

# Truth teller

HONESTY PROVES TO BE CHEF  
J-C POIRIER'S STAR INGREDIENT



Get J-C Poirier talking about food, and the word “honest” will be sprinkled throughout the conversation like the Diamond Crystal kosher salt the Michelin-starred chef uses in the kitchen of his Quebecois bistro, St. Lawrence, in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.

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## HONEST FOOD

Poirier’s favourite food is “honest food.” As a culinarian, and one paying homage to his French-Canadian heritage, he’s all about “being honest with his food.”

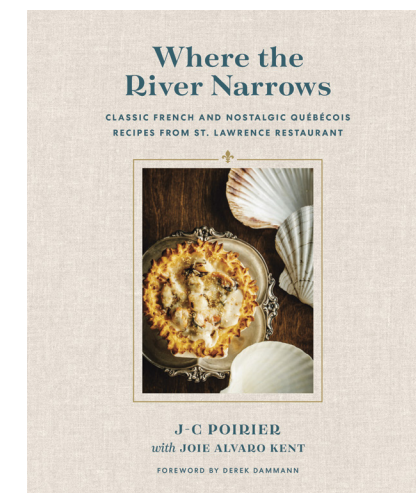
But unlike the opaque marketing buzzword that “honest” has become in the food world, Poirier applies it with earnestness to the cooking that inspires him and that he hopes to encourage in others, including with his recently released cookbook, *Where the River Narrows* (Appetite by Random House, 2022).

“What I mean is, you’ve got to be attentive to yourself as a chef or as a cook. It comes by knowing yourself and your background, and where you come from,” Poirier says. “Being honest is offering a part of who you are. That’s how I know the difference between good cooking and great cooking.”

## HONEST ROOTS

Poirier comes by his greatness at cooking, well, honestly. All apron strings lead back to his bon vivant mother, who was as convivial as she was creative in the kitchen of the family’s Saint-Jérôme, Quebec, home.

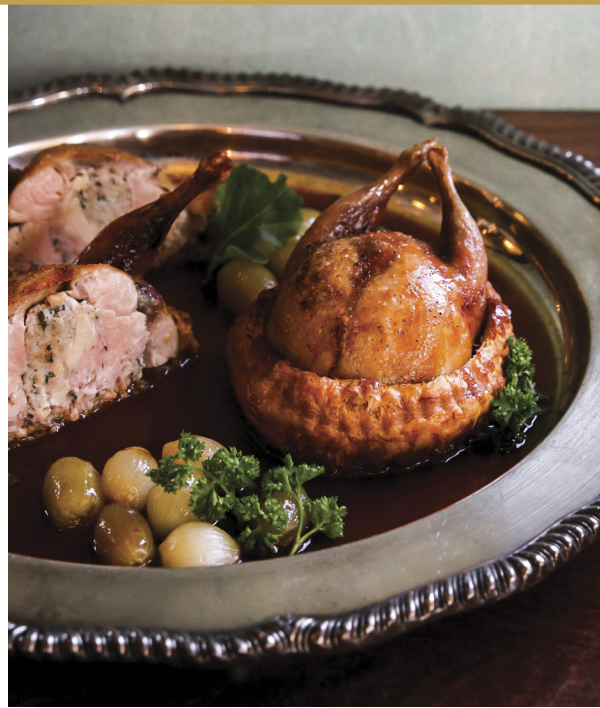
She bought local and stretched a dollar. She also pushed boundaries with the young taste buds around the table, exposing Poirier to quinoa before it became a household grain and making her own tofu. >



Recipes excerpted from *Where the River Narrows: Classic French & Nostalgic Québécois Recipes From St. Lawrence Restaurant* by Jean-Christophe Poirier. Written with Joie Alvaro Kent. Copyright © 2022 Jean-Christophe Poirier. Cover and book design by Jennifer Griffiths. Photography by Brit Gill, except page 148. Photo on page 8 by Amy Ho. Photos on pages 2, 5, and 6 courtesy of the author. Published by Appetite by Random House, a division of Penguin Random House Canada Limited. Reproduced by arrangement with the Publisher. All rights reserved.

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## KEY INGREDIENTS

Quality over quantity is as much a mantra for J-C Poirier as honesty, especially when it comes to ingredients. That's why he encourages home cooks to splurge on premium options. They make a significant difference to the end result, he argues, and because of their quality, you'll need less of them, too, extending their value.

### Poirier's essential top-shelf ingredients

- > grass-fed, cultured butter
- > organic all-purpose flour for baking; whole wheat, buckwheat, and Red Fife flours for bread making
- > top-notch oils for a variety of purposes, including grapeseed oil for cooking, first-pressed canola oil for salad dressing, and extra-virgin olive oil for finishing dishes
- > Diamond Crystal kosher salt for seasoning food and Maldon sea salt for a finishing touch to add texture
- > high quality vinegars, including red wine, balsamic, and apple cider

## HONEST TRAINING

The magic of cooking and gathering over a meal compelled Poirier to eventually enrol in culinary school. He spent a year training in classical French techniques before putting them to the test in the storied Les Remparts in Old Montreal.

Poirier was drawn to the physical aspect of cooking, but like many young people forging their own path, he was eventually lured away from the place that reared him. Vancouver beckoned.

After stints at Rob Feenie's Lumière, and even in his own Italian-inspired dining rooms and eateries, a meal in Paris inspired Poirier to get back to his roots in the kitchen. In 2017, he opened St. Lawrence, a cozy 40-seat space that's like "entering my grandma's house."

"It's being authentic to myself," he says.

## HONEST LEGACY

Poirier retraces his professional journey and personal growth in *Where the River Narrows* using recipes that channel timeless and foundational French and Québécois cooking techniques, and a more relaxed Poirier at home.

If he's being honest, Poirier hopes the book will be a legacy to share with his two young daughters, Aïla and Florence. It also serves as a business card for a restaurant that's earning prestigious accolades, including Chef of the Year and Restaurant of the Year by *Vancouver Magazine*. Last fall, dining authority Michelin bestowed one of its coveted stars upon St. Lawrence, too.

## HONEST VALUES

That success can be linked to the professional values Poirier upholds in addition to raw talent. He leads by healthy example, eschewing alcohol, especially on the job, and espousing work-life balance by opening St. Lawrence only four days a week. He also offers employment benefits, including four weeks of vacation every year. His staff stay, and success follows honestly.

Looking ahead, Poirier knows only that he will stay true—to himself and his craft.

"I'll just keep going forward and try to be me," he says. "And my team? Try to be better and better every day at what we do, and the rest will come." ▲

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Turn the page for delicious recipes from J-C Poirier's cookbook *Where the River Narrows: Classic French & Nostalgic Québécois Recipes From St. Lawrence Restaurant*.





## ARTICHAUTS EN BARIGOULE *BRAISED ARTICHOKE STEW*

My love of artichokes continues with this classic recipe, one of the best ways to eat this interesting, underrated, and strange vegetable. Frozen artichoke hearts are a time-saving substitute, though the flavour and texture of fresh artichokes are, by far, much superior and definitely preferred.

1 lemon  
4 large globe artichokes  
5 tablespoons (75 mL) olive oil, divided  
3 thick slices smoked bacon (2.5 ounces/75 g),  
cut into 1/4 by 1/2-inch (6 mm by 1 cm) lardons  
8 pearl onions, peeled and halved  
2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced  
1 stalk celery (1.75 ounces/50 g), cut into small dice  
1 medium carrot (2.5 ounces/75 g), peeled and cut  
into small dice  
1/2 bulb fennel, cut into small dice  
2 sprigs thyme  
2 bay leaves  
1/2 cup (125 mL) white wine  
1 cup (250 mL) Chicken Stock or Vegetable Stock  
(or store-bought) or water  
1/4 cup (15 g) fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves  
1 teaspoon (3 g) kosher salt  
Freshly cracked black pepper, to taste

Fill a large bowl with cold water. Using a peeler, peel three strips of lemon zest from the lemon; set aside. Cut the lemon in half and squeeze the juice into the water.

Gently pick off the first layer of the outer leaves from each artichoke. Using a sharp paring knife, cut off the stalks about 3/4 inch (2 cm) from the base, and cut 3/4 inch (2 cm) off the leaf tips. Turn each artichoke by cutting around the outside of each one to remove any green parts, trimming the leaves a bit at the top and removing any woody parts at the base. Using a melon baller or a small spoon, scoop out each furry choke, found in the centre. Cut the artichoke hearts into quarters and immediately put them in the lemon water to prevent oxidation.

In a medium pot on medium heat, heat 1 tablespoon (15 mL) of the oil. Sauté the bacon lardons, stirring often with a wooden spoon, until nicely caramelized. Add another 3 tablespoons (45 mL) of the oil, and stir in the pearl onions, garlic, celery, carrot, fennel, thyme, and bay leaves. Cook gently for 8 to 10 minutes, until softened but without colouration. Stir in the artichokes and lemon zest. Deglaze the pot with the wine and reduce by half. Add the stock and bring to a simmer. Lower the

heat to low, cover, and cook for 10 to 15 minutes or until you can just pierce the artichokes with slight resistance to the tip of your paring knife. Discard the bay leaves. Toss in the parsley leaves, salt, pepper, and the remaining oil. Taste for seasoning.

Serve the artichokes with all the vegetables and broth in a bowl. If you prefer a more intense flavour, use a slotted spoon to transfer the artichokes and vegetables into a bowl and reduce the cooking liquid by half on high heat. Pour the reduced liquid over the artichokes and serve either warm or cooled to room temperature.



### CHICKEN STOCK

*Yield: 8 cups (2 L) stock or 1 cup (250 mL) jus*

*Preparation time: 20 minutes*

*Cooking time: 2 1/2 hours*

1 large onion  
4.5 pounds (2 kg) chicken bones  
(neck, wings, and feet preferred)  
3 cloves garlic (unpeeled)  
1 stalk celery, smashed, cut into large pieces  
3 parsley stems  
1 sprig thyme  
1/4 sheet kombu (optional)  
16 cups (4 L) cold water

Peel the onion and cut it in half through the root end. Heat a large cast-iron pan on high heat, and char the onion halves, flat side down. (This step is optional but will give your stock a lot of depth of flavour.)

In a large stockpot, combine the chicken bones, onion, garlic, celery, parsley, thyme, and kombu. Cover with the cold water, bring to a simmer on low heat, and simmer gently for 2 1/2 hours, skimming off any impurities that rise to the surface.

Strain the stock carefully through a chinois or tamis; you should have around 8 cups (2 L).

To make jus, return the stock to the pot and cook on medium heat until reduced to 1 cup (250 mL). ➤



“Last fall, dining authority Michelin bestowed one of its coveted stars upon St. Lawrence.”

### COOKING FOR THE HEALTH OF IT

French food doesn't always conjure healthy eating. After all, the French eat four times as much butter and 60 percent more cheese than the average American. There are health-conscious ways to stay true to both your inner gastronome and the cuisine, however. For J-C Poirier, it's cooking with emotion, logic, and love, and remembering the following.

#### Less is more

“I don't need a 10 ounce piece of beef. I need maybe four or five, and a really high quality,” Poirier says. “I pay the price for it, but I just eat less.”

#### Eat the seasons

“In the summer, I will buy all the vegetables from the farm,” he explains. “When it's asparagus season, we eat asparagus. In the winter, we eat potatoes and parsnips and sunchoke.”

#### Cook for yourself—and from scratch

“A lot of people buy processed food, and that has a higher amount of salt or sugar than if I start from scratch and control what I put in there.”

#### Watch your fat

Use high-end, pure versions of butter and cooking oils rather than refined options or those cut with other ingredients that could negatively impact health. “It's being a little more aware, I think, of what people are buying,” Poirier says.

YIELD: 4 PORTIONS | PREPARATION TIME: 40 MINUTES | COOKING TIME: 15 TO 20 MINUTES



## CERVELLE DE CANUT *FRESH CHEESE with HERBS*

*Cervelle de canut* is basically the Boursin of France, an herbed fresh farmer's cheese spread that's a speciality of Lyon. The name is kind of weird, as it literally means "silk worker's brain," named after nineteenth-century Lyonnaise silk workers, who were called canuts. Sadly, the name reflects the low opinion of the people towards these workers. Happily for us, though, it's delicious—creamy, fragrant, and fresh at the same time. *Cervelle de canut* is one of my family's favourite dishes. It's a great make-ahead appetizer that you can pop out of the fridge once your guests arrive. Use a full-fat cream cheese for the dish, or it will be too runny and less delicious.

### CHEESE

1 large shallot, finely chopped  
1 clove garlic, grated  
2 tablespoons (10 g) chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley  
2 tablespoons (10 g) chopped fresh chives  
1 tablespoon (5 g) chopped fresh tarragon  
1 teaspoon (3 g) chopped fresh dill  
1 teaspoon (3 g) kosher salt  
1/4 teaspoon (1 g) freshly cracked black pepper  
1/3 cup (75 mL) Crème Fraîche (or store-bought)  
or high-fat sour cream  
1.1 pounds (500 g) full-fat cream cheese

### CROSTINI

2 tablespoons (30 g) unsalted butter, melted  
2 tablespoons (30 mL) extra-virgin olive oil  
1 teaspoon (5 mL) chopped garlic  
1 teaspoon (3 g) kosher salt  
1 teaspoon (5 mL) fresh thyme leaves  
1 French baguette, cut into 1/4-inch (5 mm) slices

**For the cheese:** Rinse the shallot under cold water to remove the raw onion taste. In a medium mixing bowl, stir together the shallot, garlic, parsley, chives, tarragon, dill, salt, and pepper. Add the crème fraîche and mix until fully incorporated. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold in the cream cheese until the herbs and aromatics are evenly distributed. Don't overmix. Spoon the mixture into a small airtight container, cover, and store in the fridge for up to 1 week.

**For the crostini:** Preheat your oven to 350°F (180°C), with the rack in the centre position. Line a baking sheet with a silicone mat or parchment paper.

In a small bowl, mix together the butter, oil, garlic, salt, and thyme. Lay out the bread slices on the lined baking sheet and brush each slice on both sides with the butter mixture.

Bake for 10 minutes, then flip the slices over and bake for another 10 minutes. The crostini should be golden brown and crispy, but not dried out and rock hard.

Transfer the crostini to a serving plate and serve with the cheese to spread on top.



### CRÈME FRAÎCHE

*Yield: 1 3/4 cups (425 mL)*

*Preparation time: 2 minutes + 1 to 3 days resting*

2 cups (500 mL) heavy or whipping cream (35% milk fat)  
3 tablespoons (45 mL) buttermilk

In a small bowl, combine the cream and buttermilk. Partially cover with a towel and let stand in a warmer spot of your kitchen until the cream tastes slightly sour and has thickened to a pudding-like consistency, anywhere from 1 to 3 days depending on the temperature of your kitchen.

Line a tamis with cheesecloth and rest it over a mixing bowl. Place the cream in the tamis to drain. The whey will drip into the bowl (you can reserve it for other uses, such as marinade), and the crème fraîche will remain in the tamis.

Store the crème fraîche in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 2 weeks. ➤



YIELD: 6 TO 8 PORTIONS | PREPARATION TIME: 15 MINUTES | COOKING TIME: 20 MINUTES





## MOUSSE AU CHOCOLAT

### CHOCOLATE MOUSSE

This chocolate mousse recipe is so simple and so delicious that I can almost guarantee it will become your go-to. The chocolate mousse tastes best if you eat it when it's been refrigerated between 6 and 12 hours. After the 12-hour mark, the mousse becomes heavier and more dense.



#### **What you'll need:**

**Stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment**

1 cup (165 g) roughly chopped 65% chocolate

8 egg whites, at room temperature

1/4 teaspoon (1 mL) fresh lemon juice

2 tablespoons (30 g) granulated sugar

In a large heat-resistant bowl set over a pan of simmering water, melt the chopped chocolate, stirring occasionally with a silicone spatula.

Meanwhile, wash and dry the bowl of your stand mixer so that it's spotlessly clean. Using the whisk attachment, whisk the egg whites and lemon juice on medium speed until they form soft peaks. Increase to high speed and gradually add the sugar, whisking until the egg whites form soft peaks.

Whisk one-third of the egg whites into the warm chocolate, then immediately use a silicone spatula to fold in the remaining egg whites. This step must be done quickly, since you're adding a cold mass to a hot mass and you don't want the chocolate to solidify, which would result in grainy mousse. That's why it's important that the egg whites are at room temperature. Be careful not to overmix, or the mousse will lose its lightness.

Spoon into six glasses or ramekins, or into one big bowl, and let set in the fridge for 3 to 12 hours before serving. ➤



**YIELD:** 6 PORTIONS | **PREPARATION TIME:** 25 MINUTES | **COOKING TIME:** 25 MINUTES + 3 TO 12 HOURS CHILLING



## TOURTIÈRE AU CERF *VENISON MEAT PIE*

Tourtière is, for me, the dish that best represents Québec. It can be traced back to the 1600s, and there's no master recipe; every family has their own twist. Originally, it was made with game birds or game meat, like rabbit, pheasant, or moose; that's one of the reasons why I prefer it with venison instead of beef or pork.

### What you'll need:

#### 9-inch (23 cm) pie plate

2 tablespoons (30 g) unsalted butter  
1 small yellow onion, finely minced  
1 1/2 tablespoons (15 g) chopped garlic  
1/2 cup (125 g) finely chopped button mushrooms  
1/2 cup (125 mL) red wine (plus a glass for yourself)  
1.3 pounds (600 g) ground venison  
2 1/2 teaspoons (8 g) kosher salt  
1 teaspoon (3 g) Épices à Tourtière (recipe follows)  
1 cup (225 g) grated potato (about 1 large)  
5 ounces (150 g) back fat or pork belly, ground  
1 batch Pâte Brisée (recipe follows)  
1 egg yolk + 1 tablespoon (15 mL) homogenized milk (3.25% milk fat), lightly beaten for egg wash

Preheat your oven to 425°F (220°C), with the rack in the centre position.

In a large pot on medium heat, melt the butter. Sauté the onion and garlic, stirring often, for 4 minutes. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring often, until all of the liquid has evaporated, about 5 minutes. Stir in the red wine and drink your glass while letting it cook off completely, about 10 minutes. Add the venison, salt, and épices à tourtière, and cook for 5 minutes, stirring to break up the chunks of meat.

Using your hands, squeeze all the water out of the grated potato. Stir it into the pot, along with the back fat, and cook for 20 minutes. Taste for seasoning. Remove from the heat and let cool at room temperature.

Divide the pâte brisée in half. On a lightly floured work surface, roll out each half into a 1/16-inch thick (2 mm) circle that fits into the pie plate. Lay one circle in the bottom and up the sides of the pie plate. Fill it with the venison mixture. Cover with the other dough circle. Trim off the excess dough and pinch or decoratively flute the edges with your fingers to seal. Brush the top with the egg wash. Using a paring knife, poke a few holes in the top crust in a design that pleases you—you're the artist.

Bake the tourtière for 15 minutes. Lower the temperature to 375°F (190°C) and bake for 45 to 55 minutes, until the pastry is a nice golden brown. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool for 30 minutes at room temperature before serving.

**Variation:** If you prefer to make single servings, follow our lead at the restaurant, where we make individual tourtières in the form of a dome (pithivier) and fill them with 5 ounces (160 g) of the ground venison mixture.



## ÉPICES À TOURTIÈRE

### *TOURTIÈRE SPICE MIX*

**Yield:** About 1/3 Cup (75 mL)

**Preparation time:** 2 minutes

5 teaspoons (10 g) freshly grated nutmeg  
4 1/2 teaspoons (10 g) ground cloves  
4 teaspoons (30 g) freshly cracked black pepper  
3 1/2 teaspoons (10 g) ground cinnamon  
1 1/2 teaspoons (7 g) ground ginger

In a small bowl, combine all the ingredients. Transfer to an airtight container and store in a cool, dark place for up to 6 months; after that, the spices will start to lose their potency.



## PÂTE BRISÉE *PIE DOUGH*

**Yield:** 2 pounds (900 G), enough for two 9-inch (23 cm) single-crust pies

or one 9-inch (23 cm) double-crust pie

**Preparation time:** 15 minutes + 30 minutes chilling

3 cups (450 g) all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon (3 g) kosher salt  
1 1/3 cups (300 g) cold butter, diced  
1/4 to 1/2 cup (75 to 125 mL) ice water

In a large mixing bowl, combine the flour and salt. Using a pastry cutter, cut in half the butter until the mixture resembles coarse cornmeal. Cut in the remaining butter just until the biggest pieces are the size of green peas. Gradually drizzle in ice water, tossing and mixing until the dough just holds together. Don't overwork it, as this will make it tough. If it looks like there are dry patches, add another 1 tablespoon (15 mL) water and mix until the dough comes together.

Divide the dough in half. Firmly press each half into a 4-inch (10 cm) disc and wrap tightly in plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes before rolling out.

When you're ready to roll out the dough, remove one disc from the fridge at a time. Let it soften slightly so that it's malleable but still cold. Unwrap the dough and press the edges of the disc so that there are no cracks. On a lightly floured work surface, roll out the dough as directed in your recipe. Brush off any excess flour from both sides with a dry pastry brush. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, transfer the dough to the pan, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour before use.

**Variation:** You can also use a food processor to make the dough. Place the flour, salt, and butter in the food processor and pulse about ten times, until the butter is incorporated—don't overmix. It should look like wet sand, and a few little pieces of butter here and there is okay. With the motor running, through the feed tube, slowly add ice water until the dough forms a ball—again don't overmix. Wrap, chill, and roll out as directed above. ▲



**YIELD:** ONE 9-INCH (23 CM) PIE | **PREPARATION TIME:** 30 MINUTES | **COOKING TIME:** 1 1/4 HOURS