

## Cookbook author Laura Calder coming to the Alton Mill

### By Constance Scrafield

Laura Calder is a fine, multi-faceted diamond in human form, with all the sparkle and depth of such a gem. To put yourself right in the mood to meet this lady, be sure to watch a couple of her videos (link at the end of this feature) about French cooking, which, did you know, can happen in any kitchen and very simply. It is a shock and a revelation.

Meeting her is relatively easy, too, this month, for she is appearing at the Alton Mill Arts Centre in Alton on Apr. 30 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. On that day, Ms. Calder will be in conversation with Dana McCauley to discuss her latest "cookbook," Kitchen Bliss.

"The book does have recipes, yes, but it's not really a cookbook," she said during an interview of herself and Martin Kouprie, general manager of the Alton Mill, bon vivant and Cheesemaker, with the Citizen about her upcoming visit to the Alton Mill.

Ms. Calder told us, "It's a read ? there are stories."

Her life in cooking is really about "L'art de vivre," the French idea of "focusing on the little things, which are actually huge opportunities hiding in plain sight."

Born in New Brunswick, she attended a French Immersion school. She went on to Concordia University in Montreal, York University in Toronto and the London School of Economics in the UK. Returning to Canada, she made a move to study at the Dubrulle Culinary Institute in Vancouver.

Her early association with French, however, was the basis for Ms. Calder's decision to go to France.

"I couldn't imagine France and Italy [before I went]," she confirmed. "Places that really care about food."

She lived and worked in Ecole de Cuisine La Varenne, owned by Anne Willan, who was also her mentor. Specifically, she learned about writing books about food, about cooking.

"I mostly worked on books," was her comment, adding, "Food is a lens on the world."

Mr. Kouprie remarked about Ms. Calder, "She's a writer, not a cook."

"My husband [Peter Scowen, well known Canadian journalist] is a great cook," she told us. "We were introduced by a mutual friend who told Peter about me and said, 'You should take her out to lunch.' We discovered we had everything in common."

Laura Calder began to explain her approach to not just the kitchen but life: "I'm coming at things with more depth. Take care of all the little things and putting care into the way you make a salad. Pay attention to the details.

"With this book, Kitchen Bliss, I have scratched the surface, so, I'll take whatever soap box I can."

She elaborated by telling us that, "funnily enough," she recently found a book on a 13th Century monk's idea on how to live your life. Every encounter is like your life.

The Zen of cooking was the consensus.

"The way we handle food, it changes," she remarked.

"When we teach somebody about the beginning of food," said Mr. Kouprie, "there was no waste."

Laura Calder has a long line of accolades from her considerable accomplishments. Her television show, "French Food at Home," which ran for three seasons, an impressive 78 episodes she wrote herself, was awarded the James Beard Foundation award for Best Television Series for Studio or Fixed Location. The "Fixed Location" was her own kitchen here in Canada.

Taste Canada made her a winner of a Gold Medal for her Cookbook: "French Taste, Everyday Elegant Eating."

Equivalent to a knighthood in France, Ms. Calder received the Order of Agricultural Merit from the French government (Chevalier du Mérit Agricole).

All this plus much more.

With six books to her credit, Kitchen Bliss may be the focus of her conversation with Dana McCauley, but Ms. Calder is bringing her latest book as well, Inviting Life, so she told us.

"I thought I was writing about hosting," she said. "then I was seeing the superficial things. I had older people for dinner every week because they were so isolated. The table is a place in the centre, a place to reconnect. You have to come and sit around it so that your focus goes in, facing each other.

"When you walk away, you're better than when you arrived."

Ms. Calder emphasized the importance of families eating together, noting that this "raises good emotions, better moods. Young people learn to think from this space of social interaction.

"It is more important than the food."

Having lived in France for 10 years, Ms. Calder and Mr. Scowen are off to France for a while this year, staying some of the time in Paris "to eat, see life there as a different life. When I'm there, I walk differently," she remarked. "lighter and slowly to soak it up."

Back here, when she brings her groceries home, she soaks the produce in a sink with vinegar water and treats them carefully.

Reflectively, she offered, "Not to treat food well [how it is grown, harvested and prepared] is to show a lack of respect of what sustains you."

When you come to listen to her talking on Apr. 30, Laura Calder hopes you will take away a warm and intimate conversation [with Ms. McCauley] about something real, about food, dining and making a place for food in our lives, "how to live better."

Here is the link to watch one of her delightful videos from her French Food at Home Series.

For more information and tickets, go to [www.altonmill.ca/visit/events/Cookbook\\_Club\\_A\\_Culinary\\_Conversation\\_event](http://www.altonmill.ca/visit/events/Cookbook_Club_A_Culinary_Conversation_event)