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THE BOUQUET GARNI

Newsletter of the British Columbia Culinary Arts Specialist Association



President's Message



As I sit on the patio getting ready to write this school year's final President's message, I am left reflecting on the year we have had and find it hard to believe that we are already into June. Maybe it is because I am getting older, but each school year seems to go by faster and faster. If anyone has any advice on how to make time slow down, I am all ears. Around this time every year, I take a moment to reflect and decide what I liked about the year and what would I like to change.

One decision that I made right after returning from Salt Spring so inspired and recharged, was to focus more on my culinary roots. It seems like for years, my focus has been on things like curriculum development, assessments, course codes etc. While all of this is essential to what we do, I think it is also as important to ensure that we stay up to date on culinary trends, technology, techniques and of course networking.

While I know that many of us are individually connected with outside groups, I thought it important for us as a Provincial association to get back out into the culinary world and restart partnerships once very strong but faded for multiple reasons that include the isolation of COVID. Rekindling the relationships between BCCASA with the two other local chef associations, the BC Chefs Association (BCCA) as well as the BC Chef's Table Society has been a valuable journey and a reminder to the local culinary world that we need to encourage and support our high school culinary arts students to sustain the future of the industry.

This year I also worked hard to create somewhat of a work/life balance. Like the rest of you, I love what I do and live it each waking moment. I tend to almost never take my mind off my program, professional development or other opportunities that may benefit or inspire myself, my program, or my students. This year, I made a conscious effort to give myself permission to take some time for just me. Sometimes this would simply be an evening, sometime a whole weekend

and even maybe a week over the breaks. Although I would often find myself feeling guilty and pressure for falling behind, missing deadlines or canceling meetings because of the disconnect, the feeling of jumping back into the race mentally and physically recharged has been a game changer for me. I have always been on an elusive search to find a work balance between chef and teacher, but I have added another challenge of balancing work with mental and physical well-being. I have earned over the past year that life is too short to neglect any aspect of our time here and will continue to pursue a good balance.

As the theme of this year's PSA Day BCCASA conference, that work/life balance will be the main theme of our 2023 BCCASA conference and AGM in October. For the first time ever, we will be dividing the weekend in half by bringing a work/wellness balance to the conference as we learn and collaborate as well as rest and disconnect as a group at the absolutely beautiful Sparkling Hill Resort and Spa in Vernon, BC. A huge thank you to Lori Pilling and Jennifer Gray for working so hard to provide such a unique experience to us all. Please be sure to register early, this conference will fill up immediately as soon as it is published on the BCTF PSA Day page as mandated. We will hold the publication off as long as possible to give current BCCASA members the first chance for registration but please do not hesitate. Once space is gone, there is no more.

Have an amazing and well-deserved summer break. Thank you for all that you do and I encourage you to give yourself the permission to disconnect and enjoy the holiday.

Editor's note:

Hello folks!

So, we got a new website (almost) and a new logo! A special thanks goes out to Nicholle Xiao, whom I was lucky enough to have as a very dedicated teacher candidate from UBC. She grew rapidly in her practice here at the ol' Burn Central, so much so that I was able to hide in my office and work on BCCASA stuff. Kudos Nicholle and good luck!

We hope you like the new logo, we feel it's modern, clean, dynamic, and better reflects us as a group. Some t-shirts and hoodies should be forthcoming. Second there is an almost new website. For now, check out the BETA test version at bccasa.weebly.com. The version you see there, will soon launch at bccasa.ca but I'm still trying to build it. Let me know if you have any feedback, or there's something you'd like to see.

Enjoy your slow roll into summer everyone. Make sure you get those students to scrub that kitchen from top to bottom! Oh yeah, and don't forget to register for the Autumn conference.

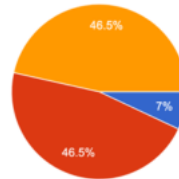
Your friendly neighbourhood editor,
Stephen Schram

NEW LOGO!

THE RESULTS ARE IN!

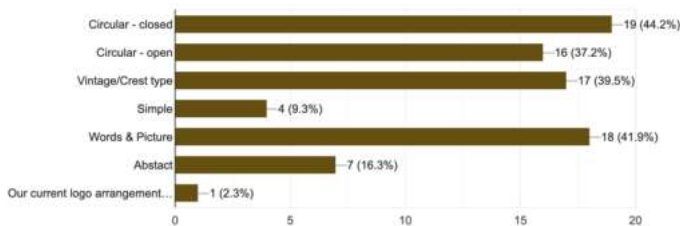
Thanks to everyone who completed the survey about developing our new logo. Your feedback was invaluable. Below are the results which we used the info to design a few options for a new one.

Does our logo need an update?
43 responses

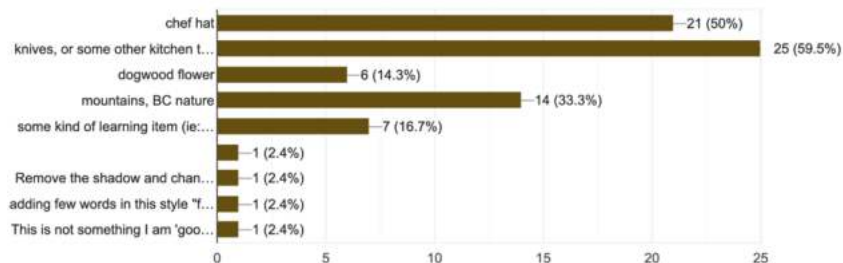


- I love tradition, if it ain't broke don't fix it!
- I love change, out with old give me something new!
- I'm not sure, depends what the new one is?

Which style of logo do you find appealing? (you can pick more than one)
43 responses



If the logo was to be changed, what images are important to you? (you can pick more than one)
42 responses



THE FINAL RESULT!



The Executive felt this was to most cohesive design. We felt it was important to have a clean, modern, and simple logo. The double circle represents a dinner plate. The chef knife represents cooking, the whisk is baking, and the spatula is the bridge between the 2 disciplines. We looked at variety of options for the colour font, including our traditional royal blue, but in the end though the green was more representative of our connect to agriculture, and Take a Bite of BC.

This colour logo will be the official design to be used on all web based and desktop media. There has also been a solid white version, and a solid black version made for clothing and merch (colour logo shirts would be very expensive). You can check out those versions under the "contact us" page on the new website. We will look at having some apparel and merch made for the autumn conference if people are interested.

We hope you like it.

Do You GRAM?



Instagram isn't just for the kids we teach; it can be a powerful tool for chef & chef teachers to communicate, promote, and create a buzz about our classrooms and the food that our students create. If you don't have an account, setting up one is easy, and if you do check out these inspiring people!

@windermere_cafeteria

Get the latest update from the cafeteria and follow along on our culinary adventures. We LOVE food!

The macaron game is strong with this one! Check out the amazing bakery and culinary work done by the hardest working cafeteria is Vancouver!



@chefstablebc

Non-profit organization started by cooks for cooks, dedicated to building a foundation of resources and network supporting culinary professionals.

Spot Prawn Festival organizers... check. Curry Cup cooking competition... check. Hosts of a monthly Social themed dinner... check. Creator of a new chef to Youth Mentorship program. check. I'm starting to wonder if there is anything that Vancouver's Chef Table Society doesn't do. Their IG account is the go to spot to find out what's what.



@sabres_cafe_

Guildford Park Secondary School Teaching kitchen.

Straight outta North Surrey! Teresa and her team run a smooth operation producing amazing dishes and inspiring the students of Guilford Park to culinary prowess.



WHAT'S GOING ON

...around British Columbia

The Turducken Dairies

By Chef Scott Roberts

I would be a mess if I did not mention John Madden when I say the word Turducken. Since our great Editor in Chief called my last article, the Turducken Diaries, and not the turducken diary, I felt obligated to write the second chapter. So, we'll give it another try.

Please see:

<http://www.bccasa.ca/bouquet-garni-/vol-24-issue-3-1.pdf>



My only regret is that I could have taken better photos; I like the images posted here but did not feel they did the Turducken, Justice; we tried our best to come up with the recipe. Keep in mind each program will

have different ovens and will cook differently. We received a take a-bite out of BC turkey, which depending on where you buy it right now, you might be paying anywhere from \$35 to \$50, except Superstore or Walmart if you get a deal. We also got a duck for about 15\$, and a Cornish game hen for about \$9.

I will focus more on the cooking time, but you can read how we did the first one in the BG. We deboned All three turkeys, game hen, and duck and stuffed them. We used a little bit of bread stuffing and then roasted it in our combi oven; we started with about 45 minutes of dry Heat, and then it was getting a bit



crispy, so we used moist Heat for 45 minutes, then finished with 30 minutes of dry Heat. Keep in mind, of course, this may be different for different ovens. We have an Alto-Sham combi

oven. The last time we made this, we cooked it just for the class to experiment; I was concerned it may not work for lunch. This time, we served it for lunch service. Overall, we got about 20 portions out of it, I don't know how that would work for an extensive program or a large school, but for us, it worked. People loved the flavour, and We had staff lining up for the Turducken.

We want to thank "take a Bite out of BC" for providing the turkeys, the last couple of years have been the most expensive we've seen Turkeys, making it challenging to be able to have it on our menu. With the donations, we were able to work on new skills and serve this product at lunch without increasing the cost of that particular entree.



In the end, the Turducken is a lot of work but worth it, and I am already thinking about dairy three.

The 20th Annual Lord Tweedsmuir Chili

Cooking Competition in Surrey

by John Buist



This year was our 20th Surrey Secondary Schools Chili Cook-Off. It has been hosted at Lord Tweedsmuir for 16 years and we were excited to get back to business after a 3-year Covid-Induced

hiatus. There were fewer teams this time around, but no shortage of creativity or passion from the Culinary Arts Students that participated.

Teams made chili in 4 separate categories: Meat, Vegetarian, Poultry and even Seafood. There were 'Special Prizes' as well, for: Best Presentation, Team Spirit, Kitchen management, Theme, Sportsmanship and Most Original/Creative Recipe.

In the end, the **Best In Show** winner was the "Nor-Vegan", Oliver Vimos, from Mountain Secondary in Burnaby who submitted a vegan, wild foraged chili with fiddleheads!

He managed a total score of 91 %, and also won Best Vegetarian and Best Theme



Some of the other winners:



Best Presentation

- 1st Place - Spice Girls - Mannat Heer and Navjot Kang from Enver Creek Secondary

- 2nd Place - Amina Farah and Muna Al-Kebesi



Best Team Spirit: "Dancing in the Sunlight" Lexandre Caticat, and Eeshmeet Saran from Enver Creek

Best Kitchen Management: Chang Lui's Coconut Chili from Burnaby Central.

Best Sportsmanship: The Pirates (an amazing

chili with Prawns & Scallops) – Nathan Reid, Nicole Clint, Hayley Ross from Cedar Community Secondary



Most Original Recipe :

- 1st Place-"Get Stuffed" Angad Gambhir, Mia Saleem from Enver Creek
- 2nd Place- "The Bannock Babes"(Kenzie McCurdy, Jessica Baloc, Kennedi Peacock

Best Meat Chili: Zoey Badiuk from Cedar Community Secondary with a Blueberry & Bison Chili

Best Vegetarian: The NorVegan, Oliver Vimos, Mountain Secondary



Best Poultry: "The Arabian Princesses" Muna Al Kebasi and Amina Farah from Enver Creek

Best Seafood: The Pirates – Nathan Reid, Nicole Clint, Hayley Ross

Some of the Rodeo Staff stopped by 'for lunch' after the Chili Chefs were finished cooking. They were all fed well and noticed some very interesting flavour combinations. As usual, we were all winners: the judges enjoyed the kids and their amazing, unique dishes, the participants learned some new skills and got to visit with other like-minded Culinary students and the teacher-chefs got to hang out and swap stories about how their semesters are going as well as encourage/cheer on their students. It's some of the best reasons for doing what we do.



If you were unable to attend the event, I highly recommend getting some kids involved next year.

Maple Ridge's 18th Annual Chowder Cooking Competition

by Kyle Tillotson



As the sun shone and the cottonwood tossed and tumbled upon a warm May breeze in Maple Ridge, Culinary Arts students put their skills to the test as Samuel Robertson

Technical Secondary played host to the 18th annual SD42 Chowder Cook-off. Beginning on the initiative of Chef Daniel Lesnes, the competition gives teams of up to 3 students two hours to complete a chowder from scratch. This year we had 16 teams in total coming from all the local programs: Thomas Haney, Garibaldi, Maple Ridge Secondary, and Samuel Robertson, along with a contingent from Abby Secondary—thanks for making the trek, Scott!

The competition was focused, but fun and I think I can speak for the other chefs when I say that the most rewarding thing for us, as educators, was seeing our students having a good time cooking. In my classroom, I repeat ad nauseam: *I don't care if you end up working in the industry or not, I just want you to enjoy cooking for yourself and others.*



Trevor Randle (coaching a whopping 5 teams) shared this insight with myself and the other SD42 chefs as we “debriefed” via text:

“There were two moments that so organically reminded me of why this local competition is so important.



#1. When the GSS group was announced as the Top Winner. Their cheers were not just because they won, but pure excitement that came from all

the effort and heart they put into their dish. They were instant cheers of pride.



#2. My student that did it solo and came in 3rd. As everyone saw, he was wound up so tight the entire day. When it came time to serve the judges, he was struggling to plate and garnish the 3 bowls on his own. Another MRSS team (who didn't know him at

all) without hesitation, jumped in and helped him plate, despite helping the "competition".

Because of these two moments, it turned out to be one of my favourite competitions I can remember.”

Judging for us this year were: Mike Mulcahy, chef/owner of the immensely popular Big Feast here in town; Chris Janowski, chef patron of local gem Sunflower Café; and Patrick Fitzgerald, long-time chef and current rep with Pratts Food Service. At the end of the deliberations, they were unanimous in their decisions and Garibaldi took home the trophy again this year, claiming the top two tiers of the podium, with a solo competitor from MRSS snagging third prize. We had prizes donated from GFS and Pratts, and I was able to get \$300 from our PAC to buy enough goodies to supply the shortfall.

Overall, the event was a hit and I want to thank all the students as well as their chef mentors/ coaches for their hard work and commitment.



Lastly, I'll leave you all with a bit of a call to action: if you haven't already, try and connect with other chef instructors in your district and try to plan some sort of collaborative venture, whether it's a cooking competition, a fancy dinner for a special occasion (See BG Vol 22 #3), or even just a shared field trip. The students get to experience food and cooking in a different context than the one they're used to in class, and there's nothing quite like the camaraderie.



Member Profiles

by Scott Roberts

I volunteered in the program in Salmon Arm Secondary Sullivan, to get my volunteer hours before I applied to the UBC Chef Education and worked with Alex Varga. Alex is part of the reason I got into the cooking industry, his encouragement along the way was the main reason I followed the path of teaching. It is very interesting to interview someone who shares the same mentor as you. When Chef Varga retired, I spoke with him, and he mentioned a former student who was interested in the job, Nimmi Erasmus.

Nimmi Erasmus is now the teaching Chef at Salmon Arm Secondary Sullivan. After she got the job, I looked into her work and was very impressed with the number of pictures and write-ups done about her. It's like a food blog of all the neat stuff being done in the program. Later I found out she takes all the pictures of food herself. When I was at a conference on Salt Spring I got to talk with Nimmi and reflect about Chef Varga and how his mentorship helped and pushed us both.

Q: What helped you get into cooking?

I had a passion to cook and coming from a rich Indian culture where food and family are the core of the home, I consider myself blessed to have grown up with grandmothers, aunts, uncles, and my mum who brought out my passion to cook. I attended a renowned international IB school in the foothills of the Himalayas called Woodstock International till Grade 9 before immigrating to Canada. I had made up my mind when I was 8 years old that I wanted to become a Chef. After immigrating with my family from India to Canada, I finished middle school in Salmon arm, then attended SAS Secondary where I completed the culinary program for grades 11 & 12. I was highly competitive so I got involved in chef's competitions and whatever I could get my hands on. I graduated from SAS and then attended S. A. I. T. where I earned my degree in hospitality management and a professional cooking diploma. I then furthered my skills and apprenticeship to attain my Red Seal. I commenced my apprenticeship at the Fairmont Banff Springs and then finished it in Banff and Calgary at local restaurants. I had my Red Seal and journeyman by the time I was 21 years of age and through experience and good mentors worked mainly with the hotel chains. Chef Alex Varga along with some other profs pushed me to teach and over time I had worked my way up to being an Exec sous chef for a hotel chain in Calgary. I also worked in the United Kingdom where I helped open a restaurant for someone else. I helped launch two concepts in Calgary as well and was a part of the management team. This was all prior to teaching. It was when I was in the industry.



Q: So, you're on the letter of permission, while you work on your teaching degree?

If teaching is something you wish to do and you wish to raise the bar for the next generation, then you should go down this path. In BC, the Ministry of Education requires you to have an Education Degree, along with your Seal and teaching

experience. Because I have a young family at home, I could not return to the industry, so I started teaching at Pacific Academy in Surrey, after returning with my young daughter from the UK. It was there where that my interest to teach developed. I come from a family of educators, so this was coming I suppose. I am now fifteen credits away from a Bachelor of Education. After further developing the program at Pacific Academy, I was hired by SD. 83 to take over my mentor's program which truly has been such an honor. I redesigned the program making it farm-to-table and have developed my own curriculum using some guidelines to change the concept of Culinary Arts here at SAS Sullivan. My advice really is to push yourself to educate yourself no matter what you choose to do. At the end of the day, this is all for the next generation and skills must be attained regardless. I am all for culinary arts and further developing programs like this. Teaching kitchens are a neat place as hands-on learning is taught in our respective spaces. Students do not just learn how to cook but attain life skills that are transferable. You really are inspiring the next generation so why not be educated well to deliver.

Q: What is your favorite dish to make with your students?

Anything fresh catches my attention. Butter chicken, which is not even classically Indian is a big selling item and we make it the authentic way so I would say I like that. Anything with fresh fish is always tasty. Our Salmon Rice Bowls are amazing too. All food is good if it is made right. If the kids learn, they gain inspiration and are willing to put in the effort to create good, healthy, fresh food. everything is a favorite. We do this neat Mango Mousse too and of course from start to finish it is created in-house, so that is one of my favorites as it is garnished with fresh Indian mangoes brought up from the coast, especially during warmer months. We use local farms for our produce. Our fish, Beef, and certain seasonal produce are all local. Because we get it in smaller quantities, we sell out. So, our deliveries come twice a week and twice a month Sysco delivers the necessary big



items. We are blessed to be in the Shuswap because we are surrounded by farms. All our microgreens are grown in-house when we can we use items like watermelon radish, rainbow carrots, beans, Aubergine, and peaches from the Okanagan Valley. Our sausages and certain bread especially are custom-made for us using a recipe that I provided to the butcher, who happens to be a friend. Our breads are from a specialty bakery in North Vancouver and the rest of the breads are made in-house by our kids. I mean you just cannot beat making everything from scratch. That to me, is personally my favorite food, when it is made fresh, and that love is brought to the table so everyone can indulge.



Q: Have you achieved your goals at SAS?

What I wanted to do I felt like I had done at SAS Sullivan. My principal and administration here supported me in my vision. I wanted to bring global cuisine concepts and heighten the elements of Culinary Arts within the program and I feel, that is exactly what we did. Our lovely community has enjoyed the food. We have made a profit while creating high-quality food. We have made money for the program, earned recognition within the province, and attended conferences to speak about the program and now I need to return home to Surrey where my husband and son are. I have to take care of my family as well, because for the last 3 years we have been apart. Our home is there so I need to wrap it up and come home if a teaching position opens, which I sincerely hope up this year. My plan is to return home to my family and teach in a teaching kitchen and elevate the program to the best of my capabilities. I am happy to teach food and elevate a program like that too but ideally, a teaching kitchen is where I wish to be. Once I complete my bachelor of Ed, I will pursue my master's in education too!



Member Profiles

Submitted by Brian Smith

Daniel Lesnes, BCCASA honorary lifetime member and the long-time Chef Instructor of Garibaldi Secondary School, retired in June 2019 after 3 decades in the position. Kind, soft-spoken, and very humble. Daniel has been a mentor and role model to thousands of students as well as to many colleagues and peers.



Daniel's culinary path began in the small village of Len in the north of France, where he was born, the youngest of five children. His father and grandfather were master butchers, and his father also owned a small catering company.

With just a bag on his back, Daniel left France and disembarked in Montreal in September 1982. He started his Canadian journey at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel. In 1986, he made his way to the Hotel Vancouver coinciding with the start of Expo 86.

He next decided that he wanted to start teaching. First, private lessons for adults. Daniel then responded to a small advertisement for a position at Garibaldi Secondary. "I didn't know where Maple Ridge was. I had to rent a car to come for the job interview" This would be the start of a 29-year career. A steep learning curve for a man that had never stepped foot in a Canadian high school. While teaching, Daniel worked diligently on his Bachelor of Education degree, and graduated from the University of British Columbia in 2002.

Daniel's students have participated in the gingerbread competition, the Harvest Festival, and the SD#42 Chowder Competition, for which he was the founder. When you ask him what he is most proud of, he will state that it was starting bi-yearly culinary tours. Since 2006, Daniel has led multiple trips and tours to New York City, twice to France, and once to Spain and Italy.

Daniel was the Host Chef for Agriculture in the Classroom/UBC Summer Institute for many years and was awarded AITC's Teacher of the Year for all his hard work and dedication. Daniel was a key player in BCCASA's foundation in 1997. He served as its 1st second vice-president, producing the Bouquet Garni and creating and maintaining the website.



Daniel has recently returned to France sailing aboard the Queen Mary 2 and is currently building a house in Angers. He spends time volunteering at the Angers Anglophone Library, teaching people to speak French as well as teaching locals to speak English. During the past year he has traveled to South-East Asia and cruised on a sailboat in the Caribbean.

Safe travels Daniel, you deserve it.

Hawaiian Conference Redux

by Trevor Randle

Earlier this year, a unique opportunity arose through our new chef association partnerships to attend a BCCASA endorsed culinary arts conference on the beautiful island of Oahu, Hawaii.

The conference was attended by educators and industry professionals. Centered around the Hawaii Hotel and Restaurant Show at the Hawaii Convention Centre, the trade show showcased local and international cuisine as well as world class seminars and presenters on subjects including; How to Manage Stress, Worry & Well Being in Your Kitchen, Plant-Based Opportunities, Waste Management and Current Food Safety Issues.



The true highlight of the conference was the two-day visit to the Kapi'olani Community College to collaborate

The conference also took us on multiple culinary tours and culinary featuring local agriculture and fisheries. A pineapple plantation, macadamia nut farm, Kona coffee lessons, fish auction, bakery tour and tasting were among the highlights.



with culinary instructors and food scientists. Their passion for cuisine education and drive to attract international students to their beautiful campus was nothing less than inspiring.

This pro d conference reminded me of the multiple international conferences BCASA has hosted. The learning that comes from experiencing cuisine and culinary education in a different culture is indescribable and unforgettable. The experience has always improved my pedagogy by broadening my knowledge and skills. Further, the sharing of my life lessons in the teaching kitchen gives my students an opportunity to learn about so many different cultures through international cuisine.



October
19 & 20,
2023



BCCASA CONFERENCE AND AGM

Balancing the Scales: Lessons for Teaching Chef's Health and Wellness

BCCASA will be hosting the next conference and AGM at the beautiful Sparkling Hill Resort & Spa. Join us as we collaboratively learn about and explore healthy cuisine, Vernon agriculture and experience the methods and benefits of personal wellness. Space is limited and will go fast. Cost: Member BCCASA Before June 30 - \$225. BCCASA Member After June 30 - \$300. Non BCCASA Member Rate - \$500.

REGISTER AT: WWW.BCCASA.WEEBLY.COM

Register Here @ bccasa.weebly.com

2023 BCCASA Conference Itinerary

Thursday October 18 - Check In

Sparkling Hill KurSpa, steam rooms, indoor and outdoor pools available until 10:00pm.



Friday October 19

Breakfast at hotel

9:30 - Board Bus for tours

10:00 - Group #1 Davison Orchard

Group #2 Planet Bee

11:00 Board bus

11:30 - Group #1 Planet Bee

Group #2 Davison Orchard

12:30 - Board bus to Vernon Secondary School

1:00 - Lunch hosted by Chef Jennifer Gray and

VSS Secondary Culinary Arts students

2:00 - 4:00 - Breakout sessions - Experimenting

with apples, botanical mocktails,

experimentation and detoxing,

lotion bar making using locally

harvested ingredients.

4:15 - Board bus to hotel.

5:30 - board bus to Parallel 50 Winery

6:00 - Wine tasting

7:00 - Dinner



Saturday October 20

Breakfast at hotel

10:00 - AGM

11:00 - Tour of hotel staffing facilities, kitchens
and 400-year-old Austrian restaurant.

12:30 - Wellness lunch at hotel

2:00 pm - Wellness breakout sessions (Aqua Fit,
Yoga and Hiking)



Evening at leisure to enjoy hotel spa facilities

Hotel Information



SPARKLING HILL WELLNESS HOTEL LTD.
888 SPARKLING PLACE | VERNON | B.C. | V1H 2K7
1.877.275.1556 TF | 250.275.1556 O | 250.275.1610 F | SPARKLINGHILL.COM

Rooms are booked under the group name: BCCASA. Please be sure to refer to this group when booking.

RATES:

Standard Mountain View with 1 King - \$250 per night plus tax/fees

Standard Mountain View with 2 Queen Beds - \$250 per night plus tax/fees

Standard Lake View with 1 King - \$270 per night plus tax/fees

Standard Lake View with 2 Queen Beds - \$270 per night plus tax/fees

NOTES FROM THE BACK OF HOUSE

... great thoughts on what we do

Noma is closing its world famous restaurant. Is this the future of fine dining?

Posh Danish establishment re-invents itself as a food lab, calling its former business model 'unsustainable'

By Sheena Goodyear
CBC

Posted: Jan 10, 2023

Accessed at:

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithapens/noma-reinvention-1.6709199>

World famous Noma is closing its restaurant. Is this the future of fine dining?

As one of the most celebrated restaurants in the world closes its doors, a Canadian chef who worked there is wondering whether there's a future for fine dining as we know it.

Noma — a Copenhagen restaurant known for its lavish and inventive 20-course meals — announced that it's transforming into "a pioneering test kitchen" in 2024.

That means the fine dining establishment — which has three Michelin stars and been named the world's best restaurant by several publications — won't be open to the public for the foreseeable future.

Its founder, chef René Redzepi, says there may be Noma pop-ups at some point, and that he'll eventually return home to "do a

season in Copenhagen." But overall, he told the New York Times, the modern fine-dining model he helped to create is "unsustainable."

David Zilber agrees. Originally from Toronto, he was the director of Noma's fermentation lab from 2016 to 2020.

Here is part of his conversation with *As It Happens* Host Nil Köksal.

What do you think is behind the decision to move the focus from running a restaurant to Noma existing as a food lab?

I worked at Noma for over six years, and it felt like 18. René's been doing it for 20, so that must feel like 60. So, I get it.

How difficult is it to pull off what you guys [pulled] off?

It was akin to maybe training for the Marines.

It felt like that level of not just dedication, but like physical endurance was required to actually do the job to the standard that was needed to be the world's best restaurant. Getting up at five in the morning to be at the door at 5:50, leaving later that day at 1:30 in the morning after re-scrubbing the kitchen because something wasn't clean enough.

It was a demanding six years — but also extremely rewarding.

Give us a snapshot of what the experience would be like for [Noma diners].

As a diner, it's a bit like opening a closet door and finding Narnia on the other side. Beyond whatever baggage and preconceptions might come with arriving at the gates of something that is considered the best in the world ... when you actually kind of step foot in the building, you're immediately transported onto a roller coaster through the biomes and flavours and stories and landscapes.

It sounds pretentious and it sounds trite, but when you're actually there and it's happening, you're also greeted with the most disarming service you've ever experienced. As if your buddy from your college dorm down the hall was bringing you a plate of something that took 36 hours to make.

You had to love what you did to work there, and to give these guests experiences that they would never forget. Which is why ultimately, by the time you finish your 18-, 20-course meal and you've tasted thousands of different flavours that you never even imagined were possible and you leave, you feel high.

But when the staff leaves, they're depleted.

Yeah. And there's also an emotional tax to giving that much of yourself to strangers every day, you know, on top of the physical burden and the mental burden of putting the restaurant together. It does kind of

make for a perfect storm of burnout, I would say.

Is there a dish, though, that you helped create or contributed to that that will always stay with you?

One winter, René's like, "For the next season, I want mould all over the menu."



We had to figure out how to grow a very delicious mould on asparagus. And it was plated with a kind of multicoloured white and green sauce. It looked like an impressionist painting, almost surrealist, with a landscape of forged herbs that was arranged almost like a diorama. And you're looking at like, these fat stalks of asparagus covered under snow, and you bite into it and you're like: This tastes like the best cheese I didn't know France never produced.

I think a lot about those times where we were trying to basically push nature to its limits to create this experience and to create something that never existed on Earth before.

Chef Redzepi — or René, as you've said — also told The New York Times that Noma, in its current form, was "unsustainable." [He said]: "Financially and emotionally as an employer and as a human

being, it just doesn't work." So what do you think that says about the future of restaurants like Noma?

I think that statement kind of serves as a canary in the coal mine for a certain type of restaurant. I think that maybe there's a sea change. Maybe the time has come for restaurants like this that go to the ends of the Earth to one-up each other. Because I don't think that a restaurant that serves food as delicious as Noma or as creatively as Noma needs to be run in the same way. And I thought that even when I was there.

How should it be run?

Creative and delicious doesn't equate a 20-course tasting menu. Neither do I think it equates a \$1,000 [US] cheque for a single hit.

The style of service that was born out of the French establishment, that then kind of went through period permutations in the '90s and the 2000s through gastronomical movements, you kind of keep beating this horse that should have died with monarchies, and trying to contort it and turn it into bigger and better and more impressive and entertaining versions of itself without ever stopping to think: Is this the be all and end all of food and cooking?

I think there's lots of other alternatives. Ones that foster community involvement and feed lots of people equitably and are equitable for the staff that work in them. I think soup kitchens and long houses are great examples of that.

So do you think that fine dining is inherently exploitative?

I think it's a bit of an inverted pyramid. I'll say that. I think that it's very top-heavy in what it portends to deliver to the guests that eat within its walls. And what's squeezed at the bottom is often human labour, ingredients, [and] rejections to farmers for products that aren't good enough. And then, well, what do they do with it?

Can I just ask you, what do you just love to eat when you're not working?

I just like cooking tasty, tasty food from all over the world. I'm Torontonians, you know. So it's Taiwanese one night and Caribbean the next night and mac and cheese the night after that.

There's nowhere like Toronto in terms of access to all different kinds of food.

Here's a funny thing. Growing up and trying to learn to cook in Toronto, I always thought that Toronto was so shafted in terms of fine dining on the global scale. Like, there were no Michelin star restaurants back then in the early 2000s. There were no restaurants that got, like, global accolades. And that's why I left Canada.

And 10 years later, after jumping ship, I realize now that we're seeing fine dining sputter ... Toronto had it so figured out.

It's a food city, beyond the multiculturalism of it all, that shines without being overwrought and overthought and showy and glittery for the wrong reasons.

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