



Culinary *ambassador*

Conestoga College graduate Taylor Martin
first chef to represent school at French institute

BY ALEX BIELAK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOMASZ ADAMSKI

Chef Taylor Martin appears relaxed despite just having come off a busy eight-hour shift as a line cook at Jake's Grill and Oyster House in Burlington. She's composed beyond her 24 years, articulate and gently assertive as she shares her life-changing experience at a prestigious culinary institute in France.

A 2017 graduate of Conestoga College's culinary program, Martin was the first Conestoga student to benefit from the college's recent association with the Institut Paul Bocuse.

The partnership connects students to an annual four-month intensive program

aimed at improving culinary skills and techniques, gaining an appreciation of French gastronomy while absorbing the traditions of other cultures and sharing their own.

Students from a dozen countries comprised the 2017 intake last fall. Understandably, Martin, who grew up in Cambridge, wanted to perform well on her school's behalf.

"Not only was I representing Conestoga within the program, I was representing Canada, and not many countries had only one student, so yes, the pressure was on, but it actually helped me perform."

Students lived in a dorm a five-minute walk from institute facilities, headquartered

in the 19th-century Château du Vivier in Écully, on the outskirts of France's gastronomic capital, Lyon. This made it easy to make friends among the group of 49 participants.

"Everyone was in the same boat in that they were thrown into this group of people from all over the world, and we all wanted to learn about each other and each other's culture. We bonded right away," Martin says.

Martin quickly made friends with students from Ecuador, Finland and Taiwan, among others, and is planning a trip to the southern United States to meet up with some of them later this year, with another

Last fall, Taylor Martin was the first chef to represent Conestoga College's culinary program in France at the Institut Paul Bocuse. Earlier this year, Martin was a guest chef with Les Marmitons – Waterloo Region. Writer Alex Bielak is a co-founder of the men's cooking group, which provided a \$1,000 scholarship to Martin to help pay for her studies in France.



Chef Taylor Martin demonstrates her technique cooking frog legs to Michael Herz during Martin's evening as guest chef with Les Marmitons – Waterloo Region.

trip, to South Africa, likely in a couple of years.

After graduating from the International Baccalaureate program at Cameron Heights Collegiate in Kitchener, Martin took first-year chemistry at McGill University before deciding the program was not for her. After serious soul-searching, she concluded cooking was it: she's been a kitchen helper since childhood, so cooking has always drawn her interest and attention.

"A big part of that is I like to make people happy and food is one of the best ways to do that. There is also a lot of creative freedom. There are not always rules you have to follow, and I like the flexibility that

comes with it." She pauses for a moment and adds with a smile: "The chaos, if you will."

For someone born and raised in Cambridge, Conestoga College was a natural choice not just for its proximity, but also because Martin had always heard good things about the program.

The formal training at Conestoga has helped give her a leg up in a lot of ways, she says.

"There are a lot of things about the theory of food, cost management, menu planning, and just a general understanding of cooking and food; I would not have learned so quickly otherwise. The things I took away from the course there would have taken years to learn," she says.

Chef Gini Bechtel, who taught Martin in the techniques lab, found they really connected in one-on-one conversations.

"Taylor is a purposeful individual and you could tell she was trying to discern what she might do in the future," Bechtel says. "Once the Bocuse came up, she was able to focus on that: it seemed a good motivator to push her forward. She's fastidious, meticulous, wanting to do the best job, not satisfied with mediocre results."

On learning about the opportunity in France, Martin immediately grasped the possibilities. "Being on the cusp of graduating, I jumped on it: it was a now-or-never opportunity."

Timing was tight to complete the rigorous application process. While not a selection criterion, an affinity for the French language is a big advantage. Martin brushed up fast to produce a resumé and supporting documents in French and, once accepted into the program, figured out how to foot the bill. The all-in cost for the 15-week experience was about \$17,000, she estimates, roughly half of that being course fees, the balance going to living and travel expenses.

"It was worth every penny," says Martin, who took out a student loan and dipped into savings to cover the bulk of the costs.

"I would tell anyone to do it, as long as they are driven enough. I don't regret a second of it."

Once in Europe, the opportunity to explore a variety of places presents itself and Martin says she took full advantage. "I did as much travelling as I could and that made the experience so much richer."

On the professional front, each week featured a different class, some at Expérience, the campus restaurant, where each student also led a gastronomic lunch or dinner service – both in the kitchen and the front of house – for a largely French clientele. Other classes took place at the Institut Paul Bocuse restaurant in downtown Lyon.

Classes were predominantly taught in French, and while the teachers were

patient, Martin said they had high expectations. "They pushed us to be more efficient in the kitchen and really encouraged us to make our plates properly, to be creative with them and develop our own personal style," she says.

Martin says she loves all kinds of food and being able to try it all, getting her hands dirty.

"That's part of what drew me to the program, to see worldwide cuisine first hand. In a broader sense, it gave me a wider perspective about the way the world is, how different cultures act and eat, and what it's like to live in certain corners of the world . . . what those cultures are like behind the curtain."

She says a fish mousseline stuffed with frogs' legs, stewed in white wine cream sauce, is the one dish she made in France that lingers in her memory. "It was

delicious."

Martin made an impact as the sole Canadian, says Charlotte Jacquier, who oversaw all teaching at the Institute for the 2017 cohort.

"She brought Canadian savoir-faire and cuisine, her very strong personality and a much-appreciated feminine touch to the program," says Jacquier, speaking in French.

"On a personal note, I remember she always had a smile: she's a very sensitive soul with the ability to bring a sense of cohesion and team spirit. For example, she created a souvenir video for the other students."

Martin says she produced the video – featuring clips of her colleagues from the Alliance program recounting their favourite memory of their stay in Écully – as a last-day surprise for the program staff.

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Chef Keith Muller, Conestoga College's chair of the School of Business and Hospitality, says he saw a marked difference in Taylor Martin's confidence when she returned from studying in France.

Martin regrets not being able to meet Paul Bocuse, who was not very mobile at the time and subsequently died in January 2018. The legendary founder of the Institute was a prime mover in the nouvelle cuisine movement and, in 2011, was celebrated as the "Chef of the Century" by the Culinary Institute of America.

"Wherever you go, people are going to carry through on their own visions, but they did their best to stay true to Mr. Bocuse's legacy," Martin observes. "There is a real sense of pride the chefs have about living in France and working under his name and trying to do right by it."

The link to the Bocuse program is a valuable one for Conestoga College, Martin says.

"The name 'Institut Paul Bocuse' doesn't come lightly and that is for a reason. It is a great way for culinary students, especially in Canada where we are so far removed from that, to get a chance to go back to our roots, essentially of cooking, and to understand where we came from, where we're going and how to be the best cooks we can be."

Founded almost 30 years ago, the Institute was recognized earlier this year at the

Worldwide Hospitality Awards as the best international innovative program for Hospitality, Culinary Arts and Foodservice.

Conestoga College is currently the only Canadian school – and will be the sole representative of Ontario for the duration of a four-year agreement – in Bocuse's Hospitality and Culinary Arts Alliance, a network uniting 21 of the top hotel, restaurant and culinary arts management schools and universities.

Jacquier, network co-ordinator for the alliance, says they have known Chef Keith Muller, Conestoga College's chair of the School of Business and Hospitality, for years, since he was with George Brown College, one of the alliance's founding institutions. So, in May 2017, when Muller expressed an interest in having Conestoga join the alliance, it was an "obvious choice," Jacquier says.

"We thought it the best school in the region . . . a valued partner that shares our values of innovation, excellence and entrepreneurship."

Even though the culinary and hospitality programs at Conestoga have been running 18 and 40 years respectively, that's high praise indeed, and a lot to live up to, given the calibre and reputation of other schools

in the province.

"I think it is great what we have done has been recognized," Muller says. "The institute did a full audit on the college before accepting us as a partner and they looked at all the entrepreneurial stuff we do, and the governance of the college which I'm really proud of, and that's why it is a good partnership to be with."

Beyond the learning opportunities for students, the additional benefits for Conestoga College's expanding culinary and hospitality programs include: international co-op opportunities for students; and faculty exchanges, including welcoming to the college chefs-in-residence from the institute and alliance partners.

Even though Martin had worked at Jake's Grill and Oyster House as a student, she says she returned after graduation instead of seeking out a position at a fine-dining establishment because she felt she had more to learn at that restaurant.

"Since I knew I had a job to go back to there, I wanted to take advantage of it, learn everything I can before taking those skills with me on to bigger and better things," Martin says.

"I do love my job there, but it has always been more of a stepping stone. Eventually, when I have more experience, I'd like to go off on my own, and either run a restaurant or think about opening a new place. I'll definitely be able to take some inspiration from what I did in France."

Muller says he saw a marked difference in Martin's confidence when she came back from the Bocuse program. Mark Kneblewski, manager of Jake's, is also a fan.

"She's awesome and I'd hire her if I was ever to open my own restaurant," he says.



Slow Roast Pork Loin with Pearl Barley Pumpkin Risotto

Serves 4-5 People (20 min prep) plus 90 min Cooking Time

Ingredients

- 1 Stemmler's Fresh Pork Loin
- ¼ Cup of Melted Butter & Canola oil combine
- 3 Crispy Apples
- 2 Tbsp Apple Syrup
- ½ Tsp Ground Cinnamon
- Salt/Pepper

For the Risotto

- 2 Cups Pearl Barley
- 6 Cups Chicken Stock (Hot) **Veg stock can be used also**
- ¼ Cup Ontario Pinot Grigio or Riesling
- 2 Tbsp Olive Oil 2 Shallot (minced)
- 1 Tsp Chopped Fresh Garlic
- 2 Sprigs Fresh Thyme
- 1 Cup Butternut Squash (roasted & cubed)

- 1 Cup Smoked Pork Jowl Bacon - chopped (from Stemmler's)
- 1 Cup Kale (shredded)
- ¼ Cup Maple Butter (from Stemmler's)
- ½ Cup Smoked Mozzarella (from Stemmler's)
- 2 Tbsp Pumpkin Puree
- 1 Tbsp Fresh Sage (chopped)
- Salt & Pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Place your Stemmler's Pork Loin on a lined baking sheet. Pour melted butter, apple syrup and add seasoning. Set in 400F oven for 15 minutes then turn it down to 300F. This should slow roast for about 1 hour. Using a temperature probe, roast it until internal temp is between 140-145F. Remove from oven and cover with foil for 10 minutes. It will continue to cook a bit more. You don't want it drying out so this temperature will be great to keep it juicy. A little pink colour of the meat is good despite what you've heard over the years about pork.
2. Slice the apple into quarters and toss in cinnamon and apple syrup. Place on another lined baking sheet and roast with the bacon, about 20 minutes.
3. Heat some olive oil (med-hi) in a pot then add the shallots. Saute for a couple minutes, stirring. Add garlic, salt & pepper and the fresh thyme. Cook for 1 minute, careful not to burn. Pour in the barley now. Keep stirring then add the wine. Let the wine become absorbed. Turn the heat to medium and begin ladling the hot chicken stock to the barley, just enough to cover what's in the pot. Stir often with a wooden spoon, to avoid sticking or burning the bottom. As the liquid absorbs, add more, until the risotto is tender (about 20-25 min). To finish, stir in squash, bacon, kale, pumpkin, maple butter, cheese, sage and salt/pepper until it becomes creamy.
4. Slice the pork, add the apples, then pour the pan juices over it. Serve & Enjoy!



For more information on Chef Scott Yates please visit : chefscottcooks.com

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