MENU

CANADA'S FOODSERVICE MAGAZINE



THRIVING AGAINST THE ODDS:
CHEF TIMOTHY CHARLES LAUNCHES CUMULATIVE DINING AT FOGO ISLAND INN

MARISSA LEON-JOHN:
MTL SHOW UP FOR THE GOODS

GOING MOBILE:
THE FOOD TRUCK GAME IS NO LONGER A SIDE HUSTLE

PATIO PIVOT:
BUILDING COMMUNITY FROM THE OUTSIDE

BY CHRISTINA VEIRA

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Restaurants Canada

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

After what seemed like a never-ending pandemic, we are officially in 2022 and provinces across Canada have been rolling back pandemic restrictions, many doing away with vaccine passport requirements and masking. Furthermore, the federal government has eased COVID-19 test requirements for travelers, which is good news for many in our industry who rely on both local and international travel. There's almost some sense of "normal" in the air.

Moving into the warmer weather, with lessening restrictions and pent-up demand from consumers who miss dining out with their friends and family, Restaurants Canada is forecasting improved sales in the second quarter of 2022, across all segments.

Looking back at the last two years, this is music to our ears: however, as I reflect on the challenges we've faced, I also think about "returning to normal"—are we going back to the way it was? Has our industry learned from the mistakes of the past? Are we ready to take a step forward in adopting innovation, technology and looking at the different ways we can be more productive? Or have we become so accustomed to merely surviving that we return to a "normal" where every inch lost can cost you a mile? Personally, I have seen so many across Canada step up from the status quo which, from a consumer lens, excites me, and in this issue we look at some of those themes.

In this edition of MENU, we spend some time on the East Coast with Gene Cormier sharing his story of resilience throughout the pandemic. We take a look at how some restaurateurs are exploring ways to expand or replace their brick-and-mortar operations with mobile food experiences as well as how, by embracing minimalism, you can find high-margin, low-cost ways to create smart, profitable bar menus.

Coming off International Women's Day, Canada's top female chefs acknowledge the women who inspired their careers and share their hopes for the next generations of culinary women. Finally, we sit down with Fogo Island Inn Executive Chef, Timothy Charles, and discuss culinary tourism and destination dining.

As restrictions are eliminated and Canadians start to move freely about the country, I believe they will travel and they will want experiences. Regardless of where they go - across the street, or across the country they will be looking to you to help them make up for those moments they have missed.





Roberto Sarjoo
Editor

Spring 2022
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Restaurants Canada

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

Do you have comments or a story for us? If so, please email menueditor@restaurantscanada.org.

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LETTER FROM OUR OUTGOING CHAIR

BY CINDY SIMPSON
CHAIR, RESTAURANTS CANADA
BOARD OF DIRECTORS





My term as Chair of the Board of Directors of Restaurants Canada ends with the Annual General Meeting on March 30, 2022.

These last two years, first as vice-chair working with the 2020 chair Guy Laframboise, and then as chair working with Guy, the Executive Committee and the staff, have been both challenging and inspiring. In essence, every thought we had and everything we did was informed by the need for our industry first to survive, and then, hopefully, to revive. In this, our lives were not very much different than yours.

I am very proud of the team we had working for you. The government relations people in particular pushed and pushed, pressed and pressed, and did incredibly well to ensure that meaningful supports were in place for all of you and that these supports aided as many of you as possible in ways that were useful to you. Restaurants Canada was seen and heard across the country as "the voice of the foodservice industry".

I would be remiss if I did not make note of the consistent and valuable contribution of all members of the Board of Directors. As we lurched from critical issue to critical issue, as we needed to agree on public positions and deal with the media, my board members were always available for urgent meetings and deliberations. They always provided sage advice and guidance offered with the best interests of all members of the industry—large, small and in between.

I would also like to take the opportunity to introduce Mike Yasinski as the incoming chair. In keeping with our practice of choosing people from all regions of the country for this role, Mike is a fellow restaurateur from Edmonton, Alberta. Mike has been part of our executive committee, so I am confident he will continue to maintain the relationships we have built with our legislators at all levels and thus ensure that we follow the path to revival that has been laid out.

In closing, I would like to wish all our members the best possible success in this new year. The incidence of COVID-19 seems to be lessening, the hospitals and other parts of the health system seem to be gaining control and the governments have agreed to keep the supports for our industry in place for the time being. Many of you have suffered, both—personally and financially— but I sense a resiliency and an indefatigable desire to succeed that will carry our industry through this challenge.



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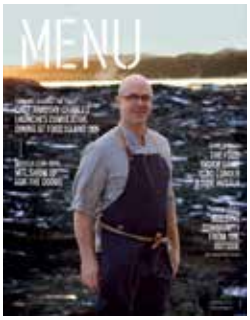
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Photo by Valerie Howes

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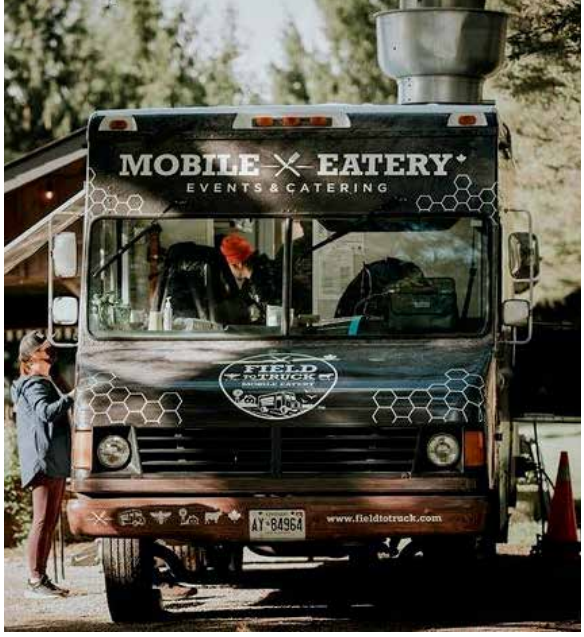
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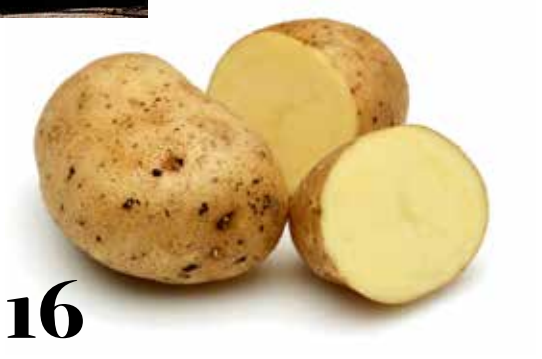
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DIGGING INTO THE LONG-TERM FORECAST FOR CANADIAN FOODSERVICE

WITH RESTAURANTS CANADA'S SENIOR ECONOMIST, CHRIS ELLIOTT



To understand Restaurants Canada's 2022-26 Foodservice Industry Forecast, we connected with Chris Elliott, economic visionary (and resident "metalhead") to dig a little deeper into what lies ahead for Canada's foodservice industry.

Let's start with the basics. How you go about forecasting foodservice sales, especially given all the uncertainty of this pandemic?

We use an econometric model to forecast foodservice sales. This statistical model includes economic forecasts of GDP, disposable income, retail sales and employment.

The model also includes a factor economists call "habit formation." Essentially, past consumer spending behaviour and habits have an impact on current and future spending behaviour and habits. If I liked going out to restaurants it the past, it's likely I'm going to enjoy going out to restaurants in the future. We see this in real life: consumer spending does not change instantaneously, but adjusts slowly over time. Unless of course, there is a pandemic. We capture that using the Bank of Canada's stringency index.

The stringency index captures the impact of the pandemic through government containment measures, such as school and workplace closures, stay-at home orders and the severity of enforcement measures. It has been very helpful in explaining the ebbs and flows of foodservice sales throughout this pandemic. We have to acknowledge yes, there continues to be a lot of uncertainty. Events are unfolding on a day-to-day basis. This reminds me of the Paul Murdin quote: "There is no certainty in the future, only probability." Our forecast is based on what we believe is most probable given the information we have today. As we get more information, we will update the forecast.

The Quarterly Forecast released in the early Fall of 2021 painted an optimistic picture for 2022. Your latest forecast now paints a much less rosy picture. What happened?

To understand our updated forecast, I need to take a step back to explain the underlying assumptions behind the previous forecast. At that time, nearly 80 per cent of Canada's population was fully vaccinated, restaurants were fully opened without any on-premise dining restrictions and there were relatively few cases of COVID-19. There was a sense, maybe naively, that the worst of the pandemic was over and that the strong momentum we saw in the third quarter of 2021 would carry forward into 2022.

In addition, we also anticipated that workers would slowly return to their offices in the latter

part of 2021 and into 2022. Not a full return, mind you, but at least two or three times a week. We also expected international travel would improve sharply in 2022 as people felt more comfortable travelling.

Of course, all of that changed with the spread of the Omicron variant.

Because of the lockdowns and on-premise dining restrictions in many parts of the country, foodservice sales in the first quarter are forecast to fall to their lowest level since Q2 2021. I don't expect the restrictions will be in place for more than a month or two, depending on where you are in the country, but given how highly transmissible this variant is, it will take time to rebuild that consumer confidence and have guests come back out to restaurants.

Won't foodservice sales just snap back once lockdowns are over?

In past lockdowns, we saw sales improve gradually. It's not instantaneous. As an analogy, lockdowns are like falling off a bike. Once restrictions are lifted, it takes time to get the bike back up to speed again. So it is with consumer confidence. It takes time to get people back in the habit of dining out after a lockdown.

Even though there were no dining restrictions and patios were open in the summer of 2021, sales at full-service restaurants and drinking places did not snap back to pre-pandemic levels.

What about the impact of pent-up consumer demand?

There is definitely a lot of pent-up demand out there. Survey after survey conducted by Restaurants Canada show that Canadians miss dining out with their friends and family. And that's why we are forecasting improved sales in the second quarter of 2022, across all segments, compared to the first quarter of 2022.

But your new foodservice sales forecast for Q2 2022 is still a downgrade from what you were expecting in your previous forecast?

Yes, beause Canadians tend to be cautious. According to past household surveys, about half of Canadians are eager and ready to return to restaurants immediately or within a few weeks after a lockdown. Others tend to take a wait and see approach. This is especially true when it comes to dining indoors or going to bars. So that hesitancy on the part of many Canadians following a lockdown is part of that downgraded outlook.

Another part reflects the delayed recovery in business dining, people returning to their offices and tourism.

But when you look at seasonally adjusted sales for the second quarter, that will bring quarterly foodservice sales back to where we were prior to Omicron.

And will the summer months be the same for foodservice sales?

With patios opened, we are forecasting that full-service restaurants will finally return to their pre-pandemic levels for the first time. So there is some positive news. Originally, we were expecting that to happen in the second quarter of 2022, but the Omicron variant delayed it by a quarter.

What are you forecasting for menu prices in 2022?

Based on our survey of restaurant operators, menu prices are forecast to climb 5.2 per cent in 2022. The price of everything is going up; it's no different for restaurant operators. While our current operator survey found that a majority of Canadians are somewhat or very accepting of recent menu price increases, restaurant owners need to be wary. If prices rise too fast, it could lead to a decline in traffic.

What are you most concerned about for 2022?

It was a struggle for many restaurant operators to get through 2021, and the Omicron variant is really pushing a lot of owners to the brink. The variant couldn't have come at a worse time, as bookings were cancelled and consumer confidence was shattered over the holiday season. Many are continuing to go into debt, and without further government assistance, they won't make it through 2022. So while it's good to see sales slowly improving, the financial burden on restaurant owners will take years to pay off.

What do you look forward to the most in 2022?

Three things: getting back out to restaurants, the RC Show 22 and going to concerts. I've already had several metal concerts cancelled due to lockdowns and Omicron, but my fingers are crossed that the concerts at the end of March won't be cancelled.

Whether it's dining indoors at restaurants, the RC Show or going to a concert in person, it's always much better experience than only eating takeout or watching virtually at home. I miss the atmosphere and the energy that you can only get at a restaurant, trade show or a concert venue. That experience is something you can't replicate at home and it's what I've missed the most in the past few years.

What does the future hold for 2023? Will it get better?

Yes. 2022 was supposed to be the year where the foodservice industry returned back to pre-pandemic levels. Unfortunately, the Omicron variant has temporarily delayed that recovery. A return in consumer confidence, business dining and tourists will help Canada's foodservice industry return to pre-pandemic levels in 2023, with annual sales forecast to rise by $83.3 billion.

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Chris Elliott moderates **Restaurants Canada's State of the Industry: Future Trends and Demographics**, a discussion with some of Canada's leading data and insight providers on the Speaker Stage at RC Show 2022.

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Making up for the moments we've missed

BY MEENA NOWRATTAN



410,200 Canadians are out of work as of January 2022 alone, and 13,000 permanent industry closures have been reported across Canada since the start of the pandemic.

Although restrictions are lifting across Canada, the pandemic is not over yet. COVID-19 has been devastating for many industries, with foodservice and hospitality topping that list. 410,200 Canadians are out of work as of January 2022 alone, and 13,000 permanent industry closures have been reported across Canada since the start of the pandemic. Even with restaurants returning to full capacity, many working in hospitality and foodservice still remain in a vulnerable state from continuous lockdowns. The aftershocks of long-term restrictions and closures will be felt for years to come, and will still require both government and diners' support to keep the industry afloat.



71% of restaurants are currently operating at loss and 11% are just breaking even.



> ***Small businesses, restaurants in particular... need to have a voice at that table."***
>
> - Paul Marshall, Owner, Century Park Tavern

The **"REVIVE THE INDUSTRY THAT FEEDS THE NATION"** campaign, launched by Restaurants Canada, featured a series of videos all geared towards painting a realistic picture of the industry's challenges during and post-pandemic to educate consumers on the state of the industry, and the support needed to revive it. With this, Restaurants Canada continued to push to get restaurant representatives a seat at government tables to offer an inside industry perspective on creating long-term solutions that will support the foodservice industry as it rebuilds.

The campaign series showcased a cross-section of industry voices, all sharing their unique stories and offering an inside look at how COVID-19 has personally affected them and their business, and the long-term challenges they see ahead as they struggle to survive.

The video featured the perspectives of **Chef La-Toya Fagon** of Twist Catering, **Bruce Miller**, CEO of Pilot Coffee Roasters, **Trevor Lui**, Owner of Highbell Group, **Spiros Liarakos**, General Manager at Duke of Cornwall, **Paul Marshall**, Owner of Century Park Tavern and **Donna Dooher**, Owner of Mildred's Temple Kitchen.

Although the damage has been done, the pandemic has created additional, longer-term uncertainties such as supply chain and staff shortages which reinforce the need for a rally cry of support and a robust discussion with the government regarding what is needed to ensure the survival of the industry.

"*Today is not the time to starve the industry that feeds Canadians," says Bruce Miller. "What we need from the government is proactive solutions to be able to help our industry. Even for the small percentage that do qualify [for support], it's such a drop in the bucket compared to the over two years of debt they've taken on.*"



> ***I don't know if anyone is going to feel fully comfortable until we have a definitive answer on how we're supposed to move forward."***
>
> - La-Toya Fagon, Owner, Twist Catering

Stats from the Restaurants Canada Outlook Survey showed that 71 per cent of restaurants are currently operating at loss and 11 per cent are just breaking even.

"*We have accumulated a lot of debt individually and as an industry," says Dooher. "We work on incredibly thin margins at the best of times and now we are going into even more difficult times. We continue to accumulate more debt. This is extremely problematic.*"

The restrictions and closures have meant closing the doors to restaurants—from franchise systems to family-owned and operated establishments.

"*It's not like turning on a light switch. It's going to take years of recovery for the industry to get back to where we were pre-COVID,*" adds Dooher.

As the restrictions on dining capacity lift, Restaurants Canada will continue to advocate on behalf of restaurant owners, and encourage Canadians to get back into restaurants for in-person experiences.

This April, Restaurants Canada will ask businesses and consumers to participate in a **#DineInDoOver** all month long. Serving as an industry revival effort, the campaign will encourage Canadian consumers and businesses to come together at their favourite local restaurant, and 'redo' the moments they've missed over the last two-years. These include a do-over of birthdays, holidays, milestones, corporate celebrations, etc. that have taken place during the pandemic, but haven't been celebrated in their entirety due to the restrictions.



To learn how you can take part in this initiative, help spread the word and get Canadians to make up for the moments they've missed, visit: www.DineInDoOver.ca.

#DineInDoOver
#RestaurantsareFamily

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FINE DINING, POGOS & DONUTS:

ROLLING THE ROCK IN MONCTON, NEW BRUNSWICK

*MENU magazine in conversation with **Chef Gene Cormier***

After opening five-star hotels and leading award-winning restaurants around the world, Chef Gene Cormier and his wife Susan returned after years abroad with a renewed appreciation of the bounty of the local food and emerging culinary talent in New Brunswick. Opening three successful restaurants in four years earned the Cormiers the inaugural Business Person of the Year distinction by Moncton's Chamber of Commerce.

Born and raised on the east coast, after graduating from the University of Moncton and completing his culinary certification at a local community college, Cormier realized that the opportunities for a new chef in New Brunswick were slim. "I was looking for work and ways to expand what I learned about food and cooking. My cousin who was working in Bermuda suggested that I go work at hotels there since there were so many different chefs and hotels," says Cormier. "That was the spark to work abroad."

He met his wife Susan while they both worked at the Jasper Park Lodge. Together they travelled and worked at five-star hotels and renowned restaurants throughout southeast Asia, including Doha Qatar as a corporate executive chef overseeing 40 restaurants, as well as The Plaza Hotel in New York and Fox Harb'r resort in Nova Scotia. Through his work as a chef and hers as a sommelier and managing front of house operations, they learned about creating memorable experiences, the value of customer service and the importance of recognizing and growing talent—all of which they put into action in their restaurants.

The first, Euston Park, opened its doors in May 2019. With waterfront views and close to downtown Moncton and the cycling trail, a 40-foot shipping container houses the kitchen and the eight taps that feature local craft beer. The focal point is a large patio that seats 100 people where people can enjoy classic food like burgers and "Dog of the Day" smoked sausages while trying a pogo with kimchi ketchup and chickpea masala dip. "We spend time on the recipes. We offer more than the typical assembly-type experience," says Cormier.

Just five months later in November 2019, Cormier opened Clos, a modern dining restaurant inspired by local cuisine. Offering tasting menus paired with wine as well as a la carte offerings, the restaurant was an immediate success. Within four months of opening, they were named one of the top 10 restaurants on the east coast by Open Table. The restaurant is led by Executive Chef Rahil Rathod, who also doubles as the captain of the National Culinary Team of Canada, and who now calls Moncton home. Trained internationally, Rathod brings an inflection of new flavours, with a representation of all the seasonality of local food in the area.

Prior to the pandemic, Cormier was looking to offer something unique to the community - something fun, trendy, delicious and reminiscent of a different time. "There's a demographic of older teenagers and people in their twenties who remember when donuts were made fresh, every day," says Cormier.

Like most restaurants Clos and Euston Park closed during the initial days of the COVID-19 lockdown. "We had closed restaurants and staff. So, we started developing donut recipes at Euston Park with a small Kitchenaid mixer and Halo Donuts was born." With inspired flavours like Banana Cream Pie, Homer/Marg



"There's growing talent in Canada and especially in the east coast. I try to offer opportunities to students and graduates that I didn't have. I don't want them to just learn about food—it's also about creating experiences and moments that people will remember."



and Dunkaroo along with traditional offerings like apple fritters and chocolate dip, Halo Donuts was a success. "We moved out of Euston Park and created a smaller baking area in the private dining room at Clos. We would bake in the early morning, and then serve dinner in evening. We were able to keep on all our staff to support Halo Donuts," says Cormier. There are now two Halo Donut locations.

When asked about his success Cormier is thoughtful. "You need to find a niche or something that you can offer up that's unique," says Cormier. "Sometimes you just need to roll the rock the right way. Running restaurants isn't just about a love of food, of creating, of ingredients. It's also a business. You need to be a business manager, a creative, a financier and understand your restaurant from every aspect. The only way for a small business to run is to be hands-on and involved. I see a shift from working in a restaurant to owning a restaurant happening early in the new generation of chefs. It's a sign of change in the mindset." He continues, "I'm not sure what the pandemic will do to that entrepreneurial spirit. Let's be honest. Over the last two years, if your restaurant has survived, then you've won."

Having local supplies has helped Cormier weather the pandemic. "I didn't have to wait for shipments for ingredients," says Cormier. "There are fresh micro green farms where we



buy our produce. We're able to plan and let them know that we will buy from them during our season. Our cheese, eggs, fruit—all from people we know. A local baker makes our buns. I buy all my major proteins within a 30 kilometre-radius. We have great quality products in New Brunswick that taps into a chef's creativity and imagination. It's way for us to support our community and for us to source and spend locally. The east coast is part of the country that is much more connected to the community than others."

Staffing three businesses can be challenging, particularly now when there's such competition for talent. Cormier recommends considering people who may not fit the traditional hiring criteria but have transferrable skills or traits that would make them successful. "I hired a young woman who was a former elite gymnast," says Cormier. "Her previous experience was working the deli counter at the supermarket. But what I was interested in was that she had determination



and drive. You can't be an elite gymnast without putting in the time and effort," he says. "She spent a summer with us. We watched her confidence grow as she was given more responsibility in the kitchen. Now she's on full scholarship at a culinary school."

Cormier also finds talent through the community. "A supplier of mine knew a 14-year-old boy who was super interested in cooking. He had his own recipe book that he created and had a strong desire to be a chef," says Cormier. "His interview was better than some of the university graduates I hired. But I also knew that he needed to work his way up through the restaurant. He started part-time working weekends and by the end of the summer, he was on the line holding down his position. I was calling out the line and he was on it and getting it out. He's remarkable. He's coming back again this summer."

"There's growing talent in Canada and especially in the east coast. I try to offer opportunities to students and graduates that I didn't have," says Cormier. "I don't want them to just learn about food – it's also about creating experiences and moments that people will remember. For example, our guests always have an interaction with the chef and that's coordinated through the front of house with a buzzer system. It's connecting the idea of who made your food with the experience."

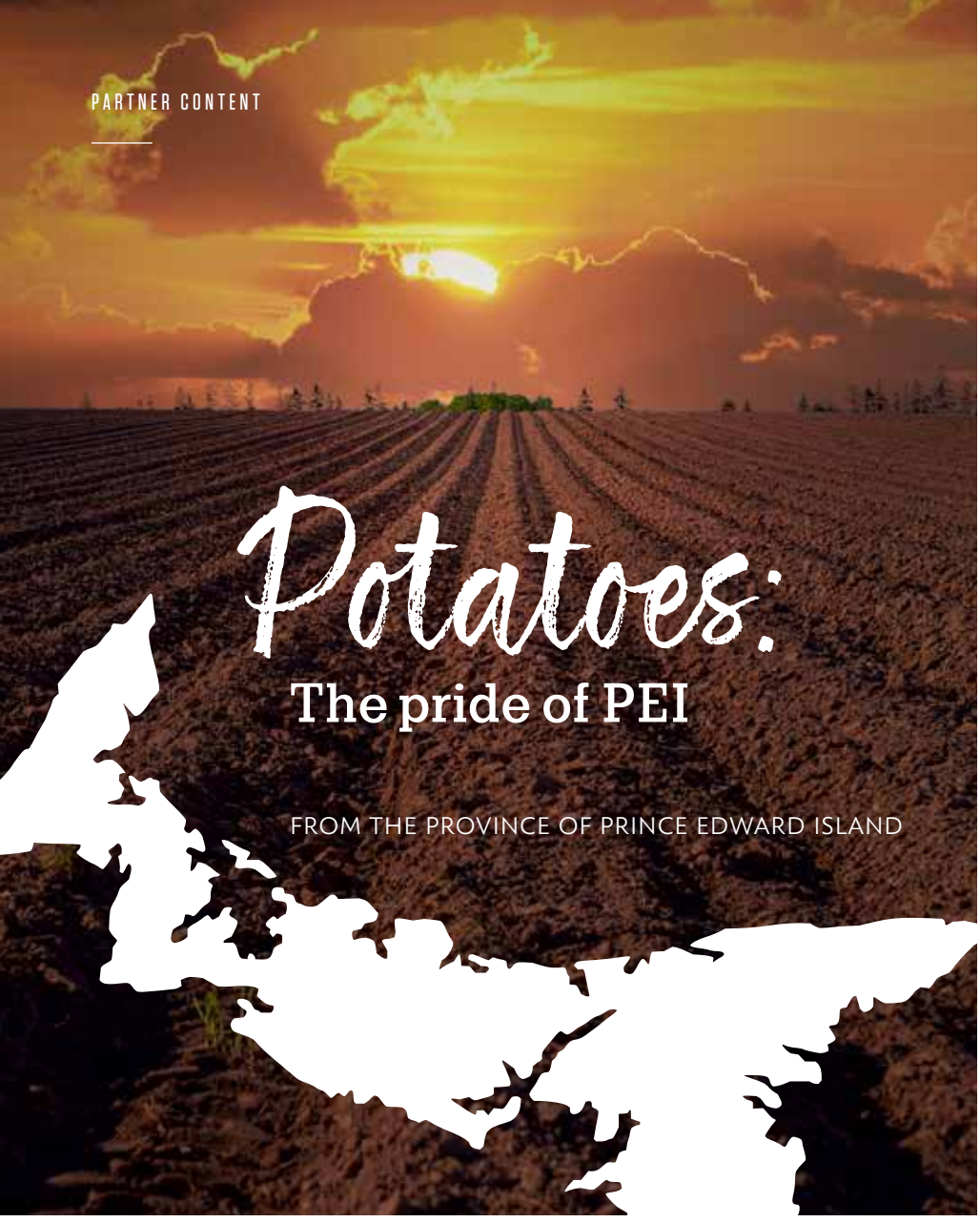
Now that he is back home in New Brunswick, Cormier is thankful. "My job is to have fun, to create memories and to create business ecosystems that are sustainable and local," says Cormier. "It doesn't get better than that."

Euston Park Social in Moncton is open every day from May to September. The second location in Parlee is open every day as of June 2.
www.eustonparksocial.com

Clos is located in Moncton and hours and menu vary.
www.closrestaurant.com

Halo Donuts is open from Wednesday to Sunday on a first come, first served basis. They have two locations in Moncton.

halo.donuts.moncton



Potatoes: The pride of PEI

FROM THE PROVINCE OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Mention the name Prince Edward Island to most Canadians and a few images likely come to mind. White-sand beaches, red sandstone cliffs, and rolling hills in every shade of green—all jewels in the province's crown. But hidden beneath the rust-coloured earth and amid the fields of perfectly lined rows lies another Island gem: the potato.

PEI is renowned for its potatoes, with the starchy staple accounting for more than 80 per cent of the province's agriculture and agri-food international exports.

In a time when many people around the world are turning to food for comfort, few are as dependable or diverse as the potato.

Mashed, baked, fried, chipped. Personal and professional chefs rely on the potato not only for its versatility but its ability to span cultures and cooking techniques.

"The potato is a seemingly humble ingredient, but its inherent versatility, affordability and nourishment has cemented its place on our tables here on Prince Edward Island and stretches far beyond our provincial borders," says Chef Ilona Daniel, a well-known PEI chef who teaches at the Culinary Institute of Canada and has been featured on a variety of lifestyle and cooking shows, such as Untamed Gourmet.

Chef Ilona has prepared PEI potato recipes in countries around the world, as far as China and Ethiopia. She says her potato dishes are how she communicates the symbolism of PEI's beloved spud.

"It is truly fulfilling being able to convey the story of our iron-rich terroir, the people who grow them and the ritual of consuming a new Irish Cobbler potato," says Chef Ilona.

PEI might be Canada's smallest province, but last year, 85,250 acres of potatoes were grown on the Island. So it's no surprise the potato business is the Island's single largest industry, contributing over $1 billion to the provincial economy annually.

After ideal growing conditions throughout the summer of 2021 led to what is locally known as a "bumper crop" (meaning high yields for PEI potato farmers), the industry was rocked when trade restrictions were announced in November following two detections of potato wart earlier that fall.

Although the pest isn't new to PEI and the detections were contained through well-established plans, trade bans were imposed that prevented fresh PEI potatoes from entering American markets.

This left many producers in a state of uncertainty and consumers across the border without the top-notch PEI potatoes they've come to rely on for their restaurants and recipes.

Despite trade hurdles, Islanders and farmers remain confident in the quality of their potatoes and have been doing everything in their power to ensure that message reaches markets and consumers – domestically, nationally and internationally.

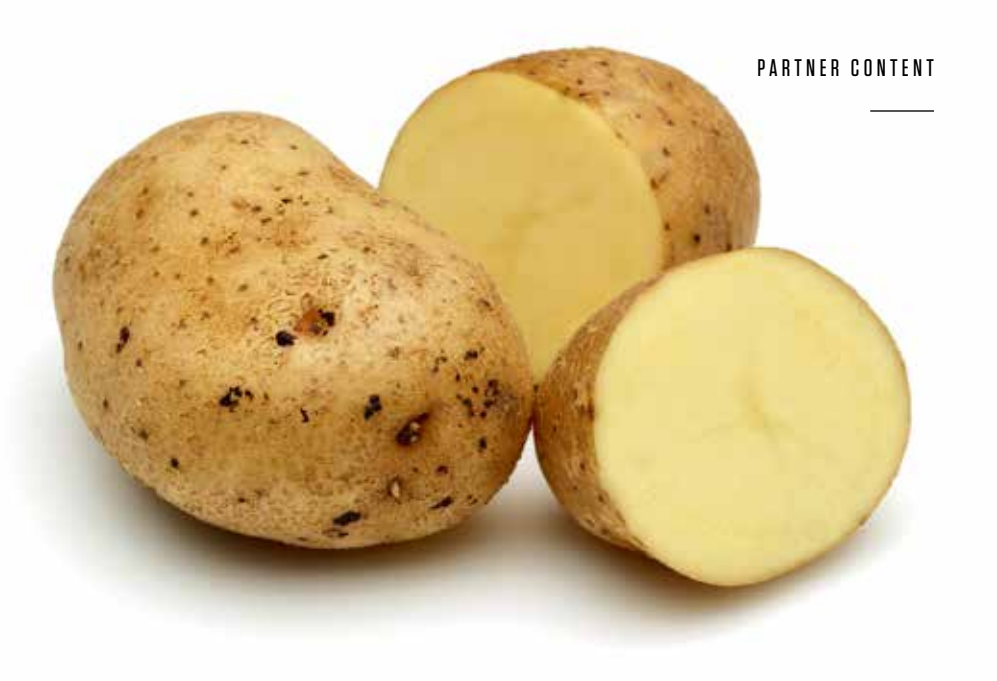
"Our PEI potatoes are known around the world for their high quality," says Bloyce Thompson, PEI's minister of agriculture. "And even though our world-famous industry is experiencing trade restrictions right now, I want everyone to know our spuds are safe, healthy and remain the best of quality."

Thompson says producers are just as eager to return to fulfilling orders as consumers are to receiving them.

You need only look as far as a recent social media campaign that's gained some attention: 'Papas por Puerto Rico' ('Potatoes for Puerto Rico'), which called for the return of PEI potatoes to the American territory where potatoes are a dietary staple.

It's clear: there's a demand for Prince Edward Island potatoes—in all their flavourful forms.

"Whether you enjoy your potato twice-baked, mashed or in the form of a french fry, consumers know a PEI potato will always deliver the best results," says Thompson.



Indeed, PEI potatoes are famous for their tasty reputation.

"As a farmer and as minister, I've had the opportunity to travel many places and I can tell you: wherever I go, as soon as people learn I'm from PEI, they always comment on the quality of our potatoes."

Even if you've never been to Prince Edward Island, chances are you've eaten a PEI potato—perhaps without even knowing it.

Island spuds are served in restaurants and homes around the globe. And with over 180 potato producers across the Island, PEI has the supply to satisfy all customers and consumers.

"Our farmers work hard every season, year after year, to make sure the potatoes they grow are not only healthy and plentiful, but also live up to the reputation PEI potatoes have established over decades of care," says Thompson.

"They take great pride in growing the best potatoes in the world and know that when an order is placed – whether it's for fresh potatoes, frozen fries or even potato chips – consumers expect the best from a PEI potato."

Roughly 60 per cent of the potatoes PEI produces goes to the processing sector where they're transformed into other products.

Popular manufacturers such as Frito Lay and Cavendish Farms use Prince Edward Island potatoes for a variety of their goods.

While the PEI potato is enjoyed by food lovers in countries all over the world, some of its biggest fans can be found a bit closer to the source.

Each year at harvest time, thousands of Islanders flock to local grocery stores, farmers markets, and roadside stands to pick up a bag of "New Potatoes"—even the province's premier, Dennis King.

"Every Islander, myself included, looks forward to a feed of new potatoes," says Premier King, who grew up in rural PEI surrounded by fields of the popular crop.

"Boiling up a pot of new spuds in late spring is practically tradition on PEI. They're so fresh and the skins are so tender, you can practically rub them off with your thumb after cooking."

King, who grew up in a family of 10, says potatoes were always on the table in his home, mainly because of their affordability and accessibility.

It's why he says he'll always work hard to support the PEI potato industry and Island growers.

"PEI and its farmers are dedicated to making sure our Island potatoes are available to families and retailers everywhere," says King.

"Potatoes are a way of life, part of Prince Edward Island's identity. We're proud of that and we don't mind saying so. We want people to know it—and know us."

Known for their hospitality, Islanders have as many potato recipes as there are potato varieties—and they're always happy to share them with anyone, at any table, in any season.

Soups, salads, stuffed, scalloped. Even on pizza. Any way you slice it, there's no shortage of ways to enjoy a PEI potato.

"Kitchens at home and in restaurants everywhere deserve the best and should continue to depend on Prince Edward Island to offer just that," says Thompson.

While officials are working hard to find a solution to current trade restrictions on potatoes, they're happy knowing the pride of PEI is still being safely shipped across Canada.

On PEI, potatoes – and the people who grow them – are a tradition to be celebrated and cherished, says Chef Ilona.

"If we want to preserve and protect our agricultural legacy, we must ensure we are doing our utmost to support and promote PEI potatoes and potato farmers."

To learn more about PEI potatoes, visit www.peipotato.org



Check out Chef Ilona Daniel's delicious PEI Potato Pierogi recipe on **Menumag.ca**

For more PEI potato recipes, go to **www.peipotato.org/recipes**



East Coast Inspiration:

Can't Miss Culinary Experiences & Food Connections in **New Brunswick**

Known for some of Canada's most extraordinary and well travelled natural attractions, New Brunswick is home of the world's highest tides in the Bay of Fundy, the flowerpot rocks at Hopewell Rocks and the warmest saltwater beaches in Canada. Lesser known are the inspired culinary experiences that bring local food to unexpected places, taking advantage of New Brunswick's geography.

Ideally situated with the Gulf of Saint Lawrence to the northeast and the Bay of Fundy to the southeast, New Brunswick is nearly 85 per cent forested and Canada's only official bilingual province. This provides the foundation for the ingredients of the locally inspired meals you can find across the province. "Farm to table is a way of life here," says Neil Hodge from New Brunswick Tourism, Heritage and Culture. "Our connection to our food is a reflection of where we live and our appreciation of nature. Many restaurants in New Brunswick were saved from pandemic-related supply chain issues because they've always sourced food locally. You can find everything here and not have to rely on things being shipped or brought in."

Gene Cormier, Moncton chef and restauranteur agrees. "I can source every protein within a 30-kilometre radius from smaller







farms. I get duck from Bouctouche, lamb from Sussex, beef from Memramcook and oysters and seafood from several Indigenous fisheries." Cormier continues, "I also needed hamburger buns for Euston Park (one of Cormier's restaurants), so I approached a local bakery, and we created our buns for the restaurant and now they're my supplier. My vegetables are from local farms. Everything I need is close and local and supports the people in my community." This ethos is ingrained in culinary experiences across the province.

Red Rock Adventures in St. Martins, located 90 minutes from Moncton, offers unique local fare as part of their culinary adventures. Food cooked over open fire on the beach with locally sourced seafood, paired with local beer, cider and wine while discovering the Bay of Fundy brings the experiences of local food and place together. For the more adventurous, there's a five-course meal option prepared by a chef on the Bay of Fundy's ocean floor at low tide with food brought in on boats during high tide and rappelled over the cliffs. Taking advantage of the local geography by creating a multi-sensory experience extends the traditional dining experience into the exceptional.

During a two-hour evening, guests of Atlantic Ballet Atlantique Canada experience original dances paired with a local tasting menu prepared by renowned New Brunswick culinary talent, like Chef Emmanuel Charretier. The stage for Ballet by the Ocean is set on a private, protected wetland with the backdrop of the Northumberland Strait in the heart of Grande-Digue. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ballet by the Ocean was created to support the dancers and staff of the Atlantic Ballet Atlantique Canada as well as fundraise for its youth education programs. The result is a popular series that lets you experience exquisitely prepared local food and wine while watching an internationally touring ballet company, with exceptional views. Ballet by the Ocean is now in its third year, with dates in the summer and the fall.

From May to October, you can access Ministers Island near St. Andrews-by-the-sea by travelling along a road on the ocean floor during low tide. As Canada's largest tidal island, its long and rich history plays a large role in the culinary events held in unique settings across the island. From railway themed events to concerts featuring local musicians, the popular events overlooking the Passamaquoddy Bay must be booked in advance as attendance is limited to ensure patrons are able to access the island during specific times.

Farm-to-Table NB is a small business that creates one-of-a-kind culinary experiences in unique locations across New Brunswick. From dinners served in the middle of a blooming lavender field at Ocean Breeze Farm to a Sugar Shack Outdoor Dinner served at Chateau Scoudouc, a maple syrup farm, owner Chanelle Belliveau creates intimate dinner experiences for people to gather, share food and learn about where their food is grown and raised. "I started hosting cooking classes in 2015, showing people how to make delicious and nourishing meals using local and seasonal ingredients. I love the idea of people gathering and cooking together," says Belliveau. "I started hosting events to reconnect people to where their food comes from. I incorporate what's grown on the farm in the menu. If we're having a grazing table, I feature products that are available at the farm, as well as products from producers close by. At every dinner, I introduce the guests to the farmer, so they can learn about the farm's history and understand the work it takes to bring food to the table," says Belliveau. "I love the connection and the experience of eating and cooking where the food is grown."

"Businesses in New Brunswick support and promote each other," says Hodge. "Partnerships that create unique foodie experiences is possible in New Brunswick because of the amazing amount of locally sourced food that's available. We are very much a community."

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Photo by Alex Fradkin

Drawing outside the margins of culinary tourism and taste of place at...

Fogo Island Inn

Executive Chef Timothy Charles in conversation with MENU magazine





Photo by Alex Fradkin

If the past two years have taught the restaurant industry anything, it's that every aspect of the foodservice and hospitality experience is ripe for examination. Long-accepted truths and cornerstone beliefs are all out on the table as the industry tinkers with the potential flavours, properties and forms that will help shape the sector's future. One seminal truth ripe for dissection is the notion that future-forward business principles like sustainability and community need to take a back seat to allow the sector to focus on recovering from extraordinary and unprecedented losses. And another is that location—proximity to established destinations or recognized halls of culture—are ingredients essential to the special sauce of hospitality success.

As we seek to identify the next generation of big hospitality ideas, we should look to Fogo Island Inn for inspiration. Part profitable business, part social economics experiment, the Inn perches on the rocks of one of the most remote island shores of eastern Canada off the shores of Newfoundland. People don't come here to "be seen" or for the shopping and nightlife or to forget their cares. They come for a more provocative hosting experience that redefines "guest experience" and "taste of place" by immersing guests within a community bounded on all sides by the Atlantic Ocean. It's an idea that many thought would be bogged down by idealism, but that has not only persevered, but grown and matured, proving the viability of hospitality ventures powered by social enterprise thinking.

The Inn lies at the centre of a circular economy that aims to enrich all aspects of island life and preserve its history. From Fogo Island Arts' residency program which draws creatives and thinkers from around the world, to Fogo Island Workshops, a special-order business that offers popular furniture and textile items designed for the hotel and made on the Island for special-order purchase, this is no ordinary hospitality operation. The business gathers in elements of place, food and art and delivers a category-disrupting experience.

The location—which one might fairly assume would be a barrier to the destination's success—lies at the core of founder and innkeeper Zita Cobb's vision and faith in the landscape and community. Cobb has been recognized across Canada and around the world as a leader in social business design for the Inn as well as for Shorefast, her registered Canadian charity dedicated to growing the resilience of the economics and culture of her home island. Part of an integrated cluster of successful social enterprise ventures stewarded by Shorefast, Fogo Island Inn is a near-perfect expression of asset-based community development. The Inn was designed by Todd Saunders, a Newfoundland-born architect residing in Norway. The vernacular, angular building is balanced on stilts or "shores" that provide stability and no small amount of visual interest. Inside, guests are housed within its 29 unique, modern guest rooms, each featuring large windows to connect guest visitors with the sea and sky. The Inn's restaurant, helmed by Executive Chef Tim Charles, is tucked neatly within and features a world-class menu inspired by the landscape and seasons.

"Food arts have elements of both culture and nature", Chef Tim says. "If you follow those two markers—nature and culture—and you can break them out in any way, they could be successful pillars in any business. As far as how we use them, food is important, but people *have to*

eat while they're here. It's how this program was developed in relation to the building and the place, it's all just expression. I think that any business—whether they're planning or self-reflecting—can find those defining elements just as well. It doesn't matter where you are. It's just how you're self-defining and what sort of goals you have. It's exciting to see this in action with chefs moving to more rural areas where they can have a couple beds at the property and have the ability to host for more extended stays. Looking at that model… it's ancient. It's the old European and North American model. People stop somewhere for a few days and they are hosted there. They weren't just in a bed, ordering thoughtless food to a room—it was true hospitality."

Chef Tim's path took him to Fogo nearly a decade ago, and he has embraced the landscape and lifestyle. "Coming here at first was funny—you'd tell people about what's going on—some people knew and were skeptical and others knew and were super enthusiastic about it, but it still seemed so outlandish. They're building this place on this little island off the coast of Newfoundland… But arriving and seeing it getting framed up with all the final touches, I could only imagine having been part of it sooner—like when the ground was being broken. There are only a few little spots in Canada where you can cook at this level and be able to work for a business that gives back to a community that it's built for and in."

Chef Tim originally came on as sous-chef and ascended through the ranks under Chef Murray McDonald and then Chef Jonathan Gushue. Now leading the Inn's globally-recognized culinary program, he has embraced his journey to Fogo Island and the years spent helping to craft its food story. "I understand the place, the seasons, what grows here, who grows it and how they grow it. It's pretty intimate and, once you spend so much time here and develop a relationship, it's really quite beautiful. It all comes back to community, getting to know our growers, their families, our other vendors, who's doing what and understanding how growing changes for them depending on the weather—it's a lovely thing and probably one of the nicest parts about working here. Everything they grow comes from these little plots of land that their grandparents were growing on; sometimes even their great-great- grandparents. People first moved here in the 1700s and they've been following the same rhythm since. In the winter they go and collect seaweeds to use as fertilizer—a lot of them still don't use any chemical fertilizers. Some people are still growing potato varieties, like the Blue Nose, that first came here in the early 1900s. That's quite special."

While commercial potato varieties and non-indigenous foods are also available, Chef Tim points out the food link to the island's past. "People are still using root cellars here—how cool is that? The need for preservation may not be survival-based anymore, but it's still very much a part of these natural, seasonal rhythms. When it's partridgeberry season (that's what we Canadians call the lingonberry made famous by IKEA, the Swedish furniture and design company), people are out on the hills picking them, then preserving them. In cod season, people are still out fishing for themselves—salting and drying it the same way the people who formed this place did. It's crazy to understand the amount of depth to this place and then being able to bring it right to the table. Not to say that it's easy, but most restaurants don't have the advantage that we do."

Over the last two years, Fogo Island Inn's culinary team has had a little more time on their hands to reflect and refine their offering. As the team reviewed their guests' booking patterns, the hospitality team noticed a four-day stay was becoming the average.



Photography by Iwan Baan:
@iwanbaan | www.iwan.com

> *"Food arts have elements of both culture and nature. If you follow those two markers—nature and culture—and you can break them out in any way, they could be successful pillars in any business.*





Photo by Alex Fradkin

"Our clients come for four-day minimums now," Chef Tim shares. "From the time they arrive to the time they leave, that's, like, 10 to 20 food and drink-centred interactions, inclusive of snacks. That really helps us create a cumulative dining experience where guests are presented with this very textured, immersive experience with their food and drink that adds further depth to their experiences out in the community. They'll run into the people doing the farming naturally or learn that the person doing the island orientation is a brother of a person who hunted moose for us. But it's not staged or scripted; it just happens because of the type of community Fogo Island has."

This insight was the inspiration for the culinary team's new focus on developing a cumulative menu. The Inn's intentionally designed dining experience smartly gold-plates the challenges and opportunities of hosting a captive audience (think cruise ships or all-inclusive resorts) so that, over a four-day or more stay, guests will experience the seasonal narrative of the Fogo Island terroir, told in serialized chapters on the plate. "Maybe it's seasonality and the fact that we're given a moment to reflect here where maybe other businesses don't," muses Chef Tim. "Before shutdowns, our menus were all akin to typical ones you'd see where every meal, even though they kind of aligned with one another, was still a standalone. Where breakfast was a traditional breakfast—bigger meals—you'd forget your guests are in your dining room just three to four hours later for their next meal. At lunch, we serve a table d'hôte that changes daily. At supper, we moved to just doing either an expedited menu (40 minutes-ish) for guests who have something else to do, or a regular five-course, or extended 10-course meal. On top of this, guests can also indulge in a snow crab supper in the Inn's "Shed"—another Saunders-designed building on the property. We give people an opportunity to relax to their own liking—they're not forced to sit down for a tasting menu every night." This flexibility is fundamentally about guest accommodation and what Chef Tim refers to as "proper hosting". Guests have options that respond to both provision (I've got to be somewhere in an hour) and inspiration (I want to experience a tasting menu that features all of the foods and flavours I learned about today).

The organic evolution of the Inn's menu is already showing results. Guest feedback has been very positive, which may be the by-product of the natural intensification of the already immersive total stay experience. Dining isn't just a necessity or value-add; it reinforces and deepens guests' connections with the venue and Island itself. While the food has always been a crucial component of the Fogo Island Inn offering, cumulative dining allows the flavours and textures to reach full maturity on the palate, delivering a timed release of the Island's history and terroir.

Coming down from the mystique of Fogo Island, the Inn has endured many of the same challenges so familiar across the foodservice and hospitality landscape, but with a distinctly Fogo twist. "We've changed our whole staffing structure—partially out of necessity, but also from actually taking a moment to think about how we were doing things. I think the industry-wide staffing crisis has helped instigate change because we have really been chewing





> ***The number of beautifully talented people that have left the industry—even just throughout my own career—is tragic.***

up young professionals for too long, in an in unsustainable way, as an industry. The number of beautifully talented people that have left the industry—even just throughout my own career—is tragic. These are people who could have made huge contributions and were kind of pulled out of it because they weren't able to either feed themselves or keep themselves healthy—mentally, or physically—under the burdens of a broken system. We've been very mindful of the number of hours our salaried employees are being asked to work in a week, making sure we're extending benefits as quickly as we can, ensuring we're clearly communicating what their roles and responsibilities are—things you would think are super basic but were not built into typical kitchen practices. We've also moved to hiring a tighter group of deeply experienced people. Instead of having a brigade of employees in the high 30s, we staff in the mid 20s. And we did that by hiring people who are dedicated, career professionals."



Photo by Alex Fradkin

Even with the allure of Fogo Island Inn's sterling hospitality reputation, the location poses some genuine hiring challenges; not everyone is willing to leave city life behind for the remote and unknown. To ease the transition and improve retention, Shorefast offers temporary staff housing on the Island. "As great as it is getting people out for a season or two, the point of this project was to increase the population of the island," Chef Tim clarifies. "To stabilize and increase. Both through getting people who moved away to move back, but also through encouraging people to move here. A number of cooks who used to work here have opened own their own restaurants on the island which has changed everything. There's now a place you can go for an espresso and a pastry, which really wasn't here before. The dream is that they stay and buy a property— it's up to us to give them quality work and a good quality of life for them to want to do that."

Originally from Prospect Village in Nova Scotia, Chef Tim lives on the Island with his wife and two young daughters, with another child on the way. They bought a house that had been vacant for a decade and brought it back to life. His wife, a small business owner, teaches wellness and yoga at the Inn and in


Photo by Scott Ramsay

the community. Currently, they're breaking ground on a 35-acre, organic farm, which will be the first commercial agriculture operation on the Island since the 70s. They are living examples of how the Fogo Island dream can work.

The Island itself is more than three times the size of Manhattan, but with less than 2,500 residents, many of whom can trace their Island roots back hundreds of years. It stands to reason that feelings about the Inn and the tourists it brings to the Island would garner a mixed reaction. "I think if we were to have opened a private, corporate business here, it would have been far more disruptive," Chef Tim allows. "The whole idea was to grow another leg on the economy and the way that its structured is very honest and sustainable, as any other business here is. We can't exist without the community, we are a part of the it."

Part of Fogo Island's unique ECONOMIC NUTRITION© labelling, designed to mimic the familiar nutritional labelling on packaged foods, provides a breakdown of how the money from purchases is distributed locally, nationally and internationally. Chef Tim emphasizes the importance of sourcing within the local community. "Our purchasing is as community-centric as we can make it, and we push ourselves on that one too. Our preferred vendors are owned right here in the province—ideally on Fogo Island. We watch where the money goes, and our economic nutrition label represents exactly how we think. I don't believe it's protectionism, it's just conscious and direct purchasing in hopes of not contributing to an extractive economy. Some people in the industry think we're a charity, but we're not. We're a full-frontal business, running a hotel, that benefits a charity. It's structured very intelligently in a way that the profits we make are being directed to into what I perceive as an important project here on the island."

Chef Tim is clear that the organizing goal of the Shorefast enterprise family is to stabilize and grow the community. The role of the business within the broader community is to help solve problems that affect everyone on the island, from access to affordable childcare to housing blight and even supply chain concerns. One of the reasons Chef Tim and his wife elected to start a farm on the island was to address the decline in farming and the resulting instability of the food supply which could be traced to Newfoundland joining Canada in the 1940s. "We've lost 90% of our agricultural infrastructure since then, and we will start to run out of food in less than 10 days if the ferry doesn't run, obviously huge issues. Because of the supply chain, the food that arrives here after all the travelling is not in great shape and probably shouldn't be sold in most stores. People then pay an exaggerated amount so grocery stores can cover their losses. The resulting carbon footprint of our food supply is also huge. We want to be a small part of that bigger conversation. Community is an action rather than a description, understanding that our purchasing matters—and who owns what— matters, so when you buy something, you're voting for something at the same time. By directing our intention in what we do, we can change the direction. Considering your place in each little circle, and then how they all touch each other and intersect."

Tim's life, career and perspective have been dramatically changed by his years on Fogo Island, and you get the clear sense that he has few regrets. "Fogo Island has allowed me space to mature and refresh my approach to it all. I was never a cook interested in getting my picture taken and being on TV. My favourite moments have been welcoming people from the greater hospitality community to the Island and offering them an opportunity for introspection and a chance to connect with what we're doing and for them to share their knowledge with our community. That's super enriching. Those non-transactional moments feel so good and are so natural and I think they're something people should chase."

When the fisheries collapsed seventy years ago, Newfoundland's government offered Fogo Islanders resettlement. They refused, dug in, and vowed to build back better. As the Canadian foodservice and hospitality industry seeks to define what's next, there is much to be learned from the Inn and the Fogo Island community about interception, resilience and revival.

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CANADA BEEF

CANADIAN BEEF CATTLE CHECK-OFF

ON YOUR RADAR:

Canada's top female chefs acknowledge the women who inspired their careers and share their hopes for the next generations of culinary women.

BY BRIGITTE FOISY, VP, CHEFS CANADA

Our earliest food memories are often of our moms' and grandmothers' cooking, a task almost exclusively marked as "woman's work." Bizarrely, the culinary arts are (still) considered a man's game. In Canada, more than 60 per cent of chefs and cooks are men while 70 per cent of kitchen support staff and food counter attendants, generally lower paying jobs, are held by women. It's no surprise to find more women in culinary schools' baking than cooking programs, and only a select few ever make it to the limelight.

As we celebrate International Women's Day, Chefs Canada together with Menu magazine, are committing to honouring and elevating female chefs and restaurateurs year-round. From coast-to-coast, there are so many tremendously talented chefs but here are just a select few notable Canadian restaurants run by women that should be on your radar.



Chef Donna Dooher
Owner/Chef, Mildred's Temple Kitchen (Toronto), Author

Ottawa-raised cookbook author and ex-Food Network TV star of Cookworks, Chef Donna paved the way for many women in the Canadian culinary world. As restaurants refused to hire women for senior culinary work, the former chef of the Ritz climbed her way from bussing tables to owning one of the city's most popular brunch spots for over three decades.

Who is your female role model—the one who paved the way for women in professional kitchens?
As an apprentice, I worked in a small, bustling, Italian restaurant in Ottawa. The chef was Raffaela (Bella) Milito, who trained in professional kitchens in Italy. Raffeala taught me so much more than the nuisances of Italian cuisine. She was a source of inspiration and demonstrated how to run a kitchen with passion, empathy and humour. The story of her journey to Canada, from running kitchens to opening her own business, is untold, but she had a profound influence on me.

Why are there not more women in the culinary limelight and how do we change that?
Simple – hero worship of the male chef! For generations a role model of the macho, loud, bullying chef has been shaped and glamourized through television programs, books and movies. But there has been tremendous change over the years and women who work the stoves are finding their own voice as opposed to emulating the male stereotype. There's still work to be done but the young women today who choose to work in the hospitality industry approach their roles with the confidence I lacked when I started out. They deserve our support and recognition.

@Donnadooher



Meeru Dhalwala
Co-owner/Chef, Vij's Restaurant (Vancouver)

Chef Meeru Dhalwala is an author and co-owner of the Indian restaurant Vij's in Vancouver. Hailed by the New York Times as "among the finest Indian restaurants in the world," Vij's boasts an all-female kitchen staff. Chef Meeru is also the founder of My Bambiri baby food.

Who is your female role model—the one who paved the way for women in professional kitchens?
I don't have a female role model in the cooking world as we were too few when I started in 1995. Even the public didn't seem too keen on women chefs back then. My role model cannot be found in kitchens. It's Lynn Smith, a retired BC Supreme Court judge. Lynn was the first female dean of University of British Columbia's School of Law. Amazingly, as a judge, she struck down Canada's ban on doctor-assisted suicide, paving the way for the Supreme Court of Canada to create

new legislation for assisted dying. She was determined. A calm trailblazer who carried a passion for her craft no matter what and where. What Lynn brings to the legal world I strive to bring to the food/restaurant industry.

When I started, I was a passionate, petite, self-taught Indian woman trying to navigate a male dominated industry. The chefs were pumped up with stories of abuse they endured at their European cooking schools. I hadn't "paid my dues" and I was mostly ignored by the men around me (except for my husband/business partner Vikram Vij). I decided I wasn't going to compare or compete. I decided to create my own work environment, my own style and focus on my own personal best. I hired women with little to no experience but with zest like mine! I focussed on the world I wanted for the cuisine and the people in my restaurants. I can't tell you how many times I have had to ignore the labels of "firecracker" and "she sure has balls" or "kiddo." This has changed for the better, especially in the past 10 years. Vij's is a 100 per cent female kitchen and for the first time in 27 years, the front of house management is also all females. It took patience and commitment, but I love my place as a chef in Canada with other chefs—all genders. Old-world/old-school traditions are giving way to new dynamics.

Why are there not more women in the culinary limelight and how do we change that?
Men become peacocks in their kitchens and that's fine for a male (the public definitely likes the stereotype we see on TV cooking shows). Women are as disciplined, perfectionist, creative and hard working, but I don't think we release stress as aggressively and we don't like the energy of being around it. We've seen tremendous change over the past 10 years for women and this correlates to the entire women's rights movement. In my 27-year career, I was able to work because my business partner was my husband and the father of our children. We had joint family stresses and we filled in for one another. For example, I never worked the night line because we wanted one parent to be home with our daughters. I created recipes and cooked during the day and my office was at home. If women want families —a partner, children and a dog—we need to carry a disproportionate amount of the work, which includes nurturing as well as the daily logistics of running a household. The restaurant industry has been based on male workaholics who weren't main caregivers.

@meerudhalwala



Chef Dyan Solomon
Olive & Gourmando, Foxy & Caffe Un Po' di Più (Montreal)

The cookbook author and ex-Toqué! chef set out to pour the same amount of creativity and care into "daytime dishes" as she had in upscale, gastronomic fare. A testament to the evolution of gastronomy in La Belle Province, Olive et Gourmando has been a must for locals and tourists alike in Old Montreal for more than 20 years. While her Griffintown's restaurant Foxy is about the essentials of fine dining, Un Po' di Più can be described as an Italian-style buvette.

Who is your female role model—the one who paved the way for women in professional kitchens?
There are many, but I would say Alice Waters. The American chef, restaurateur and author is the owner of Chez Panisse, a restaurant famous for creating the farm-to-table movement and for pioneering California cuisine in the 70s.

Why are there not more women in the culinary limelight and how do we change that?
For the same reason that women aren't highlighted in any industry! We still live in a very sexist culture. Women are paid less, have limited rights and still do the majority of housework (even if they work). My industry is particularly hard for women, because there is little structure in place to support women who have children and hope to keep working as chefs. Not to mention that up until recently, kitchen culture was very macho and exclusive. That is slowly changing. The only way to bring about this change in restaurants is for owners to make conscious efforts to create safe, inclusive work environments that encourage female leadership and mentorship. And to have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to sexual harassment, and anything that promotes a toxic kitchen culture. It's possible… I have been creating these workspaces for over 20 years with my business partner. We are committed!

@DyanSolomon



Chef Elia Herrera,
Los Colibris (Toronto)

Former Top Chef Canada and Top Chef Mexico star Elia Herrera takes great pride in bringing authentic, fresh Mexican food and culture to Toronto. Using traditional recipes passed down through many generations for inspiration, she founded both Los Colibris as well as her latest, LosCo Vegan, a Mexican-inspired vegan restaurant. Herrera has been featured on a slew of Canadian TV shows and magazines and has appeared as a judge on MasterChef Canada. She is a gold medal winner at the 2018 Canada's Great Kitchen Party.

Who is your female role model, the one who paved the way for women in professional kitchens?
100 per cent my grandmother; she was an exceptional woman. With a big heart, brilliant mind and spirit.

Why are there not more women in the culinary limelight and how do we change that?
I think we must stop thinking about gender and focus on capabilities, knowledge and mindset. We have to unlearn what society taught us back in the day and start learning that we are able to do anything in this world as long as we have the desire.

@chefeliaherrera



Christie Peters
Primal Pasta (Saskatoon)

Born and raised in Saskatoon, Christie Peters started her career as an international model. It was in Vancouver that she followed her passion and developed her culinary skills by training under numerous chefs. Throughout her career she has travelled to work in kitchens in San Francisco, Amsterdam and Denmark before opening Primal Pasta in the heart of Saskatchewan, Canada's breadbasket.

Who is your female role model—the one who paved the way for women in professional kitchens?
Alida Solomon from Tutti Matti Restaurant in Toronto is someone I look up to very much. She was running the pass at the Le Pavillon pop-up put on by Joe Beef where I was helping, and she was so great! I also got to chat with her while on the set of Food Network Canada's Wall of Chefs when we were both judges. She is so incredible and inspiring.

Why are there not more women in the culinary limelight and how do we change that?
Maybe not globally, but in Canada there are a ton of female chefs on the rise. I do think that women have more challenges in this industry if they want to have children; it can put them behind, but it doesn't have to! There is definitely work to be done for equality.

@crustinthekitchen



Renée Lavallée,
The Canteen (Dartmouth, NS)

Also known as "The Feisty Chef," Renée Lavallée has spent more than two decades in the restaurant industry, working in kitchens across Canada as well as in Italy and the Caribbean. The ex-Top Chef Canada contender is the owner of The Canteen in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia where she serves up east coast classics.

Who is your female role model—the one who paved the way for women in professional kitchens?
Elaina Asselin. She was the first chef I worked for while I was still at George Brown College. She was strong, imaginative, exacting and a good teacher.

Why are there not more women in the culinary limelight and how do we change that?
There is a stigma for women in this profession about being able to perform to the highest level AND be a mother. I met and worked with very few female culinary professionals with kids who have not taken a step back at some point or another, especially if they are still working their way through the ranks, to make sure their children are cared for. I know countless young female chefs who opted for taking a step back in order to start a family.

We have a long way to go in this industry in general to make inclusivity real. We are still all programmed to work 60, 70, 80+ hours a week to "make it" in this business. It shouldn't be expected for any of us to make cooking the only thing in life we focus on to grow in this business. We all need to find balance and teach that to young cooks so they can start to shape and mold future expectations for us all.

I also feel like women are not always seeking out the limelight in the same ways. Our confidence, skill and knowledge does make an impact on those around us but not often seen outside our circles. And therefore, we are not in the limelight in the same capacity. It is still the loudest voices that are heard. We just need to be louder!

@feistychef



Nuit Regular, Sukhothai, PAI, Sabai Sabai and Kiin, Sukho Thai (Toronto, ON)

If you live in Toronto and love Thai food, chances are you've been at the Toronto Star and Now Magazine's Readers' Choice-winning PAI restaurant. An ex-nurse, Chef Nuit left her career behind to pursue her passion through her family's recipes in a humble curry shack in the town of Pai in Northern Thailand. From there, she came to Toronto and transformed the Thai food scene where she is responsible for over 200 staff members across her restaurant empire. Chef Nuit is on Wall of Chefs, has been a guest judge on Top Chef Canada, appeared on the Big Food Bucket List and is the author or Kiin: recipes and stories from Northern Thailand.

Who is your female role model—the one who paved the way for women in professional kitchens?
I'm a self-taught chef and my style of cooking is home-cooked and traditional dishes, so my mom is my role model. She taught me how to cook and helped pave my way into the kitchen as a professional chef. I watched her and worked alongside her from a very young age.

She taught me everything I know, from how to cook recipes to how to grow fresh produce and herbs in her garden, to how to pick the best ingredients at the market, to perfecting recipes and techniques. It is because of my mom that I have my work ethic and perseverance. She also encouraged me when I decided to change my career path from nursing to cooking! She told me that as long as I was happy and doing what I loved, that's all that matters. It meant a lot to me when she told me that, especially when times were tough, because it reassured me that I was right to follow my heart.

Why are there not more women in the culinary limelight and how do we change that?
I think this has to do with the old way of thinking that the hospitality industry is a male-dominated industry. All the "top chefs" were male and so they were getting all the attention, and that is what people saw all the time. But in recent years, we are slowly seeing a shift in this way of thinking as more opportunities are being created for women in the kitchen, as women gain more respect and equality in the industry, and as the work environment improves to become more inclusive and less toxic. There are so many amazingly talented women chefs out there, in all different positions and in all different kitchens. We can't just focus on the "top chefs," because at the end of the day, there will only be a limited number of spots available. What we need to do is feature women in all these different positions and roles, whether they work in a large, fine-dining restaurant or a small, family-owned shop with just a handful of employees. Because these are women who have a unique perspective, interesting stories and incredible talent that deserves to be shared and celebrated.

@chefnuitregular



Chef Suzanne Barr
Chef, author and social advocate

Chef Suzanne Barr is one of our most respected chefs with a signature flair for fresh comfort food. Her culinary repertoire includes True True Diner, Saturday Dinette as well as work at the Gladstone Hotel and Sand and Pearl Oyster Bar in Prince Edward County. She had a starring role in the acclaimed documentary film The Heat, is a resident judge on Food Network Canada's series Wall of Chefs, and hosts the online series HistorEats. She's also been published in Foodism, Post City and Menu Mag, and her book My Ackee Tree: A Chef's Memoir of Finding Home in the Kitchen is due to be released in 2022.

Who is your female role model—the one who paved the way for women in professional kitchens?
B. Smith, Eunice Barr and Edna Lewis. These women to me (one of them being my own mother) represent being fearless, compassionate, willing, brave, rule breakers, sheroes of their own futures.

Why are there not more women in the culinary limelight and how do we change that?
There are female-identifying leaders in the industry, but we must recognize that the limelight doesn't always see that light. They are amongst our families, friends, teams, classrooms and communities. Their work holds space where the camera isn't turned on their profiles, but they are out there and their stories will never be lost in vain. They are mighty, they are brave, we are wild, and once they feel, see and witness our power they try to contain, silence, and break us but we rise and will continue to rise.

suzanne_barr_food

CHEFS CANADA

To discover more Canadian chefs, we invite you to check out @chefscanada on Instagram where, every day in March, they will feature one female chef that should be on your radar.

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The Ultimate Community: MONTREAL



Marissa Leon-John is a proud two-time MasterChef Canada alumna and was a finalist on its fifth season. Going back for the all-star season in 2020 provided Marissa with a platform to showcase herself, unapologetically – as a strong, charismatic, queer, Black daughter of immigrant parents who can throw down in the kitchen with the best.

Montreal doesn't care what your deal is. If you're making something delicious, they're coming out for it. It's not about your name or the names of the people who support you. It's about quality. It's about food that's made from the heart. It's about making something delicious (and generally affordable). If you have these covered, the people of Montreal will turn out to support you. Once you take that chance, people will come from far and wide because there's a genuine passion in this "community" for good food. I say community because there are shared ideals here in Montreal about food, about taking care of one another, about belonging.

I've been lucky to have the support of the people of Montreal, the place where I was born and raised. I have an incredible passion for feeding people and this community has let me live that passion. When I auditioned for MasterChef Canada, I was supporting my colleague at the music company where I worked. She didn't want to go alone, so I agreed to go with her—I got on the show.

It was on MasterChef that this fire in me was lit and it validated that I had skills, even though I had no formal training. When I came home after filming, I knew that I couldn't go back to the life that I was living. The show gave me the confidence and courage to live my passion and completely change my career – and I was supported by the people of Montreal.

After MasterChef Canada, I started a successful private catering business and began creating and hosting events across Montreal. When the pandemic hit, overnight, six months' worth of bookings were gone. I didn't know what to do. So, I took a chance and started a food delivery service. It gave me a routine, a sense of purpose, something to work for. A few people in the community took a chance and started ordering food. Soon more and more people joined in. I cooked and prepped the food, but also did delivery. I spent Sundays delivering food to people in the greater Montreal area, which was exhausting but fulfilling. I was able to share my cooking, create new recipes while still interacting with people (at a distance). My clients raised my spirits during an isolating time.

Building a new business and surviving the pandemic was—and continues to be—one of the things that I'm most proud of. Aside from

the food delivery service, I also created a blend of spices, "Fairy Dust", that I launched after years of trying to perfect the perfect combination of my favourite spices. It's versatile and delicious and is great for barbeque season (which is year-round for me).

Through all of this, I wasn't alone. Before the pandemic, I participated in a business coaching program at DESTA, a community-based charitable organization that empowers young Black youth to reach their educational, employability and entrepreneurial goals. They helped me understand all the different aspects of running a successful business and gave me the tools and confidence I needed to expand my success as a Black entrepreneur. There are resources like these across the country, and I would encourage anyone to look for professional help to see your business or your ideas in a new light.

I also had support from my grandmother, my parents, and my family, who are also my inspiration. I'm constantly chasing the feeling of being in my grandmother's kitchen—the warmth, the love, the food that smells and tastes amazing. I'm trying to recreate that feeling of love, of the generations, of the traditions when I am making something. But nothing will ever beat my grandmother's stewed ox tails, rice and peas, coconut rice, fried plantain with lots of gravy.

I've been inspired by so many people in Montreal who have taken me under their wing and shared their knowledge, their food journey and offered a hand. The passion for food is real and it's infused with the multiculturalism of the city. It's so wild to me that you can roll the dice and get almost every type of food in Montreal—beyond poutine. Poutine is great and delicious, but it's too easy. Bistro Nolah is a southern Louisiana-style restaurant and the place I recommend to people who are visiting the city. It's not what you would typically expect from Montreal, but you'll have an amazing meal. As a native Montrealer, early spring is so nice because of the old-style sugar shacks. You can get a nine-course meal, and everything is homemade on shared plates served at a long family table and inspired by maple syrup.

We are so spoiled in Montreal because you can have an ultra-high-end restaurant down the street from the best slice of pizza in the city. There's truly something for everyone.

You can find Marissa Leon-John at ***ellejays.ca*** *or on* ***@ellejays_*** *or at Quell –* ***quellnow.com****—an agency representing a collective of exceptional, underrepresented food, drink and lifestyle leaders and experts.*



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RESTOGREEN

Reducing Barriers to Improve Restaurant Sustainability

BY SHANNON MURPHY



Over the next few months, as the pandemic subsides, restaurant owners will face a multitude of challenges and priorities for their foodservice businesses. According to Restaurant Canada's Foodservice Facts 2021, 64 per cent of all restaurant owners will focus on reducing operating costs and, while there are many ways to achieve this, one of the less common tactics is to focus on sustainability.

While this may be surprising, the pandemic saw diners proactively seeking out brands that consider their carbon footprints and their impact on the environment. That level of consumer awareness will not go away anytime soon as consumers continue to make environmentally conscientious food and beverage choices, making it a perfect time for restaurants to leverage this awareness as they work to reopen and re-establish their businesses.



Enter Restogreen, a B2B, 24/7 one-stop shop sustainability resource and waste reduction platform for the total foodservice ecosystem including restaurants, bars, hotels, caterers, manufacturers, distributors and service providers. Restogreen works with partners like LEAF (Leaders in Environmentally Accountable Foodservice) to lead and support the foodservice industry in a step-by-step process of sustainability, while making the process as simple and cost efficient as possible. According to Restogreen, reducing energy costs by 20 per cent will have the potential to increase profits by 30 per cent.

"With consumers growing increasingly concerned over the environmental impacts of their dining habits, restaurateurs are likewise becoming more focused on the sustainability of their business operations," said Chris Elliott, Restaurants Canada Senior Economist. "Canada's foodservice sector is mindful of how sustainability is becoming a necessity for profitability."

However, sustainability within the restaurant industry is not always easy to achieve. In a 2018 survey by Restaurants Canada, respondents said the greatest barriers to improving the environmental sustainability of their business operations include the cost of implementing changes, the additional burden of training staff and the lack of availability of more environmentally friendly products.

"Restogreen aims to reduce these barriers," says Tricia Ryan, President of Restogreen and Chair and Board President of LEAF. "There's a marketing opportunity and a way to make money and evolve your business through the sustainability continuum that doesn't have to be a complete about-face."

Driven by community engagement, Restogreen offers a variety of products to assist the foodservice industry. The main offering is REX, a restaurant exchange which can be considered the Facebook Marketplace of the foodservice industry. "Our circular model of production and consumption specific to the foodservice industry involves buying, selling, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products," says Ryan. "If you have leftover food you can put in on the exchange and sell it rather than have it sit in the back and then throw it out." But the exchange is not just limited to food items. Kitchen equipment and patio furniture can all be sold on the exchange. Resource sharing including kitchen space and staff can also be negotiated on the exchange. Restogreen even works with a distribution company so that delivery can be arranged through the site's end platform. "It's a dedicated platform for restaurant owners, where they can connect in what I call a "full-circle economy"," says Ryan.

Restogreen also assists restaurant owners in navigating sustainability audits by approaching sustainability efforts in increments. "The challenge we see is that restaurants are not even getting to audit and for the last two years we've been in COVID, so restaurants are not up to shelling out large sums of money," says Ryan. "Restogreen can take businesses through the process to a point where they can be audited so they don't have to waste money having an audit and not succeeding."

One of the key restaurant needs identified by Restogreen is a list of sustainable suppliers. During the pandemic, 61 per cent of restaurants started offering delivery/takeout, and the expectation is that delivery and takeout will continue to make up a large part of foodservice sales for the foreseeable future. According to Restaurants Canada Foodservice Facts 2021, restaurants will continue to need safe and effective, single-use items they can source at affordable costs. Restogreen can provide a list of suppliers offering environmentally friendly packaging, saving owners sourcing time. Restogreen can also direct restaurants to guides and apps that can help in the management of waste, water and energy usage, cleaning products, food and beverage sourcing and social responsibility.

"There seems to be a consciousness that's just percolating through the system," says Ryan. "All of us are on the path to sustainability and lifting the industry. Restaurants are in a tough place right now and embracing sustainability gives restaurants owners a marketing story that is appealing to their customers."

Restogreen has recently formed a joint venture partnership with Restaurants Canada and is excited to formally launch at this year's RC Show. "The new definition of hospitality is really about building trust with consumers, leading straight into a sense of community," says Ryan. "Sustainability is just another part of that knitting of the fabric that you really care about the community that your business is in."

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Don't Stop Being Unstoppable

How **GoDaddy's** marketing campaign helped Pizza Hub improve its digital presence

BY ANGELICA ZAGORSKI



When Harpreet Banwait's father started his family restaurant, Pizza Hub, 10 years ago, his dream was to share his passion and dedication for food and hospitality with communities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). After working outside of the family restaurant for years, Banwait took over the family business as his heart always led him back to his family and spreading joy and magic through their food. "I'm very grateful that I get to support something so close to my heart and carry on what my father has built," he says.

Throughout the pandemic, Banwait continued to serve hand-crafted pizzas, made with time-tested recipes at each of the three Pizza Hub locations in the GTA. He represents one of many Canadian restaurant owners who have been pushed to their limits emotionally and financially, after many long months of pandemic-related business closures.

According to Banwait, a major part of running a small business are the connections owners make with the customers and making them feel like family when they return. In the



past, building relationships with customers was easier with dine-in service. But amid restrictions on indoor dining in Ontario, many customers rushed in to pick up their orders or had their orders delivered. This made Banwait realize how essential a strong online presence was to his business' success.

For small business owners, a digital presence has become essential—particularly with the continued changes to rules around in-person dining. When restaurants closed at the beginning of the pandemic, Banwait moved quickly to improve Pizza Hub's website and search engine optimization (SEO) in an effort to stay relevant and to stay in business. In 2021, Banwait was randomly selected to participate in GoDaddy's campaign, "Don't Stop Being Unstoppable," which showcases small business owners who have overcome obstacles.

"It's been a challenging couple of years for everyone, especially small businesses, so getting a chance to put ourselves out there was welcomed," he says. With fierce competition, and with the increase of smartphones users accessing restaurants online and while on the go, he realized that having a strong online presence is critical to sales.

Pizza Hub placed a big emphasis on improved takeout and delivery options on their website to serve customers across the GTA over the last two years and stay competitive. Since customers decide where to eat based on location, price and the number of positive reviews online, Banwait added SEO capabilities to ensure Pizza Hub was on the first page of search results for pizza delivery and takeout across the GTA. Optimizing the website improved its search result ranking, making the business easier to find when potential customers searched for things like "dinner, pizza or delivery."

Banwait explains that the Pizza Hub website has been crucial in communicating Pizza Hub's COVID-19 response as well as providing quality menu options for customers when ordering online. He was able to create a responsive website without any technical knowledge and manage everything in one place—from website updates to email and SEO, through the tools provided by GoDaddy.

Although many restaurants have already made an investment in a website and digital marketing, efforts to keep the content current, relevant and optimized for mobile use won't go unnoticed. Whether your goal is to increase online orders, highlight new offerings or keep customers up to date, a digital focused marketing strategy is essential during these times.

Created originally in 2011, the Pizza Hub website has evolved over the years. Banwait urges restaurant owners to use GoDaddy's products and services as they "take all of the thinking out of it with ease of use." GoDaddy helped Banwait in real time, to set up and specifically adjust his website to complement his restaurant.

Harpeet Banwait's top five tips for starting a website are to:

1. Keep the design simple and ensure the navigation is user friendly;
2. Have a logo that connects back to your business' brand or visual identity;
3. Ensure that your website is mobile friendly;
4. Hire a photographer or use high quality images for your brand marketing;
5. Select clean fonts and colours for website accessibility purposes.

With this unique, non-traditional partnership, GoDaddy and Pizza Hub's campaign demonstrates how businesses can collaborate and assist each other to move the industry forward. Opportunities for cross-promotion exist—not just with large companies—but through local initiatives. Banwait hopes that his partnership with GoDaddy motivates other small business owners to take a chance on improving their digital presence. "You truly never know where it will take you," he says. "Having an unbreakable spirit is a prerequisite to being a small business owner, but that skill has become even more essential since the pandemic began two years ago."



Feeding the Open Road

BY CHRIS SZEGO

Most of us have enjoyable memories of ice cream trucks—the bliss of sweet cold treats on a hot summer day. Part of the joy of the experience was the immediate availability: the ice cream came to you. That timeliness has always been a major feature of food trucks; they're right there on the spot when they're needed most. And that continues to be true. But as culinary and technology trends have evolved, so have food trucks.

Today's food trucks offer more than a quick, convenient bite. These days, they're mobile kitchens providing a wide range of options and unique tastes. More importantly, they provide the opportunity to enjoy something novel and delicious in a safe, socially-distanced way. No one understands the scope of that opportunity better than Niki Hodgskiss, General Manager of Venture Food Trucks

Starting the Journey

Located in Napanee, Ontario, Venture Food Trucks designs, builds, retrofits and leases food trucks and mobile kitchens of every description for customers all over North America. Niki herself has been in the mobile food business most of her life. Almost thirty years ago her father, Will Hodgskiss, built a hot dog cart; the first of what became the Willy Dog fleet. Niki remembers playing under the condiment tables set up at event grounds as a child. After running a food stand herself for several years, Niki came on board the family business almost ten years ago and launched Venture Food Trucks.

The timing was right. "A lot has changed in ten years", Niki says. "Cities have become more comfortable with food trucks, and there's more space for them." As municipalities became more accepting, and the permit process less restrictive, the range of food truck offerings grew apace. "There are a lot more high-end food trucks these days. More unique and gourmet menus."



> **“FOOD TRUCKS ARE VERSATILE. YOU CAN REACH CUSTOMERS WHERE THEY ARE. YOU CAN EXPERIMENT, CHANGE THE MENU BASED ON THE AUDIENCE.”**
>
> **- Niki Hodgkiss, Venture Food Trucks**

There is also a wider sense of what “mobile” means. Venture can custom-build trucks and trailers, retrofit older vehicles or adapt shipping containers into semi-permanent, but still moveable, kitchens. “Wineries and breweries like having something stationary on the property for a season”, shares Niki “It’s a fun change, and people love a good pop-up event.”



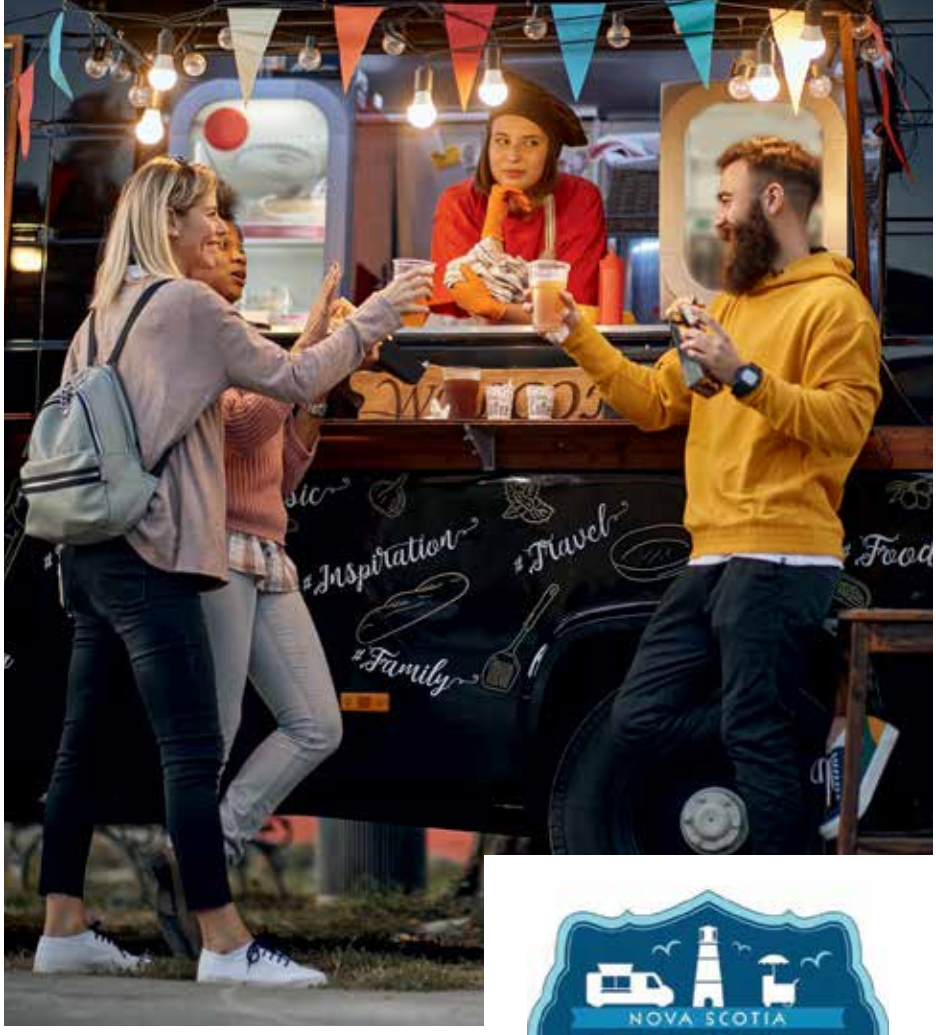
Matt Brennan, co-owner and operator of Shameless Buns in Vancouver, BC, definitely agrees. “There’s a great beer scene out here. But many of the breweries don’t have commercial kitchens. It makes for great collaboration”. Matt used to work in event planning, and had attended many festivals and eaten at many food trucks. A die-hard foodie, he thought, “What if we did this?”. After months of planning and development with his wife Corvette, Shameless Buns began showcasing Filipino foods and flavours in May 2019.



Their truck itself represents some of the family’s Filipino heritage. “Jeepneys are amazing vehicles. They’re everywhere in the Philippines; left over from the military after WWII. Locals took them over, jazzed them up and began to use them for everything, even public transportation.” Matt and Corvette found a half-converted school bus on craigslist. The fully-converted bus, complete with hood, fire suppression, gas, electrical, etc., is as brightly painted and hardworking as any city bus in Manila.

Edmonton’s Thea and Jonathan Avis also purchased a used vehicle for their mobile food business. In their case, it was an old Purolator truck which they bought in 2014, then gutted and redesigned. Cost was of major concern to the Avises: their cheesecake manufacturing business had gone bankrupt in 2012, and they lost everything. They sailed to Mexico on the sailboat their son had salvaged for them, but they missed Canada and the food business. “Jonathan had always wanted to try making meat pies,” says Thea. “It was he who came up with the idea of a food truck.” Meat Street Pies started selling their specialty 4-inch pies during the summer of 2015.

When they began, Thea and Jonathan were living in their son’s basement. They made dough in small batches, prepared fillings in two woks and a pressure cooker, and walked



them out to the truck to assemble the pies. Eventually, they earned their way to a bigger commercial kitchen. "We built pies in our kitchen, then baked on the truck." Jonathan died unexpectedly in 2020, but their daughter Meghan has joined the business. Their middle son helps out with any electrical, mechanical and plumbing issues. And the family's eldest son has a farm just south of Edmonton. "It's from him I'm able to buy my grass-fed/finished beef. It's turned into a family affair – I didn't figure on that."



Chef Chad Stewart is another food truck operator who prizes fresh ingredients. The red seal chef has long been a proponent of the local food movement, and his London-based Field to Truck Mobile Eatery is the most recent expression of his culinary passions. "I chose a food truck to help with our catering company back when we were Field To Fork Catering. Outdoor casual-themed weddings were becoming the new trend and we wanted to be able to cater them efficiently by having our own mobile kitchen."

But the advantages didn't stop there. Chef Chad values the freedom the food truck offers. He appreciates having the ability to travel to various events, and being able to choose his clientele. "And most importantly, being your own boss. Making your own schedule. And being able to create new and exciting grab-and-go style foods."

Despite having more than 15 years' experience in the food industry, Chef Chad put in two years of research before taking the plunge and buying a food truck. "You're not just running a kitchen, but a kitchen on wheels: a lot can go wrong. Having a good support group is key."

Support on Rough Roads

Today, there are many support groups for food truck operators across the country. Terry Miller is currently President of the Food Truck Association of Nova Scotia (FTANS). The aim of the volunteer-run association is to help advertise, schedule and provide guidelines for mobile foodservice operators across the province. On his own time, Terry runs Miller's Gourmet Kettle Corn, popping and selling snacks in and around Halifax at farmers' markets, the Exhibition Centre, the airport and other locations.

Currently FTANS is lobbying the city of Halifax on behalf of mobile operators,

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discussing fees, locations and the many benefits to having vibrant street life. In addition, the association is reaching out to other local organizations to develop smart partnerships that will lead to more exposure and hopefully opportunities to create food rallies. "After two dark years with the pandemic, my goal has been to educate the public that we are still here, and to shine some light on our association as a whole and each member in it."

COVID-19 affected food trucks too, albeit in a different way than bricks-and-mortar restaurants. "When the world shut down, we had to figure something out," Matt said. In the first few months of lockdown, Shameless Buns operated out of their commissary kitchen, where they also began to bottle and sell some of their sauces. "Once things opened up again, in summer 2020, food trucks became one of the most popular ways to experience foods."

The pandemic meant the many outdoor festivals and events that are big money-makers for food trucks were cancelled across the country. But in Edmonton, Meat Street pies began to offer their product frozen and unbaked in addition to piping hot. "We used to have a tiny freezer between the two front seats. Now there isn't a passenger seat: only a much larger commercial freezer."

Chef Chad said COVID-19 changed Field to Truck's operations in a big way, as all the public and most of the private events they'd booked were no longer permitted, due to restrictions on crowd sizes. But he says the experience wasn't all bad. Now they offer curbside pickup, cater to smaller outdoor gatherings, and are considering third-party delivery services. "It forced us to slow down and evaluate the business and our consumers, and how we wanted to run things going forward."

Rolling On

That kind of flexibility is a key benefit of food trucks. Operators can change plans on the go. Niki says Venture's clients are savvy, prepared and adaptable. "Food trucks are versatile. You can reach customers where they are. You can experiment; change the menu based on the audience. What you serve at an art show, for instance, might be different than what you serve at a metal concert. It gives chefs creativity and freedom."

Matt likes the scalability of food trucks, and thinks they're a good way to get started in the industry. "If you want to start a food business, but don't have any experience, I think a food truck is the best avenue. You can start on a smaller scale; test a concept for a while." He suggests renting a food truck as a trial run. "You can spend a few months doing that; see if it's something that works for you. It's not for everyone. You can work some very long hours."

"Definitely be willing to work your butt off," agrees Chef Chad. "Consider the season and the weather changes, and have a passion for the food you plan to serve. Be prepared to not have a normal income for the beginning stages. Learn the events, work with the right people and be open to changes."

"As the truck usually only operates in the summer, you have to make hay while the sun shines," says Thea. Since Edmonton is known for the length of its winters, customers are eager to get out when it turns warm. "Depending on how many gigs you book, you can be working seven days a week. But if you have a food item that's unique and the very best of it s class, people will find you. You have to like people – our customers are our reward."

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Patios are great (if you have them), but what's the point in Toronto?

BY CHRISTINA VEIRA





“A beach bar in a parking lot? Sure.”



Dozens of times over the years, I’ve said some version of the above with an unwavering self-assuredness. And then COVID-19 happened…

Bar Mordecai – or “Mordy” as we affectionately call it – has always been a testament to the power of creative collaboration. For one, my business partners, Emily and Joshua Leblanc, are also married – the ultimate collaboration. But beyond that, from conception to sourcing to the actual build, they worked closely with friends and design firm GREYNORTH. Our beautiful bar opened in January 2020, the perfect time to open a two-floor multi-purpose space. And my partners found a perfect space at the corner of Dundas and Dovercourt. Plus, it was sentimental as it was our prior landlord’s former real estate office. We could take a personal space and breathe new life into It.

Inspired by design, the whimsy of a Wes Anderson film and our favourite hotel lobby bars, Bar Mordecai was always designed to transport. Amber lighting, playful murals featuring storybook versions of our actual pets, a plant shop’s worth of greenery and enough antiques to have at least three ghosts-in-residence. Downstairs was to be a second bar with five themed, private rooms, with the added draw of karaoke. If upstairs is sexy like a hotel bar, downstairs is what happens when that hotel bar gets bought out for a baller’s birthday party – fun, maximalist, transporting. Every inch of ol’ Mordy is meant to be looked at and catch your interest.

And in March of 2020, no one was allowed to look at it.

Most of our bar’s young life has been spent closed to the public. That means that we’re not only consumed by efforts to stay alive, but by the fact that every pivot has meant a new introduction to our guests. What if they hate the pivot and it sours them from visiting us? Or, potentially even worse, what if they love the pivot and then are disappointed to visit the place we always intended it to be? How do we connect with guests in a way that inspires them to come back to try something completely different? Luckily, four lockdowns later, we’ve been able to try the gamut.

And the first major pivot? Let’s build a patio.

In June 2020, Ontario announced its reopening plan, which allowed for restaurants and bars to serve in-person again, but only for outdoor dining. According to CafeTO guidelines, we didn’t have any outdoor space that the city deemed appropriate, and our corner front was too close to traffic to qualify for a curblane space.

As I mentioned before, I used to think patios weren’t worth the effort. Back in 2019, finding a perfect space for your bar was like The Hunger Games: competitive and heavily-skewed towards the wealthy. And that was without wanting an outdoor space. Patios are costly. They’re labour-intensive. Between rain, hail and extreme heat, they’re highly variable. And, beyond that, they’re temporary. Why put in that amount of work for just two or three months? Why worry about a temporary space when you could just build a beautiful bar? Flash forward to 2020: a variable, labour-intensive, temporary space is a hell of a lot better than nothing. We had to get creative.

An opportunity arose to collaborate with a neighbouring grocery store (it pays to be friendly with your neighbours). They had a va-





cant lot just a couple doors down and wanted to partner with a local bar with a catering endorsement to facilitate a pop-up. We wanted desperately to serve people until the province would allow indoor (eventually, they would grant us a patio of our own in September). This pop-up became Venice Beach Bar and ran in the summers of 2020 and 2021. A beach bar in a parking lot? Sure.

The first year, the store ran the food program themselves. This past summer, we collaborated with local food businesses with pop-up experience. Pop-ups are hard work and it takes a special breed to load in and out of a parking lot every day. Working with Preserve Indulgence, Eats by Betty and Guu Izakaya meant our guests could access the excellence of a professional crew but also the fun of a special experience. How do you make a parking lot feel special? You lean into it being temporary. Temporary can also mean "exclusive", if you spin it the right way.

From weekly karaoke nights to cigar specials for National Rum Day to live bands in the mid-afternoon, VBB gave us the opportunity to create something new while staying true to our spirit of hospitality. On our Mordecai patio, we also had acoustic band sets, martini and oyster nights, blanket programs andTurkish samovars filled tasty hot drinks. Oh, and plants. Everywhere always has plants. The design of Bar Mordecai was always going to draw people but our specific approach to hospitality would keep them returning. The washroom at Mordecai is gender-neutral. Venice is in a parking lot, so we had to bring in a washroom trailer, all of which are gendered. We decided on simple signage: "This washroom has two stalls" and "This washroom has a urinal and a stall". If gender inclusivity was important for us to incorporate into the ethos of our brick-and-mortar, so it should be in our pop-up.

By design, most patios aren't hidden. You've literally put yourself right into your community. Often, we focus on the negative aspects of this – noise complaints, garbage collection days – but when done right, it's a powerful promotional tool. We could connect with all the neighbouring residents – not only the ones willing to come in at night. We learned their rhythms and could contribute to the soul of the street. We could cater to families in the mid-afternoon so that we could be top-of-mind for the parents' date night. We could build that elusive currency that's out of reach for many late-night bars: community goodwill. Not everyone will come inside to see how we support local artists. But they could see it in that parking lot. A dark, candlelit room can be intimidating.

Pivoting in such a different way also gave us a comparatively low-stakes testing ground. If something didn't work on the patio, guests wouldn't expect it inside. For example, Josh always thought it would be a great idea to have canned cocktails available in our downstairs. The pop-up provided the perfect opportunity to test it out. They had to be delicious, of course. They had to be shelf-stable (not a lot of refrigeration). And they had to be cost-effective. At Venice, we only served bespoke canned cocktails. We researched, consulted friends in the beer world and learned a lot about carbonation and shelf-stabilization. Then we made them into cute, tasty and crushable cocktails, designing the packaging in house. It's aesthetically very different from what we do at Mordecai, but spiritually the same – thoughtful, well-executed, unserious.





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> “Often the conversation around pivots is about revenue and ingenuity. But, for us in Mordy-land, it was as much about creating a community and staying true to our vision.”



Would people really want to go to a bar where they could only order cocktails that were canned? Would they pay $12 for them? The answer was: yes. Even now, people still come into Mordecai requesting those drinks.

There have been many more pivots since: our virtual family restaurant and thousands of cocktail kits. They’ve come, then gone. And then come back. It wasn’t until December 2021 that we finally received the liquor license extension for our basement. Over this long two years, our bar only existed in its intended state for about only 5 percent of the time. At one of my first restaurant jobs, the GM would often tell us that you’ll never know the quality of your service until six months later. “Anyone can get new people to fill a room, but the key to success is getting those people to come back”. I’ve seen it happen over the course of my career: splashy, well-promoted opens that “inexplicably” die out after a year. To still exist through the worst of times has not only been a challenge but, in its own way, a success story to be proud of. As I write this, we’ve just re-opened after Ontario’s fourth lockdown. Amidst all the excitement – and awkwardness – of people remembering how to be out again, for every guest that gushes about being excited to be back, there are so many curious about and looking toward summer: “What will you do next? It’s always so great.”

Often the conversation around pivots is about revenue and ingenuity. But, for us in Mordy-land, it was as much about creating a community and staying true to our vision. I’m in awe of those who could pivot to bagels or takeout. But what we’ve always wanted was an experience our guests could touch. We didn’t need to painstakingly mimic our original creation on our patio but we had to bring the essence of that vision – the soul – to it.

As for the future? We’re not too sure what outdoor adventures await the business for summer 2022, But whatever it is we’re excited for it to build our community.

Christina Viera is a certified beverage and hospitality expert and educator chosen as one of Imbibe magazine’s 2019 Imbibe 75 and one of the 50 under 40 future influencers of the global drinks industry by WSET and IWAC. Proud owner of Bar Mordecai and Venice Beach Bar in Torono, she was also named one of the 100 most influential figures in the global bar industry by Drink International’s Bar World in 2020 and 2021. Christina is currently director of programming for Toronto Cocktail Week, a national coordinator for Speed Rack Canada, a WSET spirits educator and co-curator of the Bar & Beverage experience at RC Show 2022.

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BEVERAGE TREND TENSIONS

FINDING OPPORTUNITY IN THE WHITE SPACE FOR CANADA'S REOPENING

BY ADY FLOYD



With spring right around the corner, the bees aren't the only ones buzzing; consumers across Canada are eagerly awaiting patio season and the full reopening of bars and restaurants. With that, expect some changes that will satisfy both customers and fellow industry professionals.

Whether these changes rely on the acceleration of past trends or the emergence of new ones, they birth new tensions and whitespace opportunities. For example, new approaches to experiential dining must consider the renewed consumer desire for community alongside technological advancements. When it comes to flavour and ingredients, the tension lies somewhere between curiosity and wellness. Even the fundamental business structure of bars and restaurants must weigh the tensions between safety and transparency. Let's deep-dive these new (and renewed) trends.

COMMUNAL SPACES & EXCLUSIVE TECHNOLOGY

Gatherings for occasion-based dining have long existed, but so have exclusive private events. In the modern context, consumers miss the "togetherness" and shared experiences that restaurants and bars provide. A major trend emerging as a result is space hybridization; the utilization of one space for many interests. A working example of this concept is Rendez Views, Toronto's largest outdoor patio that plays canvas to everything from beer festivals to charity events. With something new happening nearly every day, the venue's ability to reach consumers is endless. The opposite to this extreme is tech-derived exclusivity, from members-only NFT restaurants to speedy, custom home deliveries.

There is an opportunity here — the culinary metaverse; two extremes under the same umbrella that merge seamlessly together. Lockdowns across the country have taught consumers that hybridized dining formats that blend the physical setting with technology are both feasible and enjoyable. We saw this come to life from Chipotle last year when they created a virtual restaurant for Roblox players offering a spooky, online Halloween experience with the promised reward of a free (real world) burrito.

CURIOUS CONSUMPTION & HABITUAL WELLNESS

One tension that has long existed is dietary restrictions or health-conscious lifestyles falling opposite humanity's innate curiosity.

Over the next few months, expect to see extreme product diversification from potato-based milk alternatives in cafés to fizz-free beers. From the camp of curiosity, we have Blood Brothers, a brewery that created a line of nitro brews ranging from "Nitro Sour Ale with Strawberry, Lime, and Salt" to "Bourbon Barrel Aged Nitro Stout" — offerings that have consumers more curious about flavour than concerned about calories. Opposite that, from the camp of health-conscious, there are experiential tonic waters, seltzers, and canned prebiotic teas that cater to wellness without compromising flavour emerging on a seemingly daily basis.

Between these two extremes, we see an opportunity for harmony with the revival of the halfway healthy lifestyle of yesteryears. Breweries continue to experiment with low-ABV beers and sparkling hop waters. Even gluten-free beers are on the rise with an expected compound annual growth rate of about 13% globally.

INDUSTRY AWAKENING

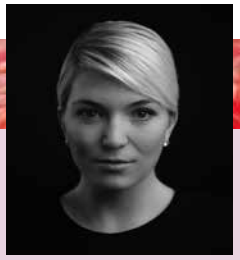
A major conversation that is rippling across Canada concerns safety, equality, career longevity and salary. Liveable wages will vary regionally, but today's employees are looking for companies that have taken steps to officially become "Living Wage Certified", like Traynor Family Vineyards in Hillier, Ontario and Left Field Brewery in Toronto, Ontario.

Employees and consumers are also seeking accountability as well as in-house policies, or codes of conduct (something that many bars and restaurants don't or didn't have until recently) to ensure they're working and/or dining at places that align with their values. In the craft beer space, a movement called "Brave Noise" is underway. Emerging in 2021, Brave Noise advocates for safe and inclusive environments. This type of consumer motivation is not isolated to the beer world; it spans across the foodservice and hospitality industry. In some aspects, lockdowns provided space for reflection, and an opportunity for employers to create mutually-beneficial action plans focused on consumer and employee safety and retention. While the next few months will show which businesses succeeded in creating such plans, it's never too late to take steps in a meaningful direction.

As older generations such as Baby Boomers slowly shift out of the industry, members of both the Gen Z and Millennial cohorts are looking for radical transparency and authenticity when it comes to their employers and the establishments they visit and support.

The restaurant and bar industry is one of the largest and most ever-changing, meaning it is constantly ripe for innovation. Being able to identify trends and understand the tensions between them will be the key to unlocking new opportunities for success.

Through tension, there is growth.



Ady Floyd is a Futurist and VP of Client Success at Trend Hunter. She's also a certified Beer Specialist and World Beer Judge.

Ady is a curiosity-driven individual who seeks out unique and interesting trends in the world of food and beverage, and beyond, working with over 40 brands every day to curate and customize research strategies that help them find their next big idea and ultimately create the future!

As a keynote speaker, she's presented on stage at national and international events such as Future Festival, EMA, and the CMA+SIMA Conference. Curating private keynotes and workshops for partners such as Beam Suntory, Givaudan, Diageo, and Crayola is the best part of her job. Ady specializes in topics such as food and beverage, entertainment, sustainability, and retail/omnichannel.

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Promoting your bar by embracing menu minimalism

BY ANGELICA ZAGORSKI

Memorable bars across the country carry lists of specialty spirits and exquisite cocktails with carefully curated menus. But creating an interesting—yet simple—menu is key to fostering an atmosphere that makes a restaurant profitable across many demographics. In this case, less is more and promoting a smaller, more intentional range of menu items that sell well can drive the most profit.



By using fresh herbs, infused syrups, fresh fruit and vegetable juices, non-alcoholic bitters and other fun, low-sugar ingredients, you can bring the flavour complexity and intrigue to a non-alcoholic crowd.

Marlene Thorne, owner of the Toronto bar Famous Last Words, explains that condensing your menu can increase profit margins. Famous Last Words is known for its literary-themed menu, which was printed into small books containing 40 different cocktails. Since March 2020, the bar significantly reduced its cocktail roster to a select 12 drinks. Thorne explains that reducing their menu items has made service smoother and increased profit margins.

Thorne says cutting back was difficult, as beloved outlier cocktails were cut for space on the menu. However, a drink with a low margin and low sales is an easy menu cut, whereas cutting an incredibly popular drink with a low margin is a more difficult decision. A minimalistic menu can help balance out these factors. Thorne says, "It's a gradual and iterative process. I would say it takes a little bit of trial and error and a willingness to be able to be flexible." For Thorne, minimalism focuses on organizing the menu in such a way that highlights the features of each drink, even if you only have a handful, making it easier for people to find what they're looking for based on style.

Recent trends like mocktails have made it more difficult for bar owners to keep their menus socially relevant without soaking the cost of low-profit drink margins. Ryan Ringer, owner of Grey Tiger cocktail bar has overcome this issue by showcasing unique ingredients to promote non-alcoholic beverages that cater to a growing crowd. Ringer's advice for increasing zero-proof cocktail sales is to maximize the use of ingredients that are under-utilized in your alcoholic drinks program and that may otherwise go to waste.

By using fresh herbs, infused syrups, fresh fruit and vegetable juices, non-alcoholic bitters and other fun, low-sugar ingredients, you can bring the flavour complexity and intrigue to a non-alcoholic crowd. Relying on commercially zero-proof spirits shrinks drink margins as their prices are comparable to their alcoholic counterparts. Ringer says, "Your menu represents your ethos and how much you care about the guest experience. Don't underestimate the power of good design and creative, practical cocktail descriptions as well."

Having a minimalistic menu design with simple, classic colours and photos may seem boring, but it will ultimately attract more guests to a bar or restaurant over time. Once customers have entered an establishment, a cluttered and confusing menu could cancel out the work that landed them there in the first place. Changing your menu once or twice a year keeps things relatively familiar for customers and builds interest and anticipation, making them more likely to return in the future.

Focusing on local sustainability and fresh produce can influence how often a menu changes. Vivian Lynch, co-owner of Lavender Menace cocktail bar (formerly Yard Sale Bar), says, "Showcasing ingredients is important for seasonal menu changes." Having a minimalistic summer/winter and then spring/fall menu change is more manageable for owners and doesn't disorient customers. Lynch says, "With highly seasonal produce for specialty cocktails, it's a better option to have those drinks as specials or holiday offers; something more temporary than a menu item change."

Menu minimalism is on the rise and with it, many restaurants and bars are converting to a one-sheet menu. Ringer says that when thinking about menu minimalism, you must realize you can't be everything to everyone, and this will teach you that less is more.
Ringer ensures that although the single-page menu can easily come off as boring, with a few solid, no-brainer options —fail-safe cocktails and simple spins on classics like the negroni, old fashioned, whisky sour, a couple of good, approachable wines and beers, plus a tight snack selection — you can satisfy your guests and show that you are focused on their experience. Most guests are perfectly content with a small list of cocktails if the other aspects of the bar experience are pulling their weight. After all, the menu is only a gateway to the entire experience.

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