

Meet Your Iron Chefs: Krystian Catala of Gourmet Gringos



By Brock Weir

When Krystian Catala put his food to the test on Food Network's Dinner Party Wars, he learned a few things coming out of the competition.

The first was to keep the menus simple, fresh, and current. The second was to always focus on flavourful food. While the co-founder of Gourmet Gringos, the recently opened Mexican restaurant in Aurora, has no shortage of flavour on his menu, he is adhering to the simple, fresh, and current principle when he prepares to do battle in front of a hometown crowd next Thursday, May 29 at the Aurora Community Centre.

The arena will be transformed into Kitchen Stadium for the second annual Iron Chef Aurora, where five of Aurora's top chefs will do battle with two secret ingredients, all in the name of securing the Iron Chef title and raising money for the Aurora Food Pantry.

Although the two secret ingredients each chef has to work with cannot be divulged before the date itself, Catala is not shy to admit that they threw him for a bit of a loop.

"My first thought was, "What am I going to do with these ingredients?" he exclaims. "They are not common Mexican foods. It was definitely challenging to figure out what to do with them, but I was able to come up with some cool ideas for dishes. I'm improvising a play on some of our dishes, but it is still a toss-up right now."

He is currently weighing variations on their popular fish tacos, as well as a dish involving braised short ribs.

Mr. Catala opened up Gourmet Gringos on Bayview Avenue, just north of Wellington Street, earlier this year as a sit-down offshoot of his popular Toronto-based food truck.

Catala hails from Ecuador. Born to an Argentinian father and an Ecuadorian mother, he has used these influences, as well as those from his travels throughout South and Central America to inform his cooking.

As the popularity of their food truck grew, they were often encouraged to establish a standalone location, and they decided Aurora was the place to do it.

"Aurora has been fabulous and people have embraced us," he says. "Some people think we're a fast food burrito place, but I want people to [take away from Iron Chef Aurora] that we're actually a sit-down restaurant. We offer gourmet, authentic Mexican food.

"All of the people who work for us are chefs and culinary school graduates and we have high standards for casual dining. This is a

great way for people to get to know us!?