

South African Chantel Dartnall Named World's Best Female Chef

Here's her winning recipe.

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CHEF CHANTEL DARTNALL

One of the few Gauteng chefs not disregarded by national (and international) food-award judges, Chantel Dartnall from Restaurant Mosaic at the Orient, just outside Tshwane, is someone who is constantly evolving, never resting on her laurels.

Her most recent accomplishment was being named the World's Best Female Chef Awards 2017, which took place in Warsaw, Poland.

She was also placed at number 32 in the Best Chef Awards Top 100 list for 2017, ahead of luminaries such Spain's Elena Arzak at 33, France's Sebastien Bras at 35 and celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal at No 37. Dartnall was also the only South African chef listed in the top 100.

Launched in Poland in 2016, this international competition seeks out the world's top chefs in terms of culinary artistry and visual presentation. The winning chefs are selected in six categories by 300 voters comprising chefs, food writers and culinary experts across the globe as well as 1.5 million followers on the competition's digital platform.

Dartnall -- who has twice been named South Africa's Chef of the Year -- beat strong competition from globally acclaimed chefs including the aforementioned Arzak (Best Chef -- Lady 2016 winner) of the three-Michelin-starred restaurant Arzak; Emma Bengtsson, who is at the helm of the two-Michelin-starred Scandinavian restaurant Aquavit in New York; Sophie Pic who gained three Michelin stars for her restaurant, Maison Pic in France; and Clare Smyth, the first and only female chef to run a restaurant with three Michelin stars in the UK with her establishment Core.



MOSAIC AT THE ORIENT

She takes everything she does seriously and yet, she's always visible to her customers and ready to talk food. She loves sharing her inspirational ideas and talking about their origin and where her current interests lie.

Seeing her work with the students from the University of Pretoria's Department of Consumer Science recently when their new kitchens were launched, another side of her personality emerges. She's comfortable and eager to pass on her trade secrets and because of her high profile in the industry, large crowds don't faze her. She loves ploughing back and remembers how and where she started and the hard work it takes to make it in the industry.

It was 11 years ago when she started cooking in the Mosaic kitchens. Having worked in a few commercial kitchens following her graduation, it was here she started formulating her food ideas. Even in those early days, her food had a special quality. One immediately knew that this was something worth experiencing and through the years, while paying her dues (with tough lessons along the way), she signalled that she would realise her full potential... and more.



MOSAIC AT THE ORIENT

It was clear even then that she realised the importance of developing a signature style. Each season with menu changes, the growth was visible and her creativity intensely personal. Dartnall travels regularly, sampling food from top tables around the world. Imagination is at the heart of her cooking.

"I think the biggest change over the past 11 years was moving from an environment that was new and uncertain for all of us to the space we are in now."

Her autumn menu which has just run its course was spectacular, a visual feast and also excelling as a taste sensation. Named Tabula Rasa (a Latin phrase referring to a blank slate and anything existing undisturbed in its original pure state), her commitment towards a natural approach was clear.

She has always been able to achieve magnificent visual explosions. It's almost like being embraced by a colourful spring garden. You want to sit back and wallow in the exquisite picture.



MOSAIC AT THE ORIENT

And then the detail of the dish itself. I have always thought that Chantel's food should be savoured and shared on rare occasions. It's that special and I have been privileged countless times. It is all in the detail, the delicacy of the plating and the deliciousness of the food.

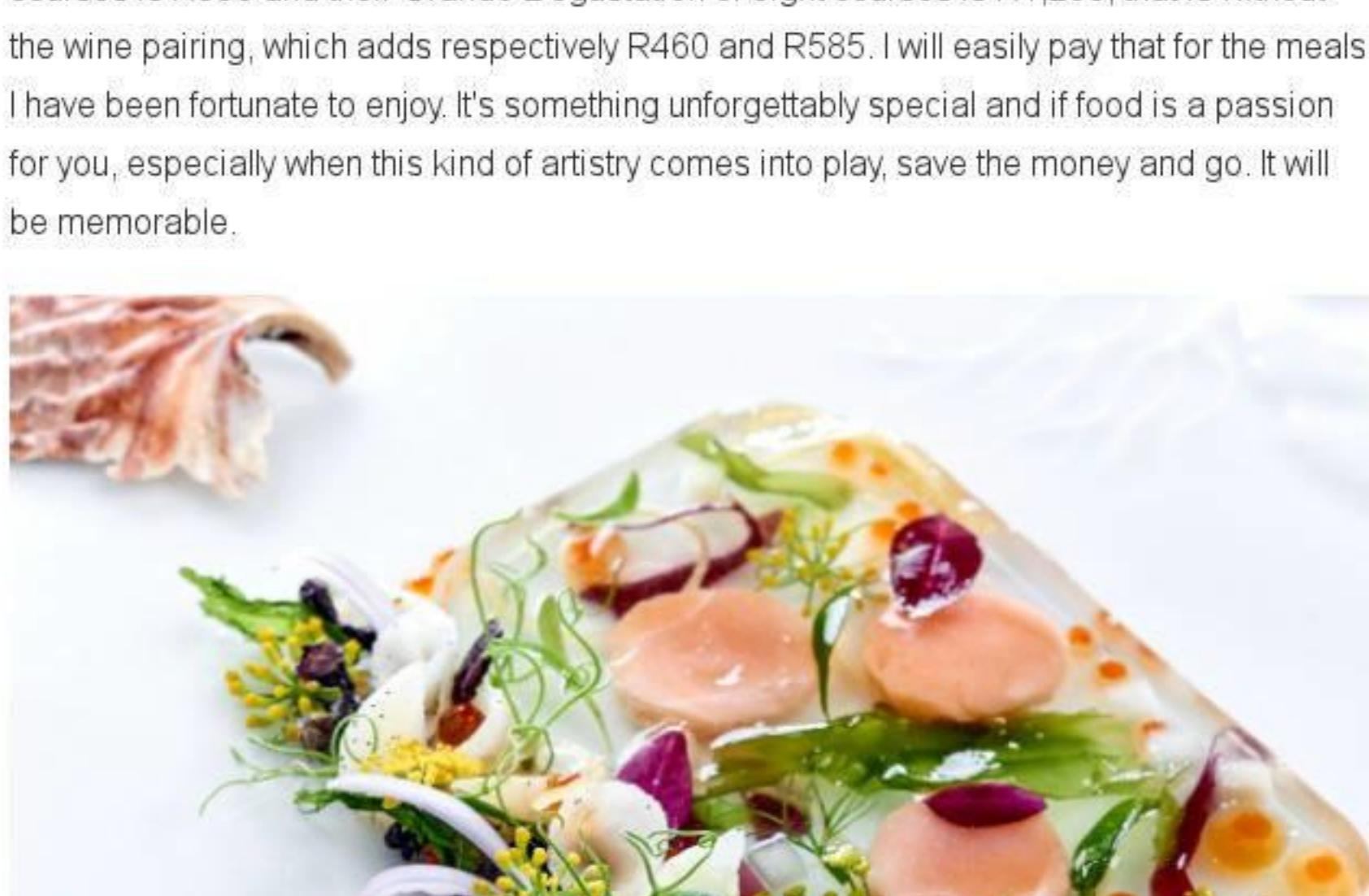
She says that through the years, Mosaic's emphasis has become purer. "The focus is truly on emulating nature in each of our creations." There's no chance of leaving Mosaic without feeling spectacularly spoilt. Everything possible is done to make sure it is a rare night.

If this sounds like a total rave, that it is. But I have been a guest for all 11 years and witnessing the transformation has been special, particularly as part of the Pretoria food scene. We have many fine unacknowledged chefs and restaurants in the city arguably because they don't fit into the standard requirements, but Mosaic was determined not to be ignored and they shouldn't be.

Confidence has allowed them to move forward and the current object foremost in Chantel's head and probably heart is her spring menu which was launched on the Equinox (September 22). Titled Cosmorganic, it alludes to the "supposed character of the universe as a living organism whose atoms are endowed with sensibility, asserting that the organic in the whole of the universe as well as in the narrow sphere of a single body on the earth, is the first thing from which the inorganic is separated".

That's a mouthful, but then so is Chantel's thought processes as she creates the individual dishes. Just look at the pictures of the individual plates from the autumn menu, each one with its own story and personality.

These meals do not come easily and they're pricey. Their Market Degustation menu of five courses is R850 and their Grande Degustation of eight courses is R1,250, that is without the wine pairing, which adds respectively R460 and R585. I will easily pay that for the meals I have been fortunate to enjoy. It's something unforgettably special and if food is a passion for you, especially when this kind of artistry comes into play, save the money and go. It will be memorable.



MOSAIC AT THE ORIENT

Mosaic is an experience and as much as it is about food it is also about the people who are watched over by Chantel's adorable mom Mari. She's always there to greet you, to see that your every need is met and to make sure you're personally cared for. Add to that the sommelier team of Germain Lehodey and his protégé, commis sommelier Moses Magwaza, who inform you of the luxurious wines you're being served.

What I feel about Mosaic comes from the heart and in the end, it truly is about sweetly savouring every mouthful -- and revelling in the moment.

And the rest of the world agrees!