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City & Living Style

FOOD

A long family style table, unusual lighting and a glass enclosed wine cellar greet guests at Rush P. 21.



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Seafood reigns at Rush

Great Expectations:

A playful menu, striking decor and accommodating staff adds to the dining experience at Rush in downtown Calgary. Photography by [Derrick Woo](#)



RESTAURANT INSPIRATION

Two if by Sea



WITH AN INVITING STAFF, INNOVATIVE CHEF AND A FEELING OF ESCAPE FROM THE BUSTLE OF DOWNTOWN CALGARY, RUSH LEAVES DINERS WANTING MORE.

BY *KAILASH MAHARAJ AND SHIVANA MAHARAJ*. PHOTOGRAPHY BY *DERRICK WOO*

“YOU CAN DISARM THEM
A LITTLE BIT...
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AND AT THE END OF THE DAY, YOU’RE GOING
TO SAY ‘WOW, I DIDN’T EXPECT THAT.’”

- EXECUTIVE CHEF JUSTIN LEBOE

Calgary is bereft of sea, yet, reading the menu at Rush, one would never know. Dishes like poached octopus, lobster with sweetbreads, and dungeness crab waldorf salad appear alongside traditional land-based meats. Executive Chef Justin Leboe attributes this to the challenge and eventual triumph of preparing seafood. “Fish is so delicate. It requires a certain amount of finesse and for me, cooking fish perfectly is a better representation of what it is I do on a technical level [than cooking meat]. As a chef it’s more of a payoff.” For Leboe, the art of preparing seafood begins with choosing “pristine” fish from sources in Vancouver, and the East Coast. He looks for “translucent skin, clear eyes, red gills, and fish that smell sweet rather than of the ocean.” When preparing seafood Leboe believes in simplicity. “You need to enhance the fish but not overpower it. You need to use things that will work with its natural flavour and not mask it.”

Growing up in Vancouver, food was an important part of the Leboe household, whether picking chanterelles in winter on Vancouver Island, collecting beach oysters or crabbing with cousins. “From very early on [food] was part of my childhood, and it became a natural extension for me because when I walked into a kitchen for the first time when I was thirteen, I just knew that’s what I wanted to do.” For ten years, the chef worked in some of the top kitchens in North America (The French Laundry, Daniel, Jean-Georges), dedicating his entire life to pursuing his love for cooking. “You have to resign yourself to the fact that for ten or

fifteen years you’re not going to make any money. If you don’t make decisions for your career based on money, learn as much as you can and see as much as you can, everything will work itself out.”

Chef Leboe’s career path was not so much unusual as it was ingenious. After a brief pause from cooking, at eighteen (“I questioned whether the thirteen year old was right”), to earn a University degree in political science and philosophy, Leboe stepped back into the kitchen, and knew he was home. Sensing that the best way to advance his skills would be to work with world renowned chefs, Leboe quickly concocted a plan - writing, what he calls “stacks of letters” to various chefs. One in particular garnered the response he was seeking. Leboe had remembered reading that foremost American chef Thomas Kellers’ favourite cookbook was the Fernand Point classic *Ma Gastronomie*, which articulated the intricacies of the profession of cooking. “I actually transcribed parts of [the book], about what it was like to be a chef, into a letter I wrote to Thomas Keller. Two weeks later I got a phone call from the French Laundry,” recalls Leboe. “I threw one hundred and fifty percent into it. There was nothing else in my life that was nearly as important as doing the right things for my career or achieving the goals I had set for myself - and, it paid off.”

From then on, recounts Leboe, he worked with a slew of culinary mentors. “I was fortunate to work in kitchens where the chefs were driven and wanted to be the best that they could be in what they did. They had a sense of being a chef rather than it just being a job.” In fact, it was while working in Virginia under chef Patrick O’Connell at The Inn on Little Washington that Leboe learned the most about running a restaurant. “That was a turning point for me because the attention to detail needs to extend far past the food. It needs to extend to the

entire restaurant, the entire experience.”

In 2006, Leboe travelled to Bermuda for a three year stint as executive chef at a fifty room Relais and Chateau property. He candidly notes that the experience was “a way for me to stretch my legs as a chef. Because, with anything there’s a certain sense of self doubt, like, can I really do this?” Rush has given the chef an opportunity to move to another stage in his career. “When you’re a little kid growing up your mother always tells you don’t play with your food. I managed to turn that into a career. That’s really all I do for a living every day, and it’s a different atmosphere in the kitchen because you’re just playing and it’s not really work at that point,” says Leboe.

Leboe is one among many at Rush who believe their work is more like play, and that making guests feel comfortable is *de rigueur*. Undoubtedly the décor at Rush is scintillating with its combination of glass, crystal and pin tucked leather banquettes. Such a flawless setting usually makes for stuffiness, but echoed again and again by Anthony Chalmers General Manager of Rush, Heather McDougall, sommelier, and Leboe is that guests who dine at Rush should feel comfortable. Perhaps it was Leboe’s own “ridiculous” experience at a Michelin star restaurant in Spain- the mere sight of the exterior inducing heart palpitations- that encourages Rush to create an environment without a sense of trepidation or intimidation. “People walk past the window and go, ‘oh my gosh that place is going to be expensive’, but when people come in, you can disarm them a little bit and say ‘I put my pants on one leg at a time just like you do.’ When you come [to Rush], you’re going to feel like the King or Queen of the world and at the end of the day you’re going to say ‘wow, I didn’t expect that,’” explains Leboe. In fact all expectations should be shunned upon entering the restaurant.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A LUSH SETTING - PIN-TUCKED FURNITURE AND MODERN GLOBES; BRIGHT PEA AGNOLOTTI WITH PARMESAN FOAM; A LOOK AT THE BAR; THE WINE CELLAR HOLDS AN IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION; FROZEN PINK HIMALAYAN SALT BLOCKS COOL OFF SPOT PRAWNS, AND ASTURIAN AIOLI WITH PISTACHIO, ORANGE AND BLACK OLIVE; THE WATER IS BOTTLED ON SITE.



LEFT: RICOTTA BEIGNETS AND ESPRESSO CREME BRULEE END A MEAL EFFORTLESSLY; THE CHIC MODERN TOUCHES AT RUSH ADD PERSONALITY; A LOOK INSIDE THE RESTUARANT IN THE DAYTIME.

Sitting at the Chef's Table, a cozy corner, literally overlooking the kitchen, Leboe's experience in working in some of the most high pressure kitchens in North America comes through in the ease and synchronicity of his movements. His eyes do not linger for a moment past the task in front of him. Noticing our awe at the kitchen dynamic, Chalmers comes by our table and whispers conspiratorially, "he's very focused when he's in the kitchen. He's been here since this morning and won't leave until midnight."

At dinner the chef's philosophy on cooking comes across in clear flavours. "Certain flavours pair very well together in terms of a counterbalance- point and counterpoint. There has to be a sense of harmony on a plate for me, there can be nothing else that's confusing the star attraction of the dish. There needs to be one clear voice," Justin articulates. McDougall approaches our table, a bright smile on her face. She proudly holds a bottle of Greek wine – an Assyrtiko from Santorini- to pair with our lobster and coconut bisque. It's an ingenious ploy to toy with us and expand our pre-conceived ideas about colour-by-number pairings or trendy varietals. Little wonder Chalmers had called her "a young spitfire with an incredible knowledge of wine and food."

Dining too, is a sensory sometimes cere-

bral experience allowing us to use all of our senses. So far, we've enjoyed a 'breakfast' of potato flakes and creamy vichyssoise, a fragrant coconut lobster bisque, served from a coffee press and we've cut open our rhubarb palette cleanser freezies with safety scissors. This approachable, interactive food is refreshing. As we eagerly anticipate our next course, Leboe recounts his favourite experience in the last week. "The other day we did what we call 'Summer's garden'- a goats cheese pudding with diced vegetable and molasses-rye bread dirt on top. It was a true expression of me and my food -it's playful." We cap off our meal with light ricotta beignets with espresso crème brulee, and hazelnut ice cream.

Throughout the night as we've chatted with Chalmers, McDougall, and Leboe we have come to know each a little better. This is a restaurant where facades conceal reality. The modern exterior of Rush conceals what was once the Old Canada Post office. Beneath manager Anthony's cool demeanour and impeccable suits are an array of tattoos, provided courtesy of his daughter. Beneath sommelier Heather's incredible knowledge of wine and wine pairings is a former dancer and creative spirit. Beneath Chef Justin Leboe's down to earth, earnest manner lies grit, determination and philosophy. And if you were to concern yourself with facades alone, boy, would you be missing out. **CSL**

FROM THE CHEF

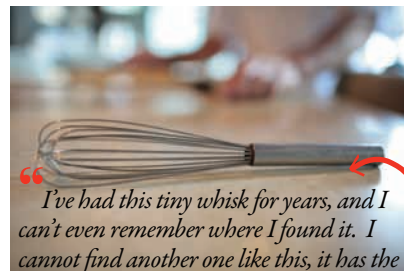


the yanagiba knife

"This is a left-handed knife. I use it for fish."

- CHEF JUSTIN LEBOE

the whisk of life



"I've had this tiny whisk for years, and I can't even remember where I found it. I cannot find another one like this, it has the ability to bring suspended sauces back, like Hollandaise."

- CHEF JUSTIN LEBOE



recipe

(For Chef Leboe's **lobster and coconut bisque** recipe turn to *page 59*)

> **RUSH**; 100, 207 9 Ave SW
www.rushrestaurant.com