

Dean Hassock embraces seasons

At three Whistler restaurants, his cuisine exemplifies the 'fresh, casual, local' ethos

Mia Stainsby

Whistler's having a very good snow season, which will keep the boutique Nita Lake Lodge a busy place. That in turn means a busy season for chef Dean Hassock, who oversees Aura Restaurant, Cure Lounge and Fix Cafe, where you'll find some of the best dining in Whistler. Even through the winter, he focuses as much as possible on farm-to-table menu.

Q What and who have motivated and inspired you as a chef?

A As a young cook before any formal training, I was intrigued by the knowledge of the cooks I was working with. Cooking was in my blood but I had to know more. Once I had completed culinary school, I met and was inspired by chef Bruno Marti, a former Vancouver restaurateur, manager and coach for both Culinary Teams B.C. and Canada. Over the next 12 years and many international competitions, chef Marti was a dedicated and inspiring mentor.

How would you describe the type of food you like to cook?

I love to use local produce. Root-down Organic Farm produce the most amazing produce, and when you can see the fields, feel the soil in your hands and discover what they deliver to the kitchen, the term farm-to-table really hits home. Fresh, casual, local.

What might diners not know about you?

I am a pretty calm and easygoing chef. Not too many "Gordon Ramsay" moments on our kitchens. Consistent results and dedication to the job at hand goes without saying, but occasionally we remind our team!

Describe a couple of your most recent creations.

With the launch of our winter menus in Aura, one of the first courses we are featuring is winter beet medley, with fresh Okanagan apple, shaved goat cheese and micro greens from Pemberton. It includes three colours of beets, prepared five different ways. One of our entrées is a Farmcrest chicken duo with pan-seared breast, whiskey braised leg, local root vegetables and a maple bacon jus. Farmcrest chicken come from a farm in Salmon Arm where they are 100 per cent naturally raised and Canada's first verified non-GMO chicken.



What's your favourite local product and how do you use it?

The elk chorizo from Two Rivers Meats is an amazing product. This season it, along with a nice gin, is helping to flavour the Salt Spring Island Mussel broth.

If there's one important piece of advice you might have for cooks, what might that be?

Be inquisitive and ask questions, develop your passion for food and never stop learning!

What's unique about being a chef in Whistler?

Coming from the Okanagan, we had one season, summer! Here in Whistler, we have two busy seasons, giving us the opportunity for creating completely different menu offerings.