

THE MAGIC OF ALCHEMY

in the Mosaic kitchen

By Petro van der Westhuijzen

Since ancient times, food has had a magical connection. It was left as offerings to the gods, used as protection for a new home or feasted on to celebrate the changing seasons. Some of these traditions still continue today and with the artful use of the correct ingredients, we are able to calm or inspire individuals, becoming an alchemist of old.

Restaurant Mosaic's own enchantress, Chef Chantel Dartnall, is known internationally for her unique interpretation of botanical cuisine, weaving her magic and applying her creative innovation to exhilarate her guests and enhance their experience, in a way that only she can.

The magic of Mosaic is experienced through all the senses - taste, smell, texture, touch, mouthfeel and satiation. The ancients were eternally searching for the elixir of life, consuming foods supposedly containing the energy of love, protection, sensuality, strength, fertility and prosperity. Chantel taps into these ancient mystic beliefs by making use of fragile herbs and flowers that are more than just garnish. They become the essential ingredients that allow you to emerge yourself in the sustenance of Gaia herself. The essence of each ingredient is captured in her delicate dishes, poems of nature that fill your soul, releasing neurochemicals that calm and soothe, creating feelings of joy and contentment, assisting in the nourishment of your body on levels far beyond just mere satisfaction.

Chantel explains: 'In creating one of my most visually stimulating dishes called 'The Alchemist Infusion,' I incorporated a combination of fresh herbs, vegetables and edible flowers, along with Hibiscus petals, which is brewed into a fragrant consommé in a theatrical display at the table, for my guests to enjoy and almost become part of the cooking experience. Hibiscus adds a wonderful natural acidity and tartness to the consommé and as it is rich in antioxidants, assists in combating various illnesses, slows down the natural ageing process, invigorates and refreshes the guest and creates a sense of youthfulness.'



Each composition on her menu is intended to allow for mood enhancement, grounding and stress relief - guests are carried through shifts in emotions and energy without relying on alcohol or caffeine. Layers of harmonious rhythms and melodies manifest in Chantel's botanical creations as she strives to enable nature to speak through her. It is more than foraging; it is about being in tune with the essence of each ingredient as she utilises herbs and flowers not only to nourish, but also to invigorate and enthrall her diners. The preparation, cooking and eating of food becomes a sanctified act and she makes use of her kitchen to deliberately hone her craft and weave her spells...

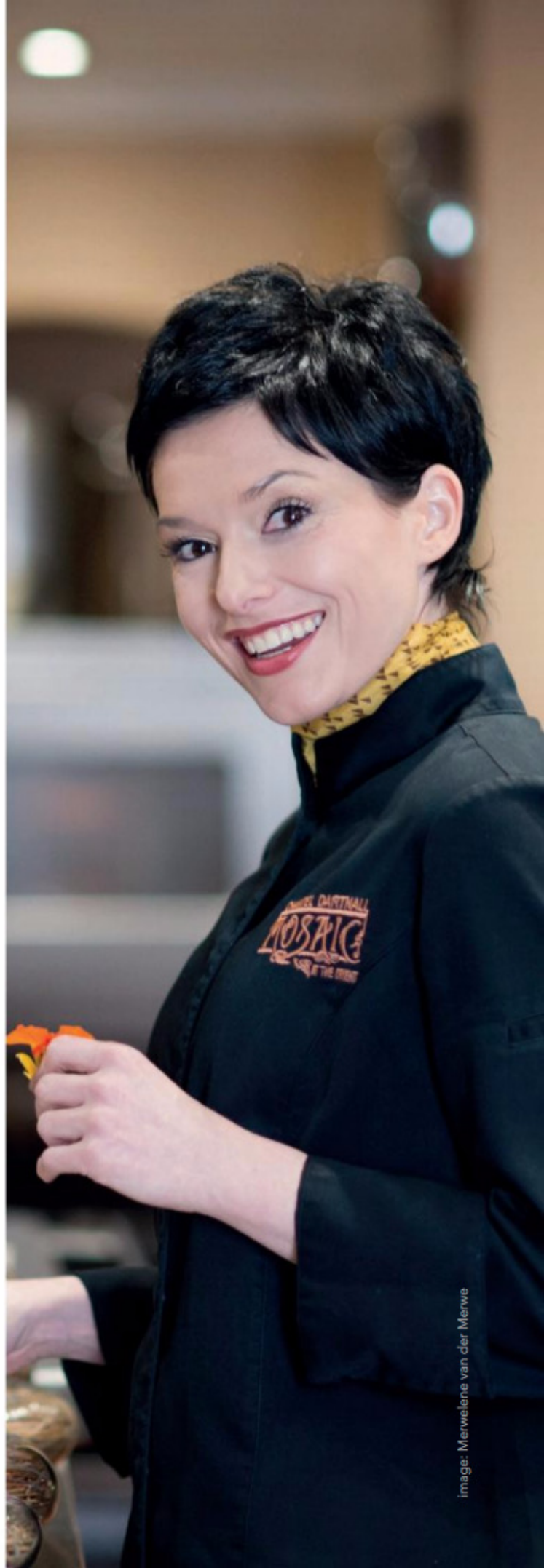
During the past ten years Chantel's cooking has matured, resulting in her dishes evolving into more precise, delicate pieces of art on the plate, in her own unique highly creative style. All the flavours are in balance with each other; from the intricately small amuse bouche to the sweet savourings of dessert. Even though each one is captivating in its own right, they come together in a rhythmical composition where each ingredient becomes a verse in an intricate composition and in the end flow together in perfect harmony, creating a magical ballade.



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The ethereal Mousse de Mer is a beautiful tableau, inspired by Chantel's walks on the beach. The sweet and tart flavour of tomato is combined with the fragrance of the traditional South African Rooibos Tea and merges naturally with the sweetness of the langoustine.

Chantel describes: 'Rooibos Tea which actually forms part of the herb family, is a diverse natural remedy which is low in tannins, caffeine free, and gives a wonderful boost to the immune system, containing powerful antioxidant properties assisting the body to combat the harmful effects of everyday living. It is well known that Rooibos Tea is the perfect ingredient to aid in relaxation, ease tension and promote good blood circulation. When combined with fresh lemongrass which contain powerful anti-inflammatory properties, these two herbs are beneficial for my guests as it promotes a sense of wellbeing and aids in digestion while they are enjoying our extended tasting menus.'





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She finds inspiration from Restaurant Mosaic's lush surroundings and the profusion of plant life in the Francolin Conservancy, where there are no distractions from the beauty of nature. Her commitment to a natural approach is evident with her recent seasonal menus, titled 'Origins' and 'Roots & Shoots' and her current celebratory menu, honouring Mother Earth and her abundance. Chantel believes in focusing on the origins of the products that are used, making use of exclusively organic and sustainable produce of impeccable quality sourced from local artisanal farmers.

At Mosaic, each dish has its unique place in the menu line-up, with the perfect pairing of ingredients and wine; an invisible thread, connecting all the dishes, the one following seamlessly into the other as if in a carefully composed symphony, complimenting each other as the music continues to unfold.

There is a subliminal rhythm to the progression of the courses. Slowly, like a heartbeat, it taps into one's senses, growing with each new dish until you experience the continuous melody of what Chantel's menu wants to relay. Individual creations become instruments in the gastronomical orchestra, each with their own prominent role, following each other in the correct order, until all the elements come together in a joyous composition, leaving you with a sense of fulfilment as the crescendo echo's a song of celebration...

'I will take you on a journey through the elements of nature. Creations inspired by Gaia, as I explore, discover and share each beautiful note of her bounty. I invite you to follow me as I combine nature and culinary art in creating a fantasy world for you to explore.'

'Mosaic is an experience...a destination...and I aim to further enhance that for all our guests...', says Chantel.

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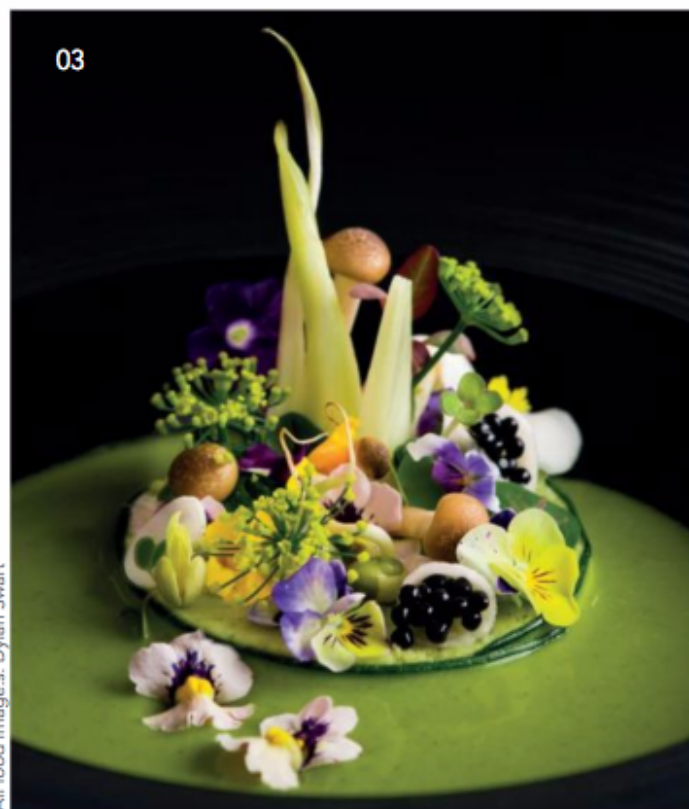
'Beetroot has a legendary connection to affairs of the heart and, with Aphrodite as its patron, word spread that beetroot could enhance beauty and capture you under its magic spell. With 'Bountiful Beetroot' the dish is visually striking and presents a diversity of flavours, colours and textures, enhancing stamina, improves blood flow and aids in lowering blood pressure along with being low in fat and filled with a diversity of vitamins and minerals - a natural energy booster', says Chantel.

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Chantel is intimately connected to her surroundings and even the very first dish on her menu becomes an emotionally pleasurable experience. 'Celebration of Spring' is my ode to the great master of Botanical Cuisine, chef Michel Bras of Aubrac in France. It is a fragrant composition of individually marinated heirloom vegetables with tender herbs and aromatic flowers, lending their energy to us through their pure potential, nourishing our life force so we grow more awake, conscious and alive.'

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All food images: Dylan Swart