

RESTAURANT MOSAIC

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Chantel Dartnall of Restaurant Mosaic has created one of the most celebrated culinary destinations in the country. Just outside of Pretoria housed in the Orient Boutique Hotel with its Moorish architecture and sumptuous décor, head chef Dartnell has collected a slew of awards (and the list is growing). We asked her about her cooking creations.

Q&A with Chantel Dartnall of Restaurant Mosaic



Who or what influences you?

The father of botanical cooking Michel Bras. His restaurant is on the top of the Aubrac plateau in Laguiole France, about four hours from Paris in the middle of nowhere. You get there by driving along long, winding roads in the countryside. One salad has 29 different vegetables. You can feel you're starting to glow with health after eating it!

I am also inspired by the setting of Restaurant Mosaic, which is situated in the Francolin Conservancy with an abundance of wildlife, birds and indigenous plants. I am passionate about using organic and seasonal produce and endeavour to render "nature on a plate".

Describe your style of cooking

Passionate, feminine, botanical.

What is your favourite comfort 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.

How do you stay so slim?

It is all about moderation.

What do you love most about cooking?

There are no boundaries regarding how creative you can be in the kitchen...

Is there anything you would never eat?

"Anything" is a very vast concept when it comes to food – as a chef I believe that you should try everything at least once (this naturally excludes any daredevil concoctions made by anyone with the sole purpose to be unpleasant or inedible).

Have you ever had a disaster in the kitchen?

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!

What would you have as your last meal?

Scallops seared in a caramel crust with a champagne sauce and wild strawberries and Tonka beans. I'd wash it all down with a Belle Epoque champagne.

Where do you buy your meat?

I buy our venison from Wildshoekie in Centurion, and our ducks from Helen of Ducks on the Go.

Where do you buy our vegetables?

We have several farmers and suppliers that deliver to Restaurant Mosaic several times throughout the week with a wonderful selection of fresh produce – Denzyl at Kazi Farms, Merryn at Aloedale and Vasili at Herbtanical. We also visit the Tshwane fresh produce market once a week.

When you eat out, where do you go?

When I have some time available to eat out I like to explore and to visit all the different chefs I know, so I very seldom go to the same restaurants and vary from Japanese and Italian to fine dining – I really enjoy other chefs' cooking. Every year I am fortunate enough to travel abroad and try and eat at some of the best restaurants in the world. I've had some 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. Rather he uses Oriental ingredients and citrus. I'll never forget his foie gras with raw button mushrooms and hazelnut oil.

What would you choose: Banting or Mediterranean or low-carb or low-fat?

I believe that in order to live a healthy lifestyle and to maintain your weight you should eat everything in moderation. I am not a support of following any diet where you restrict yourself certain foods as you need to consider how sustainable it would be to implement these restrictions on a permanent basis – if you alter your diet to exclude certain foods to lose weight but then revert back to your original eating patterns the chances of gaining weight again is very good.

What makes your food special?

Passion





