

# Stirring up *Romance*

with Chef Marcus Von Albrecht



Chocolate Macadamia  
Pomegranate Lover's Heart

by Jason McRobbie  
photos by Rob Newell



Chef Marcus preparing butternut squash ravioli with shaved truffles and local prawns



No one ever had to push Chef Marcus Von Albrecht into the kitchen. His mother did, however, tell him that kitchen skills were good life skills. By the age of four, he was already running his own imaginary restaurant.

That single lesson has served him well for the past 32 years in ways both personal and professional. He has served celebrities, dined with dignitaries and carried his passion for community and cuisine from Vancouver's Eastside to the peak of Mount Kilimanjaro. As past-president of the B.C. Chefs' Association, and a driving force behind culinary tourism in the province, his passion for cooking is matched by an unabashed ardour for promoting provincial cuisine.

"You can buy fresh ingredients from anywhere on the planet these days," admits Chef Von Albrecht. "Importantly though, people are starting to realize that B.C. grows most of them here on our doorstep. We have so many great growers and markets, it's pretty easy to find unbeatable product close home."

"There is a real value that comes from using wholesome ingredients that works on a lot of levels."

Working on a lot of levels is what keeps Chef Von Albrecht happiest.

His *Food for Life* line of healthy, frozen meals is on select shelves of Whole Foods and IGA Marketplaces, as well as aboard BC Ferries, and his Richmond-based production kitchen also services the Meals on Wheels program.

"The goal was really to make a difference: use local growers, give back, help the elderly and focus on a good, growing market."

For Chef Von Albrecht, food is a doorway to better living, and befitting our Valentine's theme,

to romance. While he admits Valentine's Day is one of the busiest nights in the restaurant industry, he stands by the home creation as the quickest way to the heart.

"Going out is always great, but Valentine's Day is a great chance to really express your love," he says. "Get organized and plan to have some fun. Prepare what you can ahead of time, but leave at least part of the meal to be cooked in front of the one you love."

Just don't forget about the other aspects that go into a romantic meal like the setting and the ambiance. Having a special ingredient or two on hand is another trick to elevating the experience. In this case, Chef Von Albrecht has a rich mass of black truffle on the cutting board that is sumptuously aromatic and a well-rumoured aphrodisiac. Decadent, flavourful, and enticing, it is worth every penny, a great many pennies.

Less expensive, but equally enticing are the glistening, ruby-hued hemispheres of pomegranate, another garnish guaranteed to garner romantic praise. For any who have ever stained a counter or shirt wrestling the red, fruity seeds from the white pulp, a chef's advice comes in handy.

"Let the water do the work. Split the pomegranate, break it apart and let it sit in a bowl of cold water. After a couple minutes, the fruit will begin to float to the surface."

Regardless of what makes it to the table Valentine's Day, it is the passion that shines through. The only thing that could make it shine even brighter are a heartfelt handful of recipes compliments of a veteran chef.

As to the cost of the truffle, Chef Von Albrecht laughs. "Well, it is cheaper than a diamond, but a definite investment of love." }

Butternut Squash Ravioli with Shaved Truffles and Local Prawns



Veal rack with mustard port sauce and pistachios



Fresh berry finish







## Butternut Squash Ravioli with Shaved Truffles and Local Prawns

- 1 pkg. ready-made pasta dough
- 1 butternut squash, halved, seeded (1 lb.)
- 4 local prawns (21-26 count/lb.)
- 1 small black truffle (or a favorite mushroom)
- 1 cup cream
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp nutmeg
- 1 tbsp orange juice
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tbsp grated parmesan
- 1 medium tomato, finely diced
- 2 pieces chive, finely diced

Preheat oven to 400F (200C). Brush squash with oil, sprinkle with brown sugar and season with nutmeg, orange juice, salt and pepper. Place onto a roasting pan and cook for 35 minutes or until squash is soft. Remove from oven, cool, peel and puree.

Roll out pasta dough into 3 mm thickness and cut into uniform desired shape (we have used a heart shape cookie-cutter), that measure roughly 4 cm x 4 cm. Place a small spoonful of the squash into the center of each square, run a wet finger around the edges, place another piece of dough on top and squeeze the edges together.

Once sealed, drop raviolis into salted boiling water. Cook pasta for approximately six minutes or until it floats to the top.

In a sauce pan, melt the butter and add the cream along with a few shavings from the truffle. Reduce cream by about half before adding parmesan cheese and cooked raviolis into sauce. In another saucepan, heat oil, chives, tomatoes and prawns. Cook for five minutes or until prawns are pink; season with salt and pepper.

Plate with raviolis atop one another, using



a toothpick to hold them in place. Anchor prawns on the protruding toothpick end and pour reduced cream sauce atop and around the plate. Garnish with truffle slices, chives and diced tomatoes as desired.

## Veal Rack with Mustard Port Sauce and Pistachios

- 1 rack of veal or lamb (eight rib count)
- 1 cup veal stock (at Granville Island stock market)
- 1 cup sweet port
- 1 tbsp hot mustard
- 125 ml pistachio, finely chopped
- 1 lemon, juiced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 425F. Season racks with salt and pepper, sear in hot frying pan or grill for approximately four minutes per side, remove and cool. Brush racks with hot mustard and then coat with chopped pistachios. Place into preheated oven for 18-20 minutes. Once meat is cool, remove and let sit for five minutes before cutting the rack into chops.

While meat cooks, bring the veal stock and port to boil in a sauce pan. Reduce, simmer and stir occasionally for 20 minutes until volume is reduced by 50 per cent and the sauce thickens.

## Pan-roasted Baby Vegetables

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 mini zucchini
- 2 small patti pans, halved
- 4 shiitake mushrooms, stemmed
- 2 baby beets, cut in 1/2" rounds
- salt and pepper to taste

Toss vegetables in olive oil before adding to medium-high frying pan. Season and cook to desired tenderness (8-12 minutes).



## Cauliflower Hair

- 2 cups cauliflower
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 3 tbsp sesame oil
- 4 shavings of black truffle
- salt and pepper to taste

Heat the olive oil in a pan over medium heat while you grate the cauliflower as you would shred cheese. Heat olive oil in a pan over medium heat and add cauliflower. Cook for five minutes, stirring occasionally. Add sesame oil and truffles.

Stir and cook for additional three minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. To create a simple mould for presenting on the plate, use either a soup or tomato paste can with both ends removed.

**To serve:** Plate your cauliflower hair in the center and position the veal/lamb chops atop. Half the vegetables between the plates and dress with mustard port sauce.



Chef Marcus Von Albrecht

# Chocolate Macadamia Pomegranate Lover's Heart

## Flourless Chocolate Macadamia Cake

500 grs bitter-sweet chocolate (65%+)  
250 grs butter  
1/2 cup whipping cream  
125 grs sugar  
4 whole eggs  
1/2 tsp salt  
1 tsp vanilla  
125 grs macadamia nuts, toasted,  
chopped

Melt the chocolate and the butter on a double boiler. In a separate bowl, warm the cream and the sugar and add to the chocolate mixture. Stir until a slight shine develops (about 4-5 minutes) to create a ganache. In a separate bowl, whisk the eggs and add the salt and the vanilla.

Mix the ganache with the egg mixture and the chopped macadamia nuts before pouring into a 8x8 baking pan. Bake in a 325F (160 C) oven for 35-45 minutes until a toothpick can be inserted and pulled out clean.

## White Chocolate Mousse

500 grs white chocolate  
2 whole eggs  
1 egg yolk  
2 tbsp gelatine  
4 tbsp cold water  
500ml whipping cream

Melt the white chocolate over a double boiler. In a separate bowl, mix the eggs and the egg yolk and whisk over the double boiler to heat them until they are warm to



the touch. Add the chocolate to the egg mixture and combine well.

Add cold water to the gelatine, stirring gently to bloom the gelatine and stir into the white chocolate mixture while it is still warm. Whip the cream to medium peaks and fold into the chocolate mixture.

## Pomegranate Glaze

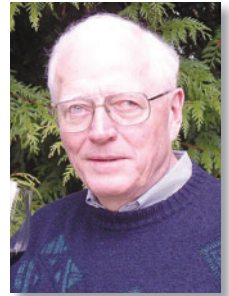
3/4 cup pomegranate juice

In a small pot, bring the pomegranate juice to a boil, then simmer to reduce by half or until thickened.

**To serve:** Feel free to use cutting forms to shape your dessert as you wish. Cut and place the flourless cake on the bottom of a cake ring (minimum 2" high) making sure that it is a little bit smaller than the ring. Pour the white chocolate mousse on top of the cake and flatten with a spatula. Place in the freezer until it sets (approximately 45 minutes). Pour the pomegranate glaze on top of the cake and place it back in the freezer for another 25 minutes until the glaze sets.

Additional garnishes can include fresh pomegranate seeds, chocolate sheets to rim each cake, sugar tuiles or berries. ①

JOHN  
*Schreiner*



A Vancouver marketer named Bruce Fuller has been working on launching an Okanagan winery for several years. His original theme, an Italian village, did not work out. The project has been reborn as Rustico Farms and is being pitched as "Canada's most romantic winery." Not a bad theme for a winery. It taps into the rich vein of romance that runs through the wine industry.

There is no better example than Champagne, the wine of weddings, engagements and seductions. To quote Lord Chesterfield: "Give me Champagne and fill it to the brim ... I'll toast in bumpers ev'ry lovely limb ... ." Or if you prefer a more ribald verse, here is Ogden Nash: "Candy is dandy but liquor is quicker."

Over the years, some of the greatest Champagne houses were run by women, none more storied than Veuve Clicquot. Nicole-Barbe Ponsardin, who in 1899 had married the son of the founder of this Champagne house, was widowed at age 27. She talked her father-in-law into letting her run the business. She was a great success, dying a wealthy widow in 1866 at the age of 88.

However, Champagne owes its romantic image not to the gender of the owners, but to how effectively they positioned Champagne as a wine of celebration. The widow Clicquot shipped her Champagne to Russia in 1814; the Russian nobility toasted their victory over Napoleon with it – and re-ordered. In a twist on the romance of celebration, another mistress of a Champagne house, Madame Lily Bollinger, convinced the Nazi army not to loot her cellars in 1940 so there would be enough Champagne to celebrate their victory! Such was the arrogance of the Germans that they fell for the line.

The high romance of Champagne is summed up by the image of the dashing lover who drinks the wine from his companion's slipper. That image has now popped up in the label of The View Winery, a new winery just opening in Kelowna. The labels all show a red slipper hanging by a stiletto heel from the neck of an empty bottle. The winery hints that the idea came from the romantic conclusion to a celebration.

Hints of romance have made it onto other wine labels as well. The wines of unheralded Scherzinger Vineyards in Summerland became must-have wines when the winery changed its name to Dirty Laundry and, with such labels as Hush Hush and Woo Woo, celebrated a bordello that once operated from a local laundry.

A little risqué, perhaps? The rivalry to be Canada's most romantic winery will be a race worth watching.

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