

HEMI CULTURE

FOOD, DRINK, HOTELS, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT



BON APPÉTIT
The spread at
NYC's King Bee

NEW YORK CITY

Northern Exposure

The underappreciated Canadian culinary bridge between French and Cajun cuisines

BY AMBER GIBSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAM POLCER

Beyond Tim Hortons' doughnuts and Quebecois poutine, few Americans know the first thing about Canadian cooking. But all that could change with the opening of New York City's King Bee. The rustic East Village restaurant is dedicated to the little-known food of Acadia, a 17th-century French colony in what is now the Maritime Provinces and Maine.

If some of the dishes on the menu look familiar, you may recognize the flavor profiles from their later iterations in the cuisine of Louisiana, where the Acadians emigrated after being expelled by the British in the 1750s—it was here that the Acadians became the Cajuns. (The spot takes its name from "I'm a King Bee," a 1957 swamp blues tune by Baton Rouge's Slim Harpo.)

"People have been really interested in tracing the origins of Cajun food from France to Newfoundland



A HIVE OF ACTIVITY
Diners at King Bee

"PEOPLE HAVE BEEN REALLY INTERESTED IN TRACING THE ORIGINS OF CAJUN FOOD."

to Louisiana," says King Bee chef Jeremie Tomczak. "I'd really never heard about the culture before. I didn't know the background of Cajun cuisine. That's what attracted me to it. I was fascinated by their journey."

Rural French farmers adapted to living in the harsh Canadian Maritimes by fishing, hunting, foraging and farming hardy root vegetables. As a result, Acadian food is uncomplicated, with minimal ingredients and straightforward preparation. Take, for example, the potato dumplings known as poutine *râpée*, stuffed here with lamb neck, instead of the traditional fatty salt pork, and served with partridgeberry preserves, or even cod tongue, the gelatinous bits of flesh around the fish's throat. "Fishermen used to cut out the jowls and make this stew on the boat," says Tomczak, who serves cod tongue in the approachable style of fish and chips. "It's a delicacy to them. It has so much more flavor than other cuts. It's more oceany."

Tomczak explains that a lot of Old World cuisine is about preservation, "whether it's pickling, preserving, smoking, salting or curing." Sailor-staple salt pork appears in dishes like confit lobster with grits and mustard greens, while other entrees incorporate pickled and preserved produce or smoked and salted fish and meat.

In the future, dishes may skew even more, well, wild. "In Acadian cuisine, there's beavertail, beaver fat, wild game, waterfowl—a little more adventurous for some people to swallow," Tomczak says. "We're taking baby steps with the restaurant right now, but we're going to start pushing the boundaries."



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