

Raymonds again

27 Apr 2012 by Erin Turk

Checking online to see whether this review had been published before, I came across a suggestion that the author actually worked at the restaurant reviewed and wrote to ask. Here is the reply:

'It's true. Bread baker and sommelier. I have published a book on bread (Sourdough A Recipe For Life). It was Jeremy Bonia who told me about your open call for restaurant reviews. He knows I have a bit of a penchant for writing and we decided I should submit an entry. I wondered if my being an employee would be along the lines of conflict of interest... I hope it doesn't disqualify me from participating.'

Since I had already mentioned that we had two reviews of this small Canadian restaurant (see the earlier one [here](#)), I have decided to publish it but must point out that Erin is certainly disqualified from winning the Mouton 1996, and has inspired me to add the criterion that restaurant reviewers should have no professional nor familial connection with the subject of their review.

See our [guide to all readers' restaurant reviews](#).

Raymonds. What's in a name anyway? Who's Raymond? And why is there no apostrophe? What's a Raymonds?

Raymonds is a restaurant in St John's, Newfoundland owned and operated by two Jeremys. Both Jeremys have wives names Sarah. So, if there are two Jeremys and two Sarahs, it likely means that indeed, there is more than one Raymond. Suppose someone was to dig deeper into the heritage of said Jeremys and find that one had a father named Raymond and the other had a grandfather named Raymond. Clearly there were two Raymonds, but today there is only one Raymonds.

In November of 2010 Raymonds officially opened its doors. A bona fide heritage site, the building is nearing its centennial and has been restored to award-winning perfection. Given Newfoundlanders and their predilection for hospitality, it goes without saying that Raymonds made an enormous splash in its opening weeks and it appears that the spray is getting higher as it rounds the corner into its second summer in operation.

Jeremy Charles is executive chef and Jeremy Bonia is operations manager and a certified sommelier. No strangers to the Newfoundland culinary scene or each other, the Jeremys spent a full year in the planning and construction of what would soon become a national landmark for fine dining in Canada.

Charles and Bonia were both born and raised in and around St John's. They met back in 2007 while working together at Atlantica, a restaurant just outside the city in Portugal Cove. It was in that same year, with Charles manning the kitchen and Bonia coordinating the front of house, that Atlantica was awarded Canada's best new restaurant by Air Canada's inflight magazine. The pair made history when they were awarded the same distinction in 2011, only this time the restaurant was their own, Raymonds.

As if being crowned Canada's best new restaurant *twice* wasn't enough, the two Jeremys also championed the Newfoundland sector for Canada's esteemed culinary competition, Gold Metal Plates, in 2010. Upon receiving the top prize for the event, head judge and renowned Toronto food and wine writer James Chatto announced that he was especially pleased with the excellent choice in wine pairing presented by Jeremy Bonia (Ravine Vineyard Reserve Merlot 2008, Niagara, Ontario). He then went on to describe how Jeremy Charles' dish (a composition of wild Newfoundland rabbit) had been awarded the highest marks for technical precision and presentation in any competition that he had ever judged.

So what is it that makes these gentlemen, this restaurant, and St John's, Canada's new culinary point of interest? Newfoundland is home to the boiled dinner, or 'salt junk' as it's called by those rooted in a seasoned out-port home. The name alone is a sin for the refined culinary palate. It's understandable how traditional fare settled on salted meat and salted fish in an attempt to keep food from spoiling over the winter season. Tie that in with some root vegetables (yes, some vegetables do grow here - the ones that grow underground do best), and then boil until tender. Dinner.

Sadly, 'salt junk' (Charles's refined version is pictured above) doesn't read well on a menu that's suited more towards fine dining, and 'boil until tender' isn't exactly a stretch for the culinary imagination, but there are ideas here that can work. Charles creates dishes with ingredients that are indigenous to the island, helped by the availability of wild game to put a contemporary spin on traditional Newfoundland fare.

His seamless efforts are celebrated further with Bonia's well-integrated wine pairings in a detailed and professional style of service that leaves guests with nothing more to be desired. With a wine cellar that boasts some 2,000 bottles and a wine list that represents Canadian winemaking headliners (Norman Hardie of Prince Edward County, Ontario) alongside Old World pillars (1982 Pétrus, for instance), it's no wonder Raymonds stands alone in St John's.

But salt junk and solidarity aren't the only things this duo has to offer. A few minutes chatting with these two and their true passions start to surface. In an incessant puddle of fog and drizzle, the Newfoundland seasons are not marked by the likes of spring, summer, fall, and winter, but rather by the acquisition of tags for salmon- and moose-hunting season. Be it hip deep in a river for an afternoon of fly fishing, or spending painstaking hours wandering around aimlessly in a bog trying to flush out a moose, there's certainly no questioning their inherent emotional ties to this land.

Naturally, the boys at Raymonds didn't hesitate to apply for the wild-game licence that would allow them to serve the likes of these national treasures in their restaurant. It's an experience, to say the least, to sit in the dining room at Raymonds and look out into the harbour, past the narrows, and watch another ocean barge sail on into the unforgiving Atlantic waters. Titanic went down just 200 miles off the shores of Newfoundland. This April marked the 100-year anniversary of its sinking. Together with a plate of Newfoundland's finest fare and a glass of wine, it's almost too much to digest.

Cast off the east coast of Canada's mainland, it sits in a quiet and unmistakable sovereignty over the rites of its own esoteric doctrines. Newfoundland. A giant rock bound by rugged coastlines and the occasional rogue wave. Cars and houses corroded with salt air and trees that only grow branches that point away from the direction of the relentless wind. What with the impossibly long winter season muddled into a freezing rain-riddled, non-existent spring, followed by a few short weeks of summer (sometime around the end of August). Sure, who wouldn't want to come for a stay? Planning on visiting? Pack rubber boots. And a parka.