

# A Taste of Muskoka

By Dawn Huddleston / Photos by Jan Pitman

## Medora is creating new cottage memories

Sometimes, when you say goodbye to an old favourite, what comes after is a delightful surprise. Medora, the new Port Carling restaurant in the location where Rebecca's Casual Fine Dining used to be, is one such surprise.

Under the direction of new owners Craig and Eiki Alvaro and executive chef Melanie Carter, the restaurant has been transformed into upscale cottage comfort cuisine. It's a blend that sounds contradictory but, like chef Carter's perfectly balanced flavours, it's a pleasing blend that contains just the right amount of indulgence.

Craig and Eiki met in Seoul, South Korea, where both were foreign workers, she from her native Japan and Craig from Canada. They married and, after deciding to settle in Canada, set their minds to making jobs for themselves. Craig had spent summers cottaging, boating and vacationing in Muskoka. Eiki ran a bar in Seoul and comes from a family of restaurant operators. A restaurant in Muskoka seemed like a natural fit. When they stumbled upon the real estate listing for Rebecca's, the timing was perfect and suddenly they were restaurant owners.

The Alvaros set to work revamping the 100-plus-year-old building, giving it an elegant black and white treatment, and the menu, keeping in mind what elements they felt would add to the Muskoka cottage experience.

"Muskoka has this magical mystique and we wanted to recreate that with food," says Craig. "Food plays such a big role in our memories of the cottage. We'd be honoured if we could be part of our guests' memories in that way."

The restaurant's name is also a nod to local memories. "We wanted to tie into Port Carling's history and everywhere I looked I saw the name Medora," says Craig. The name comes from Mrs. Medora Cameron, niece of the then Com-



Craig Alvaro welcomes cottagers to create new memories at Medora in Port Carling.

missioner of Lands, gracing both one of Muskoka Lakes' original townships and one of Port Carling's main streets. "It kind of rolls off the tongue and lends itself to fine dining."

To create a memorable menu, they needed the right chef. The Alvaros found a kindred spirit in Melanie Carter, a former chef at Rebecca's who had since moved on to manage a corporate kitchen in Burlington. The Alvaros recruited her back to Muskoka, but it wasn't a difficult decision for Carter to make.

"I was ready to bring my creativity to a new restaurant and Craig and Eiki shared my values," she says. "We started by brainstorming all of the things that local cottagers might like, what their needs and wants might be. We wanted to create items with interesting flavour profiles that people would

*"Food plays such a big role in our memories of the cottage"*



Chef Melanie Carter returned to Muskoka to work at Medora.

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Medora's fondue is prepared with white wine and Gruyere and Emmental cheese, but chef Melanie Carter suggests using a dark ale and cheddar cheese for a different flavour. Serve the fondue with cubed apples and chunks of hearty bread.



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**Medora restaurant in Port Carling is located in a 100-year-old building decorated with an elegant black and white décor.**

activities and vegetarian options because all of these are a way of life for some people and I take that seriously."

That attention to small details shows throughout the menu. There are no croutons in the Caesar salad and its dressing is a vinaigrette. To help satisfy dietary restrictions, each main dish comes with a choice of sides, among them a kale and fennel

slaw or a house rice blend. The Papardelle pasta is 100 per cent spelt and comes in two varieties: a mushroom and kale vegetarian option or a rich shrimp and lobster variety.

New takes on old favourites are also peppered throughout the menu. Log cabin chick pea fries and corn fritters replace the ubiquitous sweet potato

fries. Chocolate or salted caramel pot de crème served in mason jars are a fresh alternative to crème brûlée. And the cheese fondue with apples and bread, the recipe included here, is a throwback to a time of connectedness.

"I wanted to share something to replace the usual party dips that people have," says Carter. "Fondue is social and brings people together." While wine, Emmental and Gruyere are the standard fondue on the menu, daily features may deviate from that.

"For all of our features, we'll use local farmers as much as possible. There are good local sources of humanely processed meat and well-grown foods," she says. All of the ingredients on the menu are chosen with equal care for quality and freshness.

Medora will be open seasonally with year-round operation possible if there's enough demand. Catering, special events and holiday celebrations are all future plans. "We'd like to spread our wings a bit," says Craig. "But we'll do it without sacrificing the allure of the restaurant."

So, for now, the Medora team will focus on delighting their guests – both new and old – and inspiring them with cottage fare done differently.

**Cheese Fondue to Share**

- Ingredients:**  
 2 tbsp cornstarch  
 1 cup wine (or try a dark ale with cheddar cheese)  
 8 ounces Gruyere cheese  
 8 ounces Emmental cheese  
 1 garlic clove  
 1 tbsp lemon juice  
 pinch nutmeg  
 1 tbsp Kirsch (cherry brandy) – optional  
 Granny Smith apples, cubed  
 hearty bread

**Instructions:**  
 Coat cheeses in cornstarch. Rub inside of fondue pot with garlic clove. Discard clove or keep in with the cheese if you'd like.

Over medium heat, bring wine and lemon to a simmer. Gradually stir in cheeses – melting gradually on low heat helps produce a smooth fondue. Once smooth, stir in nutmeg. Traditionally, a tablespoon of Kirsch is also stirred in at the end.

Serve with cubed apples – Granny Smith are best for flavour – and chunks of your favourite, hearty bread.

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