



New Years dinner menu revolved around truffles

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I hope that you all were able to ring in the New Year in style. We had a house full of foodies here and spent the evening basically cooking and eating—two of my favourite things.

Lucky for us, my friend Monika and her husband Bill were here. They are the Owners of Okanagan Grocery Artisan Breads in Guisachan. Monika and I themed our evening to be a Truffled New Year—and for good reason—we also had the proprietors of Trufficulture here with some of their "black gold" to share.

Wikipedia's definition of a truffle: A truffle is the valuable and highly sought-after edible fruiting body of a group of subterranean ascomycete fungi of the genus *Tuber*. All truffles are ectomycorrhizal and are therefore found in close association with trees.

As described on TruffiCulture's website: To cultivate truffles, inoculated truffle trees are planted in orchards much like those for fruits and nuts, except that the crop appears below ground and is usually harvested with the help of trained dogs that can smell the truffles through a layer of earth. Truffles begin to appear several years after the inoculated seedlings are planted and production can continue for decades. The onset and duration of production depends to some extent on the species of host tree and on other factors such as soil composition, health of the host tree, irrigation and climate.

Retail prices in the U.S. for *Tuber melanosporum*, the French black truffle or Perigord truffle have reached \$1,000 and \$3,000 US per pound.

Most truffles are harvested in the wild and since the wild supply is diminishing, prices continue to climb. TruffiCulture was founded in 2003, and is the premier Canadian producer of truffle-inoculated trees. They grow, import and export truffles and truffle-related products. This is extremely exciting news for all of us truffle pigs out there. Check them out at www.oyamagardens.com.

Incidentally, our menu looked like one from the Iron Chef with truffles being the theme ingredient. We started with a truffle fondue (Rhys' recipe in last week's column plus truffles) served with Monika's heavenly experiment—truffle bread.

We then moved onto truffle pasta, seared beef tenderloin and king crab legs.

Monika, who was the head chef for the evening, also made dessert—a chocolate truffle cake (totally different truffle).

With Monika cooking up a storm in the kitchen including rolling out pasta and hanging it on the arms of all of the guests to dry, friends old and new gathered together to eat good food and drink good wine. All in all, it was the perfect way to start a new year.

My New Year's resolutions for 2009 are:

1. Confront my dough fear and learn to make good bread from scratch (key word here is "good")



Monika and Bill Walker make pasta at a truffle-themed New Years eve party for foodies.

Jennifer Schell/contributor

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2. Purchase a pasta maker and make pasta exclusively at home, and

3. Have more cheese fondues.

For fans of maple syrup and beer (how Canadian can you get?) do try Penticton's own Cannery Brewing Company's new holiday special brew: Maple Stout (www.cannerybrewing.com).

This dark beer is rich, smooth and well, very maple-y and makes for a delightful new bevy to enjoy on a cold day.

Try using some to jazz up your chili, chicken wings or to glaze a ham. It's available at Orchard Park Liquor store alongside Cannery's other delicious beer.

Make sure to get some soon—this is a seasonal product only.

Next week: How to make an Italian-style panini to knock your socks off.

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