

Destination Golf

Tees up to the Table

by Lisa Harrison

The Okanagan Golf Alliance (OGA) was the first golf-oriented marketing consortium of its kind 15 years ago. The valley's top destination golf courses appreciated the economic benefit of pooling their resources to effectively sell the stunning beauty of their courses and championship golf experience directly to golfers far beyond the region's borders.

Booking 10,000 plus rounds of golf every season, the OGA brings golfers from major provincial centres, Toronto, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Washington. Playing an average of three to four rounds with a typical four-night stay, these golfers are introduced to the Okanagan's award-winning wines and bounty of fresh produce in the club's dining rooms. Every spring as each course grooms their fairways to welcome new players, the course's culinary teams also prepare to tee up to the table to impress their guests.

Along with quintessentially B.C. interior landscapes, each of the four courses offer distinctive local cuisine prepared by chefs who collectively bring more than 90 years of experience to their respective clubs.

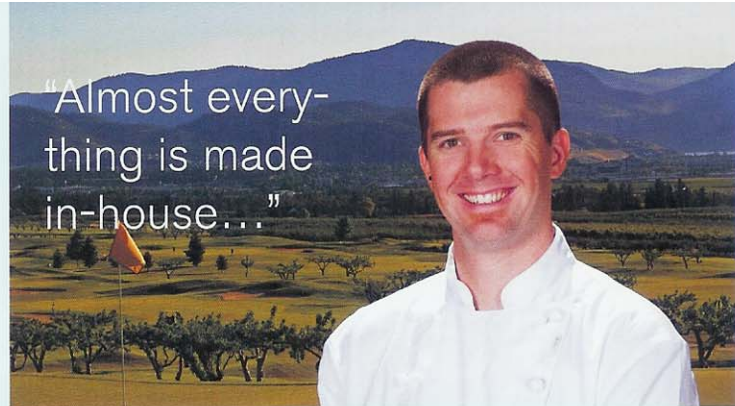
Harvest Grille at the Harvest Golf Club

The Harvest Golf Club is unique in Canada: it mingles fairways with vast orchards and vineyards. Within the sprawling 254-acre property are 60 acres of apples, peaches, nectarines, apricots, pears, cherries and grapes. Many of these fruits find their way into dishes created by executive chef Heath Cates.

Indigo coronation grapes add flavour and colour to pineapple and grape sorbet and brie and grape-stuffed chicken breast. Apples, pears and cherries arrive in desserts and entrees as they ripen with the seasons.

In a relatively small vegetable garden, tucked away from the main thoroughfare, grow fresh herbs, pumpkins, and tomatoes. Pumpkins may seem like an odd choice until Cates describes his pumpkin gnocchi with roasted tomato cream sauce, a dish he created after his arrival at the club in 2009. Another new dish features salad greens with sumac lemon vinaigrette, peppers and cucumber.

Although his cooking has continued to evolve since graduating from Okanagan College in 1998, he stays true to basic concepts. "I'm always keen on simple, fresh flavours," says Cates. "Almost everything is made in-house: sauces, vinaigrettes, stocks. We'll be working on jams this year."



Chef Heath Cates.

Diners at the Harvest Grille and Lounge can sit indoors or on the expansive verandah. Either place offers a lovely view of the gardens, fountain, orchards, and, far beyond, a shimmering blue sliver of Okanagan Lake.

Wines by the glass range in price from \$6.75 to \$13. For those looking for exceptional vintages, Ryan Brown, the food and beverage manager, stocks Penfolds Grange 1997 (\$570). More affordable indulgences include 2005 Blue Mountain Chardonnay (\$68) and the Sumac Ridge Private Reserve Gewurztraminer (\$30).

The club serves Sunday brunch most of the year and during golf season the popular 9 and Dine promotion includes nine holes of golf and dinner for \$55 per person.



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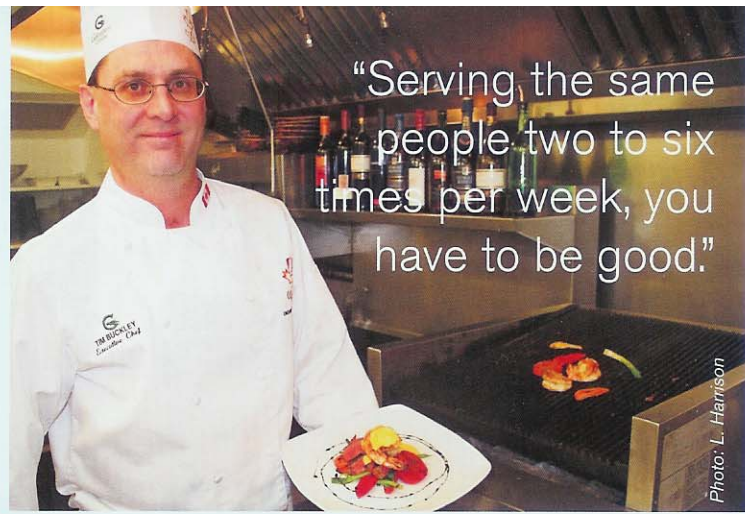


The Canyon Café and Lounge at Gallagher's Canyon Golf & Country Club

Located in Kelowna's southeast hills, Gallagher's Canyon takes golfers to impressive heights on rocky bluffs overlooking the canyon below. The scent of ponderosa pine pervades the course as the semiarid natives spread their roots beneath the well-watered greens.

The club's culinary experience is something executive chef Tim Buckley describes as "relaxed, casual dining, with fresh local ingredients and wine." The clubhouse has a cozy, informal dining area and an outside deck. Buckley serves 35,000 meals per year, mainly to members and local residents. That, he says, is his inspiration. "Serving the same people two to six times per week, you have to be good. So far, they love me!" He also keeps the menu interesting with approximately 18 seasonal sheets.

One of his most beloved seasonal desserts is cherries jubilee. He describes it with the same sheepish bemusement of a pre-fame Susan Boyle being prodded onto stage at a karaoke party. "Caramelized sugar gets a hit of Grand Marnier and black raspberry Chambord liqueur; then swirl in fresh Bing cherries. Flambé then spoon the warm cherry mixture over Mario's Vanilla Bean Gelato. Top with whipped cream and a crisp tuile."




Chef Tim Buckley.

Dinner items range from burgers and salads to more artful entrees such as fiery chicken Yakitori skewers. The prices are very reasonable. "We're not quail and pheasant eggs; we're not upper level dining here," says Buckley. "We focus on what the residents see as a price point and how golfers perceive their food budget after a day of golf."

The club offers two \$39 per person promotions: 9 and Wine includes nine holes of golf followed by wine (a glass to half a litre depending on the selection) and a cheese platter; Back 9 and Breaky includes nine holes of golf, use of a cart and breakfast.

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O'Neill focuses on fresh ingredients, homemade stocks and sauces.

Predator Ridge Resort.

The Range at the Predator Ridge Resort

The Range restaurant at Predator Ridge towers two storeys above the course below. During the warmer months, the walls around a portion of the dining room are removed, filling the entire restaurant with light and inviting an unobstructed view of the fairways carved out of the ruggedly, hilly terrain. The décor is nearly as impressive.

In 2008, the restaurant was updated with espresso-coloured wood, lots of glass, new furniture, and a stunning floor-to-ceiling wine case. It's quite a change from its humble beginnings.



Chef Jeff O'Neill.

"They started with a little trailer on his site in the early 1990s where they sold hotdogs and burgers," confesses executive chef Jeff O'Neill. Prior to that, the 1,200-acre property was slated to become a refuse site for Vernon until a group of entrepreneurs stepped in with a development plan.

Among the transformations are those introduced by O'Neill when he took the reins in March 2008. He revised the menu to add competitively priced favourites for frequent diners and exquisite dishes with a local slant for destination golfers. There are quick noshes (e.g., burgers, salads and sandwiches) along with items such as lamb sirloin topped with blueberry port reduction and dried apricot relish.

O'Neill focuses on fresh ingredients, homemade stocks and sauces, and generous portions. He often cooks with local apples and pears, but finds it challenging to secure reliable, adequate sources of other local produce or meat. At peak season, he can serve as many as 300 diners per night.

Of course, supplying local wine is far easier. O'Neill recommends Nota Bene, a Bordeaux-style blend from Black Hills in Oliver, B.C. (\$85) and with dessert, the Late Harvest Riesling from Quail's Gate (\$61). Wines by the glass range from \$6 to \$10.

Sarazen's Restaurant at the Okanagan Golf Club

The Bear and Quail courses at the Okanagan Golf Club are nestled above the city of Kelowna offering impressive views and sky-high serenity despite their proximity to the airport and the university. The 18th hole of each course enfolds the clubhouse with its wrap-around patio, beckoning golfers to settle in for a drink and a meal.

The milk chocolate and latte colours in Sarazen's Restaurant and the lounge create a sophisticated and relaxing environment. The busiest days see executive chef Dean Hossack serving close to 600 patrons.

Hossack trained at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, then apprenticed at the Lake Okanagan Resort with chef Dave Ryan. They teamed up again for international culinary competitions including Luxembourg in 2002 (their Team B.C. placed fourth out of 70) and Germany in 2008.

Considering Hossack's training, it's not surprising that standard menu items such as steak, chicken and fish are served with more flare than usual. He prepares pan-roasted halibut with sautéed langoustines and a crab and prawn bisque. Appetizers often marry unexpected flavours like the spicy baked brie, which is brie wrapped in a spicy almond crust and accompanied by toasted crustini and wild blueberry shallot compote.

More than an apple?

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Appetizers often marry unexpected flavours...



Chef Dean Hossack.

For events and specials, the club brings out one or both of their massive barbecues to grill ribs, steak and chicken or even a full pig on a spit.

Wines by the glass range in price from \$6 to \$11. The club offers a wide selection of B.C. wines by the bottle ranging from \$26 to \$95 and some unusual imports such as Caymus Conundrum from Napa Valley (\$65).

The club recently introduced take-out service with a menu of 30 items. 🍷