

Chefs' Essentials

Indispensable implements Waterloo Region's leading culinarians can't live without

BY ALEX BIELAK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALISHA TOWNSEND

Space in many kitchens can be at a premium but there always seems to be a spot for that particular tool used to perform a special function, or one treasured for its sentimental, historical or even esthetic value. Sometimes all of the above reasons apply. Here, some of Waterloo Region's leading culinarians share the stories about the kitchen kit they can't be without, from bargain-bin nail brush to bespoke knife roll.



DONNA MARIE PYE and MARIA BURJOSKI
Relish Cooking Studio
in Waterloo

Burjoski's battered, multi-functional pans came from her late father, who brought them with him from Italy. "They've been around forever. My dad and I used them for coiling home-made sausage, something just the two of us did together." Cookbook author Pye has had her set of three 'white and cane' glazed earthenware nesting mixing bowls for more than 20 years, and her mother-in-law has one at least three times as old. Made by the Mason Cash Company in England's Midlands since the early 1900s, Downton Abbey fans would recognize them as the bowls head cook, Mrs. Patmore, used daily in her kitchens. Their iconic design has changed little, and Pye loves how heavy and solid they are, far more so than any glass or plastic versions commonly available. She uses hers for all of her baking and loves that they can be stood on their side to facilitate whisking.



JASON BANGERTER
Executive Chef
Langdon Hall
Cambridge

"A chef's most important tools are his hands," says Bangarter. "But if it must be an implement, for me it would be a spoon. They can have a number of purposes and help me in plating and, in particular, saucing. This vintage spoon is my first tasting spoon." He received the elegant implement – still an integral part of his kit – in the early 1990s when he was apprenticing at the King Edward Hotel in Toronto. There, he was responsible for a daily soup creation at Chiaro's, the hotel's fine-dining restaurant, honing his skills and "falling in love with soup and the process of making soup and sauce." He says soup is still one of his favourite things to cook. "Something so simple, yet can have the most layers of flavour and technique applied. You can tell a lot about a chef, how well they have been trained, by the quality of their soup and sauce."

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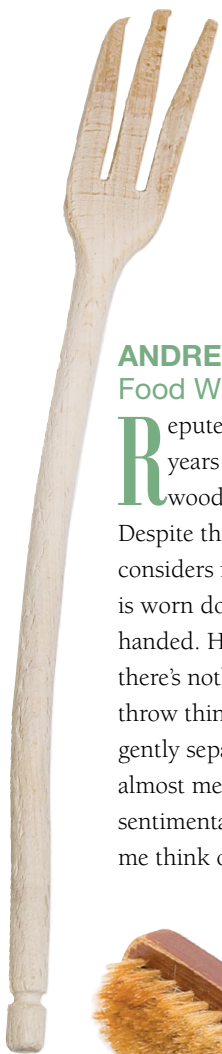
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ANDREW COPPOLINO
Food Writer

Reputed to make a mean Bolognese, the years of practice are reflected in the crooked wooden fork Coppolino uses to stir pasta. Despite the lack of any intrinsic value, he considers it a bit of a culinary totem, noting it is worn down on one side because he's right-handed. He muses nostalgically: "It's really silly, there's nothing wrong with it. I don't like to throw things away. It has a purpose, and that's to gently separate pasta, a process I find reflective, almost mesmerizing. It's not 'indispensable,' but sentimental. It must be 25 years old and it makes me think of my nonna, her sauce in an old pot."



ERIC NEAVES
Executive Chef
Fork and Cork Grill
in Kitchener

"For me, it's a nail brush. I use it for cleaning all my mushrooms, something I've had to do a lot of through all my gigs. I got it at Winners for \$3 on clearance when I was a young chef on the pizza station at Buca in Toronto. It was all I could afford, but the test of time has shown it was all I needed." He allows his staff to use the brush "on penalty of death," confiscating it if he finds them employing it for anything but cleaning out the nooks and crevices of the foraged hedgehog, morel, chanterelle, porcini, lobster and other mushrooms he loves to include in his menus.



KEN YIM
Ken Sushi House
Waterloo

Negotiating the timing of getting his knife to and from the photo shoot for this feature, Yim was emphatic that his "sushi knife is needed at all times. It's an extension of my hand." One of several knives this restaurant owner uses for various specialized tasks, he's had it for more than a decade and says its construction, one side of the blade convex, the other concave, makes it particularly suited to the task of shaping sushi. "The blade's curvature prevents the fish from sticking to the blade," the chef explains. Of course, he hones it himself with a stone, noting its predecessor also began life as a 13-inch blade before being retired at five inches long, after 15 years of superlative shaping and sharpening.



KATIE FERGUSON
Head Pastry Chef
Little Mushroom Catering
Cambridge

Being a pastry chef must be in her blood as her mother owned a bakery in Niagara Falls when she was pregnant with Katie. "She had a palette knife she used to decorate pies, cakes and cookies, as well as all her friend's wedding cakes. She began to teach me when I was three, and when I went to culinary school at George Brown College, she passed on all her tools to me," says Ferguson. There is a bit of a bend to her knife, something that's developed over the many years of pushing in the edges of cakes. Apart from the obvious sentimental attachment, she finds any newer palette knives simply not as comfortable; the patina on the handle on hers imparts subtle warmth to an otherwise fairly prosaic implement.

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TERRY SALMOND
Executive Chef
Charcoal Steakhouse in Kitchener

Even though he lists a handful of essential items, he says his most-used and versatile piece of equipment is a small, bent offset palette knife. “The first time I saw someone using one was when I was working at Susur, in Toronto. When I asked what it was for he said ‘it’s for everything. Get one.’” The palette knife is a stand-in when fingers won’t do, and came before tweezers in arranging elements on a plate. With the knife you can do everything from breaking down boxes to tasting sauces. “One day I was making blini and the pan had a tight angle. I could not get to them easily, so I put the knife in my fridge door and bent it. Suddenly I had better leverage, better stick-handling ability.” A palette knife is among the items Salmond now insists all his staff keep handy.



PATRICK MATHIEU
StationHouse Inc. in Wellesley

A regular instructor at Relish Cooking Studio, this firefighter, cookbook author, private chef and caterer says he can’t live without his cast-iron pans. They totally remind me of my grandmamma and grandpapa and cooking in their kitchen in Quebec City. Grandmamma was the most amazing cook I’ve known, and is my inspiration still to this day for my love of cooking. And there is just something about the rugged, rustic beauty of a cast-iron pan and how it performs that makes it my first choice in the kitchen. I have three cast-iron pans, one cast-iron grill pan, a big cast-iron Dutch oven and a cast-iron pot: This is a newer pan and the one I use for pretty much everything!” Mathieu says you can cook anything in cast-iron pans, from searing on the stovetop to baking in the oven.

BRIAN McCOURT
Culinary Director
Ignite Hospitality in Kitchener

McCourt, a Dublin-born chef, sports a fair bit of ink, including a striking tattoo of a pig demarcated into various pork cuts. The culinary director for Ignite, which includes The Berlin in Kitchener and the new Graffiti Marketplace in Belmont Village, says he long coveted a custom-made knife roll before deciding it was simply too expensive. For his birthday, three years ago, his wife, Jenn Letson, surprised him with this solidly constructed roll, made of heavy, yet supple pigskin. It is embossed with not just his name, but also the same pig design that appears on his left forearm. “To get something as beautiful as this from her meant a lot.” He says a chef needs a proper knife roll to provide protection for their tools, “so they’re not laying around in a bag. Or for events, or when you get away to a cottage: there’s nothing worse than someone else’s unsharpened knives,” he laughs.



Twisted & Healthy Cobb Salad with Wine Soaked Eggs

Serves 2 - 4 People (30 min prep/ 2 hours resting time/30 min cook time)

Ingredients / Components for the Salad

- 1.5 Cups Bone - In Ham from Stemmler's (possibly leftover from Easter/cut into cubes)
- 1 Smoked Turkey Drumstick from Stemmler's (Shredded) or any leftover from Easter
- 2 Pieces Smoked Pork Jowl Bacon from Stemmler's (Cooked & Chopped)
- 1 Cup Baby Spinach
- 1 Cup Chopped Kale
- 1 Medium Red Onion (pickled)
- 1 English Cucumber (peeled in ribbons)
- 1 Can Garbanzo Beans (chickpeas; drained and rinsed)
- **Can Use Soy Beans, Pine Nuts or any other nuts if desired*
- 1 Pint Coloured Grape Tomatoes

- 1 Avocado (Chopped)
- 1 Lemon (Juiced)
- 1 Cup Quinoa
- 1.5 Cups Low Sodium Chicken Stock (available at Stemmler's)
- 1 Cup Shredded Cheese (Local St. Clements Goats Cheddar from Stemmler's)
- 3 Eggs (Hard Boiled & Peeled)
- ½ Cup red Wine
- ½ Cup Red Wine Vinegar
- 1 Sprig Fresh Thyme
- 1 Bay Leaf
- 1 Tbsp Coconut Oil or Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Salt & Pepper plus 1 Tbsp of your Favourite Dried Seasoning

Ingredients for the Vinaigrette

- ¼ Cup Olive Oil
- ¼ Cup Maple Syrup
- ¼ Cup White Balsamic or you can sub Apple Cider Vinegar
- 2 Tsp Grainy Mustard
- Pinch Salt

Quick Pickled Onions

- 1 Med.Red Onion (Thin Slices)
- ½ Cup Apple Cider Vinegar
- 1 Tbsp Brown or Cane Sugar
- 1 ½ Tsp Kosher/Sea Salt
- 1 Cup Water

Instructions:

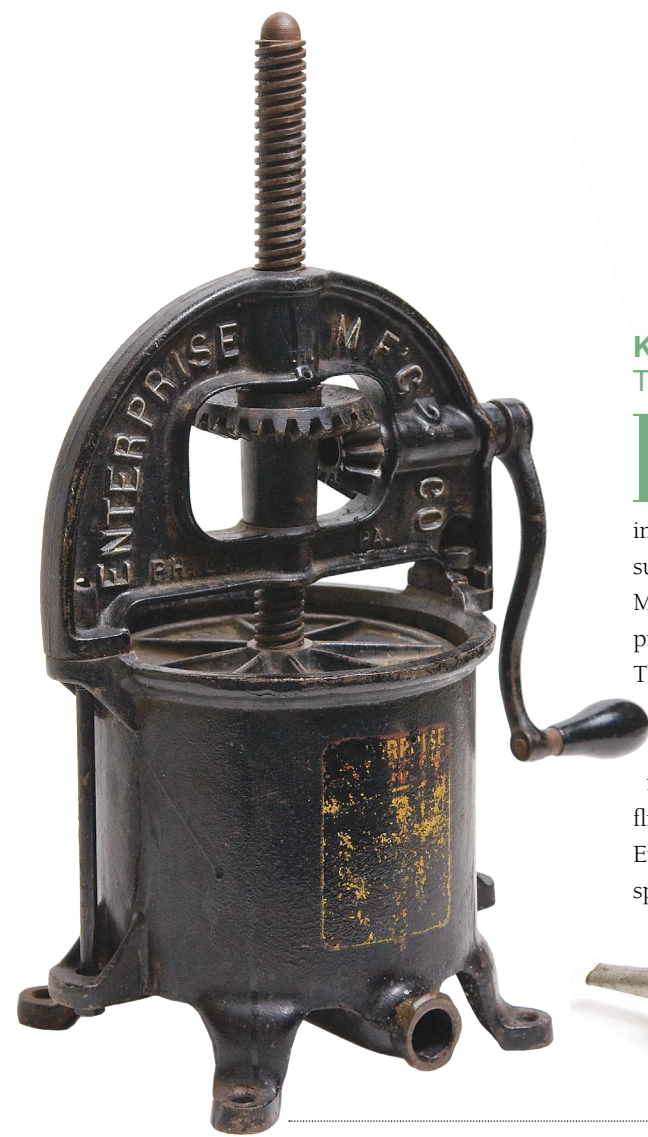
1. To prep ahead of time, start the Quick Pickled Onions by mixing the vinegar, sugar, salt and water together in a bowl until everything has dissolved. Place the sliced onions in a jar and pour in the liquid so it totally covers them. Seal it tightly then set aside on the counter for at least an hour.
2. Toss your drained and rinsed chickpeas in 1 tbsp of oil and seasoning and place on a parchment lined baking tray. Bake at 375F approximately 30-40 minutes, occasionally stirring them around so they crisp up evenly. Remove from oven and set aside.
3. Hard boil your eggs and peel off the shell. Rinse then place in a small bowl. Add the red wine, red wine vinegar and the bay leaf to fully cover the eggs. Place in fridge for 1 to 2 hours turning occasionally. You want the liquid to infuse and colour the egg evenly.
4. For the vinaigrette, add the last four ingredients of the recipe together in a bowl and slowly whisk in the oil to emulsify. Set aside in the fridge until ready to serve.
5. Cook the quinoa in the chicken stock according to the instructions on the package. Set aside.
6. Chop the kale (or you can purchase it chopped in bags) and place in a bowl. Add a tsp of the oil, salt and a squeeze of lemon then begin to “massage” these ingredients into the kale for about 30 seconds. It helps to take away the bitterness and breaks down the toughness of the raw kale. It also tenderizes it. Place in fridge until you're ready to use it.
7. Drizzle the sliced avocado with lemon juice. It prevents it from turning brown. Slice the eggs as well into small wheels to showcase the colour of incorporated wine. Now, begin to assemble your salad, placing all the items however you want for a beautiful presentation of colours. Enjoy.



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

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KIRSTIE HERBSTREIT and JODY O'MALLEY
The Culinary Studio in Kitchener's Belmont Village

Herbstreit sings out to her staff "Where's Uncle Phil?" and someone produces a hefty, beautifully crafted meat mallet. She got it from her great uncle Phillip, the first Herbstreit to immigrate to Canada from East Germany. "It is so functional and such a part of my heritage: we use it all the time for schnitzels." Meanwhile, O'Malley, one of 20 grandchildren, acquired a sausage press and stuffer that belonged to her 94-year-old grandmother. The contraptions are the sort of thing found in an Eaton's catalogue from the turn of the 19th century and continue to be used at the Culinary Studio, for instance during specialized classes in sausage making run by Herbstreit's husband, a butcher. In the days of flimsy appliances, the imposing and weighty sausage press, made by Enterprise Manufacturing Company of Philadelphia, and for which spare parts are still in production, just works better, says O'Malley.



PHILIPPE SARAIVA
Professor of
Culinary Programs
Conestoga College

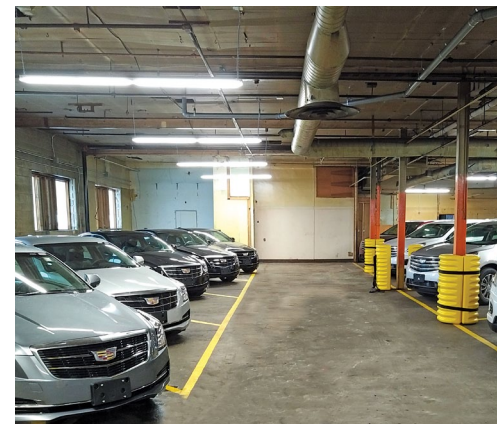
Passionate about knives, Saraiva estimates he has about 140 secreted in various locations, to the point his wife won't allow another into the house until one vacates the premises. A connoisseur of fine hand-forged Japanese steel, he counts some beautiful blades in his collection, insisting they're all used regularly. Designed to slice rather than chop, the knife Saraiva uses at home daily – 45 layers of hammered Damascus steel, with a custom staghorn blade – comes from Japan's Osaka Prefecture. "A knife is only as good as how sharp it is," says Saraiva. Most chefs are content if their blades will easily slice paper but Saraiva can shave the ink off a page of newsprint. He uses an array of sharpening stones, both natural and ceramic, some of which cost well in excess of the knives themselves. He is gradually returning to the use of old-fashioned stropps made of various leathers, or even balsa wood, to attain the ultimate edge, polishing steel to a mirror finish.



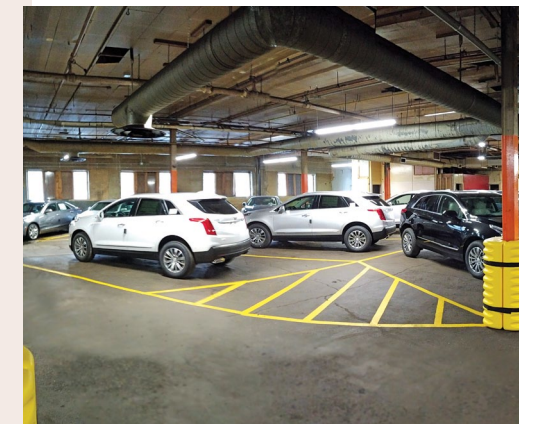
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