

What's cooking in Whistler?

By Holly Fraughton

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Chefs talk shop with locals in new library

Foodies of all ages and abilities gathered by the fireplace at the Whistler Public Library on Tuesday afternoon, eagerly soaking up culinary stories and tips from a few of Whistler's top authorities on all things edible, as the early spring sunshine shone into the airy new facility.

Whistler Cooks' Grant Cousar, and Melissa Craig, executive chef at the Bearfoot Bistro, accompanied by pastry chef, Dominic Fortin, all took time out from their busy schedules behind the scenes at their respective restaurants, and were on-hand offering their tales from the kitchen — free of charge — as part of the WPL's week-long "libration" activities to commemorate the long-anticipated opening of the new community facility.

Chris Quinlan, owner and operator of the popular local coffee hangout, Behind the Grind, moderated the discussion, which touched on everything from favourite cooking shows, to specific challenges each faces running restaurants in Whistler, to where each would eat their last supper.

The interview-style forum yielded some amusing personal anecdotes from each chef's childhood, like Fortin's first foray into the culinary world, after complaining about a meal his mother had prepared, and Craig's "secret ingredient" — a complex mixture of salt and pepper.

And how does each stack up at the stove, in comparison to their parents?

"My mom's a great cook, if you like casseroles," Craig said with a smile.

But they also managed to talk a bit of business, in between the chuckles.

Cousar spoke about his commitment to sustainability in the kitchen, using fresh local, seasonal produce, which triggered a discussion about the 100-mile diet and the slow food movement. He started out ordering in the best produce from around the world to create dishes, but has recently become committed to using more rustic, local ingredients.

Cousar, Craig and Quinlan also discussed staffing challenges that are intrinsic to any resort town like Whistler, and the subsequent decline in work ethic in today's West coast kitchens (apparently, the chefs can't actually behave the way Gordon Ramsay does in Hell's Kitchen — no yelling at the staff!)

They also fielded a wide range of questions from the audience: why is sugar added to everything? How do you get good strawberries at this time of year? Where do you purchase produce for your personal kitchens? American or Canadian beef? The panel deftly responded to each and every inquiry (and in case you're wondering, both buy Canadian cows, though Craig also gets Japanese Kobe beef.)

They even brought in some treats to help inspire the audience's culinary interests.

Jealous yet? You should be; Craig passed around a mouth-watering assortment of canapés, while Fortin provided rhubarb brownies, classic petit-fours, chocolate macarons, white chocolate biscotti and strawberry jellies to satisfy those in the crowd with a sweet tooth.

And to incorporate the written word into the event — which was only fitting, given the setting — the three guest speakers each selected books that had helped to inspire and fuel their passion for the culinary arts.

Much to my delight, one of Craig's selections was Irma Rombauer's all-time favourite countertop anthology, *The Joy of Cooking*. You see, I recently invested in my own 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of this treasured tome, which I just received last week, and have yet to take for a spin, so I was pretty pleased that it came so highly recommended from Canada's recently appointed top chef. Now, I really can't wait to peruse the pages and try out some of the tried and true recipes that are sure to lie within.

And this isn't the only food-related activity going on at the library this week. To wrap up the Libration celebration, organizers are also hosting a martini party on Thursday, April 17, boasting literary-themed martinis created by local bartenders, hors d'oeuvre, a live auction, and entertainment. Tickets are \$75 and are available through Armchair Books or at the library.

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