

CALGARY'S HAYATO OKAMITSU AWARDED TITLE OF CANADA'S BEST CHEF AT THE CANADIAN CULINARY CHAMPIONSHIPS

February 23, 2009

Six of Canada's finest chefs came together for the Gold Medal Plates Canadian Culinary Championship held at the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel February 19 to 21. Following the intense two-day competition, Calgary's Hayato Okamitsu of Catch Restaurant emerged as the 2009 Canadian Culinary Champion. Vancouver's Frank Pabst of the Blue Water Café took the silver medal and Deff Haupt of Montreal's Renoir took the bronze.

The competitors were the chefs who had triumphed at the Gold Medal Plates regional events across the country in the autumn of 2008:

Frank Pabst, <i>Blue Water Cafe</i>	Vancouver
David Cruz, <i>Sage Restaurant</i>	Edmonton
Hayato Okamitsu, <i>Catch Restaurant</i>	Calgary
Patrick Lin, <i>Senses Restaurant</i>	Toronto
Charles Part, <i>Les Fougères</i>	Ottawa
Deff Haupt, <i>Renoir</i>	Montreal

Mystery Wine Pairing Event

The weekend competition began with the Mystery Wine Pairing event held Friday. The evening before, each chef was given a bottle of the same wine with no label and an unmarked stopper. All they knew about it was that it was Canadian and that GMP's National Wine Advisor, David Lawrason, had selected it especially for the competition.

The chefs were instructed to taste the wine and create a dish that would pair with it. Part of the challenge was ensuring their dish would feed the 235 guests attending the event on a budget of \$350. Shopping for ingredients was local (Banff, Canmore, Calgary – anywhere except in the hotel) and each had to present receipts for everything they purchased.

The guests were able to taste the mystery wine (later revealed as Inniskillin Okanagan Malbec 2005) and each of the dishes. Guests voted that night for a "people's choice" favourite, an award that went to Charles Part.

Black Box Competition

Considered the most intense competition of the three, each chef was given an identical group of secret ingredients and given 50 minutes in which to prepare and present two separate dishes to the judges. The chefs staggered turns at 15-minute intervals in a race against the clock.

Ingredients were local Alberta produce and included: Alberta pork tenderloin with a good fat cap on it; three farmed rainbow trout, gutted but with heads on; a bag of rolled oats; a bottle of Saskatoon berry syrup (fresh local fruit being impossible to find in Alberta in February); a bag of organic carrots; a substantial wedge of a local Gouda cheese.

Three chefs scored particularly highly in the black box competition: Hayato Okamitsu, Frank Pabst and Deff Haupt but going into the third and final element of the competition it was still anyone's race.

The Grand Finale

For this event, each chef was allowed to create any dish he wished, the limits set only by his own imagination and the fact that he only had Saturday afternoon to pull the masterpiece together. He could bring in whatever ingredients he wished but he had to prepare enough to serve 300 guests and he could only be assisted by his two sous chefs and two hotel apprentices. Wine pairing was again a component. Each chef was instructed to work with the same winery he had chosen to pair with during the regional events, though not restricted to the same wine.

Gold medal winning chef Hayato Okamitsu presented a triptych. The first component was an Alberta beef short rib braised sukiyake-style with a profound soy-based sauce. A finger of Quebec foie gras torchon gained extra flavour from a light soy cure; Chef served it on a tiny morsel of toast. A demitasse held a rich and intense lobster bisque. Across the rim of the cup a lattice sesame crisp supported a shiso-scented B.C. spot prawn. A dab of ginger-yuzu "pudding" was as intense as any of the powerful flavours on the plate. Sumac Ridge Private Reserve Merlot 2005 was a fine match for the beef.

Silver medallist chef Frank Pabst showcased great west coast seafood. His plate consisted of three elements – the first a raw kushi oyster, out of its shell and set on a mound of chopped cucumber jelly, topped with horseradish foam. A slice of raw Qualicum Bay scallop was turned into a delicate ceviche, its natural sweetness perfectly balanced against the tart citrus of the dressing. Beneath it was a spoonful of salad made from green seaweed and fine shavings of Humboldt squid. The third element was a cold parfait of sea urchin, its marine pungency mitigated by a cap of ponzu jelly. Dotted here and there were tiny amounts of green onion, preserved watermelon rind, black dots of a sauce made from sake, soy and nori, and a dab of tangy yuzu-sake "pudding". Chef Pabst paired his dish with Sumac Ridge Stella's Jay Brut 2004 sparkling wine from B.C.

Bronze medallist chef Deff Haupt presented three ethereal cornmeal gnocchi smothered in a nutmeg-spiked parmesan sabayon and strewn with crispy little nuggets of pan-fried sweetbreads. Black winter truffle was grated over the dish and it was finished with a dramatic spiral of sweet tuile and some wisps of wheatgrass. His wine was from Prince Edward County, Ontario – Black Prince Winery's First Crush unoaked Chardonnay 2005.

"It was a superb weekend for Canada's best chefs," said Stephen Leckie, president and co-founder of Gold Medal Plates. "The intensity of the chefs' three challenges made for a great

weekend for the hundreds of guests who travelled from all parts of the country to witness the fierce competition. Gold Medal Plates is proud to crown Calgary's Hayato Okamitsu of Catch Restaurant this year's champion and congratulate all six chefs on a most impressive showing."

The judges selected for this year's Canadian Culinary Championships include:

- James Chatto, National Culinary Advisor, Toronto
- Julian Armstrong, Montreal
- Anne Desbrisay, Ottawa
- Sasha Chapman, Toronto
- Sid Cross, Vancouver
- Clayton Folkers, Edmonton
- John Gilchrist, Calgary
- Andrew Morrison, Vancouver

About Gold Medal Plates

Since its inception, Gold Medal Plates has donated more than \$2.5 million to support Canadian Olympic and Paralympic athletes and has elevated the profile of Canadian cuisine and wine. Gold Medal Plates is proudly sponsored by GE and EPCOR.

For more information about the competition or to download photos visit www.goldmedalplates.com

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