

THE STORY OF TREE TO TABLE

Case Study

Dave Schonberger, Ottercreek Woodworks

November 2024





This case study is featured in the first part of the *Destination Dialogues 2024 Report: ReThinking and Crafting Experience Development in Canada's Destinations* by [Celes Davar](#). The report delves into the key concepts and learnings presented in [Destination Dialogues 2024](#), a virtual event organized by Destination Canada, to inspire, inform and empower rural destination development professionals. While Celes facilitated the virtual event, [Dave Schonberger](#) was featured as a speaker and Canadian experience host.

Dave Schonberger is founder of Ottercreek Woodworks in Tillsonburg, Ontario—and the architect and facilitator of [From Tree to Table: A Build-Your-Own Board Experience](#).

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Red Seal carpenter, storyteller and experience development mentor, Dave crafts custom furniture and woodwork from local hardwoods, including unique charcuterie boards, that are sold in shops across Canada. Since 2019, he has hosted the From Tree to Table Experience, inviting guests to join him at his woodshop to create their own charcuterie boards. as an in-market experience available year-round.



Dave describes his experience personally, as a story.

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It's a day of adventure and self-discovery! Guests arrive to a roaring fire. The fire is an opportunity to slow down, shed the stress of travel. It's a reset to clear the mind for a day of adventure and transformation.

We set the stage with some stories of the land. If we are going to be crafting with local wood, it's important to know where that wood comes from. I want to go into the forest with clear understanding of how special that wood is, not as lumber, but as trees that sustain us in so many ways.

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FIRE



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Then we embark on the trail into the forest to discover the trees. The Mother Tree greets us as we enter the forest. She is the oldest and grandest tree in the forest, whom I have grown a deep relationship with, a mighty white oak.

As my feet connect with forest floor, I embrace the Mother Tree and lean into her deep forest wisdom. I invite guests to do the same.

It is here where we tap into the Wood Wide Web and discover a world beneath our feet - mycelial fungi! Along the way we gather ingredients to make a freshly foraged tea.

The ingredients change based on what the land offers each season. The flavour of the tea is ever changing, from one experience to the next.

I invite guests to explore the forest with all of their senses. We're smelling the broken branch of a Sassafras tree, which smells like citrus, grasping the rich forest soil, full of mycelium, and standing in silence as we hear the forest move around us.

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FOREST, FORAGE, DISCOVERY

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Guests get an opportunity to choose a piece of wood and then design their own charcuterie board under my guidance. They choose a piece of wood that ‘speaks to them’. Trust me, wood does speak to you! You just have to listen.

They get to use a combination of hand tools and power tools. They even get an opportunity to use my grandfather’s drawknife, which is used to shape the live edge of the board. This is my most sacred tool; I let the guests use it.

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THE WORKSHOP



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At the end is the big reveal. The boards are oiled, revealing the true character of the wood, that was kept secret until just now. This is a special moment. All the hard work in crafting the board is rewarded in this moment. As the host, it's exciting to watch it all unfold.

Finally, we celebrate with food from the local community. All the best charcuterie presented in an artistic way, immersing the guests in what our local farmers, producers and makers have to offer.

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FOOD STORY



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In fact, we created a road map of where it all comes from, A Feasting Box. The following taste of place food guide helps our guests to know where all of the foods come from, within my region.

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Just like a forest, a charcuterie board is an ecosystem. A well-dressed board includes a diverse selection of foods and flavours that celebrate the local terroir and includes local farmers, producers and a bountiful harvest. Gathering around a board is meaningful, thoughtful and socially intentional. It tells a **FOOD STORY**.

At its core, a board is a canvas for the food that is presented on it. Consider adding a pop of colour and texture to your board and lay out flavours with intent, but keep it loose and creative. Organized chaos is OK! Glass and pottery dishes help compliment any board and can elevate the visual experience. When in season, source fresh produce from the local farmers market or your garden and for extra colour, don't be afraid to leave those greens right on the carrot!

TAKE YOUR GUESTS ON A FLAVOURFUL AND BOUNTIFUL JOURNEY THAT CELEBRATES YOUR OWN FOOD STORY!

Charcuterie board ROAD MAP



THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE FROM TREE TO TABLE EXPERIENCE. WE CAN'T WAIT TO SEE THE CREATIVE WAYS YOU USE YOUR BOARD!

Contact us

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Here are a few of our favourite ingredients to help you craft an elevated **TASTE OF PLACE** experience on your board:

GUNN'S HILL ARTISAN CHEESE

Nestled within the rolling hills of Oxford County, Gunn's Hill was founded by cheesemaker Shep Ysselstein who studied the art of making cheese in the Swiss Alps. The cheeses produced here are truly unique and you can taste the Swiss influence. The milk used to create the cheese comes from Shep's family dairy farm and all of his cheeses are handcrafted using traditional cheese-making methods.

- Darkside of the Moo
- 5 Brothers
- Topsy
- Handeck

KRIZAN MEAT & DELI

A family-owned and operated butcher shop, Zolt and Anita bring authentic Hungarian influence to their artisan smoked and cured meats. A most genuine butcher shop experience and a must visit for all of your charcuterie needs.

- Garlic Sausage
- Beef Salami/Sausage
- Smoked Capicola
- Hortobágyi Salami
- Smoked Beef Filet
- Landjäger

THAMES RIVER MELONS

Thames River Melons is a family-owned and operated fruit and vegetable farm located just outside of Innerville. In 1984, the family decided to grow 1 acre of cantaloupe and as the family grew, so did the farm! Today, they have expanded to over 500 acres growing a range of produce. They produce high quality artisan preserves including jams, jellies and pickles all made fresh from what they grow. They also craft a most inviting honey made from beehives located in their melon fields.

- Dill Pickles
- Red Pepper Jelly
- Pickled Garlic Scapes
- Blueberry Jam
- Pickled Beans
- Champagne Garlic Scape Mustard
- Pickled Asparagus
- Melon Blossom Honey
- Onion Scape Jelly

COURTLAND BAKERY

Open since 1939, Courtland Bakery is a bakery and European style deli that attracts visitors from near and far. As you walk in the door, fresh bread and authentic baked goods enchant your senses. They have a deli full of various charcuterie meats with many locally crafted selections. You'll be sure to find something for your board here!

- Double Dutch Stroopwafel
- Smoked Westphalian Ham
- Landjäger
- Smoked Pepperoni
- Schinkenspeck

GREENER PASTURES ECO-FARM

Located on a 75 acre family farm just outside of Woodstock, farmers Carl & Andrea VanRooyen's main focus is all about eating locally and sustainably. Through regenerative farming practice, dedicated land stewardship and pasturing of heritage breed pigs & cows, Greener Pastures is a great example of how farming can be done differently.

- All Beef Summer Sausage
- Pork/Beef Sausage Sticks

HABITUAL CHOCOLATE

Habitual Chocolate is home to Canada's largest selection of bean-to-bar chocolate. Located in Woodstock, owner and chocolatier Angela Neddo crafts all chocolate in-house straight from the cacao bean.

- Dominican 75%
- Sal Marina 75%

BRE'S FRESH MARKET

This family run market is your local fresh food connection! Community-minded owners Bre & Kyle and family not only supply fresh produce from their farm, but from neighbouring farms in the area. At a young age, Bre was inspired by the vast variety of locally grown produce available and started her market with a picnic table and a few heads of sweet corn. Since then, she and her family have continued to build and expand on this inspiration year after year having recently built an incredible market space and community just outside of town. Bre's Market is a must visit when it comes time to fill your board!

BERRYLICIOUS FRUIT FARM

Founded in 2002 by Wendy & Don Colcuc, Berrylicious is a small family farm that has flourished into a diverse planting of fruits and vegetables. Notable fruits include elderberry, blueberry, and raspberry which they use to craft a delightful selection of jams, jellies and syrups. You can also visit the farm for a unique pick-your-own experience!

- Elderberry Jelly
- Elderberry Apple Jam

COYLE'S COUNTRY STORE

Established in 1899, Coyle's has an interesting blend of their own fresh roasted nuts, fudge, dried fruits and baking ingredients. They roast over 50,000 pounds of nuts each year!

- Dried Apricots
- Double Dutch Stroopwafel
- Various nut varieties and blends

THRIVE NORFOLK

Six Courses from 1 Acre in rural Norfolk County. Thrive aims to celebrate the true meaning of "farm to table" by cultivating, preparing and cooking individual ingredients in their prime and showcasing them in their beautiful "dining room" which is located in the heart of the garden, where the walls are forever changing. Founded by Chef Matt Demarest, Thrive Norfolk gives guests a true Taste of Place and from time to time, Chef Matt offers us unique creations to put in our Feasting Box!

SIXTHIRTYNINE

Located in Woodstock, SixThirtyNine is a destination restaurant dedicated to fresh, local, terroir driven cuisine. Owner and Chef Eric Boyar and wife Jennifer have created a quaint and modern dining space with an ever changing menu of farm to table cuisine prepared articulately and artfully! The Chef's Table Experience is highly recommended!



The [From Tree to Table Experience](#) is designed for a maximum of six guests to ensure an optimal and safe experience in the workshop. Pricing is available on the website.

Dave attributes the success of this award-winning experience to early conversations with Meredith Maywood, Product Development and Marketing Tourism Specialist at Oxford County, contacts at his regional tourism organization, Ontario's Southwest, and his mentor, Celes Davar, president and owner of Earth Rhythms. This guidance, tools and coaching enabled him to evolve, test and refine the experience—then launch it.

In summary, Dave says



A great experience should have layers and substance, it should be more than just one thing. From Tree to Table is an opportunity to share a vision, an overall shift in thinking about our environment, each other and how these two elements mesh. It's about getting to the root of a greater concept: self-discovery, appreciation, regeneration and shared knowledge, making an impact in even the smallest of ways. It's not just about building a board.

The actual value of From Tree to Table for me, is that it transcends the physical wooden charcuterie board. My artistic intention is to create space for meaningful conversation and deepened relationships, while showcasing the wonder of trees in a way that contributes positively to the health of my community and planet — and having fun at the same time. It's so much more than a board.

- Dave Schonberger



CONTACT INFORMATION



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