

SPIRIT OF EXCELLENCE

Sunshine bouncing off the limo windows. Aqua ocean, warm beaches, breath-taking west coast views. Bliss. Laughter. Unforgettable cuisine. These are my memories of an extraordinary culinary adventure with Chef Shirley Lang. Her culinary tours are an extension of her rich and far reaching creative spirit and her artistic imagination as an accomplished chef. The engine behind her achievement is a commitment to excellence. From catering to touring, she gives everything she has and then some, every ounce of her positive energy fuelling the ultimate experience for her guests.

Founder of *Kitchens of Distinction Culinary Arts Ltd.*, Executive Chef Shirley Lang's goal is to "elevate the dining experience to the level of a culinary masterpiece." Her repertoire includes creating delicious works of art in her Chef's Table Dinner Series; Private Intimate Events; Caviar Experiences; Culinary Seminars; and her Culinary Tours. Every dish Shirley creates is designed to elicit a rapturous experience: "We aspire to bring the best ingredients, menus and flavor together in a way that will make your dining experience exquisite." An aboriginal Cree woman, Shirley's business ethics mirror her cultural beliefs. Within her personal and professional lives, there is a common thread of deep compassion and respect for all things. Caring deeply about the food she prepares, her passion translates into a world of extraordinary tastes. Shirley's emphasis on new tantalizing flavours, spices and aromas - in her own unique combinations - turns ordinary food into an exotic culinary *experience*.

Shirley's creative sense of adventure extends to a new enterprise, *Spirit Culinary Excursions*, where guests discover the rich culinary diversity of Vancouver Island while basking in the glory of world-renowned scenic panoramas. The Chef's "exclusive farm, wine and artisan tours" treat guests to a day of indulging the senses - travelling to picturesque places, meeting local artisans and sampling their libations and cuisine. Shirley believes that "The only way to be truly successful is to assist others to be as well." A major focus of her tours is spreading the word about "our local food artisans, bringing awareness to the world that they exist - and in such premier locations!"

On a sunny day in June, our tour of discovery started with a taste explosion – Shirley Lang's Cheese Raven Spirit Cree Bannock - a warm sweet ambrosial delight. True to form, the gifted chef pushed the envelope in every aspect of our bucolic excursion. The first venue was *SaltWest Naturals*, a sea salt harvestry at Otter Point, Sooke, where we enjoyed a fascinating tour of their facility and sampled their products. I still dream about their Salted Caramel Chocolate sea salt. According to the owners, sea salt contains copious amounts of essential minerals. Next stop, *Sheringham Distillery* in Shirley (the town), with an introduction to their operations and tastings of their premium quality homemade gin, vodka and whiskey made with BC ingredients. It was easy to taste their "steadfast craftsmanship" in the extraordinary elixirs. Sooke's *Tugwell Creek Honey Farm and Meadery* was set in a pastoral balmy expanse of lush greenness. Here, natural honey – crafted from local berries by wild bees - ferments into "the world's finest, hand-crafted mead." Proof in a bottle: the luscious *Harvest Melomel Honey Mead*. A vast panorama of sun-drenched grapevines greeted us at *Unsworth Vineyards* in Mill Bay, where staff are "committed to making wines that reflect the exceptional soil and growing conditions of the Cowichan Valley." 'Joy' defined: Sipping one exquisite wine after another while *Unsworth* staff treated us like royalty. Finally, the *O.U.R EcoVillage*

experience: visiting “a sustainable village community rooted in social, ecological, and economic well being.” Imagine: Sitting under a setting sun at the *EcoVillage* farm at Shawnigan Lake, relishing a feast of farm-raised succulent lamb and chicken, freshly picked salad greens and cold beer.

The personable chef believes that food reflects the spirit of the person cooking it: “I am giving them (guests) more than just sustenance. I want them to feel the love that went into it!” Biting into succulent jumbo prawns, dripping in spicy herb lemon dressing, and gazing over hills and an ocean vista at *Sheringham Distillery*, I knew that Shirley Lang had pushed the boundaries once again. Her lunch was another peak performance: spicy tuna cakes, smoked salmon in puff pastry, green salad with blueberries and pasta salad with tortellini, broccoli and fresh peas and radishes. Her 'stinging nettle cookies' with a lemon glaze were a glorious and edgy finale, complete with an ethnically diverse zing.

The feast-for-the-senses tour showcased Chef Shirley Lang's exceptional skills at organization, planning, and the culinary arts. “I want my guests to have the best time ever with incredibly delicious cuisine, that they will talk about forever, I want to create memories, I want people to feel like they were treated royally, and were given more than they ever imagined.” According to her guests, Ms. Lang succeeded beyond her wildest dreams.

Maureen Kelly-Matyczuk, Rooms Division & Revenue, Hotel Rialto: “Shirley took care of every detail from beginning to end. She is calm, cool and collected and a joy to spend the day with.” Deborah Sleno, Concierge, Fairmont Empress: “Shirley is a fantastic host, and a culinary professional with a passion for what Vancouver Island has to offer.” Steve Erickson, culinary adventurer: “Shirley's food is wonderful and makes the adventure of discovering Vancouver Island an experience you shouldn't miss.” Teresa Sutherland: “Shirley has a wonderful heart and soul with a passion for the complete culinary experience.” Tiffany Armstrong, Sales & Marketing Manager, The Union Club: “I enjoy Shirley's tours immensely as she is a warm and welcoming individual with a great knowledge of food.” Kyara Kahakauwila, VP/Operations, L.A. Limousines & Transportation Services: “It is wonderful working with someone who is aligned with our own value proposition and who is dedicated to the experience of her guests.” Ray MacDonald: “Her leadership, education, food preparation and service, along with the joy she exudes in making a great experience for others, will long remain with me.” And finally, Campbell Hunter: “Shirley Lang is authentic and genuine. You can see her caring and passionate personal philosophy in the experiences she is creating for her guests.”

During that exciting excursion in June, I saw excellence in action. Imagine a halcyon day, joy and fun, the sun's warmth, eating intoxicating food, surrounded by natural wonders. And think of the passionate spirit behind the adventure. Just imagine.