

TASTEMAKERS

Northern Explosion

Toronto's new breed of chef is sticking close to home, calling on centuries of Canadian culinary tradition. Take a cross-country trip—from the seafood shacks of Nova Scotia to the prairies of Alberta—without ever leaving the table. **By Nicholas DeRenzo**



Clockwise from far left: Fish skin with smoked crème fraîche, fennel, and dill pollen at Acadia; Chantecler's antique stoves; boneless back rib burgers with smoky tomato jam and maple mustard BBQ at Bannock; Chef Aaron Joseph Bear Robe, of Keriwa Cafe

Acadia

Those Cajuns didn't always live in the bayou. French-speaking settlers (Acadians) actually lived on the rocky shores of Maritime Canada before they were expelled in 1755 by the British. Chef Matt Blondin invites them back above the border: His dishes dress North Atlantic seafood (like Yarmouth albacore or Northumberland Strait scallops) in the soulful flavors of the South (pickled watermelon rinds, chicken cracklings, and blackening spices). 50C Clinton St., acadiarestaurant.com, albacore \$23.

Bannock

Named for a Scottish flat-bread that was adopted by indigenous people and settlers during 18th century fur trading days, Bannock opened last year in the flagship store of The Bay, retail brand of the Hudson's Bay Co. With a menu of comfort classics, the spot almost requires Canadian citizenship to catch all its nostalgic references. St.-Canut pulled pork *tourtière* (meat pie), for instance, comes with a packet of Heinz ketchup, just like you'd find it in Quebec. 401 Bay Street, oliverbonacini.com/bannock.aspx, *tourtière* \$16.

Chantecler

This "progressive Canadian" bistro takes its name from one of the nation's two heritage hen breeds. The bird shows up in Chef Jonathan Poon's signature consommé: More *pho*-like gem than sick-day snack, it's served with smoked breast and, appropriately, hen-of-the-woods mushrooms. Like the multicultural city itself, the menu draws freely on Italian and Asian flavors. Gnocchi, for example, is topped with cod roe and red seaweed, harvested in New Brunswick. 1320 Queen St. W., restaurantchantecler.ca, *gnocchi* \$13.

Keriwa Cafe

There's something exciting about a menu written all in English that still contains so many items you've never seen before: sea buckthorn, miner's lettuce, Saskatoon berries. Chef Aaron Joseph Bear Robe's "aboriginal-inspired" food pays homage to his youth in Alberta's Siksika Nation. Look for lots of rustic produce and that quintessential Great Plains protein—bison—in dishes like braised tail or tongue pemmican, a twist on a native Blackfoot staple. 1690 Queen St. W., keriwacafe.ca, *bison tongue pemmican* \$15.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: RENEE SUEN; GIZELLE LAU (2); KAROLYNE ELLACOTT