

From the archive: Walk through urban garden helps inspire winning dish

Restaurants face off in fundraising event

BY SUSAN SCHWARTZ, THE GAZETTE JUNE 1, 2012 12:03 PM

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Chef Ayelet Or (left) forms heart-shaped falafel patties with Panthère Verte owner Haim Shoham (centre) and cook Joslin Webster to create the winning recipe at the second annual Santropol Roulant Iron Chef competition, which raises funds for the organization's Urban Agriculture Program. Sept. 2011
 Photograph by: Peter McCabe | The Gazette

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Panthère Verte chef Ayelet Or made quick work of a baby eggplant: chop, chop, chop and the pale flesh was in a pile of nearly transparent slices. Within an hour, it would be part of a carpaccio on a dish placed before a panel of judges at Santropol Roulant's second annual Iron Chef competition, a fundraiser for its Urban Agriculture Program. And it would win best dish.

The festive event, which also featured a corn boil and klezmer music, took place last Thursday on the McGill University campus in a remarkable edible garden that is one of the programs of the not-for-profit organization (santropolroulant.org).

At least a couple of hundred spectators watched as chefs from five Montreal restaurants - Lola Rosa, the McCord Café, la Panthère Verte, Laloux and Crudessence, which won last year's cook-off - and a team of three students from the École Hôtelière Calixa Lavalée had an hour to harvest from the garden whatever they wished to use in a dish that would serve a single person.

Participants were judged - I was one of the judges - on taste and creativity and how little waste there was.

Each team had a station equipped with basic materials, including a propane-powered hot plate, canola oil for cooking and access to a grain or legume. Or chose basmati rice, which she cooked with sweet and lemony verbena. A sliced leek, cooked slowly in oil, was used to flavour the rice.

Each team brought a special ingredient: For the Panthère Verte team, which included owner Haim Shoham and cook Joslin Webster, it was falafel, chickpea patties flavoured with herbs and then fried: Shoham says falafel is his passion.

As competitors walked through the garden to choose their ingredients, ideas began to form. As Or said: "I saw the beets and thought 'beets with lavender, I feel them together'... I saw the Swiss chard and it was immediately: 'Swiss chard, thyme and dill.'"

She rubbed the lavender with the canola and salt to bring out its flavour, tossed it with a raw baby beet sliced thin, then topped it with the eggplant carpaccio (see recipe). Another salad featured baby carrot and bell pepper, seasoned with tarragon, salt and pumpkin seeds.

A third salad included chard blanched and chopped with dill and thyme also rubbed with oil. Then Or seared the leaves from the beet in oil, tossed them with the same herbs and mixed them with the chard.

The falafel patties were placed on a smear of tahini, a paste of ground sesame seeds. They were heartshaped because, as Or put it, "I cook with my heart."

Each team had committed to raising at least \$500 for the Urban Agriculture Program; the Laloux team won the award for most money raised. The Crudessence team won the award for best team spirit.

EGGPLANT CARPACCIO WITH APPLE CIDER VINEGAR AND FRESH HERBS

Serves 4

This carpaccio was part of the dish that won Santropol Roulant's second annual Iron Chef competition for chef Ayelet Or of la Panthère Verte.

- 2 small eggplant, firm and shiny, sliced thin
- 4 tablespoons (60 mL) fresh mint leaves, sliced thin, not chopped
- 2 tablespoons (30 mL) fresh chives, sliced thin
- 4 tablespoons (60 mL) fresh coriander, sliced thin, not chopped
- 1/4 jalapeno pepper, seeded and cut into fine dice
- 1 stevia leaf, or 2 tablespoons (30 mL) agave nectar
- Salt, to taste
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) apple cider vinegar
- 4 to 6 tablespoons (60 to 90 mL) olive oil
- 1 raw fresh beet, sliced thinly

Mix all ingredients, except the beet, together in a bowl - ideally with your hands. Add more salt, stevia or vinegar, if necessary. Serve on the beet.

La Panthère Verte, a vegan restaurant, has two branches, one at 2153 Mackay St., and the other at 66 St. Viateur St. W

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