



DINNER ROLLS:

Roger Mooking's delicately prepared kona kampachi crudo, with yellow tomato, Peruvian chili, Kalamata olives and tarragon, is a customer favourite at Nyood in Toronto

Dine Local, Eat Global

By Signe Langford // Photography Margaret Mulligan

Chefs pair spices and cooking styles from around the world with local product to create uniquely Canadian cuisine

When it comes to Canadian cuisine, what's hot and what's not really depends on who you ask. Chef Tawfik Shehata of Vertical Restaurant in Toronto says "Spanish influences are still big, and it's led the way for South American." OK, but are chefs constantly looking out for new trends? "I really never know what the next big trend is going to be," says Roger Mooking of Toronto's

Kultura Social Dining and Nyood. "I look for cool ingredients, talk to my suppliers and see what I can do with them. I suppose it's up to writers to define what the next thing will be. I don't have that power. I just cook. But I have always toyed with elements of South American cuisine in my cooking."

While few can deny the current emphasis on local food and sustainability, is it even possible for chefs to indulge their hunger for the exotic and still respect the locavore philosophy? "Not really," Mooking says bluntly. "Nothing can replace olive oil, lemons and mangos."

But there are many who believe it is possible. Trend guru Dana McCauley says the trick to finding the balance between local and global is getting creative in the kitchen. "Chefs are inspired by global ingredients and techniques but they can find a way to do it with local product."

Paul DeCampo, leader of Slow Food Canada's Toronto convivium, recognizes the challenges and opportunities as well. "The seduction of the exotic prevents us from fully exploring what we can achieve locally," he says, adding, "We're producing good quality cold-pressed oils in Ontario, like Pristine Gourmet's extra-virgin can-ola, and there's a small grower out in B.C. producing paprika. So why do we automatically buy Hungarian?" Ultimately, says DeCampo, "It's about incremental change, not absolutism."

While the evolution of how we cook and eat is good news — a slumping economy isn't. "With the downturn in the economy, it will be a conservative time for chefs," says McCauley. "It's expensive to experiment and easier to go back to the classics and add a twist — such as Indian, Spanish or Middle