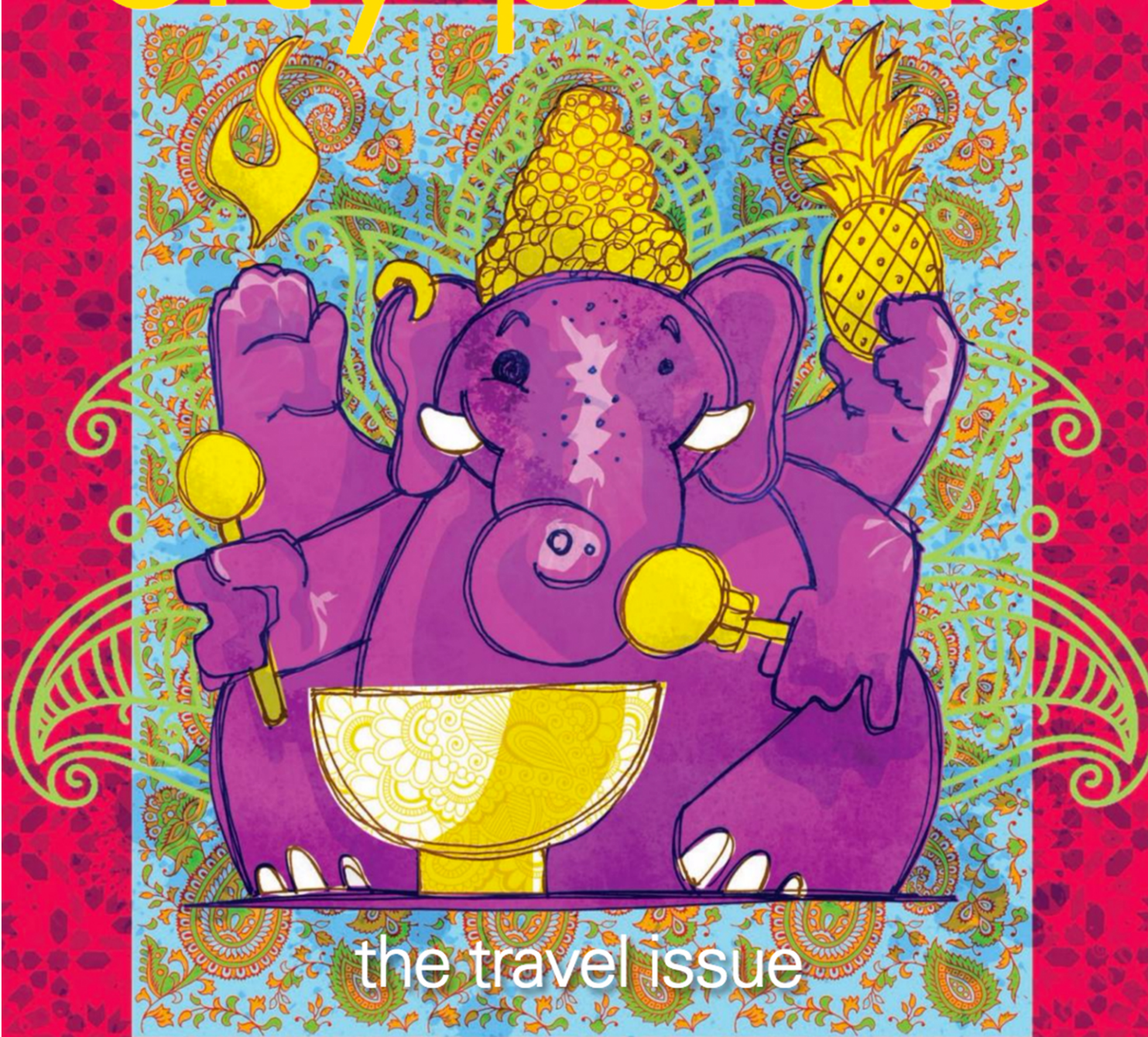


THE FLAVOUR OF CALGARY'S FOOD SCENE
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It's Delicious, it's Diverting... it's: **DEVOUR!** THE FOOD FILM FEST

This enlightening, energizing Food Film Festival is coming to a province near you



Devour takes place at the Watermark Beach Resort.

by Kate Zimmerman, photos by Ron Shewchuk

Sometimes your palate just needs a break. Not a break from eating, but a breather from the same-old, same-old of your own cooking and your regular haunts. The brain can use a re-boot, too, which is why Osoyoos' *Devour! The Food Film Fest* comes as such a treat in May.

The festival, which will celebrate its second year in Western Canada in 2017, and its seventh in Nova Scotia in October, pairs delectable food with short films about the ingredients that go into it. Osoyoos's *Devour!* takes place May 5-7 at the Watermark Beach Resort, with the final day given over to a modest Slow Food Market.

The original festival was founded by Chef Michael Howell in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Howell owned a celebrated restaurant there called Tempest. A proponent of Slow Food and local products, the chef wanted to find a creative way to lure people into the Annapolis Valley in November, traditionally a slow month for local businesses. He started *Devour!* in 2009 as a one-day event called the Slow Motion Food Film Festival.

"We showed three films – *Babette's Feast*, Robert Kenner's seminal *Food Inc.*, and a film called *The End of the Line*, which was about over-fishing – an amazingly depressing film," Howell said in an interview in Osoyoos.

Wolfville's initial *Devour!* sold 1,000 tickets and packed Tempest. It launched a yearly foodie film fest that now lasts five days, includes appearances by celebrity chefs like Anthony Bourdain, and offers 27 screenings of more than 80 films.

Howell eventually sold his restaurant to his sous-chef, re-named the festival "*Devour!*" and threw himself into it almost full-time. In 2015, he staged a two-day version in Seattle. "We realized that we had the opportunity to do this everywhere," he said.

Since then, there have been *Devour!* events in Toronto, L.A., and at the Canadian Embassy in Berlin. Howell was approached by Watermark Beach Resort to launch *Devour!* in Osoyoos in 2016, and the inaugural event took place with a modest film component during the waterfront resort's shoulder season.

Friday night launched the weekend with a cocktail party and East versus West showdown, with Watermark's exec chef Adair Scott and his team serving up tasty appetizers like salmon tartare on marble rye, and Howell handing out samples of his scrumptious award-winning grilled cheese sandwich, with prosciutto, Havarti, lemon aioli, figs and arugula. One big draw was a table where guests could compare the surprisingly distinct flavours of raw West Coast and East Coast oysters.

Saturday night's special dinner featured six courses, made by Scott, local chef Jeff Zver's Two Rivers Specialty Meats, and two Vancouver chefs – Felix Zhou of Beach Bay Café & Patio and Ricardo Valverde of Ancora Waterfront Dining & Patio. Each course was paired with wines from the Similkameen Valley's Clos Du Soleil, Orofino, Rustic Roots, Robin Ridge, Eau Vive, Hugging Tree and Seven Stones wineries.

Before every dish, a short film – from 90 seconds to five minutes – was shown that depicted one of that dish's key ingredients. Some were food porn-y, up-close looks at food being made, one of them showing the process in reverse. But *Hannah*



Kuterra salmon with fish skin "chicharron".



Chefs Adair Scott and Michael Howell.



*Scuba diver harvests wild oysters in *The Oyster Men*. (Screen grab)*

Cheesman's Cheese, which preceded Chef Zhou's cheese course, was a funny look at a young woman, who apparently knows nothing about cheese, being assigned to supply a gourmet's party with a sophisticated array of same. "Just don't make it bourgeois," the hostess warns gaily as we watch our heroine braving a hardcore Toronto cheese emporium (hannahcheesman.com/cheese).

The great thing about combining shorts with a multi-course feast, Howell pointed out, is that the movies give you something new to talk about with your seatmates every 15 minutes or so. The first item on Saturday night's bill was Bullrush Films' documentary, *The Oyster Men*, which depicts the hand-harvesting of "superior" wild oysters – once endangered – by scuba-divers in Long Island Sound (you can watch this film on Vimeo). Watching

The Oyster Men beforehand prompted Watermark chef Scott to offer a first course consisting of a solitary raw oyster with lemon seafoam.

The next day, Howell explained that he'd opted for simplicity after marveling at the oyster men's efforts. "How fast do you eat an oyster? It takes, like, one second to eat an oyster, and that poor guy's in that suit and under water for seven to eight hours, just to get a couple of oysters at a time. Now, I almost feel a little bit guilty every time I eat an oyster. It's like, go pick your OWN oyster."

Over the course of preparations for *Devour!* Scott was also inspired by the chefs' idea exchange. Both he and Howell were impressed by the crunchy dehydrated olive "dust" Zhou made to accompany his goat cheese with rhubarb, and the fish skin "chicharron" Valverde used as a garnish for his barely cooked roulade of Kuterra salmon (Atlantic salmon sustainably raised on Northern Vancouver Island by the 'Namgis First Nation). Howell was taken with the stinging nettle orechiette ravioli that Van Geest served with morel mushrooms, ramps, local asparagus, burrata cheese and green chickpeas, an ingredient the East Coast had never tried. Meanwhile, Howell got the chance to introduce Scott to Nova Scotia's Hama Nori seaweed, most of which it exports to Japan.

It seemed that *Devour!*'s participating chefs got as much of a jolt to their imaginations as the event's guests did.

"It's the perfect spring event for us to do," said Scott. "Everyone's waking up." ✦



For details on *Devour!* in Osoyoos, BC, May 5-6, 2017, visit: watermarkbeachresort.com

For details on the 7th edition of *Devour!* in Wolfville, NS, October 25-29, 2017, visit: devourfest.com

Vancouver writer Kate Zimmerman was overjoyed to be present at the Osoyoos marriage of her two favourite things – food and films.