



CULINARY CHEMISTRY

at Q Haute Cuisine

BY RENNAY CRAATS

When it comes to pleasing the guest, Q Haute Cuisine sets the standard; amazing contemporary food, impeccable service, a knowledgeable sommelier and incredible decor. What it lacks, however, is the unapproachable, intimidating atmosphere often associated with fine dining establishments. Instead, over the past ten years, Q Haute Cuisine has worked hard to create an environment where guests feel at home every time they walk through the door.

“If you interfere with a chef’s creative spirit consider him or her dead.” It is this spirit that set the course for Q Haute Cuisine as Calgary’s culinary visionaries.



“With fine dining, you have the stereotype of being stuffy, intimidating. We don’t want that,” says Marcello Belvedere, Q Haute co-owner. And the restaurant has succeeded. A stone’s throw from the Bow River, it has embraced its breathtaking surroundings and, while the decor is contemporary and clean, it also incorporates the natural beauty just outside its wall of windows.

The decor is simple, allowing the star of the show – the food – to shine. The menu items are as beautiful as they are delicious, edible works of art on ceramic canvases. Until 2008, the Calgary dining experience was always the same in one aspect – it was menu driven. Chef Michele Aurigemma wanted to bring something innovative to Calgary. In 2008 Chef made the bold move to remove the menu from the dining experience. Much like a theatrical event, the customer would now be taken on a journey of the palate. “This wasn’t anything new in cuisine but, as a Calgarian, I knew it was a bold move as the change was new to our market. It turned out that Calgary was more than ready for a new dining experience,” said Aurigemma.

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What's on offer changes with the seasons and with what is fresh from local purveyors that day, so each visit is a unique experience. Central in the kitchen is an automated garden filled with sprouting herbs like chervil, sunflower shoots and spearmint, all ready to be picked and plated in seconds. "Getting ingredients as fresh as possible makes a big difference to the finished product on the table," Belvedere says.

After all, it's all about the customer. An express menu gives diners a selection of dishes for a quick lunch while the evening fare is a four- to seven-course tasting menu. The chefs can work around allergies and dietary restrictions, offering great vegetarian dishes and an almost entirely gluten-free menu. Over the years Q Haute has become a popular downtown destination; its 40-seat dining room is

often full. For weddings and special events there are three private rooms which have seen parties of over 200 people. There will be an extra-special event at the restaurant this August. Q Haute Cuisine is celebrating its ten-year anniversary with an incredible ten-course Q Classics dinner. This milestone is a great opportunity to look at all that has changed since Q Haute opened in 2005. Diners are no longer content going out and ordering off an à la carte menu. Instead they want to be challenged, surprised and indulged – from wine pairing menus to unique ingredients to decadent dishes.

By merging chemistry and physics with traditional cooking, the chefs are transforming and reinventing foods in a fascinating way. In some cases, they are playing with structures and shapes – stabilizing bubbles into an airy, flavourful foam, making mousse in a whipped cream canister,

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and creating unique frozen or partly-frozen delights using liquid nitrogen. The anti-griddle (a flatbed griddle reaching -35 C) allows chefs to control the level of freezing foods undergo and also allows for higher amounts of alcohol in creations because of the low temperature.

Spheres are a restaurant favourite made by puréeing or liquefying foods and then using sodium alginate and calcium chloride to cause a reaction. This reaction creates a skin on the ball while leaving the insides soft or liquid. Diners can then pop these spheres on their plates in the case of sauces or pop them into their mouths for a flavour explosion.

“You can take something and serve it in a way that is unusual and unexpected,” says sous-chef Paul Stoffel. “We like to do it as a surprise, to shock the senses.”

Q Haute is also using technology to enhance main dishes

using sous vide. This technique involves vacuum sealing food and flavourings in a package and then placing it into a circulating water bath at a precise temperature to slow-cook to perfection. It takes a long time to cook some meats but is well worth the investment.

“Traditional cooking tends to push all the juices out as it’s so high a temperature. But here there’s no shrinkage, you don’t lose juices and it converts the collagen into gelatin a lot more efficiently,” says Stoffel.

From amuse-bouche starters to the sinfully delicious desserts, Q Haute Cuisine is applying science and creativity to its already proven menu and quality service to make an evening out a true experience. With the innovative and passionate chefs constantly honing their craft, it’s exciting to imagine what the next ten years will bring.

**Congratulations to Q Haute Cuisine
on your 10 Year Anniversary!**
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Q Haute Cuisine on their
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Marcello and Chef, ten years for a restaurant is phenomenal. It has been an absolute pleasure to be your marketer. You are masters of the dining experience! - David Howse