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Grapevine

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Le Jardin
Kingston, ON

Le Jardin

THE START OF SOMETHING NEW: COOKING WITH THE ELEMENTS



By Sabrina Pirillo

The tapas experience of Tango Nuevo, the relaxed Middle Eastern themed tapas lounge bar Mayla, and the globally inspired elemental cuisine of Le Jardin, are all the brain-children of Gokhan Cifci. He came to Canada in 2009 from Turkey, where he had studied hotel and tourism management. Meeting his wife (who is Canadian) through the cruise line industry, they settled in Kingston to grow roots. Kingston was an easy choice for the couple who were attracted to its history and vibrant downtown that has so much to offer. Gokhan worked in the Kingston restaurant scene for five years until 2013, before opening his first restaurant. After growing Tango Nuevo into a well-known Kingston landmark, Gokhan was ready for a new challenge. At the time Covid hit, but fortunately business remained strong.

"I usually try to turn every kind of negative thing into a positive," Gokhan explains. "It pushes me harder to do something different. In 2021 we bought the building at 343 King Street East, the former law office of Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first Prime Minister." Kingstontians may recall this previously was known as The Public House.

Andrew Smyth is the talented executive chef who oversees all three restaurants and is also head chef at Le Jardin. Gokhan's sister, Hediye Cifci, was the sous chef at Tango Nuevo during that time, and is now the head chef of Mayla. Gokhan decided to move them to 343 King Street East and Mayla was born in the summer of 2021. The plan was to open a second floor. "We had a woodfire grill idea for our third restaurant, but it was quite challenging to create an open concept woodfire in an enclosed space in Kingston." Working diligently with the fire department, Le Jardin was ready to open by summer 2023, following the transformation of the second floor into a wood-fired steak-forward restaurant, a first for Kingston.

In Le Jardin's unique dining room, guests may sip one of the many carefully chosen wines from the exclusive wine vault while sitting amid the plants beneath seashell inspired lights. Or if they prefer, diners can enjoy a specialty cocktail whilst watching their chosen dish being prepared on the handcrafted 9-foot woodfire. The ingredients' natural flavours are enhanced by the open flame cuisine which prepares turf, surf, vegetarian dishes, and believe it or not, even desserts.





Earth, Fire, Water

Chef Andrew fell in love with cooking at the early age of nineteen, and now has been cooking for twenty-one years. The uniqueness of using the woodfire grill allows Chef Andrew to take cooking back to old school ways. "Cooking over coals enhances the flavours and takes it back to the basics. It adds complexity with scoring, searing and charring to find balance within the menu," explains Chef Andrew. "We are the only woodfire grill in Kingston, which makes us unique. Le Jardin features a steak-forward menu, and I'm really proud of our dry-age program where we age our own Canadian Ribeye. We bring in Angus beef which we dry age 30 to 60 days in-house."

Le Jardin's woodfire grill was custom made in Kingston by Victor Matos, a local welder and artist. White oak is cooked down into coals. "You can create bold flavours at 1400 degrees. It makes it exciting to cook because you're constantly adjusting temperatures and techniques allowing the restaurant to grow and to create something new for the restaurant and for the city," explains Chef Andrew.

"When you come to Le Jardin, it is not your everyday restaurant. It is a restaurant where you create special moments and can enjoy more of a fine dining experience," observes Gokhan.

The restaurant's modern design scheme inspired by nature creates an intimate atmosphere for guests. A brown and green colour palette complements dark wood, symbolizing the concept of earth, fire, and water. Chef Andrew confides this is no accident. The menu reflects this theme; plant-based dishes represent earth, woodfire grilled meats, fire, and the delectable selection of seafood epitomizes water. "During Covid, after spending lots of time at home, we wanted to create something based on old cooking techniques. We wanted to go back to basics, using wood and charcoal like the Old World. And to make people think about how we should care about the elements and the environment we have. We want people to be aware of the basic needs, rather than looking for so many unnecessary details. Earth, we

Inspiration from international flavours, fundamental elements and a unique cooking technique, creates the ultimate dining experience.

need it. Fire, we need it. Water, we need it," says Gokhan. Woodfire cuisine is the restaurant's undoubted highlight. An open concept kitchen allows guests to have the pleasure of watching these talented chefs at work and to appreciate their energy. The Le Jardin team consists of executive chef Andrew Smyth, sous chef Thomas Henson and Jacob Diamanti. Henson is also a talented visual artist and his work can be seen in many of the restaurant's decorative elements.

The three restaurants try to use as many locally sourced products as they can, believing in the freshness of their ingredients and supporting local and small businesses. During the summer growing season, they try to source products from as many small farms and independent retailers as possible and showcase local seasonal fruits and vegetables in their menus.

What's in a Name

Gokhan was tasked with coming up with the names for the restaurants: Mayla originates from combining his children's names, Mavi and Ayla. Le Jardin's story is a little different, "It is complicated to run two separate restaurants in the same building, and especially in such a small town like Kingston. We needed to create something quite different. Since our theme is earth, fire, and water, we wanted to develop that good feeling in the kitchen. Between the crackling fire and the comforting appeal of Mother Earth vegetation in the dining room, we wanted to give diners a sense of place whilst they dine with us. We also admire French cuisine, so we thought Le Jardin would be a good fit," explains Gokhan.

The Ultimate Dining Experience

Gokhan aspires to see one simple thing: "I want people who dine with us to have smiles on their faces, I want them to be happy. We think of everyone who dines with us as our guest, our staff treat them well. In my culture, we feed guests first, then we feed ourselves. I know we serve great food and provide great service, but that's not enough. I ask our servers to show their individual personalities and characters at work, to make everyone involved in the experience of dining with us. Our job is to leave a good taste in our guests' mouths, make them happy and make a memorable night for them. I believe that what we are providing for our guests is truly original and unequalled in Kingston." But it doesn't stop there. Next on Gokhan's agenda is the development of the third floor to create an open rooftop terrace patio, which will double as an event space. It will be like entering a speakeasy. You will go through the restaurant, then ascend another floor to what will be Le Jardin's patio roof terrace. The aim is to open this summer. I cannot wait for that...roll on summer. 🍷