

Local Dinners

Celebrating Our Terroir

For two decades, Jamie Kennedy has been a passionate advocate connecting us to the source of our food. From his many à la carte venues over the years to the flourishing catering operation that keeps him busy today, Kennedy has always practiced terroir.

In February, Kennedy launched the weekly Local Food Movement Dinners, hosted at the Gilead Café, as a creative collaboration with an artisanal producer and a winemaker, who also attend.

Breaking bread with people at the source of one's meal is a rare offering for a restaurateur, and the dinners are ideal for this. The room is set with a communal table, creating a private dinner-party atmosphere. Guests engage with likeminded guests, as well as the farmer who grew the meal's vegetables, for example, and the winemaker with an intimate understanding of what makes the evening's wines unique.

The dinners draw a steady stream of industry people who come to build their gastronomic knowledge, and the lion's share of attendees is loyal, repeat clientele. They tell Kennedy they're surprised, pleased and impressed with the quality of food and wine in this local context. From a restaurateur's point of view, the dinners provide opportunity, as it did for Kennedy, for new revenue, press, and food blogs writing about the dinners in great detail, keeping the buzz alive.

Q: When were you first struck by the importance of the local food movement?

JK: It crystallized for me in 1989 when Michael Stadlander and I started Knives and Forks, an alliance of organic growers and cooks joined by the common goal of local food procurement.

Q: The dinners appear to be very important personally for you. How would you describe the experience?

JK: It's the high point of my work-week. It's an exploration of terroir-based gastronomy. It represents the purest expression of my work as a cook, because



Photo: Margaret Mulligan

I'm passionate about food culture in Southern Ontario. What we hope to achieve is a unique food culture born of a place and delivered through the work of the people of that place. It's also a creative endeavour in core values that generates more revenue.

Q: You once called yourself a "terroir-iste." How tough has the battle been and how much further do we need to go?

JK: We're at a turning point and education is key, but there's been great progress, and the movement is gaining momentum. The proliferation of farmers markets in Toronto is just one example. The new guard of chefs and restaurateurs has fully embraced using local food, which has spawned a new era of opportunity on the supply side. We now have a burgeoning artisan-based industry of small-scale farmers, producers and distributors thriving outside the status quo.

Q: How telling is it that, among young cooks, we're in a phase of cooking styles

that has artisanal and molecular cuisine thriving at the same time?

JK: I'm trying to create Ontario tradition. In Europe, where so much tradition already exists, people like Ferran Adria feel constrained and need to force the boundaries, which make practices like molecular gastronomy flourish.

Q: What's your view about why charcuterie has become so popular?

JK: Charcuterie ties in with rediscovering lost subsets in the trade of cook. It symbolizes a movement away from the industrial production of food. It represents traditions in food culture that have depended on the noble pig for their survival. Charcuterie honours the whole animal. As the new guard of cooks evolves in our community, it's no surprise that charcuterie figures strongly on the menus today.

jamiekennedy.ca or **647-288-0680** for more information



Savour Ontario

The Savour Ontario Dining program was developed in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, and is part of the Pick Ontario Freshness initiative. The program is designed to promote fresh, high-quality Ontario foods and to make them the preferred choice of consumers, retailers and restaurants. Contact us at Savour@Ontario.ca