

Calgary's Chefs

Chef in Profile:

Johnathan Canning, Executive Chef

Restaurant:

OLIVES RESTAURANT

Some of our fondest memories of food come from childhood. Who can't remember coming home to fresh-baked cookies to be dipped in milk or fresh-baked bread, still hot from the oven, ready to be slathered with butter?

For Johnathan Canning, executive chef at Olives Restaurant, some of his favourite early memories are of cooking with his father. Growing up in Nova Scotia, he remembers making many traditional dishes with East-Coast flavours.

"My father was a big influence on me," says Canning. "I remember many special times cooking up rustic dishes like seafood chowder and baked beans with him. He was a great cook."

And it's something that still influences his dishes today. Seafood is one of his preferred ingredients to work with at Hotel Arts Group's latest restaurant. Olives is located in the community of Victoria Crossing just north of the Stampede grounds; an area that is being revitalized into upscale condos, restaurants and shops.

The restaurant offers innovative Italian cuisine with their top seller being truffled mascarpone ravioli. Other customer favourites are oysters with prosecco-pickled shallots and steamed P.E.I. mussels from the antipasto menu.

"We use fresh seasonal ingredients in an uncomplicated way in our recipes and put an innovative twist on it," says Canning. "With Italian food, I find it's best to keep it simple and just let the ingredients shine."

Wine pairings are also important and Olives has teamed up with its neighbour, 100 Wines, in a unique arrangement to select and provide excellent Italian wines for the restaurant's dishes. Knowledgeable staff, which has been hard to find in the past, has been trained to help clients make the best choice for their meal.

"Getting enough experienced staff has been an issue in the past where it was difficult even trying to find a dishwasher," says Canning. "But now we're getting more resumés and seeing more people with experience in this field so we're now able to pick from a growing talent pool."

Even without the staffing issues of the past, the restaurant business is not easy. There are many details to keep track of in order to run a restaurant smoothly, from sourcing out fresh local ingredients to making sure clients are satisfied with their meal, but Canning thrives in this type of work atmosphere.

"I consider myself very lucky to be doing what I'm doing," says Canning. "Being able to create dishes and be in the kitchen every day is something I really love."



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Something that obviously comes through in his dishes as Olives was voted one of the top 10 new restaurants in Canada for 2008 by Where magazine. Another Hotel Arts restaurant, The Chef's Table at Kensington Riverside Inn, was also voted as one of Canada's top 10 new restaurants for 2008 by Enroute magazine.

"This company is growing quite fast," says Canning. "We'll have to wait and see what they have in their plans next."

In the meantime, it's great to savour an excellent Italian meal at Olives in their fresh and modern décor that invites customers to relax and enjoy the atmosphere. For more information and reservations visit www.olivesrestaurant.ca. **BIC**