



Mosaic at The Orient: reviewed



Cathy Marston savours the meal of a lifetime!

by: Cathy Marston



Image by: Cathy Marston

Mosaic at The Orient is a mad place. Insane, over-the-top, mindbogglingly-mad... so much so, that I hardly know how to begin this review. So perhaps the best way to start is to say that if this is madness, you can sign me up for the nut-house right away, lock me in and throw away the key for ever.

It's a place which shocks the senses, filled with so many oddities and intricacies (is that even a word? It is now.), you can scarcely rest your eyes anywhere when you first arrive. Every inch of every wall, piece of exquisite furniture and floor is covered with something, be it Indian latticework, gorgeously-painted tiles, original artworks and sculptures. It should be too much and for a moment, it teeters on the edge of being so, but in its OTT-ness, it achieves a sort of epic grandeur, a sort of 'we're lavish and we know it' confidence which after the initial shock, cannot fail to make you smile and wonder at it all.

I was invited there for the night and dinner by a friend and yes, as such, we were guests of the family team behind Mosaic. Chef Chantel Dartnall and her parents Marie and Cobus, are justly proud of their many achievements, but when you go to such a decorated establishment, your expectations are off-the-scale, so it's still a bit of a risk inviting reviewers along.

This isn't a hotel review so I shall say little about the rooms except that they have everything you could want or need and more. My interests lay in the food and the wine. So let's do the wine first.

Germain Lehodey is the sommelier of Mosaic. Previously working with other top chefs in SA and originally-trained in Europe, I think his cellar may be the finest I have seen in Africa. It's also the most convoluted and crowded, but I am assured there is method to this particular vinous madness!

They bring in many wines directly from Europe and elsewhere and I saw wines which I never thought I would find here in South Africa, making me drool and dream. Perfect temperature, perfect ageing conditions and, of course, two perfectly-trained sommeliers in Moses and Veronica (disclaimer – I trained them both, although undoubtedly Germain has had a huge hand in this as well!).

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The food

Where do I start? Chantel has to be one of the prettiest chefs around and I'm not talking about her physical appearance, charming though it is. I don't think I've ever eaten so many flowers in my life, certainly not since I was three years old and decimated my mother's nasturtium bed.

The menu is deceptively simple - Jewels of the Sea, First Growth and Creation - but delightfully-combined with an entire pack of explanatory notes on her inspirations, her ideas, the ingredients and a whole, wonderful, mystical story behind each dish.

And the food itself? Pretty, playful, contrasting, layered, delicate, satisfying, surprising – I could go on. And on. And on...

I've eaten at most of the [top restaurants in SA](#) and this is up there and leading them on several occasions. The attention to detail is immense, the thought and care is always-obvious. The wines, expertly chosen by Germain are sublime and without a doubt, this must rank as one of the most enjoyable meals I've ever had.

I could show you pictures, I could explain particular dishes, but take it from me, eating at Mosaic means everything slides gracefully and happily into the most delicious evening you've probably ever spent.

One final word of advice – if you can stay over, then do. Breakfast is a gourmand's delight of about eight different courses of home-cooked perfection and I didn't want to eat for the rest of the day.

I'm not going to say Mosaic is cheap because it's not, and nor should it be. Any kitchen which can take the time and the trouble to slice grapes into 1mm thick slices should be treated on another, higher and more hallowed plain than any others. This is not an everyday place, this is the place to celebrate the best day of your life. I've dreamt about it since and, in my over-privileged life as a reviewer, this is somewhere I would pay any money, pretty much literally any money, to visit again.