

By **Valerie Howes**

I'M LOOKING AT INSTAGRAM with Connie de Sousa in the Green Room at the *Marilyn Denis Show* CTV studio in Toronto. She's here competing to be Marilyn's next food expert. With her blow out, TV makeup and sweeping lashes, the 33-year-old celebrity chef is barely recognizable as the fresh-faced girl with sweat-drenched ponytail in her race photos. Different look, same drive. At six months pregnant, she's as focused cooking before millions on television as training for her first Ironman.

Most Canadians know her as the ex-ballerina on *Top Chef Canada*, who could debone a pig's head in 40 seconds. She made the finals in Season 1 – a feat no woman contender has since achieved. Last year at the prestigious Terroir Awards, de Sousa's industry peers recognized her as "Canada's most outstanding chef." To Calgarians, she's the sausage aficionado at Charcut Roast House, which she co-runs with her mentor, John Jackson, who hashtags himself *#TheOtherChef* on Twitter, because it's Connie de Sousa people ask for by name.

With their spouses, the kitchen partners bought their 110-seat, meat-centric restaurant five years ago. It's inside Le Germain, a luxury boutique hotel in downtown Calgary, and draws high-profile diners from Mayor Naheed Nenshi to William Shatner.

When Charcut opened, de Sousa and Jackson would arrive at 9 a.m. and leave up to 20 hours later, seven days a week. "We poured every last penny of our savings into our restaurant," she says, "so we had the mentality of working like our lives depended on it." It paid off. In 2015 they're opening a second place: Charbar, occupying all three floors of the former Simmons factory, by the Bow River.

Somehow de Sousa consistently found time to run 10K a day. "I'll get out in my neighbourhood, Killarney, or along the reservoir in Glenmore Park, as long as the temperature doesn't drop below -10 C," she says. "Being in the fresh air gives me a clear head for work."

Last year, the chef decided to take it to the next level and train for a triathlon. "The hours I can push through in the kitchen help me as an athlete," she says. De Sousa began mixing up her runs with cycling and swimming training, but not without facing some struggles. "At one point I was doing 90K bike rides before my shift, so I'd be up at 5 a.m. I did get tired, and my co-chef was getting a little frustrated – as was my husband, who wasn't seeing me much." Luckily, both were supportive overall.

Swimming was even harder: "I never made it past Maroon as a kid, because I couldn't do front crawl properly," she says, laughing. During her first open-water swim at the Elbow Valley triathlon, de Sousa was terrified: "With everyone starting at the same time there was so much white water. I was getting kicked in the head and elbowed, and I was choking," she says. "I forgot all my training and was just paddling to stay afloat."

For the rest of the summer, the chef switched to training in lakes. It paid off at her last tri of the season in Invermere, B.C. "We swam in this gorgeous lake that was warm and crystal-clear, with the mountains as a backdrop," she recalls. "I felt



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