

A Worldly Menu Hits Close to Home

BY STELLA ORTEGA



The era of bringing wild and wonderful ingredients from afar is waning. We'll still want Piedmont truffles, Costa Rican vanilla and Spanish espelette pepper, but for the lion's share of our diet, we're shopping close to home, and so are our best chefs.

Canyon Creek's Executive Chef Mark Jachecki is a champion for the cause. "Local food is important to us as a company," explains Jachecki, "because the flavour is exceptional, and we participate in keeping Ontario farming and production viable."

Canyon Creek Chophouse, an upscale-casual restaurant chain with eight locations in the GTA, has partnered with local farms to create a seasonal menu showcasing Ontario's best locally grown ingredients on its new Local Harvest menu.

Inspired by the edible gifts of our land and waters, here are some of the dishes from the Canyon Creek Local Harvest Menu.

Wellington County Dry-Aged Striploin

As a steakhouse, Canyon Creek is hyper-vigilant about meat quality. They work with Leavoy Rowe, a firm that brings them Ontario-raised Wellington County striploin, which they dry-age for a more tender steak and an earthier, richer, nutty taste. The process begins with 35 days of wet aging. Then they dry the meat by hand and age it another seven days for its unique flavour.

Purdy's Walnut-Crusted Lake Erie Pickerel

Jachecki thanks Daniel Speck of Pelham wines in Niagara for telling him about Purdy Fisheries. At a recent menu tasting, Speck told wonderful stories about the Purdy family and their fishing adventures. "I love to fish, and it's usually for pickerel and perch," says Jachecki, "so I got excited about putting them on the menu." Based in Point Edward, at the southernmost tip of Lake Huron, Purdy Fisheries goes back four generations and live-land fish from trap nets.

The spaghetti squash on this plate comes from Thames Farms Melons of Innerkip, north of Woodstock. The sweet pea vines were cultivated by Fresh Herbs by Daniel, a Niagara-region company that has been supplying restaurants with baby lettuces, herbs and other specialties for over 20 years. "What's great about using their vines is that they're a live and growing ingredient," says Jachecki. "They come into our kitchens still in their potting trays, and we clip what we need when we need them. I have great respect for this product." He pairs the pickerel's earthiness and flaky, white flesh with the clean, natural flavours of the roasted spaghetti squash. The vines tease the palate with the taste of sweet, sum-

mer peas. To finish, declares Jachecki, "beurre blanc for some rich elegance."

Lake Erie Yellow Perch and Pingue Prosciutto

From Wheatley, near Leamington, comes Canyon Creek's yellow perch. About 16 km from Point Pelée National Park, Wheatley Harbour is the largest inland fishery in North America, bringing pickerel, yellow perch and bass to all who love local, fresh-water fish.

The perch, which is stuffed with lobster, is a standout starter for the Harvest Menu. "We'll still go east for lobster," claims Jachecki without apology, "but the prosciutto is something else." The prosciutto is the work of the Pingue family in St. Davids, in the Niagara Region. Jachecki was talking over ideas for the perch dish with Gord Mackie, Executive Chef of Far Niente, one of SIR Corp.'s Signature restaurants. "Why don't you wrap it with prosciutto?" he suggested. "Call Mario."

Mario Pingue Sr., and sons Mario Jr. and Fernando use Ontario pork to produce some of the best prosciutto anywhere, or so say discerning chefs across the province. "He showed up with a slicer and a whole prosciutto, sliced some up, and made me a sandwich," recounts Jachecki, "and it was amazing." Jachecki promises that if there's going to be prosciutto in his fridges at Canyon Creek, it will be from Pingue.



Carron Farms on the Holland Marsh provides the parsnips for this plate, "so sweet and naturally buttery, a perfect match with the salty prosciutto and earthy flavours of the fish," Jachecki says.

Braised & Grilled Honey Garlic Angus Beef Short Ribs

Carron Farms also brings the heritage carrots featured with the ribs dish. "We were hoping to get three colours," reports Jachecki, "but Carron set the bar much higher for themselves." They bring him red, yellow, white, orange and purple carrots. The ribs themselves are Ontario Angus beef, which Jachecki is pleased to have on a fall menu. "Braises suits the season well," he explains, "because they bring a comforting kind of warmth and the rich, complex flavours of slow cooking."

Other suppliers Canyon Creek credits for the authenticity of their Harvest Menu are Cohn Produce in Bradford for Yukon gold potatoes, and for an array of fungi, Ravine Mushrooms in Woodbridge and Enviro Mushrooms in Milton. For pumpkin cheesecake and a vanilla pudding, Iroquois Cranberries of Muskoka provides both fresh and dried.

Canyon Creek Local Harvest Menu runs until November 25th. For more information and locations visit CanyonCreekChophouse.com.