



# The London Chef Cooking School

By Jane Mundy

Combine the contemporary surge of interest in cooking classes, a swanky kitchen, an entertaining and engaging chef and you have The London Chef cooking school in Victoria, BC—a guaranteed recipe for success.

Whether you are a novice cook needing to learn the basics, a home cook wanting to learn more skills, or a skilled cook looking for inspiration to keep cooking, you'll be entertained and educated by a cooking class with chef and owner Dan Hayes.

The London Chef offers a variety of classes, from lunch-hour demonstrations to hands-on evening and weekend classes. And age is no barrier when it comes to cooking. Hayes' customers range from eight to 80. His classes appeal to high-school students and Oak Bay "ladies who lunch."

Darlene Mooney took her friend to a one-hour lunch demonstration for her 60th birthday present. "We learned a lot, and Chef Dan is so entertaining," says Mooney. "My friend, Christine, is not a cook, and at first she was a bit intimidated, but we have both signed up for the hands-on cooking classes." Like many home cooks, Mooney tends to cook the same meals at home, but cooking classes get her out of that "boring routine."

"Christine and I took that fast-paced class months ago, but we remember just about everything," Mooney adds. "Chef gave us tips on mussels, from what to look for when you buy them (shells are shut tight) to prepping (scrub and rinse well) to emulsifying the sauce (shake the pan).

"And then he demonstrated steak



A Recipe  
for Success  
in Victoria

tartare. Both of us were terrified, but Dan instantly put us at ease. He asked if anyone had a problem eating raw meat and a few brave souls put up our hands. We talked about meat safety, cuts of meat, and the history of this particular dish. I thought it was brave of Dan to offer this dish. We cautiously tasted it—beautifully presented with little quenelles on chilled plates—and everyone almost licked their plates clean."

Why risk offering steak tartare instead of a dish more mainstream? "When people pay for lunch that I am demonstrating, I want to give them a slightly different experience," says Hayes. "When someone explains to you what this dish really is (and not raw hamburger), and it is served in the right manner and style, it is wonderful."

Hayes is daring. For instance, recently a private class of twelve requested an Italian meal. Instead of doing the quintessential pasta and meatballs, he made risotto nero. He showed the class how to clean and sauté squid and explained where the cuttlefish ink comes from. "Some people would recreate this dish at home, but others just enjoy the entertainment and having dinner," he chuckles.

Back to that recipe for success. Why the sudden surge in interest? "People are increasingly more aware of what they are eating," says Becky Julseth, a repeat London Chef customer. "And the Food Network is a huge influence. Everyone is talking about *Top Chef Canada* around the water cooler." Another repeater, Stacy Kuiack, concurs. "I think cooking schools are becom-



ing more popular due to the Slow Food Movement, and the Food Network is educational besides making people happy.” You could say that the London Chef does just that.

“I haven’t seen anyone stand and stir as well as Dan does,” says Kuiack, who has taken about a dozen classes at The London Chef. “I’ve been to a lot of cooking schools, and some demonstrations are elitist, taught by snobby chefs, but not Dan. His personality reflects the type of food he teaches, like rustic Spanish and Italian. His food is more accessible. You know how everything tastes better when you go camping? It’s like that when you take Dan’s hands-on classes.”

Ian Trimble is a “serious cook.” And he’s a serious foodie. Whenever he and his partner travel, they find three-star Michelin restaurants in New York or Paris, so when he raves about Hayes’ cooking, that’s really saying something. “Of all the restaurant meals we’ve had in Victoria, The London Chef meals are the best we’ve had,” he says.

So far Trimble has organized two private cooking parties with 12 friends and has already booked another. “I inquired about a French theme, and Micayla (Dan’s wife and manager) sent great suggestions. The second time, I just asked for something we might like based on the first class. We had a French fish stew and gnocchi made from scratch. And scallops with cauliflower vanilla puree; that sounds strange, but it was delicious.

However the biggest attraction is his running commentary. As for the

(Top) The U-shaped counters and cooking stations allow Chef Dan to attend to each individual student. (Bottom) The cooking school is designed to be open and inviting, a place to learn in a non-intimidating manner and be entertained at the same time.



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### The London Chef Steak Tartare

#### Ingredients

- 1- ¼ pounds fresh beef filet, hand diced
- 2 egg yolks
- 2 anchovy filets, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 shallot, finely chopped and rinsed
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- ¼ cup capers, rinsed
- 4 cornichons, finely chopped
- 4 sprigs of flat parsley, finely chopped

#### Method

Put the egg yolks, mustard and anchovies in a large stainless steel bowl and mix well. Add the oil and mix again. Fold the onion, shallot, capers, cornichons and parsley into the mixture. Add the chopped meat to the bowl and mix well using your hands.

Serve with fresh warm bread, crisp crostini or melba toast.



With his customary flair, London Chef's Dan Hayes demonstrates a flambé for a cooking class.



A casual but elegant touch on the communal dining table.

cost of the private classes, it varies depending upon the menu. Regardless, The London Chef is an absolute steal compared with cooking classes in other cities.”

Chef Dan’s teaching style is informal and approachable. He avoids too many measurements; he doesn’t want students to cook by numbers. Rather, he wants you to get a feeling and emotion of the food.

And the room reflects his teaching style. It allows people to follow the lead of an instructor (sometimes guest chefs are scheduled) around the U-shaped counter and cooking stations. The instructor can easily jump to people who possibly need a bit more guidance. “We go the pace of the slowest person, so no one falls behind,” adds Hayes.

People go home with different experiences and knowledge. Hayes recalls a couple who recently attended a class. She had no cooking skills and her husband was quite accomplished.

He learned how to temper spices and get exactly the right ratio of sugar in the chutney. She learned how to cut an onion and cook pasta. They were both rewarded.

Serious cooks are looking for chef tricks, but most important is to have fun. Cooking classes are therapeutic and invigorating and a great way to spend an evening with friends and family. “Everyone used to be part of preparing dinner,” says Chef Dan. “The kids were shelling peas, and Dad was looking in the garden for a rabbit. For us it is great that we can recreate a family atmosphere.” 🍴

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