NEW AGE, THE
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Local and international hefs who defined the world of dining last year

Over the past 12 months, these chefs launched bold new projects, expanded their culinary footprint across the globe, and made the world sit up and listen. For gaining the world's attention, leaving behind legacies, expanding their local footprint into new markets and opening up important dialogue on the state of consumption and production of food today, here's a selection of both local and international chefs who made their mark in 2014.

TANKISO KOMANE

LOCALLY

1. Chantel Dartnall

Chantel Dartnall of Restaurant Mosaic at the Orient in Pretoria proved she's a culinary force to reckon with as she became the second woman to win the coveted title of San Pellegrino Chef of the Year for 2014.

Margot Janse of The Tasting Room (in Franshoek, Western Cape) was the first woman who has received this award since the introduction of the awards in 1998.

In the same week, Dartnall, renowned the world over for her innovative and meticulous approach to botanical fine dining, was once again named chef of the year at the annual Eat Out Mercedes-Benz Restaurant Awards.

Last year alone, Dartnall has gained a huge wealth of knowledge as she visited Portugal, Spain and France.

She explains: "As a chef it is important for me to know what is happening in my industry across the globe and I enjoy meeting other chefs, sometimes working with them and experiencing their creativity. It inspires me to work harder at what I do."

Darnall is off to Italy as part of her San Pellegrino Chef of the Year prize package where she's participating in the Chef's Cup Südtirol in Alta Badia, an annual event, which brings together 70 renowned chefs from around the globe.

2. Evert Calitz

Last year saw Jozi-based Etihad Airways' in-flight chef and cabin crew manager become one of an elite 13-member group from across the globe to complete the world's first training course as a flying butler.

Calitz, 25, was handpicked for his extensive experience in hospitality to attend an intensive three-week training course in London, led by the Savoy Hotel's head butler, Sean Deveron.

The airline's in-flight butlers debuted their newfound skills last month (December 27) when the Abu Dhabi-based airline took delivery of its first superjumbo Airbus A380 aircraft, the biggest commercial aeroplane in the world.

This proud wearer of the highly coveted world's first flying butler title will look after the airline's customers who have booked The Residence by Etihad, a three-room cabin that costs R224 000 for a one-way ticket. The most luxurious and expensive, it comprises a living room, private shower room and double bedroom.

3. Roxi Wardman

Mzansi's own Roxi Wardman, 26, the leopard print-wearing train driver assistant from Durban, is the latest MasterChef SA crown holder following his glorious victory win at the Sandton Convention Centre in November, when she narrowly beat Cape Town domestic worker Siphokazi Mdlankomo, 39, by a mere eight points.

As South Africa's new MasterChef, Wardman walked away with half a million rand in cash and a brand new VW Tiguan as part of her prize package.

Expect to hear more about Wardman in 2015 as she gets the chance to spread her wings further and share her unique culinary skills with some of the world's best in one of the country's premier food shows, The Good Food & Wine Show.

4. Zwelithini Tshuma

Chef Zwelithini Tshuma of Radisson Blu Gautrain Hotel was crowned the overall winner in the chef category of the second annual Cape Legends Inter-Hotel Challenge.

The multifaceted initiative, which took place over a six-month period, saw chefs from across the country produce an excellent three-course menu.

Tshuma, who started his career in 2005 at the age of 21 as a kitchen assistant, was up against some tough competition but it was his award-winning braised pork belly that tantalised a panel of renowned judges, landing him first place.

Mark Wernich, general manager of the Radisson Blu Gautrain, had the following to say about developing talent at a hotel level: "One area in our 4D strategy is supporting talent development to drive better results. We need to be an employer of choice attracting and retaining the best talent."

As part of his prize package, he took home R35 000 and an all-inclusive trip to Mumbai, India.

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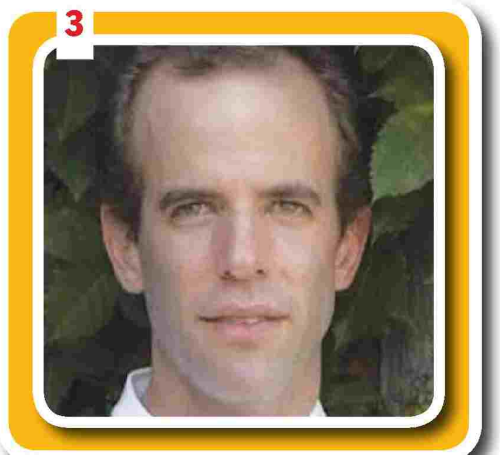

OVERSEAS

1. Alex Atala

Atala, chef of the acclaimed Sao Paulo restaurant DOM. was named the Lifetime Achievement Award winner for Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants.

"Alex Atala has not only led the transformation of Brazilian cuisine but also been its global ambassador," William Drew, group editor of Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants said.

"Almost single-handedly, he has changed perceptions both in his own country and across the world."

Atala has been credited for introducing the world to native Amazonian and Brazilian ingredients like wild ants, acai, pupunha (a palm fruit), cupuacu (a small melon-sized fruit with a creamy pulp) and pirarucu, a large white-fleshed fish. – Relaxnews

2. Roy Choi

Choi is the man credited with single-handedly launching the gourmet food truck movement in the US with his Korean-style taco chain Kogi BBQ.

Last year, the renegade chef worked with actor and filmmaker Jon Favreau as a food consultant for Chef, a film based loosely on Choi's life as a professionally-trained chef turned king of street food.

In 2014, he also collaborated with The Line Hotel in Los Angeles to open a series of restaurants and dining options, including Commissary, a rooftop, light-infused greenhouse with a menu that puts a special emphasis on vegetables. – Relaxnews

3. Dan Barber

It was one of the most hotly anticipated books of the year. When Barber, chef of Blue Hill restaurant in New York, released his latest book, The Third Plate, it was reviewed by all the major newspapers in America: The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal.

Because, when Barber has something to say, people sit up and listen.

As one of the champions of farm-to-table dining, Barber created a culinary paradigm for a school of admiring chefs.

But in his latest book, the chef proposes reinventing the model he helped popularise for a new philosophy that eschews the "cherry-picking" of desirable – and resource-intensive – foods, in favour of a more "integrated system" that values aesthetically imperfect produce, grains and legumes. – Relaxnews

4. Joel Robuchon

The most-starred chef in the world, in 2014 Robuchon published a thought-provoking new book penned with a neuropharmacologist and acupuncturist, that aims to tap into the curative, restorative and "magical" powers of certain foods.

Recipes in Food & Life are developed to pull double duty: satisfy the taste buds as only a Michelin-starred chef (he has 28) can, but also help alleviate physical and mental ailments ranging from anger, trauma to fatigue.

This past autumn, the 69 year old opened his latest restaurant in a 19th century Bordeaux mansion, La Grande Maison, and has been outspoken of his unabashed goal of adding another three Michelin stars to his existing constellation. – Relaxnews