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FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO *read*, LOVE TO *eat*, AND LOVE TO *travel*



YOUNG JOURNALIST



THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Anne Leroux and Chef Norman Zeledon; Harvesting potatoes; Dining room at Annie's Table; Homemade scones; Annie's Table.





AT ANNIE'S TABLE

by LISA JACKSON

First-time visitors are often most surprised by the pulpit

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN a 60-year-old United Church is taken over by chefs and food lovers? You get Annie's Table — a cooking school located in a converted church on Prince Edward Island. Since its opening in 2012, gourmets have been flocking to this unique culinary studio for an authentic taste of Island cuisine.

"New London is a fishing and farming community," says owner and instructor Annie Leroux. "It's ideal for a cooking school because we can showcase all the extraordinary foods that the Island produces."

Leroux isn't kidding. The studio itself is situated amidst the farm fields of New London, close to the birthplace of Lucy Maude Montgomery. Within walking distance are oyster and lobster fishers, a potato farm and a mussel farm that produces 17 million pounds per year.

"You can't get anything fresher," Leroux says. "Oysters harvested that morning or lobsters coming right off the

boat. It's unbelievable for a cooking school to have access to this kind of food."

In 2011 Leroux purchased the church and renovated it into a cooking school. Now she teaches classes alongside Norman Zeledon — a Nicaraguan chef who trained in Calgary and has lived internationally. Inspired by his tastes and travels, Zeledon loves to mix flavours and create "worldly culinary treats."

What's really special about Annie's Table is the authentic field- (or sea-) to-table experience. Students get to interact with their food, whether it's picking vegetables in the garden or learning from local farmers first-hand.

"Sometimes we get our lobster fishers to deliver their catch and talk to the students," Leroux says. "Other times, our local oyster fisherman will demonstrate how to shuck oysters. We are so close to the food source."

All classes are hands on and capped at 15 guests. Students have ranged from professional chefs to novices who have never donned an apron. Others have rented the whole studio for a demonstration class — an opportunity to watch the chef in action, while relaxing with friends and enjoying a glass of wine.

"We are here to learn, to cook, to eat," says Leroux. "But most of all, we're here to have fun."

Entering the studio, it feels like stepping back in time with the stained glass windows and antique décor. The original ceilings have been removed, exposing the trusses and creating a luminous space. A 12-foot-long harvest table dominates the centre of the studio, built from 150-year-old attic boards in Leroux's house. But first-time visitors are often most surprised by the pulpit, now integrated into the upstairs railing.

"When I bought the church, I asked if I could keep the pulpit," Leroux says. "I wanted to do something really special with it."

Upon arrival, we join Chef Norman in the potato fields. It's one of those dreamy overcast days, with the sun seeping through the clouds and illuminating the yellows and greens in the field. Two men from the Prince Edward Island Potato Board are waiting, ready to demonstrate how to harvest a potato.

It's hard work to pluck a potato from the ground without bruising or damaging it. Donning black utility gloves, we get down on our knees and dig into the dirt mound until we hit Yukon gold. The sandy soil beams rust red from being so rich in iron — an element that blesses PEI. »

Cook
to

NORMAN FOR HENRI

SERVES 4 AS AN APPETIZER

Black Garlic and Gahan Beer ISLAND MUSSELS

Blue Cultured Mussels
fresh, 2 lbs

Butter 2 Tbs
Black Garlic
3 cloves,
smoothed to
a paste

Onion 1
medium,
chopped

Lemon ½,
juiced and
zested

Gahan Beer
½ bottle¹

Green Onions
2, sliced

Salt
¼ tsp

Pepper
¼ tsp

¹ Or other
lager-style
beer.

1 RINSE mussels in tap water. Discard any mussels that do not close when tapped. Set aside.

2 IN a large pot, melt butter over medium heat; cook chopped onion, black garlic, salt and pepper, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 3 minutes.

3 ADD juice from lemon and zest into pan.

4 ADD beer; bring to a boil and reduce by three quarters, about 8 minutes.

5 ADD mussels; reduce heat, cover and simmer until mussels open, about 4–5 minutes. Discard any that do not open.

6 SPRINKLE with green onion and serve with crusty bread (optional).

Recipe by Chef Norman Zeledon, Annie's Table.

«potatoes with their creamy texture. Sometimes, we grab the plant by the roots and tug until it's dislodged. We hold up these prized spuds into the air like trophies before placing it into the pail.

Back in the cooking studio, steaming cups of tea and warm scones await. We help ourselves while Chef Norman lays his goodies onto the cooking island — a reclaimed pharmacy counter from 1910. He has planned a sumptuous feast of lobster quiche and latkes with Island smoked salmon.

Before prepping the quiche, we marvel at the Island fare: fresh farm eggs, applewood smoked cheddar, diced lobster meat, chives and herbs. Chef Norman begins with a brief 'Lobster 101' lesson: how to choose a lobster, meat extraction, nutritional value, and most importantly, regulating lobster juice.

"You don't want too much lobster juice in the quiche," he instructs. "Cut up the lobster, roll it in a towel, and then squeeze out the juice."

While the lobster quiche bakes, we prep the potato latkes, heaping handfuls of shredded spuds onto a baking sheet and sprinkling with garlic powder and other spices.

For dessert, it's a sweet apple crêpe topped with a frothy whipped cream. To everyone's delight, the apples are from a local orchard and sautéed in butter.

"You're on vacation, so we're not going to worry about the butter," Chef Norman says, throwing another stick into the pan.

But the Chef's secret weapon for perfecting this dish? After sautéing the apples, add a little ice wine brandy to the mix and light it on fire.


The scent wafting from the oven makes our bellies rumble. To distract us, Chef Norman shares a culinary delicacy: black garlic. Originating in Korean cuisine, black garlic is made through a special fermentation process. Over three weeks, the garlic is kept in a warm fridge and gradually turns chocolate brown. This 'black gold' is rich in antioxidants and coveted by chefs for its sweet balsamic flavour, ideal for sauces, desserts, soups, rubs and more.

"It can be used in anything," Chef Norman tells us. "Down the road, there's a place that sells black garlic beer."

To prove a point, we sample slices of black garlic chocolate cake. It's moist and sweet, smelling like molasses and tasting much like a date. No traces of a pungent garlicy flavour. Our group hastily plans to visit the neighbouring farm, Eureka Garlic, to stock up on this black gold.

Once the meal is ready, we sit at the dining room table to enjoy a well-deserved glass of wine and Island fare. As we sink our forks into the lobster quiche, Chef Norman offers one last piece of advice to take home.

"Before you leave the Island, stuff yourself with as much lobster as possible."

Wise words to live by. 

Visit
to

Annie's Table
www.annies-table.com

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to

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