MENU

CANADA'S FOODSERVICE MAGAZINE



SUSTAINABILITY FEATURE:

Chef Rodrigo Pacheco, FAO Goodwill Ambassador, on Nature, Sustainability & the Evolution of Gastronomy

+

Leveraging Sustainability for Growth and more

THE COLUMN:

Open Letter to the Canadian Hospitality Industry from

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Dear Readers,

As we move into the fall season, a time for fresh ideas and innovative thinking, I'm excited to share what's in store for this issue. Our team has been working hard, connecting with thought leaders, uncovering the latest trends, and diving into the most pressing challenges and exciting opportunities in the foodservice industry. This issue is packed with stories that not only inspire but also provide actionable insights to help you stay ahead in this dynamic sector.

First, we sit down with Restaurants Canada's Chief Economist and VP of Research, Chris Elliott, to explore the ideas, insights and themes behind *Foodservice Facts 2024: Charting a Path to Prosperity*. Then, we take a deep dive into sustainability, with a spotlight feature where you'll hear from Jillian Rodak, Restaurants Canada's VP of Sustainability, for a look at the sustainability policy landscape and what's on the horizon for Canadian operators. This is followed by a fascinating conversation with Chef Rodrigo Pacheco, FAO Goodwill Ambassador and visionary, who shares his transformative thoughts on what sustainability really means and the future of gastronomy. Closer to home, Court Desautels of The Neighbourhood Group shares the story of the restaurant group's unwavering commitment as they pursued and achieved B-Corp status—a move that's paying off rather than holding them back. You'll also learn about La Tablée des Chefs' mission to unite chefs and operators across Canada to tackle food insecurity, a cause we should all seek to support in any way we can.

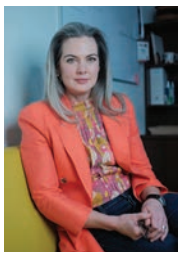
We look under the hood of one of our most beloved heritage brands, Garland Canada, hearing from top chefs about the symbiotic relationship between the company's R&D process and their most demanding fans (and optimizers).

We also hear from Paul Methot, President and CEO of Groupex Canada, as the organization celebrates 40 years of outstanding growth and service. Paul highlights how Groupex's profits are reinvested into Restaurants Canada, supporting advocacy and amplifying the voices of operators from coast to coast to coast.

Next, we explore restaurant brand and interior design strategies with Marlo Onilla of Biography Design and Stacy DiCarlo from Yellowbird Design Studio, offering tips and insights to help both established and new operators think about how design can enhance profitability and drive scalable growth. Our newest columnist, Val Upfold, shares her expertise on sharpening hospitality recruitment strategies in her column, *People Perspectives*.

Lastly, we're building excitement for RC Show 2025, which celebrates its 80th anniversary with the theme: FUEL Your Potential—People, Prosperity and Passion. Stay tuned for exclusive sneak peeks, interviews with industry changemakers and insider tips on making the most of this must-attend event, starting in our Winter 2025 issue.

As always, we are driven by our passion for showcasing the best and brightest in the industry, and this issue of *MENU* reflects that commitment. We can't wait for you to dive into these stories—and many more! We welcome your feedback and ideas on how we can continue to bring you the most relevant and engaging content in foodservice.



Kelly Higginson
President & CEO

Fall 2024
Volume 9 Number 4

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

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

Scan to access the latest news, updates, tools and resources from Restaurants Canada:

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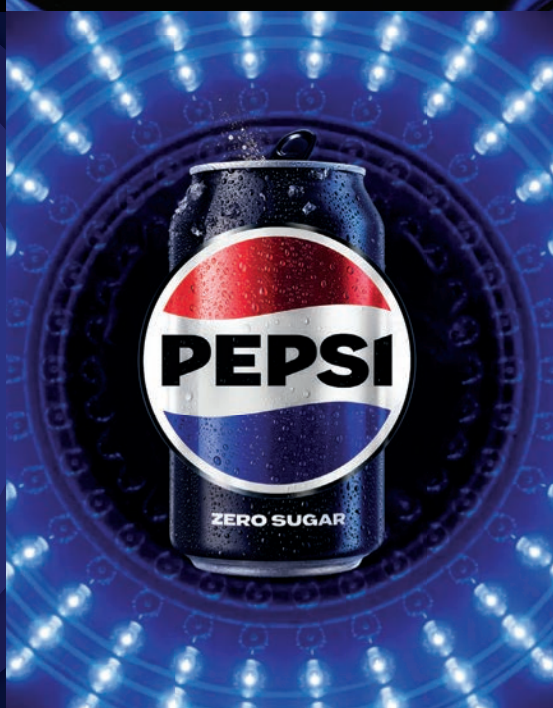
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THE PASS

RC Show
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THE RC SHOW 2025 THEME IS: FUEL YOUR POTENTIAL, PEOPLE, PROSPERITY AND PASSION

Restaurants Canada invites you to join us in Toronto to celebrate the 80th anniversary of RC Show—a momentous occasion where we explore our potential, inspire our people, and feed the passion that drives our prosperity.

Restaurants are more than just venues and menus—they're the architects of culture, shaping the tastes and experiences that unite people and communities. The 80th edition of RC Show is a three-day celebration, crafted exclusively for us, by us, offering an unparalleled opportunity to connect and grow. Engage with industry leaders, witness live culinary, bar, and coffee competitions, and explore disruptive innovations firsthand. Discover the latest sustainable solutions and actionable growth opportunities. Join us at the table to elevate and celebrate our industry as we honour the past, embrace the present, and FUEL the future.

Applications are open for the incredible lineup of 2025 culinary competitions: Garland Canada Culinary Competition, Restaurants Canada Pizza Competition and the all-new Breakfast Sandwich Competition. This is a great opportunity to elevate team and staff members to take their place on the culinary stage. Scan the code to learn more and apply:

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



THE QUARTERLY CANADIAN RESTAURANT INTELLIGENCE REPORT: Q3/24 AVAILABLE NOW!

Presented by Restaurants Canada, with support from Uber Eats.

Restaurants Canada's industry research and analytics team has launched the Q3/24 edition of the Quarterly, essential reading for senior industry leaders and entrepreneurs.

Scan the code to download The Quarterly

OCTOBER IS SUSTAINABILITY MONTH IN CANADA

Sustainability Month is a time to spotlight environmental stewardship and sustainable practices across the foodservice and other industries. From reducing waste to promoting sustainable business innovations, it's a chance to celebrate efforts that contribute to a greener future. Let's work together to prioritize sustainability in our industry and make a lasting impact for generations to come.

Check out the special Sustainability Spotlight in this issue of MENU, beginning on page 19.

COFFEE ASSOCIATION OF CANADA'S (CAC) 2024 CONFERENCE: COFFEE UNITES



Sold out in 2022 and 2023, the CAC's 2024 conference has been moved to a larger venue and will feature Canadian business icon, Arlene Dickinson, as the keynote speaker.

Learn more and register now at: coffeeassoc.com/annual-conference/

LES GRANDE TABLÉES

Toronto | Monday, October 28, 2024 | Fairmont Royal York - **SOLD OUT!**
Montréal | Monday, November 18, 2024 | Palais des congrès de Montréal
Québec City | Monday, November 25, 2024 | Fairmont Le Château Frontenac

Each year, La Tablée des Chefs gathers brigades of renowned chefs from the Montreal, Quebec City, and Toronto regions to create one-of-a-kind menus for three unique, epicurean events: Les Grande Tablées.

At our press deadline, there were still a few tickets left for Montreal and Quebec City—don't miss your chance to support their mission to feed and educate, starting with a cocktail reception and followed by a five-course dinner crafted by renowned chefs and local culinary students.

Learn more about La Tablée des Chefs and register for Les Grande Tablées at: tableedeschefs.org



photo by Victor Diaz Lamich

La Tablée des Chefs

2024 TASTE CANADA AWARDS SOIRÉE

Monday, October 21, 2024 | Fairmont Royal York, Toronto

Join Canada's top food writers, chefs and passionate food lovers at the **2024 Taste Canada Awards Soirée**, honouring 73 culinary titles. With Chef Devan Rajkumar announcing this year's Gold and Silver winners in English and French, it's more than an awards night—it's a celebration of the flavours, traditions,and stories that make Canadian food writing exceptional.

Also, don't miss the 2024 edition of **Taste Canada Cooks the Books Student Cooking Competition** happening Sunday, October 20, 2024 at Cirillo's Academy, Toronto.

Learn more and get tickets at: tastecanada.org

RESTAURANTS CANADA WEBINARS

Groupex Webinar: COMING SOON
Registration opens soon for the Groupex Canada webinar on cost saving strategies for operators, happening November 19, 2024 at 1:00 p.m. ET!

REGISTRATION OPEN:

Mythbusting: Sustainable Seafood and Plastics Explained
October 22, 2024 — 1:00 PM ET
Presented by Restaurants Canada and Ocean Wise

Ocean Wise experts cut through the noise on greenwashing myths surrounding plastics and sustainable seafood and highlight their mission to tackle plastic pollution in our oceans, urging businesses to take ownership of their waste and collaborate across industries for impactful plastic reduction. Hear how their Seafood Program is partnering with local restaurants to national brands to create a sustainable seafood market. Dive into the realities of overfishing, what it means for seafood to be "sustainable," and how your business can make a tangible difference in protecting ocean health.

AVAILABLE ON DEMAND:

Foodservice Facts 2024: Charting a Path to Prosperity
Presented by Restaurants Canada with support from Uber Eats and The Fifteen Group

The Canadian foodservice industry stands at a pivotal moment: incremental growth is on the horizon, but the path forward remains clouded by ongoing challenges. Chris Elliott, Restaurants Canada's Chief Economist and VP Research, walks viewers through the economic pressures, changing demographics, consumer behaviours, and aftershocks of global disruptions that continue to create headwinds for operators, helping foodservice professionals navigate through the uncertainty and challenges to prosperity.

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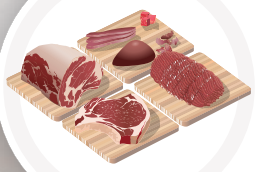
OF CANADIANS WANT TO ORDER CANADIAN BEEF*

*Based on a November 2023 survey of 896 Canadians when asked to agree or disagree to the following statement: When purchasing a dish with beef from a restaurant, I prefer to purchase beef from Canada.

The **wheretoeat.cdnbeef.ca** website has been created to
Canada Beef congratulates and thanks these restauran

The **Canadian Beef Restaurant Showcase** has been created to help inform diners about where they can find Canadian beef dishes on the menu.

The Restaurant Showcase highlights restaurants that are currently serving and promoting Canadian beef and shares information for each chain about:



Beef Types

What product categories are available? Diners can learn if the restaurant serves Canadian beef *Roasts, Ground Beef, Steaks,* and *Other* products (e.g., cubes, stir fry strips, etc.).

Canadian Beef Grades

Which grades are being sold? Diners can see if they can order Canada Prime, Canada AAA, Canada AA or other graded Canadian beef dishes at each restaurant showcased.



Restaurant Chain Website

Diners can choose to directly access the restaurant chain's website, to learn more about its Canadian beef offerings.



Location

This feature allows Canadian diners to discover each restaurant's footprint, illustrating whether a chain has a national or regional presence.

recognize restaurant chains that promote Canadian beef.
ts for supporting Canadian beef farmers and ranchers.

OPEN LETTER TO THE CANADIAN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY:

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMITMENT TO DE&I IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

quell.



LELAND HARPER
Associate Professor of Race, Justice, and Equity Studies; award-winning author, speaker, and educator

STEPHANIE LUI-VALENTIM
President & co-founder of Quell

TREVOR LUI
Restaurateur, Chef, author & co-founder of Quell

REN NAVARRO
Certified Beverage Expert, Diversity Educator & Consultant, founder of B. Diversity Group

TO THE LEADERS, VISIONARIES, AND CHANGEMAKERS OF CANADA'S HOSPITALITY SECTOR:

The current era of uncertainty has forced many businesses into a defensive posture. Economic pressures, political turbulence and the growing polarization in public discourse have shifted priorities, often leaving once-urgent social imperatives—like diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I)—pushed to the margins. Yet, now more than ever, we must resist the impulse to retreat. The Canadian hospitality industry must show resilience and renewed commitment to DE&I, not as a secondary or "nice-to-have" initiative, but as a foundational pillar of business success and social responsibility.

For the hospitality industry, this rollback is particularly devastating. We know that a commitment to DE&I is not just about representation; it's about leadership, innovation and the very future of our sector. Perhaps more than any other industry, equity-deserving groups are our future workforce and our future customers. We MUST learn how to attract, retain, engage and elevate underrepresented people into leadership roles to sustain our growth and reputation.

THE ILLUSION...

In the wake of global movements for racial and social justice, including the widespread protests following the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, many corporations—including those in hospitality—rallied behind DE&I initiatives. Statements were made, budgets were allocated, and policies were put in place. It felt, for a moment, like genuine change was possible.

However, four years later, the initial surge of DE&I momentum has faltered. Corporate leaders— including some in the foodservice sector—once vocally supportive of these efforts, have begun to sidestep conversations around equity. Some have quietly scaled back their DE&I budgets or reassigned these initiatives to marketing departments—a move that exposes the shallow and possibly performative nature of their initial commitments.

While advocates like us have been sharing the same message for four years, there's little real penetration in leadership. The data reflects this reality. A 2024 report by the global employee engagement, performance and development platform Culture Amp revealed that while 56 per cent of the global organizations that participated had DE&I leadership roles in 2021, only 41 per cent retained those positions by 2023.[1] The same report also found that, in recent years, the landscape of corporate DEI investment has shifted, with HR teams feeling the strain of diminishing resources and focus. In 2021, a robust 85 per cent of HR professionals believed their organizations were fostering a diverse and inclusive culture—a sentiment that had notably dropped to 77 per cent by 2023. More concerning was the reduced emphasis on addressing DE&I beyond mere compliance; 71 per cent of HR teams in 2021 reported focusing on broader, more meaningful aspects of diversity, yet only 60 per cent felt the same two years later.

But perhaps the most disheartening aspect is the continued scarcity of resources. Even in 2021, only 34 per cent of HR professionals believed they had sufficient support to uphold their DE&I initiatives, a figure that barely shifted to 33 per cent in 2023. These numbers paint a troubling portrait of corporate commitment to diversity: while the rhetoric of DE&I might still echo in boardrooms, the tangible support behind it appears to be waning. Even without the rollback, global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company pointed out that, even with sustained investment in DE&I, progress is slow.[2] In 2020, companies globally invested approximately $7.5 billion (USD) in DE&I initiatives, such as employee resource groups (ERGs). This figure is expected to more than double, reaching $15.4 billion by 2026. However, despite these investments, it is projected that at the current pace, it will take 151 years to achieve full global gender economic equality.

That's why knowing which factors and initiatives yield the greatest, most sustainable results is of paramount importance. That's also why sprinkling in a Black History Month campaign or Land Acknowledgement Ceremony to showcase your DE&I bona fides to your customers will never show positive impact on your workplace culture.

THE CONTEXT...

It is impossible to discuss the rollback on DE&I without addressing the broader context: the intersection of policy, economics and politics cannot be ignored. Social instability, compounded by the looming U.S. elections and global tensions, has made corporate leaders cautious. The fear of alienating certain segments of the population—fueled by the rise of anti-DE&I rhetoric—has led to the abandonment of many initiatives that were once central to corporate strategy.

In Canada, the narrative has shifted dramatically. International students, who once helped fill staffing gaps in hospitality, are now being blamed for high unemployment and housing shortages. This sentiment echoes a broader global trend where immigrants, previously relied upon to perform essential jobs, are now viewed as a "problem" once their labour is no longer immediately required.

But our memories are short. During the pandemic, the immigrant population stepped up and did the work no one else wanted to do. Now that they're not needed, we have an "immigration problem." This troubling and rapid shift reflects a broader issue within our sector: the inconsistency in how we value and respect workers, particularly those from marginalized communities.

As political polarization deepens in America (with Canada not too far behind), a number of companies are retreating from their commitments to DE&I in a bid to appease certain conservative factions of their customer base. High-profile figures like Elon Musk have fueled these shifts by claiming that DE&I initiatives undermine meritocratic values, casting these efforts as unnecessary or even harmful. But such rollbacks are not only shortsighted—they are fundamentally out of step with the rapid demographic changes underway, particularly in countries like Canada.

THE BUSINESS CASE...

Canada's demographic landscape is evolving rapidly. By 2036, nearly half of the population will be immigrants or the children of immigrants, with a growing proportion from non-European countries. Indigenous populations and other equity-deserving groups are also advocating for greater representation across all sectors. Abandoning DE&I initiatives during this demographic shift isn't just

a missed opportunity—it's a business risk. Companies that fail to engage with and elevate these groups risk being left behind by a workforce and consumer base that is increasingly diverse.

Diverse teams foster innovation, make better decisions and improve employee engagement, making DE&I central to long-term success in a multicultural society. Rolling back these programs may alienate the very employees and consumers driving future economic growth. While appeasing a narrow customer base may offer short-term gains, it comes at the cost of a company's competitive edge and ability to attract top talent in a world that increasingly values equity and inclusion.

The evidence is clear: investing in DE&I is one of the most critical strategies for business success. Diverse companies outperform their counterparts in innovation, employee satisfaction, and financial returns, with Culture Amp reporting showing that global businesses investing in DE&I see stock prices rise by 6.8 per cent and that 84 per cent of employees feel more engaged when they perceive their company values diversity.

In dynamic, pace-setting industries like hospitality, diversity isn't just ethical—it's a competitive advantage, helping companies remain agile and meet the needs of an increasingly multicultural market. Yet, even at Quell, we continue to hear stories that reveal the opposite trend. A recent comment from a potential client that a menu was "too Asian" reveals how entrenched biases persist beneath a thin veneer of social justice, despite the clear and growing demand for authentic, diverse culinary experiences. This remark underscores that, for some, old attitudes are merely masked by performative gestures toward inclusion, rather than genuine efforts to embrace diversity. This disconnect between what the data tells us and how certain decision-makers behave is symptomatic of an industry stuck in its ways, reluctant to embrace the change that our customers and employees are calling for.

THE SOCIAL CASE...

The rollback on DE&I also carries profound social implications. This is not just a corporate issue—it's a human one. We need to take the steps to educate on why advocates are so exhausted and why the policies and politics have an effect on how we operate as owners. When companies deprioritize DE&I, they send a message to their entire workforce—not just to underrepresented groups but to every employee—that fairness and equity are negotiable. This erodes trust, diminishes morale, and stifles innovation.

In dynamic, pace-setting industries like hospitality, diversity isn't just ethical—it's a competitive advantage, helping companies remain agile and meet the needs of an increasingly multicultural market.

According to the 2020 General Social Survey, 92.0 per cent of the population aged 15 and older agreed that ethnic or cultural diversity is a Canadian value.[3] What are the consequences of letting values so woven into our sense of collective identity degrade to become a point of political opportunity or "elective" line item in a corporate budget? Moreover, as younger generations enter the workforce, they bring with them a set of non-negotiable values around inclusion and fairness. Millennials, Gen Z, and the forthcoming Alpha generation will not tolerate the kind of performative lip service that has characterized so many corporate DE&I efforts. The upcoming generations aren't going to stand for it. When those folks come of age, and you haven't put in the effort to catch up, your dining room may be empty.

THE WAY FORWARD...

First, **stop being afraid of getting it wrong**. Progress is messy, but that's no excuse for inaction. Hospitality leaders must blaze the trail, not just for the best food and service but for creating the most welcoming, equitable workplaces. DE&I is not a box to check; it is a commitment that requires ongoing effort, resources, and accountability.

Second, **invest in people**, not just in marketing. Many organizations made the mistake of relegating DE&I to their PR or marketing departments, treating it as a branding exercise. This approach is hollow and unsustainable. DE&I needs to be embedded in the very fabric of business operations, from human resources to leadership development, so that its effects are lasting and meaningful.

Finally, **hold ourselves accountable**. It's not that we don't have the data—we do. But people aren't willing to back it up with resources or financial support. We must demand more from our leaders, ensuring that DE&I is prioritized not just because it's the right thing to do but because it is essential for the future of our industry.

THE TRUTH...

The hospitality industry has always been a microcosm of broader society—a place where people from all walks of life come together to create memorable experiences. In a time of social instability, we have an opportunity to lead by example. By doubling down on our commitment to DE&I, we can build an industry that leads in equity, respect and inclusion.

This is our moment to act. Not out of fear, but out of a shared belief that a diverse, inclusive, and equitable hospitality industry is not just possible—it is essential.

Sincerely,

Leland Harper, Stephanie Lui-Valentim, Trevor Lui, Ren Navarro

[1] Culture Amp. (2024, May 16). *The state of DEI in 2024: Key takeaways and insights*.
[2] McKinsey & Company. (2023). *Diversity, equity, and inclusion lighthouses 2023*.
[3] Statistics Canada. (2022, October 26). *Canada in 2041: A larger, more diverse population with greater differences between regions*.

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Quell can help you design a DE&I strategy tailored to your business and connect you with top industry talent to bring it to life.
Learn more at: www.quellnow.com

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MTLàTABLE RETURNS:

Discover the Best of Montreal's Culinary Scene with Tourisme Montreal and American Express

As the air turns crisp and the leaves begin to change, Montreal's culinary scene is heating up for one of its most anticipated events of the year. MTLàTABLE is back, running from October 31 to November 17, 2024, offering Montrealers and visitors alike a chance to explore the city's diverse and dynamic dining landscape. American Express Canada, for the second consecutive year, is the proud presenting partner of this event, supporting restaurateurs and the city's renowned dining industry.

MTLàTABLE is more than just a dining experience—it's an invitation to celebrate the vibrant culinary spirit that makes Montreal a global food destination. Featuring over 160 participating restaurants, diners can expect a delicious array of fixed-price menus, with options ranging from $25 for brunch to $80 for a lavish four-course dinner. And with the introduction of a brunch menu this year, food lovers can indulge in gourmet delights even during the daytime.

RESTAURANTS WORTH DISCOVERING

Nikkei MTL



Nikkei MTL seamlessly blends Peruvian and Japanese influences into an unforgettable dining experience. First-course menu options for MTLàTABLE include Seb Iche with halibut and leche de tigre or Hamburguesitas, mini grilled pork tenderloin sandwiches, with second and third-course options like Tronshi-to de Atún with Bluefin tuna and pickled daikon, Nagano Anticuchado, pork with ají panca, or Curry de Hotate, seared scallops with Japanese curry. Desserts include a Berry Tart or Nikkei Suspiro, a miso dulce de leche treat.

Babacool



Another must-visit spot is Babacool, an eclectic eatery that offers an intriguing mix of Mediterranean and Caribbean flavours. With vibrant dishes and an atmosphere to match, it's an ideal location for those looking to savour something truly unique. Highlights from their special, on-site sampling menu blend flavours with a choice of dip platters, Lebanese kefta meatballs with mint and labneh, olive chicken with turmeric and more. Side options include fried cauliflower with schermoula mayo and za'atar fries, with a peanut mousse chocolate brownie or pistachio-topped Knafeh for a sweet finale.

Perles et Paddock



For a more refined dining experience, Perles et Paddock provides a sophisticated setting with a menu that focuses on local ingredients and contemporary French cuisine. With its sleek, modern interiors and thoughtful dishes, it's an excellent choice for those looking to enjoy a truly elegant meal during this year's event. Highlights from their menu include Tapioca Arancini with pumpkin and curry, Roasted Cauliflower with tahini yogurt, or Sweet Potato Confit with harissa, followed by a choice of Braised Beef Short Rib with parsnips, Turnip Carpaccio with figs, or Trout with barbecued salsify. For dessert, enjoy Brest-Montreal choux pastry, a vegan Dark Chocolate Tartlet, or Grey Owl Cheese with cranberry confit.

Le Boulevardier



Le Boulevardier, located in the Le Germain Hotel in the heart of downtown, is an exceptional dining destination that artfully blends the sophistication of Parisian brasseries with a modern twist. As part of MTLàTable, Le Boulevardier's prix-fixe menu will highlight seasonal ingredients and innovative takes on classic French cuisine, from options like the Perfect Egg with truffle, Tuna Tartare with ponzu, or Beef Carpaccio with parmesan. The second course offers Burrata with pesto, Duck Confit Cromesquis, or Scallops with bacon cream. Ricotta and Wild Mushroom Ravioli, Sea Bass with yuzu beurre blanc, or Lamb Shank Confit are followed by fruit salad, Milk Cap Mushroom Fondant, or Pear with squash and spices.

AMERICAN EXPRESS: CHAMPIONING LOCAL RESTAURANTS

American Express Canada's partnership with MTLàTABLE is a testament to its ongoing commitment to supporting local businesses. Through this sponsorship, Amex helps drive foot traffic to some of Montreal's best dining spots, allowing food lovers to explore and enjoy the city's culinary diversity. Over 111,100 places in Canada started accepting American Express® Cards in 2023, including over 42,700 places in Quebec. This expanded footprint has made it easier than ever for Amex Cardmembers to support local restaurants, whether they're dining out for a special occasion or enjoying the city's gourmet scene during MTLàTABLE.

Whether it's a casual brunch or a multi-course dinner, there's something for every palate at MTLàTABLE. Food enthusiasts can start planning their dining adventures now by browsing the full list of participating restaurants at **www.mtlatable.com**.



The Journey Ahead for Canadian Foodservice

Chris Elliott, Restaurants Canada's Chief Economist, breaks down the key insights and opportunities revealed in the 2024 edition of Foodservice Facts.



> *Whether it's through menu innovation, better customer service, or loyalty programs, the operators who can adapt to the changing landscape will be the ones who thrive."*

Chris Elliott
Chief Economist & Vice President, Research

Restaurants Canada INTELLIGENCE

MM The post-release Foodservice Facts interview has become a bit of an annual tradition. We'd love to get your candid thoughts and insights to dive a bit deeper than the numbers—what stood out to you when you started working on this year's report? Was there anything that surprised you?

Chris Elliott: *This year felt different for me, personally. Over the last few years, our focus has been on recovery—how the industry was bouncing back from the pandemic, how it compared to 2019, and how the pandemic had impacted everything. But now, as we move forward, my approach has shifted to think about how we can help operators navigate what's coming. We've talked a lot about the challenges, but I believe there are also big opportunities on the horizon.*

When I started pulling the data together for this year's report, several key themes emerged:

First, the economy is projected to improve by 2025, which should give the foodservice industry a boost.

Second, Canada's population is becoming more diverse, and operators who cater to this shift are going to see real benefits.

Third, loyalty programs are a growing area of opportunity, particularly because Canadian operators aren't offering as many as their counterparts in the U.S.

And finally, technology is becoming essential, not just for improving speed but for ensuring accuracy in orders, which is something younger Canadians are particularly focused on.

MM The technology piece is really interesting. It seems like people are just saying, "Give me what I ordered!"

CE: *Exactly! It's funny, but it's a real consumer demand. Especially as prices rise, people want to know that they're getting what they paid for. One of the most surprising things we found is that 40 per cent of Canadians, particularly younger ones, want technology to help ensure order accuracy. It's not just about speed anymore—people want their orders correct. It seems like a small thing, but when you look at how frequently orders are wrong, it's a real issue for consumers.*

MM Do you think that ties back to labour shortages? Is technology becoming more important because there just aren't enough fully-trained or available staff to get things right?

CE: *That's exactly it. Labour shortages are still a big challenge for many operators, and technology can help bridge that gap. But technology isn't always affordable for smaller operators, and many are hesitant to invest in it. That said, by 2025 and beyond, I think we'll see more and more restaurants adopting tech to stay competitive. It's not just about solving immediate problems; it's about being prepared for the future.*

MM You mentioned that Canada's population is becoming more diverse. How should operators adapt to this shift?

CE: *Demographic changes are going to shape the future of foodservice in a big way. One of the biggest growth opportunities lies in catering to the diverse tastes and preferences of Canada's changing population.*

For example, the South Asian community is one of the fastest-growing segments, and we're already seeing some operators respond to that. A&W, for instance, has introduced a paneer burger, which caters not only to the South Asian community but also to vegetarians and those looking for plant-based options. That kind of innovation is crucial. It's not just about offering familiar options; it's about expanding menus to meet the needs of a broader audience.





"I always tell operators that cutting corners on quality is a mistake. Donna Dooher from Mildred's Temple Kitchen once said, "If you need to save money, go to single-ply toilet paper, but don't cut out the butter that makes your signature dish."

MM That's really smart, but what about independent operators who don't have the same resources as chains like A&W? How can they—and should they—make similar adaptations?

CE: *It can definitely be harder for smaller operators, but that's where creativity comes in. I always advise independent operators to pay attention to their local community. Walk around, see what's happening, and talk to your customers. You might notice more bubble tea shops popping up in your area, for example—that's a sign there's a demand for certain types of flavours and experiences. You don't need massive amounts of data to see where the opportunities are. Sometimes, simply observing your neighbourhood can reveal a lot about where the market is heading.*

Restaurants Canada also offers resources, like Foodservice Facts and The Quarterly that can help operators understand these trends on a broader scale, but at the end of the day, it comes down to knowing your local market.

MM Let's talk a bit more about loyalty programs. You said they're underutilized in Canada compared to the U.S. Why do you think that is, and how can they be a growth driver?

CE: *Loyalty programs are a huge opportunity, especially for creating repeat business. In Canada, the percentage of people using loyalty programs is similar to the U.S., but fewer restaurants offer them here. That's a gap operators can take advantage of.*

Successful programs, like Starbucks' rewards program, give people tangible benefits for coming back, whether it's free coffee or points toward their next purchase. But beyond free food, operators should also think about how they can offer exclusivity—being the first to try a new menu item or getting access to special events can be just as valuable to customers as discounts. It's about creating an emotional connection and a sense of belonging.

For independent operators, it's tougher to roll out large-scale loyalty programs like chains can, but they can create similar experiences by focusing on personal relationships with their customers. Inviting loyal customers to exclusive tasting events or offering personalized deals based on their preferences can build that loyalty without the need for complex systems.



MM You mentioned earlier that the economy is expected to improve in 2025. How do you see that playing out for foodservice operators?

CE: *We're expecting the economy to start improving by 2025, which will help lift the foodservice industry as well. But even with that growth, we're not expecting a huge surge in sales across the board. The pie isn't going to grow significantly, so the challenge for operators will be finding ways to capture more market share. That means being competitive, not necessarily on price, but on value. Quality and service are going to be key drivers. People are willing to pay more, but they expect the full experience—great food, great service, and no mistakes. Menu innovation will also be crucial to attracting new customers and keeping regulars coming back.*

MM Quality and consistency seem to have emerged as operational priorities; however, with rising costs, how do operators maintain that quality without cutting corners?

CE: *It's definitely a balancing act. One thing I always tell operators is that cutting corners on quality is a mistake. Donna Dooher from Mildred's Temple Kitchen once said, "If you need to save money, go to single-ply toilet paper, but don't cut out the butter that makes your signature dish." That's always stuck with me because it's true.*

Customers notice when the quality drops, and it's hard to win them back. Even if portions are a bit smaller, as long as the food is exceptional, people will understand.

And quality doesn't just mean the food—it's also about the service. If a restaurant can't afford to invest in new technology, they need to focus on the basics: consistency, good customer service and making sure orders are correct. Those are things customers will appreciate, especially when they're paying more.

MM What other strategies do you think operators should focus on to stay competitive in the coming years?

CE: *One thing I always highlight is menu innovation. The industry is changing, and consumers are looking for new flavours and experiences. Adding plant-based options, for example, or incorporating dishes that reflect the diversity of your community can help attract new customers and keep things fresh for regulars. Even small changes can make a big difference.*

Another area to focus on is becoming an employer of choice. Restaurants are only as good as their staff, and in this industry, having happy, engaged employees is critical to providing a great customer experience. That doesn't always mean raising wages—it can be as simple as creating a positive workplace culture where employees feel valued. I've heard stories of restaurant owners taking their staff out for unique experiences, like tobogganing, to build morale. Little gestures like that can go a long way in retaining staff and creating a great team atmosphere.

> *"Demographic changes are going to shape the future of foodservice in a big way. One of the biggest growth opportunities lies in catering to the diverse tastes and preferences of Canada's changing population."*



MM As a final thought, what should operators be focusing on in the long term?

CE: *Long-term sustainability will come down to innovation and adaptability. Operators need to keep an eye on demographic shifts, embrace new technologies, and continue to find ways to create value for their customers.*

Whether it's through menu innovation, better customer service, or loyalty programs, the operators who can adapt to the changing landscape will be the ones who thrive.

> *"Technology is becoming essential, not just for improving speed but for ensuring accuracy in orders, which is something younger Canadians are particularly focused on."*







Download the complete Foodservice Facts 2024, presented with support from Uber Eats and The Fifteen Group, on the Restaurants Canada member portal on restaurantscanada.org.

Scan the QR code to watch the Foodservice Facts 2024 webinar on demand:

Growing Revenue While Consumers Cut Back

Despite the pandemic being far in the rear view, consumers in Canada continue to feel the lasting impacts on the economy, and they are increasingly cautious about spending. Commercial foodservice sales in the first half of 2024 had their softest growth since the start of recovery in 2021.

In this time of financial uncertainty, restaurants face the challenge of attracting value-conscious consumers while managing high operating costs. It's crucial to adapt to consumers' spending strategies. You can do this by showcasing value, using a customer-centric mindset to get people through the door, and taking advantage of upsell occasions. Here are some ideas for responding to spending changes so you can gain repeat visits and grow cheque size.

Bounce-back Coupons: +11M

Circana's CREST® data reports FSR traffic on deal grew by 11 million (year-to-date June 2024 vs. prior year), and now represents nearly one in four orders at FSRs. Providing special offers to customers after they dine at your restaurant can be an effective tool for encouraging repeat business and brand loyalty.

Introducing Mocktails: +27M

Occasions where a consumer ordered only a beverage at FSR grew by 27 million year-to-date June 2024, representing nearly one in three orders. Adding alcohol-free cocktails to your menu can help you lean into this growth while using existing mixes. Mocktails are growing in popularity: They appeal to a wide audience by being healthier and more budget-friendly than cocktail equivalents.

Next-day Meals: Encourage diners to upsize their meals to create leftovers. This could include selling smaller-portioned, ready-to-heat meals for the next day, perhaps utilizing surplus ingredients or unsold dishes. This is a win-win strategy to provide value to customers while potentially reducing food waste.

Suggested Pairings: -13%

FSR items per eater have declined 13% compared to year-to-date June 2019. A tried-and-true method of amplifying the customer experience is suggesting pairings of appetizers, beverages, desserts, or mains that complement each other. You can also offer smaller portions to accompany the beverage-only occasions mentioned above. Who wouldn't want a small order of salty fries to complement their refreshing beverage?

Shareable Desserts: +11%

Desserts had the fastest declines among food categories year-to-date June 2024, but dessert occasions have an 11% larger party size than the average FSR occasion. Introducing larger desserts that are designed to share, such as a sundae platter or an assortment of mini treats, can enhance the dining experience with a fun element – without a lot of additional cost.

Navigating financially challenging times requires creativity, adaptability, and a deep understanding of your customers' needs. These concepts can help restaurants attract customers and encourage them to spend more. And that can turn these challenging economic conditions into a growth opportunity.



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

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From Compliance to Competitive Advantage: Leveraging Sustainability for Growth

MENU in conversation with Jillian Rodak, VP Sustainability, Restaurants Canada



In today's world, where environmental impact is a critical concern and consumers increasingly demand transparency and eco-conscious practices, the restaurant industry stands at a crossroads. Sustainability is no longer a luxury but a necessity for long-term success. From reducing food waste to adopting circular economy practices, restaurants that embrace sustainable solutions can not only improve their environmental footprint but also enhance operational efficiency, cut costs, and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

Working on behalf of Canada's foodservice sector, Jillian Rodak, VP of Sustainability at Restaurants Canada explores and helps operators understand the pressing challenges facing the industry—chief among them navigating a complex patchwork of environmental regulations, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and tackling food waste—and highlights the opportunities for restaurants to lead the way in sustainable innovation. Restaurants Canada, under Jillian's leadership, is helping operators navigate these changes and realize the opportunities that sustainability can bring.

For restaurant owners and operators, the message is clear: sustainability isn't just about keeping up with regulations; it's about driving profitability, resilience, and long-term success in a world beset by fragile economic conditions and vulnerable food systems. Restaurants have the opportunity to lead by example and innovate in ways that not only reduce their environmental impact but also improve their bottom line.

We had the opportunity to connect with Jillian prior to the beginning of her maternity leave, to learn more about the opportunities afforded by sustainability initiatives that are sometimes overshadowed by the complexities of policy and regulation in Canada.

MM It's been wonderful to watch the early success of your new role as VP Sustainability. Can you share a bit about your professional journey and how you ended up at Restaurants Canada?

Jillian Rodak: *Absolutely! I'll try to keep it brief. I studied at Western University and was drawn to humanities, ethics—and particularly business ethics. I attended Ivey Business School but was keen to explore responsible business practices. At the time, only a few of us were passionate about corporate social responsibility, but it was becoming more recognized by the time I graduated in 2010. I knew I wanted to merge sustainability with consulting, and though the opportunities weren't abundant, I shaped my career around that goal.*

In the early days, I created my own internship opportunities with social purpose organizations and wrote a lot about sustainability.

Eventually, I landed at Deloitte Canada, where I spent six years immersed in sustainability consulting for some of Canada's largest companies. The food system has always fascinated me, which is what led me to Restaurants Canada—a place where I could combine my passion for sustainability with my love for the restaurant industry.

MM It seems like you had a clear sense of the need for sustainable business practices early on. What drives that passion?

JR: *I've always been deeply passionate about human rights and social justice. My grandparents were Holocaust survivors, and that profoundly influenced me growing up. Their experiences gave me a keen sense of responsibility toward human rights and the social aspect of sustainability. Combine that with my love for business models and making things work efficiently, and sustainability became the perfect intersection of my values and professional interests.*

Sustainability isn't just a professional focus for me—it's personal. I see the way business and sustainability can coexist to drive both profitability and positive social outcomes. That has driven my career, and it's why I'm so excited to be working with Restaurants Canada.

Sustainability in the Foodservice Industry

MM As the first person in this role at Restaurants Canada, what's your vision for sustainability in the industry?

JR: *For much of my career, sustainability in the private sector has been driven by consumer demand, reputation and its impact on the bottom line. But now, policy is the biggest driver. Many restaurants see these policies as a threat to their business, and my role involves advocating for our members and helping them navigate these changes.*

At the same time, I aim to guide them toward seeing sustainability as an opportunity—whether it's through cost savings or new revenue streams. I believe the restaurant industry can be a leader in sustainability innovation. It's not just about compliance; it's about future-proofing their businesses.

MM There's certainly a lot of pressure on restaurants, especially smaller businesses. What are the main challenges they face when it comes to sustainability?

JR: *One of the biggest challenges is the patchwork of legislation around plastics and packaging. Different cities and provinces have varying laws, which adds complexity, time and cost to operations. For larger chains that rely on scalable models, adjusting operations based on local regulations can be particularly challenging. Consistency is something we're advocating for on behalf of our members.*

Another major challenge is infrastructure. Recycling and composting systems vary widely across Canada, making it difficult for restaurants to implement scalable solutions. Even when they want to reduce waste or switch to more sustainable packaging, the lack of uniform infrastructure complicates things.

MM That's frustrating and overwhelming. How are you helping restaurants navigate these challenges?

JR: *We focus on meeting restaurants where they are and taking small, achievable steps. Sharing success stories is a big part of that. For example, some restaurants are partnering with third-party reusable takeout container companies, and customers are responding positively. By highlighting these real-world examples, we can inspire other businesses to adopt similar practices.*

We're also facilitating conversations between restaurants and regulatory bodies to ensure there's clarity around policies and opportunities for input. It's important to make sure our members feel heard and that they understand the business benefits of sustainability—not just the challenges.



> One of the biggest challenges is the patchwork of legislation around plastics and packaging. Different cities and provinces have varying laws, which adds complexity, time and cost to operations."



Tackling Food Waste

MM Food waste is a major concern, both from a sustainability and a financial perspective. What are some ways restaurants are addressing this issue?

JR: *Food waste is a huge opportunity for the industry. Many operators are already optimizing their forecasting and portion sizes to reduce waste from the outset. Some are repurposing surplus food into new menu items—one of our members, for example, uses leftover ingredients from certain dishes to create entirely new offerings, ensuring nothing goes to waste.*

Training staff is another effective strategy. Many restaurants are streamlining kitchen operations to reduce waste and improve sorting practices. This often involves educating kitchen staff on food waste reduction techniques and creating clear procedures for sorting compostable and recyclable materials.

Many operators are diverting food waste to help address food insecurity in their communities, partnering with local food banks and providing either valuable ingredients or nutritious, ready-to-serve meals.

We're also seeing a surge in partnerships with food surplus apps, which connect restaurants with customers who purchase leftover food at a discount. This reduces waste while offering consumers affordable meals. Some restaurants are even participating in used cooking oil recycling programs to convert waste oil into biodiesel, further reducing their environmental footprint.

The Circular Economy and Innovation

MM Speaking of waste, how does the concept of a circular economy apply to the restaurant industry?

JR: *A circular economy is about shifting from a linear, take-make-waste model to one where resources are optimized, and waste is minimized throughout the entire value chain. For restaurants, this means thinking about everything from food waste to packaging and working to keep materials in use for as long as possible.*

We're seeing restaurants innovating with fibre-based packaging, exploring ways to extend the life of materials, and even partnering with suppliers to reduce waste at the sourcing level. But for circularity to truly take hold, we need collaboration across the entire supply chain—from suppliers to waste management companies. It's a complex journey, but the potential is huge.

MM What excites you most about the opportunities ahead?

JR: *The innovation potential. We're already seeing progress in things like recyclable and compostable packaging, and there's so much more we can do. The restaurant industry is incredibly adaptive, and I believe it has the power to drive real change. The key is to focus on tangible solutions that are accessible and affordable for businesses, including small and medium-sized ones.*

Greenhouse Gas Emissions and the Road Ahead

MM Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are another pressing issue. How do you see this affecting the restaurant industry?

JR: *Many of our larger members are already working on measuring and reducing their GHG emissions, especially those with international ties. Canada is expected to introduce its own version of international GHG reporting standards soon, which will likely apply to larger companies initially. For smaller businesses, the impact will come later, but it's definitely something they need to be aware of.*

At Restaurants Canada, we're looking at how we can help restaurants start assessing their emissions at a basic level and identify opportunities to reduce them. We see this as a huge opportunity not just for environmental impact but for cost savings as well.

MM Looking ahead, what trends do you see having the biggest impact on sustainability in the restaurant industry over the next five years?

JR: *Beyond the circularity piece we discussed as the main focus for the next few years, I see food waste reduction and emissions as major focus areas. The restaurant industry is in a unique position to lead on supply chain transparency, ensuring that customers know where their food comes from and that it's ethically sourced. We're also going to see more attention on human rights in supply chains, as more businesses comply with Canada's Modern Slavery Act.*

The industry has made a lot of progress, but there's much more to come. The next five years will be pivotal, and I'm excited to see how we evolve.

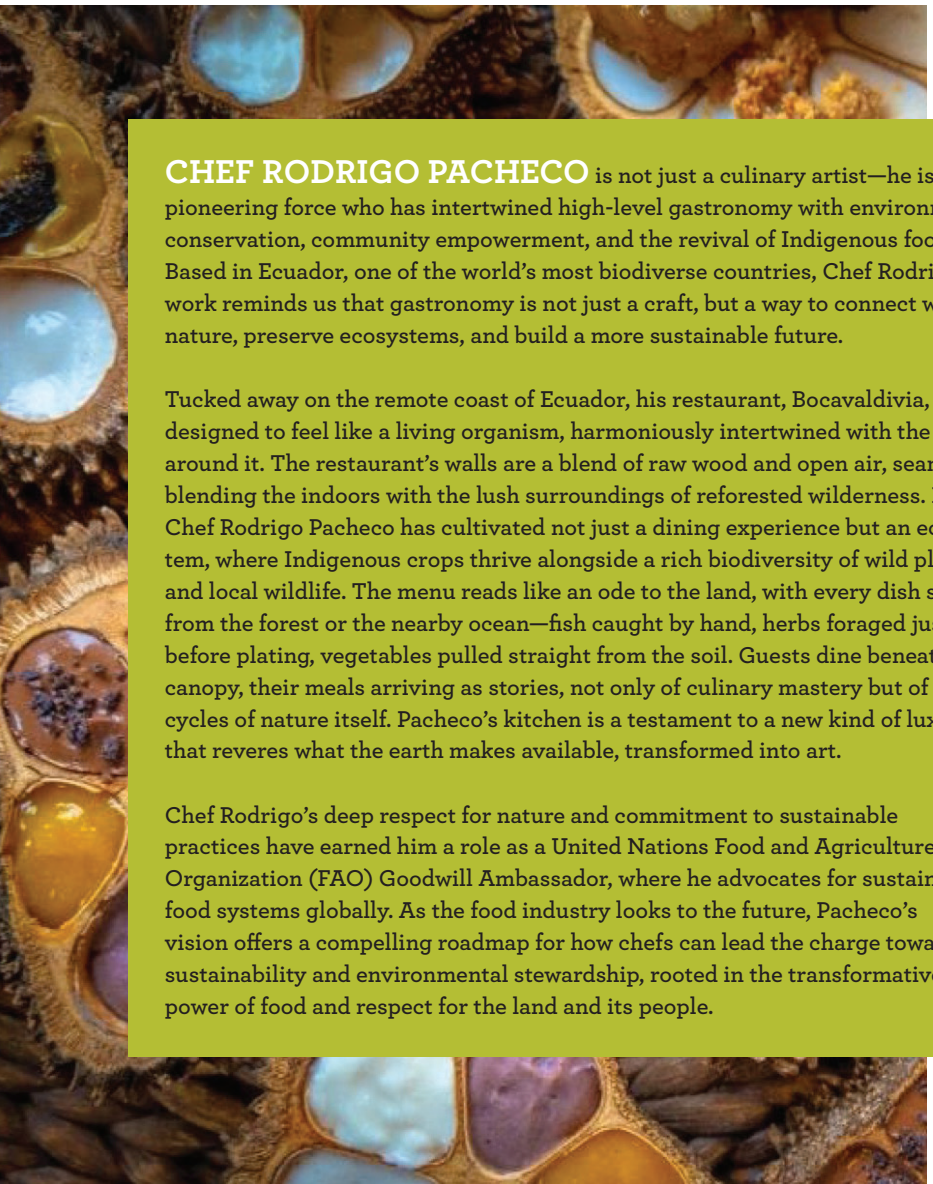
Restaurants Canada

Although Jillian has begun her maternity leave, she will return next fall to continue leading these vital efforts for the industry. In her absence, there is a strong team in place at Restaurants Canada to continue the momentum and continue to shape the future of sustainability in foodservice.

If you have any questions in the meantime, please reach out to sustainability@restaurantscanada.org


BOCAVALDIVIA
Rodrigo Pacheco

Chef Rodrigo Pacheco on Nature, Sustainability & the Evolution of Gastronomy



CHEF RODRIGO PACHECO is not just a culinary artist—he is a pioneering force who has intertwined high-level gastronomy with environmental conservation, community empowerment, and the revival of Indigenous foodways. Based in Ecuador, one of the world's most biodiverse countries, Chef Rodrigo's work reminds us that gastronomy is not just a craft, but a way to connect with nature, preserve ecosystems, and build a more sustainable future.

Tucked away on the remote coast of Ecuador, his restaurant, Bocavaldivia, was designed to feel like a living organism, harmoniously intertwined with the land around it. The restaurant's walls are a blend of raw wood and open air, seamlessly blending the indoors with the lush surroundings of reforested wilderness. Here, Chef Rodrigo Pacheco has cultivated not just a dining experience but an ecosystem, where Indigenous crops thrive alongside a rich biodiversity of wild plants and local wildlife. The menu reads like an ode to the land, with every dish sourced from the forest or the nearby ocean—fish caught by hand, herbs foraged just hours before plating, vegetables pulled straight from the soil. Guests dine beneath the canopy, their meals arriving as stories, not only of culinary mastery but of the cycles of nature itself. Pacheco's kitchen is a testament to a new kind of luxury—that reveres what the earth makes available, transformed into art.

Chef Rodrigo's deep respect for nature and commitment to sustainable practices have earned him a role as a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Goodwill Ambassador, where he advocates for sustainable food systems globally. As the food industry looks to the future, Pacheco's vision offers a compelling roadmap for how chefs can lead the charge toward sustainability and environmental stewardship, rooted in the transformative power of food and respect for the land and its people.

MENU Magazine: Chef Rodrigo, your career blends fine dining with environmental activism. How did your journey as a chef lead you to where you are now?

Chef Rodrigo Pacheco: *Thank you for the opportunity to share my journey. I've always felt that my career is more than just cooking—it's a life mission. I was connected to nature from a very young age. Whether I was hiking in the forests or observing wildlife, I saw the world around me as an intricate system, a cycle of life. I was fascinated by how everything in nature worked in harmony, and I wanted to be a part of that.*

In my home, the kitchen was the heart of the house. My mother and grandmother were amazing cooks, and they taught me that food is not just about nourishment—it's about relationships, culture and memory. These experiences shaped how I think about food today. As I grew older, I wanted to combine my passion for gastronomy with my respect for nature. I trained in France under chefs like Paul Bocuse and Michel Bras, and while I learned a lot about discipline, precision and technique, I realized that my culinary journey had to be more than just creating beautiful dishes. It had to be a way to honour the land, the environment, and the culture of my home in Ecuador.

MM Bocavaldivia is as much about sustainability as it is about gastronomy. Can you tell us more about how you developed the restaurant, and what role sustainability plays in your work?

RP: *Developing Bocavaldivia has been an extraordinary journey. The restaurant didn't start with a kitchen—it started with the land. I wanted to create something that was truly sustainable, where the restaurant and the ecosystem worked together. Before we built the kitchen, we planted a forest. We began by reforesting the land and planting Indigenous crops, restoring the biodiversity that had been lost over time.*

In the beginning, it was extremely challenging because we had no suppliers. We couldn't rely on external sources for ingredients, so we had to fish for our seafood, forage for wild plants, and grow all of our vegetables and herbs ourselves. There were times when it felt like



an impossible task, but that necessity forced us to become more creative and resourceful. Over time, the land began to give back. The forest we planted became a thriving ecosystem, and now it provides many of the ingredients we use in our dishes.

Sustainability is not just about sourcing ingredients locally; it's about building a system that regenerates itself. Everything we do at Bocavaldivia is designed to minimize waste and reduce our impact on the environment. We compost all of our organic waste, and we recycle water to nourish our crops. It's a closed-loop system where nothing goes to waste. Our goal is to create a restaurant that exists in harmony with the land, and we're constantly learning from nature how to improve that balance.

MM Your team is an essential part of the restaurant's operation. Can you tell us more about how your team works with the land and the role they play in Bocavaldivia's sustainability practices?

RP: *Absolutely. The team at Bocavaldivia is integral to the success of the restaurant, and their role extends far beyond the kitchen. Many of the people who work with me come from the local Indigenous communities, and some had no formal culinary training when they first started. I've spent over a decade training them, not just in cooking techniques but in the philosophy of sustainability and respect for the land. This process has been incredibly rewarding, and we've learned from each other along the way.*

One of the unique things about Bocavaldivia is that everyone on the team is involved in managing the land and working the forest. For example, when it's time to harvest crops, the entire team—whether they're in the kitchen or the front of house—goes out to work the land together. We grow many of our own ingredients, from vegetables to cacao, and the team is involved in every step of the process, from planting and harvesting to processing the ingredients.

We also go fishing together. We use traditional fishing methods, like casting nets along the shoreline, which is physically demanding work. The ocean can be unpredictable, and sometimes it takes hours to catch enough fish. But the effort is worth it because it keeps us connected to the land and the sea. When we serve a dish, we know exactly where the ingredients came from and the work that went into sourcing them. This connection to the process is what makes our food special. We're not just cooking—we're part of the entire lifecycle of the ingredients.

I always say that the machete is the first knife that every chef should learn to use. Before you start cutting vegetables in the kitchen, you need to understand where they come from. The machete is used to clear the land, to harvest crops, and to understand the rhythm of nature. The land teaches us that everything has its cycle—the plants, the fish, the animals—and that knowledge is essential to creating food that is in harmony with the environment.

MM You've emphasized working with Indigenous ingredients and communities. What advice would you give to chefs who want to incorporate Indigenous foodways into their cuisine?

RP: *It's absolutely worth the effort, but it requires a lot of respect and dedication. When I first returned to Ecuador after training in France, I thought I knew a lot. I had absorbed so much knowledge from the European culinary world, but I quickly realized that Ecuador had its own culinary heritage that was deeply connected to the land and Indigenous cultures. I had to unlearn many things and immerse myself in nature and the local communities to truly understand the ingredients.*

Incorporating Indigenous ingredients is not about seeking out exotic or rare products—it's about understanding the stories, traditions and ecosystems behind them. You have to connect with the people who have been growing and using these ingredients for generations. For example, at Bocavaldivia, we've worked hard to revive forgotten plants, fruits and herbs that were once central to the local diet but had fallen out of use over time. Bringing these ingredients back into our dishes gives them a deeper sense of place and history.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that necessity breeds creativity. When you don't have access to modern conveniences or a wide array of imported ingredients, you're forced to look to nature for solutions. The Indigenous

"THE FUTURE OF GASTRONOMY IS DEEPLY CONNECTED TO SUSTAINABILITY. COOKING CAN NO LONGER JUST BE ABOUT CREATING BEAUTIFUL DISHES—IT HAS TO SERVE A GREATER PURPOSE."

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knowledge of the land has been key to our success. Chefs who want to work with Indigenous foodways need to be willing to spend time in the field, connect with the people who grow the ingredients, and learn from their wisdom.

You've spent time in Canada and have worked with Indigenous communities here as well. What's your impression of the Canadian restaurant scene, particularly when it comes to sustainability?

RP: *Canada is a fascinating country with so much potential in terms of sustainability and Indigenous cuisine. I've had the privilege of spending time in different parts of Canada, including living with the Cree community in Hudson Bay when I was younger. That experience left a deep impression on me. I participated in their rituals, went fishing with them, and learned a lot about their food culture and respect for the land.*

What I see in Canada is a diverse food culture with a wealth of ingredients, but I think there's still work to be done in terms of sustainability. It's easy to import products from all over the world, but I believe the future of Canadian gastronomy lies in building a sustainable ecosystem that reflects the local environment and honours Indigenous foodways.

Canada's greatest strength is its Indigenous cultures, which have deep-rooted connections to the land. These foodways have sustained communities for thousands of years, and I believe they are the foundation of what Canadian cuisine could become.

You've been an United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Goodwill Ambassador for five years now. Can you tell us more about your work with the UN and your recent projects like The First Table?

RP: *It has been an honour to serve as a FAO Goodwill Ambassador. My role is to raise awareness about sustainability and biodiversity through gastronomy. One of the projects I'm most proud of is The First Table, a series of mini documentaries that focus on Indigenous foodways. The idea behind The First Table is to bring Indigenous communities to the global stage by showcasing their ingredients, traditions, and stories.*

In the first episode, I invited eight Indigenous cultures from different regions of Ecuador—each from a distinct ecosystem, like the Highlands, the Amazon, and the coast. They brought ingredients that were native to their regions, and we cooked together. It was the most meaningful meal I've ever prepared, even though I've cooked for Michelin-starred chefs, presidents and Hollywood stars. Serving these Indigenous brothers and sisters, and sharing their traditions, was an incredibly humbling experience.

I'm excited to bring The First Table to Canada. There are so many unique Indigenous cultures in Canada, each with its own foodways, and I believe we can use gastronomy to honour and elevate their traditions. By sharing these stories, we can create a deeper understanding of how food connects us to the land and to each other.

Finally, what do you see as the future of gastronomy, particularly when it comes to sustainability and environmental transformation?

RP: *The future of gastronomy is deeply connected to sustainability. Cooking can no longer just be about creating beautiful dishes—it has to serve a greater purpose. Chefs have the power to influence how people think about food and the environment, and we have a responsibility to use that influence for good.*



For me, the true measure of a restaurant's success isn't how many Michelin stars it has—it's how many hectares of land it's protecting. At Bocavaldivia, we're not just focused on creating great food; we're working to conserve the land, restore biodiversity, and support our community. Gastronomy should be a tool for environmental restoration, protecting ecosystems, and nurturing local communities.

Chefs have a unique opportunity to lead the way in environmental transformation. By sourcing ingredients sustainably, reducing waste, and educating their customers, we can make a real impact. As more chefs embrace this responsibility, I believe we'll see gastronomy evolve into a powerful force for positive change in the world.



"I ALWAYS SAY THAT THE MACHETE IS THE FIRST KNIFE THAT EVERY CHEF SHOULD LEARN TO USE."





BOCAVALDIVIA

ABOUT CHEF RODRIGO

Rodrigo Pacheco is an Ecuadorian chef, who fulfills the diplomatic role as Goodwill Ambassador in Ecuador, at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. He attracted the attention of the world through his culinary art and his innovative project "The largest Biodiverse Edible Forest in the world" that he develops as Executive Director of the Bocavaldivia Foundation, to address socio-environmental causes, through a mechanism for ecosystems conservation, reconection, restoration and strengthening, catalyzed by gastronomy. He is founder of Bocavaldivia research and development restaurant, located in Puerto Cayo, Manabí and founder of Foresta restaurant located in Quito, capital of Ecuador. His vision, career and purpose plus his extraordinary participation in the gastronomic competition "The Final Table" produced by Netflix, have been well recognized by the world press and international organizations. Rodrigo is more than a professional chef, he is a specialist in sustainable hospitality as well as a promotor of culture and biodiversity who bases his culinary art on restoring and connecting ecosystems, wisdom and flavors. One of his main life goals is to create the largest natural, cultural and community corridor on the entire planet.

Follow Chef Rodrigo: @rodrigopacheco_bocavaldivia



The Value of Sticking to Your Values:

The Neighbourhood Group is playing the long game, staying true to its principles, and reaping the rewards.



Court Desautels, President & CEO
The Neighbourhood Group of Companies

MM Your group has achieved several significant milestones, including B Corp certification. Can you explain the importance of this distinction and what it means for your organization?

Court Desautels: *Yeah, absolutely. Being a B Corporation is important because we're the only restaurant group in Canada that's B Corp certified and not part of a brewpub. So, we're the only certified B Corp restaurant group in the country, and the longest-standing B Corp restaurant group on the planet.*

We were actually the second group in the world to certify. The first group beat us by about a month, but they're no longer certified, so I really lean into that now.

MM Congratulations—that's a huge achievement. Why did you choose to pursue B Corp certification? And what changes did you make to your operations to achieve it?

CD: *B Corporation certification started for us in 2011, but we didn't get certified until 2016. We were essentially ready in 2015, but because no one had certified multiple brands under a parent company before, it took a bit longer.*

For me, it began with my experiences in hospitality. I was in and out of the industry, and working as a server, bartender, or chef was never really seen as a "real job" here in Canada. You travel around Europe and see professional waiters and chefs treated with respect, but that sentiment didn't translate here unless you were a famous chef. I realized a "real job" meant something different here and started thinking about what was missing in our industry.

I started looking at companies like Patagonia, a fellow B Corp, which really inspired us. I read Let My People Go Surfing by Yvon Chouinard in 2011, and it felt like everything we wanted to be as a company, we just didn't know how to articulate it. One of the big standouts for me was offering health benefits to employees. At the time, we didn't even know what a health and wellness program was, but we knew we needed to develop resources for our staff. It took a while, but we launched our program



The Wooly Pub | Guelph, Ontario

in 2014, making sure it covered both salaried and hourly staff. For salaried staff, we cover 100 per cent of the costs from day one. For hourly staff, they pay into the benefits for the first six months, and after that, we cover 50 per cent of the costs in their first year and 100 per cent after their second year.

MM So, it also became a retention strategy?

***CD:** Absolutely. It ties into profitability and everything else. But convincing some of our shareholders was tough. In 2011, we weren't making a lot of money, and focusing on local food made it trickier. Local food wasn't just about a fancy dinner at Canoe. We wanted it to be an everyday meal.*

Convincing shareholders to add health benefits on top of that was a challenge. Some were onboard, others weren't, so we bought out a couple of shareholders by 2014 to move forward with the program.

MM You actually had to restructure to make this happen?

***CD:** Yeah, we did. Becoming a B Corp meant we had to change our articles of incorporation. Without shareholder agreement, we would never have qualified. So, we made those changes in 2014, launched the health benefit program, and started the certification process in early 2015. By March 2016, we were officially certified, although we had essentially met the requirements by the fall of 2015.*

It took about four to five years to complete. It wouldn't normally take that long, but we had a few challenges to push through.

MM Once you were certified, how long did it take to see the benefits internally, in terms of culture?

***CD:** It took about two years. We really started noticing a shift around 2017. In 2015, we had launched the health benefits and grandfathered in those who were already with us. Initially, we were concerned about the impact on labour costs, but 2015 ended up being our most successful year. It's hard to say if that was due to becoming a B Corp or the health benefits, but things started aligning. At the same time, we were working on reducing food waste, partnering with the University of Guelph, University of Waterloo, and Wilfred Laurier University on sustainability programs. The cultural shift came as these initiatives started rolling out.*

MM How did you introduce your values and how they translate to The Neighborhood Group experience to your customers?

***CD:** At first, we led with sustainability, but it felt elitist—like we were saying we were better than others because we served local food. That didn't land well. Now, we start with the food—here's a delicious burger, and by the way, did you know it's local, hormone- and antibiotic-free? We focus on delivering value and let the emotional connection come after. We also provide more information, like on the back of the menu, where we talk about solar panels, being carbon neutral through an Indigenous offsetting firm, and other sustainability initiatives. But the key is to lead with great food and service.*

MM Has the adherence to and promotion of your values affected recruitment and retention?

***CD:** It has been transformational for hiring. Initially, we thought offering health benefits would drastically reduce turnover, but we quickly realized that wasn't the case for our younger employees. Many were either covered by their parents or school, or they felt indestructible and didn't see the value in health benefits. So, we reframed our hiring process to ask about values. Do you care about the environment? Do you value health benefits? If those things don't matter to an applicant, there's no competitive advantage for us.*

> **"You travel around Europe and see professional waiters and chefs treated with respect, but that sentiment didn't translate here unless you were a famous chef. I realized a "real job" meant something different here and started thinking about what was missing in our industry."**

We started targeting a more mature workforce—people in their 30s and 40s, or those with families—who valued these benefits. By 2017, our turnover had dropped by almost 50 per cent.

MM You've been in and out of hospitality throughout your career. What else influenced your decision to pursue local food and B Corp certification?

CD: *When I worked in Australia, it completely shifted my perspective. Over there, local food is just a given. I was working at a restaurant in Brisbane, and I mentioned how amazing it was that they were highlighting local farms. The chef looked at me and said, "Where else would I get all this from?" That moment hit me. In Canada, we pride ourselves on how far we can source ingredients from, which I think is a bit elitist. We import the best from around the world, but in places like Europe and Australia, people take pride in what's local.*

In Australia, I also saw how hospitality professionals—bartenders, servers, chefs—were treated with respect and could build lasting careers. That was something missing here in Canada. When I returned, I took over our family's pub and helped open Borealis in 2011 with the idea of normalizing local food. It shouldn't be an elitist concept; it's better for the environment, the economy, and the community.

MM You've implemented big ideas in an industry that's traditionally struggled. What kind of feedback do you get from your peers in the industry, and do you consider yourself successful?

CD: *Success is all about integrity and sticking to your values. Could we be making more money right now? Sure. But margins are tighter than ever, and sometimes we're just breaking even. That said, our values have never wavered. We've built a strong team of people who are motivated by what we're doing. It's not about short-term gain, it's about long-term impact.*



Park Grocery | Guelph, Ontario



Miijidaa Café + Bistro | Guelph, Ontario

Through COVID, we supported our staff, donating all our gift card sales—about $60,000—to help them get through. That's what helped us recover, stay strong in the community, and build loyalty. To me, that's success.

MM Has sticking to those values kept your business together during tough times?

CD: *One hundred per cent. It's the only reason we're still here. It's also what keeps our team motivated. Running a restaurant is tough, but because we've done the hard work of building this culture, the day-to-day obstacles don't seem as daunting.*

There's definitely stress—people are burnt out—but the work we're doing, like supporting local farms and Indigenous communities, or promoting sustainability, keeps them going. Interestingly, because we've stuck with key local partners, our food costs haven't risen as much as others'. In fact, our costs have decreased in some cases, because we've built stronger relationships with our local suppliers.

MM Do you think this approach will pay off in the long run?

CD: *Absolutely. People are more intentional with their spending now, and there's a shift towards supporting local businesses that align with their values. COVID interrupted that momentum, but I see it coming back. Consumers want transparency, they're more curious than ever, and they're asking the right questions—whether it's about local food or sustainability.*

We're seeing this shift not just from individuals, but from corporations too. For example, during COVID, a local Mazda dealership donated $5,000 to support our community outreach program. That was completely unsolicited. More and more corporations are interested in supporting businesses that align with their own sustainability and community initiatives. It's refreshing to see, and it reinforces that sticking to our values—despite how tough it's been—was the right decision. Consumers and corporations are both starting to prioritize value over just cost, and that's creating a stronger, more resilient local economy.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUP

Follow The Neighbourhood Group restaurants:

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ONE MEAL AT A TIME:

La Tablée des Chefs is bringing Canadian Chefs together to tackle food waste and food insecurity.

La Tablée des Chefs' Food Recovery program is making waves across Canada, rapidly expanding its efforts to rescue surplus food from restaurants, hotels, arenas and institutions. With food insecurity on the rise and growing urgency to find ways to reduce waste, their national initiative is connecting chefs, operators and local non-profit organizations to ensure that perfectly good, unused food makes its way to those who need it most.

Through collaborations with chefs helming hospitality programs at major venues like Calgary's Scotiabank Saddledome, McMahon Stadium, and numerous fine hotels and restaurants across the country, La Tablée des Chefs is scaling up its network by tapping into surplus meals generated at high-traffic kitchens and locations.

HALIFAX | NOVA SCOTIA



Jennifer Richard-Tober

Junior Sous Chef, Marriott Halifax Harbour & Harbourstone Pour House

MARRIOTT HALIFAX HARBOURFRONT

Harbourstone POUR HOUSE

As Junior Sous Chef and Banquet Kitchen Supervisor, Jennifer Richard-Tober is focused on more than creating memorable meals—she's on a mission to reduce food waste and champion sustainability in her kitchen. "I believe in creating food that brings people together while making sure every part of an ingredient is used," says Jennifer. Her goal is to leave a larger green thumbprint and set an example of sustainability in the community.

Jennifer's work with La Tablée des Chefs and Halifax's Brunswick Street Mission has allowed her to turn this philosophy into action. "We noticed a trend of excess food coming back from events, and we knew it could be put to better use," she explains. Now, her team packages unused banquet food to donate to those in need. "The cooks and staff take pride in preparing and sending out these meals. It's incredibly satisfying to know our food is helping people who might otherwise go without."

Jennifer has found enthusiasm and support from her kitchen staff. "When I brought up the idea of this program, my team was fully on board. They take great pride in what they prepare, and no one wants to see it go to waste," she says, and encourages other chefs to get their teams involved in feeding their local community. "Get your staff excited about sharing food with those less fortunate. It doesn't take much time or effort, but it makes a big impact. Full bellies are better than empty ones."

The chef's approach to waste reduction relies on expert kitchen resource management backed by technology. "By working with local partners, we can order smaller quantities more often, which helps us reduce waste and maintain higher standards of service," she notes. "We use digital thermometers and controls to maintain optimal temperatures during preparation and storage, ensuring that our products stay fresh and reduce spoilage."

Through her leadership, Chef Jennifer is proving that sustainability is not just a buzzword—it's a commitment to responsible food use, community support, and setting new standards in Halifax's culinary scene.

Follow the Marriott Halifax Harbourfront and Harbourstone Pour House: @halifaxmarriottyhz @harbourstonepourhouse

Brunswick Street Mission

Brunswick Street Mission

Marriott Halifax Harbourfront Community Partner

Rudy Ménard, Healthy Minds Coordinator at Halifax's Brunswick Street Mission, is deeply involved in addressing food insecurity for the city's North End community, both for housed and unhoused individuals. "Our mission is to fight the causes and effects of poverty by offering programming, resources and advocacy," says Rudy, noting that the partnership with La Tablée des Chefs allows the Mission to repurpose chef-prepared meals and help those most in need.

Rudy, who has a background in the restaurant industry, knows just how much food goes to waste—particularly from catering events. "If each restaurant understood their potential to donate excess food, it could make a huge difference in the community," she explains. "Even though it's extra work for chefs and cooks, the impact is undeniable when leftover food gets to shelters or food banks instead of being thrown away. The proteins we get are one of the most valuable parts of the meals for our clients."

Logistical and scheduling challenges are part of the food rescue landscape, Rudy acknowledges, particularly around coordinating pick-up and delivery times. Her ongoing partnership with Chef Jennifer Richard-Tober at the Marriott Halifax Harbourfront has been a model for overcoming these hurdles. "We've set up a standing donation time, and Jennifer and I communicate constantly to adjust as needed," she notes.

What Rudy appreciates most is the level of care and attention Chef Jennifer puts into these donations. What brings me the most joy out of all of this is Jennifer's dedication to making sure each meal packaged for our clients meets the Marriott's quality and standards. She has told me many times that her priority is making sure that everyone gets the same quality of food as they would if they were to go to the hotel, which is something I think every business should keep in mind when donating food. I mentioned once to her that protein is one of the most valuable parts of the meals for our clients, and she makes sure that all the extra proteins from events are packaged and sent to us. This has been essential in keeping our freezers stocked with protein for our clients. She also makes sure that everything is labelled as accurately as possible as we have clients with a variety of dietary needs and restrictions."

Rudy believes all foodservice businesses can play a role in raising awareness about food insecurity. "We've worked with a foodservice business whose monthly promotion was to offer all coffee sales on a Monday towards supporting a local organization. This helps to generate awareness of need in the community while displaying a social consciousness about food insecurity. Even making catering customers aware of where extra food will be sent can help the customer feel good about ordering more than they may need."

Follow the Brunswick Street Mission: @bsmhalifax

TORONTO | ONTARIO



Vidish Pednekar

Executive Chef at Delta Toronto

DELTA HOTELS MARRIOTT TORONTO

As Executive Chef at Delta Toronto, Chef Vidish Pednekar is responsible for more than just delivering exceptional dishes—he's committed to fostering sustainability in every aspect of the kitchen. "Good food is an experience that leads to joy, and it's achieved through quality ingredients," he explains. "Nature, our farmers, and their seasonal products inspire me to curate meals and create lasting experiences."

Vidish's partnership with La Tablée des Chefs, which began in 2016, embodies his dedication to reducing food waste. "Food is a by-product of our natural resources, and it's our responsibility to preserve, share and prepare it to support our communities," he says. This approach has allowed Delta Toronto to provide over 11,000 meals to those in need, transforming surplus food into a valuable resource for local communities.

In the kitchen, Vidish prioritizes creativity and efficiency to reduce waste, regularly transforming "waste" into further ingredients, like watermelon rinds into a house-made relish featured on the restaurant's charcuterie board and sandwiches. "Getting 100 per cent yield from ingredients is a global challenge," he admits. "But by encouraging our chefs to think creatively, we've found ways to maximize our use of every part of the ingredient. I wish to take the time someday to write a "Green" recipe book featuring recipes with 100 per cent yield."

Vidish is also responsible for cultivating and empowering his team to reach Delta Hotels by Marriott's zero-waste kitchen goals. "Where there's a will, there's a way," he says, highlighting how his kitchen recognizes staff contributions by naming dishes after their creators, like "Jun's Watermelon Relish" and "Nishad's Mac and Cheese." His focus on engagement not only brings out the best in his team, but brings longer-terms goals within reach.

Follow Chef Vidish Pednekar: @vidishpednekar

YSM EVERGREEN

Yonge Street Mission (YSM) Evergreen Centre

Delta Toronto Community Partner

As Director of Vulnerable Youth Services at Yonge Street Mission's Evergreen Centre, Renaldo Wall is leading efforts to combat chronic poverty in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). "We operate a multi-service youth centre that supports young people on their journey to life stabilization," says Renaldo, whose focus is on breaking the poverty cycle. Yonge Street Mission's partnership with La Tablée des Chefs strengthens this work through food recovery programs and culinary workshops that benefit at-risk youth.

For Renaldo, building partnerships with restaurants and foodservice businesses is key to reducing food insecurity. "By working with grassroots organizations and charities, restaurants can not only



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help alleviate food insecurity but also provide employment opportunities, which ensures a long-term impact," he explains, noting that logistics remain a challenge. "Pick-up and delivery can be difficult. It's often hard to collect from multiple locations and get the food to our facilities, so support in this area would really help."

Maintaining flexibility and open communication is essential to successful collaborations, Renaldo notes, recognizing that restaurants play a crucial role in feeding communities and raising awareness about food insecurity. "Restaurants can make a real impact by providing customers with opportunities to give—whether it's through direct donations or a portion of every sale going to those in need. Posters, flyers, and stats can also be useful for spreading the message."

With partnerships like the one with La Tablée des Chefs and Delta Toronto, Yonge Street Mission continues to move closer to its goal of ending chronic poverty, ensuring that Toronto's most vulnerable youth have the resources they need to thrive.

Follow Yonge Street Mission: @yongestreetmission



Lilian Cardosa

Executive Chef at the School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts (SHTCA), Centennial College Toronto, Ontario

CENTENNIAL COLLEGE.CA

At Centennial College's School of Hospitality, Tourism, and Culinary Arts (SHTCA), Executive Chef Lilian Cardoso operates a Learning Enterprise facility that comprises two cafés—one Indigenous-inspired—a restaurant, and an event centre—all with a laser focus on sustainability. "Food should be eaten, not discarded," says Cardoso, who also manages the Food and Beverage Inventory department while instilling a zero-waste philosophy in her students.

Since 2022, Lilian has led Centennial's partnership with La Tablée des Chefs, which was the organization's first Ontario food recovery partnership. From participating in Solidarity Kitchens every spring to La Grande Tablée (La Tablée des Chefs' three-city, five course gala event each fall), to regular food recovery programs, the college is at the forefront of reducing food waste. "We need to stop abusing the food supply chain. It's my responsibility to teach students how to maximize ingredients and feed people," Lilian says.

In 2020, Cardoso launched Cook'n Feed, an initiative designed to tackle food insecurity on campus using surplus ingredients from the college's inventory. Initially producing 300 donated meals, the project has since grown to provide over 200 meals per week, sold at a nominal price to ensure students have access to affordable, nutritious options. The success of Cook'n Feed has paved the way for three new pilot programs, including a Zero Waste Lab Project and a Zero-Food Waste Menu at the college's restaurant. "Students who participate in these projects learn to be more attentive when prepping ingredients for a dish. It raises their awareness about the role they play in the food chain," Lilian explains.

For Lilian, the greatest reward is seeing her students shift their mindset. "Watching them think twice before discarding a vegetable trim, day-old bread or an overcooked cake—that's what gives me the greatest satisfaction," she says. Her advice to other chefs looking to cut food waste? "Just start. Start small. Educate your staff. The biggest challenge is changing bad habits, but there's always a way to use an ingredient, no matter how insignificant it may seem."

"We work with many organizations when it comes to food waste and food donation. We work with suppliers that work with farmers in our region and we buy local as much as we can, to avoid the carbon footprint and the waste that occurs when an ingredient is travelling from point A to point B. Currently, we are working on a proposal to tackle food insecurity."

Her leadership extends beyond the kitchen. Her team is also developing a proposal to combat food insecurity across Centennial's campuses, with a focus on increasing food literacy. To further these efforts, Lilian is seeking a grant to upgrade from a manual composter to a mechanical one, which would help her team scale their waste-reduction initiatives.

By embedding sustainability into the very fabric of the curriculum, Lilian is ensuring the next generation of chefs graduates with a waste-conscious mindset. By integrating real-world food waste reduction projects, she's not only teaching culinary techniques—she's cultivating a cohort of new chefs who will carry forward the values of sustainability and waste reduction into the kitchens of the future.

Follow the School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts (SHTCA) at Centennial College:

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Janice Providence Lucenay

Executive Director, Africa Caribbean Support Services (ACSS)

As Executive Director of Africa Caribbean Support Services (ACSS) in Toronto, Janice Providence Lucenay is committed to improving the lives of seniors, in racialized and marginalized communities. "Our programs are designed to be creative and culturally reflective of the people we serve," Janice explains. ACSS offers a range of initiatives, including a food bank, senior assistance programs, and wellness programming through LuvBay Radio, which also features trends and insights from the food industry through interviews and promotions.

A key partnership in this mission is with La Tablée des Chefs, which has provided vital support for ACSS's food security initiatives. "We've had a successful collaboration with La Tablée des Chefs, including four

significant donations that helped serve over 700 prepared meals, along with desserts and salads, to elderly individuals, families, and shelters in the GTA," says Janice.

For Janice, restaurants and foodservice businesses play an important role in addressing food insecurity, noting that some donations are particularly vital. "Prepared meals work best, especially for seniors and people with physical challenges," she says. "But any and all food—cooked, raw, canned—makes a difference to the families and individuals we support."

She sees the potential for greater awareness through a partnership with LuvBay Radio, a community station with a strong reach. "By collaborating with LuvBay Radio, foodservice businesses can engage customers and raise awareness about food insecurity," she adds.

Janice and her team at ACSS are helping support some of Toronto's most vulnerable populations and they're committed to continuing to grow their partnerships with organizations like La Tablée des Chefs and Second Harvest. Their dedication to food security and community wellness serves as a model for how businesses can work hand in hand with grassroots organizations to create lasting change.

Support Africa Caribbean Support Services (ACSS) and follow LuvBay Radio at: @luvbayonlineradio

REGINA | SASKATCHEWAN



Chaminda Ambagaspitiye

Executive Chef at The REAL District (Levy Canada)

As Executive Chef at The REAL District in Regina, Chef Chaminda Ambagaspitiye is transforming how a large-scale kitchen approaches sustainability. Tasked with overseeing everything from menu development to event execution, Chaminda is committed to a culinary philosophy that emphasizes both flavour and environmental responsibility.

"It's all about using fresh, authentic ingredients while minimizing waste," he explains. "We respect every part of an ingredient, using techniques like nose-to-tail and root-to-stem cooking to get the most out of what we have, such as turning vegetable peels into broths or repurposing stale bread into croutons, maximizing the value of our ingredients and reducing waste."

His partnership with La Tablée des Chefs is central to his mission of reducing food waste and addressing food insecurity. "Working with La Tablée des Chefs allows us to turn surplus food from our events into meals for people in need," says Chaminda. "It's about aligning our culinary expertise with a cause that truly matters."

Chaminda has implemented several strategies to cut down on waste in the kitchen, including portion control, creative use of leftovers, and waste tracking systems. "By tracking waste patterns and being intentional about portion sizes, we've significantly improved our efficiency and reduced costs," he shares. "But the biggest reward is knowing that food we could have thrown away is instead being repurposed to help those in need."

For Chaminda, the most satisfying part of his waste-reduction efforts is seeing how it impacts both his team and the community. "Watching our team take pride in their role in reducing waste and knowing that our efforts are directly helping to feed vulnerable people—that's incredibly rewarding," he says.

To other chefs looking to embrace sustainability, the chef suggests they start small, educate their team, and lead by example. "Changing habits can be tough, but if you commit to it, the rewards are worth it. Achieving a zero-waste kitchen is possible, but it requires effort and dedication." Chaminda's own efforts have included the adoption of creative cooking techniques that use every part of an ingredient, finding innovative ways to repurpose leftovers, fine-tuning portions, and educating his team to ensure alignment with waste reduction goals.

Beyond his kitchen, Chaminda works closely with local suppliers and farmers to source surplus produce, further reducing waste and supporting the local economy. Technology also plays a critical role, with tools like "Waste Not" and inventory management systems helping to streamline operations. "These tools allow us to make data-driven decisions and ensure that surplus food reaches those who need it most," he explains. "By prioritizing waste reduction, we also improve our efficiency and cost-effectiveness, creating a more responsible and ethical culinary practice."

Follow The REAL District: @realdistrictyqr

Regina Food Bank

The REAL District Community Partner

Last year, the Regina Food Bank served 19,974 people and provided over 200,000 points of service to the community. For CEO John Bailey, however, the greatest challenge isn't the availability of food—it's how it is distributed.

John sees a clear role for restaurants and foodservice businesses in addressing waste and improving distribution efficiency. "Restaurants are natural gathering spaces that foster a sense of community. By donating surplus food, participating in recovery programs, or offering free or discounted meals or even sponsoring community meals or food bank events, they can make a real difference," he says. The Regina Food Bank's recent partnership with La Tablée des Chefs, which launched this summer with Mosaic Stadium and the Brandt Centre, is already making an impact. The next step? Expanding the collaborative network to include local schools, with hopes of introducing La Tablée des Kitchen Brigades food literacy program for students.

While John recognizes that not all restaurants can regularly donate food, he emphasizes there are other ways they can help. "We've built a commercial food transformation kitchen at the Regina Food Bank, and it would be a game-changer if restaurant staff could volunteer their time for meal preparation. Even better, sharing expertise on meal planning and nutrition would help food banks like ours across the country," he notes.

Raising awareness of food insecurity is another area where Bailey believes restaurants can have a significant influence. "Servers and front-of-house staff are excellent at communicating with guests and could help spread our message," he says. The Regina Food Bank has successfully collaborated with local restaurants on campaigns featuring donation drives, table displays, and special customer incentives to support the cause.

However, Bailey is mindful of the challenges foodservice businesses face, especially as they recover from the pandemic. "We understand that regular donations may not be sustainable for many, but when food is available, we're grateful for partnerships that ensure it stays in the community and doesn't end up as waste," he says. With a Red Seal chef on staff at the food bank, Bailey is confident that any surplus food received will be handled safely and turned into quality meals for those in need. "Beyond that, sharing expertise in meal planning and nutrition would be amazing. Not all food banks have the infrastructure we have, and many would benefit from local knowledge sharing. The power of food to connect people and make a difference is undeniable."

Follow the Regina Food Bank:
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CALGARY | ALBERTA



Brandi McLean

Executive Chef, Calgary Sports and Entertainment Corporation

CALGARY SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT CORPORATION

In her role as the Executive Chef for Calgary Sports and Entertainment Corporation, Brandi McLean oversees all food operations at two of the city's largest venues—the Scotiabank Saddledome and McMahon Stadium. For Brandi, creating great food is about keeping it simple, but packed with passion. "I believe in making food that people love, but it's also about how we handle that food—especially when it comes to reducing waste," she says.

Food waste reduction is a significant focus in her kitchen, and it's something she's tackled head-on through partnerships like the one with La Tablée des Chefs. "No one likes to throw food out," Brandi explains. "It's disheartening to see all that effort, and money, go into the trash—especially when so much of it is preventable." She recalls the first time her team participated in the food recovery program. "It was an eye-opener. When you see all those containers filled with food you can't use because of overproduction, it really makes you reassess everything. It's helped us fine-tune our production levels and cut back on waste, which has also lowered our food costs."

Brandi has implemented a variety of strategies to manage food waste, such as batch-firing for buffets and receptions to ensure uncooked products can be saved for future use. "We also try to reimagine ingredients in more flexible menus, so we're not just wasting good food," she explains. Technology has also played a role in streamlining the process. "We use inventory management software to track waste and a projection program to help forecast production for events," Brandi explains. "It's taken some of the guesswork out of event planning, which is crucial when you're managing a business like ours."

The partnership with the Calgary Drop-In Centre has been a game changer for Brandi's team. "We can now recover food that would have otherwise been wasted and use it to help people who need it. It's an incredible feeling knowing that something like that can make such a big impact. The fact that we can send food to their programs is huge. I think that it can be important to really look at your waste in a physical way. By this, I mean to package it up and see the stack of it all together—weigh



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it, measure it in some way that you can physically see. When it is scattered all over your kitchen(s), it may not seem like a lot. When it is all together, it can really be a shock. Some chefs need that shock to ignite that drive to reduce."

"I'm proud of what we've done," Brandi says. "Reducing food waste isn't just good for the business—it's good for the community."

Follow Chef Brandi McLean: @chefbrandim

Calgary Drop-In Centre

Calgary Sports and Entertainment Corporation Community Partner

Cindy Ngo, Manager of Fund Development at the Calgary Drop-In Centre ("the DI"), summarizes the role the organization plays as crucial. "At the DI, we welcome adults at risk of or experiencing homelessness, offering a broad spectrum of care, including emergency shelter, health programs and housing options—all aimed at helping people find their way home," she says. One of the DI's core services is its busy meal program, which serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner to an average of 750 people every day.

With rising food costs and increasing demand, the DI has leaned on partners like La Tablée des Chefs to keep its kitchen running smoothly. "La Tablée des Chefs has been instrumental in supporting our kitchen operations," Cindy explains. "Their support ensures that everyone has access to a hot, nutritious meal."

One of the standout collaborations between the DI and La Tablée des Chefs founder Jean François Archambault, was making the food rescue connection with the Calgary Sports and Entertainment Corporation. "Thanks to them, we can collect surplus food from large events while adhering to strict food safety guidelines," Cindy points out, adding that La Tablée des Chefs also donated essential kitchen equipment, making it possible for the DI to continue preparing thousands of meals daily.

Cindy counts on local restaurants and foodservice businesses to help reduce food insecurity, and the DI makes it easy to connect. "They can donate to our Meals Program, volunteer to serve meals, or create 'pay-it-forward' initiatives, where customers can contribute to providing meals for those facing food insecurity," she shares. "The impact of these efforts is profound. By supporting the DI, restaurants can help ensure that everyone in our community has access to nutritious food, fostering greater stability and wellbeing. "

Cindy points out that financial support from restaurants is one of the most helpful ways to keep meal services consistent. "Hosting fundraisers or making donations allows agencies like ours to purchase additional ingredients, kitchen supplies and cover staffing costs, ensuring meal services remain reliable," she explains. Building long-term partnerships with agencies is also essential to maintaining steady support.

For Cindy, the key to successful partnerships is communication and understanding the needs of the agency. "It takes a community to build a community," she emphasizes.

Follow the Calgary Drop-In Centre: @calgarydropin



La Tablée des Chefs

For La Tablée des Chefs, food recovery is more than just an initiative—it's a collaborative movement that reimagines how surplus food is handled, transforming the way institutions, restaurants, and chefs approach sustainability and food waste. Together, they are proving that with collective action, feeding those in need and reducing waste can go hand in hand.

Learn more and join the Food Recovery movement at: tableedeschefs.org

Circular Success:

Suppli & Kitchen Hub Harmonize Convenience with Sustainability

When visionary minds align, innovation takes flight. Suppli, Toronto's leader in reusable restaurant packaging, co-founded by CEO Megan Takeda-Tully, and Kitchen Hub, Canada's first virtual food hall, co-founded by Oren Borovitch, are perfectly positioned to revolutionize the food delivery landscape.

With Suppli's eco-friendly, circular packaging system already making waves across the city, and Kitchen Hub's tech-driven, multi-brand takeout and delivery offering already well established, the timing for collaboration couldn't be better. Their partnership is right-sized and timed for the moment, proving the arrival of an affordable, actionable able solution to single-use packaging. We met with Megan and Oren to learn more about how their businesses are working together to harmonize convenience and sustainability to transform how Canadians experience delivery —waste-free and right on time.



Suppli has emerged as a leader in the fight against single-use packaging waste, offering restaurants and consumers a simple, sustainable solution. By providing restaurants with reusable containers customers can return to local drop-off bins, Suppli has made it easier for food businesses to reduce their environmental footprint. "We partner with operators and supply them with our containers in various sizes to fit different cuisines," Megan explains. "It's a simple integration—a modifier on the apps they already use, like Uber Eats, where customers can opt in for Suppli packaging. Restaurants pack the orders, and once the food is delivered, customers return the containers to one of our drop-off locations across the city. We take care of the cleaning and sanitization, and the cycle continues."

Suppli's business model is as frictionless for restaurants as it is for consumers, offering a split-cost system that remains affordable even for small operators. "We were dead set on making Suppli affordable for restaurants," says Megan, adding that "our packaging costs range from five to twenty cents per container, depending on volume." Consumers, meanwhile, pay a modest seventy-five cents per item for reusable packaging when ordering. "Suppli-savvy customers are discovering new



"It's a simple integration—a modifier on the apps they already use, like Uber Eats, where customers can opt in for Suppli packaging. Restaurants pack the orders, and once the food is delivered, customers return the containers to one of our drop-off locations across the city."

Megan Takeda-Tully
CEO, Suppli

restaurants through our platform," Megan points out. "A huge portion of our customers' first orders are Suppli orders, and they also tend to spend about 25 per cent more per order."

Kitchen Hub, which has been on a mission to reduce its own packaging waste since its inception, saw Suppli as a natural fit for its forward-thinking business model. "We specialize in takeout and delivery, and from day one, we knew we had a responsibility to tackle the packaging waste issue," Oren explains. "When we discovered Suppli, we were impressed with how easy they made it for both the restaurant and the consumer. It wasn't just about sustainability—it was about delivering a better experience for everyone involved."

The partnership has already had a measurable impact. "We're already seeing a meaningful reduction in the packaging going out of our facility," says Oren, "and that's growing all the time as more customers demand sustainable options." They also note that Kitchen Hub's Suppli drop-off bin is frequently used by people who didn't even order from Kitchen Hub, illustrating the wide-reaching appeal of the program. "Consumers are seeking out Suppli, and that's helping drive foot traffic back to our restaurants. It's a win-win-win."

Suppli's simple yet effective solution extends beyond packaging waste. "We're putting together marketing programs to really push our customers toward Suppli-friendly restaurants," says Megan. "It's about building a community of restaurants and customers that support each other." On the operational side, Suppli has streamlined packaging logistics for many of its partners. "Some restaurants have told us they've been able to reduce the number of container types they stock because our containers work for both hot and cold foods," she explains. "It's just easier for their teams to fulfil orders."



For Kitchen Hub, the collaboration has been a natural evolution of its sustainability mission. "We started small, with one restaurant, to see how it would work," says Oren. "All they had to do was order Suppli containers the same way they'd order from any other vendor, store them like they already do, and train their staff. It was an easy integration." The results speak for themselves. "Sales hide all sins," Oren says with a laugh, "so if you're bringing in new customers while also solving an operational problem or cost issue, you're winning all around."

KITCHEN HUB

suppli.

Suppli currently serves the downtown Toronto area via Uber Eats, with plans to expand to new geographies and delivery apps soon. Learn more at: mysuppli.ca



Groupex Canada: 40 Years of Helping the Canadian Foodservice Industry



A Conversation with Paul Methot, President and CEO of Groupex

Groupex Canada started in 1984 when a small group of independent Alberta restaurant owners came together to tackle the challenge of competing with national chains by pooling their resources to unlock better pricing and rebates. Today, Groupex has grown into a nationwide supporter of independent foodservice operators, offering a range of exclusive rebate programs covering everything from food and beverages to cleaning products, equipment, and technology solutions. Their contracts with trusted supplier partners such as Gordon Food Service and Diversey allow them to provide these services at incredible value. Even with its expansion, Groupex has never lost sight of its mission: to support independent operators, helping them save time, streamline their operations, and boost profitability. As they celebrate their 40th anniversary this year, it's still all about staying true to the heart of what started it all—empowering independent restaurants to thrive.

Now owned by Restaurants Canada, Groupex is the only Canadian Group Purchasing Organization that reinvests one hundred percent of its profits back into the foodservice industry. Every dollar goes toward supporting Restaurants Canada's advocacy efforts. This means, Groupex is not just helping you today, they are also building a stronger future for the entire Canadian Foodservice industry.

We sat down with Paul Methot, Groupex President and CEO, to discuss the company's evolution, his own journey to leadership, and what the future holds for Groupex. With four decades of experience in the foodservice industry, Paul's perspective offers insight into the company's growth, its challenges, and its relentless focus on relationships and service.

A Lifelong Passion for Foodservice

Paul's foodservice career began in 1984 when he joined a young company that would soon become a staple of Canadian life: Pizza Pizza. Reflecting on his early years, he shared how his introduction to the fast-paced, high-pressure world of foodservice shaped his career.

"I started with Pizza Pizza back in the early days, working directly with the amazing entrepreneur who founded the company," Paul recalls. "I was quite young at the time and didn't necessarily know what I'd be doing long-term, but I dove into any role that came my way. I gained a deep appreciation for growing a business, saving money, and driving revenue. We were rapidly expanding across Canada, and I was at the centre of that growth. It was exciting—hundreds of restaurants opened, and I got to play a key role in that."

Paul's experience at Pizza Pizza laid the foundation for his current leadership role at Groupex, where he applies his knowledge to help independent operators grow their businesses. "The lessons I learned then—planning, risk-taking and a huge appreciation for the people behind the business—are still guiding me today," he says.

Over the years, Paul's role in the foodservice industry has evolved from working within a single company to helping the industry as a whole. His transition from company executive to industry leader came as a natural progression when he began addressing challenges that went beyond just one brand. "I realized early on that many of the issues we were facing as a business—government regulations, labor shortages, credit card fees, supply manage-

ment cost—were challenges shared by the entire foodservice industry. That's when I got involved with organizations like Restaurants Canada, and later with Groupex," he explains. "It became clear that by working through a larger association, I could help address these issues not just for one company, but for many operators across the country."

This broader perspective eventually brought him to lead Groupex, where he's been key to helping independent foodservice operators access the resources and scale typically reserved for larger chains. "What we do at Groupex is level the playing field. We have an amazing team of experienced professionals who work directly with our members. We provide independents with cost savings, creative solutions, and operational support so they can focus on running their businesses," he says. "The partnerships we've built over the years are one of the most significant benefits we offer. These partnerships open doors for independent operators that would typically be out of reach if they were negotiating on their own. Through Groupex, our members gain access to exclusive programs and pricing that provide substantial savings and value."

Building on Groupex's Core Mission

For Groupex, the mission has always been simple: to help their members. "We listen to our members and understand their needs," Paul explains. "Many independent restaurant owners don't have the time or resources to deal with pricing concerns or service issues, so we take that burden off their shoulders. We leverage our knowledge and negotiate programs that offer lower, consistent pricing and reliable service, helping them save significantly and build their business."

Over the last 40 years, through successive waves of growth, challenge and evolution across the industry, the company has grown to become a key supporter of the Canadian foodservice industry, but its core values have remained the same. Paul recalls an anecdote that perfectly illustrates the company's approach: "I was on a sales call with a potential customer, and it was clear that they needed more than just product and pricing support—they needed help organizing their business, and I knew the right people to connect them with. It wasn't about the sale; it was about helping them grow their business."

"What we do is stay close to our members. We don't see them as just a number," Paul emphasizes. "We take the time to understand their specific needs, offer personalized solutions, and build real trust. That's what sets us apart from the competition."

Even with all the growth and change that comes with expansion, Groupex's focus on service hasn't changed. "We've doubled our membership in the last four years, but we're still focused on delivering the same high-touch, personalized service and helping members save money. Their business is our business."

The Future of Groupex: Service, Innovation and Growth

For Paul, one of the most exciting aspects of the foodservice industry is its constant potential for growth. Throughout his career, he's always been drawn to opportunities to innovate. "I've always enjoyed the growth aspects of this industry," he says. "You have to break the mold and come up with new ideas to stay ahead. One of the best parts of my job is working with our team to help our members grow, whether it's through cost savings, partnerships, or new ways to provide value."

Over its 40 years of evolution, Groupex has expanded to help independent restaurants nationwide, and Paul sees plenty of opportunity for Groupex to continue to grow alongside the industry. "We're always looking two to three years down the road to anticipate what our members will need. The industry is changing rapidly, and we need to stay on top of those changes," he explains. "What we're offering today may not be what we need to offer tomorrow. We have to be ready to adjust and provide new solutions."

"The numbers are bigger now, but the challenges remain the same: competition, economic changes, and government regulations. We're here to provide solutions to those challenges at a scale that works for independents," Paul says. "We've always had a high level of customer care, and we're committed to nurturing that even as we grow. Being part of Groupex means being part of a community where we take care of each other. From day one, our members have a dedicated sales rep by their side, helping them find ways to save money without compromising on their products. Our reps bring them programs that increase their rebates or offer special promotions, ensuring they're always informed and accessing the best pricing available. We believe in being transparent, so we spell out the savings clearly, providing members with a full statement every month."

When asked what the future holds for Groupex, Paul is optimistic. "The best is yet to come," he says with a smile. "We're constantly evolving, constantly looking for new ways to help our members. Whether that's through regional growth, new partnerships, or innovative programs, we're committed to continuing our mission of service."

For Groupex, the journey continues. As the company looks toward the future, it does so with the same dedication to service, growth, and innovation that has defined it for the past four decades and they approach the next leg of the journey with a message of gratitude and optimism to members, partners and the Groupex team. "Thank you for your loyalty, your trust, and your partnership over the years. We're committed to serving you for the next 40 years and beyond."

groupex CANADA

Established in 1984 by a small group of independent restaurants, Groupex is a Canadian Foodservice Buying Group that understands the needs of foodservice operators. They negotiate directly with suppliers on their behalf, helping them access volume pricing and higher rebates. Their programs and partnerships help members save on major brands of food, beverage, equipment, cleaning and technology.

Learn more at:
groupex.com

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Delivering cost savings and value.

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Reinvesting profits into the foodservice community.

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Supporting growth and sustainability in the industry.

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Championing the success of local businesses.

Offering tailored purchasing programs for members.

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Empowering Canadian independent **restaurants.**

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Restaurants Canada

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires



Cooking up Success:

Financing Options for Restaurant Equipment

Whether you're dreaming of crafting artisanal pizzas, creating gourmet dishes or serving sushi, one thing is clear: as a restaurant entrepreneur, one of the most important choices you'll make is choosing the right equipment for your kitchen. Your restaurant's needs are unique. Understanding your options before you make the big purchases can help you save time, money and expenses now and in the future.

Since 1986, SilverChef has helped more than 74,000 hospitality establishments across Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States achieve their dreams. By providing flexible financial solutions for commercial kitchen equipment, SilverChef has options for everyone from start-ups to established businesses.

"When you have the dream to open your own establishment, that's the time to start thinking about capital, cash flow and financing," says Stuart Zalunardo, President, SilverChef Group, Canada and U.S. "The sooner you start thinking about what and how you're going to finance your business, the more prepared you will be." Zalunardo speaks from experience. With over 35 years in commercial and corporate banking, he has seen businesses grow and flourish. Since joining SilverChef's Canada and U.S. team as president two years ago, he sees how the company provides opportunities for success. "The restaurant sector is so vital to the economy, and we are here to support them by providing different options for owners to build their businesses."

For many reasons, some business owners may prefer to purchase their kitchen equipment outright, but for many others, this may not be the best way forward. "The most important thing for a business is maintaining cash flow. With produce and consumables, as well as staff to pay, it's important to have cash available for day-to-day operations. If you buy your equipment outright, you can't liquidate it and get cash back quickly." By financing through SilverChef, owners can spread out the cost of equipment, which allows them to have more funds available for the business.

When you're looking at financing, Zalunardo has another consideration for buyers. "The lifecycle of the asset you're buying should match the financing term. If you're buying a big range hood that will last four to five years, you can finance that on a longer term. But if it's a high-use, high-turnover unit, you may want to consider shorter term financing or renting."

SilverChef's Rent-Try-Buy program gives owners, particularly those starting out, an option to try kitchen equipment, with the option of returning, upgrading, or purchasing. "This program provides business owners with a lot of flexibility. Maybe you realize you need a bigger fridge, or freezer a few months after opening," says Zalunardo. "Or you change direction and now you need different equipment. With Rent-Try-Buy, you can exchange or upgrade your equipment at any time. You can choose between new and Certified Used equipment and if you decide it's a good fit, a portion of what you paid in rent goes toward the purchase price."



Stuart Zalunardo, President, SilverChef Group, Canada and U.S.

In Australia, Rent-Try-Buy is more than five times more popular than it is in Canada. "When I was with SilverChef in Australia, I saw the success owners had with the program. It's been around longer there, and people take advantage of the flexibility it provides, especially in rapidly changing times. I think it's a great option for businesses in Canada." Raveena Oberoi from Just Cakes Bakeshop in Surrey, B.C., agrees. "Having the flexibility of Rent-Try-Buy has been huge, it makes my life as a business owner a lot easier. I'd recommend Rent-Try-Buy to everyone who needs equipment."

"When it comes to running a business, we know there are things we can and can't control," remarks Zalunardo. "Whether you choose to rent, buy or finance your kitchen equipment, make sure you keep all your options on the table to make the best decision for your business."



"Having the flexibility of Rent-Try-Buy has been huge, it makes my life as a business owner a lot easier. I'd recommend Rent-Try-Buy to everyone who needs equipment."

Raveena Oberoi, Just Cakes Bakeshop
Surrey, B.C.

When you're looking for kitchen equipment, Zalunardo suggests four things to keep in mind:

1. **Do your research about what type of equipment you'll really need.** "I've seen beautiful kitchen designs, but then, when they're dropping in a deep fryer or an oven, there isn't enough space. Make sure you have enough room now and if you shold need to make any changes," states Zalunardo. "People go for what they think they need, and not what they actually need," he continues. "Is the higher priced fridge what you really need now? You need to consider what is the right asset type for your business and how it's funded."
2. **Have a solid business plan.** "Avoid using all your capital early. It's fun in the early days to kit out a restaurant, but you need to plan and forecast how much you'll need to fund your day-to-day," warns Zalunardo. "Don't spend more money early, where you don't need it. This is where financing or renting kitchen equipment comes in. It keeps some of the capital back in your pocket, to help with operations and with paying for unexpected costs."
3. **Be realistic.** While a budget is always recommended, when you're starting a business, you must account for the unexpected, and then some. "Whatever your budget is, add at least 10 to 20 per cent," recommends Zalunardo. "There are some costs you can't control, like the cost of raw materials, wages and interest rate cycles. You need to be able to handle those fluctuations to keep your business running." In addition, the budget that you have allocated for your kitchen equipment may not be enough for what you need. Financing allows business owners to purchase different or higher-quality equipment, which may help improve operational efficiency, decrease water or energy consumption.
4. **Be mindful of your personal finance biases or perceived ideas at the door.** Zalunardo knows some people have some personal preferences when it comes to renting versus buying or purchasing outright versus financing. "While some of this might be true when you're looking at your personal finances, the same isn't necessarily true for your business. Speak to your accountant to make sure you're making the right choices for your business."



SilverChef®

About SilverChef:

To learn more about Rent-Try-Buy and how it could help you start or grow your hospitality business, visit silverchef.ca or call 1-844-283-7844.

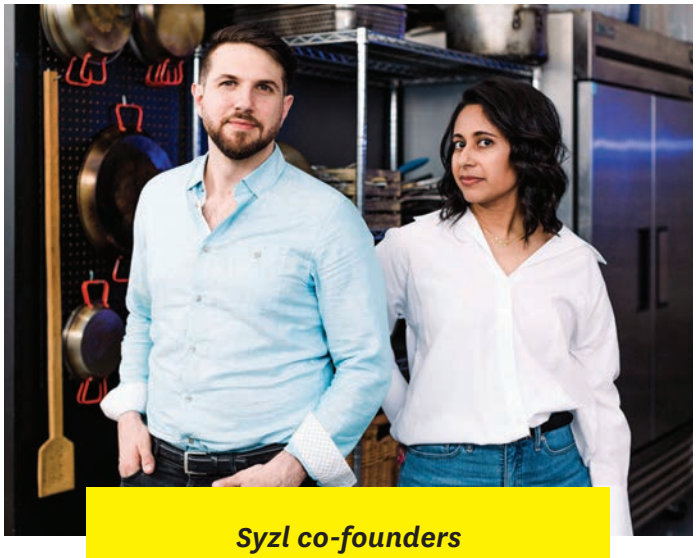
REVOLUTION IN THE KITCHEN

Syzl's mission to revolutionize kitchen space is driving new revenue for Ontario restaurants and new opportunities for food entrepreneurs

Syzl is transforming the gig economy for food entrepreneurs by offering a platform that connects chefs and small-scale food makers with certified, underutilized kitchen spaces. By simplifying the process with easy bookings and on-demand insurance, Syzl connects restaurants and commercial kitchens with new revenue streams, and allows food creators to start up and grow their businesses without committing to long-term leases or hefty infrastructure costs.

Azrah Manji-Savin, CEO & Co-Founder of Syzl, is transforming the way food entrepreneurs access kitchen space. As the driving force behind Syzl, an innovative kitchen marketplace app, she enables gig economy chefs and culinary creators to tap into safe, flexible kitchen spaces, helping them turn passion into profession, making it easier than ever for underrepresented cuisines and flavours to reach the mainstream.

MENU connected with Azrah to learn more about Syzl and how her tech background and entrepreneurial drive are helping fuel the future of foodservice.



Syzl co-founders Azrah Manji-Savin and Adrian Savin

MM So, the first thing I want to dive into is your story. Syzl is fascinating because it's such a low-risk, high-potential tool for operators to optimize their revenue. Could you share your journey and how this solution came to be?

Azrah Manji-Savin: *The story behind Syzl is really about both my co-founder and me—I can't take all the credit. Our parents and families immigrated to Canada, and for many immigrant communities, the quickest and easiest way to make extra money and maintain ties to culture is through food. Growing up, I saw this firsthand. It's how I fed myself during undergrad—through the aunties who sold food from home on paper plates wrapped in tin foil. That was how many families made extra income and stayed connected to their roots, but very few were able to grow and scale beyond that.*

Most people who try to go bigger have to gamble everything—life savings or a second mortgage—to open a restaurant, and often that gamble doesn't pay off. That always stayed with me.

Before Syzl, I worked at WeWork, helping launch their first enterprise models in Toronto and as the first employee in Alberta to open that market. I learned a lot about shared real estate and saw how beneficial it was for start-ups who needed flexible space. That led us to wonder: could we do something similar in the food industry? The pandemic accelerated this thought process, as we saw more and more independent food makers struggle with how to scale their operations. There were so many opportunities—TikTok, Shopify, Facebook Marketplace—but no clear path to safely and legally make and sell food.

We realized this was a huge problem that wasn't being addressed—how do you navigate the logistics of equipment, health certifications, and insurance? After tons of research and conversations with chefs and restaurant owners, we knew this was a problem worth solving, and we wanted to be the ones to tackle it.

That's amazing. When you started visualizing this idea in the early stages and speaking with industry people, what did you learn that most surprised you?

AMS: *I was surprised by how long it took people to find space—three to six months on average just to get started! That was shocking. Even caterers or people selling at farmers' markets would take that long to find a space, let alone open a restaurant. It was such a manual process—cold calling, relying on word of mouth, connecting through religious organizations, or through friends of friends. It was all unregulated and unreliable, and there was so much room for things to go wrong. That was a huge eye-opener.*

What was the response when you first started sharing this idea with people in the industry?

AMS: *The reception was overwhelmingly positive, especially from chefs and food entrepreneurs. I remember at our first RC Show, the product wasn't even fully launched yet, but we were already getting feedback from industry veterans saying, "Where was this years ago? My career would have been so different!" That kind of validation was incredibly rewarding.*

Your platform offers so much potential. Have you considered expanding into other areas, like facilitating distribution?

AMS: *Distribution is a huge challenge for many food entrepreneurs, especially when it comes to finding customers and moving products from A to B. We've definitely heard this from a lot of people, and while it's not our main focus right now, we're always looking to innovate. For now, we're really focused on solving the production and real estate bottlenecks, but we're open to uncovering other opportunities as we grow.*



Are there any new service releases planned for Syzl?

AMS: *Yes! One of the big things we're excited about is our single-day insurance product. It's the first of its kind in Canada, allowing gig chefs to get insured for just a day, a few hours, or a weekend, making it more affordable and accessible. This is particularly important for those who are renting kitchen space on a temporary basis, as it eliminates one of the biggest pain points for restaurants: liability.*

Who would typically use this single-day option?

AMS: *It's great for people like food entrepreneurs who make products like chili oil or baked goods. They can rent space for just a day or a few hours, make what they need, and then go back to selling at markets or online. They don't have to commit to long-term leases or produce huge quantities that might not sell. It's perfect for small-scale makers who want to keep overhead low.*

It's clear that Syzl is filling a real need in the industry. What strategic advice would you give to restaurant operators who are considering using your platform?

AMS: *I'd say a common oversight is how operators benchmark their revenue streams. Many compare it to their core operations, like what they'd make during dinner service, but that's not the right comparison. They should be asking whether this new revenue stream covers their base costs during times when they'd otherwise be closed. If it does, then it's worth pursuing.*

And for food makers—how can they get the best value from your platform?

AMS: *Start small and use only what you need. It's easy to overestimate how much time or space you require. Try the platform out, see how much demand you have, and adjust from there. It's a big mental shift for those used to more traditional methods, but once they try it, they see the value.*

Your platform must require a lot of vetting for both hosts and makers. What surprises your users the most?

AMS: *For hosts, they're surprised by how much we handle on their behalf—ID verification, food handling certifications, insurance, payments, and customer support. For makers, they're often amazed by the flexibility and the sheer number of available spaces. The fact that they can rent without committing to a lease blows their minds.*

What aspect of your business are you most proud of?

AMS: *One of the things we're most proud of is that Syzl is helping elevate underrepresented flavours and cuisines. So much amazing food is made by immigrant communities but doesn't make it into the mainstream. Now, more of those flavours have the chance to be shared. It's what gets me up in the morning.*

SYZL

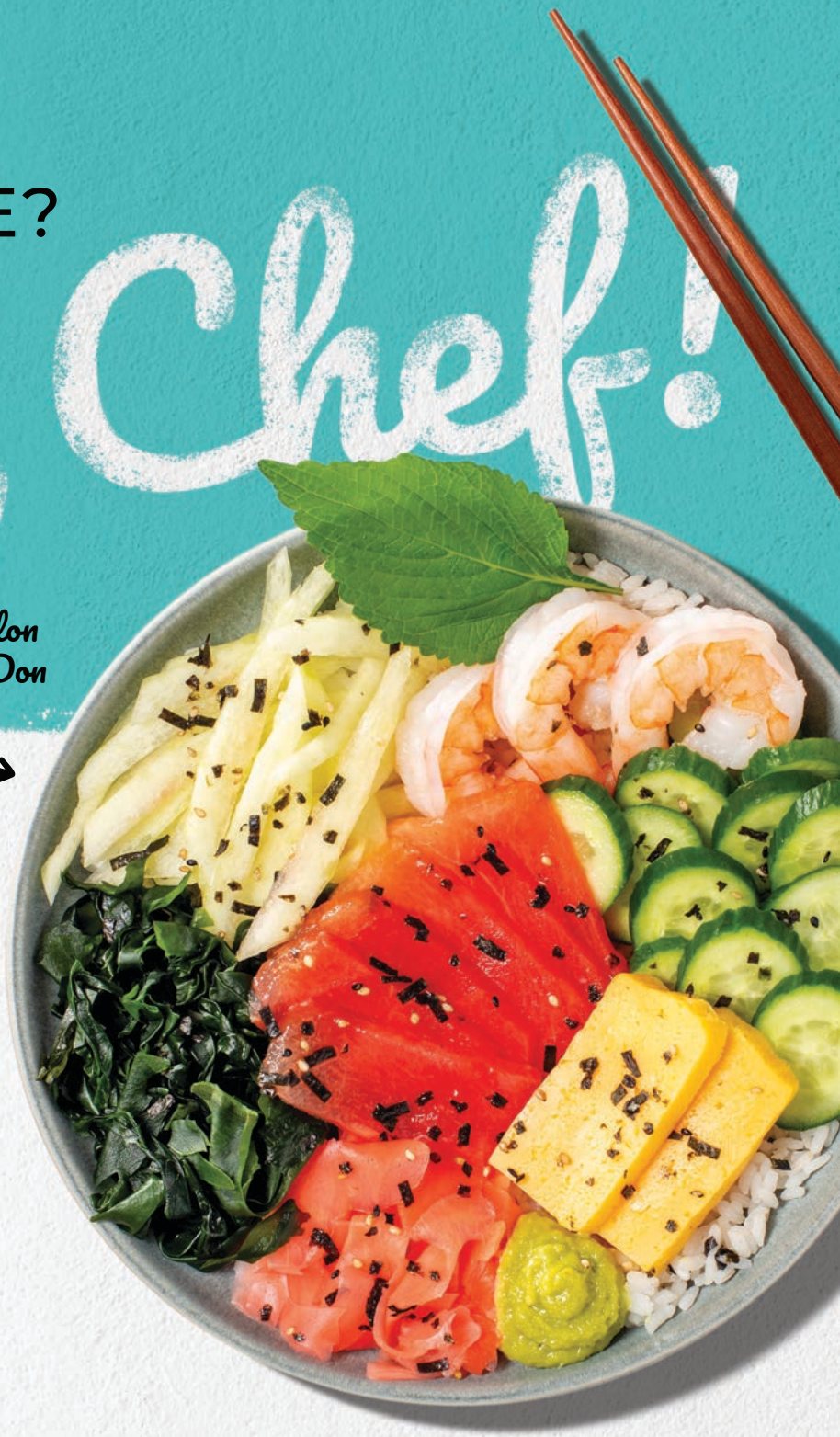
Since its launch in 2022, Syzl has focused on growth within the Greater Toronto Area and Ontario, adding new kitchen listings regularly with plans to extend their reach across Canada as demand for flexible, short-term kitchen spaces continues to grow in both urban and rural areas. The Syzl team has also just announced they are now offering Canada's first embedded insurance for commercial kitchens.

Learn more and sign up at: syzl.io

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Mary Chiarot
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Jeff McMullen
Vice President of Sales and Industry Partnerships, Garland Canada

In the fast-paced, high-stakes world of commercial kitchens, equipment durability and reliability are not a luxury—they're a necessity. Garland Canada, a division of Welbilt, with its legacy of excellence and commitment to durable, reliable equipment solutions, has established a leadership position in the Canadian foodservice landscape. More than just an equipment manufacturer, Garland Canada and Welbilt are invested partners, driven by a deep understanding of operator challenges, culinary needs and a progressive vision for innovation and sustainability.

We connected with Mary Chiarot and Jeff McMullen of Garland Canada to discuss their business model and Welbilt's forward-thinking approach to equipment design. With deep industry roots, they ensure every product is purposefully engineered to solve the real-world challenges chefs and operators face today, while anticipating the needs of tomorrow's kitchens.

Garland's decades-long history in the Canadian market gives the company an edge that few can match. Like many beloved heritage brands known for quality and craftmanship, they're still around and on top for a reason: they engineer real-world solutions for their customers, from professional chefs and independent operators to international chains, hotels and institutions. Their approach to product development across the Welbilt family of brands—which includes Garland, Beverage-Air, Cleveland, Convochill, Convotherm, Delfield, Frymaster, Lincoln, Merco, Merrychef and Victory—places customer needs at the forefront of their innovation cycle, with solutions for every possible operation and foodservice challenge. "Our equipment isn't just durable—it's intuitive," explains Jeff. "We take feedback from the people who use it daily and incorporate those insights into every product."

Garland Canada's portfolio of products are crafted and engineered with a purpose: to perform flawlessly under pressure. Often described as "workhorses" in the kitchen, their equipment is built to withstand the rigorous demands of high volume kitchen operations and professional chefs. Welbilt brands prioritize quality, durability, and reliability, are simple to use, and deliver labour and cost efficiencies to kitchen operations.

One of the biggest challenges facing today's foodservice industry is the labour shortage, particularly the scarcity of skilled culinary talent. In response, Garland Canada has dug in on developing equipment that is intuitive, safe and user-friendly, allowing operators to maintain high standards without the need for intensive training. "We focus on engineering technology that addresses key operator pain points—labour, cost and time efficiency," says Mary. "Our equipment is smart, featuring chef-approved, gold-standard menus that

> **"We're in constant dialogue with our users… It's their feedback that informs our design process.**
>
> **Jeff McMullen**
> Vice President of Sales and Industry Partnerships, Garland Canada



Garland Canada Culinary Competition first place winner, Chef Kalyan Chakraborty, Sous Chef at Richmond Station in Toronto.

even inexperienced staff can execute consistently. From Convotherm and Merrychef ovens to Frymaster fryers and Garland grills, the controls do the thinking, eliminating guesswork and ensuring menu consistency, reduced food waste, and enhanced food safety. Operators benefit from labour efficiencies through reduced training and maintenance needs. Our goal is to simplify the process, minimizing pain points and optimizing both the operator's and their guests' experience. Welbilt is also committed to designing equipment with safe operation in mind." Garland Canada clamshell grills are a prime example, designed with advanced safety features to ensure both operator and food safety. Its automated, two-sided cooking function eliminates the need for manual flipping, reducing the risk of burns or injuries from handling hot food. The grill also includes an interlocking system that ensures operators' hands are clear before the grill closes, preventing accidental entrapment and injury. Precise temperature controls ensure food is cooked to safe temperatures, reducing the risk of undercooking and foodborne illnesses. "It's all about safety and efficiency," Jeff explains. "Our equipment ensures consistent quality, even when the kitchen is short-staffed." This intuitive technology also minimizes food waste, helping operators optimize every aspect of their kitchen operations.

Each piece of equipment is designed to address as many operator pain points as possible, including food cost and waste caused by inefficiency. For example, in a time where supply costs are skyrocketing, Frymaster's oil management systems are designed to filter and manage fryer oil more efficiently. As Mary notes, "With the current price of a jig of oil, if your equipment can use less oil and maintain its quality longer, you might be willing to pay more for that fryer with an advanced filtration system. The ROI will speak for itself when you see the savings in oil costs and the overall improvement in food quality and guest experience."

By focusing on smart technology, energy efficiency, and waste reduction, Garland Canada is helping operators lower their operational costs while reducing their carbon footprint. This focus on sustainability is essential in today's foodservice industry, where consumers and operators alike are increasingly conscious of the environmental impact of their choices. Over the past decade or so, Garland Canada has expanded its manufacturing footprint in Canada, tripling its size. This not only supports local jobs but also ensures that their equipment maintains high standards of quality, while minimizing environmental impacts related to supply chain logistics. "We're proud that all of our Garland Canada and Cleveland products are made in Canada, as well as most of our Lincoln products," Mary shares. "Buying Canadian matters to me, and it matters to a lot of our customers."

Mary also acknowledges that kitchen equipment is a significant investment. "We are not the lowest price in the market; we are mid to high-end. Yet, in a lot of cases, we are the most cost-effective solution because of the efficiencies gained, the operational cost savings and our service. We stand behind our product, one hundred and fifty per cent. If our customer has a problem, we make s**t happen to get them up and running, because we know that's their livelihood."

As Garland Canada continues to innovate, their unwavering dedication to the foodservice industry remains central to their strategy. This commitment extends to the Canadian Hospitality Foundation (CHF), where they actively nurture the next generation of leaders through scholarships and bursaries for students pursuing careers in foodservice and hospitality. Garland Canada's ongoing support for the Canadian chef community includes initiatives such as Bocuse d'Or Team Canada, Terroir, the Garland Canada Culinary Competition at RC Show, the Garland Canada International Chef Challenge at the PEI International Shellfish Festival, The Chefs' Table Society of BC's COOKSCAMP, RAW:almond festival in Winnipeg, as well as Community Food Centres Canada events. These efforts not only foster future talent but also contribute to the overall wellbeing and evolution of Canada's culinary community. "These scholarships, opportunities and competitions give young chefs a platform to grow and showcase their skills," says Mary. "It's about strengthening the industry for the future. We're here for the long haul. Our goal is to not only provide the equipment for today but to help build the technology and leadership that will drive the industry into the future."

"Applications for the 2025 Garland Canada Culinary Competition are open now," Jeff notes. "We look forward to meeting and learning from the next generation of top Canadian chefs."

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Applications are open now for the **Garland Canada Culinary Competition at RC Show 2025.** This is a great opportunity to bring your emerging chefs forward for their chance to compete and shine.

Visit **RCShow.com** for full competition details!

An Enduring Collaboration with Canadian Chefs

What sets Garland apart is its deep connection with the culinary community, engaging directly with chefs and operators to ensure their equipment meets the practical needs of busy kitchens. "We're in constant dialogue with our users," says Jeff. "It's their feedback that informs our design process. Other companies might offer a single piece of equipment and try to make it fit the customer's needs, but we tailor our products and provide recommendations to fit the operator."

Garland's close collaboration with chefs ensures the precision and craftsmanship of the final product is informed by the needs of those who rely on it. Whether it's developing user-friendly smart technology or refining a piece of equipment to meet the specific demands of a high-pressure kitchen, Garland's engineering is shaped by real-world experience, including those of Chefs **Alex Chen**, **Mack Taylor** and **Ted Corrado**...



Chef Alex Chen on a Decade of Collaboration with Garland

Chef Alex Chen is a revered figure in the Canadian culinary scene, with a reputation for creativity and innovation, and a passion for mentorship. In 2013, he earned global recognition leading Team Canada to a top 10 finish at the renowned Bocuse d'Or competition in Lyon, France. Now the Executive Chef at Vancouver's acclaimed Boulevard Kitchen & Oyster Bar, Whistler's Wild Blue, and a key player at Northland Properties, Chen is known for pushing culinary boundaries while guiding the next generation of chefs. His decade-long partnership with Garland has played a quiet, but important role in his journey, powering his competition wins, reliability and precision in his high-demand restaurant kitchens.

Chef Alex shares his history of working with Garland, and the lengths the company has gone to in support of elevating Canadian culinary talent:

"We've enjoyed about a decade of collaboration, beginning in 2013 in the lead up to Bocuse d'Or. At Bocuse, there are 24 teams competing in 12 identical cubicles over two days. In this small cubicle, you have a counter, two induction burners and a Convotherm oven, which is owned by the same umbrella company as Garland. When you practice for that level of competition, why would you go and practice with a different oven? If you practice on the right equipment, when you go to the real competition, you don't have to adjust—it's the same oven, the same voltage, the same configuration. You just try to get as familiar as possible. So, I went to Garland and asked for some support and sponsorship. They donated or loaned us an oven and some induction burners. So, that was one part of the equation in terms of setting us up for success.

That was my experience then, and Garland has been supportive ever since. They sponsor many, many competitions, and I've done a lot of competitions myself, but I no longer compete, I mentor. Over the years, Jeff McMullen and I became friends. I've cooked for Jeff and Mary Chiarot, the CEO of the company, at the BC Seafood Festival in Comox. I thought it would be fun to blow their minds by cooking everything over fire—charcoal, the popping wood, all of that—it was exciting. I had their whole senior team there.

Since then, I've been working for Northland Properties, a huge company that has hundreds of restaurants. Garland has been fully integrated into their system across Canada. I really value the relationship and the personal touches they provide, and the way they own their problems. If something goes wrong, I'll be like, "Hey Jeff, this isn't right, can you expedite it?" We also have a restaurant in Whistler, which isn't ideal when you need a service call to fix something. But Garland usually expedites the service and follows up. Just knowing that someone has my back, that they'll dive into it right away—to me, that's service. That's accountability.

They're great. Both of my kitchens use Garland units every day. It's not all Garland—we have relationships with many other brands—but if I build the next restaurant, I'll be calling Jeff. I'll say, "Jeff, we need to retrofit the kitchen with your equipment." That's confidence right there.



Mack Taylor on Balancing Tradition with Innovation at MR. SUB

Mack Taylor, a seasoned chef and Brand Leader at MR. SUB—a legacy Canadian-owned brand under the MTY Group—has spent over a decade shaping the brand's direction and operations. Known for his hands-on leadership and deep understanding of the foodservice industry, Mack has been at the forefront of driving innovation across MR. SUB's 220 locations. With a focus on operational excellence and franchise success, his latest initiative—a strategic collaboration with Garland to revolutionize kitchen technology—reflects his commitment to keeping the brand competitive in a rapidly evolving market. Last year, as MR. SUB was looking for ways to innovate and stay competitive in an increasingly crowded market, a right-place-right-time meeting at RC Show helped accelerate MR. SUB's bold move forward. Mack shares the story:

“

MR. SUB is a legacy brand, around since 1968, and with increasing competition, we've reached a point where innovation is key, but our existing equipment stack was holding us back. I'm a chef by training, and I met the Garland team last year at RC Show, where we started talking about their Merrychef ovens. From that first conversation, I was struck by how engaged they were. They welcomed us into their facility, and we had the chance to work extensively with their chef. It honestly felt like an extension of our own team. Their level of involvement was impressive, from daily calls to hands-on testing in their kitchen. We even launched the new ovens into test locations, with Garland visiting those locations and working with our franchisees directly.

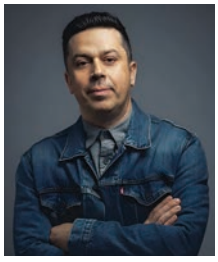
For the pilot, we tested the ovens in nine locations, including high-volume restaurants. Our goal was to measure how these ovens affected our speed of service and overall operations without disrupting what makes MR. SUB special. In particular, we needed to ensure that the ovens could handle our bread—the heart of our product—without compromising quality. The results were fantastic. The ovens maintained the consistency of our bread, which was a huge relief.

We presented the pilot results to our franchisees, and the response was overwhelmingly positive. In fact, 80 per cent of our franchisees have already signed up to implement the ovens. We've already fulfilled our first shipment of Merrychef ovens, with another shipment on the way. This is a major milestone for us, and 2025 is shaping up to be a big year for MR. SUB.

One of the most surprising aspects of this journey has been learning more about Garland as a company. Before, I saw them as just another equipment brand—a reliable one, but nothing more than that. After working with them directly, I've come to appreciate how small and engaged their team is. They genuinely care about their customers. This connection we've built has been a key factor in our successful rollout. They made us feel like a priority—even though we're not as large as some of the bigger brands they work with. Whether it was picking up the phone at a cottage or visiting a location in person, they were always there for us.

Of course, change can be challenging, especially for our franchisees, some of whom have been with us since the 70s. There was definitely some nervousness about transitioning to new equipment. But Garland's team, particularly their chef, made sure that every franchisee felt comfortable with the technology. The ovens were designed to be as user-friendly as possible—plug and play, really. By the end of the training sessions, even our most senior franchisees were confident and ready to go. When I visited stores a few weeks later, employees—some of whom had initially been resistant—were telling me that even if the pilot didn't work out, we couldn't take the ovens away.

That's a true testament to the success of this partnership. It's been one of the best vendor relationships I've ever had. Garland didn't just sell us equipment; they created an environment where our franchisees and staff felt empowered and supported and excited about the future.



Chef Ted Corrado on Building Kitchens and Breaking Boundaries

Chef Ted Corrado is a culinary leader known for his innovation, precision and commitment to quality. With over two decades of experience in Toronto's top restaurants, including his roles at the Drake Hotel and c5 at the ROM, Ted has made a significant impact on the city's dining scene. Now overseeing multiple operations as Corporate Executive Chef at Scale Hospitality Group, he is renowned for his ability to blend creativity with technical expertise. A longstanding partner of Garland, a leading kitchen equipment brand, Ted shares some of the reasons behind his long history with the Canadian brand.

“

I've spent my entire career working in Toronto's restaurant industry, and Garland has always been part of the fabric of most kitchens I've worked in. Whether it's by design or by chance, 99 per cent of the restaurant equipment I've used is made by Garland. It's reliable. I could give you a list of reasons why, but ultimately, they make a great, dependable product, which is why they've become my go-to.

Garland has been more than just a provider for me—they've been a partner. I've had the chance to work with them in different ways, from building kitchens to testing their products in real-world conditions. One example is a few years ago when I was tasked with catering for WayHome Music and Arts Festival. We had to feed tens of thousands of people in the middle of a field, including VIPs like Neil Young. That was a challenge: no kitchen, no gas lines—just wide-open space. I needed equipment that could run on propane, and Garland stepped up. They got me exactly what I needed to build a functioning kitchen in the middle of nowhere. It wasn't a typical situation, but it's a perfect example of why I trust them.

Aside from those one-off projects, I've built quite a few kitchens in my time, and every one of them is unique. Kitchens are all about the specifics of the space and the concept, so whenever I start a new project, I call up Luigi Encarnacion at Garland. We've worked together for years, and he's my first call. Whether it's a custom build or just finding the right piece of equipment for the job, they always get it done.

On top of that, I've also had the opportunity to help Garland with their R&D. They'll reach out when they're testing new equipment and ask me to put it through the ringer. I'll take their new grill or whatever they're working on and use it in my kitchens, then give them feedback on what works and what doesn't. It's great to be involved in that process, knowing that my input is helping shape the equipment other chefs will eventually use.

In the end, what stands out to me about Garland is that they listen. They take feedback seriously, and they're always willing to adapt based on what we chefs need in real-world conditions. It's not just about theory or what looks good on paper—it's about creating tools that work under the same pressures we face in our kitchens every day. And that's why they'll always be my go-to.

ENGINEERED FOR EXCELLENCE:

Garland Canada's Solutions for Today's Foodservice Demands

Garland's close relationships with chefs and operators are reflected in their purpose-built equipment from the Welbilt family of brands. Designed to meet real-world challenges with smart engineering, their product line directly addresses some of the foodservice industry's biggest concerns—labour shortages, sustainability and efficiency—while staying true to the Garland promise of reliability. From intuitive designs to advanced technology, each piece of equipment is crafted to go further in supporting kitchens with the tools they need to operate smoothly and consistently in today's demanding environment.

These are just a few of their products that stand out to us for their smart engineering and exceptional potential to elevate the foodservice industry:



Merrychef conneX®12: THE EFFICIENT INNOVATOR

The Merrychef conneX®12 is the most compact, high-speed oven, delivering food up to 80% faster than traditional methods. Its sleek, ventless design fits on a standard worktop, with a 12" x 12" cavity in a 14" width. The intuitive 7" touchscreen with easyTouch® 2.0 software and over 100 pre-programmed recipes ensures quick, consistent results. Born connected, it includes Wi-Fi, ethernet, and a free year of Welbilt KitchenConnect® for remote monitoring and updates. With cool-to-touch sides, quiet operation, and low energy usage, the conneX®12 is easy to install and delivers unbeatable value.



Convotherm maxx pro easyTouch 6.20: THE MASTERMIND

The Convotherm maxx pro easyTouch 6.20 is the premium combi oven for professionals, built with top-quality German engineering. Featuring smart innovations, optimized functions, cutting-edge digitalization, and unmatched energy efficiency, it sets a new standard in the industry. Durable, resource-conscious, and user-friendly, the maxx pro delivers high-performance cooking at the highest level.



Frymaster's FQE30U electric fryer: THE SUSTAINABLE OPTIMIZER

Frymaster's FQE30U electric fryers are designed for ultimate oil conservation and ease of use, available in 2-5 frypot models. These high-performance fryers help operators boost profits with labor- and energy-saving features, support sustainability, and promote worker safety. The open stainless steel frypot is easy to clean and uses 30 lbs of oil instead of 50, cutting oil costs by over 40%. Auto top-off extends oil life, while the optional Oil Quality Sensor ensures precise monitoring for optimal food quality and oil usage—all at the push of a button.



Garland XPress Grill: THE DRIVEN OPERATOR

Proudly made in Canada, the Garland XPress Grill's dual clamshell grill plates cook food on both sides simultaneously, cutting cook times by up to 50%. With precise temperature controls, it ensures consistent quality and food safety. Its rapid recovery and pre-heat features save energy by allowing the griddle to cool between peak periods, making it efficient and reliable.

With representatives and service partners across the country, Garland Canada's family of brands includes Beverage-Air, Cleveland, Convochill, Convotherm, Delfield, Frymaster, Garland, Lincoln, Merco, Merrychef, and Victory.

Check out their full lineup at: garlandcanada.ca

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RC Show Restaurants Canada



A WINNING COMBINATION

RC SHOW 2024 CULINARY, BAR & BEVERAGE COMPETITION HIGHLIGHTS & CHAMPIONS

BY CHRIS SZEGO

As applications open for RC Show 2025's competitions, we celebrate the winners and heroes of this year's season.

These competitions provide an unparalleled showcase of what's new and next in the culinary, bar, and coffee worlds and draw in top-tier talent from across the country to turn up the heat.

From innovative chefs crafting mouthwatering dishes, to mixologists shaking up the bar scene with their creative cocktails, and baristas brewing the perfect cup of coffee, the show was a feast for the senses. Among the highlights were the crowning of the nation's finest in various categories, each winner bringing their unique flair and flavour to the table. RC Show 2024 didn't just celebrate excellence in food, drink, coffee and skill; it set a new standard for the industry, leaving attendees inspired and eager for the next gastronomic revelation.

"Culinary competitions are especially important when it comes to showcasing new or emerging talent," says Michelle Jobin, food expert and media spokesperson. "They're a great opportunity to learn how to work under pressure and show how composed they can be when being judged by culinary experts at the top of their game."

At RC Show 2024, Restaurants Canada played host to several culinary competitions, including the Garland Canada Culinary Competition, Restaurants Canada Pizza Competition, and Fried Chicken Sandwich Competition, celebrating the depth and breadth of the extraordinary talent on display across every aspect of the industry.









GARLAND CANADA CULINARY COMPETITION

April 8-9th
Presented by Garland Canada and Restaurants Canada

The goal for this year's Garland Canada Culinary Competition competitors was to level up a classic dish from their youth or childhood, using a mystery black box of ingredients and the fully stocked stage pantry. With the help of SALT Pop-Up restaurant, owned by last year's Garland winner **Shai-Ann Tyson**, several hardworking culinary school and organization partners reviewed almost 100 entries and narrowed the field down to 12 semi-finalists.

The 12 semi-finalists went head-to-head on the Culinary Stage on day one of RC Show. The four chefs who emerged as finalists went on to compete again on day two. Overall, it was an incredible display of expertise, showmanship and skill. Hosts **Michelle Jobin** and **Chef Devan Rajkumar** kept up with dizzying pace, overseeing the delivery of each dish to judges **Chef John Higgins**, **Chef Amanda Ray**, and **Chef Joseph Shawana**.

After two days of intense competition, the esteemed judges congratulated the winners.



1st PLACE: Kalyan Chakraborty, Sous Chef at Richmond Station (Toronto, ON) took home first place. He won $5,000, a 9.5-inch Western Japanese Gyuto and 5.5 inch K-Tip Petty Knife from DICED, and a gift certificate from Chef Works.



2nd PLACE: Mariel Legere-van Herpen, Sous Chef at Atelier (Ottawa, ON) claimed second place honours. Mariel's prize was $3,000 and an 8-inch K-Tip Slicer from DICED.



3rd PLACE: Shoma Asano, Chef de Partie at Wild Blue (Whistler, BC) took home $1,500 and an 8 inch K Tip Slicer from DICED.



4th PLACE & Fan Favourite: Abigail Lopez Velasco, Sous Chef, L'OCA Quality Market (Sherwood Park, AB) won $500 and an additional $500 for the audience-determined Fan Favourite award.

"The Garland Canada Culinary Competition truly stands out to me because of the opportunity it gives to chefs that are often at the beginning of their careers... It also showcases emerging talent from across Canada, with an emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion. This year I was absolutely dazzled by the level of skill, culinary storytelling, and composure showcased by the semi-finalists and finalists. It makes me very optimistic for the future of the restaurant industry in this country."

-Michelle Jobin

With support from: Club House for Chefs, Gordon Food Service, Canada Beef, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Dairy Farmers of Canada, Chef Works, and DICED knives

Culinary School Partners: Conestoga Hospitality & Culinary Arts, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology Department of Culinary Arts & Professional Food Studies, George Brown Centre for Hospitality & Culinary Arts, Chef's Table Society of BC, and S.A.L.T. Pop Up Restaurant Co.

FRIED CHICKEN SANDWICH COMPETITION

April 10th

Presented by Chicken Farmers of Canada, Club House for Chefs, Premium Foods and Direct Poultry

The Fried Chicken Sandwich competition was live and in person at RC Show 2024. Prior to the competition, judges **Ryan Hinkson**, **Chef Imrun Texeira** and **Chef Suman Ali Sayed** reviewed all prospect submissions to choose the most creative and entertaining competitors. Those four finalists hit the Culinary Stage on the afternoon of day two.

With only one hour to prepare, cook and present their dishes, each of the finalists leveled up a fried chicken sandwich, while integrating a special ingredient assigned to them from a carefully curated list of sauces and spices.

Hosted by **Chef Marissa Leon-John**, this competition celebrated fried chicken sandwiches that were authentic and bold as well as deliciously satisfying. After evaluating the taste and presentation of each competitor's sandwich, the technical skill level, and the attention to sanitation, the panel of experienced judges whittled the list down to the final four.

1st PLACE: Tobe Onyenyeonwu, from Terrace on the Green (Brampton, ON), won the top prize of $2,000 and a 12-inch Wa Handle bread knife from DICED, plus a bottle of Piper-Heidsieck Champagne.

2nd PLACE: Billy Truong from Lazy Daisy's Cafe (Toronto, ON) took home $1,000 and a 10-inch Wa Handle Utility Serrated knife from DICED.

3rd PLACE: Ron David llaya from One Restaurant (Toronto, ON) won $750 and a 10-inch Wa Handle Utility Serrated knife from DICED.

4th PLACE: Julien Kaine from Century Park Tavern (Toronto, ON) took home $250.

Supported by: Quell and DICED





RESTAURANTS CANADA PIZZA COMPETITION

Presented by Restaurants Canada, Ardent Mills, Lactalis Foodservice and Dole

The Pizza Competition returned to RC Show 2024 for two creative and action-packed days. **John Gutekanst**, the owner and CEO of Avalanche Pizza in Athens, Ohio, hosted two competitions, each with their own judges and prize lots.

In both competitions, aspiring pizzaiolos brought their own tools and ingredients. They had 20 minutes to prepare and bake two identical pizzas, using ovens provided and monitored by FAEMA Canada. One pizza went to the panel of judges, the other was sliced up for the appreciative audience.

Traditional Style Competition – April 8

The Traditional Style competition has several rules. Competitors must use traditional red tomato sauce, choose only two toppings from a strictly curated list, and after baking, may add only a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil.

On April 8, 2024, a panel of expert judges consisting of **Rocco Agostino** from Pizzeria Libretto, **Joe Gonzales** of joeG.ca, **Leah Scurto**, owner and head pizzaiola of PizzaLeah, and Alida Solomon, chef and owner of Tutti Matti, announced the winners of the Traditional Style competition.

1st PLACE: Paulo Guerra from Rossopomodo in Toronto won first place, and a prize package consisting of $3,000, a Sunmix Sun 6 countertop dough mixer, a 7-inch Wa Handle Nigiri Knife from DICED, and a bottle of Piper Heidsieck Champagne. Paulo also earned two 3-Day buyer passes, and one guaranteed entrance for the International Pizza Challenge at Pizza Expo 2025 in Las Vegas.

2nd PLACE: Alon Fuks from Born & Raised in Hamilton took home $1,500.

3rd PLACE: Justin Tanada of Cowabunga Pizzeria in Hamilton won $500.

4th PLACE: Fabio O'Neill, from Famiglia Ristorante in Ancaster, won a commercial grade Gi.Metal Pizza Tool Kit.

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CREATIVE STYLE PIZZA COMPETITION

April 9

In the Creative Style competition, pizzaiolos could indulge their imaginations. With no restrictions on the type of dough, sauce, toppings or baking styles, entrants presented original creations, using their pizzas to celebrate their favourite flavours, share cultural traditions or tell a brand-new story. **Dominic Primucci**, President of Pizza Nova, joined Rocco, Leah and Alida at the judging table to select and celebrate the winners.

1st PLACE: Sotirios Tzakis of Descendant Detroit Style Pizza in Toronto, took first place, winning $3,000, a Sunmix Sun 6 countertop dough mixer, a 7-inch Wa Handle Nigiri Knife from DICED, a bottle of Piper Heidsieck Champagne and two 3-Day buyer passes, plus guaranteed entrance into the 2025 International Pizza Challenge at Pizza Expo in Las Vegas.

2nd PLACE: Michael Broccolo from Fratelli Broccolo in Thorold, ON, won $1,500.

3rd PLACE: Matthew Sullivan, from Aegis Brands, headquartered in Toronto, ON, took home $500.

4th PLACE: Isabelle Emtage of Toronto-based Eastenders Food Co. won a commercial grade Gi.Metal Pizza Tool Kit.

Joe LeRoux helped pioneer these Canadian competitions. A former international competitor himself, he says: “This kind of win changes people’s lives. The money is nice, and the bragging rights are great, but the publicity is unbeatable.”

Supported by: FAEMA, Sunmix, Moretti Forni, DICED, and Gi.Metal



BEYOND THE RAIL COCKTAIL COMPETITION

April 8th
Presented by Beam Suntory

Bartender duos teamed up to demonstrate their creativity, technique and scalable business savvy at this year’s rollicking Beyond the Rail Cocktail Competition, held on the Bar & Beverage stage on day one of RC Show 2024. A cocktail competition is usually a good time, but a cocktail competition that celebrates teamwork and requires audience participation…? That’s top of the line.

The base spirit for each team was revealed mere hours before the competition. Using that spirit, they had to source at least one ingredient from the RC Show floor, then develop both a craft cocktail AND a kegged version using the same flavour profile.

The judges, **Amber Bruce**, Bar Manager and Partner of the Keefer Bar in Vancouver, BC, **Kate Gerwin**, Owner of Happy Accidents in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and **Mike McLean**, Program Coordinator and Lead Trainer for Mixxit Canada by Beam Suntory from Toronto, ON, compared both versions of the cocktail, evaluating each team on the taste and balance of the drinks as well as their technical proficiency and presentation style.

This competition gave mixologists a chance to exhibit every aspect of their finesse, skills and smarts, and to level up the art of hospitality. Meanwhile, the rest of the kegged cocktail was distributed to an enthralled and delighted audience.

1st PLACE & People’s Choice Award: Monique Godhino and Subin Heo. The winning pair took home $3,000 as well as an exclusive gift from Beam Suntory.

2nd PLACE: Mike Dojcsak and Marian Walsh took home a $1,500 prize.

3rd PLACE: Kevin Barreca and Julian Manley, who claimed $500.

With support from: Reifel Rye, Maker’s Mark, Northern Keep Vodka, Basil Hayden, Roku Gin, Hornitos Tequila, and Scrappy’s Bitters

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NATIONAL COFFEE CHAMPIONSHIPS

Presented by the Canadian Chapter of the Specialty Coffee Association, Dairy Farmers of Canada and Restaurants Canada

According to the Coffee Association of Canada, coffee is Canada's most popular beverage, beating out both tea and tap water for the number one spot. It was fitting, then, to see three unique coffee championships take their dedicated stage at RC Show 2024.

LATTE ART CHAMPIONSHIP

April 8th

Each of the Latte Art Championship competitors had 15 minutes to present two free-pour lattes and one designer latte, each of which had to match the competitor's pre-submitted photograph of the same design. Two visual judges, a technical judge and a head judge evaluated each drink.

1st PLACE: Arthur Chu, Arthur went on to represent Canada at the World Latte Art Championship at the World of Coffee Copenhagen 2024 (June 27-29, 2024), at the Bella Centre in Copenhagen, Denmark.

2nd PLACE: Ehsan Khatib

3rd PLACE: Debbie Chan

CEZVE/IBRIK NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

April 9th

The Cezve/Ibrik National Championship was the first of its kind for the SCA. The cezve, also called an ibrik, is a specially designed pot used in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Northern Africa. Highlighting cultural practices and traditions while adding their own flair and originality, competitors served two identical and two signature cezve beverages to a panel of judges who evaluated the balance of acidity, bitterness and sweetness of each cup.

1st PLACE: Ply Pasarj, Ply attended the World of Coffee Copenhagen 2024, representing Canada at the World Cesve/Ibrik Championship.

2nd PLACE: Scott Sanger

3rd PLACE: Garry Go

COFFEE IN GOOD SPIRITS CHAMPIONSHIP

April 10th

The Coffee in Good Spirits Championship took place on the final day of RC Show and tested competitors' bean and bar skills. Each barista created and served two coffee cocktails: an original of their own design, and a personalized version of an Irish Coffee. The judges assessed each competitor on creativity, presentation, sensory balance and technical skill.

1st PLACE: Stacey Lynden, Stacey went on to stand as Canada's representative at the World Coffee in Good Spirits Championship at the World of Coffee Copenhagen.

2nd PLACE: Antoine Vautherot

3rd PLACE: Andrew Mok

Josh Hockin, Head of Special projects at Eight Ounce Coffee, is the Competition Coordinator at the SCA. He was pleased with how the National Championships unfolded on their new stage location, and at the passion and skill of those who took part. "Some of the latte art competitors aren't even coffee professionals—just enthusiasts who love coffee."

With support from: Giffard, Aromano Coffee Co. and Libbey

JOHN BIL OYSTER SHUCKING COMPETITION

April 9
Presented by the Oyster Master Guild and Raspberry Point Oysters

John Bil had a profound impact on Canada's seafood culture, and the community continues to promote his memory. Nova Scotia renamed their Shucking Championship trophy the John Bil Memorial trophy. Norman Hardie Wines presented the John Bil Cuvée in 2021. And, on day two of RC Show 2024, the Bar & Beverage stage hosted the fifth John Bil Oyster Shucking Competition.

In an astonishing display of speed and dexterity, shuckers faced off in a contest where mere seconds make a big difference. Competing in heats, each shucker had to open and plate a dozen oysters, registering their start and finish time on automatic timers.

Former world champion Shucker Paddy (Patrick McMurray) hosted the competition, while judges James Power, the General Manager of Raspberry Point Oysters and John Petcoff of PEI Oysters assessed each entry for cleanliness and presentation as well as speed.

1st PLACE: Chris Mannochio of Rodney's Oyster House took home the top prize of $1,000. Chris also won the award for cleanest plate ($100).

2nd PLACE: Julius Chapple, also from Rodney's Oyster House, took home $500.

3rd PLACE: Annand Dosani of Diana's took home $250.









Restaurants Canada would like to thank all the contestants, judges, and sponsors whose dedication and support made these events truly spectacular. To the winners, we salute your achievements and wish you unparalleled success in your hospitality careers. A special nod to every brave competitor who took to the stage, your passion and artistry did not go unnoticed.



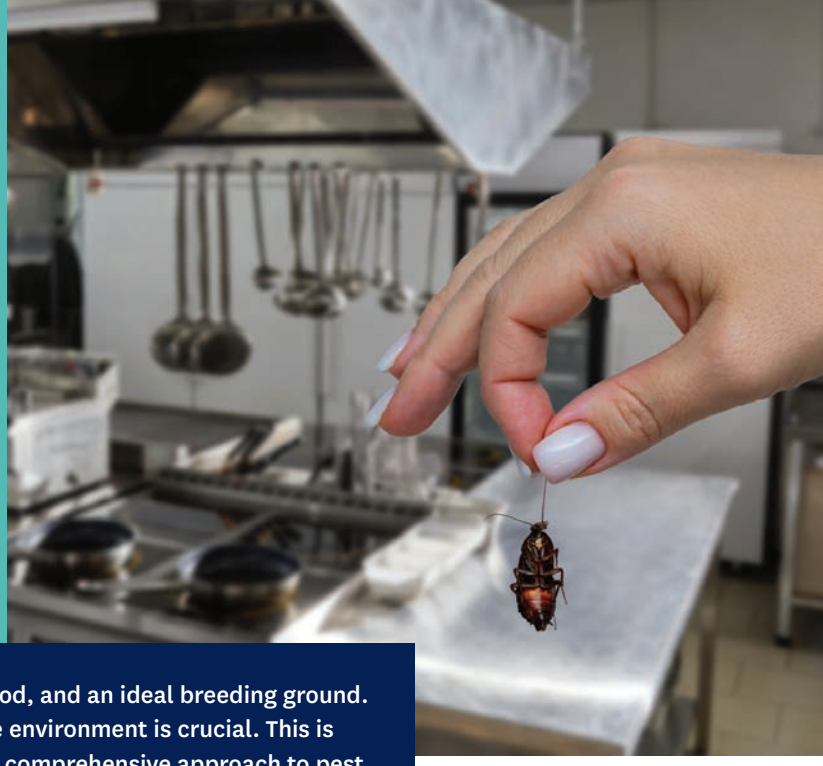
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KEEPING YOUR KITCHEN PEST-FREE:

A Must-Read for Restaurant Professionals



Kitchens are a magnet for pests. Once inside, they find shelter, food, and an ideal breeding ground. For restaurants and commercial kitchens, maintaining a pest-free environment is crucial. This is where Integrated Pest Management (IPM) comes in—a proactive, comprehensive approach to pest control that emphasizes prevention, monitoring, and targeted interventions.

What is IPM?

IPM is not just a set of techniques; it's a philosophy of pest management that focuses on sustainable and long-term solutions. Here's how it works:

1. **Proactive Prevention:** IPM starts by identifying and addressing potential entry points, food sources, harborage spots, and breeding areas, significantly reducing the likelihood of an infestation.
2. **Continuous Monitoring:** Regular inspections, traps like glue boards, and other monitoring tools help detect pest activity early, and allow for timely intervention.
3. **Targeted Control Methods:** When pests are detected, IPM employs selective yet effective pest control methods to minimize risks to food safety and the environment. These may include physical barriers, bioremediation for flies, and targeted gel treatment.
4. **Sustainable Solutions:** IPM addresses the underlying causes of pest problems like sanitation or structural issues, offering enduring solutions that meet food safety standards and audit requirements.

Partnering with Professionals

A crucial step in effective pest control for restaurants is partnering with a professional pest control company. Experts can identify subtle signs of pest activity that may not be obvious to staff and provide tailored recommendations to address any issues. Regular inspections ensure any problems are quickly eliminated, safeguarding the restaurant's hygiene and reputation.

Staff Education and Training

Educating your staff on their roles in pest prevention is another key component of IPM. Comprehensive training helps staff identify and address signs of infestation swiftly and efficiently. Implementing a clear Food Safety Policy that highlights potential pest risks and offers detailed guidance on addressing issues promptly is essential.

The CleanSafe Kitchen Program by Abell Pest Control

To support restaurants in their pest control efforts, Abell offers CleanSafe Kitchen to assist staff in setting up strict cleaning schedules and providing free video training on key topics. These resources educate management and food workers about the connection between sanitation practices and preventing pests on their premises.

Developed collaboratively by its Quality Assurance department, Pest Control Technicians, and a team of experts from Conestoga College's Culinary & Hospitality education programs, CleanSafe ensures that staff is equipped with the knowledge and practices necessary to maintain optimal cleanliness and hygiene levels daily, weekly, and monthly. As Abell celebrates 100 years, this commitment to excellence underscores its long-standing tradition of quality service and innovation. This proactive approach enhances operational safety and significantly reduces the risk of pest issues. **For more information, visit www.cleansafekitchen.com/en-ca/.**

Pest control is more than just a regulatory requirement; it is essential to ensuring food safety and quality. By incorporating an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program into your restaurant's operations, you comply with stringent regulatory standards and third-party audit requirements, to uphold customer trust, prevent economic losses, avoid adverse publicity, and build a reputation for excellence in food safety and sustainability.

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EXPERTS YOU CAN TRUST

Restaurants and commercial kitchens face unique challenges in maintaining a hygienic and healthy environment for customers and staff. With an abundance of food and water, these establishments are prime targets for pests. From cockroaches to rodents, your business is vulnerable to countless infestations.

For 100 years, Abell Pest Control has been the foremost expert in pest management. We have built a legacy of trust and have protected restaurants by ensuring their kitchens and the exterior surroundings remain free from pests.

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People *Perspectives*

IT'S TOUGH OUT THERE. HOW TO UP YOUR HOSPITALITY RECRUITMENT GAME

BY VAL UPFOLD, PRINCIPAL, VAL UPFOLD INC.



In the competitive landscape of the Canadian restaurant industry, attracting and retaining top talent has become increasingly challenging. Labour shortages and high turnover rates are significant hurdles that restaurants must overcome to stand out in a crowded market. The demand for higher wages and better working conditions, coupled with a skills gap and evolving workforce expectations, adds to the complexity.

As a veteran of the foodservice and hospitality sector, I see these challenges not as insurmountable barriers but as opportunities. To enhance your recruitment strategies and create an appealing environment for potential employees, it's crucial to shift from a reactive to a proactive approach. Traditionally, restaurants have been reactive, addressing issues as they arise. However, to truly excel in the recruitment game, you need to anticipate needs, stay ahead of industry trends, and develop strategies that attract and retain the best talent before challenges become crises. By leading rather than following, you can transform your recruitment practices and ensure long-term success in the ever-evolving restaurant industry.

To find the right people for the job, operators must master four key concepts and tools:

EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION

An employee value proposition is the unique set of benefits, rewards, and experiences that an employer offers to attract, motivate, and retain employees. This is actually where so many restaurants flinch. We have to get better at appreciating and valuing the elements that differentiate hospitality opportunities and marketing them so that job seekers see foodservice opportunities differently.

Promote hospitality as part of the opportunity. We're not going to be able to compete on salaries—that's just a fact—especially for independent restaurants and small restaurant groups. We need to learn to think of hospitality as a brand in itself and use what we can offer to our advantage.

Identify and optimize your best features. Restaurants are fun, social environments that can offer a variety of low-cost perks like free staff meals, employee referral bonuses, flexible scheduling or shift swapping, recognition programs, staff events, and opportunities for creative input.

Create meaningful employee development and mentorship opportunities. Restaurants are nimble businesses where individual staff can make a significant impact. If you have a server who is interested in getting into marketing, train them to contribute to your social media accounts. If you have a cook who wants to get into HR, have them help you develop a new training program. Working with your people to understand their skills, interests and goals beyond their immediate role is a win-win that can be enhanced by mentorship programs that help team members collaborate, connect and grow.

Create an employee value proposition you can live up to. Filling your careers web page or job posting with benefits and promises you may not be able to consistently deliver on can hurt your reputation and make it harder to attract talent.



EMPLOYER BRAND DEVELOPMENT

Employer brand development for restaurants is the process of cultivating and communicating a compelling and distinctive reputation as an employer to attract, engage, and retain top talent. Employer brands are more than what you offer employees, it's the way you communicate and interact with your employees and the community you operate within.

Embrace the industry culture. While it's important to maintain professionalism in your workplace marketing, resist the urge to look and sound like a bank or another corporate institution. We're not looking for the same people, and the operating culture is very different.

Promote your people. Showcase staff culture, expertise and achievements on social media channels to communicate your values and the importance of your people to your operation. Not only will sharing staff-centric content add dimension and personalization to your employee value proposition to potential employees, it can also attract new customers and increase feelings of belonging among current team members.

OUTREACH & SELECTION

Where and how you engage with prospective employees leaves a lasting impression and directly contributes to your employer brand. Taking the time to consider the way you communicate and connect—for those you hire and those you do not—is often an underutilized recruitment tool.

Think about talent acquisition whether you're hiring or not. Too often, managers are focused on dealing with urgent matters, which can take away from time spent on longer-term business priorities. Adopting an "always-on" recruitment mindset can ease the panic when an employee unexpectedly leaves and allows for more strategic and intentional new hires. In addition to posting regular recruitment and employee content online, consider saving older resumes and maintaining communication with past employees through a digital alumni newsletter. Stay in touch with superstar employees as they move through the industry because you never know what new opportunities the future will bring.



Go beyond job boards and job fairs. Engaging directly with youth and community organizations, high schools and colleges can help diversify your reach and grow new applicant streams.

Every touchpoint is an opportunity for brand development and promotion. The hospitality business is all about people, and that includes the way you engage and communicate with prospective employees. Consider offering interviewees a free meal in return for their time and travel, whether or not they are hired, and be sure to get back to candidates with your decision in a timely and gracious manner. Small gestures can make a big difference to your talent pipeline and reputation.

Job interviews are not pop quizzes. You're not there to try and stump the candidate, you are trying to learn as much as you can about who they are, what they offer and what they're looking for. Consider sharing the interview questions prior to the interview to show that you are invested in transparency, fairness and professional development.

Be transparent about remuneration. Candidates seeking foodservice and hospitality roles will typically have a general expectation of wage. Sharing remuneration and gratuity information up front saves time on the front end and advances the hiring process and demonstrates an open, transparent workplace.

> "To enhance your recruitment strategies and create an appealing environment for potential employees, it's crucial to shift from a reactive to a proactive approach."





About Val…

Valerie Upfold has extensive experience in the hospitality industry, having worked in hotels and restaurants in Canada and Australia. Her roles have included Restaurant Manager, Sommelier and HR Director. At Oliver & Bonacini Hospitality, Val spent 15 years—five as Manager and Sommelier at Canoe Restaurant in Toronto, and ten as HR Director, where she established the HR department and grew the company from 100 to over 1,500 employees.

With over ten years in hospitality recruitment and HR consulting, Val is a trusted expert for renowned brands. She also conducts food TV casting, identifying top talent for the screen. Val contributes to Centennial College and George Brown College hospitality advisory committees, has lectured at the University of Guelph's HAFA program, and speaks at industry events nationwide. She volunteers with Catalyste+ to support the hospitality sector in developing markets.

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ELEVATING MENUS

DIVERSITY IN THE CANADIAN WINE INDUSTRY

VINEQUITY aims to ensure people who identify as Black, Indigenous or People of Colour (including those who identify as LGBTQ+ or who are living with a disability) and work in the wine sector are given equitable treatment and opportunities to access, grow and thrive as visible leaders in the Canadian wine industry. We connected with Debbie Shing, one of the founders of Vinequity, and Arashasp Shroff to get their perspective on the Canadian wine industry.



Debbie Shing is the founder of Quvé, a boutique wine agency, and Vinequity. She is a WSET Level 4 diploma graduate and certified WSET Instructor. Shing is also an on-air wine expert for CTV Your Morning, instructor at George Brown College as well as a judge and panellist for Artisan Distillers Canada. Throughout her 20+ year career, she has served on faculty at IWEG Drinks Academy, the Canadian Association of Professional Sommeliers board of directors and the judging panel for Canada's 100 Best Restaurants.



If you are a wine lover, it is easy to argue there is a wine for everyone and for every meal. But for those who are not as familiar with varietals, grapes, regions and flavours, buying wines to complement a meal can be a daunting task, especially if you are the restaurant owner. With the globalization of menus and the desire for more sustainable options, restaurants are being challenged to create wine lists that work for their menus and their customers, while maintaining profitability.

Vinequity was launched in 2020 in response to a need Debbie Shing saw in the beverage industry to connect and elevate underrepresented beverage professionals. "We created a platform for BIPOC professionals in the wine and beverage industry to be visible and to shine a light on their accomplishments. We connect people to each other with mentorship programs, especially if they have a specific career niche. We also provide scholarships to help young people who are interested in getting into the industry." With a directory of over several hundred people, the list keeps growing. "It's a sign there's a desire for people to be seen and heard."

The globalization of menus has also made it urgent for consumers to see BIPOC beverage professionals in client-facing roles, from sommeliers to managers. "There are certain fine dining echelons where BIPOC are not as visible. But I see awards like the Michelin, recognizing restaurants with more global cuisine, and I see opportunities and hope for people in the industry," says Debbie. "We are seeing more cultural ways of sharing and eating that are different from what some restaurants have done in the past. I think as part of this shift, we have a responsibility to recognize and uplift the people who have talent."

This move to incorporating different flavour profiles, ways of cooking, and styles of serving is, according to Debbie, missing one thing: "I have yet to see lived experience become an employable asset in the industry. I think that piece is missing outside of smaller, single owner, family-style restaurants. Restaurants with big teams, multiple investors and hefty expansion plans should think about how putting skilled or knowledgeable people in key roles will help bring an understanding–it will help you make money."

An example Debbie uses is the syntax of wine. "Some of the point-of-reference flavours or ingredients we use to describe wine don't always represent flavours common in many cultures," she says. "Bring someone in who understands the culture and the food, and they can help describe the wine in a way that complements your menu. Are there hints of tamarind in the wine? Complex spices? People

who are there for your menu will see how you can bring the two together."

While the easiest place to try new flavours paired with the menu is in cocktails, Debbie sees how this can also put a strain on the restaurant. "Bartenders are already busy. If you add in cool-looking cocktails with mixed flavours, you're adding in more ingredients, more time to make, and more room for error. With wine, while it's less obvious in terms of taste, the range of flavours is infinite, and can be easier to serve and store. You don't need to be a bartender to serve wine."

Whether you have an existing wine list that needs a refresh or are interested in bringing a selection of wine to your restaurant, Debbie has some tips on how to make it more profitable:

1. ***Find your experts.*** "Some restaurants don't need a sommelier, but they can hire a sommelier or a wine agent as a consultant to help them revamp or start a wine list. If you don't know where to start, there are many talented and creative people on Vinequity's list. Reach out to them."

2. ***Invest in your staff.*** "Service starts with education. Investing in your staff by providing training and product knowledge improves service and the likelihood your customer will come back. I've been to restaurants where the staff can't recommend a wine or describe their house wine. That's a missed sale. Most wine reps can give training sessions or hire a sommelier to help. A more enthusiastic front of house team is going to drive more revenue."

3. ***Know your clientele.*** "There's a generational divide in understanding the culture of wine. When you look at your clientele, there are some younger wine drinkers who have no biases in terms of wine. Sometimes that means it's a half bottle or wine in cans. Bag in box wines are more easily stored and for some casual dining restaurants, it's an easy way to serve wine from behind the bar. There are many wine producers who have done a great job of appealing visually to a younger population that gives it more of a premium value, the same goes for natural wines."

4. ***Use beverage as the margin driver.*** "Look at trial sizes of wines. Quarters or half litres make it more of a reasonable purchase and an opportunity to bring in a certain amount of revenue that goes beyond a glass. This might ease some of the cost avoidance around wine. Also, many wine producers offer smaller size formats—you don't need to commit to cases of wine. Look at the options that make sense for your restaurant. Also, find ways to make your wine look cool. People will know if you went to the dollar store for your wine glasses. That doesn't make them want to spend money on wine."

5. ***Look at the cost.*** "Take a look at how you're pricing your wine. Sometimes by pricing wine to increase volume, you can make your wine more approachable and a more likely purchase. Make it easier for consumers to spend money in your restaurant. You can have a deeply profitable wine fridge, but it needs to be served."

6. **Have a theme.** "Sometimes the most unexpected pairings are ones your customers enjoy the most. You can throw hosted themed events where you can analyze the taste and flavour of the food, together with different wines. Taking a chance and introducing your customers to a new wine can help make them more frequent visitors."

As we see more international food trends and ingredients hit the menu in Canada, Debbie sees how leveraging expertise in these cultures can help elevate customers' experiences. "As diners, we want suggestions. At the end of the day, people want to enjoy a great meal, with a wonderful wine with amazing service. Service comes from someone who can describe the menu, speak to the wines and provide a personal touch – they've tried the food, the drinks and then make the recommendation."



Arashasp Shroff

General Manager and Wine Director, Abrielle at the Sutton Place Hotel

@arash.shroff **@abrielleto**

Arashasp Shroff is based in Toronto where he is the general manager and wine director at Abrielle at the Sutton Place Hotel. Previously he was the beverage manager and sommelier at the CN Tower, overseeing a program of over 500 wines for the highest wine cellar in the world. He has won the Ontario Hostelry Institute's prestigious "Top 30 under 30" award as well as the "Future leader of the industry" award from the Wines of Spain. He is an alumnus of the Culinary Institute of America and George Brown College.

MM How did you get into the wine/hospitality industry?

Arashasp Shroff: *As a son of immigrants, I often found myself cooking for my family at a young age. It was here I really found myself enjoying the experience of dining together at a table and sharing stories and memories from the day. I was fortunate enough to have been able to attend the prestigious Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, where I studied and apprenticed under some of the best chefs and sommeliers in the U.S. It was only after moving to Singapore and opening Spago by Wolfgang Puck that wine, beverage and front of house operations cemented themselves in my professional path. Now living in Toronto for the past six years, I've been thankful I have not only been able to work with some of the most iconic properties in the city, but also closely with Vinequity and George Brown's Mentorship program to give back to the BIPOC & Hospitality community.*

MM How would you describe Canada's wine culture – from the people in the industry, to the products that make Canada stand out?

AS: *I've been able to meet some incredibly dedicated individuals ranging from seasoned-winemakers to enthusiastic winery team members. Many producers prioritize sustainable and organic practices that reflect a strong connection to the land and promote the local terroir, which is great to see being reflected in the local wines. I'm enjoying some of the 'experimental' styles coming out of Niagara, whether that be 'classical wineries' doing unfiltered or skin contact styles, which inevitably help push the capabilities and creativities of the winemaker. The rise of unconventional 'wineries' (virtual wineries) are also playing a part in helping those who otherwise would not be able to join the community share their respective stories. Canada's wine culture is marked by its commitment to quality, creativity, and a strong sense of community, making it an emerging player on the global wine stage.*

MM As menus across Canada become more global, how important is it for different cultures to be represented in the wine industry?

AS: *One hundred per cent. Menus are more rapidly growing into more global offerings, whether that's food being sourced from non-traditional vendors or working directly with local farms. The popularity of non-traditional menu items and flavours is growing and it's great to see people being receptive and open to new experiences (food or wine). The greater the diversity in the wine, the more variety we will see in the experiences and stories, which helps the industry or brand position itself as more approachable and appealing to the average guest or consumer. At Abrielle, our wine program focuses on female winemakers, BIPOC & Queer+ winemakers, and is built on the idea of showcasing different cultures and people, while letting the wine speak for itself, sharing what might not always be a well known varietal. Our vision is to share the stories and experiences of those making these wines, working with our guests to ensure they are truly enjoying the glass in front of them.*

MM How can restaurants "break into" serving wine with their meals?

AS: *It has to be baked into their training and delivery of standards at the respective restaurants or hotels. It's more about finding the right wine for the guest than just moving inventory or pushing a guest cheque average. It's about having conversations with guests and understanding what they're looking for and wanting to engage with and experience while they are in your house.*

MM What trends are you seeing in the industry?

1. ***Dessert Wines:*** *At Abrielle, we've seen an uptick in guests requesting and drinking after dinner wines. Most wine drinkers aren't ready to have a little balanced sweetness in their early dinner wines, but certainly they have been into slightly sweet wines after dinner. As such, we've brought on this beautiful local Late Harvest Riesling, that fits the bill for slightly sweet, yet perceptible acidity, which is welcomed by most.*

2. ***Chillable Reds:*** *As a Mediterranean sharing menu restaurant, Chillable Red has been a huge hit with our lighter dinner fare and sharing items. These wines are usually lower ABV bottles of red wine that lack harsh tannins, allowing them to be chilled right above white wine temperatures. As a result, they typically end up being more silky, crisp and crushable.*

3. ***Low ABV/Non Alc Wines:*** *Post-pandemic, we noticed people placing more importance on their health and wellness. There's a huge new opportunity for low ABV/Non Alc wines to really staple themselves as legitimate and tasty options for guests looking to enjoy the taste of wine, without the alcoholic component. Zero-alcohol wine brands like French Bloom, Thompson & Scott, and Leitz are leading the category with full-flavour, alcohol-free alternatives to wine. To keep up, brands like Jackson Triggs and Kim Crawford have released intentionally light and low-alcohol options. Lower-ABV red wines will rise in popularity as a younger, more health-conscious consumer impacts that market opting for a better lighter alternative to big bold wines.*

MM What excites you about the future of wine in Canada?

AS: *The increase in representation of diverse winemakers and educators sharing their unique cultural backgrounds, bringing fresh perspectives to the industry. This leads to innovative winemaking practices and distinctive flavour profiles that reflect various traditions and techniques. A more diverse community can engage with wine production, so we're likely to see a richer tapestry of stories and experiences associated with each bottle. People like Nupur Gogia, Steve Byfield, Shiraz Mottiar, Howard Soon, and Avila Coutinho are not only winemakers, but their storytelling through wine can also foster deeper connections between consumers and the wines they choose.*



To learn more about Vinequity, visit their website at: vinequity.ca

vinequity

Avoid the Obvious.

Marlo Onilla, Principal and Creative Director of Toronto's Biography Design, shares a winning formula in designing innovative and appropriate branding solutions for independent restaurants.

In today's hyper-competitive dining scene, branding is no longer an afterthought — it's a necessity. More than ever, restaurants need to stand out, not just with great food, but with a strong, cohesive identity.

Biography Design is the creative force behind some of Toronto's most iconic restaurants, including Patria, Cluny, Madrinas, Byblos, Harbour 60, Giulietta, Osteria Giulia, Alo, and Bar Prima just to name a few Renowned for transforming dining concepts into unforgettable brand experiences, they are unmatched in their ability to craft holistic brand identity systems for the city's top culinary hotspots.

Led by founder Marlo Onilla, the boutique studio has spent countless years developing. immersive narratives for Michelin-starred establishments and cutting-edge independents alike. Biography Design doesn't just create logos; they shape every touchpoint—from signage and menus to custom uniforms, packaging, and guest experience—into a cohesive story.





Alo
Interior Design:
Commute Design

Our main inspiration for Alo was the heritage building it occupies in the heart of Queen and Spadina. The architectural render of the heritage building was the starting point of the visual identity and used throughout various touchpoints. French dining at its best—food, decor and ambience.

– Marlo Onilla

For Onilla, it's about more than design. It's about storytelling that resonates, branding that sticks, and crafting restaurants that leave a lasting impression long after the meal is over. "Our work is driven by narrative," Onilla says. "If there's no story, the design can't connect with people. It might look great, but it won't resonate. Branding, especially for restaurants, needs to tap into the emotional experience. That's what keeps people coming back."

Tell a story.

For Biography, everything begins with storytelling. From the name of the restaurant to the last detail on the menu, the story is what drives every decision. "When we start a new project, the first thing we do is build out a narrative," says Onilla. "Without it, the visual identity will feel superficial, and the overall guest experience won't be memorable."

The team at Biography goes beyond the typical design process by ensuring every client's story is carefully woven into the brand's DNA. They even employ a full-time copywriter to work on each project — something not many design studios offer or may not see the value or importance. "Smaller studios will outsource the story-telling based on the project, but for us, it's central to everything. We keep it in-house because we want the story to be embedded in the design from day one. It's not just an afterthought," Onilla explains.

For restaurants, this storytelling isn't just a nice-to-have; it's a must. "Restaurants are high stakes. Margins are thin, and the investment in the brand has to go beyond the food or the interior design. The brand needs to tell the story of who you are before the customer even steps inside," Onilla says.

Embrace independence.

Biography Design has carved out a unique niche by working almost exclusively with independent restaurant operators. While many design firms pursue larger, chain restaurant clients, Biography is laser-focused

on crafting brands for independent multi-unit operators or stand-alone restaurants, which tend to have more flexibility and creative freedom.

"Chains have their place, but they're not for us," Onilla says. "We specialize in independent operators because they're the ones who understand the importance of storytelling and identity. They don't just want a logo slapped on the front door — they want to build something lasting."

Biography's expertise lies in creating brand identity systems that extend well beyond the visual. "A logo is just one piece of the puzzle," Onilla explains. "What we're really building is a brand identity system — a comprehensive, cohesive narrative that touches every part of the restaurant. From the matchbooks and coasters to the guest experience, everything has to tie back to the brand's core story."

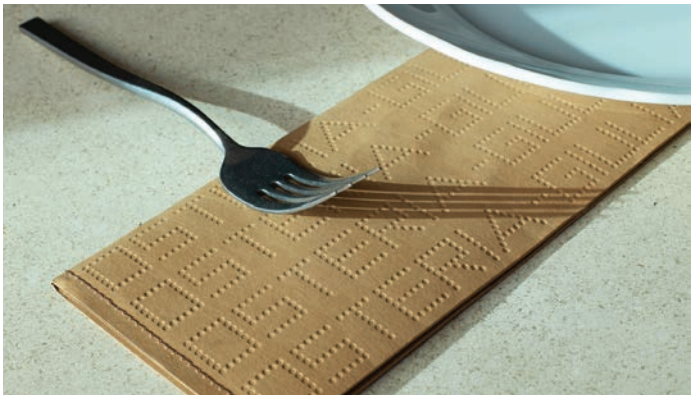
Build a brand system.

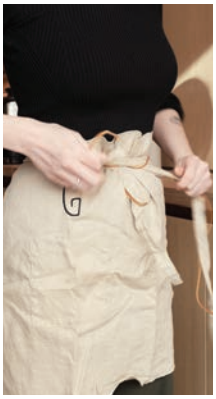
At the heart of Biography's work is a commitment to creating full brand identity systems — not just visuals. According to Onilla, many restaurant operators mistakenly think a brand is just a logo and maybe a colour palette. But at Biography, the brand is seen as a living, breathing system that guides every aspect of the restaurant's operation.

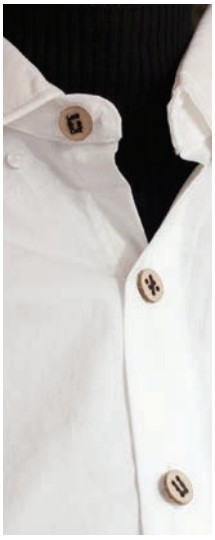
"The first thing we do is create a brand strategy," says Onilla. "It's the foundation for everything that comes after. Once the strategy is clear, we move into developing the visual identity — the logo, colour palette, typography, and all the other visual elements that make up the brand. But we don't stop there. We develop brand guidelines, which are critical to ensuring consistency across every platform."

Brand guidelines, Onilla says, are an often-overlooked part of the branding process, but they are key to maintaining the integrity of the brand as it grows. "Without guidelines, you lose control. The signage won't match the menus, the social media won't align with the print materials, and before you know it, the brand falls apart," he explains. "It's like the brand's North Star. It keeps everything consistent, and that's what builds trust with your audience."

Onilla emphasizes that investing in a full brand identity system — from strategy to websites — pays off in more ways than













Giulietta and Osteria Giulia
Interior Design: *Guido Costantino Projects*

We took the idea of "one beautiful thing"—so elegantly put by Chef Rob Rossi and David Minicucci—and created an identity that is at once playful and elevated. Just as a great chef will craft many exquisite dishes out of a few simple ingredients, our many-faceted logo design plays with the idea of "one beautiful thing" by serving up our one beautiful wordmark in a myriad of delicious ways, while the rest of our executions further emphasize the quiet confidence of the restaurant's space and menu. The print identity is a reflection of the sophisticated simplicity of the brand.

– Marlo Onilla

one. “When you have a clear brand strategy and identity system, it doesn’t just help with marketing. It helps your team. It clarifies the expectations for everyone, from the hostess to the kitchen staff. They understand what the brand stands for, and that consistency makes a huge difference in the guest experience.”

Design to connect.

One of the major benefits of a cohesive brand identity system, according to Onilla, is its ability to build customer loyalty. “When people feel connected to a brand, they don’t just come back for the food — they come back for the whole experience. The branding sets the tone for that experience,” he says.

Biography’s work with restaurants like Giulietta and Osteria Giulia for Chef Rob Rossi and David Minicucci, Alo for Chef Patrick Kriss, or Bar Prima for Craig Harding and Julian D’Ippolito is stunning in its ambition and precision. Biography’s use of materials and placemaking sense complements and elevates the menu and architectural features, providing guests with a visual muster point for the total experience. “The operators we work with know that branding is about more than just the logo on the sign. It’s about how every touchpoint of the experience connects. Whether it’s the look and feel of the menu, the subtle embroidery details on an apron, the custom pins on the shirts or the way the server presents the cheque, every little detail. reinforces the brand,” Onilla says. “That kind of consistency creates loyalty. Guests know what to expect, and they trust the experience will deliver every time.”

Dress your takeout.

“Packaging has become a huge part of the brand experience,” says Onilla. “One of our clients, Harbour 60, is a great example (A full rebrand in conjunction with design firm a HEAVY). They’re doing takeout packaging that’s premium — almost unheard of in the industry. It’s a box within a box, with custom labels and all these little details that reinforce their brand. It’s not just about getting food to go; it’s about making sure the guest still feels the luxury of the Harbour 60 experience even when they’re eating at home and knowing that Harbour 60 will go the extra mile to please it’s customers till the end.”

Onilla acknowledges that not every restaurant can afford this level of investment in packaging, but he believes it’s a smart move for brands that want to maintain their integrity across all customer touchpoints. “The packaging should reflect the brand experience. If you’re a high-end restaurant, the takeout experience needs to match that—otherwise, you risk devaluing your brand,” he explains.

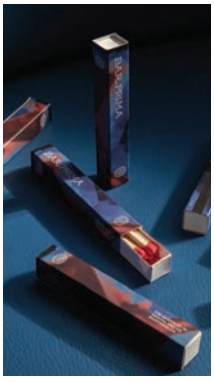
Avoid the Obvious.

Marlo delights in destroying expectations. A guiding philosophy at Biography is to “avoid the obvious.” For Onilla and his team, this means finding unexpected ways to integrate branding into the guest experience, whether it’s through a subtle design detail on the menu or an unexpected element in the décor.

“We’re always looking for something unexpected, it sticks with them. It makes the











Bar Prima

Interior Design: *Future Studio*

Biography developed the brand identity for the exciting addition to Toronto’s culinary scene– Bar Prima. Designed to resemble an imaginative culinary institution derived circa a century ago. With this premise in mind, we created an intricate framework of a conceptual logo evolution and story dating back to the 1900s to present day. A foundation built upon a rich history of excellence continually forming its future. Where decades have come and gone, the legacy of Bar Prima persists.

– Marlo Onilla

Giulietta and Osteria Giulia
Interior Design: *Guido Costantino Projects*

We took the idea of "one beautiful thing"—so elegantly put by Chef Rob Rossi and David Minicucci—and created an identity that is at once playful and elevated. Just as a great chef will craft many exquisite dishes out of a few simple ingredients, our many-faceted logo design plays with the idea of "one beautiful thing" by serving up our one beautiful wordmark in a myriad of delicious ways, while the rest of our executions further emphasize the quiet confidence of the restaurant's space and menu. The print identity is a reflection of the sophisticated simplicity of the brand.

– Marlo Onilla











experience more memorable, opens up a conversation, and that's what great branding does."

But it's not just about being different for the sake of being different. Onilla emphasizes that these unexpected touches always tie back to the core narrative of the brand. "It has to feel authentic. If it doesn't connect to the story, it's just a gimmick, and people can see through that," he explains.

Balance tradition and relevance.

As the restaurant industry evolves, so too does branding. Onilla believes that staying relevant is key to a restaurant's success. "Restaurants need to constantly evolve. After five years, if you're not thinking about refreshing your brand, you're going to fall behind," he says. "The dining scene moves quickly, and if you're not paying attention to trends and adapting, you'll get left behind."

But even as trends shift, Onilla is a firm believer in respecting tradition. "Our motto is: 'Respect tradition, challenge convention,'" he says. "We look at what's worked in the past, but we're always thinking about how we can push the boundaries and bring something new to the table."

For Biography Design, the future of restaurant branding isn't about chasing fleeting trends — it's about honouring a brand's core story while continually evolving to connect with guests in new and meaningful ways. "At the end of the day, great branding isn't just about looking good," Onilla emphasizes. "It's about creating a complete experience that feels authentic and leaves a lasting impression."

With a portfolio that includes some of Toronto's most celebrated dining destinations, Biography Design has proven that a well-crafted brand identity system is one of the most powerful assets a restaurant can possess. It's not just about aesthetics—it's about elevating the guest experience, fostering loyalty, and creating a brand that thrives well into the future. In an industry where first impressions and lasting memories count, Biography Design continues to set the bar high for innovative branding that truly resonates.

biography

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Scaling with *Style:*

How to Design Restaurant Interiors for Growth



Stacy DiCarlo, Founder & Principal, Yellowbird Design Studio

Yellowbird Design Studio, led by founder and lead designer Stacy DiCarlo, is a full-service design agency specializing in the hospitality sector, with a focus on restaurant interiors, from single-locations to national chains. Based in Hamilton, Ontario, the studio is known for its innovative, immersive dining spaces and has become a trusted partner for restaurateurs across Canada.

In this interview, Stacy shares expert insights on how Yellowbird carries core design elements from one location to another, smart design planning, and what is driving design for dining spaces.

How did you start Yellowbird Design, and what is your focus?

Stacy DiCarlo: *I founded Yellowbird four and a half years ago. We specialise in design for commercial interiors, with a strong focus on hospitality. Restaurants have been our bread and butter. I've been in the industry for about 24 years and at least 20 of those years have been dedicated largely to restaurant design. I was looking for something fast-paced, and restaurants fit that mould.*

What sets interior design apart from other design disciplines, like graphic or architectural design, and how do they work together throughout the process of planning a new restaurant concept?

SD: *There's a lot of crossover between design disciplines. My background is in architecture, so I blur the lines between architectural and interior design. Branding and graphic design also come into play, especially with quick-service restaurants, where there's a lot of overlap. We don't position ourselves as branding experts—we collaborate with branding agencies or restaurant consultants when a new brand is being developed. For graphic-heavy concepts, like a recent quick-service project we did, we brought in a graphic designer to collaborate. Interior design includes everything from the layout including guest or service flow, to sourcing and specifying furniture, finishes and lighting throughout the space. It's about creating a feeling and invoking emotion throughout the entire space.*

How do you approach design for restaurants that are expanding to a second or even multiple locations?

SD: *If you're looking to scale, the top recommendation is to work with a professional designer or consultant who can audit your brand and space. It's crucial to identify those core design elements that should be repeated for brand consistency while allowing each location to be unique and adaptable to the local market. You want to carry forward those core elements that make your brand what it is,*



Industria Pizzeria



CKTL & Co



but the design also needs to reflect the flavour of the neighbourhood.

If we know a brand has plans to scale, we design with that in mind by layering the design. We establish core brand elements that will remain consistent, then add extra layers that can be tailored to the local culture or neighbourhood. However, if scalability isn't part of the initial plan, we focus on creating the best possible design for that individual location. If they later decide to scale, we revisit the design to see what worked and what might need to evolve.

MM Should original interior designs evolve over time?

***SD:** Absolutely. It's important to stay flexible and open to adjustments after a restaurant has been in the market for a while. Core elements might shift depending on how they're received by the audience.*

MM What role does site selection play in your design process for expanding independent restaurants, and how do you ensure each expansion feels authentic to both the brand and the neighborhood?

***SD:** It's huge, though we're not always brought in early enough to advise on it. Sometimes clients already have a location in mind, but when we're involved early, we can help steer them toward a site that aligns with their brand. For example, choosing between a heritage building versus a modern condo can dramatically affect the design direction. The architecture of the building can either be part of the brand or something that we leave behind as we move to new locations.*

We recently worked with the owners of Left Field Brewery to expand their brand from a craft brewery to a full-service brick-and-mortar restaurant with on-site brewing. We explored which elements in their current brand felt authentically true to the brand as well as taking learnings from their current design and operations to determine our best path forward to evolve the design. Some of these elements may be a more obvious, literal finish, like red brick that speaks to the heritage of their original building, but some may be more subtle, such as the positioning of their draught taps to the entrance and the way they greet their guests upon entry.

MM What pitfalls should operators look to avoid when expanding to new locations?

***SD:** One common pitfall is being too "cookie-cutter"—trying to exactly replicate a previous location. Guests are looking for a more unique and memorable experience, so it's important to find a balance between brand consistency and creating something fresh and authentic. I like to think of it as a 60/40 rule—60 per cent of the design should maintain brand consistency, while 40 per cent can be customised for the local market.*

The kitchen; however, is one area where I believe it's actually okay to be cookie-cutter. If you've developed an efficient layout, you should replicate it. Menu consistency is key, though smaller locations may require a scaled-down menu or you may want to leave room for local features. When we need to scale the kitchen down, we work with chefs and equipment consultants to ensure the core elements of the kitchen remain efficient.

MM How do you collaborate with restaurant operators to balance aesthetic aspirations with budget constraints during the design process?

SD: *This is always a challenge. The key is communication—getting a clear idea of the budget up front. We also recommend bringing in a construction manager early on to run numbers from the design concept stage. That way, we avoid surprises later when the design is fully developed. Knowing the budget from the start allows us to focus on the key elements that will have the biggest impact. Even on a tight budget, it's possible to create a fantastic design by being strategic about where you spend.*

MM What are some current trends you're seeing in restaurant design?

***SD:** One of the biggest trends we're seeing is the demand for immersive, experiential design that engages all the senses. Guests want a unique and memorable experience. Another trend is the shift toward smaller restaurant footprints, often with more specialised menus. This is something we're seeing both in full-service and quick-service models. Lastly, outdoor spaces are being used more efficiently, especially over the last four years or so, with more blurred lines between indoor and outdoor areas.*

The restaurant industry moves at a fast pace and designs need to evolve every 5-7 years to stay relevant. Working with a skilled designer





Left Field Brewery



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when developing the initial design concept can help ensure the design foundation will stand the test of time while more superficial design elements like artwork or feature walls can be layered within the design allowing for an easier transition of these fads that come and go.

MM What advice do you have for a first-time restaurateur looking to open a new concept?

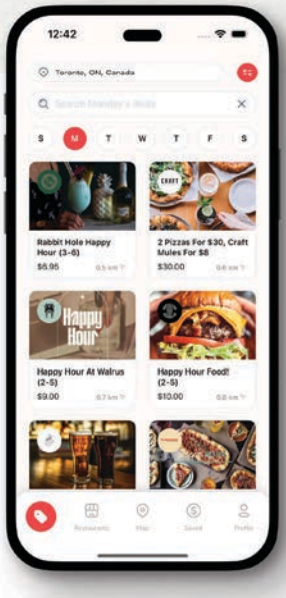
SD: *My advice would be to work with professionals and know your brand before you start. You need to have a solid understanding of your menu, your target audience, and your price point before bringing in a designer. You should have answers to basic questions like square footage, the type of space, and whether the location was previously a restaurant. These details will help the design process run smoothly.*

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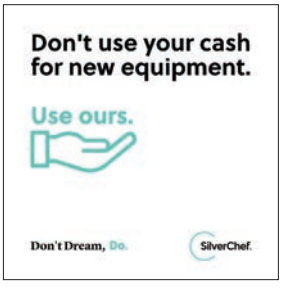
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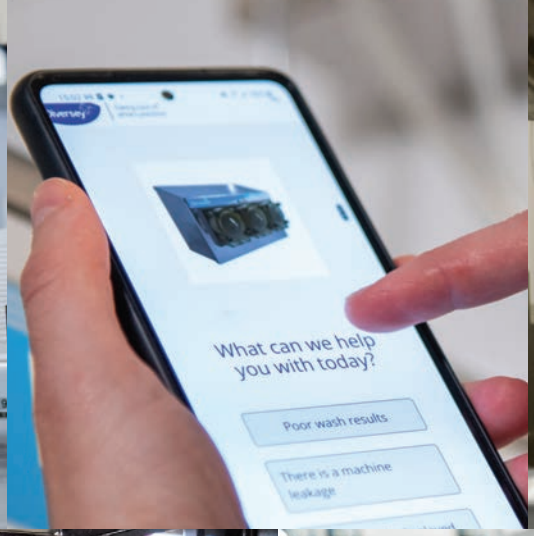
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