

Edible artwork

Meet the incredibly talented Eat Out Chef of the Year, Chantel Dartnall ... where the plate is a canvas upon which fresh, organic, produce creates the painting.

If you haven't heard of Chantel Dartnall then you're in for a treat. She's a household name not only in SA culinary circles but around the world. And we experienced her innovative and meticulous approach to fine dining at Restaurant Mosaic. Mosaic is known for its indulgent eight-course Grande Degustation menu but a meal like that would only be fitting in a palace ... and that's exactly where you're transported upon arrival. The Orient Boutique Hotel is an exotic luxury spot surrounded by all the beauty nature could possibly offer. The interior has a warm and intimate feel that really does set the mood for the mind-blowing food journey on which you embark.

Perfection is a word that's thrown around quite loosely nowadays ... but until you've sampled Chantel's delights you have not experienced food perfection. It all began with humble beginnings ... some bread and butter! Yes, please! A vintage dining trolley was wheeled in, overflowing with the best bread selection ever. We tried them all ... saffron bread rolls, olive ciabattas, rich brioche, and the yoghurt health bread. They came with a selection of

delish butters like lemon and herb, and anchovy. There were even guests asking for takeaway tubs of the stuff because they felt they couldn't live without it. Fair enough, it was that good.

Okay, now that we've got you hungry ... let's continue! Chantel's food in general is inspired by nature. Each dish is a botanical masterpiece on the plate. We wish we could talk you through every delicious detail, but we'd be here for days. The Millionaire's Nest Egg was captivating though. Inspired by weaver birds' nests, the 'nest' was created with delicate courgette tagliatelle, upon which three miniature quail eggs, each with a different flavoured liquid centre, are placed. And then ... wow ... they come to the table and slice fresh truffle onto your plate! We didn't think it could get more impressive until the Mousse de Mer was placed before us. This dish of rooibos, langoustines and risotto was inspired by a dish Chantel recently cooked for the culinary elites at the S. Pellegrino Audi Chef's Cup Südtirol in Alta Badia, Italy. She dehydrates tomato skins and then grinds them to create the 'beach sand'. Amazing! We didn't know what real tomato flavour

was until now. The journey all came to a breathtaking finale ... dessert was an ode to the beauty of the granadilla flower. It was exquisite, and although almost too pretty to eat, we tucked in anyway. Think granadilla ice creams and jellies all complemented with dark Valrhona chocolate.

When you're eating like royalty you'd best drink like royalty. Mosaic has one of the finest cellars in South Africa. The sommelier, Germaine Lahodey, is there to help you select from no fewer than 1400 different labels. We were overwhelmed by choice, so we opted for the around the globe wine pairing ... it was like tasting happiness! This is not your average night out and is most definitely reserved for special occasions. It's a 45 minute drive from Jozi, but well worth it. Restaurant Mosaic, The Orient Boutique Hotel, Elandsfontein. Details: 012-371-2902/3



Talking to the chef ...

We were lucky enough to have a little chat with Chantel about all things foodie

When did your love affair with food begin?

From the time I was small, I've always been very passionate about cooking and have always wanted to be a chef. Apart from the 15 minutes in Grade 9 when I thought I wanted to be a hairdresser!

What is your favourite childhood memory around food?

My mother's roast chicken. She squeezed a bit of lemon on it and added lots of spices. I can still smell it roasting. I longed for it while I lived in London – it brought back memories of home, feeling safe and having someone else cook for me.

Being a chef is a lot of hard work and long hours, what do you do to relax?

Read, watch TV and spend quality time at home with my family and cats Ogies and Peanut.

Is there a chef you're dying to meet or would love to work with?

I would love to meet chef Peter Gilmore at Quay Restaurant in Sydney, Australia, and spend a few days in his kitchen.

What kitchen utensil do you use the most?

I love sauces so a good whisk is essential.

Where do you enjoy eating out?

For fun casual eating I go to Koi Restaurant. I also enjoy other chefs' cooking and recently visited chef Michael Broughton's Terroir and David Higgs's 500 at The Saxon.

Is there anything you don't like eating?

I am not a big fan of kidneys.

What is your most memorable meal?

I've had so many incredible experiences but the ultimate was in a small restaurant called L'Astrance in Paris. Pascal Barbot's approach to food means no cream or butter. Instead he uses oriental ingredients and citrus. I'll never forget his foie gras with raw button mushrooms and hazelnut oil.

What is your favourite dish to cook at home for family and friends?

Pasta with a creamy mushroom sauce.

What are the five ingredients you couldn't live without?

Butter, olive oil, cream, mushrooms, fresh herbs – and lemons make six!



You've travelled extensively, what is your greatest foodie find?

My greatest food discovery while travelling was tonka beans (with their incredible marzipan, vanilla flavours) which I tasted for the first time at chef Jean-Georges Klein's restaurant L'Arnsbourg, and white balsamic glaze which I discovered in Modena during my first visit to Italy.

What is your worst kitchen disaster?

A long time ago, I tried to cook rice in a microwave. The result was charcoal. There have never been short cuts in my kitchen since then!

Where do you see food trending in the next few years?

Three areas:

1. In recent years, Asian flavours and ingredients have come to play a strong role in European food culture. This coming together of ingredients and approaches has resulted in a harmony of complementary flavours, with many traditional Asian ingredients being incorporated elegantly and effortlessly

into European dishes.

2. I think molecular gastronomy has had its day and although there are a handful of exceptional restaurants based on molecular cuisine, such as Heston Blumenthal's The Fat Duck in Bray, Grant Achatz's Alinea in Chicago, or Jean-George Klein at L'Arnsbourg in Baerenthal, it seems this movement is slowly fading.

3. More and more chefs are now focusing their attention on nature and the question of how best to capture the perfect balance of each ingredient presented on the plate. More focus is being placed on the sourcing, origin and consistency of ingredients – the ingredients themselves being seen as the ultimate dictator of the quality and success of the dish.

Any tips for aspiring chefs?

Keep it simple. Don't overcomplicate your flavours.

What are your goals for the future?

To keep on growing in culinary terms and exploring all facets of food. ▶