



IN THE HEART of Quidi Vidi Village resides one of Canada's rising culinary stars, Mallard Cottage. It's a Monday morning in March, so the restaurant is closed, but that doesn't mean the building is empty. Chef and co-owner Todd Perrin, along with a few other staff members, are busy at work.

KING *of the* KITCHEN

Meet the celebrity chef at the helm of the province's fine dining scene.

STORY BY ELIZABETH WHITTEN | PHOTOS BY TOBIAS ROMANIUK



Just days before, his restaurant had been ranked No. 17 by “Canada’s 100 Best,” which judges restaurants across the country.

“It’s cool, obviously. Lists are one of those things: you love ‘em and hate ‘em at the same time. But you know, it’s good to be there and we were pleased,” Todd says. The restaurant has been on the list before, so he likes to keep an eye on where they land each year.

“As long as we feel we’re moving forward and other people feel like we’re moving forward, then we’re happy,” he says.

And Todd is definitely someone who’s moving forward. A chef for about 25 years, Todd says he has his appearance on reality TV show “Top Chef Canada” to thank for a lot of Mallard Cottage’s success. He competed on the show during its first season back in 2011, and he says his career really took off after it. “For me, it changed everything, I guess,” he says.

Of course, Todd can remember a time when chefs weren’t celebrities and TV shows featuring gruelling challenges weren’t yet a thing.

“And now you guys are here taking pictures of me and talking to me and interviewing me...It’s completely changed,” he says. After the show aired, Todd says the next logical step was to start a restaurant. “Mallard Cottage wouldn’t exist if I hadn’t done ‘Top Chef Canada.’ That’s not an exaggeration; that’s a fact.”

Anyone eager to see Todd back on the tube is in luck, since he’s competing on “Top Chef Canada: All-Stars,” on The Food Network Canada this spring. He says his previous loss didn’t deter him from going on the show again – but why go back?

“Oh, probably the same reason I did it the first time, you know, for fun,” he laughs. “They asked me to get involved and I thought...Why not? Go do it for something fun to do and get to see some of my old buddies and some new ones. So yeah, it’s



kind of the reason we do most things, for a laugh.”

It’s also a deft move to keep Mallard Cottage’s momentum going, he admits. “It’s important to keep the exposure going for our business...There’s not really much downside to it,” he says. But he’s mum on what this season has in store for viewers. “[I’m] excited to see it come out and see how people react to it,” he says.

FOOD PHILOSOPHY

When it comes to putting together a dish, Todd approaches it with a certain mentality.

“I think here at Mallard Cottage, we concentrate on what’s available around us and we try to do it in kind of new and interesting ways. But at the same time, familiar ways, too...Our philosophy is to take local ingredients and do something good with them,” he chuckles. “You can’t get much more simple than that.”

Buried under the March snow next to the restaurant is a small garden growing herbs and veggies that will eventually be plucked from the ground and used in the kitchen. And while the crowd at Mallard Cottage aren’t fishermen or hunters, Todd says they do work closely with people to get locally sourced food.

Despite Todd’s celebrity status, he remains involved in all aspects of running his restaurant. “You know the old adage

‘Chief cook and bottle washer’...I gotta do everything, from shovel the snow in the winter to grow some of the food, to cut the wood, to cook the food and fix the plumbing. That’s what it takes, that’s what this restaurant is all about...That’s what makes it fun for me, it’s being able to be involved in everything,” says Todd.

“And I think that’s part of the success of what we’ve done here, is that people feel that connection, they know that the people that work here are invested in everything. They’re invested in the backyard, they’re invested in the building, they’re invested in the food, they’re invested in the

whole...We take what we do very seriously, even though we talk a lot about having fun and enjoying ourselves, but we're very serious about what we do, also. And so, that embodies itself in how hard we work."

And it's more than hard work that's made Mallard Cottage a success. Its unique location is key, and Todd says doing anything like it in a big city would be much harder.

"It starts and ends in the place," says Todd. "Quidi Vidi is such a unique place inside of St. John's, which is such a unique place. And then we have a really unique building inside of that. So you know everybody doesn't have the kind of palette to work with that we do. Just look out the window. We just try to take advantage of what we have."

In recent years, Newfoundland and Labrador has gained a reputation across Canada as *the* place to eat. And Todd has been around to see how dramatically the culinary scene has changed in St. John's, in particular, with a number of fine dining options making their mark. "It's awesome, it's great for us. There's never been a better time to be in the restaurant business in Newfoundland, that's for sure," he says. Having said



that, Todd offers some sobering thoughts for culinary school graduates: "Be patient and be prepared for how hard you've got to work... Restaurants and successful chefs...are built over time. Successful careers are built over time and you need to punch in the time you need," he says. "It's a long, tough trade, a physical labour job that doesn't pay very much money. So that's what you have to do and that's what it is and you have to accept it and decide how to make it work for you."



"We have a unique property and a unique space and we treat it the way that we do because we appreciate that and everybody doesn't get to do what we get to do," says Todd. "What we do in Mallard Cottage, you can't do it in downtown Toronto or downtown Montreal."

IRONS IN THE FIRE

Todd has taken many steps, some outside of the restaurant, to ensure Mallard Cottage thrives well into the future. The building across from the restaurant is set to open as an inn in a few months, and he's involved with the village's waterfront development as well.

While he deals with the day-to-day duties of running the restaurant, he's also focused on the big picture. "We're intent on kind of growing the Newfoundland tourism hospitality culinary scene. So we have our ideas and our thoughts about what we can do there. So we're moving forward on as many of those initiatives as we can with good partners, so we'll see. Time will tell on some of that stuff," he says.

One of those developments is the

site of the old Flake House property on the waterfront, but he's tight-lipped on any concrete plans for the spot. "Right now it's a blank canvas. So there's a lot of working going on behind the scenes and has been for the last two years...It's a very complicated, long and complicated and expensive process. So it's an ongoing plan, it's moving and changing."

The local economy is in a bit of a slump at the moment, but that doesn't seem to have slowed Todd down. "Obviously, the economy affects how we work and what we do but we believe in moving forward," says Todd. "We're strong believers that if you do something well and you do something good then, you know, you can be successful in any economy. So we just keep moving forward on that basis." ☺