



Always up for a Road Trip

Chef Scotty stocks his Bistro Tour
with ingredients from local suppliers and he's ready to roll

BY ALEX BIELAK

Scott Yates' culinary journey began with what he describes as an epiphany and never looked back. He's had stops at top-notch local food establishments, and he's prepared gourmet meals for appreciative guests in parks, an airport hangar and on Niagara winery tours. He has developed recipes, and he has launched products.

Throughout, Yates – or Chef Scotty as he is known – appears the picture of unruffled deliberation, developing a business and a brand despite the frantic pace.

Yates says it all began when he watched – mesmerized – as a personal chef produced a fantastic meal for a friend's wedding reception at their home.

Inspired, he enrolled in the culinary arts program at Liaison College in Kitchener, graduating in 2003 at the age of 40. He worked at Dana Shortt

Gourmet in Waterloo for about four years, subsequently getting the catering operation going at Wildcraft Grill Bar for the Charcoal Group. He became Red Seal certified in 2011.

Then, in 2013, having been involved in both catering and restaurant operations in Guelph, he launched his big black food truck, "Bistro Tour."

Yates acquired the Bluebird-built truck from the Niagara Fire Department, where it served as an on-site support truck for firefighters. His prior two decades in the automotive industry have proven useful in tending the truck, which has sometimes broken down at the worst possible moment. A less-than-glamorous part of the business, he reflects philosophically.

Juggling competing priorities can also keep him hopping, especially during the summer when he is going flat out. But through it all, his laid-back demeanour and impressive results make it easy to forgive him sometimes being incommunicado.

Scott Yates was photographed by Alisha Townsend on Maple Bend Road, between Maryhill and Bloomingdale. Yates wears an original trucker denim jacket, Levis, \$98; a faded hemp plaid shirt, Naked And Famous, \$205; distressed jeans, Publish, \$189; and Air Force Mid men's shoes, Nike, \$215. See Where to Get It, page 166.



ABOVE: Chef Scott Yates slices into one of the expensive bison tenderloins and finds it perfectly medium-rare.

RIGHT: The finished dish — bison tenderloin with shredded rabbit and vegetables.

Event and food photography by Alex Bielak



Guelph-based Yates is clearly good at establishing and maintaining relationships with customers, suppliers and a crew of occasional servers and others. His sons from two previous marriages, Alex and Jordan, often help out at events.

He has also capitalized on contacts with leading suppliers across the region, such as Dixon's Distilled Spirits in Guelph and Stemmler's Meat and Cheese in Heidelberg. Since 2013, he's become somewhat of a product ambassador for Stemmler's and writes recipes featured in the company's advertising.

"Chef Scotty's creativity and delicious recipes represent our company very well," co-owner Kevin Stemmler says. "The recipes are bold, full of wonderful flavours and wonderfully artisan, in exactly the same way as the products we create in-house. Scotty takes the very best products that Stemmler's Meats has and creates with wonderful intensity. His motto, 'What Love Tastes Like,' is very appropriate for this family business."

And, in what sounds like "Dragon's Den" territory, Yates has developed two barbecue sauces. The first, Oatshine BBQ Sauce, is based on a Dixon's moonshine distilled from 100 per cent Canadian oats. A second, Kickin' BBQ Sauce, recently hit the market based on Wellington Brewery's Kickin' Back Dry-Hopped Session Ale; it's dosed with fresh horseradish and local maple syrup.

Potential collaborations with other companies could take the total number of sauces to seven in the next while, and Yates allows he'd like to audition for the "Dragon's Den" television show in the future.

"Bistro Tour" is a case study in flexibility. It's what people want it to be, delivered to where they are.

An order of butter chicken nachos with cilantro yogurt and gluten-free nachos off a food truck at a music festival? Check.

An extension of a kitchen for a wedding? Check.

An intimate chef's table for six sisters on a winery tour? Check.

A base for serving guests at a family garden party, participating in a charity event, or catering a fine-dining experience in a grand setting? Check, check and check.

Last summer, at Riverfest Elora, he was both selling food direct to the public from the truck, and catering to the musicians.

At a fine-dining event, Yates' truck was dwarfed by the striking setting at Hangar 51, a 12,000-square-foot facility at the Region of Waterloo's International Airport. The hangar is home to the Waterloo Warbirds and seems to swallow up five vintage fighter jets, including a striking blue Canadian T-Bird painted in snappy shark livery, and a Soviet-era MIG under restoration.

The hangar's gleaming white epoxy floor seems clean enough to eat off, a good thing as it was the venue for a semi al-fresco dinner organized by the Kitchener-Waterloo branch of the International Wine and Food Society.

"I wanted to de-mystify food trucks by having Chef Scotty present gourmet food as part of a very cool menu in a very different venue," says Nadine Mueller, the event's host.

Jason Ernst took charge of the front-of-house setup, allowing Yates to focus on the food. As Ernst sets out a myriad of wine glasses, he talks about working with Yates on a number of projects, including launching Wildcraft's catering division for the Charcoal Group 10 years ago.

"He's a talented chef with no pretensions who loves what he does and isn't afraid to speak to his guests," Ernst says of Yates. "He has passion and intelligence and is very analytical in his approach to food. He moves very purposefully in both thought and deed."

The \$150-a-head event is a showcase of local food, beginning with the passed hors

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“I wanted to de-mystify food trucks by having Chef Scotty present gourmet food as part of a very cool menu in a very different venue.”

NADINE MUELLER

HOST OF INTERNATIONAL WINE AND FOOD SOCIETY EVENT HELD AT HANGAR 51



Truffled mushroom bruschetta featuring two kinds of foraged mushrooms.

d’oeuvres. Truffled mushroom bruschetta features two kinds of foraged mushrooms. A skewer offering is a study in textures and flavours – sous vide octopus sourced from Caudle’s Catch Seafood, with Guernsey Girl Grilling Cheese from the Upper Canada Cheese Company in Lincoln, and watermelon. However, Yates is not entirely pleased with the firm texture of the octopus, feeling he should have probably cooked it a tad longer.

As the servers pour wine, guests line up at the truck window for a plate of colourful beet carpaccio with sheep milk feta from

Best Baa Dairy in Fergus. As the whoosh of a departing WestJet evening flight to Calgary fills the cavernous space, the chef and his team also roar into high gear, plating the main course to tables decorated with colourful discount-store toy jet planes.

The pièce de résistance is bison tenderloin sourced from Oakridge Acres Country Meat Store in Ayr. Yates uses the bison bones, extracting their fatty essence to make rich marrow butter, and creating a jus with a hint of added maple syrup. It is served with shredded rabbit from Top Market Meats, a fourth-generation farming operation in

Ariss, the 12-hour wine-braised rabbit finished with Yates’ Oatshine BBQ Sauce.

While an edamame succotash was on the menu, Yates found some great-looking sweet peas at Mosborough Country Market in Guelph as he was picking up the other vegetables for the dinner, so a last-minute substitution was made.

The truck appears large enough on the outside, but it can seem cramped inside with two chefs prepping food and a couple of servers squaring things away. Yates notes it can also be a challenge to run back to a home base to pick up food. On this night, his son, Alex, makes the carefully timed trip to a facility Yates shared at that time in Kitchener to finish the already-seared bison tenderloins in the oven, before running them to the hangar in insulated boxes ready for slicing.

There’s a palpable look of relief on Yates’ face when he slices into one of the expensive tenderloins and finds it perfectly medium-rare. But he’s less than pleased with the way his jus has turned out, the addition of marrow butter breaking the already rich sauce. He adapts the plating on the fly.

The dish looks fine and, more importantly, tastes great. The guests are appreciative, their laughter echoing throughout the hangar as they again proceed to the truck for dessert, featuring a goat cheese from Blyth.

After the event, Minto Schneider, president of the club and chief executive officer of the Waterloo Regional Tourism Marketing Corporation, was asked for her impression. “It was a lovely event and nice to do something different,” Schneider says. “It was the first time I’ve enjoyed Chef Scotty’s creations and he did an amazing job. I really liked the assortment of tastes, and the portions were perfect. I also liked the opportunity to enjoy the food-truck experience for the first and last course.”



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Yates says he took on the event because he wanted to refresh people's memories about him as a chef, and for them to realize a food truck can do fine dining. He's been finding such special events are becoming more profitable, the generally higher-end budget allowing him room to breathe in what can be a very challenging business.

In his latest endeavour, Yates has transformed "Bistro Tour" into a lumbering yet comfortable limo, taking groups of up to six guests to Niagara wineries for tastings. The twist is the kitchen comes attached, and at the end of the day Yates cooks and serves dinner for his clients before taking them home. "It's like a Chef's Table right there on the truck," observes Yates.

The idea came about when he wondered how to use the truck in a different way while keeping the six seats rather than ripping them out. He's even hoping to add two more seats.

"One day I just drove the family down to Niagara and we had a wonderful time: We thought it would be cool to do as a business idea.

"The wineries have been very receptive. I've mainly focused on the smaller or lesser-known operations. The bigger ones are so busy, I wanted to ensure the winemakers could spend time with the guests and talk to them."

He rattles off the wineries he's taken groups to, both on the Beamsville Bench and lakeside, noting he sometimes adds a distillery like Dillon's or a brewery like Silversmith for variety. The winery visits done, Yates usually stops at the scenic Niagara Glen Nature Reserve to prepare dinner while his guests walk around, see the sights and use the facilities.

Nicolette Novak owns the Good Earth Food & Wine Company, a Beamsville winery that is now a regular first stop for the tours. Asked how she met Yates, she says, "Chef just drove in one day in his wonderful 'Bistro on Wheels,' as I call it.



Beet carpaccio with sheep milk feta was also on the menu at the Hangar 51 event.

We don't do a lot of groups, but there was something about him that felt right, off the bat, and I said an immediate 'yes' when this charming, enthusiastic young man outlined his plans."

She observes that Yates brings exactly the people Good Earth wants to attract – fun people looking for a unique, quality experience, folk who tend to know one another, and are often celebrating something. "We give them a personalized experience and a very specialized tasting. And oh my God, yes, they buy our wines, unsolicited."

Not surprisingly, there's more: Yates, ever-building an evolving brand and loving to teach, readily agreed to do a Country Roads cooking class at Good Earth's cooking school last fall. And he's now musing about adding Waterloo County outings aboard the "Bistro Tour."

Depending on the destination, the tours cost between \$200 and \$250 per person.

Ultimately, there's no master plan: he's going with the flow, juggling new opportunities as they present themselves, all while keeping true to his now-trademarked slogan, #whatlovetasteslike.



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