

## Raising money with Gold Medal Plates

**Julian Armstrong**

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A bowl of soup with all the trimmings won a 12-chef cooking contest Thursday at an annual regional fundraiser for Canada's Olympic athletes. That soup, made of creamed Jerusalem artichokes and topped with a tiny ball of foie gras ice cream, also made history for the Gold Medal Plates contest because the gold-medal winner was the only woman in the Montreal competition and the only chef to offer soup.

Denise Cornellier, widely regarded as Montreal's top caterer, said she designed her winning entry to be "un peu crazy." And took pride in using only Quebec ingredients - crab from the Gaspé, and artichokes and duck foie gras from the Montérégie.



CREDIT: The Gazette  
Gold Medal Plates competition winner  
Denise Cornellier from Traiteur.

The silver medal went to Gilles Herzog, chef at the Sainte Rose restaurant Derriere les fagots, who competed with a colourful chunk of seared red tuna accented with a puree of butternut squash and citrus chutney. Deff Haupt, chef at Renoir in the Hotel Sofitel, won the bronze medal with his scallop topped with orange and ginger foam. The scallop resembled the centre of a flower positioned on deep red petals made of paper-thin slices of marinated beet, which Haupt called beet carpaccio.

"All the bells and whistles of gastronomy were on our menu," said James Chatto, Toronto restaurant critic and head judge for the contest, which has already taken place in Toronto and Ottawa/Gatineau and will be held next month in three western cities. Finals, in which Cornellier will compete for Montreal, are planned for February in Banff.

A few too many chef flourishes on some entries was the joint opinion of our judging panel of Montreal food writers (including me) and two chefs - last year's Montreal winner Roland Menard of Hovey Manor and Melissa Craig, national winner from Bearfoot Bistro in Whistler, B.C.

Daren Bergeron, chef at Decca 77, rated high with his plate of smoked sable fish with sea urchin and monkfish liver. So did Mario Navarrete Jr. of Raza and Madre restaurants with halibut ceviche from his native Peru.

But, as Hovey Manor's Menard put it, "Some of the chefs did a lot of work but they balanced very strong tastes with very delicate tastes and didn't respect the flavours of the food. You have to be able to take one bite and get everything fitting together."

Lawyer Stephen Drymer, eating his way around the chef stations at the Palais des congrès, approved of the winning soup, "a bit kookie but fantastic." He called Haupt's scallop on sliced beets "exceptional." Another of Drymer's choices was the opening appetizer offered by last year's winner Melissa Craig, of three tiny variations on crab, ending up with a soup.

Seafood was the favourite ingredient, followed by game birds. Beef and lamb had only one entry a piece, both complicated creations of many flavours and additions. Chatto recalled the Toronto chefs went heavy for beef and foie gras. Probably Quebec foie gras, we judges decided.

Olympic athletes assisted each chef in serving the crowd of more than 700 with their creations, accompanied by all-Canadian wines - eight from Ontario and two from Quebec.

Toronto's winner was Patrick Lin of Senses, who entered a duck foie gras creation. Charles Part of Les Fougères in Chelsea, Quebec, competing in the Ottawa/Gatineau contest, won with his variations on eastern Quebec seafood. Again, more Quebec ingredients are getting some limelight.

The Montreal event raised more than \$100,000 for the athletes. The national goal for the 2008 contest is \$1 million.

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