



Christmas Gazette

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK Lesley Chesterman

The most cutting-edge store in the city

There are countless differences between home and professional cooks, but the one factor that really separates the amateurs from the pros is the quality of their knives. Many an excellent home cook I know proudly displays a set of Henckel or Cutco knives on the kitchen counter.

The really ambitious ones, spring for brands like Furi and Global. But check out the knife stash of any of Montreal's top chefs and you'll find some serious Japanese knives, most of which have been purchased from Guillaume De L'Isle.

A self-taught "emouleur" (knife sharpener), De L'Isle started out as a freelance sharpener, whose clientele includes Normand Laprise, Stelio Perombelon, Fred Morin, Alexandre Gosselin and Martin Picard.

Three weeks ago, he opened a Laurier Ave. shop dedicated to all things sharp and pointy called L'Émouleur.

Enter this tiny shop and you'll see more than 200 Japanese knives on magnetic bars in display cases. Priced at between \$100 to \$900, the knives are made of stainless steel or carbon steel, the steel favoured by purists, who like their knives made of hard metals, which stay sharper longer. Looking around the shop, I eye a long, skinny knife designed for sushi making. It's \$700, and made for slicing raw fish, but I'll bet Uma Thurman in Kill Bill could find more interesting (make that gruesome) uses for it.

Yet, every knife in this store is meant for the kitchen, and De L'Isle wants to see more home cooks jump on the Japanese knife bandwagon. "The Japanese have a long tradition of knife-making," he says, "everything from saws to hairdresser's scissors. They use superior steel, harder and stronger. When I say stronger, I mean not brittle. These knives don't chip easily."

De L'Isle shows me a beautiful knife with a blade marked with a sort of swirl of wavy layers marked on the flat side of the blade. "This is made from Damascus steel," he says, "which is folded like layers of puff pastry when it's hot and then twisted to make it stronger." The knife is a \$900 "santoku," made up of 256 layers. Heavy, shiny and beyond razor sharp, it's the most beautiful blade I have ever seen.

Yet don't be fooled by the layering effect; De L'Isle says you'll find knives with similar patterns on inferior knives at IKEA. What you're paying for here is the quality of the steel and the strength of the blade, which De L'Isle claims will last a lifetime.

When perusing the goods, never forget the name of the shop is L'Émouleur, which means great emphasis is put not only on the quality of the knife, but keeping it in prime slicing, chopping and mincing condition.

When you buy a knife, De L'Isle offers a lesson in keeping it sharp.

He recommends using a ceramic sharpening rod over any other, especially the dia-



Guillaume De L'Isle at his new store L'Émouleur on Laurier Ave. W. Some of the city's top chefs take their knives to be sharpened by De L'Isle, who is self-taught. "It's an art to do it right. You can give a beautiful new edge to any knife."



De L'Isle sharpening a knife, Japanese, of course. He wants more home cooks to use Japanese knives, which he says have superior steel that is harder and strong — "not brittle. These knives don't chip easily." The shop's knives sell from \$100-\$900 each.

mond rods, which he says are too rough to produce a smooth edge.

You can also bring your knives to the store to be sharpened at a cost of \$20 each.

That may seem costly, but I'd consider it reasonable to revive that old Henckel languishing at the bottom of your cutlery drawer.

De L'Isle takes about 10 minutes per knife, using two grindstones to create the sharpest edge.

"It's not a complicated process," he says, "but it's an art to do it right. You can give a beautiful new edge to any knife. I find that the older knives are often better quality than the new knives of the same brand."

Alexandre Loiseau of Bistro Cocagne counts seven of De L'Isle's knives in his collection. "I sold all my old knives to buy his knives, and my old knives were very good. But his are incredible: very exclusive and expensive, but they stay sharp

longer because they are made from a better, harder steel. I know because I sharpen them myself. I'm a maniac about my knives, and Guillaume's are the highest quality available in the city."

For those of you looking to get serious about your knife collection, De L'Isle recommends avoiding those sets sold in department stores and focusing on just three knives: the "gyutou," a chef's knife (21 to 24 mm), the "petty," a paring knife (10 mm), and the "santoku," a mid-sized (17-

mm) knife ideal for slicing vegetables.

And for keeping them at their best, he offers six hints: **Always cut** on a wooden cutting board, which is softer than plastic and won't damage your knife; **Don't pile your knives** in a drawer; **Use a block** or magnet rod to store them individually; **Never place** your knives in the dishwasher, which is too hot and abrasive an atmosphere for the blade; **Make sure** to maintain your

days, five years is worth popping a Champagne cork over. To celebrate, this Tuesday, Nov. 3, chef-owner David Ferguson has invited chef Dennis Johnston from Fid Resto in Halifax to create a four-course menu made up of organic and sustainable ingredients Johnston is bringing with him from the Halifax farmer's market.

The menu consists of: Seared Eastern Shore smoked salmon with pumpkin;

Crispy pig's head with toasted hazelnuts and barley;

Fresh Atlantic swordfish with laughing mushrooms, Annapolis Valley salsify and kale;

Organic quince Tatin with a buttermilk ice and parmesan

A native Haligonian, Johnston spent years in Montreal working in some of the city's top restaurants including Les Mignardises, Les Halles and Mediterraneo. His Halifax restaurant, Fid, has been considered one of the city's best for a decade. I have dined at Johnston's table often, and can assure you that not only will the meal be a treat, but you'll get the chance to meet one of the most genial chefs in the business.

To book, call 514-722-2175. Le Jolifou is at 1840 Beaubien St. E. The four-course dinner with wine is \$95.

Get squashed at Cocagne

Having just completed a wildly successful apple menu, Bistro Cocagne chef Alexandre Loiseau is now in the midst of serving a menu starting the second-to-last seasonal vegetable, squash. Until Nov. 9, the menu will feature foie gras, gnocchi, deer, Manchego cheese and more paired with several varieties of heirloom squash. If you can't make it for this menu, consider the next from Nov. 13-30, which will feature potatoes.

To book, call 514-286-0700. Bistro Cocagne is at 3842 St. Denis St. The five-course squash menu is \$60, \$110 with wine.

knives by sharpening them at least one a week with a ceramic sharpening rod; **Start with** a good-quality knife instead of a cheap knife, which will quickly lose its edge.

Only three weeks old, L'Émouleur is already the talk of the chef crowd. De L'Isle is on the lookout for a line of cutting boards to sell, as well as top-quality scissors and a good bread knife. By the way, he can sharpen bread knives, too.

L'Émouleur, 1081 Laurier Ave. W., near Querbes St., 514-813-3135. The website: www.aiguillagecouteauxmontreal.com/

Halifax chef Dennis Johnston to cook at Le Jolifou

Le Jolifou is celebrating its five-year anniversary this month, and considering the endless challenges faced by young restaurateurs these

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