

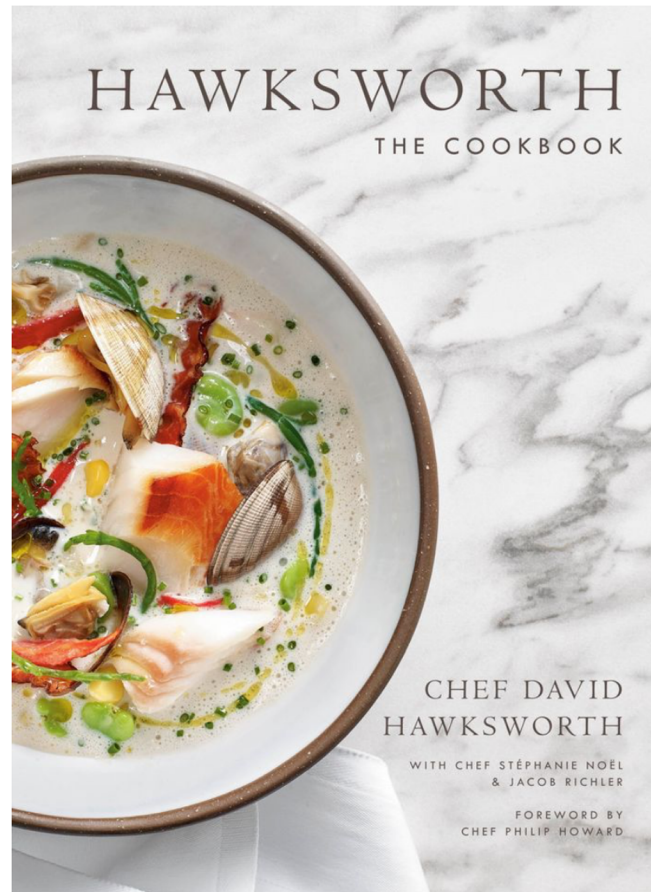
Chef David Hawksworth celebrates career with new cookbook

Award-winning chef releases namesake cookbook.

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Hawksworth: The Cookbook



By David Hawksworth

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David Hawksworth can often be found walking around the city's green spaces with his eyes cast down.

The celebrated Vancouver chef admits keeping an eye out for ingredients — fungi, fruits and more — is a force of habit.

In fact, speaking recently after a walk with the family dog Lola through Spirit Park, Hawksworth recounted how his somewhat-absent-minded search with his pup in tow yielded some pretty good bounty: Lobster mushrooms.

“I cannot,” Hawksworth says with a laugh on the topic of whether or not he can go anywhere these days without looking for something that might prove edible. “I walked down the street the other day and found a fig tree that’s producing some nice stuff.”

His foraging doesn’t stop at natural wonders. Hawksworth is also always on the hunt for a new “mom-and-pop” restaurant in the city where he can enjoy a great meal.

“I was walking on Robson Street the other day and I found this place called Noodle Arts,” Hawksworth says. “If I was in charge of giving Michelin stars, I would give them a star for their noodles.

“They’re no joke. It’s the real thing.”

That’s big praise coming from a chef who is considered to be among North America’s greatest talents; was the youngest chef to be inducted into the B.C. Restaurant Hall of Fame in 2008; named Vancouver Magazine’s Chef of the Year in 2012 and ’13; and whose restaurants have notched several top honours, including Maclean’s magazine’s Restaurant of the Year.

Remarking on his hometown city’s restaurant community, Hawksworth says it boasts a formidable number of small eateries that quietly produce what he calls “exceptional food.”

“The small operations that I find are pretty interesting. And I’m always looking out for them,” Hawksworth says enthusiastically. “There are tons of little hole-in-the-walls just waiting to be discovered.

“Kind of like looking for mushrooms.”

These days, the chef admits that he’s more apt to step into a small, quiet place for a meal rather than a fine-dining establishment.

“When you’ve been doing this for so long, you kind of want to just go and have a nice meal somewhere and have it be nice and calm,” Hawksworth says, noting that while he appreciates the pomp and circumstance of the fancier eateries, he often prefers something a little more low-key. “It’s nice to go somewhere and not get recognized and just have a nice little meal and then be on your way.”

Unfortunately, Hawksworth says, the team at his recent find, Noodle Arts, has now caught on to exactly who he is.

“I took some people there for lunch the other day and the woman there said, ‘I know who you are!’ ” Hawksworth recalls. “I was like, ‘Oh, no.’ ”

While many people recognize Hawksworth as the mastermind behind his eponymous eatery at the Rosewood Hotel Georgia, which opened in 2011, he admits that not as many people are familiar with the fact that he also helms the popular eateries Nightingale and Bel Café.

It’s a fact check he’s happy to have highlighted in the new cookbook.

“It’s kind of nice to put those in there,” he says of the destinations, which both have recipes featured within the new hardcover book alongside Hawksworth’s award-winning cuisine. “There’s recipes in there for if you want to do an elaborate dish from Hawksworth, you can do that. Or, if you want to go home and do something simpler — there’s lots of different things there.”

While his restaurant offerings span vastly different dining experiences, Hawksworth says his approach to food at each eatery has always been very much the same.

“There’s no difference in how we look at food. We look at it the same way,” he says. “A sandwich or a lobster dish, it doesn’t matter, we focus the same way at it.”

That consistent approach to food has helped hold Hawksworth’s interest in an industry that he’s been hard at work in for more than 30 years.

“It definitely keeps you interested,” he says. “If you are only doing eight main courses and eight starters, that does get very ... focused in on that. But, it’s nice to have a big spectrum. We’re lucky that way.”

The cookbook also contains a recipe, for Provençal Fish Soup, that holds a special place in Hawksworth’s professional history.

“That’s kind of how Hawksworth all started, was over fish soup,” Hawksworth says of his hand-picked recipe from the new book. Recalling how he’d made the soup for his friends — former Vancouver Canucks defenceman Willie Mitchell and his wife, Megan — when he was working at West, they requested the recipe so they could try recreating it for themselves at home. The at-home attempt, they told him, failed. So, Hawksworth ended up making the off-menu soup for them again during a rare lull in service at the restaurant.

They, again, fell in love with it. And the rest, one could say, is history.

That dinner included developer Bruce Langereis of Delta Land Development, purchaser of the Hotel Georgia, which would become home to Hawksworth’s restaurant.

For Hawksworth, the book's release in October couldn't come at a better time. Not only does he expect it be a great gifting option for the upcoming holiday season, he says the book, created with the help of Jacob Richler and longtime collaborator Chef Stephanie Noel, is a "positive, upbeat" creation during what he says have proved to be a "pretty difficult" last few years.

"I'm pretty proud of it. I can't wait to see it out there," Hawksworth says of the cookbook, noting that it has been in the works for some time. "It's a dream come true to do my actual own book. It's a great celebration of my career, obviously, but there's also so much to do with Vancouver."

While he admits he'd "love to do a Nightingale book" in the near future, for now, Hawksworth is focusing on doing the very same thing that most in the restaurant industry are trying to do as the effects of the continuing pandemic linger on: Survive.

"When all the subsidies go away, the house of cards is going to be pretty f—king real. We're going to see who can figure it out. It's really not easy," Hawksworth says. "I want to bring everybody that was working for us before back. We kind of halved our workforce and I want to see all of our people back full-time and making full-time money. That's my goal right now."

Hawksworth says he would also like to see an eventual return to regular programming with Air Canada, which he has had a culinary partnership with since 2015, as well as consultation for clients such as Whistler Blackcomb resort.

"I just want everything to go back to the way it was," Hawksworth says with a sigh. "It's challenging, but I think I'm optimistic."
