

# NO EGOS HERE

## Local chef competes on *Chopped Canada*—did he make the cut?

Words by Leo Graziani

Who knew we were two concussions away from missing out on a fabulous chef in Lorne Park?

JohnRoss Woodland, the 24-year-old head chef at Tu Casa Fine Dining, wasn't planning on a culinary career; he was en route to the NHL as a goalie, but the injuries (both happened in the same week) meant he had to change gears. "I'm not one of those chefs who 'cooked at home with mom' or anything because we were always on the road with hockey," says Woodland. "So when I took Home Ec in Grade 10, I finally got the chance to sit down and develop a good relationship with food—it just clicked. From there I went to culinary university."

A big believer in farm-to-table cooking, Woodland hails from Prince Edward County, currently a hotbed for creative restaurants and chefs. He trained for four years under celebrated locavore chef Michael Potters, and at the ripe old age of 21, he opened and eventually sold his own place, The Devonshire Inn, in Wellington. He's been with Tu Casa for almost three months.

Though he's put something of his own spin on Tu Casa's menu, his main concern is staying loyal to the residents of Lorne Park. "I'm not going to come in and do the ego thing of changing the whole menu to my food," he says. "I have changed things

here and there, but if our customers don't like it, I'll change it right back. It's a business as much as it is a passion. I want to get this to the point where our clients can trust me."

It's this lack of ego (and a firm non-disclosure agreement) that prevents him from telling me a lot about his appearance on *Chopped Canada*, scheduled to air on May 15. "We filmed a year ago," he says. "It was tough, mentally, because of the time constraints and the random ingredients. Even so, I knew the flavour profiles of the ingredients and I knew how I could make them work." And in case you're wondering, as I did, the time allotted per course is real. "Once it starts, there is no stopping that time, even if you cut yourself."

Woodland states that it's unlikely he'll cook what he made on *Chopped* again, but perhaps the experience has left more of an experimental mark than even he realizes: according to Tu Casa manager Dale Redmond, the chef made a lobster cappuccino for their bar menu the other day. "It's really a spin on a lobster bisque," says Redmond, "and it was delicious."

*Did Chef Woodland win on Chopped Canada? To find out, watch his episode on May 15 at 10:00 p.m.*



JohnRoss Woodland



The Tu Casa team

### LOADED BAKED POTATO "RISOTTO" ▼

I like to take classic dishes and present them in a way no one has seen before. This dish is a play on my loaded baked potato; it takes all the expected flavours of a loaded baked potato and turns them on their heads. Cooking the potatoes by using a risotto method allows the starches to create a creamy sauce without the addition of cream. Note: it's important that you use a russet potato—the starch content is higher and it creates a creamier sauce with better texture. Vegetable stock would work just as well as potato stock, if desired.

Enjoy,

*JohnRoss Woodland*



#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 large russet potato
- 4 cups potato stock
- ¼ cup white wine
- 2 strips bacon
- 2 tbsp parmesan
- 4 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp crème fraîche or sour cream
- 2 tbsp scallions

#### METHOD

1. Dice peeled potato to ¼-inch cubes; do not rinse or submerge in water.
2. Render bacon in a medium sauté pan until desired doneness is reached; add potatoes and sweat for 1 minute.
3. Add white wine and reduce until pan is almost dry; set aside.
4. Begin adding potato stock, ¼ cup at a time.
5. Continue adding stock until potatoes reach desired texture.
6. Finish with parmesan and butter; garnish with remaining ingredients.

#### POTATO STOCK

#### INGREDIENTS

- 6 cups water
- peels of 1 large russet potato
- 1 sprig thyme



#### METHOD

1. Rinse potato skin very well and then roast until dry.
2. Add potato skin, water and thyme into a medium sauce pan and reduce until 4 cups remains.
3. Pass through a fine strainer, pressing to extract flavor; set aside.

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