

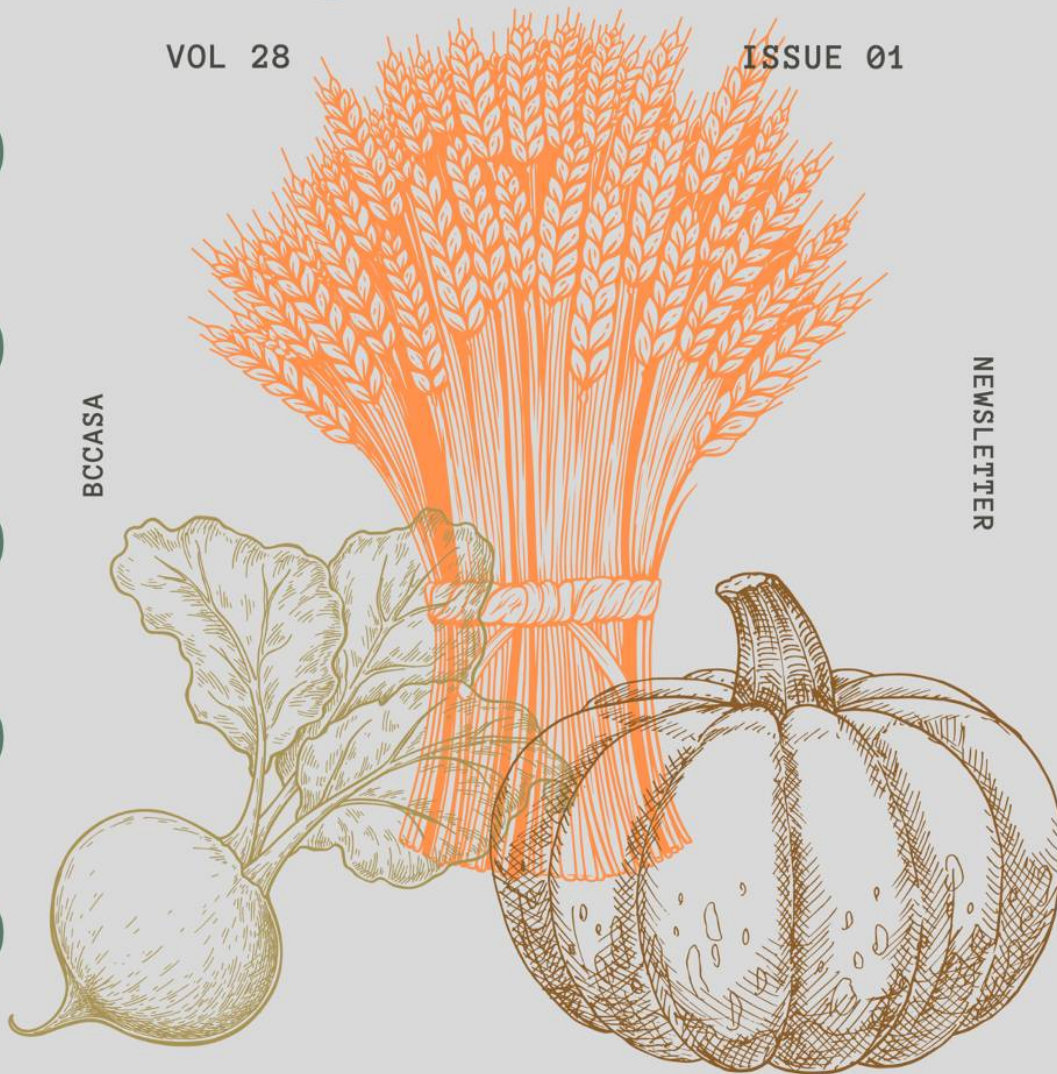
BOUQUET GARNI

VOL 28

ISSUE 01

BCCASA

NEWSLETTER



Autumn 2025

THE BOUQUET GARNI

Newsletter of the British Columbia Culinary Arts Specialist Association

President's Message



It's that time of year again when summer already feels like a distant memory and the routines of teacher life are in full swing. Some years, the start-up is a grind. Other years, everything just seems to fall into place.

This year, for me, has been one of those smooth ones, surprisingly smooth. Despite having more students than ever, things are just working. (Although I'm typing this with a bit of hesitation, hoping I'm not jinxing it!)

Most importantly, I'm heading into school each day feeling sharp, focused, and genuinely inspired. I'm keeping ahead of the curve, ready for the barrage of questions, the hustle, the organized chaos of the kitchen. And while experience plays a part, I honestly believe a big reason for this clarity is a summer spent recharging, prioritizing self-care, and embracing some positive life changes.

Over the past few years, I've learned just how much stress and outside noise can weigh on both body and mind. As chefs and teachers, we're used to pushing through, showing up no matter what, and doing the job, but it's not without a cost. This year feels different. Clearer. Lighter.

And in that clarity, I'm reminded of how lucky we are to do what we do. We have such unique roles in our schools, and we get to work with some truly incredible people, both in education and in the culinary industry.

I've had the privilege of connecting with many of you this past year, as well as industry partners who are always eager to hear about the amazing things happening in teaching kitchens across the province. The enthusiasm and generosity they show, with time, resources, and opportunities for our students is a powerful reminder that we are not doing this work alone. Our students really are the next generation of culinary leaders, and there's a whole community rooting for them (and us).

These conversations and connections have helped clarify our direction as a PSA this year and have inspired how I'd like to approach my final term as President of BCCASA if I am allowed the privilege to serve one more time.

Over the next year, the BCCASA Executive will focus on supporting and engaging our members in meaningful ways. We'll continue with the familiar, communication through social media and newsletters, and offering

strong professional development. We'll also focus more on community building, peer support, and public awareness of the great work happening in our classrooms.

I'll share more details at our upcoming AGM but keep an eye out for both business and social opportunities ahead. They're all designed to help you find that same clarity and balance we all need to thrive.

We are incredibly lucky to be part of a strong and passionate community of chef educators here at BCCASA. Let's make the time to show up for one another, to connect, share, and support each other through the challenges and celebrations of this unique and rewarding work.

Here's to a year of clarity, connection, and continued passion for the craft.

Warmly,
Trevor

From Your 2023-2025 BCCASA Executive

This is an election year for BCCASA, and I'd like to take a moment to sincerely thank **Kyle Tillotson** for his contributions over the past two years in his role as 2nd Director. Kyle has decided to step down from the Executive, and we are grateful for the steady voice of support and reason he brought to the team.

At this time, all other current Executive members have chosen to self-nominate and are willing to continue in their roles. However, it's important to note that *all positions will be considered vacant at the time of the election*, and any eligible member is welcome to put their name forward for a position on the BCCASA Executive.

If more than one person is nominated for a position, a vote will be held. For eligibility criteria and nomination requirements, please refer to the BCCASA Constitution, available on our website: www.BCCASA.ca

Editor's note:

I hope you enjoy this edition of our illustrious *Bouquet Garni*. I was fairly light on submissions from y'all so I had a little fun coming up with a few articles. In honour of our Day of Truth & Reconciliation, check out this edition of an all Indigenous themed "What's Going on in BC". If you plan on joining us for our annual Conference and AGM and you never been to Nanaimo before, I've done a little digging into the city's local libation, and culinary haunts. I can't wait to reconnect with you all that weekend.

Bye for now, and keep those ideas and submissions coming in.

Your friendly neighbourhood editor,
Stephen Schram

WHAT'S GOING ON

...around British Columbia

Squamish Nation Chef's Travelling Kitchen meant to Inspire Pride in Indigenous Cuisine

By Brandon Barrett

Pique Newsmagazine, Nov 24, 2024

Paul Natrall's Little Spirit Moon pop-up will teach traditional and contemporary techniques at schools and offices across B.C.



It's been a decade and a half since award-winning Squamish Nation chef Paul Natrall enrolled in an Indigenous cooking course at Vancouver Community College. All these years later, it's a pair of field trips he and his fellow students took that still vividly sticks out in his mind.

"They brought us to Musqueam [territory] to see some of their traditional smoke houses. That was huge to be able to see some of those things still being practiced. We also went up to Mount Currie on special occasions when they would prepare wind-dried salmon," he said.

Now, instead of students going to the knowledge source, Natrall wants to bring it to them. The man behind Mr. Bannock, Vancouver's first Indigenous food truck, is taking his wealth of experience on the road with a new venture called Little Spirit Moon. Named after the 13 moons in the lunar calendar recognized by many Indigenous cultures, the project is a travelling classroom of sorts. Outfitting a trailer with a dehydrator, freeze dryer, and smoker,

alongside equipment for canning and pickling, Natrall plans to visit schools, offices, and organizations interested in learning traditional and contemporary Indigenous culinary techniques. That will include recipes for his trademark bannock, dried meats, homemade jams, salsas, and spice rubs.

"It's super exciting," he said. "The whole goal is to be able to share the knowledge and experience I gained from the last 15 years within our community, hoping to connect with people that aren't connected to their communities, who can't go to their homelands and learn from their families and knowledge keepers there."

Like so many aspects of Indigenous culture in Canada, colonization severed First Nations from their culinary traditions. From 1885 to 1951, the potlatch, a traditional ceremony involving feasts, dancing and singing that was integral to the social hierarchy and governance of Canada's Indigenous Peoples, particularly on the Northwest Coast, was banned by the federal government, who saw it as un-Christian and a barrier to assimilation. Settlers took control of salmon distribution on the West Coast. Buffalo were nearly wiped off the Prairies, Ottawa's attempt at starving the First Nations that relied on them.

The disconnection manifested in smaller, but no less damaging ways, as well. Traditional food knowledge was lost along the way. Teachings about wild plants. Family recipes long forgotten.

"There's a huge gap between Indigenous food ways and all the other cuisines from around the world," said Natrall. "There was a lot that was lost with the trauma. I'm just super happy to be a part of the Indigenous culinary world that is rebuilding the food culture. I see a lot of successful Indigenous chefs across the country and I talk to a lot of them and really just cheer them on. We are stepping up and taking our place in the culinary world."

With only two brick-and-mortar Indigenous restaurants across the entire Lower Mainland—Salmon n’ Bannock Bistro in Vancouver and Tradish’s The Ancestor Café in Langley—there are few opportunities for the average diner to sample First Nations food, let alone know how to cook it. Through his Mr. Bannock food truck and catering service, as well as his role as chair of the Indigenous Culinary of Associated Nations, Natrall is well positioned to change that. And he’s fully aware it’s going to take more than just food to do so.



“It’s not just cooking. You have to be able to tell stories and have a bigger presence on social media, too. When I go travel and talk with people, there are a lot of great cooks out there, but if they can’t share stories, communicate and talk, that’s not enough,” he said. “You have to have the hustle and drive, and hopefully I can show people, if I can do it, they can too.”

Cooking in two worlds

by Mike McGhee



On March 6 and 7, 2025, UBC Food Services and Vancouver Community College (VCC), with primary financial support from Feed BC, held the *Cooking in Two Worlds* gathering.

Organized by leaders from UBC and VCC, with consultant Jared Qwustenuxun Williams, a food educator, writer, and consultant from Quw’utsun (Cowichan) on Vancouver Island, the gathering was deeply rooted in the objective of enhancing the presence of local Indigenous foods in British Columbia’s public institutions.

Over the two days, *Cooking in Two Worlds* brought together renowned Indigenous leaders and chefs to share powerful insights on integrating authentic Indigenous foods into institutional programs within BC’s hospitals, schools and post-secondary institutions.

“We extend our deep gratitude to Qwustenuxun for generously sharing his guidance and knowledge throughout this project. His insights ensured that Indigenous voices were honoured, respected and brought forth in a meaningful way.” — David Speight, Executive Chef and Culinary Director, UBC Food Services

Day 1: UBC Gathering

The first day of *Cooking in Two Worlds* was held at UBC, in the Marine Drive residence ballroom, where Indigenous elders, knowledge keepers, chefs, Indigenous food businesses, academics, students, government staff, and



food leaders from healthcare organizations and primary, secondary, and post-secondary educational institutions

came together for in-depth discussions and knowledge sharing.

In addition to hearing from keynote speaker, Andrew George, Hereditary Chief of the Wet'suwet'en Bear Clan and BC's first Indigenous Red Seal Chef, attendees learned about a range of topics, including:

- Stronger inclusion of Indigenous food practices in BC institutions
- Colonial legacies and systemic barriers
- Building sustainable Indigenous food systems

Day 2: Culinary Training at VCC

VCC hosted the second day of the gathering, which focused on hands-on culinary training.

This session allowed 25 chefs from BC post-secondary and healthcare institutions to connect directly with Indigenous chefs and gain first-hand experience in traditional food preparation, techniques and philosophies.

The day's activities included:

- Cooking with Indigenous and Indigenous-sourced ingredients, such as Gitanyow salmon, elk and plant-based medicines.
- Engaging with Indigenous cultural teachings through food.
- Learning about and how to respect Indigenous food protocols and ethics.

David Speight, Executive Chef and Culinary Director, Food Services, shares some of his key takeaways from *Cooking in Two Worlds*:

- Supporting Indigenous food sovereignty is essential for BC's public institutions.

- Institutions need to collaborate and engage in meaningful relationship building, with the Indigenous communities on whose land their institutions exist on, before incorporating Indigenous foods.

- Institutions must be prepared to source ingredients ethically and honour the cultural significance of Indigenous food preparation.

- Institutions should advocate for critical policy changes in provincial food regulations that can pose barriers to using some traditional Indigenous ingredients.

"This was a powerful and transformative event that laid the groundwork for a future where Indigenous foods are not only present but celebrated within BC's public institutions," says chef David Speight.

"The lessons learned, and relationships built during this gathering will continue to guide institutions in honouring Indigenous food sovereignty, sourcing responsibly and fostering reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities."

In addition to financial support from Feed BC, the organizing committee would also like to acknowledge the financial support of Sysco, the UBC Food Systems Committee, Pedersen's and Sage Catering.



AI IS MY CO-AUTHOR

A series of articles written with help from Chat GPT... our students use it, why shouldn't we?

Tasting Nanaimo: The Island City's Best Eats and Brews



Nestled on Vancouver Island's east coast, Nanaimo has long been known for its scenic harbour, easygoing pace, and of course, its namesake dessert square. But over the past decade, the city has quietly transformed into one of British Columbia's most exciting small-city food destinations. A wave of creative chefs, craft brewers, and local producers has helped turn this port town into a flavour hub where coastal freshness meets global inspiration.

From elevated farm-to-table dining to award-winning microbreweries, Nanaimo's culinary scene offers a balance of sophistication and approachability — all with a distinct island character.

What ties Nanaimo's culinary landscape together is its sense of community. Restaurants collaborate with nearby farms, breweries support local artists and food trucks, and nearly every business — from fine dining to casual cafés — shares a dedication to sustainability and authenticity.

Seafood remains a cornerstone, but Nanaimo's food scene is now defined by its diversity: Greek, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Pacific-Northwest flavours all thrive side by side. And thanks to a compact downtown and scenic harbourfront, you can easily spend a weekend eating and sipping your way from one highlight to the next — no car required.

Nanaimo might not yet have the culinary fame of Victoria or Vancouver, but that's precisely its charm. Its chefs, brewers, and bakers aren't chasing trends — they're crafting flavourful, heartfelt experiences that reflect the best of Vancouver Island living.

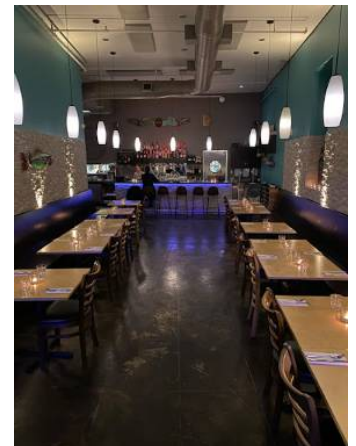
Melange Restaurant

Tucked in the Old City Quarter, Melange captures everything that defines modern Nanaimo cuisine: seasonal ingredients, bold creativity, and community warmth. Chef Aaron Keilty's ever-changing menu features locally sourced meats, seafood, and produce — from Cowichan Valley farms to Vancouver Island shellfish.

Dishes like seared albacore tuna with ginger miso glaze or duck confit over wild mushroom risotto demonstrate a global flair grounded in local roots. With a cozy, contemporary dining room and an emphasis on sustainability, Melange is arguably the city's top choice for fine dining with soul.

223 Commercial St

<https://melangenanaimo.com>



Asteras Greek Taverna

A long-time local favourite, Asteras Greek Taverna is as close as you'll get to a Santorini evening without leaving the Island. Housed in a charming heritage home, this spot serves up authentic Mediterranean dishes — from grilled souvlaki and lamb shoulder to flaky spanakopita — all prepared with precision and heart.

The warm atmosphere and attentive service make it a go-to for date nights and celebrations. While Nanaimo has no shortage of international eateries, few match the consistency and hospitality of Asteras.

347 Wesley St

<https://asteras.ca>



Gabriel's Gourmet Café

Casual yet thoughtful, Gabriel's embodies the West Coast café ethos. Their menu changes daily based on what's fresh and local — think pulled pork sandwiches with house slaw, lentil curries, or creative vegetarian bowls. Nearly everything is made from scratch, and the café's commitment to sustainability (zero waste and local sourcing) makes it a community favourite among locals and visitors alike.

It's the kind of place where you feel like a regular after your first visit.

39 Commercial St

<https://gabrielsgourmetcafe.ca>

White Sails Brewing

Located in a bright, airy taproom just off downtown, White Sails Brewing helped kickstart Nanaimo's craft beer revival. Their *Mount Benson IPA* and *Snake Island Cascadian Dark Ale* are local legends, striking the right balance between West Coast punch and drinkability.

The taproom hosts regular live music, food pop-ups, and community events, making it a hub for both beer lovers and social seekers. Whether you're grabbing a pint after work or exploring a flight with friends, White Sails delivers a quintessential Nanaimo experience.

125 Comox Rd

<https://whitesailsbrewing.com>



Longwood Brewery & Brewpub

An institution on the Island, Longwood is both a brewery and a brewpub — and one of the pioneers of truly local brewing. They source barley and hops from nearby farms and use pure Island water, giving every pint a "from-here" authenticity.

Signature beers like *Steam Punk Dunkel* and *Big One IPA* showcase balanced, flavourful craftsmanship. Pair them with the brewpub's hearty fare — from wood-fired pizzas to chargrilled burgers — for a complete tasting experience.

5775 Turner Rd

<https://longwoodbeer.com>



Wolf Brewing Company



Smaller and more offbeat than the others, Wolf Brewing offers a rustic, laid-back vibe that's pure Vancouver Island. Their European-style ales — like the *Golden Honey Ale* and *Black & Tan* — highlight malt character and clean brewing techniques.

The on-site lounge, “The Wolf Den,” often hosts local musicians and food trucks, making it an underrated gem for anyone chasing good beer and good company.

940 Old Victoria Rd

<https://wolfbrewingcompany.com>

Big Bang Cider

Set against the lush greenery of Nanaimo Lakes Road, Big Bang Cider brings the orchard to life — quite literally. This farm-based cidery is built around one of British Columbia's few 100% heritage cider apple orchards, where every tree tells a story. The owners cultivate traditional cider apple varieties from England and France, pressing and fermenting small batches to create ciders that are dry, aromatic, and distinctly tied to the Island's climate.

Visitors can enjoy tastings outdoors among the apple trees, where picnic tables and mountain views make it a natural spot to linger. Each vintage reflects subtle shifts in the orchard's rhythm, resulting in ciders that vary slightly year to year — a mark of authenticity that fans adore.



1235 Nanaimo Lakes Rd

<https://bigbangcider.com>

Millstone Estate Winery

Just minutes from downtown, Millstone Estate Winery proves that good wine doesn't need to come from the Okanagan. This boutique, family-owned vineyard sits along the Millstone River, producing elegant, cool-climate wines that express the coastal terroir. The six-acre estate grows Pinot Noir, Ortega, Pinot Grigio, and Gewürztraminer, while select grapes from the Okanagan round out their portfolio.



The winery's tasting patio overlooks the vines and is especially beautiful on sunny afternoons, with occasional live music and seasonal food pairings. The result is a serene, slow-paced experience — a little slice of European vineyard culture right in Nanaimo's backyard.

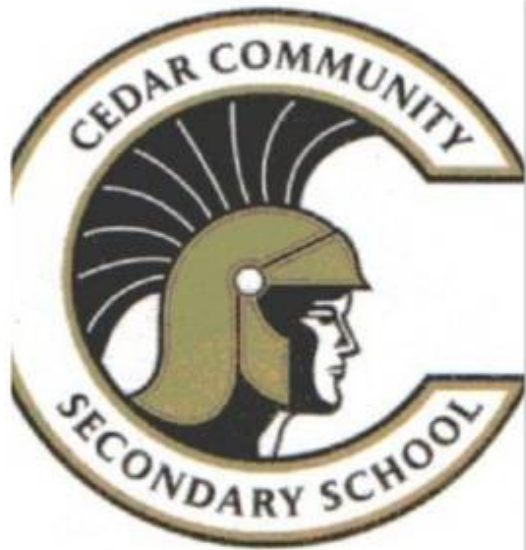
2300 East Wellington Rd

<https://millstonewinery.ca>

See you all in Nanaimo!

BCCASA Conference October 24th and 25th, 2025

**Central Vancouver Island:
Trades in Education**



Join culinary educators, industry experts, and professional chefs from across BC for an unforgettable weekend of learning, networking, and inspiration at the 2025 BCCASA Annual Conference & AGM on beautiful Vancouver Island. Membership Early Bird price is only \$300 (which includes annual membership fee) until June 30th. Member's regular rate is \$350 (including membership fee). Non members fee will be \$400. Please be sure to register early at: <https://bccasa.ourconference.events/> or on our website at: www.bccasa.ca



BCCASA Conference Schedule

Schedule Friday:

- 8:00am - Board Bus & Leave for CCSS
- 8:15am - Register for Conference at CCSS
- 8:30 am - Breakfast and AGM
- 9:00am - Conference Begins with Keynote Speakers
- 9:45am - Keynote Speaker
- 11:00am - Board bus(es) to VIU meet in the Arbutus room
- 11:30am - Keynote speaker - VIU Program Director, Buddy Wolfe, BC Chef Association Education Director, and guest to presentation about Culinary & Baking Programs at VIU and in the Province of BC, sustainable culinary practices, culinary technology, cultural awareness and principals of culinary methodology
- 12:00pm - Lunch in the Arbutus room prepared by the VIU Culinary Students
- 1:15pm - Culinary lessons in the Baking and Culinary Programs. Modern techniques in teaching culinary arts to youth.
- 3:00pm - Board Bus to the Hotel
- 5:00pm - Dinner at Melange Restaurant



SATURDAY:

- 9:00am - Meet in lobby to board buses
- 10:00am - Qualicum, Coombs & Parksville Stops (2 groups)
 - Group 1 - Milner Gardens VIU Gardens
 - Be prepared for exciting and engaging lessons about sustainable farming. Guest speakers will educate and share their knowledge of local growing and harvesting for responsible procurement of local foods.
 - Group 2 - Little Qualicum Cheeseworks
 - Hosts and speakers will teach the group about sustainable cheese making, history of cheese in BC and share lessons and resources will be shared on how to set up a classroom cheese making lessons.
- Noon - Lunch at Cuckoo Trattoria and Pizzeria
- Self-guided time at Goats on the Roof
- 2:30pm - Qualicum, Coombs & Parksville (2 groups)
 - Group 1 - Little Qualicum Cheeseworks
 - Group 2 - Milner Gardens VIU Gardens



Wild Mushroom Risotto with BC Pinot Noir



After a rainy day in the woods, there's nothing like the earthy aroma of wild mushrooms — chanterelles, pine mushrooms, and oyster varieties all thrive in B.C.'s coastal forests.

Fold them gently into a creamy risotto, using Arborio rice simmered in homemade chicken or vegetable stock, and finish with a splash of B.C. Pinot Noir for depth. Top with a shaving of local Alpine-style cheese from Kootenay or Cowichan Valley dairies.

Serves: 4

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 35 minutes

For the Risotto:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil or unsalted butter
- 1 small yellow onion, finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cups BC wild mushrooms (chanterelles, pine, or oyster), cleaned and sliced
- 1½ cups Arborio rice
- ½ cup BC Pinot Noir (optional: use local white wine or omit for non-alcoholic)
- 5 cups warm chicken or vegetable stock, kept on low simmer
- ½ cup grated BC Alpine-style cheese (e.g. Kootenay Meadows Alpine Gold or Cowichan Valley Comox Brie)
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, for finishing
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Optional Garnish:

- Chopped fresh parsley or thyme
- Truffle oil or extra cheese for drizzling

1. Prepare the mushrooms:

In a large sauté pan, heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil over medium heat. Add the wild mushrooms and cook for 5–7 minutes, until golden and fragrant. Season lightly with salt and pepper, then set aside.

2. Start the risotto base:

In a heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, heat the remaining olive oil (or butter) over medium heat. Add the diced onion and cook until translucent, about 3–4 minutes. Stir in the minced garlic and cook for 30 seconds more.

3. Toast the rice:

Add the Arborio rice to the pot and stir to coat with the oil. Cook for about 2 minutes, until the edges of the grains start to look slightly translucent.

4. Deglaze with wine:
Pour in the Pinot Noir and stir until it's mostly absorbed. This step adds depth and a touch of B.C. character to the dish.
5. Build the risotto:
Begin adding the warm stock, one ladle (about ½ cup) at a time. Stir gently and allow each addition to absorb before adding the next. Continue this process for about 20–25 minutes, until the rice is creamy but still slightly al dente.
6. Finish with richness:
Stir in the cooked mushrooms, grated cheese, and butter. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Let the risotto rest for 1–2 minutes before serving so the flavours meld beautifully.
7. Serve:
Spoon into warm bowls and top with a sprinkle of fresh herbs and a drizzle of truffle oil or extra cheese. Pair with a glass of BC Pinot Noir for the perfect fall evening.

Local Ingredient Notes

- Mushrooms: Foraged chanterelles, pine mushrooms, or oysters from Vancouver Island or the Sunshine Coast.
- Cheese: Try Alpine-style varieties from Kootenay Meadows, Little Qualicum, or Upper Bench Creamery.
- Wine: A light Pinot Noir from Blue Grouse, Orofino, or Tantalus pairs beautifully.



TREASURER'S REPORT



**STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS (Note 1)
FOR THE YEAR ENDED June 30, 2025
(Unaudited)**

	2024-25	
Balance, July 1	\$ 13,396.32	\$ 13,702.03
<u>Receipts</u>		
BCTF grant	7,000.00	6,000.00
Membership/subscription fees	565.00	2,674.00
Interest income	405.16	607.66
Conference fees	-	16,695.59
Conference grants	-	3,000.00
Conference miscellaneous	-	980.00
	<u>7,970.16</u>	<u>29,957.25</u>
<u>Disbursements</u>		
Meeting-executive	-	1,752.47
Meeting-table officers	-	389.53
Meeting-other meetings	1,010.56	-
TTOCs-general	362.49	271.18
TTOCs-PSA conference	431.00	-
Operating expenses	-	83.08
Furniture & equipment purchase	2,572.25	1,808.32
Scholarships	-	1,100.00
Miscellaneous expenses	1,729.42	1,239.49
Conference-operating	9,823.14	3,195.09
Conference-facilities	-	576.00
Conference-catering	4,844.31	17,634.58
Conference-committee costs	387.42	1,110.60
Conference-miscellaneous	814.23	166.62
Conference-speakers	-	936.00
	<u>(21,974.82)</u>	<u>(30,262.96)</u>
Balance, June 30	\$ (608.34)	\$ 13,396.32

Notes:

1. This statement reflects only funds held by the BC Teachers' Federation on behalf of the BC Culinary Arts Specialist Association.

NOTES FROM THE BACK OF HOUSE

...great thoughts on what we do

BC chefs are finding success with life off the line

by Joie Alvaro Kent
February 1st, 2025

Accessed at:

<https://www.straight.com/food/bc-chefs-are-finding-success-with-life-off-line#>



In his iconic book *Kitchen Confidential*, Anthony Bourdain opined that “cooking is a craft, I like to think, and a good cook is a craftsman. Practicing your craft in expert fashion is noble, honorable, and satisfying.” Yet the pursuit of honing that craft can be relentless, punishing, and all consuming, in no small part thanks to outrageously long hours, physically demanding work, and deteriorating mental health.

British Columbia’s restaurant industry has certainly rebounded from the pandemic’s disastrous effects, but the impact of Covid-19 lockdowns and disruptions is still being felt. Covid spotlighted the razor-thin margins on which most

restaurants operate, while the already tenuous staffing balance tipped perilously when qualified workers seeking stability and better work-life balance decamped to careers in other sectors. And yet, there is hope: rather than falling into the conventional rigours of a restaurant job, local chefs are increasingly choosing alternative paths—ones that give them more control over their time, but still keep them connected to food and to the community they hold so dear.

“I think where the restaurant industry is now versus where it was 10 years ago, credit needs to be given, because it’s significantly better,” reflects Alex Ploughman, co-owner of Legends Haul. “Vancouver’s a really difficult city to be a chef, but having more mentorship and mental-health resources now makes it easier for young cooks to choose the path they want to take.”

Things were a little different when the former chef de cuisine at Chambar was climbing the ranks.



“I’m part of what’s likely the last generation of cooks to go to Europe and stage for free, working under the premise that you need to put in time at this or that Michelin-starred restaurant if you ever want to do anything great,” he reflects. “Truth be told, it probably broke me a bit. But it’s not as prescriptive now.”

Ploughman tapped out of restaurant life relatively early (at age 25), exploring both private cheffing aboard a yacht and corporate cooking before co-founding Legends Haul in 2018 as a wholesale supplier to the culinary community.

“A lot of why I enjoy it is because I’m still an industry guy, through and through,” he says. The enterprise took on new life when it expanded into home grocery delivery during Covid, offering an employment lifeline to many of Vancouver’s culinary workers while restaurants were shuttered. Legends Haul reimagined itself yet again with the return of in-person shopping, closing grocery-delivery operations at the end of 2022 and turning its retail attention to a bespoke slate of packaged and ready-to-cook products—including Woozas frozen pizza, pre-seasoned spatchcocked chicken, and Essentials by Legends frozen

meals—that are available at stores across the province.

After 50 storied years in the industry, Tofino-based chef Lisa Ahier also bid adieu to restaurant life in pursuit of culinary endeavours on her terms. The cookbook author, industry pioneer, and Top Chef Canada season 11 competitor founded SoBo as a food truck in 2003, and its overwhelming popularity spurred the transition to her renowned brick-and-mortar restaurant of the same name in 2007. Family was always her foremost priority, however, and being in the kitchen for 14 hours a day stopped being sustainable for her.

“I knew what a gift I had with my two young children,” she says. “If anything had to drastically change, it was reduced hours at the restaurant.”

Exacerbated by Covid, Tofino’s unique housing and staffing challenges made increasingly unrelenting demands on Ahier’s time, often keeping her away from her family. It eventually became insurmountable, prompting her to close SoBo in 2023. In its wake, she “tried to recognize what other things you could do with all the hard work that you built your name and reputation on.” The solution:



developing a SoBo line of heat-and-eat soups crafted with wild, organic ingredients. A salmon chowder was the first to roll out in select Choices locations this year, with many other retailers and soulfully nourishing recipes lined up to follow.

Then there’s Colin Johnson, whose love of all things charcuterie was his lodestar for stepping away from restaurant kitchens. His cooking career began in England, marked by noteworthy stints as pastry chef and saucier for the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, and as sous chef in the Simon Hopkinson era of Bibendum at London’s Michelin House. During his most recent tenure as chef de cuisine at Vancouver’s St. Lawrence, the wear and tear of over three and a half decades on the line prompted his exit.

“Sure, I’m not the oldest person to ever wear an apron—far from it,” Johnson reflects. “Cooking was taking its toll when I was in my twenties and thirties, but it wasn’t a barrier when I was that young. I’d just carry on. Now that I’m in my fifties, I’ve really been struggling physically and mentally. I felt like a square peg in a round hole over the past two years, and I wanted to create an environment where I could be a bit more in control of what my day might look like.”

Cue the 2024 launch of Le Petit Chapeau. The business sees Johnson craft a tightly curated selection of pâtés, terrines, and

other cured meats for wholesale to restaurants and food purveyors across the Lower Mainland, including Autostrada, Merci Boulangerie, and Pete’s Meats.



“It’s been so liberating for me,” he reflects. “Am I exhausted? Yes, but I’m having an absolute whale of a time. It’s been challenging and invigorating in ways that I didn’t imagine, but I couldn’t be happier. Looking over my prep list the other day, I realized this is the nucleus behind it all: doing the things I love to do while helping other people by making these products more accessible for their businesses as well.”

The common denominator between all three chefs is their willingness to take a risk. To be bold and brave enough to trade the glory and adrenaline rush of life on the line for something humbler—but equally fulfilling.

“The point is: I have an opportunity to pursue something that brings me joy and satisfaction, and I don’t want to say, ‘I wish I did, I wish I’d tried,’” Johnson says. “I can’t be afraid of the mistakes—failure isn’t the opposite of success. It’s a part of getting it. And if this doesn’t work out, I can live with myself that I gave it a go.”

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BCCASA current,
Sharing the ideas and voice of Chef Instructors
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