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BRET HART

THE FIGHT OF HIS LIFE

MERCATO

When Dominic Caracciolo moved his parents' Italian market from Bridgeland to


4th Street S.W. in 2005, it was still primarily a market with a restaurant counter wrapping around an open kitchen. Now, more than 10 years on, it is the restaurant that fills the room, wrapped by an ever-shrinking market. Executive chef Spencer Wheaton has anchored this success — known to patrons for his signature ear-to-ear grin. Mercato's grilled Bistecca alla Fiorentina topped with arugula and lemons is one of the tastiest steaks in town. The house-made pasta is second to none. The wine list pours forth with Italy's best. Mamma Cathy Caracciolo and friends still gather with Wheaton every three weeks on a Monday evening to roll — by hand — the gnocchi served here, often making as much as 500 pounds before all sitting to eat, family-style.

And that's how it feels, dining at Mercato. It's like you're part of one big, boisterous family that loves big, boisterous flavours and putting the least ingredients together for the most flavour. Simplicity can be so sublime. —K.A.

📍 2224 4 St. S.W., 403-263-5535,
mercato gourmet.com



Executive chef Spencer Wheaton grilling a double-cut Fiorentina-style rib steak.



“ONE THING I’VE LEARNED FROM IRONMAN IS THE CONCEPT OF ‘YOU GOT THIS.’ IF THIS IS WHAT YOU WANT TO DO, YOU GOT THIS. AND THERE’S NOTHING LIKE CROSSING A FINISH LINE.”

Thirteen hours and 10 minutes after she started last summer’s infamously cold Whistler Ironman, Coppens crossed the finish, smiling and high-fiving the crowd.

“It always seems impossible until it’s done,” she says.

Coppens, 31, was the 12th-ranked Ironman triathlete in Canada in 2015 for her age group — an impressive showing for a woman who had only completed her first triathlon three years earlier to keep a promise she’d made to honour her little brother.

Born and raised in Edmonton, Coppens and her three siblings grew up close. Her bond was thickest with Rhys, seven years her junior. “My sister used to call him my shadow,” she says. “We always had a special connection, especially when it came to sports.”

After high school, Coppens went to The King’s University in Edmonton to play soccer. After a knee injury kept her off the field, she moved on to the University of Victoria. Rhys stayed in Edmonton, becoming one of the stars of the University of Alberta Golden Bears football team.

In March 2010, Rhys died on a weekend ski trip, turning his sister’s world upside down. “I was so shocked and raw. I needed to come home,” Coppens says.

On the drive back to Alberta, she made a pact with a friend to remember her brother through what he loved best — sport. Coppens, who’d never

even ridden a road bike, decided to honour Rhys by completing an Ironman triathlon, considered one of the toughest challenges in athletics.

At her first attempt at a triathlon, a half-Ironman in 2012, Coppens walked away from the start. “I mentally broke down and panicked,” she says.

Two months later, she signed up for another triathlon. This time, she knew she’d at least finish when she received her race number, 25, the number both her brothers wore as high-school football players. Her kit also included the now-ubiquitous bracelet — a black band attached to a small picture of her brother — which she has worn over nine half-Ironmans and two full Ironmans, including one world championship.

This year, Coppens has set her sights on the long-course triathlon, the distance used in the Olympics. She’s reluctant to say it aloud, but Coppens admits her goal is to compete in the Olympics one day. “That’s my big, hairy, audacious goal,” she says.

To get there, Coppens has adopted a grueling schedule, training up to 15 hours a week, all while working as a key leader for Lululemon and a personal trainer at The Commune Training Co. in Calgary and taking part-time course work through Athabasca University to complete her after-degree in education. Most days, she does some combination of swimming, running and biking, with two days of strength work

a week. Her rest days are about “active rest,” with a short bike ride or a yoga class.

Coppens says her focus now is on building power and strength to improve her time. Under the guidance of her trainer, Sean Guevremont (owner of The Commune), she is targeting her muscles’ ability to “fire” — exhausting a large muscle group to force her body to rely on muscles she neglects. A typical workout might include six rounds of weighted front squats, followed by squat jumps. “My victory is when my legs don’t seize,” she says.

On the nutrition side, Coppens doesn’t count calories. Triathlon, she says, is about trying to consume enough food to fuel five-hour workouts. “There’s always a point in any race, or during long training rides, where all I can think about is what I’m going to eat after,” she says. (Her mom hands her a ginger ale and a bag of plain potato chips at the finish line of her races, which is usually followed by a burger and beer.)

Coppens has three big races planned this summer and hopes to qualify for the 2017 long-course world championships in Penticton. This fall, she’ll return to her studies full-time at the University of Calgary to finish her degree — undeniably ambitious, but certainly not impossible goals.

“One thing I’ve learned from Ironman is the concept of ‘You got this,’” Coppens says. “If this is what you want to do, you got this. And there’s nothing like crossing a finish line.” ☺

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Crazy for Noodles

BY Elizabeth Chorney-Booth,
Lynda Sea AND Vincci Tsui
PHOTOGRAPHY BY Jared Sych

What's that slurping noise? Why, it's the sound of Calgarians lapping up the latest Asian noodle craze. Last year's obsession was ramen. Before that it was pho. Even chow mein was the hot new thing in its day, while udon and soba have a quiet, but loyal following. What's great about noodlemania is that, unlike most food trends that come and go, these come and stay, giving us ever more options for fast, delicious and wallet-conscious meals in a bowl. So, with this in mind, we offer this Asian-noodle primer: a brief taxonomy of what, exactly, you're plunging your chopsticks into, along with our picks on where to find the best examples of different noodles.



Pho Dau Bo

This spot in Forest Lawn's Little Saigon Towne Square strip mall is famous for its spicy pho satay noodle soup. You can choose chicken or beef, but we recommend having the beef satay with its tender slices of meat in the fiery broth. You know it's hot when you're simultaneously slurping, sniffing and sweating.



Pho

There are few things that can compare to a hearty, steaming bowl of Vietnamese pho that warms you from the inside. Even though this dish — essentially rice noodles in a meat broth — is slightly different everywhere you go, it is always satisfying with its fragrant, rich, umami broth, slick rice noodles and tender slices of beefy goodness.

A good test of a top-notch pho (pronounced “*fu*h”) starts and ends with the broth. Typically, the savoury taste is a result of simmering yellow onions, ginger, marrow-rich beef bones, beef knuckle, chunks of beef, star anise, cloves, sugar, salt, cinnamon and fish sauce. When made well, the soup is clear and brown, not dark or cloudy. No one flavour should dominate, but they should instead combine in each mouthful.

In pho, the beef can be well done, barely cooked or uncooked, depending on how you order. Most house specials offer the whole shebang — beef balls, beef flank, brisket, tendon, tripe and slices of rare beef — a blend of chewy, fatty, moist and tender textures. The best pho joints give you just the right balance of rice noodles in a piping-hot broth, with the rare beef on top and slightly pink. This way, it remains rare and does not overcook as you stir and mix in garnishes at the table.

Pho is definitely not complete without its toppings. Every restaurant will bring you a plate of fresh bean sprouts, basil, mint, sliced onion, chili peppers and lime wedges to add to taste. These only serve to enhance the already flavour-packed noodle soup. And, while most of us tend to go for the bottles of sweet hoisin sauce and Sriracha hot sauce, make sure to slurp the soup without those punches of added flavour first to get the complexities and taste of the unsauced soup. A good pho will stand alone without all these added ingredients. —L.S.

OUR PICKS

Pho Binh Minh

This long-time Forest Lawn favourite gets a stamp of approval from pho-lovers of all ages (mothers and grandmothers alike swear by this place). The must-order is the Binh Minh special noodle soup, loaded with beef slices, brisket, flank, tendon, tripe and beef balls in an aromatic broth. Also, Pho Binh Minh doesn't skimp on your fresh herbs, lime wedges, bean sprouts and chili peppers.



Pho Kim

At this Vietnamese restaurant located right off Centre Street the service is very fast, so you're always guaranteed a table, making it a go-to spot despite the challenging street parking situation. Try the rare beef, flank and tripe (*pho tai nam sach*), a blend of tender beef and crunchy, chewy tripe in a tasty broth that's just the right temperature.



Pho Pasteur Saigon Vietnamese Restaurant

At this classic spot in Chinatown, the No. 1 *pho dac biet* is a perfectly balanced mix of steak, well-done beef, brisket, flank, tendon and tripe in a sweet and rich broth. Definitely a hole in the wall, but worth a visit.



Song Huong

This cash-only place off International Avenue down toward Elliston Park has the best *bun bo hue* in Calgary. Unlike traditional pho, *bun bo hue* has a slightly spicy, sour, sweet and salty lemongrass broth and is made with fermented shrimp paste and a thicker, round rice noodle. Song Huong's version is the real deal with its pork knuckle, beef slices, Vietnamese ham slices and cubed blood pudding.



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