

Dinner at Smoothwater is unlike anywhere else. First of all, it's a communal affair. Everyone gathers for appetizers in the main living room of the lodge, and everyone sits at the same long table for dinner in the dining room. Dress is casual. Guests staying at the lodge may have just come in from a canoe trip or hiking the trails surrounding James Lake, so they will be very relaxed.

On the evening we were there, six of the guests were staying at the lodge, four were the speaker for the evening and his guests, and three were from New Liskeard, who had come to hear the speaker. With Talker Managing Editor Marion Russell and myself, we made up a full house for dinner. The chatter was lively. Caryn brought in a beautiful tray of appetizers, which she announced to everyone, both to catch their attention and to explain the ingredients! Readers of her cookbook, *Celebrating Temiskaming Terroir*, will recognize the orange day lilies



(chèvre). The day lilies are eaten whole with the cheese. The flavours are softly spicy and earthy: mouth-wateringly delicious. With the stuffed lilies were fritters of shredded carrot with cumin. The fritts are light, and again a lovely blend of subtly earthy and spicy flavours. We enjoyed the appetizers with Smoothwater's own pine beer. It's very tasty but not strong. I found my first sips of it to have a little of an edge, a bit like Greek Retsina, but it quickly settled down to be a delicious beer that complimented the food.

When we were called to dinner, we each picked up the plate that was at the place of our choice at the table, and lined up at the serving counter between the kitchen and dining room. Caryn was assisted in serving from the beautifully arranged platters by Josh Atkinson, a student of Fanshawe College's Culinary Arts program, who is her sous-chef for the summer. We were served Lake Temiskaming whitefish, dusted with buckwheat flour and lightly sauteed in canola oil with wild herbs (sweet fern and balsam needles) and bergamot. Because the herbs darken in the cooking, the fish had a light crust of dark brown and green specks, in contrast to the white flakey flesh inside. The fish pan had been de-glazed with maple syrup and pine beer to make a light sauce that was drizzled over the fish. With it was served a mixture of wild and brown rice, garnished with garlic scapes. Grilled zucchini spears, a beautiful salad of wild lettuce, arugula and French sorrel, all from the garden, and whole grain bread made from grains grown in the Temiskaming region mixed with summer flowers such as mallow and St. John's wort, completed the main course. As with any delicious meal given to a diverse group of people in a charming and

Trailblazing Cuisine at Smoothwater



by Judy GOUIN

comfortable environment, everyone was thoroughly happy and the animated conversation continued. Caryn's family and staff took off the dinner dishes, and dessert was announced: a strawberry tart with custard, and a choice of coffee, tea or mint tea. Once again we lined up at the counter where Caryn and Josh served each of us in turn. The tart was a variation on the Wild Blueberry Kuchen in Caryn's book. The thick crust was excellent, very short and crunchy, but not hard. Mint tea, for those readers who may not know, is an excellent aid to digestion as well as a very pleasant-tasting finish (with no caffeine) for a meal.

I should also say that the interiors of the lodge, the furnishings, serving dishes and utensils, the table settings, decorations and linen, combine the elegant and the rustic. Caryn's attention to colour and texture, along with imagination and a sense of humour, results in a warm feeling of well-being, spiced with little surprises like an unusual ceramic napkin ring, or one of the eccentric carved fish that decorate the dining room table. Outside are lovely views of the deck overhung by big pines, and James Lake and its islands.

Dinner is not available every night, as the dining room can only accommodate fifteen, and the number of guests staying at the lodge varies. Reservations are requested at least twenty-four hours ahead, preferably forty-eight, as Caryn makes up her menu to accommodate the dietary needs of her guests. When we were there, two of the guests were Vegans. They were served a spicy chick-pea dish in place of the fish.

The cost of dinner is \$50 per person, plus taxes and gratuities. You may bring your own wine, so ask for the menu ahead of time and buy something to match. We just took a chance on a French Merlot, which Marion happened to have. With fish, you ask? With fish prepared this way, it was gorgeous! The flavours of the various herbs were brought out by the wine, creating unusual, delicious combinations.

You may wish to make an evening of it by following dinner with one of the house concerts that are held in the Gathering Hall next to the lodge. There is plenty of parking, but bring your flashlight and bug dope, because the parking lot is just a clearing in the bush! The lodge is at the end of Smoothwater Road, on the west side of Highway 11, just south of the old Scandia Inn. For the program of speakers and house concerts, and for Caryn's classes in "Looking & Cooking" wild edibles, go to www.smoothwater.com. For dinner reservations, call 569-3539.

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dramsay.mpp.newliskeard@liberal.ola.org

dramsay.mpp@liberal.ola.org