

About Daniel Hadida and Eric Robertson

Chef Daniel Hadida originally joined Pearl Morissette as the vineyard's Chef in 2015. Inspired by the environment and the importance of small organic farming, Hadida introduced the idea of opening a restaurant at the winery. The idea later came to fruition and the culinary experience at the Restaurant at Pearl Morissette reflects the integrity of the local ingredients.

Prior to joining Pearl Morissette, Hadida held esteemed positions at premier restaurants worldwide. For three years, Hadida worked as the Chef Tournant at Toronto's highly rated Nota Bene restaurant. Yearning to travel and learn more about the culinary arts, Hadida made his way to Europe where he worked as a Chef at Le Châteaubriand and after, as a Pastry Chef at the Michelin-starred Septime, two of Paris' trendiest restaurants.

Hadida spent time working on organic and biodynamic farms around France and Belgium – some of the most significant experiences he's had in terms of influencing the operations at The Restaurant at Pearl Morissette and impacting its success in terms of cultivating relationships with farmers and producers. After returning to Canada and working at Edulis restaurant for ten months, Hadida moved to South America, where he worked as a cook at the Pujol Restaurant and at Central in Lima. Above all else, from these experiences Hadida learnt that he was ready to run a restaurant.

Chef Eric Robertson joined Pearl Morissette in April 2017, the result of a friendship cultivated with Hadida, whom he met while working in Belgium. The two had kept in touch throughout their time in Europe and beyond, sharing experiences as Canadian chefs with similar culinary backgrounds and passions.

Robertson spent time cooking in France and then in Belgium, first working as a cook at the Michelin-starred In de Wulf in Dranouter and later, he led the kitchen at De Vitrine in Ghent for a year and a half. After returning to Toronto, and working as sous chef at Langdon Hall, Robertson later joined Hadida at Pearl Morissette. Robertson brings to Pearl Morissette his international influences and passion for creating dishes from locally sourced foods. Originally from the Niagara region, Eric has always had an agrarian passion.

The Restaurant at Pearl Morissette

Located in the Niagara region of southern Ontario, an hour drive southwest of Toronto, The Restaurant at Pearl Morissette reflects the European ideal of destination dining in the heart of agriculture. The Restaurant at Pearl Morissette shares the Pearl Morissette spirit of place, relying on regional ingredients that reflect the places where they were grown and the people who cultivated them.

The restaurant serves an ever-changing prix fixe menu composed of the highest quality ingredients of the region and inspired by seasonal French cooking. The wine menu represents a selective list including Pearl Morissette wines as well as global producers who follow similar principles to Pearl Morissette – a ‘step out of the way’ approach, coupled with a dedication to the unearthing of wines that are reflective of a place and time. Pearl Morissette has a distinct reputation for its methodology, and now the onsite restaurant adds another dimension, highlighting how the wine can be received in a dining environment created with a similar ethos of passion and care. Guests are treated to the collaborative work of skilled chefs, sommeliers, foragers and producers, who are united in their honest approach, hard work ethic, creativity and celebration of local ingredients.

A dinner at the restaurant begins rapidly, a few snacks brought out upon arrival may include Atlantic oyster served in preserved rhubarb juice with sour cream, hemlock oil and candied Angelica alongside Lake Erie pickerel, marinated in shio-Koji, before being skewered and grilled over charcoal and glazed in a soy-like, wild mushroom sauce. These are quickly followed by slices of pickled black radish, wrapped around fresh goat cheese, seasoned with elderflower vinegar and dried fennel pollen, sauced with an unctuous charred lamb broth.

After snacks, a warm dish of slow roasted winter carrots, sweetened by the frost is brought to the guests. These are served with salted pork cheek, hung for a year and a half in the wine cellars with wild oregano. The fermented carrot slices add a gentle acidity to the pork cheek, before the dish is sauced with roast chicken jus infused with prickly ash berries, and finished with sweet cicely. A glistening lump of line caught Atlantic cod is slowly cooked on the barbecue to crisp the skin and gently infuse the flesh with smoky heat. After being doused in leek butter, it is served with a stew of crosnes and clams, cooked in roasted onion sauce, and finished with pickled pear, horse radish and wild field cress.

Dry aging is the preferred process for meats, and could be a 6 week aged goose breast roasted pink and served with a whipped parsnip purée, studded with flecks of confit goose leg. Gently wilted winter spinach, dressed in salted gooseberry and fig leaf oil, balances the richness and sweetness and a simple goose jus connects all of the flavours together.

A very simply served cheese course leads into a few sweet courses. Starting with a raw honey ice cream served on dried white mulberries, engorged with honey kombucha, and layered with caramelized sourdough and sweet milk crisps. Finally a ginger crisp apple, grown on the property and cellared through the winter is hollowed out and filled with apple and lemon balm candies, smoked apple pieces, caramelized apple syrup and a meadowsweet infused sunchoke mousse. A fermented crab apple powder is sprinkled on top before being recapped to appear as an unperturbed piece of fruit, as innocuous initially as it is ultimately delightful.

As visitors arrive, they drive through the vineyards, not demarcated by a sign, but rather by the oversized cardinal statues, past a historic house and duck ponds towards a minimalist black building, designed by celebrated local architecture firm gh3. The restaurant's interiors are by DesignAgency and include composite concrete tabletops with stream-like metal inlay details of Niagara rivers and elegant benches combining steel, leather and upholstery; custom designed lights and a backlit art installation displays a revolving selection of regional photographs by Xavier Girard Lachaine. The restaurant's thoughtfulness extends even to the custom ceramics and utensils, crafted by local and international artisans.

About Deirdre Fraser

Since joining Pearl Morissette in 2015, as forager and gardener, 'Plant Wizard' Deirdre Fraser has built an onsite garden, providing The Restaurant with regional food, flowers and herbs. As a result, Fraser has also increased the biodiversity of the property and the pollination in the area.

A Niagara local who grew up on a sprawling country property near the Erie shore, Fraser's longstanding interest in food and culinary history has its foundations in the gardens, fields and farmers markets of her childhood. Over the years she has complimented her curiosity with a lifelong quest to learn more about wild plants and herbs. Joining the team at Pearl Morissette offered her the chance to build a permaculture garden and to experiment with sustainable regional plants, representative of a shared value of the spirit of place.

Fraser served for six years as an independent forager, providing some of Toronto's best restaurants, such as Edulis, Woodlot, Dandelion and Alo, with carefully wild foraged food and unusual herbs and flowers from the Niagara region. Her motivation has always been to provide eaters with a deeper understanding of plant ecology.