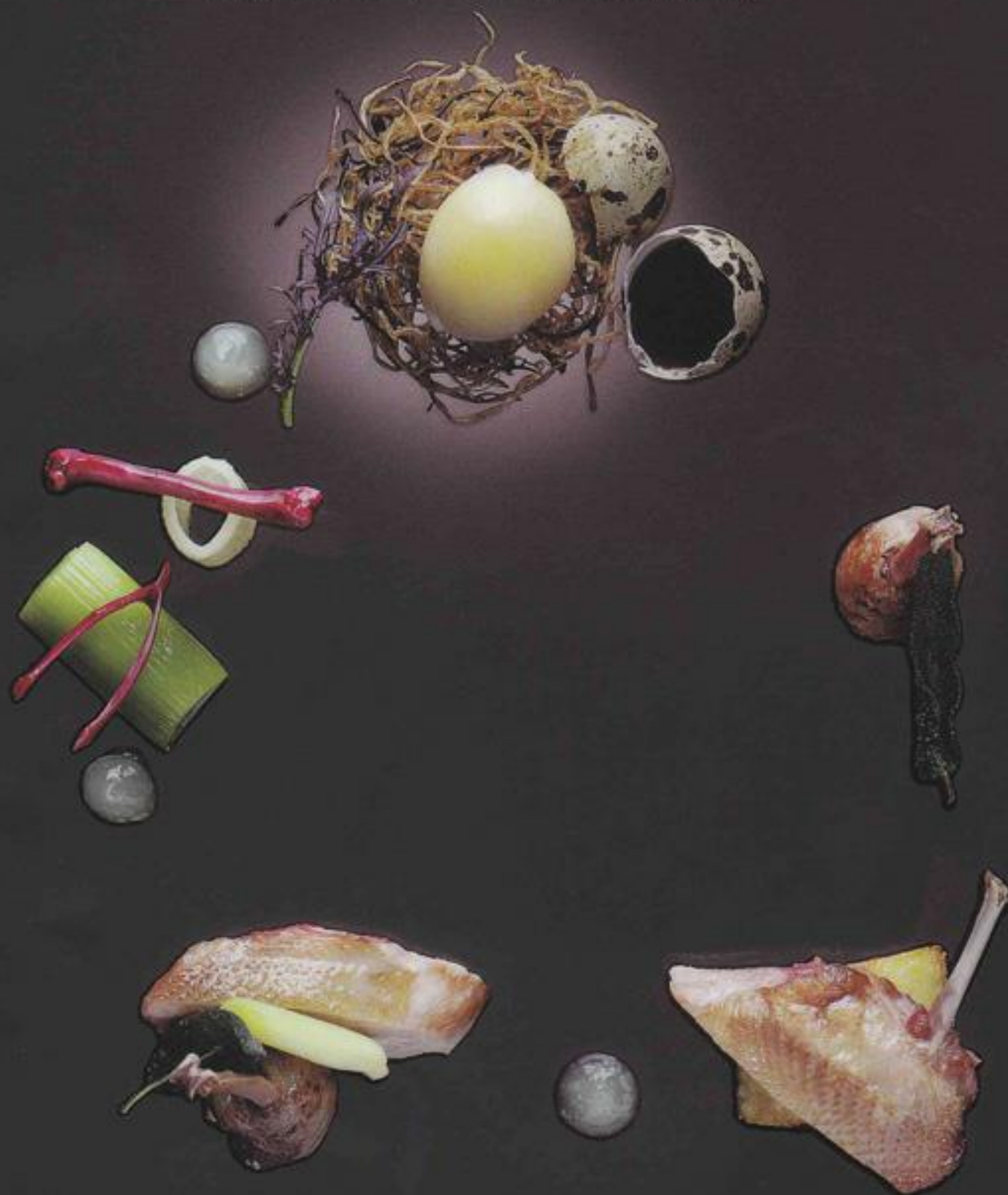


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CHEF CHANTEL DISCOVERS EUROPE'S FINEST HOF VAN CLEVE



Every year, Chef Chantel Dartnall closes Restaurant Mosaic when winter is at its fiercest to spend her holidays eating at some of Europe's finest culinary establishments. This year she included the renowned 3 Michelin star Hof van Cleve in Belgium and found inspirational food of the highest order...

Written by Chantel Dartnall

Chef Peter Goossens is often referred to as one of the Godfathers of modern Belgium cuisine and is a master of contemporary culinary artistry. At his restaurant, situated on a farm in Kruishoutem at the edge of the Flemish Ardennes, he has been dubbed "a composer of flavours" thanks to his purist and highly creative compositions. Goossens attended the Ter Duinen College of Hotel Management in Belgium and, after graduation, moved to Paris where he worked in a number of restaurants before returning to Belgium and Hof van Cleve. In 1993, he was crowned Belgium's best executive chef and in 1994, at the age of 30, he received the ultimate accolade: his first Michelin star.



Shortly after, in 1998, he was awarded a second Michelin star – one of the youngest chefs anywhere to be singled out in this way.

Goossens' artistry did not go unnoticed and the prestigious Gault Millau Restaurant Guide awarded him 19.5 out of 20 points in 2004 – a rating maintained to the present day.

The very next year Goossens was awarded his third Michelin star. On arrival, Hof van Cleve looks like any other farmhouse in the area with freshly ploughed fields surrounding the house. Entering the building, visitors are led through what was clearly the farmhouse's previous veranda, into the minimalist dining room with crisp white walls and terracotta floors, with the few accents of colour coming from the contemporary Belgium art adorning the walls.

Goossens is a chef who has a very exact philosophy about sustainability and supporting local producers. All of his fresh produce is sourced within a 50 km radius of the restaurant and,



although he has enough farmland surrounding the restaurant to be able to produce his own fruit and vegetables, he prefers to and feels strongly about supporting local producers. Even the fish presented on his seasonal menus comes from specific anglers from the North Sea, which is only 40 km away from the restaurant. Not surprisingly even the cutlery, crockery, vases, stemware – and staff uniforms - are made by local Belgium producers.

Sommelier Pieter Verheyde leads Chef Peter's front of house team and it is evident that he shares the same philosophy, having gone through an extensive process to source some unique wines for their cellar and during our dining experience, the wines selected with each dish of our exceptional seven course tasting menu continuously surprised us.

What characterises Goossens' cooking is his intricate yet easy to understand techniques. Tied to the produce of the North Sea and his immediate surrounding region, Goossens is a master in the use of unusual combinations. Yet, these are always used in subtle ways. Amongst one of his most impressive dishes is

CHEFS IN ACTION

ravioli of ox cheeks and langoustine with Paris mushrooms and Piment d'Espelette (a variety of chili pepper). What seems like a wild combination of very different flavours is in reality a well-balanced culinary tour de force.

Goossens loves to send his guests on a journey around different flavours, textures and temperatures: "Cooking is art, science and craft" is his motto. In explaining his philosophy to me, I found a lesson for all chefs everywhere and for me in particular:

"In order to cook at the highest level every day and guarantee an exceptional experience for our guests, it is important that the interior of our restaurant exudes the same traditional spirit and identity that the kitchen does. Our preparations are, after all, in my opinion, the result of a great deal of effort at various levels. We handle the best local products that the gardeners, farmers, growers, anglers, hunters and cheese refiners can provide.

Out of respect for their passionate work and thanks to their fantastic ingredients, we are able to provide our guests with a unique culinary experience. This makes cooking a true craft. Chefs need to draw their inspiration from everyday life, from their own experiences and by travelling. It is important to focus on your environment and what is available and in season - then the inspiration will follow!"



"When planning a menu it is important to look at the richness and heaviness of each dish. I do not use a lot of cream and butter in my food. Although I like both of the ingredients very much, it is important to use them in moderation."

I asked him if he believed that certain ingredients that have been ignored in the past few years are now making a return to the culinary scene.

"When I started as a young chef in Paris vegetables didn't form part of the main dish and you had to order green beans or spinach as a side dish. Vegetables now play a very important role, especially in my food, and are integrated as part of the dish."

Goossens firmly believes that chefs have to travel to stay ahead of the game and to broaden their own horizons.

"I do use Oriental ingredients in my food but it is not fusion. I focus on the taste and flavour I want to present.

With dishes, such as the Wagyu beef with Shimeji mushrooms and seaweed broth, the total dish reflects the Oriental flavours I discovered on my journeys. These ingredients are used to enhance the flavour of the dish and not to become the main focus."

Goossens' food and attention to detail ensures that the meal comes close to perfection. If you have the chance to dine there, do not miss it.



Chantel Dartnall has become renowned, not only in South Africa but in culinary circles around the world, for her innovative and meticulous approach to modern fine dining. She is the award-winning patron chef at Restaurant Mosaic, located in The Orient Private Hotel in the Francolin Conservation Area, Elandsfontein, Crocodile River Valley, Pretoria, Gauteng.

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