



20 Reasons to Eat Canadian Right Now

The current froth of northern nationalism has Canadians staying put this summer—and planning trips to domestic dining destinations. Luckily, Canadian cuisine has never been more exciting. Where else can you find the world’s fanciest pastrami? A secret six-seat sushi counter hidden in another restaurant? An Inuit chef preparing crave-worthy grilled narwhal? We canvassed the country to find epic restaurant experiences, brilliant chefs and must-try dishes to make this summer the most delicious one ever. There’s never been a better time to put your money where your patriotism is.

BY LIZA AGRBA, ALYANNA DENISE CHUA, MATTHEW HALLIDAY, SARA HAROWITZ, JADINE NGAN, MARK PUPO, KATIE UNDERWOOD AND CAITLIN WALSH MILLER







EDMONTON

The Married Couple Behind Edmonton's Best New Restaurant

Bernadette's, the dining room from Scott Iserhoff and Svitlana Kravchuk, is the hottest reservation in town, with a punk-rock soundtrack and a menu of reinvented Indigenous classics

Most of Scott Iserhoff's earliest food memories involve his grandmother. During spring hunts in the northern Ontario wilderness, he'd watch her pluck geese and then roast them over a fire. She'd turn moose meat into hearty stew and bake hot, doughy bannock. Iserhoff, who's Mushkego from Attawapiskat First Nation, always left his grandmother's house with a full, happy belly. So when it came time for him and his wife, Svitlana Kravchuk, to launch their own restaurant, it was a no-brainer to name it after her.

Bernadette's, which opened last year, is now one of Edmonton's coolest culinary experiences. The 23-seat room features a mural painted by Sakâw Nêhiyaw-Métis Iskwew artist BB Iskwew, and the speakers might be blasting Indigenous EDM or Ukrainian music. Kravchuk, who hails from Ukraine, takes care of the front of house, while Iserhoff runs the kitchen, remixing the hearty Indigenous dishes of his childhood. His potato dumplings resemble Italian gnocchi, but are actually inspired by the potato pancakes Iserhoff's dad used to make. At Bernadette's, they're paired with a rich rabbit ragu. The deep-fried olives are stuffed with Spam—a nod to the canned meats the Canadian government rationed out to First Nations when it outlawed their traditional foodways. They also got instant rice, so there's usually a rotating ocheshishak (rice in Omushkegowin) on the menu; one version last fall, for instance, featured fried risotto balls made with creamy butternut squash. "It's storytelling," Iserhoff says.

Bernadette's by Curtis Comeau; Sabayon by Michael A. Bandfassak



MONTREAL

02

The Can't-Miss Tea Service

Sabayon, a tiny Montreal jewel box, pours royal-worthy afternoon tea

Chef Patrice Demers and sommelier Marie-Josée Beaudoin knew they had a hit on their hands months before Sabayon even opened. The duo tested their tasting menu concept during a two-month stint at Brooklyn's Fulgurances Laundromat in the spring of 2023. Word spread among Quebec's culinary diehards, and Montrealers were soon making pilgrimages to the pop-up. That summer, they opened a 14-seat jewel box in Pointe-Sainte Charles, a residential neighbourhood on the banks of the St. Lawrence. If diners were willing to cross the border (and the East River), surely they'd cross the Lachine Canal.

The restaurant is just them: Demers prepping his carefully choreographed courses in the kitchen, Beaudoin pouring wines from

her meticulously crafted list. Their tasting menu unfolds like a slow, easy inhale, with four savoury plates—a tomato tartlet topped with whipped ricotta, perhaps, or Île de la Madeleine lobster with fresh peas and white asparagus in a smooth bisque sauce—followed by two dessert courses. Reservations open up monthly and sell out within minutes.

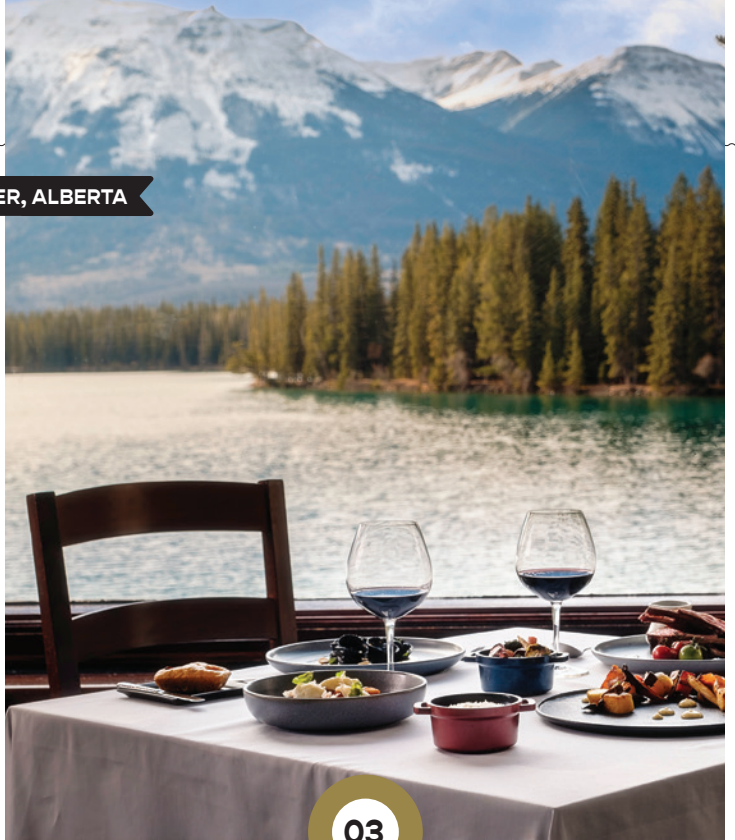
On Friday and Saturday afternoons, Sabayon shifts into something softer as guests settle in for a tea service that goes above and beyond your standard scone and Earl Grey affair. Here, teatime is a \$58, three-course ode to pastry, paired with infusions from *Camellia Sinensis*, the cult Quebec tea house Beaudoin has been obsessed with for two decades.

Each tea is poured to match, not mask, the desserts. A deep, cocoa-scented pu-erh from Jeju Island in the South China Sea amplifies the richness of a chocolate and coffee mignardise. A dark oolong, the shui xian lao cong, hums with maple, making it a natural fit for Demers' maple cream layered with pistachio sponge. There's maple-cinnamon brioche with a quince purée and candy-cap mushroom purée, or a pastel-pretty strawberry sorbet with pistachio cake and vanilla cream.

It's a quieter kind of hospitality, one that trades flash for finesse, and one the pair say they wouldn't have been able to pull off a decade ago. No gimmicks, no egos, just two pros doing their thing for 14 lucky guests at a time. Just don't forget to set an alarm for when reservations drop on the restaurant's website.



JASPER, ALBERTA



03

The Best View in Canada

Orso, a trattoria hidden in Prince Harry's favourite Canadian hotel, pairs a locavore Italian menu with a sublime mountain panorama

One of Alberta's best-kept dining secrets is tucked away in the rugged, mountainous beauty of Jasper National Park. Orso is located in the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge—a favourite of Prince Harry and Meghan—but it's a far cry from your average hotel restaurant. Enter through the lodge's grand lobby, past the fireplaces and down a set of stairs. There, a host welcomes guests into the long, luminous room. The decor is spartan, with plenty of natural light and lots of dark wood. All the better to focus on the main attraction: a set of floor-to-ceiling windows that offer astonishing views of the glassy Lac Beauvert, a lush pine forest and the craggy skyline of the Rockies.

The food lives up to the view, reimagining Italian classics with local ingredients. Agnolotti is made with Alberta egg yolks, stuffed with charred scallions and in-season corn from Taber, Alberta (known as the corn capital of Canada), and served with a gremolata made from local sage. A signature entrée is Alberta bison striploin, grilled and paired with seared Alberta beef bone marrow, a chianti jus and quirky local vegetables—kabocha squash, icicle radishes or spring peas, depending on the season.

It's Italian food, sure, but it's also distinctly Rocky Mountains—a point of pride for a town that has recently begun to rebuild after it was devastated by wildfires last summer. The Fairmont lost a few structures on its property, including one of its cabins and some of its staff housing, says food and beverage director Jamie Hussey. Other local businesses were not so lucky. "We want tourism to come back," says Hussey. "I think sharing the journey with people is special." Drinking in the mountain view over a plate of perfect noodles is an excellent first step.



04

MONTREAL

The Country's Fanciest Cafeteria

The deluxe dining hall Le Fou Fou brings together Montreal's best chefs and, after dark, a rotating schedule of dance parties and DJ nights

On any given night at Le Fou Fou, diners might chase a torched crab maki roll from James Beard Award-winning chef Tony Messina with some garlic naan from the Montreal Indian institution Le Taj. They might slurp chef Hanhak Kim's rich tonkotsu ramen alongside frites from Lenny Lighter, former owner of Moishes, or share a plate of tuna tacos from Hogar while eyeing the next round of pancake bites from Eva's, dripping with homemade Canadian maple fudge. There are lobster dumplings, wagyu beef burgers, Neapolitan pizzas, handmade pastas.

This is Le Fou Fou: not exactly a food court, not exactly a restaurant, but a choose-your-own culinary fever dream featuring a who's who of Montreal's culinary talent. Twelve restaurants and

three bars fill the 900-seat communal space inside Royalmount, the city's newest mall. To make the mix-and-match work, owner David Haas invested in tech. Every table is equipped with a QR code that pulls up every menu in the hall. Diners can order from anywhere—sushi, tacos, pasta, wine—in a single transaction, and servers (or “ambassadors” in Le Fou Fou-speak) deliver the goods.

Le Fou Fou was built to feel like a place you might stumble into for brunch and end up staying for dinner, cocktails and maybe a show. There are DJs every Friday and Saturday night, and Le Fou Fou hosts large-scale events each year. Last October, a Vampire Ball featured dancers, DJs, a live band and fortune-tellers. In February, 450 people turned out for a Cupid Party on Valentine's Day. “The core philosophy is that it's a place to have fun,” Haas says. Ultimately, he's betting that what diners want isn't just food—it's community.



05

MONTREAL

The Best Mexican Restaurant Outside of Mexico

At Alma, chef Juan Lopez Luna pays tribute to his homeland—and works wonders with heirloom corn

Chef Juan Lopez Luna comes from the place of corn—literally. That’s what Tlaxcala, his home state in central Mexico, means in Náhuatl, the Uto-Aztecán indigenous language still spoken in parts of the region. His family were corn farmers for generations until trade policies in the 1980s and ’90s flooded the market with cheap American grain, making it impossible for small growers to compete. When he was 16, he immigrated to Canada with his family. And now, decades later, he’s reconnecting with his heritage.

At Alma, his restaurant in Montreal’s Outremont neighbourhood, Lopez Luna goes all in on the flavours and ingredients from his homeland—especially the corn. He gets his heirloom varieties from small producers in Tlaxcala’s Ixtenco region, where cobs are still laid out on rooftops to dry. At the restaurant, the kernels are soaked in

limewater each night in a Mesoamerican process called nixtamalization—Alma is one of few restaurants in Canada to deploy that method—and then ground into masa. The resulting dough is fragrant and nutty and, in Lopez Luna’s hands, used for handmade tortillas and as a vehicle for mezcal-cured foie gras, grilled mussels with smoky chintextle chili paste and grasshoppers, and Oaxacan cheese on local oyster mushrooms.

Alma was recently named the best Mexican restaurant outside of Mexico by the prestigious *Culinaria Mexicana* in its gastronomic guide to Mexico’s cuisine. And while his food is scrupulously authentic, it’s also filtered through Quebec’s curt, opinionated seasons. For Lopez Luna, it’s not about recreating Mexico in Montreal, it’s about expressing where he’s from with what he has: he recently swapped an impossible-

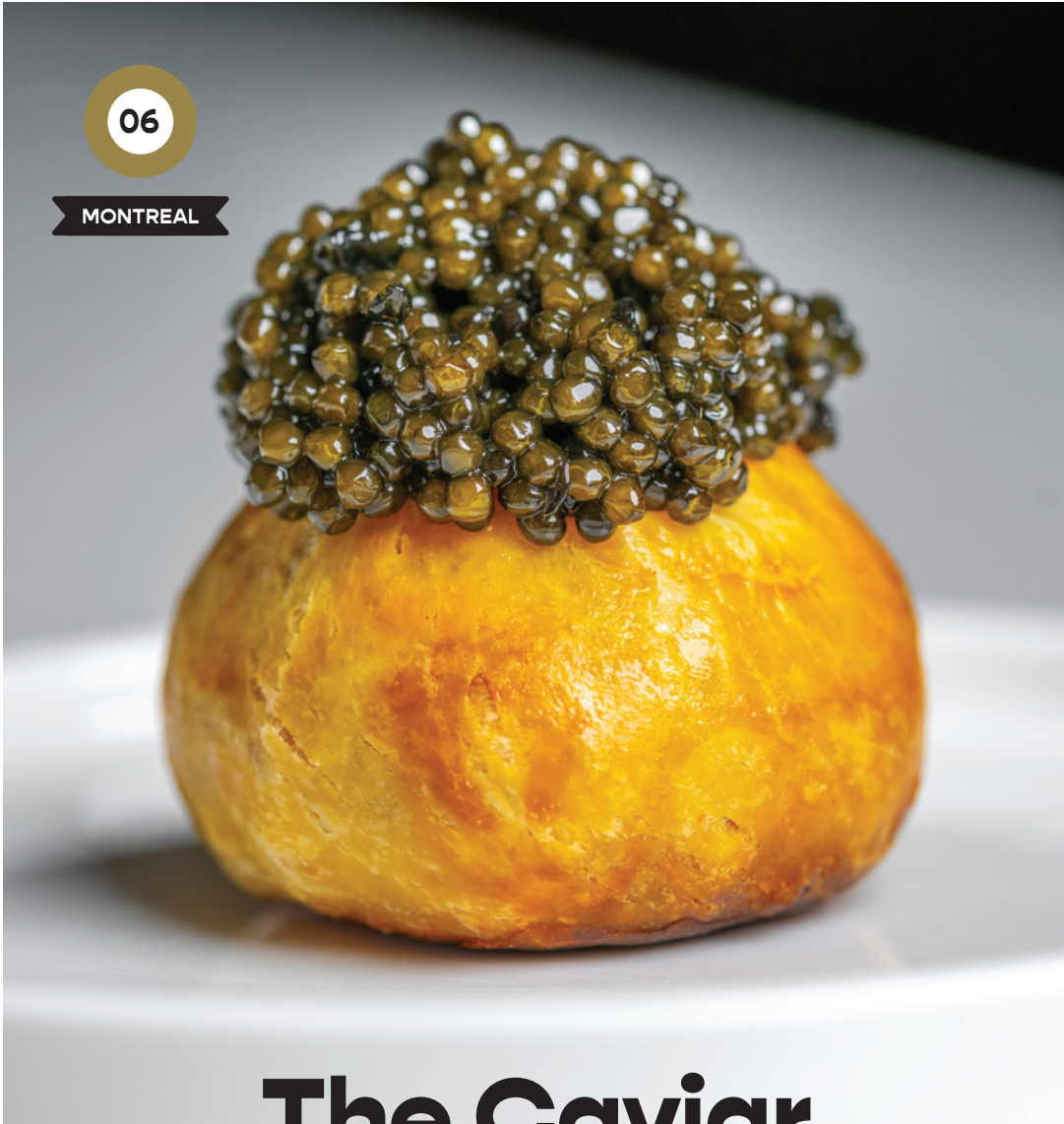
to-source chili for blanched rutabaga to create a bright, fresh aguachile verde.

His tasting menu, available in five- and nine-course options, moves like a wave, rising and receding through temperatures and textures, never overwhelming, always balanced. (And for diners who think Mexican food has to be heavy, fried or covered in cheese, it’s a gentle but firm correction.) Alongside is glorious, natural Catalan wine handpicked by sommelier and co-owner Lindsay Brennan (also Lopez Luna’s wife), whose cellar is an ode to aged malvasia, sun-baked macerations and funky, expressive reds.

There are no shortcuts at Alma—nixtamalization takes about 12 hours, after all. Instead it leans on long-held traditions and slow-fermented ideas. Like a good mole, each dish is layered, made with patience, and just a little unexpected.

06

MONTREAL



The Caviar Knish at Beba

Chef Ari Schor's first food job was for a kosher catering company, where he plucked feathers from chickens and made egg salad party sandwiches for 400 people. Years later, when he opened Beba, his snug Montreal spot, he decided to showcase historical dishes, semi-inspired by his Jewish-Argentinian background: traditional tapas straight out of Spanish vermouth bars, poultry poached in schmaltz, not a tweezer or sous-vide bag in sight. "We're not into inventing things," Schor says (an innovative approach in and of itself). One day, Schor went online to look for inspiration and found a recipe for knish—the flaky, oniony potato turnover you buy from New York street carts—by the catering company he worked for as a teen. It was meant to be. Schor adapted the recipe into one of Beba's signature dishes: he stretches the dough like strudel and laminates it by hand, filling each dumpling with caramelized onions and smashed potato. On top: an enticing blob of bright, poppy caviar. This *is* your grandmother's knish—with an added touch of opulence.



JORDAN, ONTARIO

The Winery Destination

Pearl Morissette, perched on a patch of dreamy Ontario farmland, offers a restaurant, winery, bakery and bucolic getaway in one

First came the winery. Mel Pearl, a prolific, second-generation Toronto condo and commercial developer, partnered with winemaker Francois Morissette in 2006 to plant 30 acres of grapevines in the southern Ontario village of Jordan. Morissette is a magnetic Quebecer who honed his skills in some of France's fanciest wineries. (He labels himself, modestly, a "vigneron," which is like calling Frank Gehry a carpenter). His plan: create wines more exquisite and delicious than had ever been attempted in this country.

Next came the restaurant. When fans of Pearl Morissette's chardonnays and cab francs began showing up at the property, the proprietors recruited two young, well-travelled, uncommonly ambitious Canadian chefs, Daniel Hadida and Eric Robertson, to run a kitchen that, like those wines, would challenge what's possible. Their mandate: seasonal, hyper-local, experimental, always evolving. The Restaurant at Pearl Morissette opened in 2017 and is now as famous as the winery, topping critic's lists and earning a Michelin star. Perched on the second floor of one of the winery's barns, it has sweeping views of the countryside, plus cows, chickens and a farm that supplies much of what appears on the dinner menu.



STEVESTON, B.C.



08

The Chef Making Canada's Most Opulent Thai Food

At Baan Lao, Nutch Phanthoupheng cooks up Royal Thai cuisine in a charming B.C. fishing village

The historic village of Steveston, sitting along the Fraser River in Richmond, B.C., is hardly the kind of place you'd expect to find a fine-dining restaurant. The place has a storybook quality, with many businesses that have been there for decades. There's the toy store, the bread guy, the cobbler, the pub. And yet, it's there that chef Nutch Phanthoupheng decided to open Baan Lao, which was recently named the best restaurant in Canada by the World Culinary Awards. Steveston turned out to be the perfect setting for Baan Lao. The space exudes an almost euphoric sense of calm: white walls, tall ceilings, soft music and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the river. Somehow even the kitchen—usually the source of bangs, clanks, sizzles and yells—is mysteriously muted.

The 20-seat restaurant, which opened in 2021, is Phanthoupheng's love letter to her homeland. She grew up in northeastern Thailand, where she lived on her family's farm and developed an early passion for food. But it wasn't until she moved to B.C. with her husband in 2014 that she pursued cooking as a career. She went back to Thailand to train under Michelin-starred chefs, learning the techniques of Royal Thai cuisine (an official designation that means, yes, it's food fit for a king).

White-gloved servers present plate after meticulous plate. Ingredients are luxe, surprising and sourced from a combination of local and Thai farms, including rice from Phanthoupheng's family property. A meal might include an amuse bouche of water buffalo served on a spoon carved out of pineapple; an appetizer of coconut mousse with Dungeness crab and caviar, wrapped up in a crispy rice cup; and a main course of tom yum soup with a giant Japanese tiger prawn and caviar made out of seaweed. Each dish is fresh and vibrant, representing the essence of its maker: elegant, thoughtful and proud of where it came from.

When those same fans began asking where they could purchase the restaurant's sourdough loaves and pastries, Robertson and Hadida opened a standalone bakery and lunch-stop, RPM Bakehouse, which also sells produce from the farm and preserves made by the restaurant's cooks. On weekends tour groups might be stomping through the estate's fields, edging around cow patties, to learn about cultivating heirloom fruits and vegetables, or attending bouquet-building workshops with the restaurant's in-house floral designer. If it all sounds a little too twee and utopian, well, what's wrong with that? We could all use a little utopia these days, especially if it comes with a chilled glass of Ontario chardonnay.



The Pastrami at Linny's

Linny's, a new amber-lit Toronto dining room from prolific restaurateur David Schwartz, advertises itself as a steakhouse—but that's not the reason to come. The no-excuses, absolutely mandatory, must-order dish is the house-made pastrami, which is presented with the ceremony of a religious ritual. And not for nothing: this iteration is no humble deli meat, but thick, near-fuchsia slabs of smoky, peppery beef, brined for up to seven days until it melts, and served with its natural companions of mustard and dill pickles. The dish is so popular that Linny's is launching a new sandwich shop—Linny's Luncheonette—this spring to keep up with demand and serve the midday crowd.



The Haida Gwaii Chef Who Serves Food in Her Own Dining Room

Diners at Keenawai's Kitchen book over the phone, months in advance, for chef Roberta Olsen's vibrant seafood

Roberta Olsen runs what may be the most unusual restaurant in Canada. It's exceptional not only for the food—traditional Haida cuisine—but for its setting. Keenawai's Kitchen is located in Olsen's own home in Skidegate, a small community on the remote eastern shore of Haida Gwaii. Travellers book in advance, by phone, and Olsen opens her dining room to groups of diners that range from two to two dozen. "My home is like a museum," she says. "I don't even have to tell visitors a story because it's all here." The dining table that dominates Olsen's dining room is surrounded by artwork, masks and totems and commands a dramatic view overlooking the Hecate Strait.

The Haida are traditionally an oceangoing culture, closely connected to the waters surrounding Haida Gwaii. Olsen serves dishes drawn from those same waters. The offerings change depending on the season, and might include k'aaw (herring roe on kelp), skuu (dried seaweed), naaw (octopus balls) and juum (halibut soup).

Olsen, who is now 84 years old, grew up nearby, raised as a food gatherer along with her three siblings. Her family spent summers travelling across the Haida Gwaii archipelago in her father's small boat, gathering food from its bays and inlets to prepare for winter. They would spend months at a time away from Skidegate, fishing for salmon and halibut and venturing onto the ocean floor when low tide exposed clams and mussels.

In 1985, dozens of Haida protesters assembled on Lyell Island, part of Haida Gwaii, to protest clearcut logging that they feared would destroy old-growth forests and devastate ecosystems. The rally turned into a months-long blockade. Olsen prepared food for the protesters, working out of a small cookhouse. "Lyell Island is what brought out this love of cooking for me," she says. "Through all the tears and the drama, I realized that food is such an enormous aspect of life, and you can make people happy with it. That's what I still do."



11

P.E.I.

The Chef Who Turns Trash Into Culinary Treasure

Nick Chindamo of An Island Collective hosts zero-waste micro-dinners, where chefs make brilliant use of peels, bones, offcuts and cooking scraps

Nick Chindamo didn't intend to host the most famous dinner party in P.E.I. By day, he's a full-time forager at the celeb chef Michael Smith's Inn at Bay Fortune. His idea of heaven is an undiscovered forest patch of mushrooms and sorrel. Wouldn't it be cool, he thought, to gather like-minded chefs for an irregularly scheduled pop-up dinner during the off-season, when the tourists vanish and the nights are long and lonely? He and his partner, sommelier Marie-Pier Fecteau, called their event An Island Collective. The 32 tickets to the first event, held in a Charlottetown market hall in 2021, sold out in six minutes. (Each dinner costs \$165, which goes to reimburse chefs for their ingredients, and future events are announced on the collective's website and via Chindamo's Instagram)

There are rules. Each of the 10 chef participants must prepare one course using only what's grown or caught on P.E.I. Everything must be in season or preserved. And, trickiest of all, the chefs must produce zero waste, using every ounce of every ingredient (which inspires some trading, like when one chef's vegetable trimmings end up in another's sauce base). P.E.I. mussels and potatoes are menu staples. But so are the berries of the smooth sumac shrub (in an infusion of water, it passes for lemonade), seaside lambs quarters seeds (a quick replacement for quinoa), wild coastal spinach (salty from the ocean air) and something called seaweed truffle (unshockingly, a seaweed that tastes just like white truffle). Before dessert, Chindamo serves a tea brewed from cooking scraps.

He has now hosted six Island Collective dinners, each in a different location. People travel from across the country to attend. The next will be sometime this December, perhaps, he's not sure exactly when. The point was to build community among cooks, share knowledge and celebrate what the land provides. In the process, he created a movement.

Chindamo by A.I. Douglas; La Cabane d'à Côté by Scott Usheroff

ST-BENOIT DE MIRABEL, QUEBEC



12

The Gourmet Picnic

La Cabane d'à Côté's French delicacies are meant to be enjoyed in an apple orchard

Summer in Canada isn't just a season. It's a feeling, and a fleeting one at that. And there are few better ways to experience it than sitting beneath a canopy of apple trees with a basket full of cold soup, homemade burrata, country pâté and veggies so fresh they taste like they were just plucked from the neighbour's garden (because they probably were).

Set on a 165-acre farm an hour west of Montreal, La Cabane d'à Côté started out as a sugar shack extravaganza from the team behind the famed restaurant Au Pied de Cochon. During COVID, looking for a way to keep their staff busy and their

fires lit, they turned their attention to the orchard, and the idea of high-flavour, chef-driven picnics was born.

Here, you don't reserve a table. You book a weeklong window, where you can show up anytime with proof of reservation—that way you can plan your picnic around the weather (baskets are \$89 and packed for two). You don't order à la carte; you surrender to the moment and whatever culinary delights, somehow both impossibly refined and entirely unfussy, the team has concocted that month. Think chilled asparagus with tarragon mayonnaise, buttery trout tartlets, pasta filled with creamy ricotta, wild garlic and earthy mushrooms, and seared lobster skewers in a tangy sauce. And you don't take out, you take part, in a communion with Quebec's terroir. Cold apple pie—topped with crème brûlée, naturally—in an orchard just makes sense.

This year, La Cabane is adding something new: a barbecue season that will run from mid-August to October. Flame-kissed steak and chicken will be served alongside the last of the summer vegetables and quenching drinks from Au Pied de Cochon's cidery. The vibe is cider-soaked backyard dinner party—if your backyard happens to be a pergola-shaded working orchard staffed by fire-cooking obsessives schooled at Montreal's best restaurants. The meal, like the season, only lasts so long, but the feeling lingers.



TORONTO



13

The Bar Serving Mad-Scientist Cocktails

Mother Cocktail Bar in Toronto—equipped with its own own fermentation room—mixes up wacky, wondrous drinks

Under the stairs at Toronto's Mother Cocktail Bar, behind a glass door, is a tiny room about half the size of Harry Potter's childhood bedroom—complete with a collection of magic potions. This is the fermentation room: the fizzy, funky heart of one of Canada's most inventive cocktail bars, where the shelves are lined with muslin-covered jars and mysterious liquids in various stages of transformation. There's lemon verbena kombucha, lacto-fermented pear honey, preserved plums, ginger beer, and low-ABV quince wine, which has been slowly developing since the fall.

Fermentation is Mother's thing. The bar has a loyal fanbase of food nerds and fermentation heads who show up for the ever-changing menu. Some ferments are quick—like the tart and spicy tepache, made from left-over ginger and pineapple skins, which self-carbonates over the course of a week. Others, like the quince wine, take months.

Whatever the timeline, these ferments bring tang, texture and a touch of controlled chaos to the drinks, along with housemade infusions that add unexpected depth and funk. The Porcelain, for example, is a delicate, floral number made with jasmine tea-infused baijiu, sake, spiced coconut, crème de violette and a splash of juice from lacto-fermented pears. Visions of Oaxaca is a smoky take on an old-fashioned, deepened with pickled black garlic and sweetened with an infusion of candy cap mushrooms.

Several cocktails are barrel-aged in 10-litre oak casks, which are topped up using the solera method—never fully draining the barrel before refilling, which creates layered, evolving flavour profiles. One standout is the negroni ristretto, a bold, spirit-forward tippie with a rotating seasonal lacto-fermented fruit (this season, it's plum).

The prep, of course, is intense; every drink is the product of hours of behind-the-scenes work. Chocolate chip cookie-infused vodka? Check. Housemade caramelized yogurt for an affogato-style cocktail? Naturally. If a regular cocktail bar is about precision and consistency, Mother is about process and play.



14

VANCOUVER

The Six-Seat Sushi Restaurant Within a Restaurant

The minuscule omakase counter Sushi Masuda presents a parade of perfect Japanese bites—and a front-row seat for some virtuosic knifework

Yoji Masuda's sushi spot puts the "hidden" in "hidden gem." You enter through one of Vancouver's glittering office towers, then via a glass-doored print shop. Behind it is a Japanese restaurant (Masuda won't tell diners what it is until they've made reservations), and nestled into a sectioned-off corner of that spot is Sushi Masuda: a six-seat omakase counter, accessible only by a back door. When diners make a reservation, Masuda has to personally text them with directions.

He opened Sushi Masuda last March. By the end of the year, he had a Michelin star and a Michelin Young Chef award. His simple vision: good sushi. Over the 90-minute meal, which runs \$260 a head, Masuda presents a clean flow of 18 to 22 courses from behind a wood counter, walking diners through each dish as he plates it. The intimate setup gives him precise control over the temperature—and therefore, the flavour and texture—of his sushi rice. It also means that anyone who scores a reservation gets

a close-up look at his knifework and an audience with Masuda himself. Sometimes Masuda's wife, Akari, is around too, chopping away alongside him or greeting diners at the front of house.

Masuda was trained on the rhythms of Japan's waters, so his menu shifts with the seasons, reflecting the freshest flavours he can fly in from Tokyo's Toyosu Market. When it's the season for seikogani—pregnant female snow crab from Sapporo, Akari's hometown—he cooks the roe-filled crustacean in seawater as his opener of choice. In the spring, there's firefly squid; in the winter, briny monkfish liver. To close the meal, Masuda selects a seasonal fruit, often the expensive, candy-like muskmelon.

Masuda's obsessive attention to detail extends to his elaborate Japanese tableware—a hand-picked assortment of regional styles, collected throughout a decade of travels. The oldest among them date back to the 19th-century Meiji era. He wraps and stashes them in his checked luggage for the Pacific crossing: "It's always over the weight limit, but not a single dish has ever broken," he says.



15

TORONTO



The Most Coveted Reservation in Toronto

Chef Eva Chin is the mastermind behind Yan Dining Room, a waitlist-only micro-restaurant serving offbeat twists on Chinese classics

Yan Dining Room hides inside Hong Shing, a Chinese restaurant in downtown Toronto. It began as a low-key pop-up—an experiment by chef Eva Chin to serve a Chinese omakase-style tasting menu filled with dishes shaped by her childhood in Hawaii and her years in top kitchens. But word got out. Today, it's one of the toughest tables to book in the city. Yan runs three nights a week, with reservations available via Tock.

The \$108 tasting menu unfolds in eight courses and 15 bites, beginning with a steaming bowl of clear broth. At 7 p.m., Chin enters the room and sets the tone. “This is how my mom welcomes me when I come home,” Chin tells guests. “She doesn’t say hi. She shoves a bowl of broth into my hands and forces me to drink it on the spot. It’s the type of love that raised me.” Sometimes, that’s when the tears start, as guests remember their own childhood homes.

The food changes monthly, based on what Chin’s team gets from their network of local butchers and fishers, as well as the aunties selling produce in Chinatown. But the structure remains the same. After the broth comes a Chinese bread course—maybe a buckwheat milk bread scroll with black olive butter, a jujube-walnut sesame steamed bun, or a French-Canadian chausson aux pommes stuffed with char siu. Then there are five cold snacks, inspired by the traditional Cantonese eight treasure plate. They’re followed by some carbs, like salted-cod agnolotti in dried squid and clam butter or sweet potato noodles in a northern-style stew. The main is always a protein. In March, it was a chicken terrine folded into farro risotto, layered with the flavours of Cantonese steamed chicken—lily

Yan Dining Room by Boris Melev



bulb, wood ear mushroom, goji berries, jujubes, shiitake and Chinese wine.

There's a reflex to call Chin's food fusion, but she resists the term. "I'm simply using everything I've learned, but in Chinese cuisine," she says. Take her version of lobster yi mein, the classic Cantonese noodle dish. Instead of discarding the lobster shells, Chin simmers them into a deeply oceanic Chinese-style lobster bisque and uses that to cook the noodles.

The dining room is fully communal. Strangers become tablemates. Occasionally, they become real-life friends. "I get tagged on Instagram when people who met at Yan hang out after," says Chin. Others return with their immigrant parents. "I know I'm doing something right when folks bring their moms and dads," she says.

MALAHAT, B.C.



16

The Best Lunchtime Pit Stop

Soul's Toast, a food stall off the Malahat Highway, is a must-visit for authentic, messy, delicious Korean street sandwiches

The Malahat Highway, a twisty, forested strip along the Saanich Inlet about a half hour north of Victoria, is one of Canada's most glorious road trips. A pit stop for lunch is non-negotiable: it has to be Soul's Toast, just off the highway, next to (bonus!) a notoriously cheap gas station. Chef Soul grew up in Busan, South Korea, where toasts—known in North America as toasted sandwiches—were a staple of the street food scene. After cooking in 18 kitchens over 16 years, he finally opened his own sandwich stall in 2021. The thing to get is the shrimp toast. It's a towering assemblage of toasted white bread, pickles, sliced eggs, cabbage, a house-made sauce and, of course Soul's signature shrimp patties, crisped up in the style of Korean fried chicken.



TORONTO

The Blind Tasting Menu from a MasterChef

At Akin, chef Eric Chong serves up show-stopping Asian-inspired fine dining. The catch? You never know what you're going to get.

Even before Trump's tariff war, Eric Chong was buying Canadian. Last year, when he opened Akin—his Asian fine-dining spot in Toronto's financial district—the restaurant transformed 200 pounds of peak-season Ontario corn in virtuosic ways. Dehydrated, it became a vibrant yellow garnishing powder with a touch of sweetness. Cooked, it stood in for taro in crispy wu gok dumplings. At Akin, local strawberries are preserved in jam for foie gras parfait, and the organic Peking duck, dried in-house, is raised at a Fergus farm

called Feathered Acres. The result? A celebration of two Canadian specialties: farm-fresh ingredients and, of course, Asian food.

After Chong won the first season of *MasterChef Canada* at 21, he opened R&D with Michelin-starred chef Alvin Leung. Akin is Chong's latest endeavour, and a bid for a Michelin star of his own. His tasting menu, which costs \$275, is blind—no one knows what's in store until the dishes arrive in front of them. The idea is to scramble traditional elements from Asia's vast playground into something new. Yellowfin tuna tartare, for example, is marinated with unagi sauce and furikake, then topped with a frozen foie gras parfait. "Most guests think that's it," Chong says.

ST JOHN'S



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The Forage-Friendly Chef

At Terre, Matthew Swift sources ingredients from forests, fields and even under the sea

For two decades, Matthew Swift led kitchens at casual fine-dining spots, like Vin Papillon and Joe Beef—located just a few doors apart on Montreal's Rue Notre Dame. But unlike in Montreal, where meat and produce trucks drove up at predictable intervals, filling the fridges at Terre, his new St. John's establishment, required dedicated networking. What Swift couldn't source from small-scale farmers, he got from sending hopeful, "sketchy" texts to a merry band of foragers on land and at sea. "The supply chain is a bit of a disaster for me, and sort of by choice," he says.

Swift's go-to aquaman is a licensed diver who collects lobster, scallops, sea cucumbers and urchins and other oceanic meats, taking care not to upset rocks, overharvest or pluck too-young specimens. (His solo scallop catch rate—between 50 to 60 pounds—is on par with half the average haul of larger boats, with the help of one assistant and no net.) Shawn Dawson, one of Swift's greens guys, is similarly careful not to over-pluck edible plants, which, in the past, have included berries, plums and the wild mushrooms that blanket the island in the summertime. Dawson's more novel picks, like stinging nettles, feed into Swift's love of surprise. "I didn't realize you could eat hostas," he says. Last spring, Terre served them with braised beef cheek and fried onions.

Swift is clear-eyed about the challenges posed by the Rock's short harvest seasons, chaotic weather and finite produce. "People come to the restaurant and say, 'Wow, I didn't know you had this ingredient here!'" Swift says. "And I'm like, 'Well, we had 10 kilograms, and I bought most of them.'" In the five years since he arrived in St. John's with no contacts, his kitchen has earned a world-class reputation for churning out rare, inspired and undeniably delicious food out of the ingredients they do have. Diners visiting St. John's would be wise to remember an adage favoured by locals, one usually applied to weather: if you don't like this, wait five minutes.



But then the server reveals that the plate has a liftable lid. Underneath is a vibrant trio of scallops, soaked in a sauce spiked with makrut lime. "It's like a double surprise." The dish is called Hidden Gem.

The 10-course meal changes regularly, so even crowd favourites enjoy only a fleeting time in the limelight. Earlier this year, Chong assembled a Lunar New Year feast, opening with a set of five snacks showcasing culturally auspicious vegetables. For Valentine's Day, he leaned into an aphrodisiac theme. Every menu features a molecular explosion of flavour that Chong calls a "one-bite sphere." So far, iterations have captured the essence of hot pot, herbal chicken soup and tom yum.



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IQALUIT

The Inuit Chef Putting the Arctic on the Culinary Map

Sheila Flaherty of Sijjakkut brings ingredients like narwhal, seal and cloudberry to southern diners

Sheila Flaherty had a few big breakthroughs on her mission to bring Inuit food (or *inuksiutit*) to the masses. The first came in 2010, after she moved up to Iqaluit from Ottawa with her partner, Johnni, a skilled hunter originally from Aussuittuq, or Grise Fjord. Missing urban fare like tapas, Indian and Japanese—which were nowhere on the menu in Iqaluit—Flaherty, a self-taught cook, whipped up arctic char sushi rolls made from Johnni’s fish stash. She sold them through Facebook Marketplace, hand-delivering orders in fleecy pyjama pants in a blizzard.

By 2017, Flaherty’s experimental cuisine earned her a spot on *MasterChef Canada*—a first for an Inuk woman. Her appearance caught the attention of an Executive Affairs staffer, who gave Flaherty her first catering gig: preparing hors d’oeuvres for 25 VIPs, including then-Prince Charles

and then-Duchess Camilla. “No pressure at all, right?” Flaherty says. “I wanted to joke, like, ‘You’re the Prince of Wales? My brother, Charles, is the prince of whales!’ He hunts.” Flaherty later heard from an RCMP escort that Camilla could not stop raving about her hot smoked arctic char.

That royal seal of approval marked the start of Sijjakkut, Flaherty and Johnni’s catering and culinary tourism business (events are listed on the company’s website). Sijjakkut serves exclusively wild food, which means Flaherty and Johnni humanely catch or harvest all the seal, goose, turbot and cloudberry in their dishes. They’ll travel to their hunting and gathering spots via boat or snowmobile—in the case of the char, as far as 300 kilometres away. Occasionally, they’ll barter their catches with friends at higher latitudes, like when Flaherty signed on to serve 60 people at the Dine Out Vancouver festival two winters ago. “They wanted clams, we needed narwhal,” she says.

The ingredients then travel with Flaherty from the freezer to her gigs via giant ice-filled action packers—Rubbermaid containers large enough to fit entire caribou. In the past few years, she’s served all over: soirees at Nunavut Brewing Company, two Canada Goose events in Toronto and New York City, four courses at Vancouver’s Salmon n’ Bannock, and teaching a tutorial on how to work with seal meat at a chef event in Nuuk, Greenland. While Flaherty admits that the traditional Arctic diet’s emphasis on fatty, boiled and raw proteins can be an acquired taste, she’s pleasantly surprised by her diners’ appetite for experimentation.

In 2024, Flaherty spent 11 weeks on the road and missed seal season. This year, her ambitions lie closer to home. She’s nearly secured funding to build a hybrid bed and breakfast and commercial kitchen on her property in Iqaluit, where she plans to serve multi-course tasting menus “At this point, I want people to come to me,” she says.

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HALIFAX



The Petits Fours at Mystic

The bite-sized desserts at Halifax's gorgeous fine-dining spot might arrive on a ridge of driftwood or a lacy blanket of dried moss, or placed among the spikes of a sea urchin. The team harvests petals from the rugosa roses that grow along Nova Scotia beaches and infuses them into dainty fruit jellies—other flavours include quince (the restaurant buys the whole annual harvest from a small farm nearby) and sea buckthorn (imagine a funkier passionfruit with a hint of honey). A traditional French financier is flavoured with the myrtle that grows in nearby peat bogs (it tastes like ginger). And white chocolate fudge is spiked with decadent smoked bone marrow, then poured into a split cow bone. The presentation is like nothing you've ever seen, and the flavours are like nothing you've ever tasted. ■