

Professional Spotlight

Takashi Ito, C.C.C. Maître Rôtisseur, Victoria Vice-Conseiller Culinaire

Chef Takashi Ito spent the first twenty-three years of his life in Sendai, Japan. As a child, his father would tell him stories of his travel adventures abroad, sparking a desire in the young boy to follow in his father's footsteps. Chef Ito knew from a very young age that he wanted to travel to Canada.



Chef Ito recalls clearly where his passion for cuisine began: "My father was a Chemistry Professor by trade but gourmet chef at home." He explains, "Cooking is similar to being a chemist; both must marry the ingredients to result in the desired creation." Sunday dinners are some of Chef Ito's fondest memories. He enjoyed listening to his father reminisce about his time in North America and was introduced to complex and exquisite foods at a very young age. They would celebrate with foie gras, blue cheese, pâté and various other European delicacies, which were unheard of in Japan during the 1960s.

With all his passion for cuisine, Chef Ito did not begin his career in a kitchen. Instead, he followed the wish of his father and entered into law school. Halfway through his schooling at Tohoku Gakuin University, he realized his passion for food would not subside and he enrolled to receive his Japanese Inter Provincial Cook Diploma. Graduating with both his law degree and his provincial cook diploma in 1980, Chef Ito and his wife, Chika, departed overseas to Canada and landed in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Career opportunities and the draw of a more cosmopolitan lifestyle led Ito to Ottawa, where he met his mentor, Fritz Marechal, at the Radisson Plaza. Fritz advocated that in addition to cooking, Takashi must develop strong leadership skills to build a true culinary team. In 1993, Chef Ito's arrival at The Fairmont Palliser in Calgary afforded him his first opportunity to develop his own style of cooking. Chef Ito attributes his change in cooking style to the progressive development and acceptance of Asian influences worldwide.

Upon Chef Ito's arrival in Canada in the early 1980s, cuisine was highly influenced by European methods and

ingredients. However, trends changed during the 90s and the public began seeking fresh local ingredients in pursuit of a healthier lifestyle.

"When I first arrived in Canada, my guests didn't know what wasabi was," Chef Ito quietly snickers. Healthy food soon became a priority and fresh food and Asian flare became the norm. His culinary focus shifted from skill and technique to menu style and creation. While Chef Ito's cuisine is very much influenced by Japanese ingredients, it retains a distinct European flare. Chef Ito's philosophy is to create fusion cuisine using fresh local ingredients, to respect food's individual character while maintaining balance. "A carrot is a carrot", comments Chef Ito, "there's no sense in hiding it with other ingredients."

Soon after arriving in Canada, Chef Ito's ice carving passion began. The Japanese are renowned for their talents in ice carving and, in the early 1980s, there were no ice carvers in North America. Ito saw this as an opportunity and took a three-day crash course in ice carving techniques during his first trip home to Japan in 1985.

Immediately upon his return, the determined Takashi asked his Chef for a block of ice and created his first ice sculpture: a swan. "I did in four hours what I can do now in 45 minutes" he chuckles. Unfortunately, it was in a freezer! Ice carving quickly became a passionate hobby for Chef Ito. At first, he used the newfound skill to showcase his cuisine. Now, he enjoys the friendly competition.



Chef Ito with one of his ice carvings.