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David Hawksworth's eternal quest

Rather than rest on his laurels (and there are lots of them) Vancouver chef is always wanting to improve his art

SoundBites

By Martha Perkins

Queen Elizabeth once had an *annus horribilis*. For Vancouver chef David Hawksworth, 2012 will go down as an *annus mirabilis*. Pinnacle Award for Chef of the Year. *Maclean's* magazine's Restaurant of the Year. *Vancouver Magazine's* Chef of the Year. *WE Vancouver's* Best Overall Restaurant and Best Chef.

Can it get much better than that?

"It's been unbelievable, surreal," he says in an end-of-the-year interview with *WE*.

"Everything you wish for happens, which is kind of bizarre."

It took three years of waiting and planning to open Hawksworth restaurant as part of the multi-million-dollar refurbishment of the luscious Rosewood Hotel Georgia. But ever since that moment in early summer 2011, Hawksworth has been reaping accolades by the bushel.

But as rewarding and overwhelming as it's been to garner such praise, David Hawksworth himself is always striving to create the next great meal, the next memorable dining experience, the next got-to-go-to restaurant.

"We're just trying to make it better and better," he says. With 35 staff in the kitchen and almost 90 other staff to handle Hawksworth, Bel Café and catering, it's a constant challenge to maintain and train for the standards that diners expect. Vigilance is a must because "you just never know what's around the corner."

Vancouver is too small to cater to any one kind of market — the businessman looking for someplace smart to impress clients, the couple wanting someplace special to celebrate an anniversary, the girlfriends hungry after a morning shopping at

Pacific Centre, the gourmand wanting to have his or her tastebuds challenged — so in many ways, Hawksworth has to be all things to all people.

"I think our prices are reasonable, the room's amazing and we give people options, from a hamburger cooked just the way you want it to caviar. There's a great spectrum of value," he says.

Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, Hawksworth has been pleasantly surprised by how busy lunch has been over the holidays thanks to the proximity of so many stores.

Rather than resting on his laurels, however, Hawksworth is setting new goals for himself. "We're aiming for a scholarship program for later in the year," he says. It will be for a beginning chef (28 or younger) and Hawksworth describes it as "a huge project."

Then, to whet everyone's curiosity, he says "I've got a concept for a new restaurant type thing. I have an idea of what I want to do but I'm working on the location."

Before you start wondering how to be first in line, he adds that this project will also be a couple of years in the making.

And since there's no better way to compliment someone than by borrowing a page from their recipe book, expect to see some Japanese-inspired dishes on the menu soon. On January 16, Hawksworth is flying to Tokyo, where he's booked for dinner at Sukiyabashi Jiro. This 10-seat, three-star Michelin restaurant, tucked into a subway station, is where the inimitable Jiro Ono has created his legendary cuisine. "Apparently it's out of this world," says Hawksworth, who advises everyone to watch *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, a movie about the 90-year-old chef.

Meanwhile, asked what advice he'd give to an aspiring chef or restaurant owner, Hawksworth pauses a moment, as if not yet accustomed to his guru status.

"Aim as high as you can," he says, "and that can be making the best cheeseburger you can possibly make. Never be completely satisfied." ■

This is the first of a weekly series of profiles of the people who feed our desire for good food. One week we may talk to a chef, the next a restaurant owner or sommelier or restaurant interior designer. The mix will be as eclectic as the restaurants in Vancouver. Bon appetit!



David Hawksworth. Supplied photo