



CHANTEL DARTNELL OF MOSAIC RESTAURANT: THE CHEF WHO
GROUNDS ETHEREAL INTO SOLID MAGIC

As a writer one thing that is never expected of you is an inability for words.

When words come easy to and you understand and respect the responsibility and power they hold, you can sometimes get a sort of writer's block. This happens when it comes to needing to language an experience that was so extraordinary as to feel almost out of this world.

That block is a fear that your words won't be enough. Like when you can't put words to deep feelings that are beyond words, like intense grief at losing something you can't replace, or a love that defies logic and makes you feel things more magical than words or a joy that was so outside the realms of normal that you would have to find new words that don't exist to define it.

Yet, it's a writer's instinct to find the words because a writer feels compelled to communicate in such a way that their experience impacts another. A writer needs you to feel what they did and uses the power of language to try and connect you to whatever it is they want to communicate about.

Writing about Chantel Dartnell and my meal at her restaurant, Mosaic (<https://www.restaurantmosaic.com>) at the Orient on Saturday evening puts me in that kind of tension and quandary. How on earth am I going to find words adequate enough to portray this?

My only way out of the block is to actually accept failure here and announce it before I start.

I am simply not going to be able to find the right words to adequately express just how magical that experience was or the particular alchemy that presents when the energy of this very special lady creates food for you.

Whatever words I find, they won't be able to be enough to replace the experience of eating there. It would actually in this case be easier to paint to express the magic of her creation than write it.

I am hopeless with drawing though so this is the best I can do.

I have had the utter pleasure with the work I do to have connected with some of our country's finest chefs. We always share a similar passion for farms and finding the best quality ingredients and the friendship that results is always a result of this joint passion. So I have a treasure chest of incredible taste experiences in my memory, I'm a very lucky girl at the food I get to experience being in this world.

So it would be a very large deal to be able to say that my experience at Mosaic was my peak food experience ever in this country. You never want to say one chef is better than another but it's not about that with Chantel's food, something extra happens on the plate with her. There is a something extra that is so rare and pretty tough to define but it's a particular form of magic. Even magic seems too weak a word for this – it's no less than alchemy.

The attention to detail that comes through in her food – is so outstanding. That you have to sit there and stare at the plate for a while. I found it hard to get my head around the blatant courage in her creativity. Because when you dare to be that creative to the detail Chantel goes to, you then have a responsibility to get the execution right and the planning that must go into making her vision on your plate manifest is quite mind blowing. I would never have the courage to be as creative in vision as she is here, because I know I don't have the skill to pay such meticulous attention to detail.

The spell that she weaves to create that alchemy as far I'm concerned is one of connection.

By the time that artful plate is put in front of you, a series of sacred connections made it so.

That's why you'll love her vocation. What you have in common with her, her love and connection that she brings to the plate delivered with the ethereal beauty of a fairy Godmother – starts with the farmer. Some of the farmers you support and buy produce from are her firm favorites too. Like you, she supports Aloe Dale and Clan-Williams Organics and Kazi Farm. She visits the producers of the food, connects with them and gets goosebumps like I do when we talk about exceptional farmers and their produce. Behind every ingredient and every dish she connects you to the story of where it came from, what inspired it and then she breathes the most meticulous attention to honoring every single part of the dish and undeniably infuses it with love.

You feel like eating her food is a *sacred ceremony*, there's love and respect woven into every single part of the experience. The result is a feast that breathes rich warmth and magic from every sensory angle. It starts with the way she talks to you about the courses before your meal. I watched people transfixed at her while she talks, she manages to make every table feel special and it is authentic. There is an aura of love around her that she seems to live to exude. Kindness and love oozes out of her eyes like candy dust.

Then the courses arrive one by one and your senses are captivated further, first by the sight of your plate – she has basically delicately drawn on your plate with food. It's art and it's not pretentious, it's all connected. That's hard to define but when presentation is complex and about the technique – it feels different to what her presentation does – hers isn't about blowing you away with ostentatious flair.

It's far too delicate for that – you feel like every aspect of the dish is connected and every tiny ingredient that makes it up has been loved and respected.

We chose to have it with an international wine pairing which has become slightly problematic as I left Mosaic with a deep desire to understand French wines more. To be honest, I might have left a little obsessed with it actually. All their wines are sourced by themselves through trips to France and a story is told about each vine, each farm and the region that inspired it. I have never experienced that before – wine where the smell of it is as pleasurable as drinking it.

Our first course was Chantel's interpretation of 'fish and chips'. This was a delicate sardine wrapped in a pastry so light it all but dissolved in your mouth, that was served on a saffron mayonnaise and with lemongrass salt. The plate is decorated so that the lemongrass shavings mimics the color of the sea and dill leads you from the sardines mouth to caviar which looks like a bubble.

Every taste blends and compliments the next, the connection between all ingredients just quite extraordinary.

That was followed by a beetroot dish that I will never be able to forget.

It looked like a beetroot fairy garden had magically appeared on our plates, delicate candy striped beetroot, yellow beetroot, all displayed in what looked like a garden with the central piece being the most beautiful glossy beetroot fondant.

While you're soaking up the visual delight of that, they arrive with a beetroot baked in flour, salt and pepper. It is explained that a whole beetroot was wrapped in this covering and baked for 6 hours. They cut away the outer covering and shave off the inside onto your plate and it tastes like nothing less than beetroot silk. While you're taking in the

whole experience, staring at your plate transfixed, they add a 30 year-old aged Italian balsamic to the corner of your plate. There are little balls in amongst this beetroot fairy tale on your plate of a dill mayonnaise. I have never known or thought about beetroot like that before, never tasted it like that before.

I thought I knew beetroot but what Chantel did was transform the character of beetroot into something fantastical. She adds dimension and character to food in a way that she makes you experience it differently and respect it more.

I almost shudder now to think about how limited I have always been with beetroot, only roasting or steaming it. What an *utter fool* I've been.

I left Chantel wanting to do so much more with it, I want to connect with beetroot differently and understand the deeper facades of its character more wholly.

That's what creativity does, it inspires us to new heights and new experiences.

Of course my playing with new recipes with beetroot will get taken out on you, I'll share new recipes with you as we head into a good month of getting great bunches in from Chartwell Veggie Patch.

After that there was another out of this world experience where a simple scallop was transformed into a treasure island. A sort of Bunsen burner with 2 compartments was placed on the table. I'm sure there is a proper technical name for this contraption but that kind of detail escaped me while I sat mesmerized in culinary connection wonderland.

In the bottom half there was a consommé – it had some sort of honey in and very delicate spices. In the top half sat a beautiful bouquet of different types of very real, very fresh seaweed and standing like two beautiful towers amongst this stems of lemongrass. A gentle flame is lit under the consommé and as it starts to heat the vapors reach the seaweed and lemongrass, their essence starting to drip back down into it. The most tender scallop in a bowl all beautifully flanked with the most delicate of herbs and tiny baby exotic mushrooms is then put in front of you. The consommé now infused with the tastes of the sea from the seaweed and made Asian by the lemongrass is poured around your scallop.

Oh for crying in a bucket, that was an experience of culinary exaltation.

If you find me dramatic, you'll understand why this is no exaggeration if you take the time out to spoil yourself with an experience with madam fairy butterfly Chantel Dartnell.

I won't go through every course but the next was beef. I was almost too fearful to ask where the beef is being sourced from because this is always where an experience can fall flat, I know all the beef suppliers and want to weep when a restaurateur gives me the name of something not so great that they are sourcing from. Of course this wouldn't be the case with Chantel. She excitedly speaks of Black Angus and tells me where it is being sourced from and I smile because I know it is truly grass-fed and not a compromise.

We know, because we are proving it over and over again, that the best tasting food comes from the most sustainable farms that do things properly.

Chantel and her team at Mosaic bring that reality to life in a way that gives you an experience of the love and connection in food that you will never forget.

Swapping stories about farms we know was an utter delight, she is a kindred soul in our very real SA food (R)evolution. It's a duty and an honor for us to start getting our community together and connected to people like her that honor and respect food and its sacred origin in the farmer like we do.

We're going to spend a lot more time celebrating people like her in our world and if you haven't experienced Chantel Dartnell and Mosaic yet – put it on your bucket list and make it a celebration.

She cares about food to the same degree you do and then adds a magic that is beyond words, she will transform your understanding of the possibilities that good food offer, the delicacy of this exquisite woman's imagination, a treasure to everybody who respects and values all the connection and nourishment that good food, responsibly grown and lovingly prepared brings.

Follow Mosaic restaurant on Facebook (<https://web.facebook.com/Restaurant-Mosaic-at-The-Orient-210774718940975/>) for events, glimpses into the menu and recipes.



The most incredible beetroot dish

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