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CANADA'S HOSPITALITY BUSINESS MAGAZINE

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Dominic and Suzanna
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TEAM SPIRIT

From apprentice to chef de cuisine, Kristian Eligh pays it forward at Hawksworth Restaurant
BY JACKIE SLOAT-SPENCER

Kristian Eligh is living proof a competitive attitude, influential mentors and a dash of luck are the secrets to success in the culinary world. The Edmonton-born chef de cuisine of the award-winning Hawksworth Restaurant in Vancouver is setting high standards for regionally inspired cuisine.

The chef gained an appreciation for Southeast Asian and Spanish cuisine at a young age, while accompanying his father on business trips overseas. Then, while studying child psychology at university, he supported himself while working as a line cook. "I am a competitive person by nature and the kitchen environment stimulated that with daily challenges, physical work and an immediate sense of gratification," he says. "It was then I realized a job behind a desk was not in my future."

After graduating from culinary school in 2001, the Red Seal-certified chef began an apprenticeship at the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise and Banff Springs Hotel. Before long, he moved to Vancouver to cook at Diva at the Met in the Metropolitan Hotel where he worked his way up from second cook to chef. "I equate a lot of my success to those four years — I almost re-did my apprenticeship," he says.

Eligh's next move was opening Jean-Georges Vongerichten's Market restaurant at Vancouver's Shangri-La hotel, where he spent almost two years as the restaurant's chef de cuisine. The stars aligned when he catered an event for David Hawksworth. "I received a phone call two weeks later, and he was very impressed by the dinner I had done," he explains. Hawksworth picked Eligh's brain for six months before convincing him to become chef de cuisine at Hawksworth Restaurant. "He was putting a lot of responsibility on my shoulders, not



only with menu development and creative freedom but with the chance to build my own kitchen and design it from the ground up," says the 31-year-old chef.

The 110-seat restaurant, located in the Rosewood Hotel Georgia, celebrated its first year in business as *Vancouver* magazine's Restaurant of the Year, Best New Restaurant and Best Upscale Restaurant with the Best New Design. During that time, Hawksworth and Eligh travelled to Hong Kong, Singapore, New York City, Las Vegas and San Francisco to draw inspiration for the menu. "He or I will strike up an idea, we will bounce it back and forth, and then he empowers me to carry out

the execution of it," Eligh says of the seafood-heavy menu that is largely locally sourced. "Vancouverites want simple, clean flavours," he adds, citing Hawksworth's signature dish as the Yellowfin Tuna Ceviche with avocado, crispy amaranth, pecan and cilantro (\$17).

A self-described perfectionist, Eligh is constantly looking ahead. "I'd just like to continue to refine the system in the back-of-house and create an environment like the experience at Diva at the Met, where we had a competitive kitchen and a lineup of [people] waiting to get in," he explains. In those rare moments out of the kitchen, Eligh is a self-described "outdoorsy" guy, who takes advantage of the West's lush surroundings by hiking, skiing and heading to the cabin in the summers. And, with a successful career based on great apprenticeships and memorable mentors, the chef is paying it forward, inspiring the next wave of top chefs in his 25-strong brigade.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Favourite ingredient: Organic fresh lemon • **Alternative career choice:** Professional ski bum • **Favourite local producers:** Mikuni Wild Harvest, Deluxe Seafood Vancouver Ltd., The Lobster Man and Two Rivers Specialty Meats