



Canadian Chef Profiles: Kristian Eligh, Hawksworth, Vancouver B.C

Kristian Eligh is the chef de cuisine at Hawksworth restaurant in Vancouver B.C. where he showcases Canadian ingredients in contemporary dishes with diverse ethnic touches.

Chef Kristian Eligh says his passion for food was kindled as a child by parents who were incredible cooks. However, as the chef points out, his initial field of endeavour was aiming for a degree in child psychology. He says that he was supporting himself by cooking in kitchens in Victoria B.C. and he found himself drawn to the atmosphere in the kitchen and the immediate gratification at the end of a hard day's work. He adds, "I didn't feel like I wanted to spend my life behind a desk or working with kids. I laugh now because in child psychology you're working with troubled children and it's actually been a really interesting tool to have as a chef."

Line Cook Training

Industry recognized, flexible line cook training & certification!



Chef Kristian Eligh

There are several chefs with whom Eligh worked that he credits as having helped shape him into the chef he is now. The first chef that he mentions was Alain Leger. He was cooking with Leger as he finished his apprenticeship. He explains, "He'd come from Diva at the Met in Vancouver. He saw some potential in me and encouraged me to move to Vancouver if I really wanted to get somewhere."

Eligh went to work at Diva and he says that the experience opened his eyes. He says that his chef there, Damon Campbell, was a true mentor and points out, "It was like doing my apprenticeship all over again. It was a really competitive kitchen."

Another experience that Eligh credits with having shaped him was working at Market by Jean-Georges. He explains, "Doors definitely opened up for me with that whole ethnic side with lighter flavours and really compelling flavour profiles."

Working with his current executive chef, David Hawksworth, has helped bring all of his experiences together according to Eligh. He says, "We've turned the corner in the maturity of food that we're doing. We're trying to simplify it and streamline it."

The current menu at Hawksworth, Eligh says, is based around the idea of "contemporary Canadian" food. The chef says, "By contemporary, we're referring to the techniques we use and the presentation of the food on the plate. The Canadian aspect means that we utilize as many coast-to-coast ingredients as we can."

He adds that he and David Hawksworth are attempting to streamline the menus at the restaurant. He elaborates, "We want to keep the program streamlined because we do incredibly big numbers here for a fine dining restaurant. In order to maintain that consistency, we're basically trying to remove things from the plate to the point that there's the refined sensibility we're known for but there's a simplicity that comes through in the food as well."

Seasonality also plays a role according to Eligh. He says, "I think we definitely cook as seasonally as we can. We never do a full menu change but we put things on as ingredients arrive at the door."



Hamachi sashimi with passion fruit, jalapeño, coconut and white soy



Dungeness crab, truffle custard, Meyer lemon, edamame, artichoke

Sourcing ingredients is a source of enjoyment, Eligh says. He explains that he's always inspired by going to markets as well as Vancouver's abundant seafood. He adds that Hawksworth has obtained a fish import license (a rare occurrence for an independent restaurant) which allows them to tap into other markets for their seafood and import directly to the restaurant.

The chef points out that ingredients are what defines a chef on their menus. He says that he's always keeping an eye on what's available and adds, "It is exhausting because I'm shopping every morning before coming to work and trying to find new things. David has been very good with me. We'll travel together nationally and internationally, all the while keeping our eye on what's out there that we can utilize."

Building and maintaining relationships with suppliers starts with a successful business relationship for Eligh. He explains, "It's easy for someone to send me a sample that's beautiful but, when you need fifty pounds of that ingredient a week, it either remains consistent or it doesn't. We keep relationships with those people who produce for us and that we're happy with."

The creative process, Eligh says, is fueled by discussion and collaboration with Hawksworth. He says, "David's stepping out and allowing me to run the day-to-day operations, but he still wants to be incredibly involved. We'll always discuss and collaborate with each other and get a dish going in the direction that we want it to go. The idea is then turned over to me to bring to fruition and be fine-tuned until we're both happy with it."



Lamb shoulder, de Puy lentils, celeriac, pumpkin seed, tangerine

He adds that he likes to get his kitchen team involved by having them suggest ideas for how to use ingredients coming in to the restaurant. He says, "I always try to push them to put ideas on paper with ingredients that are coming in. It really gets them interested and a lot of the time if something makes it onto the menu that they came up with, there's always more vested interest if they were responsible for the idea."

When it comes to the traits that Eligh considers important for a chef to possess, he says that he strives to play an inspirational role for his kitchen team. He says that he wants to get into the trenches as much as he can with his team but says, "It gets tougher and tougher as we build this business. It's tough to keep yourself chained to the stove if you will, but its something that remains important to me. I try to stay involved on a day-to-day basis with menus and menu development."

As for what he wants from his kitchen team, Eligh says that he looks for people with "a brain in their head, the ability to absorb information and take direction and a strong work ethic," and adds that he doesn't hire for experience but for the traits that he listed.

Eligh says that inspiration comes from several sources for him. He says, "David and I make a point of going on food trips. It's incredibly helpful to me to see what other people are doing around the world. That's number one. I'm a cookbook hound, I love cookbooks and I'm always diving into them to see new stuff or bring back old memories. Living in Vancouver gives me such an incredible environment to draw from. It's always inspiring."