



Chef Chantel Dartnall cooks to the beat of her own drum. She's been amazing guests with her unique brand of botanical cuisine for over a decade from the Restaurant Mosaic kitchen in Elandsfontein. Honouring each changing season with a new menu, she wipes the slate clean every 3 months and lets the change in produce and weather guide her. Chantel's Autumn menu is fittingly called Tabula Rasa meaning a new beginning, a fresh start, and sees her gearing down from the bright colours and flavours of summer to a more earthy, subtle and contemplative menu as we head towards winter.



The term Tabula Rasa doesn't refer to starting over from 'scratch', it is a change of mindset," says Chantel. "We need to be in tune with nature to truly reflect the flavours of the season on the plate, as the pace slows down as we head into winter." Chantel begins development on her seasonal menus a few months ahead of the launch date, and so began to think of concepts and flavour combinations while on holiday. "Even when we travel abroad, we always tend to end up along the coast to rest and recuperate – my family with their noses buried in books... and me with my toes in the shallow waters of the tidal pools, amazed by the miniature treasures of the sea." Capturing the beauty and intricacy of rock pools is Chantel's first dish, Tidal Pool.



“It was during one of these lazy summer days, with me, feet dangling from the rocks, toes in the water and lost in my own private world, that this dish started to take form in my mind,” says Chantel. “Clear, pure water through which you can see all the tiny creatures and plant life on the sandy bottom – a small self-contained little universe.” Leaves of seaweed and circles of salmon are suspended in clear verbena aspic, with a vanilla-spiked seaweed salad and salmon ceviche encircling the beautiful pool.

Returning from the coast, Chantel’s African Aromas harnesses a scent that’s familiar to all who live on the Highveld. “It is striking how every city has its own unique smell,” says Chantel. “I always look forward to that first whiff of Johannesburg’s unique scent in mid-winter, a mix of veld fire smokiness and the sweet aromas of Acacia wood burning.” With this dish, which consists of red hartebeest, madumbi roots and baby turnips, Chantel tells the story of her home: “The abundance of our wildlife, the exotic tastes and aromas of our open spaces, and the sweet smokiness of our campfires.” Soetdoring smoke surrounds the dish which is served under a glass cloche, and fills the room with the evocative scent of the veld.



Indigenous ingredients continue to mingle beautifully with others on the dishes that follow African Aromas on the Tabula Rasa menu. Suurvygies bring their sweet, tartness to the duck and plum dish Le Canard; Oyster Leaf (which really does taste of oyster) joins tilapia and halibut on Where the River Meets the Sea; Clemengold and nasturtium make a beautiful team in the Indian Summer palate cleanser. “I think with the global merging of cuisine it has become very important for chefs to focus on the unique ingredients in our countries that showcase and reflect their immediate environment,” says Chantel. “It wasn’t really difficult to incorporate the indigenous ingredients alongside the ‘global’ selection that is available nowadays, as in nature they all grow and live harmoniously together. It is just a matter of finding the correct balance between the ingredients so that they enhance rather overshadow.”



While a meal at Mosaic is always marked by excellent cooking, the team's appreciation for the unusual, the unique, the quality, elevates the experience. The crockery is exquisite, each plate different to create a unique stage for each dish. And complementing each dish is a wine expertly chosen by Sommelier Germain Lehodey from the wine cellar. The wine list is as thick as a phone book, and with more than 75 000 bottles of wine under 5 500 different local as well as international labels to choose from, there are many, many wines that could go with each dish. Germain, though, puts great thought into his selection, highlighting unusual local vintages, different regions, interesting varietals – wines that you're unlikely to find anywhere else.

You'll also find Mosaic's appreciation for quality in the Cheese Selection dish, where shavings of the Charles Arnaud 36 month matured French Comté are plated simply. Mosaic is one of the few restaurants in the world which has been able to secure this prestigious cheese, that has been crafted for more than ten centuries in Jura in the French Alps. The cheese is made with only the best milk from the Montbeliarde and French Simmental breeds, and production is done in a cooperative style, with the farmer and cheese maker working in tandem, together with the cheese ager who matures the cheese in special caves.

Bringing the menu to a close, First Frost is inspired by the Francolin Conservancy where Restaurant Mosaic found its home 10 years ago. “During the founding years of the Conservancy, when properties were incorporated into the larger nature park, the previous owners’ orchards were retained for future enjoyment of the birds and wildlife,” says Chantel. “I especially love it when the air gets cool enough to dig out my scarf and take an early morning walk through the orchards to see the colourful autumn changes. The last of summer’s bounty ripens and fades, and the very last fruit from the trees drop to the ground. As we slip closer towards winter, I find my inspiration from nature’s very first frost covering the last of the fruit as I venture into the orchard to fill my basket with the last offerings of the season.” The dish is an exquisite representation of the autumn orchard floor; a tonka custard filled baked pear is served on candied vine and hibiscus leaves, which hide mounds of chocolate ganache and through which tiny profiterole mushrooms peek out. A dish with a story that is as evocative as it is delicious, as is each dish on the Tabula Rasa menu.

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