

International Jeunes Commis Rôtisseurs Canadian Gold – 1986, 2006, 2015 and 2018!

As Canada prepares to host the International Jeunes Commis Rôtisseurs competition for the second time, we are pleased to update an article originally run in 2006 which explored the lives of Canada's two past Gold medal winners as of 2006. We update that article today with the background pieces done on our two subsequent winners since then: Michael Christiansen who won in 2015 in Budapest, Hungary and Joseph Tran who took the Gold Medal just last year in Keelung, Taiwan.

We were fortunate to have been able to speak in 2006 with Canada's first gold medallist, Geoffrey Couper, who won the 1986 competition held in Koblenz, Germany. A retrospective on his win and career to that point follows below along with a discussion with Canada's Daniel Craig who won the gold medal at the 30th International Jeunes Commis Rôtisseurs competition held in Adelaide, Australia in 2006. We conclude with a full chart of all the Gold Medal winners since the competition started in 1977.

We would be remiss in not also mentioning those who won silver and bronze since 2006 at this competition (Note: the International website only publishes Gold Medalist names prior to that date). Our past Silver and Bronze medal winners over that time period include Third place 2016 Mackenzie Ferguson; Second place 2014 Rupert Garcia; Third place 2010 Stephanie Schnepf; Second place 2008 Michael Dekker; and Third place 2007 Tobias Grignon.

They all contribute to Canada's rich tradition of success as does all of the many chefs and culinarians that have donated so much of their time and expertise in mentoring all of our fine young chefs.

Geoffrey Couper – 1986 Gold: A retrospective

Geoffrey Couper, a young, talented and energetic Canadian chef, took the European culinary community by surprise in 1986, winning Canada's first gold medal over national champions from such bastions of gastronomy as France, Austria, Switzerland and Germany at the International Jeunes Commis Rôtisseurs competition in Koblenz, Germany.



Geoffrey receiving his trophy in 1986.

There are some differences between the competition then and the one held today. In 1986, while each chef was still given an identical black box of food products, they were required to design and prepare a four-course menu for six people in under six hours. The competing Jeunes Commis were also assigned two assistants each. Geoffrey's assistants spoke a smattering of English but, along with his broken German, they managed to communicate fairly well. As you can imagine, the kitchen that day was a hectic whirlwind of eleven competing chefs, twenty-two assistants, one supervising chef, numerous TV cameramen and several reporters.

"You are under a lot of pressure," Geoffrey said in an interview with the Vancouver Sun at the time.

"You have no idea what you will be given, so you can't prepare for the competition. And all the time you are preparing the food, you are getting used to the kitchen and the stove."

Geoffrey had compiled an impressive record prior to being chosen as Canada's representative, having been chosen top apprentice in both BC and Canada in 1984, and winning the BC and Canadian Jeunes Commis Rôtisseurs competitions, qualifying him for the international competition. He took his initial cook's training at the BC Institute of Technology and apprenticed under Executive Chef Gerhardt Pichler at the Hotel Vancouver. Following the competition, he took time to travel and experience as much of the European food scene as possible, returning to Vancouver to resume his career at the William Tell restaurant.



Geoffrey at Cedar Creek Estate Winery in Kelowna.

What he loves best is the presentation of food, Geoffrey said upon his return. *"When you have a sound knowledge of the basics, then you can experiment."* He admired the simplicity, imagination and beauty in many Japanese food presentations and learned a great deal working with a Japanese-trained chef, just as he has from chefs trained in other parts of the world. *"That's the stimulating thing—chefs travel around a lot,"* he said.

Winning Menu - 1986

Cold Terrine of Guinea Fowl
Served with Marinated Vegetables

Paupiettes of Salmon
Stuffed with Braised Celery in a Chive Butter Sauce

Lamb Loin
with a Ragout of Wild Mushrooms and Leeks

Poached Figs in Vanilla Syrup
Served Warm with a Port Wine Sabayon

Over the past 30 years, Geoffrey has continued his love of travel and cooking by taking advantage of everything this highly mobile trade has to offer. His career is a postcard gallery of postings throughout some of the most beautiful places in British Columbia including the Gulf Islands, Whistler resort and the Rocky Mountains. He is presently in the wine country of the Okanagan Valley serving as Culinary Arts Chair & Instructor at Okanagan College, Kelowna, British Columbia.

Daniel Craig – 2006 Gold Medallist

On September 14, 2006, life changed a bit for Daniel Craig. An apprentice chef under Chef Craig Stoneman, Delta Ocean Pointe Resort and Spa, Daniel outdistanced twenty-two other superb Jeunes Commis from around the globe to win the International Jeunes Commis Rôtisseurs gold medal for Canada. Along with his medal, Daniel received the Arthur Bolli Memorial trophy, a scholarship from le Cordon Bleu International to attend a five-week cuisine programme at its Académie in Paris and an attaché case of eight Wüsthof chefs' knives.



A few days after the competition, Daniel was able to reflect on his experiences. Mandatory ingredients in the black box were marrons, whiting fish, lamb saddle, mangoes, enoki mushrooms, leeks, almonds and Kipfler potatoes. Other ingredients included shallots, veal sweetbreads, coconut, bush tomatoes, various wines and spirits, and the staple ingredients salt, pepper, sugar, flour, etc.



David Tetrault, President of the Competition and Membre du Conseil d'Administration, presents the Arthur Bolli trophy to Daniel.

Daniel found the marrons, which are fresh water crayfish, the most challenging ingredient. He treated them as if they were live lobster. The other challenging ingredient was a fish called "whiting." To him, it had a mild flavour like our trout, so that is how he treated it!

Daniel found the most difficult part of his experience was coming down with the flu—which was the worst on the actual day of the competition. The hospital told him it was a serious virus and gave him some antibiotics. Then he crashed for two or three days after the competition. He was sorry to miss out on some of the fabulous eight-course dinners, but he soon felt well enough to celebrate with other competitors.

Daniel did not find any major differences between Australia and Canada in the format of the competition; in fact, the national and international competitions are run by the same rules so that competitors are fully prepared. The most tense part of the experience was when he heard them call the second and third place competitors. He didn't really believe it when he heard them call his name for first!

Winning Menu - 2006

Appetizer

Citrus Baked Paupiette of Whiting
with Butter Poached Medallion of Marron,
Braised Leek and Enoki Mushroom Ragout,
Marron Essence, with Sherry Wine Gastrique

Main course

Juniper-Roasted Saddle of Lamb
with Basil and Mint
Kipfler Potato and Carrot Terrine
Lemon-Scented Broccolini, Roast Shallot Reduction

Dessert

Mango and Lime Bavarian "Bombe"
Minted Mango Salad, Blueberry Balsamic Syrup
with Crisp Almond Cookie



Winning appetizer; main course, and dessert.

Chef Daniel's passion for cooking began early. At the ripe age of 12, Chef Craig had his first restaurant gig at a friend's parent's cafe. From there, his passion took him to Victoria, British Columbia, where he apprenticed at The Fairmont Empress and Delta Victoria Ocean Pointe Resort and Spa. Later, he graduated with honours and a Red Seal Certification from Camosun College. Bit by the travel bug, Chef Craig packed his bags once more, this time heading to Australia where he worked with two of the world's top 50 restaurants in Sydney before heading to Paris, France to study at Le Cordon Bleu School of Culinary Arts.

With an impressive resume, Chef Craig continued to work at a variety of notable restaurants in France and Canada, before landing the role of Executive Chef at The Ritz-Carlton, Toronto. Since that time, he has worked as Executive Chef at Delta Hotels by Marriott, Grand Okanagan Resort and as of February 2019 is Executive Chef with Westin Hotels & Resorts back in Toronto.

Michael Christiansen – 2015 Gold Medallist

Canada's own Michael Christiansen took first place and the gold medal as the Canadian national representative at the prestigious 39th 2015 Concours International des Jeunes Chefs Rôtisseurs Competition held in Budapest, Hungary on September 11, 2015.



Twenty-two of the world's finest young chefs were chosen for 2015 through selection competitions held in their respective countries. Competitors came from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Costa Rica, Finland, France, Guadeloupe, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, UAE, UK and USA. Compulsory ingredients in the 2015 "black box" included one whole sturgeon, a whole goose liver and venison along with butternut squash, caviar, king mushrooms, plums and Valrhona chocolate.

Winning Menu - 2015

Appetizer
Confit of Sturgeon
served with parsley emulsion, cured tomato, black caviar and crisp Arborio rice

Main course
Slow Roasted Saddle of Venison
served with pan-seared foie gras, pumpkin purée, and enoki mushroom

Dessert
Caramel and Valrhona White Chocolate Cremeux
served with marinated plums and white chocolate mousse



Appetizer.



Main Course.



Dessert.

A graduate of Kelvin High School in Winnipeg with a diploma in French Immersion, Michael attended the University of Winnipeg from 2009 to 2011. In 2011, he decided that a career in the culinary arts was for him, and he attended and graduated from the Red River College Professional Cooking Program in 2012. While at the college, Michael won the Co-op Program Award, the Leadership Award and the Queen’s Jubilee Award for Academic Standing.



(left to right) David Tetrault, Bailli Délégué of Canada; Gold Medalist Michael Christiansen, Canada; Klaus Tritschler, Bailli Délégué of Germany.

After the competition, Michael served as Commis at the Pear Tree Restaurant in Burnaby, BC working under the guidance of Executive Chef Scott Jaeger, Vice-Conseiller Culinaire. Michael previously held the position of Commis at the Bonfire Bistro in Winnipeg and worked under the guidance of Executive Chef Takashi Murakami, C.M., during a co-op placement at the St. Charles Country Club. Following the international competition, he was quick to attribute his success to this support: *“To prepare for this international competition, I relied heavily on the training and guidance I had received from my chef Scott Jaeger and other great Canadian Chaîne des Rôtisseurs member chefs who supported me through a tough year of training. Having this*

experience and support behind me made all the difference when I first saw the contents of the black box, as I had been exposed to many different options through dry runs or just in day-to-day restaurant cooking at the Pear Tree.” Michael also went on to comment on the international competition itself, “The international competition is an incredible experience, not only based on the competition itself, but also the week spent with my fellow competitors. We were treated to a unique view of Hungarian culture and gastronomy. We were able to visit Domonyvölgy where we competed in the “Puszta” Games and then saw a fantastic horse show.”

Michael was no stranger to competition, and success, in his young career. Since 2011, he competed at the CCF (Canadian Culinary Federation) Junior Chef Competition (2011); the Centrex Iron Chef (finalist 2011); the British Columbia Chaîne des Rôtisseurs regional competition (first place); and won the Hawkesworth Young Chef Scholarship.

Joseph Tran – 2018 Gold Medallist

Our most recent Gold Medalist Joseph Tran took first place at the 42nd Concours International des Jeunes Chefs Rôtisseurs Competition held in Keelung, Taiwan on September 7, 2018.



Lunch at Master Chef Chin Restaurant Link.

Joseph competed against twenty-two of the world's finest young chefs, coming from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Dubai, Finland, Germany, Hungary, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, UK and USA.



Joseph at the Competition.

The young chefs competed in the kitchens of the Department of Culinary Arts at the Ching Kuo Institute, whose motto is “cooking is a work of art, while dining is a matter of culture”. Designed by top chefs in Taiwan, its programmes prepare the students to not only become well-rounded culinary professionals who know more than just great technique, but through a multi-disciplinary approach to culinary education also to develop their scientific understanding and leadership skills.

As with Michael in 2015, Joseph received a first place prize of a 5 week advanced culinary course at le Cordon Bleu, Paris, sponsored by le Cordon Bleu and the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs; and an executive chef attaché case with a complete set of professional knives, sponsored by Wusthof. He also received a set of professional Wüsthof carving knives for his exceptional skills and organization in the kitchen during the competition. The 2018 black box compulsory ingredients included two blue crabs, two whole racks of lamb, porcini mushrooms, chia seeds, tofu, cream cheese and banana.

The program started with a press conference at CKU with both the Mayor of Keelung and the Assistant Deputy Minister from the Ministry of Education for the Republic of China expressing their enthusiasm for this competition. News programs on local and English-speaking TV as well as print articles showcased the competitors and the competition. The local government sponsored a night fishing trip for squid which yielded more than one hundred fish.

Competitors had the opportunity to take in the culture and history at the National Palace and the Chang Kai-Shek Memorial Plaza. Every day they had culinary adventures from a master class with Michelin 3-star Master Chef Chan, a tour of the local fish/fruit/vegetable market in the wee hours of the morning to dinner on the 86th floor of “101”, the tallest building in Taiwan. Some even squeezed in a visit to the famous Keelung Night Market.



Keelung Fish market.

As Tran put it, “*the International competition is jam-packed with programs and activities. You have a unique opportunity to experience the country’s culture and diversity. No place better personified that than our visit to the fishing market in Keelung. All the Competitors had to rise early at 3 so we could arrive at the market in time to see all the fresh catches (giant groupers, milk fish, sea squirts) auctioned off to restaurants and locals. You meet young competitors and chefs from all around the world. For myself, the most memorable experience was lunch at Master Chef Chin Restaurant Link, having the opportunity to taste modern Taiwanese cuisine in an authentic setting.*”

Winning Menu - 2018

Appetizer

Blue Crab and Shrimp Terrine

served with Tofu and chive puff, miso Aioli,
Scallon Beurre Blanc

Main course

Marbled Lamb Rack

served with Salt Baked Lamb Cap Stuffed Potato,
Braised Leeks and carrot, Soy and Porcini Jus

Dessert

Banana and cream cheese mousse

Citrus sable, white chocolate and
Passion fruit Macaroons



At 25 years of age, Joseph had already been cooking for a decade, starting in his father's restaurant in London, Ontario as a dishwasher. His favourite meals are home-made dishes, such as a vermicelli bowl with spring rolls and, originating from Vietnam, his background has influenced his style of cooking. Playing with flavour and texture profiles has his dishes dancing between sweet and sour, and crispy and chewy, each bite a surprise to the senses.

After realizing his passion for cooking, Tran took culinary skills and culinary management at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario in 2013. On graduating, Joseph began working in a local hotel restaurant. Tran's talent was quickly recognized by his Chef in London, who suggested that Tran be mentored by Chef Takashi Ito of Inn at Laurel Point in Victoria, B.C. Chef Ito travelled from Victoria to interview Tran and, recognizing the potential in this young cook, hired Joseph to work at AURA waterfront restaurant + patio, Inn at Laurel Point's acclaimed restaurant.

In his two years at AURA, Tran's dedication and zeal resulted in his rapid rise up the culinary ladder to first cook. He constantly experiments with new dishes and combinations. Always looking to improve, Tran leaves no stone unturned. He has even taken his work home with him, creating a professional kitchen of his own, complete with a deep fryer.

Practicing for the 2018 competition was a group effort, led by Executive Chef Takashi Ito. Tran stated at the time that *"if it wasn't for the chefs and mentors that took the time and resources to train me and insure I was able to compile extensive Black Box experience in preparation for the International competition over the past year, I wouldn't have been able to achieve what I have. Chef Takashi Ito and David Tetrault decided to allow me to participate in a number of Canadian Regional Chaîne competitions over the year, including Vancouver where I met Chef Hamid Salimian and Chef Scott Jaegar and Winnipeg where I met Chef Takashi Murakami and Chef Cameron Huley. I am also particularly grateful to Executive Chef Takashi Ito and Chef Manpreet*

(restaurant chef at Aura) for being my mentors. Their influence pushed me to do my best, yet to have fun and do what I love.” One ingredient, however, will always be a challenge for Tran, as he has a severe shellfish allergy. When using the ingredient, Tran

says he wears layers of gloves, and takes extra care. Joseph has become an expert at blind seasoning seafood, since he cannot actually taste a dish containing it.

International Gold Medal Winners (1977 – 2006)

Year	Country	City	Winner	Nationality
2018	Taiwan	Keelung	Joseph Tran	Canada
2017	Frankfurt	Germany	Amelia Mei Vern Nn	Malaysia
2016	UK	Manchester	Christoph Eckert	Germany
2015	Hungary	Budapest	Michael Christiansen	Canada
2014	South Africa	Durban	Peter Lex	Germany
2013	Turkey	Istanbul	Jan-Philipp Berner	Germany
2012	Germany	Berlin	Christina Merz	Germany
2011	Turkey	Istanbul	Reilly Meehan	USA
2010	Finland	Helsinki	Stacey Lee Chan	South Africa
2009	USA	New York	Lasse Koistinen	Finland
2008	Paris	France	Tobias Günther	Germany
2007	Frankfurt	Germany	Jesper Bogren	Sweden
2006	Australia	Adelaide	Daniel Craig	Canada
2005	Bermuda		Arto Rastas	Finland
2004	Canada	Calgary	Luke Turner	Australia
2003	South Africa	Cape Town	Carsten Neutmann	Germany
2002	Singapore	Singapore	Bin Kamarudin Norhilme	Malaysia
2001	Turkey	Istanbul	Viktor Angmo	Sweden
2000	Austria	Vienna	Markus Gradel	Germany
1999	France	Paris	Andrée Alaman	France
1998	Sweden	Stockholm	Ludovic Aubiat	France
1997	USA	Greystone	Tamara Baur	Germany
1996	Hungary	Budapest	Claus Weitbrecht	Germany
1995	Finland	Tampere	Tomas Palmqvist	Sweden
1994	Spain	Mallorca	Gabriel G. Ubina	Spain
1993	Australia	Brisbane	Bradley Jolly	Australia
1992	Germany	Frankfort	Ulrike Korte	Germany
1991	South Africa	Johannesburg	Wolfgang Rammer	Austria
1990	Switzerland	Lausanne	Bärbel Rimmel	Germany
1989	Norway	Stavanger	Johann Lugstein	Austria
1988	France	Nice	Wolfgang Quack	Germany
1987	Spain	San Sebastien	Petra Roth	Germany
1986	Germany	Koblenz	Geoffrey Couper	Canada
1985	Italy	Venice	Bruno Bertin	France
1984	Luxembourg	Luxemburg	Dominique Schmidt	Germany
1983	France	Nice	André Gindraux	Switzerland
1982	Ivory Coast	Abidjan	Matthias Schantin	Germany
1981	Egypt	Cairo	Eschusa Farin	Spain
1980	Tunisia	Tunisia	Michael Bonacini	UK
1979	Austria	Vienna	J.Marie Bonnefois	France
1978	Germany	Berlin	Clemens Baader	Germany
1977	Switzerland	Zurich	Alain Guillon	France