foodservice, it's critical to understand the shifting dynamics within digital ordering.



46%
Nearly half of digital orders included a **deal,** up 2 points

35%
Quick-and-easy **dinners** were a digital staple, but this daypart was down 1 point

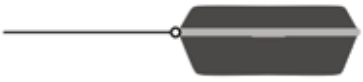


Preordered, grab-and-go coffees and **morning meals** were the second-most important daypart for digital and gaining share

24%



34% Over one-third of digital customers had a we-have-drinks-at-home mentality and **only order food**



28%
Fast **family meals** have been a cornerstone of digital ordering, but lost 2 share points as consumers made tough spending decisions





72%
The youngest three generations, aged **less than 44 years old,** accounted for nearly three-fourths of digital orders and continued to gain share

Gen Z and millennials are today's digital ordering generations. But the future lies with Gen Alpha, a cohort growing up in a fully digital age, witnessing their families order dinners with ease, and signaling further integration of technology into their dining habits.

Source: Circana, CREST®, Canada, Year Ending October 2024 vs. 2023



Circana Foodservice Industry Specialist Tate Bastien inspires actions that unlock business growth. He supports some of the industry's top operators and manufacturers through exceptional industry knowledge, technical and communication skills, and client relations. Reach Tate at tate.bastien@circana.com.

Circana.

SMART TECH IS FUELING THE NEXT ERA OF HOSPITALITY

DANA MCCAULEY, CEO of the Canadian Food Innovation Network (CFIN), gives the industry a view around the corner at what's next.





Technology is no longer a nice-to-have in foodservice—it's become a necessity. From rising costs and labour shortages to shifting consumer expectations, the industry is facing challenges that demand smarter, more efficient solutions. Automation, AI, and data-driven tools aren't here to replace the human touch that makes hospitality unique; they're here to enhance it, freeing up professionals to focus on what they have been trained to do: deliver unforgettable experiences.

The right technology helps operators streamline operations, reduce waste, and deliver better guest experiences—without sacrificing quality or creativity. Instead of fearing change, the most successful businesses are embracing it, using innovation to fuel resilience, profitability, and long-term growth.

Serving all of Canada, the Canadian Food Innovation Network (CFIN) is fueling the next wave of food innovation by funding game-changing food technology, driving collaboration, and building the most dynamic food business community in Canada. And they're doing just that—connecting thousands of members from across the food value chain, from global brands to groundbreaking startups. CFIN provides tailored funding, resources and research to help innovators accelerate real-world solutions to address the foodservice and hospitality sector's unique challenges.

Just a few of the solutions CFIN has helped bring to market include **Cheffer** (cheffer.co), a smart ordering platform that helps hospitality operations maximize their purchasing cost savings, **Remy** (cibotica.com), a robotic makeline that automates repetitive tasks to enhance kitchen efficiency, and **Harvest** (harvestsystems.ca), an oven waste heat recovery system that reduces restaurant energy use.

MENU connected with Dana McCauley, CFIN's CEO to help illuminate the trends, technologies and ideas that are moving foodservice forward.

MM From your unique and focused vantage point, what are the most promising new technologies currently being developed for the foodservice and restaurant industry?

Dana McCauley: *Two of the technologies for foodservice we're most excited about include advanced robotics and artificial intelligence (AI). Robots are evolving rapidly and can now take on tasks that require a delicate touch, such as plating intricate dishes or handling more advanced cooking techniques. Some experts believe a "ChatGPT" moment for robotics is imminent—where these technologies become deeply embedded across industries and as part of our everyday lives. CFIN-funded companies like* ***GreenCo Robotics*** *(greencorobots.com) are at the forefront of this transformation.*

AI is of course another game-changer. It's already being used to power predictive analytics for inventory management, chatbots for customer engagement, and dynamic pricing models that help restaurants optimize revenue. One example is ***Jitto*** *(getjitto.com) whose AI-enabled wholesale ordering platform helps foodservice operators save time, labour, and avoid lost sales.*

MM From an R&D perspective, what are the top transformative trends or areas of emerging focus in foodservice?

DM: *In addition to robotics and AI, health and wellness is another rapidly evolving area with significant implications for the foodservice industry. Ingredient innovation is reshaping menu possibilities to align with shifting customer preferences. For instance,* ***New School Foods'*** *(newschoolfoods.co) groundbreaking work to develop plant-based alternatives to whole-cut seafood products is*


Photo courtesy of Jo-Anne McArthur | We Animals Media

unlocking new avenues for exciting culinary experimentation, combining the health and sustainability benefits of plant ingredients with the taste and texture of traditional animal products.

Functional foods are another dynamic area. Companies like ***Crush Dynamics*** *(crushdynamics.com) are leveraging by-products from winemaking to create ingredients rich in antioxidants and other bioactive compounds. These functional ingredients can enhance the nutritional profile of menu items, and facilitate the short, pronounceable ingredient lists that consumers are increasingly seeking—without compromising on taste.*



MM Sustainability and AI remain key areas of industry focus. What role does CFIN see artificial intelligence and sustainability playing in the future of restaurant operations and customer experience?

DM: *AI-enabled sustainability solutions, like* ***CarbonGraph****'s (carbongraph.io) integrated platform that offers lifecycle assessments of products and services, hold significant promise for the hospitality sector. These tools can help restaurants quantify their impact and operate more sustainably while satisfying growing demands from customers and regulators for greater transparency.*

Of course, barriers like high upfront costs and the need for specialized expertise can slow adoption of AI and sustainability solutions throughout the sector. That's where organizations like CFIN come in—to connect operators with resources and knowledge that make it easier to take the leap.

MM How have the headwinds buffeting the industry for the past four years—the pandemic, inflation, labour shortages—influenced research and development priorities in the foodservice sector?

DM: *The challenges of the past few years have accelerated the digitization and automation of the sector to address labour shortages and inflationary pressures. We're seeing new software platforms like* ***App8*** *(app8solutions.com) flourish as restaurants strive to profitably manage their dine-in, pickup and delivery workflows amidst these pressures.*



This period has also seen increasing R&D investments devoted to personalized nutrition and the concept of "food as medicine." Companies like ***Fresh Prep*** *(freshprep.ca) are responding to these trends by focusing on personalized meal kits tailored to individual health goals and dietary preferences. These advancements, alongside emerging technologies in wearable health monitoring and nutrigenomics, are reshaping how foodservice operators cater to health-conscious consumers by enabling customized, data-informed options.*

Recent challenges are also influencing things like the development of functional foods and tools that enhance supply chain resilience. We're seeing a lasting desire for solutions to issues like long-term health and operational adaptability that the pandemic brought into sharp focus.

MM What are some of the most significant consumer trends affecting foodservice today, and how is CFIN helping businesses adapt?

DM: *Consumer preferences are shifting rapidly, and some of the most significant trends include a growing demand for convenience, health-conscious choices, and transparency. Convenience is driving the rise of delivery, takeout, and quick-service dining. Demand for health-conscious plant-based, organic, and allergen-free options are also growing.*

CFIN helps businesses adapt to these trends by providing funding, fostering collaboration, and connecting operators with cutting-edge solutions. YODL, our online community and platform, is designed to connect food businesses with technology providers and resources that make adapting to consumer demands simpler and faster.

MM What are some of the most promising new kitchen technologies that are expected to revolutionize the foodservice industry in the next few years?

DM: *The future of kitchens lies in smarter, more sustainable technologies designed to optimize efficiency and reduce waste. Large kitchen appliances are increasingly equipped with sensors to maintain precise temperatures, track energy usage, and ensure food safety. These smart appliances provide opportunities for kitchen operators to leverage digital tools and AI to monitor performance, predict maintenance needs in advance, and reduce downtime.*

Energy-efficient cooking systems like induction ranges and waste-heat recycling will also become the industry norm. These advancements are setting the stage for kitchens that are not only more efficient but also environmentally and economically sustainable.

MM Can you share any insights on the future of food delivery and takeout services?

DM: *Food delivery and takeout services will continue to grow and evolve. Delivery platforms are expanding, and technologies like autonomous delivery robots are becoming a reality. Companies such as* ***Real Life Robotics*** *(realliferobotics.com) are already piloting robots capable of navigating complex, unpredictable environments to make food delivery faster and more efficient.*

Ghost kitchens are another trend to watch, as part of a larger redefinition of what even qualifies as a restaurant kitchen. Along with the rise of on-demand commercial kitchen





*spaces like **Syzl** (syzl.io) launching a low-overhead, yet high-quality, takeout or delivery-oriented operation has become easier than ever.*

Finally, as takeout and delivery service continue to grow, so too does the need for more sustainable food packaging options. The development of lower-cost, easily compostable packaging options will accelerate as a shift away from single-use plastics continues to build momentum at the policy level.

MM What new entrepreneurial opportunities do you see for restaurants looking to scale/diversify their offering?

***DM:** There are so many exciting opportunities for restaurants looking to grow. A post-pandemic trend has been the growth of virtual brands and ghost kitchens to let existing operators test new concepts or expand their reach without the high overhead of opening a new location.*

*Product line extensions are also popular, with restaurants branching into retail-ready items like sauces or frozen meals. These ventures allow businesses to leverage their brand recognition and connect with customers beyond the dining table. This can extend to subscription-based models, like meal kit deliveries or loyalty programs. Guelph-based **Crafty Ramen**'s (craftyramen.com) meal kits are a favourite amongst the CFIN team, and an excellent example of how restaurants can adapt and thrive in a competitive, constantly evolving industry.*



ABOUT DANA MCCAULEY, CFIN CEO

Dana McCauley is a value proposition driven innovator who leads the Canadian Food Innovation Network as it seeks to create sector change for Canada. Before joining CFIN in 2021, Dana successfully launched many food products and programs in collaboration with domestic and international food companies and entrepreneurs. Dana is known for having her finger on the pulse of food innovation after many years as a successful food writer and editor, a television food trends commentator, keynote speaker and a senior executive in the food manufacturing sector. Dana began the economic development phase of her career as the founding Executive Director for Food Starter, a Toronto based food business incubator and accelerator that was recognized with an Ontario Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence. In 2017, Dana was recognized by WXN as one of Canada's Most Powerful Women in the Trailblazers and Trendsetters category.

CANADIAN FOOD INNOVATION NETWORK

The Canadian Food Innovation Network (CFIN) is a national organization that's stimulating transformative and transferrable innovation within the Canadian food sector. With over 6,000 members and counting, CFIN has built the fastest growing and most engaged food business community in the country and their members come from across the globe, representing all parts of the food value chain. CFIN's free membership includes access to exclusive funding programs, five Regional Innovation Directors, and YODL.

RC Show Restaurants Canada

Visit Innovation Alley, presented by CFIN at RC Show 2025 to discover the companies and technologies that are accelerating the future of foodservice and hospitality.

Scan the code to **REGISTER NOW.**

People *Perspectives*

THE PARADOX OF USING AI TO BRING BACK THE "HUMAN" IN HUMAN RESOURCES

BY VAL UPFOLD, PRINCIPAL, VAL UPFOLD INC.



I still remember the moment AI first surprised me with its potential. Sitting at my desk, I casually typed a prompt into ChatGPT: "Come up with a development plan for a server assistant to grow into a server and, eventually, a manager over the next year." Within seconds, it returned a comprehensive, step-by-step plan. I was floored. Not only was the response thorough, but it also sparked a realization: we—particularly in hospitality HR—have barely scratched the surface of what generative AI platforms—like ChatGPT—which essentially use existing content and data to create new, human-like content, like text, images, video and music.

Over the years, I've seen firsthand how the hospitality industry often struggles with the time and resources needed to invest in employee growth and retention. Smaller independent restaurant groups frequently don't have dedicated HR departments, let alone the tools to craft personalized development plans for their staff. But with AI, the barriers suddenly shrink. From automating administrative tasks to creating actionable career paths, AI isn't just a tool—it's an opportunity to reimagine how we support our teams.

THE UPSIDE: MORE TIME FOR THE "IMPORTANT" WORK.

One of the biggest pain points in HR, as many of my peers would agree, is the constant triage of urgent tasks at the expense of important ones. AI helps flip this script. Administrative burdens—like crafting job descriptions, developing performance reviews, or designing training materials—can now be handled in minutes rather than hours.

Take training plans, for instance. In my early days at Oliver & Bonacini, we built detailed development checklists to help staff grow from server assistant to server, and eventually, into management roles. It was an exhausting process that demanded hours of focus. With AI, you can achieve the same results almost instantly. You input your objectives, and it generates clear, actionable steps. Suddenly, the focus shifts from creating the tool to using it—spending more time on meaningful conversations with staff instead of on paperwork.

The benefits are not confined to managers and leaders. According to the Stanford and MIT research report, "Generative AI at Work," in 14 per cent of average-level workers and 35 per cent of low-skilled workers (roughly equivalent to entry-level hospitality jobs) productivity was increased by the use of generative AI tools. The research also showed that low-skilled workers who were exposed to AI advanced three times faster than those without AI exposure. Perhaps most compelling is the report's finding that business that use and expose their employees to well-implemented AI tools enjoy a 40 per cent reduction in employee attrition and a 25 per cent decrease in customer requests to "speak to a manager."

The time-saving value of AI tools extends to recruitment as well. Instead of manually sifting through a mountain of resumes, AI can screen candidates and even identify patterns of potential. For example, I once fed a stack of resumes into AI and asked it to rank candidates based on their cultural fit and growth potential. Not only did it prioritize the candidates I might have chosen myself, but it also flagged overlooked strengths. This allows us to dig deeper into candidates' potential beyond the surface of their resumes, opening doors for those who might have been unfairly dismissed.

THE DOWNSIDE: ADDRESSING BIAS AND ENHANCING EQUITY

AI isn't without its challenges. As businesses start to realize the advantages of generative AI, the risks it poses are also coming into focus, including concerns about data privacy, bias, and potential intellectual property (IP) infringement.

Bias remains a critical concern, and in HR, we have to tread carefully. In March, 2024, the Ontario Government announced the passage of the Working for Workers Four Act, 2024, wherein they introduced legislative amendments to several employment laws in the province. The Act enhances protections for workers in Ontario while placing new obligations on employers, including a mandate to disclose the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the hiring process, preventing the use of biased AI in applicant tracking systems. Studies have shown that AI often reflects the biases built into its data, favouring men for higher-paying roles or dismissing candidates based on incomplete patterns. These "hallucinations" highlight the need for a careful balance between embracing AI and exercising critical oversight.

But bias isn't just a tech problem. It's a human one, and AI can be part of the solution. For example, in restaurants with a high percentage of ESL (English as a Second Language) workers, AI can simplify and translate training materials, making them more accessible. Verbal testing—once the gold standard in inclusive training—was time-consuming and inconsistent. AI now bridges that gap, helping eliminate bias in how we evaluate skills and support diverse teams.

THE OPPORTUNITY: PERSONALIZING THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Perhaps the most exciting frontier AI opens up is hyper-personalization. Gen Z workers, in particular, value tailored career development and meaningful experiences. AI allows us to cater to these preferences by automating routine tasks and freeing up time for one-on-one engagement. Imagine an employee development plan that's not just comprehensive, but also entirely customized to the individual's strengths, interests, and career aspirations.

"The time-saving value of AI tools extends to recruitment as well. Instead of manually sifting through a mountain of resumes, AI can screen candidates and even identify patterns of potential."



This isn't just theoretical. In my conversations with industry peers, I've seen how some forward-thinking HR leaders are using AI to create bespoke growth paths for their teams. For instance, one HR director at a large hotel chain told me about her AI-driven system that tracks employee goals, sends automated reminders, and even proposes next steps. By removing the manual legwork, she can focus on coaching and mentoring—the parts of HR that truly make a difference.

IT'S NOT THE TOOL, IT'S HOW YOU USE IT.

There's no denying that AI stirs fear in many industries. For some, it's a threat to jobs; for others, it's a shortcut that undermines the "real work." But I'd argue that it's neither. AI doesn't replace skills; it enhances them. It allows us to focus on the parts of our jobs that matter most: building culture, fostering growth, and creating spaces where people want to stay.

Hospitality, in particular, stands to benefit. Unlike industries where automation threatens to eliminate roles, ours thrives on the human touch. AI doesn't cook meals or deliver service with a smile—it makes it easier for the people who do to succeed. It's a tool to amplify creativity, streamline processes, and reimagine what's possible.

To realize the full suite of benefits, human resource leaders and operators need to put in the time to anticipate and address gaps and shortcomings in AI applications. They are



technologies—tools—designed to be put to purpose by an experienced, thoughtful user who understands they are responsible for applying a critical eye to the raw products and ideas it generates.

As I reflect on my own journey in hospitality HR, I'm struck by how much the landscape has changed—and how much more it can change if we embrace these tools thoughtfully. For operators who say they lack the time or resources to develop their teams, AI offers a solution. For those worried about retention, it's a game-changer. The question isn't whether to adopt AI but how to use it wisely. So, here's my challenge to you: Explore the possibilities. Start small. Use AI to draft your next job description or create a training outline. And most importantly, keep your critical thinking hat on. Trust the technology but verify its results. After all, AI is here to stay—and if we use it well, it might just make our industry stronger than ever.



About Val...

Valerie Upfold has extensive experience in the hospitality industry, having worked in hotels and restaurants in Canada and Australia. Her roles have included Restaurant Manager, Sommelier and HR Director. At Oliver & Bonacini Hospitality, Val spent 15 years—five as Manager and Sommelier at Canoe Restaurant in Toronto, and ten as HR Director, where she established the HR department and grew the company from 100 to over 1,500 employees. With over ten years in hospitality recruitment and HR consulting, Val is a trusted expert for renowned brands. She also conducts food TV casting, identifying top talent for the screen. Val contributes to Centennial College and George Brown College hospitality advisory committees, has lectured at the University of Guelph's HAFA program, and speaks at industry events nationwide. She volunteers with Catalyste+ to support the hospitality sector in developing markets.

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RC Show Restaurants Canada

Don't miss the Find, Retain and Train the Best Managers fireside chat with Val Upfold and Amrita Bhalla on in StudioEx on April 8th from 12-1:00 p.m.

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AI-GENERATED RESUMES:
WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR & HOW TO ADAPT YOUR HR PROCESSES

If you're worried that the majority of resumes and applications you're receiving are AI generated, and possibly inaccurate (or at least somewhat opaque), you're certainly not alone. The good news is that AI is not infallible, and also not inscrutable. If you find yourself in doubt about a picture-perfect candidate, here are a few tips to help you separate the person from the machine:





1. Ask the AI.

AI can be used to provide a second opinion on the authenticity of a resume or other content. You can input the content directly into a generative AI platform and prompt it to flag strange patterns, awkward phrasing and suspiciously erudite language (see what we did there?).

2. Demand details.

Resumes created by AI are often well-written, but lacking in personality and detail. They also tend to create the illusion of substance by relying on generic phrasing that sounds pretty good but doesn't tell you much about the applicant. Try updating your application process to require specifics, like detailed information on education, training, and other experiences and accomplishments. Of course, resumes do traditionally come with a side of word salad so, if you're not sure, use the in-person interview to probe further.

3. Make the interview the primary selection tool.

If you're in the habit of choosing "favourite" candidates before the interview phase, it's time to change things up. Update your interview process to include scenario-based questions to better understand a candidate's experience level, problem solving skills, and risk mitigation abilities. Often, the ideas they present and the language they use in the interview itself is the best indicator of their aptitude, personality and real-world expertise.

4. Make time for reference checks.

Often, busy employers treat this phase as a formality, but now it's more important than ever to do a deep dive into a candidate's employment history and personal references to confirm you're making the right hiring decision.

5. Look for imposters.

If they've worked anywhere for any amount of time in this industry, a candidate will have a certain comfort with the jargon that comes with it. Look for clunky phrasing, excessive use of keywords and repetition that are often the elements of AI generated content.

6. Consider candidate motivations for using AI.

Remember that reliance on AI does not necessarily mean a candidate is misrepresenting their experience and abilities. As a diverse nation, many Canadian applicants are likely to be newcomers who may use AI to improve the presentation of their resume. Unless original content creation is part of the job, look for the gems of experience within the fabric of the resume so you don't miss out on your next great hire.

Encourage honesty by making it clear in job postings and interviews that using AI to enhance a resume is acceptable, but exaggerating or falsifying information is not. This fosters trust and helps you focus on candidates who align with your values.

Moneris: A Canadian Leader in Restaurant Commerce & Financial Solutions



Canada's foodservice industry never stands still—and neither does Moneris. As the country's largest payment processor, Moneris has built direct and personal relationships with restaurant operators from coast to coast to coast, ensuring they have the tools they need to succeed in a competitive and constantly shifting market. But Moneris is more than just payments. As a proudly Canadian company with deep expertise in both the national and international economic and financial landscape, Moneris offers strategic guidance on local regulations, consumer behaviour, and emerging trends—helping restaurants not just keep up but stay ahead.

The Moneris team understands that the modern restaurant experience is more than great food and service—it's about seamless transactions, frictionless digital experiences, and tools that enable growth. That's why the company has expanded its portfolio beyond payments, making major investments in digital commerce, customer engagement, and financial services. Today, Moneris provides restaurant operators and business owners with an integrated ecosystem of solutions designed to help them scale efficiently, streamline operations, and deliver exceptional customer experiences.

Founded in 2000 as a joint venture between RBC and BMO, Moneris was built to support businesses with secure and reliable payment solutions, with a distinctly Canadian touch. Over the years, the company has evolved alongside the industry, ensuring that its services remain relevant to today's restaurant operators and the speed of hospitality business.

With a presence in every province and territory, Moneris understands the distinct challenges of operating in different regions and is committed to providing solutions that cater to local business needs. "Canada is a diverse market, and we take pride in understanding the unique needs of our merchants," says Gad Elharrar, Vice President, Product for Small



to Medium-sized Business (SMB), Moneris. "Because we live and work in the same communities as our customers, we're invested in their success. Whether it's adapting to new tipping regulations, tax requirements, or digital payment trends, we help businesses transition smoothly."

Elharrar only recently joined Moneris in his current role; however, he brings more than 15 years' experience in the payment, banking and fintech world and is excited to focus on a widening array of small and medium business solutions at the company. Part of what attracted him to the role was that Moneris understands that running a restaurant involves balancing many moving parts, from managing supply chains to keeping up with changing consumer expectations and recognizes that payment processing is just one piece of the puzzle.

"Restaurants today require more than just a way to accept payments," Elharrar points out. "They need solutions that help them grow and adapt to industry changes. Our focus is on making sure our technology is easy to use, integrates smoothly with restaurant workflows, and ultimately helps businesses succeed."

Elharrar is enthusiastic about new technologies offered by Moneris, like Moneris Go Restaurant POS, a new point-of-sale system designed specifically for foodservice businesses. Currently undergoing live field testing with Moneris merchants, it is scheduled for release later this year. Moneris Go Restaurant has built-in tipping options, kitchen display system (KDS) integration, and advanced reporting tools, simplifying operations for both front- and back-of-house teams.

Moneris has also expanded its services for restaurants through strategic acquisitions, such as UEAT, an online ordering solution that aggregates orders from third-party delivery services like Uber Eats and DoorDash into a single, seamless interface. "Restaurants today need a strong digital presence," Elharrar explains. "Our solutions help them manage online orders, optimise workflows, and improve revenue."

Another big plus that stood out for Elharrar is Moneris' approach to merchant support and experience, noting that maintaining a "human element" remains a central business priority. While many financial technology companies rely primarily on automation and chatbots, Moneris prioritizes direct customer support, offering 24/7 customer service with live representatives. Additionally, Moneris Field Services (MFS) provides in-person technical support, a rare advantage in the industry. "We understand there's no room for error in a restaurant," Elharrar says. "If payment systems go down, revenue is lost immediately. That's why we offer hands-on support to keep businesses running smoothly."

Many financial institutions have become more cautious about lending to the restaurant sector, particularly as economic conditions fluctuate. While Elharrar acknowledges that the restaurant industry is known for its ups and downs, he is clear that Moneris continues to see value in supporting foodservice businesses for the long-term, through capital solutions designed to help them expand, upgrade, or navigate uncertain times. "We understand that restaurants are essential to our communities, and while the economic climate may be challenging, our goal is to grow alongside our customers," he says. "We provide capital solutions based on real transaction data, ensuring restaurants get the funding they need to move forward."

"We're not just a payment processor anymore—we're a commerce solutions provider, helping restaurants streamline operations and drive growth," says Elharrar. "It'll be super powerful for our merchants in in the market, so my mission is to make sure we're really thoughtful and innovative, and that we're pushing the cusp of commerce for our customers. I'm all in for that."

Restaurants Canada
The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

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Meet the Moneris team at Booth #1235 at RC Show to learn more about how Moneris is powering Canadian restaurants.

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Chef Tuệ Nguyễn, better known to her millions of followers as TwayDaBae, is as real as they come—authentic, generous, and unapologetically herself. Spend just a few minutes talking to her, and it's obvious that these qualities, combined with undeniable talent, have propelled her to remarkable success as a content creator.

Now also a successful restaurateur and bestselling cookbook author, Tuệ has built a multi-faceted career driven by grit, authenticity, and an unwavering passion for Vietnamese cuisine. She's not here to reinvent tradition but to share it—inviting the world to experience the depth, vibrancy and soul of the dishes she grew up with. From her viral recipes to the meticulously crafted menu at ĐiĐi, her West Hollywood restaurant, Tuệ brings Vietnamese food to life in a way that's approachable, dynamic, and unmistakably her own.

This April, Tuệ brings her talent and infectious energy to Toronto as RC Show 2025's Culinary Keynote speaker. She'll team up with fellow chef and content creator Wallace Wong for an electrifying live cooking demo on the Culinary Stage, and then join Trevor Lui for a fireside chat on the Speaker Stage to talk about her meteoric rise as a content creator and the ins and outs of restaurant operations.

We spoke with Tuệ the day after the devastating L.A. fires began in January. Despite the chaos, her generosity, passion, and drive to connect through food shone through, leaving us more inspired than ever.

The Real One: MENU In Conversation with CHEF TUỆ NGUYỄN (AKA TWAYDABAE)

MM What motivated you to put yourself out there as a content creator, and what were your initial goals?

Chef Tuệ Nguyễn: *I think my confidence in being in front of the camera really came from my childhood. My mom was always taking pictures and videos of me, so I grew up feeling comfortable in front of a camera. She also has this vibrant personality, and I think I inherited that from her. It's always felt natural to me—there's never been a time when I didn't want to be on camera.*

When I started creating content, it was more about figuring out what I wanted to do with my life. In high school, I was on the path to becoming a nurse. I was volunteering at hospitals and doing everything to prepare for nursing school. But at the same time, I was watching a lot of YouTube—everything from fashion to makeup to comedy. I thought it was really cool, but I didn't think it could be a career until I heard creators talking about making a full-time living from it.

So, I started dabbling. I made some fashion and makeup content because those were things I was interested in, but I didn't really know my niche. By my senior year, when it came time to apply to nursing school, I realized I didn't want to do it. I didn't know exactly what I wanted, but I knew I was curious about other options. That's when culinary school came up. It was something I was genuinely interested in and wanted to explore.

When I went to culinary school, I discovered this deep love for food and cooking. That's when I started taking content creation more seriously. I realized I had something unique to offer in the culinary space. Growing up as an immigrant in Oxnard, L.A., eating my mom's Vietnamese food, I noticed there wasn't much representation of that experience.

When I focused on food, I saw a real purpose in my content—whether it was showing people how to enjoy Vietnamese dishes or showcasing the diversity of Vietnamese cuisine beyond pho and bánh mì. That's when I knew food was my niche and what I wanted to dedicate my content to.

MM We read somewhere that you were inspired by Anthony Bourdain.

TN: *Yes, definitely. I came to America in third grade, around eight years old. At the time, I didn't speak any English, so making friends was really tough. I ended up watching a lot of TV, and one day I came across Anthony Bourdain's show and the episode where he was in Vietnam really stood out to me. He was eating Vietnamese food and talking about the culture in a way I had never seen in American media. It sparked something in me. I remember thinking, "That's so cool—he's in Vietnam, eating food I know, in places I recognize." It made me feel incredibly proud to see my culture represented like that. I've been a fan ever since.*

MM You mentioned that Vietnamese cuisine is more than just pho and bánh mì. From your perspective, if you had to pick one or two dishes that represent the essence of Vietnamese cuisine, what would they be?

TN: *Oh, that's such a great question. I think braised dishes like cá kho tộ (braised catfish) or thịt kho tàu (braised pork belly) really embody the essence of Vietnamese cuisine. They're such classic, family-style dishes. They're not difficult to make, but when you have them with rice and a whole meal, they transport you. For me, they remind me of spending time with my family and take me back to Vietnam. Those dishes hold so much nostalgia and connection to home.*

MM You talked earlier about finding your niche, and I think what's so interesting about your content is the way you bring your passions and personality into your projects in a way that's so seamless. How do you balance that, especially while running a restaurant and juggling everything else?

TN: *Oh man, thank you for saying that—it really means a lot. When I went to culinary school, they instilled this very traditional mindset about how chefs should present themselves in the kitchen: no makeup, no nail polish, proper shoes, and all that. And while I still follow the rules—I keep my nails short and neat, for instance—I also express myself.*

> The culinary space is so male-dominated, and I feel that as soon as I walk into a room full of male chefs. I can sense the judgment—like, "Who's this girl with a full face of makeup and Jordans in the kitchen?" But this is who I am, and I think it's important to break that mold."

I wear makeup in the kitchen, and my nails might have a subtle French gel manicure.

As someone who loves fashion and beauty, I feel that being in the kitchen shouldn't mean giving up those forms of self-expression. Just because I'm a chef doesn't mean I need to strip away the parts of myself that I love.

The culinary space is so male-dominated, and I feel that as soon as I walk into a room full of male chefs. I can sense the judgment—like, "Who's this girl with a full face of makeup and Jordans in the kitchen?" But this is who I am, and I think it's important to break that mold.

If I can show other women—especially younger women—that it's okay to be yourself and express who you are while pursuing a career in this industry, then I'm doing something meaningful. We don't need to fit into a box or conform to outdated standards.

MM What's unique about your content is that it's successful not just from a growth and management perspective but because it really resonates with people. I imagine your audience is incredibly diverse—some

might initially come for the food, but they stay because of the other parts of yourself that you share. Food content can feel like a monolith sometimes, but I think people connect with your authenticity and root for your success beyond just a recipe.

TN: *I agree with that.*

MM Of all the dishes you've profiled on your channels, which one surprised you the most in terms of audience response?

TN: *Oh wow... the one recipe that always comes to mind is the first one I ever shared: the easiest fried rice in the world. It completely blew up and really changed the direction of my career and my social media presence. That's when I realized I didn't need elaborate recipes or polished "chef-y" tips. People just want recipes they can recreate easily with ingredients they have on hand.*

That video did so well because there was no overthinking involved. It was during the pandemic, and for the first time in a long time, my whole family was home. I was in such a great mood, and I decided to make fried rice for everyone. I just recorded it on a whim, and it translated so naturally to the audience. That's when I realized I didn't need a high-production setup to create impactful recipe videos.

MM That's amazing. Was that literally your first food video?

TN: *It was! That was my very first recipe video. Up until then, my food content was more about vlogging. I'd take people around Vietnam, show them where and how to eat different dishes, or do eating videos. People saw me as "the foodie girl," but they didn't know I cooked.*

When I started sharing my cooking content, people were surprised. They'd say, "Oh, you cook?" Then, as I shared more of my journey, they realized I went to culinary school and had a professional background in food. I'd never really talked about it or posted about culinary school because I didn't think people would watch or care. But once I did, the connection deepened.

"For my audience, my main focus is keeping recipes simple and approachable, sharing easy recipes that people can recreate without feeling overwhelmed. I always ask myself, "Can my little sister make this?" That's my benchmark. I grew up taking care of my sister, and she does not cook at all. In fact, I dedicated an entire cookbook to her! If I know she could follow the recipe, I'm confident anyone else can, too."

MM Many of your recipes are rooted in traditional Vietnamese cuisine. How do you decide when to innovate to engage your audience versus preserving the integrity of the original recipe?

TN: *It's a very different process for ĐiĐi versus my content. For the restaurant, I have to think about creating dishes that are restaurant-quality while also making them practical—like ensuring the kitchen staff can prepare them efficiently during service.*

But for my audience, my main focus is keeping recipes simple and approachable, sharing easy recipes that people can recreate without feeling overwhelmed. I always ask myself, "Can my little sister make this?" That's my benchmark. I grew up taking care of my sister, and she does not cook at all. In fact, I dedicated an entire cookbook to her! If I know she could follow the recipe, I'm confident anyone else can, too."

When it comes to keeping tradition alive, it's tricky because "traditional" means different things to different people. For me, a dish is traditional if it tastes like something I grew up eating or if it reminds me of the food I had in Vietnam. That's my standard—if the flavours take me back home, then I feel like I've done justice to the recipe.

MM At what point did you decide to take the leap from content creation to running a brick-and-mortar restaurant?

TN: *Honestly, there was never a moment where I felt ready—I still don't feel ready! It all started with a year of doing pop-ups. Straight out of the pandemic, I began hosting pop-ups every month. I just wanted people to try my food and see that I'm more than someone who cooks online. I needed to prove to myself and others that I could do this in real life.*

The pop-ups ranged from sit-down dinners to simple sandwich pickups. Even though I didn't feel fully prepared, the opportunity to partner with H.Wood to open a restaurant came my way. I thought, "Why not?" If the opportunity is there, I might as well take it. There was nothing to lose—just a chance to work hard, run with it, and do the best I could.

MM How did the reality of opening a restaurant compare to what you initially expected? What was your biggest eye-opener?

TN: *I thought the recipes I had in mind from the start would be the ones on the menu. I figured we'd just perfect them and that would be it. But curating a menu for a restaurant is so much more complex than I expected. There are so many technical considerations—what works, what doesn't, and even the demographic of the area.*

For example, Vietnamese food is very pork-heavy, but we're in West Hollywood, where not a lot of people eat pork. I had to rethink things. So now, we only have a few pork dishes on the menu. If it were a more traditional menu, it would probably be almost all pork and shrimp.

MM What was the original inspiration behind your restaurant?

TN: *ĐiĐi means "let's go" in Vietnamese, and honestly, it turned out even better than I expected. Partnering with the H.Wood team was amazing. The design of the space is absolutely gorgeous—it's colourful, vibrant, and full of texture. I showed them pictures and explained that I didn't want another beige L.A. restaurant. I wanted it to feel homey and comforting, like being in Vietnam. They nailed it.*

When it came to the food at ĐiĐi, this was my first real experience standing up for myself and saying, "This is what I truly want to serve." It wasn't just about the dishes—it was about the intent and what the food represents. For example, we have a whole fried snapper on the menu, complete with the head, tail, eyes and teeth. That's how it's traditionally served in Vietnamese culture.

In L.A., though, it's rare to see whole fish served like that. My partners weren't sold on it at first, especially because of the bones. But I fought for it—I wanted ĐiĐi to stand out. We eventually compromised by doing a pocket cut. We removed the rib cage and most of the bones but kept the head and tail intact. It still has that whole-fish presentation, but it's easier for diners to eat. So, boom—everyone is happy!

MM Amazing compromise! How's the restaurant doing now? Has it met or exceeded your expectations so far?

TN: *I can't believe we've made it past a year and a half! That's a huge milestone, especially in L.A. I feel so blessed and thankful that people keep coming back and loving what we're doing. Right now, we've started doing late-night events every Friday at ĐiĐi. We have a DJ, bottle service, and a whole vibe. It's been incredible to see the space evolve into something even more dynamic.*

MM So you're expanding the concept into more of an event or club-type space?

TN: *Yeah, and it's so amazing to see people celebrating their birthdays or anniversaries at the restaurant. I'm always in awe. There are so many places they could choose, but they pick ĐiĐi. It makes me so happy and giddy.*

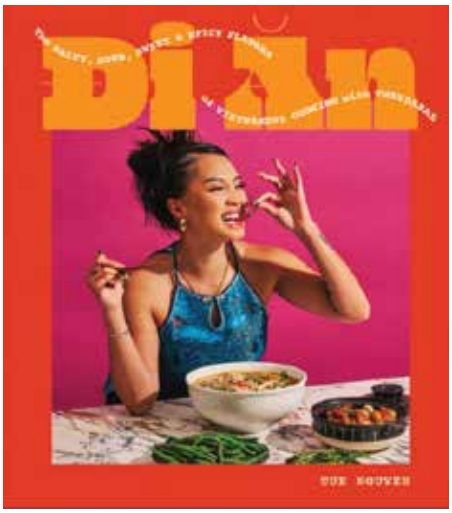
MM In terms of guest feedback, what's been the most meaningful thing you've heard about the restaurant?

TN: *I'd say the most meaningful feedback has come from Vietnamese people who travel all the way from Orange County to visit ĐiĐi. It's incredible when they tell me they want to bring their parents or grandparents here. That makes me so happy because it's not just a place for friends or date nights—it's somewhere they feel proud to share with their family.*

For me, if I eat at a restaurant and think, "Oh, I need to bring my mom here because she'd love it," that makes the place special. Hearing people say they want their parents or grandparents to experience an upscale Vietnamese restaurant is so meaningful. It feels like I'm creating something that honours their culture and family connections in a way they want to share.

MM You've done so much in such a short time—opening the restaurant and now your cookbook, Đi Ăn: The Salty, Sour, Sweet and Spicy Flavors of Vietnamese Cooking with TwayDaBae, which you've described as a kind of scrapbook of your journey. How do you balance sharing your personal stories with the recipes to create a narrative? It's not just a cookbook—it's so personalized, but it still feels accessible to a broad audience. How did you decide what to include or leave out?

TN: *I think the journey of creating and sharing content—and hearing how it resonates with people—shaped my approach to writing Đi Ăn. Even though my story is personal, it's one that a lot of people can relate to, especially older siblings, immigrants or anyone who's struggled to find their footing in life.*



Those shared experiences make the stories in the cookbook feel relatable. I think that's why the book feels so connected to people —it reflects struggles and journeys that many of us go through. It's not just my story; it's a story that belongs to so many others as well.

MM Which of the recipes in the book are you most proud of?

TN: *Oh, all of them! But if I had to pick, I'd say my Thịt Kho recipe—braised pork belly with quail eggs. I think it's the best recipe I've ever put out. It's such a quintessential Vietnamese dish, but I've made it so accessible and easy that people feel confident making it as part of their regular dinner rotation. That makes me so happy. It's also the recipe I've seen replicated the most by my audience, which is really special.*

My honey-glazed shrimp recipe is another one I'm incredibly proud of. It was the first recipe I ever created—for a final in my Garde Manger class. It was also the first time I watched my colleagues try something I came up with, and they loved it. That experience meant a lot to me. So, those two recipes are probably my best work so far.

MM How did writing a cookbook compare to opening a restaurant?

TN: *Writing the cookbook actually took longer than opening the restaurant! I had no idea how much work goes into writing a cookbook. There are so many rounds of edits and changes—it's such a detailed process.*

But it was also my fault because it took me three years to finish. During that time, I was doing so much: hosting pop-ups, opening the restaurant, making my own fish sauce... It felt like the cookbook was always looming in the back of my mind. I'd constantly be thinking, "You need to write the cookbook. You need to work on this for the cookbook. You need to finish the cookbook." It felt never-ending.

How much of a role has your engagement with your audience on social media played in shaping your culinary philosophy and approach to cooking?

TN: *A huge role. When I started culinary school, I had a very traditional mindset. Everything had to be precise, picture-perfect, and meet these high standards. But as I started sharing recipes with my audience, I realized the easier and more accessible a recipe is, the better.*

My approach now is always about simplicity. That's my guiding principle when creating recipes to share with an audience. I never want people to watch my videos and think, "These are pretentious recipes I could never make."

That connection with your audience—especially the ones who try your recipes and share feedback—must make you uniquely aware of what people actually want.

TN: *Absolutely. It's such a valuable feedback loop. Hearing directly from people who make my recipes gives me insight I wouldn't get otherwise. It helps me stay grounded in what works and what resonates with my audience, which represents a wide variety of people.*

A lot of your work focuses on celebrating and demystifying Vietnamese cuisine. Are there any common misconceptions you really want to address or dispel?

TN: *Definitely. I think people are starting to come around to fish sauce, which is great—it's not as intimidating to them anymore. But I feel like the next step is for people to embrace and appreciate the "stinky" stuff, like shrimp paste and dried shrimp, and start adding those into their cooking.*

What do "stinky" ingredients do for a dish?

TN: *They add so much depth and complexity—another layer of flavour that many people don't realize is possible. It's like unlocking a whole new dimension of taste. But to be fair, it's something you have to ease into if you didn't grow up with it. It's similar to durian, which I never thought of as stinky until I moved to the U.S. In Vietnam, it has this sweet, pleasant smell that you instantly recognize. But here, people describe it as one of the worst things they've ever smelled. It's all about perspective and exposure.*

You've got so much on your plate—how do you stay motivated and find joy in cooking when it's constantly coming at you from every direction?

TN: *For the longest time, I didn't even cook at home. I'd only cook if I was filming videos or working at ĐiĐi. I'd always eat out or order in, and I remember asking myself, "Why am I doing this? I have a perfectly good kitchen at home."*

Eventually, I realized I was just burned out. I didn't want to think about what to eat or cook for myself—it felt like work. But then I remembered when I first moved to L.A., my parents didn't support my decision to go to culinary school. I was living in my car and struggling to feed myself. When I think back to that time, it puts everything into perspective. I don't want to take for granted all the opportunities I have now. Yes, it's a lot, but I remind myself that I'm the first in my family to do this, and I want to make the most of every opportunity that comes my way.

We're so looking forward to your culinary keynote and demo sessions at RC Show in April. What are you most looking forward to about coming to Toronto?

TN: *I'm not sure what to expect, but the one thing I always look forward to in any new city is trying the food. I want to know what you're known for, what's the best of the best. That's always my first priority. I'll be at RC Show on my birthday, actually, so I'm extra looking forward to it.*

ABOUT CHEF TUỆ NGUYỄN

Chef Tuệ Nguyễn, a.k.a. social media icon @TwayDaBae, is an acclaimed Vietnamese chef and one of the fastest rising stars in the culinary space. Since graduating from culinary school and beginning her content creation journey, she has showcased her skills through sold-out pop-ups in Los Angeles and New York City, which led to her partnering with the world-renowned h.wood Group to open the hottest new restaurant in Los Angeles, ĐiĐi. Her debut cookbook *Di An* was released in September 2024 with Simon & Schuster and named one of the best cookbooks of 2024. She can be seen as the current host of Making it Big on BuzzFeed's food network Tasty and as the host of People's digital food show, Celeb Eats.

@twaydabae

RC Show Restaurants Canada

Catch Chef Tuệ Nguyễn live at RC Show 2025!

The Social Chef Revolution:
Chef Tuệ Nguyễn and Wallace Wong serve up Vietnamese Bites and Share Tips for Succeeding in the Creator Economy
Tuesday, April 8 - 12:15-1:15pm
Culinary Stage

Viral Fame to Restaurant Success:
Fireside Chat with Chef Tuệ Nguyễn and Trevor Lui
Tuesday, April 8 - 2:45pm-3:45pm
Speaker Stage

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Cheer on Canada's top talent at the **Garland Canada Culinary Competition**, **Bocuse d'Or** and **World Pastry Cup Team Canada Qualifiers**, **RC Pizza Competition**, **John Bil Oyster Shucking Competition**, three-day **Latte Championship**, **Beyond the Rail Cocktail Competition**, and all-new **Breakfast Sandwich Competition**.

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5 EXPERIENTIAL FEATURES

Taste, touch, learn and explore the future of hospitality and foodservice.

- **Restaurants Canada Pavilion**
- **RC Pop Up Experience**
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Photo by Josh Telles

RC Show 80th Anniversary Headliner

CHEF JOSÉ ANDRÉS

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Fireside Chat | Speaker Stage | Monday, April 7 at 3:00 PM

As an extension of their deep commitment to the empowerment and elevation of the Canadian foodservice industry, **Restaurants Canada** and **High Liner Foods** proudly present a fireside chat with **Chef José Andrés**—the globally celebrated chef, humanitarian and founder of **World Central Kitchen** (WCK), who has transformed the way the world thinks about food and the role of hospitality.

From disaster zones to dining tables, Chef Andrés has shown how food and foodservice can be a force for good, solving some of humanity's biggest challenges, as he recently stated upon being awarded the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom: "Chefs like me feed the few, but our destiny is to feed the many. To be an army of goodness where a plate of food becomes a plate of hope…a light in dark times. Together, we can change the world through the power of food."

In a candid and intimate conversation with Kelly Higginson, Restaurants Canada President and CEO, Chef Andrés will highlight the vital role restaurants play in building healthy, vibrant communities, celebrate the industry's resilience, and inspire foodservice professionals to lead with purpose and thrive in an era of rapid transformation.

Through the success of his vision and the example of his work, Chef José encourages us to embrace bold thinking, act with empathy, and channel our expertise into meaningful change.

This is more than a special event—it's an opportunity to learn from one of the most innovative and impactful leaders in food. Don't just witness the future of the industry—help create it.

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Culinary Keynote: Chef Tuệ Nguyễn

Viral Fame to Restaurant Success: Fireside Chat with Chef Tuệ Nguyễn and Trevor Lui

Speaker Stage | Tuesday, April 8 | 2:45 PM

Chef Tuệ Nguyễn—better known as @TwayDaBae—is a celebrated chef, cultural storyteller, and viral content creator. As the visionary behind acclaimed Vietnamese restaurant, ĐiĐi, in Los Angeles, Nguyễn is redefining the culinary landscape with unapologetically authentic dishes and a unique ability to connect with her audience of over 1.3 million followers.

At RC Show 2025, Chef Nguyễn will take centre stage in Toronto, delivering an inspiring Culinary Stage demo with knife-skills master Chef Wallace Wong, followed by an intimate fireside chat with Canadian culinary entrepreneur and thought leader Trevor Lui.

From sharing recipes featured in her critically acclaimed cookbook, Đi Ăn, to exploring her journey from content creator to restaurateur, Chef Nguyễn invites attendees to fuel their creativity and celebrate culture through food. Don't miss your chance to experience one of the brightest stars in the culinary world.

Don't Miss Tuệ Nguyễn's live demo with Chef Wallace Wong:

The Social Chef Revolution
Vietnamese bites and tips for success in the creator economy with Chefs Tuệ Nguyễn and Wallace Wong.

Culinary Stage | Tuesday, April 8 | 12:15 PM



Scan the code to explore the full RC Show 2025 schedule:

WHAT'S NEW AT RC SHOW 2025

- Special 80th Anniversary activations and our **biggest Opening Night Reception** ever!
- An emphasis on **FUELing connections and solutions** for Canadian operators looking to **build resilience** into their supplier list.
- All-new Breakfast Sandwich Competition.
- **Bocuse d'Or** and the **World Pastry Cup Team Canada Qualifiers**.
- **Reimagined RC Pop Up Experience** with **Chef's Table Stage**.
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- **Expanded Indigenous Pavilion** and **The Black Experience Pavilion!**
- **Curated receptions** like **The Chefs' Exchange** to inspire **connection**, **conversation** and **collaboration**.









UNPARALLELED EVENTS & INDUSTRY NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

Enjoy the best in guest experience and the company of industry trailblazers at exclusive RC Show events including **Opening Night Reception**, **Industry Night Out** and a series of new and **exclusive in-Show networking events**.







OPENING NIGHT RECEPTION:

Monday, April 7, 2025 | 5-8 PM | Enercare Centre, Toronto

Celebrate in style at the 80th anniversary edition of Opening Night Reception, **RC Show's ultimate networking event**. Step into an enchanting **urban garden experience** where innovation meets sustainability and culinary artistry. Immerse yourself in a night of flavour and creativity, and take advantage of the all-industry guestlist to **forge new connections**—this is one event you can't miss!

INDUSTRY NIGHT OUT:

Tuesday, April 8, 2025 | 8 PM – 1 AM

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Get your ticket for the ultimate **RC Show 2025 after-hours industry party** at the stunning new **Earls King West**, the talk of Toronto's vibrant entertainment district. Expect bold flavours, chic vibes, and a dance floor that won't quit. It's not just a night out—it's a **taste of Toronto nightlife** done right and a triumph of brand evolution. Don't miss your chance to network, unwind and party with the industry's hottest crowd.

THE CHEFS' EXCHANGE

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April 8 , 2025 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

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Every dish tells a story

Chef Victoria Rinsma likes a challenge. She's the sous-chef at the Michelin-starred restaurant Hexagon, the winner of the S. Pellegrino Young Chef Academy competition and busy perfecting her recipes in preparation for the finals in Milan. But she's also the kind-hearted birthday cake baker for her boyfriend's four young nieces and nephews.

"I'm making three cakes in the next couple of weeks and they're all different and quite intricate. I just ordered everything since I'm also decorating the cakes." When asked about the different skills required for baking and decorating Rinsma admits, "There's this part of me that says I know I can make it happen. I like to take things on, and I like being busy. At one point someone said to make the cake simpler, and I said, 'No. If I'm doing it - I'm doing it'".

Like many chefs, her earliest influence in the kitchen was her grandmother. "I learned to cook from my grandmother. She's like a huge inspiration for me," Rinsma recalls. "Her flavours are delicious. When I think about my childhood, there are so many things that we would make, and we had so many different fun food traditions that I don't think were very typical." She adds, "For Thanksgiving, instead of having turkey, we would buy a cookbook from somewhere else in the world. Then we would make meals that we picked from the cookbook, and it would change every year."



Chef Rafa Covarrubias & Chef Victoria Rinsma

With these early experiences in the kitchen, Rinsma knew her career was in culinary. She originally wanted to be a pastry chef. "When I was in high school, my cooking teacher said that I needed to be able to cook. He felt that there wasn't a lot of jobs for people who only did pastry, so that's why I got into cooking."

While in high school and at Durham College, Rinsma got her first taste of cooking competitions, from skills to Taste Canada's "Cooks the Books."

"I was really keen and eager, and I would try anything. When I first heard of S. Pellegrino Young Chef Academy competition, I thought, 'Oh I'm going to do this,' but then I got busy doing other things." These other things include her career at Hexagon, a restaurant in Oakville, Ontario which recently received its first Michelin Star. After starting as a cook in 2018, she became chef de partie and now is the proud sous-chef of the acclaimed restaurant. It's here that Rinsma saw the level of dedication and work required for the competition. "Working with Rafa (Hexagon's Chef Rafa Covarrubias), I watched him prepare for the S. Pellegrino competition, and I helped him practice and get ready for New York. It was so emotional to see him compete and win. His dish was amazing, and it was so great to see him showcase his skills, show what he has to offer and for him to tell his story." But instead of being intimidated, Rinsma was inspired.

Thinking of her signature dish was a challenge, "I knew it wasn't just about the dish itself, but also my story, and I was confident in my story. Many dishes I saw had a lot of components in it, but mine was more on the simplistic side." Rinsma's award winning dish, "Across the Sea and Home Again" was a two-part meal that includes a chawanmushi and a main course inspired by her grandmother. "She made a split-pea soup with dumplings which was one of my favourites," muses Rinsma. "Since this was a meal about my journey I wanted to pay tribute to my grandmother."

The competition was a milestone showcasing her creativity, resilience and determination. "It was more difficult than I anticipated," she admits. Balancing work, life and practice sessions took a toll, both physically and mentally. "At one point, I was sick, lying on the table shucking peas, thinking, 'I don't know if I can do this.' But I kept going. It was me against me." When her name was announced as the winner, Rinsma describes the moment as surreal. "Everyone was composed and clapping and my boyfriend and Rafa were just screaming." Winning not only validated her hard work and vision but also opened doors for her to represent her culinary vision on a global stage. "I'm very competitive, so I'm going to Milan to win this thing," she says. The final is scheduled to take place in Milan in October 2025.

"Seeing Rafa compete in the same competition and win was incredibly inspirational," she shares. Under his guidance Rinsma gained invaluable insights not only into cooking but also pushing boundaries and striving for excellence. "His mentorship is everything," she states. "I wouldn't be where I am without it and his friendship. There hasn't been a day at Hexagon where I've stopped learning." Reflecting on her early days she acknowledges how her initial independence sometimes held her back. "When I was younger, I didn't want to ask for help. But I've realized that asking for help shows more strength."

Competition Dish

"Across the Sea and Home Again"
A composed dish consisting of a chawanmushi made with smoked ham hock, lovage, english peas and tomato and then striped bass from the baja peninsula, dry aged for four days, finished on the coals, served with nixtamalized honey nut squash, a condiment made from roasted squash, pickled ginger, preserved summer tomatoes and trout roe and to finish, sauce pilpil scented with charred guajillo peppers.





Signature Dry Aged Duck

Since the kitchen at Hexagon thrives on collaboration, the team brings diverse backgrounds and experiences to the table. "We brainstorm together. Everyone contributes something unique based on their life experiences," says Rinsma. This environment of mutual support fosters both technical excellence and creative innovation, proving that mentorship is not a one-way street, but a shared journey of community.

"My community believed in me before I believed in myself," declares Rinsma. "They were my first taste testers, my biggest critics and my loudest cheerleaders." When she began competing for the S. Pellegrino title, the support from her community became even more tangible. Friends, family and local businesses rallied behind her offering everything from ingredients, to places to hold practice sessions, to handwritten notes of encouragement. "It felt like everyone was invested in this journey with me," she recalls. "That kind of support is priceless. It pushes you to do your absolute best."

It's this idea of doing her best that makes her excel in fine dining – which some believe is a world of small portions and finicky foods. Rinsma hopes to change that perception. "At the end of the day everyone in cooking is here for the same reason: to give someone a good experience," she explains. "Fine dining, pushes the boundaries of culinary arts, inspiring the entire industry. Techniques once confined to fine dining, like sous vide, have now found their way into more casual kitchens, demonstrating its impact".

Her philosophy for fine dining is straightforward. "Simple, delicious food. Not pretentious. I want people to leave saying, 'That was really good. It was worth every penny'". She believes the industry's role extends beyond the plate. "Fine dining teaches people about themselves. It's an experience that can surprise you, expand your palate, and challenge your perceptions of food."

Central to Rinsma's culinary vision is the idea of storytelling through food. Every dish she creates serves as a narrative, weaving through her personal experiences, cultural heritage, and inspirations. Her menus are thoughtfully crafted, with every element intentionally designed to evoke emotions and spark conversations.

This commitment to storytelling extends to how she approaches new recipes. "I start with the emotion I want to convey," Rinsma says. "Then I think about the flavours and textures that will bring that emotion to life. It's like composing a piece of music or painting a picture." By anchoring her culinary creations in emotion and memory, Victoria ensures that her work resonates deeply with customers.

Having navigated her journey with both triumphs and challenges, Rinsma offers heartfelt advice to aspiring chefs: "Don't be afraid to ask for help. Everyone starts somewhere. And balance is crucial. Staying creative means stepping away sometimes–going for a walk, eating at other restaurants, experiencing life."

She also emphasizes the importance of perseverance and resilience. "The kitchen can be tough. There are long hours, high-pressure situations, and moments where you'll doubt yourself. But every challenge is an opportunity to grow. Learn from your mistakes and keep pushing forward."

Her parting words reflect the philosophy that has driven her success: "Stay true to who you are. Focus on being the best you can be. And remember, at the heart of every dish is a story, so tell yours with pride."

Follow Chef Rinsma's journey at:

@victoriarinsma **@hexagonrestaurant**

QUICK SIX

Greatest inspiration: My grandmother.

Favourite flavour: I like combinations of flavours, textures and contrasts like salty and sweet, hot and cold desserts and acidic foods.

Secret ingredient: Lemon, the whole fruit, not the bottled version.

Top tool of the trade: I think a petty knife is underrated because they're smaller so you can do so many things whether it requires finesse because it's intricate or you're just chopping an onion.

Top skill: It's either a skill or a personal downfall but I always want things to be as perfect as possible.

Signature personality trait: I'm always busy – I like taking on a lot of things and I like the stress.

RC Restaurants Canada Show

Head to the new Chef's Table Stage in the RC Pop Up Experience on April 8th from 3-4:00 p.m. for an intimate conversation with Chef Victoria Rinsma and Chef Rafael Covarrubias of Hexagon restaurant, part of the all-new Success Stories content series at RC Show.

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COFFEE BAR, COMMUNITY AND CULINARY HAVEN



When passion meets necessity, incredible things happen.



After moving from London, U.K. to Liverpool, Nova Scotia, Shani Beadle and Andreas Arnmar wanted one thing: a good cup of high-quality coffee. "We couldn't find a place to get a cup of coffee we liked," says Beadle. Recognizing the opportunity, Beadle and Arnmar decided to open a coffee bar, focusing on high-quality coffee and pastries. Opening Main & Mersey in May 2019, the coffee bar was an immediate success, but limitations with sourcing pastries for their café made them reconsider their options. "There was one company that made good pastries, but with prices going up, and having to drive to pick-up the pastries, we decided we needed our own bakery," remarks Beadle. "Luckily we found a qualified pastry chef to get us started." By converting the space in the basement of Main & Mersey into a bakery, the couple sourced high-quality ingredients and now make their own pastries. But the expansion didn't stop there.

During the summer, as more tourists flowed into the small town, visitors kept asking Beadle if there was anywhere good to eat in town. "There were places to eat, but I'm a tough critic," admits Beadle. "I spent 20 years in London, working in fashion and did set design for the Food Network. I ate at amazing restaurants around the world." With a deep appreciation for culinary artistry and a refined palate, she saw an opening in the local market for a quality-driven restaurant that could offer something unique.

Expanding from a coffee bar to a full-scale restaurant was no small feat. After numerous failed attempts to find the right space, an opportunity arose—a building that could house both the restaurant and coffee bar, with an apartment above to offset costs. "The renovation was much more expensive than we anticipated, and we'll be paying it off for a while, but it was the right move."

With costs escalating and their initial timelines missed, Beadle and Arnmar looked to their community – both local and abroad for support. "We couldn't borrow anymore so we decided to sell a tiered membership program. Bronze, silver, gold and diamond," explains Beadle. "Depending on the level, you would get a t-shirt, a sweatshirt, gift card, invitations to special events or even 10 per cent off. It was a way to get people invested in the success of the restaurant. But it was also nerve-wracking." After advertising through their social media accounts, they were able to crowdfund enough to get Main & Mersey over the final hurdle.



Aside from the logistical challenges, hiring qualified staff was a significant obstacle. A lack of affordable housing in the area made it difficult to attract outside talent. Initially, a Peruvian-Japanese chef was hired, but when he left unexpectedly, Beadle found herself stepping into the role she had not originally intended. "I've always cooked and my time working on set design for the Food Network was kind of like a mini cooking school. You're working with some of the best chefs, tasting the food, watching the process—you learn so much." With no other viable options, she embraced the challenge of running the kitchen, applying her years of culinary experience, albeit informal, to the operation. She consulted with a renowned local caterer and chef who reassured her that she had the skills to make the restaurant a success. "After a long conversation, she said, 'You can do this.' If she had told me it was a bad idea, I wouldn't have tried. Her confidence gave me confidence."

Inspired by her upbringing in Vancouver, her international travels, and her love of fusion cuisine, the restaurant's menu was crafted to incorporate a blend of Japanese flavors and European influences. She found joy in experimenting with ingredients and techniques that had not been fully explored in the local dining scene. "I love the lightness of Japanese food, but also the indulgence it offers—deep-fried elements balanced with freshness. Pairing those ingredients with North American and European flavors creates such interesting combinations," remarks Beadle.



"We get a lot of Japanese-sourced ingredients—our sauces, for instance. We're also experimenting with pickling and fermenting. We recently made an ice cream from umeboshi plums—it was amazing!" Beadle is always on the lookout for inspiration. "I'm always reading and researching, scrolling for ideas. We test things, and if they don't work, they don't make the menu. But we refine, adapt, and build on what works." The restaurant also offers a rotating seasonal tasting menu. "We try new dishes for events like our Valentine's Day tasting menu. We have a great Oenologist—one who studies the science of wine and winemaking—who acts as our sommelier. She also understands cocktails beautifully. She pairs dishes with sake, wine, or a cocktail, which adds another level of experience."

Balancing creativity with local tastes has also been key. "Lunch is a simpler menu, designed with locals in mind—like our fish cakes, which are our most popular dish. Not a traditional Japanese fish cake, but my version," Beadle explains. "We also serve sandwiches like chicken karaage, pork belly, and tempura mushroom." Beyond the menu, the restaurant finds creative ways to engage with the community, hosting events like "Lions Radio Bingo Nights" and collaborating with local initiatives such as the "Lobster Crawl."

With an evolving menu and a committed team, the restaurant steadily found its footing. Among her valued staff is a Ukrainian refugee who had no prior culinary experience but proved to be an enthusiastic and dedicated worker. "She was in HR before she came to Canada, but we have the best time. She's such a hard worker and wants to learn. We make it work."

Looking ahead, they have ambitious plans for the property. "There's an area behind the restaurant where we want to create a coffee garden with greenhouses and a small summer shop," Beadle shares. "But the last few years have been tough, and we've just been scrambling to get our footing."

With delays in construction and opening, the unexpected departure of their chef and increasing costs, Beadle knows one thing: "We are prepared for anything. If you own a restaurant, especially as a small business, you have to be prepared for anything that comes along. Heat pumps going out, floods, power outages, stock not arriving, staff not showing up. You have to know how every part of your business works. What if our baker leaves? What if our chef leaves? We can cover anything. Now we're not afraid."

Despite the challenges, she remains passionate and optimistic. "The freedom of not being a classically trained chef means I'm not boxed in by 'how things are supposed to be done.' It allows me to be creative. And at the end of the day, I love food. I love seeing people enjoy what we create." From sourcing quality ingredients to designing a unique dining experience, Beadle and her husband have built more than just a restaurant—they've fostered a community. "We knew we could offer a lot here. And now, every day, we get to do just that."

MAIN & MERSEY

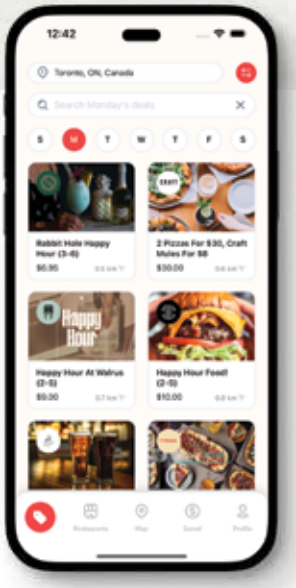
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