

The chefs of the Cornwall region



They say competition is the spice of life. Chefs in Cornwall are competing with spices and winning new customers in the process.

While restaurants abound throughout the province, many of Ontario's smaller cities can only wish for those that offer that extra dining experience.

Those wishes come true throughout the Cornwall region as recent years have seen an upsurge in the number of fine dining restaurants.

Matthew Bellsmith
Fusion Grill

Whether it be in the City itself or, a leisurely drive away, Cornwall's professional community and indeed, the community at large enjoy a selected group of fine dining establishments, each a cut above and each offering its own unique culinary fare.

Of course, no restaurant can survive and flourish without three main ingredients: flawless service, consistency, and outstanding food. And that is where our chefs come in. You're about to meet five of the region's better known chefs and find out more about their passion for good food.

Matthew Bellsmith Fusion Grill

Just down the Pitt Street Promenade is Fusion Grill, a trendy little bistro that serves up some exceptional dishes in a formal but slightly more casual atmosphere. Matthew and Katie are your hosts and together, they have created a dining experience that is not to be missed.

While Chef Matthew's background lies in business and computers, his part time jobs in college found him in the food services sector. There, he caught the bug and eventually left his studies to pursue the world of culinary arts full time. His decision paid off as he returned to his home town and four years ago, opened Fusion Grill.

His Chilean seabass, accompanied by a spicy, sun-dried tomato, spinach, crab-meat and lime-butter topping is sure to set one's taste buds dancing as will the grilled swordfish steak with its savoury berry relish. And, like many of his counterparts, Matthew has a strong focus on fresh. Fusion's menu, while offering a well rounded variety of fare, focuses on quality rather than quantity. "Offering fresh foods as opposed to pre-packaged frozen ones is the key to our success and because of that, we limit the number of items we serve," notes Matthew.

That philosophy has proven to be the right approach as Fusion has become one of downtown Cornwall's more popular dining establishments, both for lunch and for evening patrons. It is a success that has not gone unnoticed in professional circles. The young chef and his partner were named Entrepreneurs of the Year for 2005 during the Chamber of Commerce' prestigious Business Excellence Awards banquet.

Asked about his favourites, Chef Matthew notes his seafood dishes but also expresses a fondness for his pomery rubbed rack of lamb and his succulent filet mignon finished with a bleu cheese sauce. He takes pride in the fact that nothing is pre-made and the kitchen does not have a deep fryer.

The conversation moves to wine and Katie warms to the topic. "We spent considerable time putting together a wine list

that our guests enjoy and that complements the dishes we serve," she says. "We also talk to our diners and when we discover a wine that is popular with them, we add it to our selection." Matthew points out that, along with the regular list, Fusion maintains a limited selection of vintage wines. "Oftentimes, our regular clientele join us because of a special occasion and enjoy the fact that we have particular vintages for them to choose from. Katie and I pride ourselves on the superior level of service we offer and having our vintages is part of it."

Maple salmon salad, chicken stuffed with goat cheese and kalamata olives and a balsamic glaze, mushroom ravioli with sun-dried tomatoes, Asiago cheese and cream... these delectable dishes are but a few of the creations prepared by Chef Matthew and presented by Fusion's professional staff. And because the cozy bistro is within easy walking distance for most of the downtown business crowd, it has established itself as a popular destination.

Ahmad Mansorifard Mangi's

"This restaurant is as good as any we can find in Toronto." That's how a senior provincial Ministry official summed up Mangi's, after he and his colleagues discovered it during a trip to Cornwall.

The cozy and tastefully decorated dining establishment is tucked away on a



Ahmad Mansorifard
Mangi's

David Petrynka
Mangi's

corner, a few blocks away from the City's downtown core and to a casual observer, there is nothing spectacular about its exterior. But once inside, customers are greeted with a quiet and formal elegance.

Meet Ahmad Mansorifard, the resident head chef who, along with his wife, Dominique, are your hosts in this outstanding eatery. Combining her menu design prowess with his mastery of the kitchen and an outstanding team of a sous chef and waitstaff, they have created a dining experience not to be missed.

Chef Ahmad offers a delightful variety of items highlighted by an imaginative selection of fusion items. As he will quickly tell you, his sauces are amongst his culinary strengths and each one is painstakingly made from scratch. Imagine your gastronomic journey beginning with Gamberi al pernod, giant shrimp in a pernod liquor sauce. Perhaps, your preference is mussels in a five-spice infusion. Either way, Ahmad's sauce creations will burst in your mouth with flavour.

Mangi's entrées are equally as tempting, highlighted by its innovative fusion menu. Diners can savour the delicate offering of Coco-titi — tilapia crusted in coconut and papaya, drizzled with a mango sauce. Or how about Ahmad's renowned filet mignon with marsala sauce, the most succulent to be found in the Cornwall region. Of course, there are the heartier dishes headlined by the robust Lamb shank Casablanca, Ahmad's Moroccan inspired recipe. Another favourite is the El Brasileiro, selected meats fire-grilled and served a la brésilienne. The success of Mangi's is a triumph for Mansorifard. An Iranian from a very poor family, he was sent to New York City at the age of 12 to live with an uncle. After a time as kitchen help in New York City, he took a leap of faith that would change his life and put him on the road to success. He emigrated to Montreal and was engaged by a major hotel whose executive chef, a demanding taskmaster, recognized the young man's talent. He took him under his wing and proceeded to teach him the art of haute cuisine.

His apprenticing complete, the young chef was determined to find a suitable restaurant to apply his craft and nothing less than a moment of serendipity brought him to Cornwall where a restaurant was available for sale. He and his wife made the plunge and Mangi's was born.

While chef Ahmad is pleased with the success of his establishment, he is quick to identify the close-knit team that makes it happen. From the menu design expertise of spouse Dominique, to the indispensable sous chef David Petrynka, and to Stephanie, the wonderfully talented waitstaff supervisor whose service skills rank with the best, Mangi's has left nothing to chance. That attention to detail has made it the restaurant destination of choice throughout the Cornwall region and beyond and has earned it a 'five-forks' award from an American food critic.

Melvin Pyke Schnitzels

Part time jobs and summer employment introduced Chef Melvin Pyke to the world of food preparation but it was a chance encounter with an educator that galvanized him into



action. Inspired by the teacher, Pyke completed his secondary studies then it was off to Kitchener's Conestoga College with its comprehensive Food and Beverage program.

His co-op work terms landed him in restaurants as far away as Tours, France and back in Canada, he tutored under world class chefs including the renowned James Olberg. After graduation, Chef Melvin spent time polishing his skills at the Honey Harber Resorts and various upscale restaurants in Kingston. Then it was back to Cornwall and after a stay at the City's Italian destination, Casa Paulo, he accepted the position of Head Chef at Schnitzels, a downtown eating establishment honoured as the 2007 Entrepreneur of the Year by the Cornwall & Area Chamber of Commerce.

"Veau Bourré in a mushroom, green onion and peppercorn sauce with capicola ham and cheese." Chef Melvin has just been asked about one of his signature dishes. "Of course," he continues, "sauces are my specialty and one of my favourites is my peppercorn demiglaze." Another of the Schnitzels' features is the goulash and the word is spreading throughout Cornwall about this full bodied and robust dish.

"While it's a bit of an oddity, given our name, we have an authentic wood fired pizza oven," reports Pyke. "While pizza is



Robert Schultz
Peppermills

readily available at many places in the City, ours are a bit different and a scan of Schnitzels' menu will quickly tell you why."

Pizza choices are anything but run of the mill at Schnitzels. Baked in the wood oven on wafer thin crusts, diners can enjoy the Diablo, an infusion of jalapeños, pepperoncini peppers, red onion and chipotle sauce. Or, how about the Mediterranean with artichokes, black olives, feta, diced tomatoes and oregano? These are but two of the many choices on the unique pizza menu.

Chef Melvin has his healthy alternatives as well. Among other things, he created a smoked salmon salad, an infusion of taste-tempting mixed greens with smoked salmon rolled in sour cream, alfalfa sprouts, cherry tomatoes, capers and Emmenthal cheese finished with tangy balsamic vinaigrette.

Not content with just providing good food and splendid service, Schnitzels gives back by bringing in young apprentices who learn their craft working alongside Chef Melvin and co-owner of the restaurant, Dennis Smisek, who brings with him the delectable Schnitzels dishes and of course, the goulash.

Does Chef Melvin enjoy his work?

"Absolutely," he says. "Preparing a tasteful meal for a guest's dining pleasure is one of the more satisfying things that I do. Some people would find it stressful; I find it to be most relaxing, especially when our clients take a moment to compliment us. It is why I am in the business and why I plan to stay."

Robert Schultz **Peppermills**

Executive Chef Robert Schultz is a 30-year veteran of the food sector, 20 years of which he has been a chef. Sitting in Peppermills, the comfortable dining room of the Best Western Parkway Inn & Conference Centre, he reflects on some of his favourite dishes.

"I have a particular love of chicken," he says, warming to the topic. "One of my favourites is Chicken Gorgonzola, a wonderful dish that combines chicken supreme with a Gorgonzola cheese sauce with spinach and button mushrooms. Another is a fabulous Caribbean recipe I created for the recent Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards banquet."

Besides these favourites, Chef Robert lays claim to a recently developed and

tantalizing new menu, created with the assistance of a cordon bleu chef from one of the famed Muskoka resorts. Its highlights include a succulent, warm breaded goat cheese and spinach salad followed by popular appetizers, notably the sautéed tiger prawns finished in an orange-leek Grand Marnier sauce, and the classic, baked brie with grilled red peppers, zucchini and asparagus finished with a roasted tomato coulis.

Chef Schultz admits that his love of cooking goes back to his childhood and he recalls preparing all manner of delicious dishes working alongside his father. At the age of 16, Schultz began to think seriously of a career in the field and that desire took him to North Bay's Canadore College where he successfully earned certification in Culinary Arts.

Returning to Cornwall, the City of his roots, he began his professional career in the health care system but, in 1995, an opportunity arose to join the staff at the award winning Best Western Parkway Inn. It proved to be one of his better decisions and he has never looked back.

"Over the past few years, we have completely redesigned our dining room and food service," declares Schultz. "As I noted, we brought in a chef consultant and together, we revamped the menu and brought Peppermills to the next level of excellence in dining. Judging from the popularity of the restaurant and the many positive comments from our clientele, the changes are paying off."

Peppermills' signature item is its renowned prime rib au jus, a hearty complement to Schultz's chicken favourites. However, Chef Robert creates a wonderful rack of lamb along with a delicious poached sole.

When asked what's on the horizon, Chef Robert's eyes light up with enthusiasm. "My next vision is to introduce a dining experience prepared at the table. I want to bring back special items such as caesar salad, flambéed steak Diane and chateaubriand. We have the capabilities and we need only to acquire the equipment," he says.

Judging from the decidedly enhanced quality of Peppermills and the warm and cheerful atmosphere the fireplace-flanked

dining room projects, diners from all over will no doubt enthusiastically look forward to the continuing quest for excellence at one of the premier hotels in Eastern Ontario.

Christian Barque Knox Fine Dining

A leisurely 30-minute drive north of Cornwall and just minutes from the Ottawa/Montreal Highway 417 lies the village of Moose Creek. It is there that the once Knox United Church has been transformed into a spectacular dining establishment and it happened by chance.

Paul Mayer, a forestry professional whose ancestry has a touch of Italian, had acquired the church with the notion of converting it into both a residence and a base for his fledgling fresh pasta business. One of his clients, a talented chef by the name of Christian Barque, happened by one day, took one look, and exclaimed — “You must turn this place into a restaurant!” And so began the partnership.

Chef Barque has acquired enviable credentials as he has refined his craft. From Culinary Arts at Cambrian College, he apprenticed at the Auberge des Gallant in Rigaud, Quebec where his talents eventually earned him a place at the renowned Willow in fashionable Hudson and the Red Seal designation as a chef. From there, it was on to a brief stint at Cornwall’s own Mangi’s before settling into his very own establishment at Knox.

A carefully chosen menu with a classical French theme, a commitment to fresh goods, and a superb waitstaff all combine to create an ambiance second to none. Patrons will quickly attest to the ‘wow’ factor as they enter the beautifully appointed former sanctuary showcased by a spectacular six-foot round, wrought-iron chandelier upon which sit 24 large, lighted candles providing a warm and inviting glow to the entire restaurant.

Chef Barque invites his guests to first enjoy one of his succulent hors d’oeuvres such as jumbo prawns in a savoury sauce before losing themselves in deliciously imaginative dishes such as his signature bison filet with rack of lamb. Then, there is the wonderfully full-bodied taste of venison in a subtle wine sauce and for the more adventurous, a ‘taster’ platter of various meats including wild boar. Of course, along with the menu items comes a wonderful selection of wines.

“We’ve committed ourselves to the one hundred-kilometre rule,” declares Chef Barque. “We sought out sources for our menu items throughout the region east and south of the Nation’s Capital and with few exceptions, our menu is designed around those foodstuffs. It means our menu offerings are freshly prepared while at the same time, we support our local community.”

Because of the commitment to both fresh and local, the restaurant may occasionally run out of an entrée. “Interestingly, our guests never get upset when we advise them their item of choice is no longer available,” continues Barque. “In fact, they view it as a positive aspect of our commitment to fresh menu items and helps us to cement their loyalty. Besides, they know there are other sumptuous choices to be had.”



*Christian Barque
Knox Fine Dining*

Another community commitment Knox has made is to aspiring young chefs. Barque teaches within one of the area school boards and regularly brings students into the restaurant for some on-the-job training. “During my studies, I was given the opportunity to work under professional chefs and I feel a responsibility to offer those same opportunities to area young people.”

Although Knox Fine Dining has been open less than a year, the word has spread to as far as the City of Ottawa, some 40 minutes away. According to Chef Barque, it is not uncommon to greet a number of guests who have made the easy journey down the broad 417 autoroute.

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