

magic mushrooms

STORY: JACKI NELSON

Jacki Nelson (pictured with us at right in the Easter Parade) suggested this story about her friend for our food issue. Local Wanda Srdoc has become the Truffle Queen of Toronto and lives right here in our midst. From Croatia with love she brings her truffles to Toronto.



A TASTE FOR TRUFFLES

Seeing Wanda Srdoc dash out the door of her Beach area home

— carefully protecting a small cooler under her arm — is a common sight for friends who know where she's headed...and it's not a picnic! Wanda is an importer of delicate white truffles and she regularly meets with some of the most prominent culinary icons of Toronto — top chefs who are eager to add her highly-prized food ingredient to their specialty menus.

Srdoc's business, appropriately called White Truffles, is a supplier of the Tuber Magnatum truffle, also known as the "King of the Fungus". The walnut to golf ball-sized fungus is an expensive delicacy given that it is imported from Istria, Croatia where the rich soil and climate conditions it needs to grow, are favoured. Adding to the cachet of white truffles is that they begin to lose their coveted aroma and freshness within hours of harvest.

How this young mother of two children became the "White Truffle Queen of Toronto" is directly linked to a timely desire to reignite her passion for product marketing, following a less than satisfying business partnership that left her looking for a new focus.

"In early 2005, I was super stressed and busy preparing for my honeymoon through Italy and Croatia with my new husband John," says Srdoc. "It was about that time that I realized my next business venture was literally right under my nose - the luxurious scent of truffles found on my grandparents' land and surrounding forests." In fact, the Srdoc family has been working with truffles, - hunting or selling them, since the 1900's!

Since 2005, Wanda's White Truffles have been featured on the tables of restaurants and prominent homes around the Greater Toronto Area. A-List restaurants like Auberge du Pommier, Marben, Enoteca Sociale and Aria are just a few of her clients where savvy chefs have a lot of love for white truffles. They trust the Croatian origin and quality of Wanda's White Truffles, and eagerly use them to help transform dishes with the truffle's fragrant mushroom aroma and a woody depth of flavour. Some of the most common uses for truffles include shaving paper-thin wisps over pasta and meat dishes, or drizzled as oil on simple dishes like macaroni and cheese or scrambled eggs that with the truffles addition, become fit for royalty.

While on her honeymoon Wanda visited relatives who own and operate Natura Tartufi in Istria, Croatia, and learned they were eager to expand their business to Canada. Not long after her return, she decided to test out the market interest in Toronto for Croatian truffles and began to figure out the complex arrangements to import a trial shipment. There was indeed interest, and Wanda's White Truffles is now one of the most sought after suppliers in Toronto, known for consistently high quality and reliable source of origin. Over the years, White Truffles has serviced establishments in the Beach and Leslieville area, as well as some passionate fans known to request special deliveries to their front door!

"Sharing a food experience that's so closely linked to my culture is a true honour for me," she says. "I always knew my relatives hunted and sold truffles, but it wasn't until I worked with the Istrian White Truffles myself, that I fully appreciated the treasure we had underfoot." Croatia is an emerging area for unique food ingredients, oils, meats and cheeses. So much so that Wanda is currently working to create a Croatian Wine and Fine Food Alliance to bring greater exposure and appreciation for the offerings from her motherland.

"I actually wasn't much of a foodie when I first got into this business, but good food is addictive and the passion of the chefs to create amazing dishes is really inspiring," she adds. "I just love being invited into their kitchens where the magic happens and I get to share the story about the truffles they purchase from my family!" Wanda welcomes local retailers and residents who may be interested in her products to contact her at Wanda@whitetruffles.ca.

