

TOP OF THE LIST

When the right food and wine pairing is a prerequisite just to be considered for the country's premier culinary awards, you'd imagine that the ultimate winners would offer an unforgettable dining experience. You'd be right

By **Alan Cooper**

In today's competitive restaurant environment, offering good food, paired with the right wine just isn't enough to stand out from the crowd. Increasingly picky diners are seeking more innovative options, a reality recognised by the organisers of this year's Diners Club Winelist Awards.

Some new judges were introduced, along with revised judging criteria and a greater emphasis on the suitability of the food and wine pairing, including other parameters such as: balance, content and presentation. Restaurants that were up to standard with the contemporary diner's preferences were rewarded.

An eclectic mix of 229 establishments in Gauteng, the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape – including brasseries and bistros, cafes, destination and fine-dining eateries – were selected for entry. The prestigious awards seek out restaurants that have innovative wine lists and are meticulous in offering compatible food and wine menus.

Looking at the quality of this year's competition, Diners Club Winelist Head Judge JP Rossouw, publisher of *Platter's by Diners Club South African Wine Guide*, pointed to the 'pleasing and varied entries' the adjudicators received.

'It gets tougher every year for restaurants to either maintain or evolve their offering to their customers in the fast-paced culinary business. However, it's clear from looking at this year's entries, that many eateries are up to the challenge of delighting patrons' senses with tailored food and wine lists,' said Rossouw.

After a painstaking judging process, 22 restaurants achieved Diamond status (the highest accolade), 44 were awarded Platinum, 38 received Gold and three earned Silver.

The judges also voted on the best eateries in each of the four regions. The restaurants honoured with the notable award were Restaurant Mosaic (Gauteng), Aubergine (Western Cape), Hartford House (KwaZulu-Natal) and Henry White's (Eastern Cape).



WINE & DINE



RESTAURANT MOSAIC

Few eateries make as emphatic a first impression as does Restaurant Mosaic, from the Moorish-style towers of its home, The Orient Private Hotel, rising from the vegetation of the Crocodile River Valley to the bounties of its wine cellar, which is stocked with more than 60 000 bottles under 5 100 different international and local labels.

Then there's its clutch of awards, a list of which would fill this page. Its Diners Club Winelist tally alone would be the envy of most other restaurants, having earned Diamond status between 2010 and 2013, Diamond status and Best Overall Wine List in South Africa in 2014, Diamond awards and best in Gauteng for 2015 and, more recently, 2016.

With every new dish appearing on Mosaic's Seasonal Menu, Chef Chantel Dartnall and internationally accredited sommelier Germain Lehodey work together with their cellar team to select the most suitable wine for each dish. During the

creative 'deconstruction tasting' sessions on Tuesdays, the team meticulously taste each new dish's ingredients individually, together with carefully selected wines, to ensure they uncover the perfect pairing.

When the restaurant is closed for its annual winter break, the Mosaic team travel abroad to visit Michelin-star restaurants and celebrated wine estates in Europe, as well as small boutique estates in their quest to stock some of the best and rarest wines the continent has to offer. 'For me, it's so important to stay on top of the latest food trends in Europe: we always visit a select few leading chefs to see what dishes they are busy creating, in order to ensure that what we do at Restaurant Mosaic is on a par with some of the best restaurants in the world,' says Dartnall.

Guests can choose between various pairing options: a 'Connoisseur' wine pairing that features predominantly international wines, or an 'Enthusiast' pairing featuring mostly South African wines. They also offer a non-alcoholic

pairing, where you can expect delights such as aromatic jasmine tea and rose-geranium elixir.

Pairing options include 'Jewels of the Sea', an oyster macerated in Champagne and a light apple jelly topped with a Champagne foam, accompanied by Alvi's Drift Thornlands MCC; 'Honeycomb' comprising *Prosopis* honey, sunflower shoots and Saint-Nectaire cheese with Domaine Henri Bourgeois Jadis 2010; and, lastly, 'Little Black Number', layered Callebaut couverture chocolate mousse, ganache, salted caramel served with a crunchy wafer and Italian gelato, and accompanied by De Trafford Vin De Paille Straw Wine 2003.

Restaurant Mosaic recently launched its Summer Celebrations Menu to mark its 10th anniversary. The menu features re-designs of some of its most memorable dishes from the last decade, as well as a couple of favourite dishes suggested by its regular guests.

restaurantmosaic.com