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**Browse**[Food](#)[Dessert](#)[Nutrition](#)[Wine & Spirits](#)[Coffee & Tea](#)[Inside the Biz](#)[Culture](#)[Q & A](#)[Harvest](#)[Ask the Experts](#)**Black Box Dinner**by [Cassandra Anderton](#), ContributorCategories: [Food](#), [Inside the Biz](#)[Add to Favourites](#) | [Email to Friends](#)

If you've ever watched an episode of Iron Chef, you are familiar with the unveiling of a secret ingredient and the battle that follows. Originating in Japan the show became a popular hit and was reproduced in America by the Food Network. The concept is this – two chefs are given an hour to create several dishes to be judged by a panel. The catch is that the main ingredient in the dishes is unknown until seconds before the contest begins with the host shouting “Allez Cuisine!” (French for go food). It's been billed as “The Ultimate Fighting Champion meets Julia Child”.

Lately contests have sprung up around British Columbia. The Okanagan Culinary Festival featured Kelowna's culinary artists, Travis Hackl (Okanagan's Finest Foods), Paul Cecconi (The Harvest Dining Room), Rod Butters (Fresco Restaurant), and Lee Cooper (Mission Hill Winery) in their own Iron Chef battle. Vancouver has yet to jump on the bandwagon although Lumiere's Rob Feenie won his Iron Chef battle but hasn't brought the concept back to town. However, almost upstaging the one ingredient competition, local Chefs Brian Fowke and Quang Dang and their kitchen crew at Rare have done their own version. Kicking it “up a notch” they prepared an entire meal with ten surprise ingredients arriving at the last minute.

The “Black Box Dinner” (as it was billed) was a concept created at the home of Karole Sutherland by a local culinary concierge, Eric Pateman. Apparently Karole had too much wine (how this could be a problem, I don't know) and she wanted to share it with other culinary addicts by inviting them all to her house. In return they were to bring a food item to prepare. Now Eric and his company, Edible British Columbia, has now taken the concept

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one step further and on March 12 he invited twelve couples to source an indigenous product and hand it over to the professional chefs at Rare. Fortunately, I was included.

We all arrived at 6 pm with our ingredients in hand and our expectations turned on high – perhaps we've seen one too many Iron Chef episodes. The chefs headed to the kitchen to begin their ordeal while guests were pampered with blood orange martinis. Eric explained that the guests would also have their own challenge, as the wine pairings with each course would be served blind. One wine would be British Columbian and one international, with the object of the game being to determine which was which. The most pleasant surprises came from the Similkameen and included the Crowsnest's un-oaked Chardonnay and Orofino's blend of cabernet and merlot. British Columbian wines are certainly showing well against the imports.

And how did our chefs themselves show? They more than met our high expectations in a brilliant display of culinary creations. On the menu? Chris Stearns, local cocktail expert (Lumiere) had arrived with Okanagan rabbit. Out come rabbit liver terrine with brioche, a red wine reduction and kumquat compote with a side of butter poached loin of rabbit. Another soul brought oysters, which the kitchen gussied up with charred red onion compote. Halibut cheeks and filet become a handsome duo with a light crab consomme and watermelon radish. We took a break and tasted the house made bread in which Chef Brian used a yeast he grew in his own backyard. You couldn't get more local!

Salmon (our contribution from the Fraser River) arrived demi-cured and was served with hedgehog mushroom ravioli and garlic foam. A duo of lamb shank (remarkably tender even with the time constraints) and lamb chops came atop puy lentils with lardons. Venison was wrapped with prosciutto and perched above a potato and leek pave. We finished off the meal with local blackberries with crêpes and a delicious selection of artisan BC cheese.

It was all over by 11:30 pm, meaning that all was prepared and consumed within five and a half hours. If this is what Rare can do at the last minute, we will definitely be back to see what their kitchen can do with time and planning. "Allez Cuisine!"

Rare is located on 1355 Hornby Street in Vancouver
Phone: 604 669 1256
Open Tuesday to Saturday from 5:00 pm to 11:00 pm
www.rarevancouver.com

Edible British Columbia
Eric Pateman
Phone: 604 812 9660
www.edible-britishcolumbia.com

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About the Author



Cassandra Anderton, Contributor

Cassandra Anderton is a Vancouver based freelance writer, focusing on food, wine and lifestyle pieces. She has studied level one and two of the International Sommelier Program and will begin the Advanced Wine & Spirit Education Trust at the Art Institute of Vancouver in April.

Cassandra is the director of the food and wine event website www.hautespotsvancouver.com. She can be contacted via email at cass@hautespotsvancouver.com.

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