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FOOD TRENDS

Chantel Dartnall's RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

THE RESTAURANT MOSAIC CHEF SHARES HER CULINARY JOURNEY

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ON THE OUTSKIRTS of Pretoria is a magical restaurant where flowers adorn your plate and each dish transports you gastronomically to a place you had never thought of before.

Restaurant Mosaic of The Orient Hotel has been a pilgrimage site for discerning foodies over the past 10 years, but last year was a particularly good one for its chef-patron Chantel Dartnall. Not only did she rise to second spot on EatOut's best restaurant list, but she also snapped up the coveted best service and wine awards. To top it all, she was crowned the Best Lady Chef in the World at the international Best Chef Awards in Warsaw, Poland.

Dartnall says the impact hasn't really hit her yet, especially since last year's recognition occurred without a sharp change in her style or a radicalisation of her menu. Instead, Dartnall has continued her pursuit of excellence, and her execution of the botanical style she has mastered over many years has grown in confidence.

Dartnall studied at the Prue Leith Chefs Academy before she ventured overseas to London,

where she worked under three-Michelin-starred chef Nico Ladenis and two-starred chef Michael Caines. Upon her return to Pretoria, she worked as a waitress at a small bistro, before hustling into their kitchen one month later. She stayed at Carlton Café until her dream kitchen was built on her family farm, and Restaurant Mosaic was born. It won an American Express Platinum Fine Dining Award four months after it opened (and has done so every year since), and has found a steady home on EatOut's Top 10 list.

The secret to Dartnall's success — in addition to a lot of hard work and having an incredibly tight team — is her belief that chefs should be true to their environment, and focus on influences in their vicinity. "Everyone is looking at what is happening abroad and what is the next fashion, and it's not necessarily things that are implementable in our establishment," Dartnall says. "So, I think as soon as you focus on the core, and focus on what you are truly doing, that is when pure excellence starts to shine."

For her, that means focusing on local farmers

and the freshest of produce. She believes if you buy things from a store you don't have farm-picked freshness coming into your door. Dartnall's good relationship with the farmers in her area brings another level of excellence to Restaurant Mosaic. She sources from five farms in the area — although she admits that her goats are a little bit further away.

It took Dartnall a long time to find these goats, and they are used in a Moroccan tagine dish inspired by a trip her parents took. The goat farmer, Nico Hendrik Jacobs, has just 10 goats in rotation, but Dartnall likes supporting "the smaller guys".

"As a chef you need to consider what makes people happy, and one of the ways to do that is to play an active role in your community," Dartnall says. "Farmers play a role in how you establish yourself as a chef and as, I think, a caring chef."

And by the taste of her dishes, goat could indeed be the next big ingredient. Goat is featured on her latest menu, Cosmogonic, which recently launched a few new dishes, and is available until 22 March. restaurantmosaic.com