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\$6.99 US



Restaurant Mosaic

A palace of wine on a South African game preserve

By Cathy Marston

Arriving at a game reserve just outside Pretoria, South Africa, you hope to encounter wild animals ranging freely in natural landscapes. You probably do not expect to see the turrets of an Indian palace from the days of the Raj. Welcome to Restaurant Mosaic at the Orient Hotel, an exquisite temple of fine dining.

Restaurant Mosaic opened in 2006, a passion project from husband-and-wife team Cobus Du Plessis and Mari Dartnall to provide a showcase setting for Dartnall's daughter, Chantel, the chef. The decor of the main building, the reception area and 10 bedrooms is

Don't Fly features an ostrich and beetroot tartare paired with herb-infused ostrich consommé. Indochine Fragrance, a main course, showcases succulent suckling pig in a delicate red Thai curry sauce. Tajine du Maghreb is medallions of capretto in a rich, creamy broth. Winnie the Pooh fans may enjoy Heffalumps and Woozles, a dessert combining delicate almond cake and apples, served with miniature white chocolate Wellingtons that leave powdered sugar "snowprints" across the plate.

There are two ways to approach matching wine with this inventive and varied cuisine. Intrepid travelers may opt to explore the 6,000-selection wine list, which draws on the 75,000-bottle cellar assembled by Du Plessis, who serves as wine director.

The almost 3,000-selection South African section is likely the most extensive in the world, with encyclopedic breadth and impressive vintage depth. There are verticals from Kanonkop (Paul Sauer 2009, \$64), Le Riche (Cabernet Sauvignon 2006, \$73) and Klein Constantia (Vin de Constance 2012, \$95) as well as young guns such as Sadie Family Wines Sequillo 2013 (\$21), Lismore Viognier 2013 (\$30) and Storm Vrede Pinot Noir 2013 (\$76).

The international section reflects Du Plessis' personal passions (Champagne and Hungary are his current favorites); styles that are particularly well-suited to Chantel's food (Alsace and southwest France, for example); and world benchmarks, such as Krug Clos d'Ambonnay 1995 (\$4,338), Le Pin 2012 (\$5,520) and Joh. Jos. Prüm Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese GK 2007 (\$213).

But this bounty can be overwhelming, and even though the markup on bottles is tiny (only 100 percent regardless of length of time in the cellar), most diners choose one of the wine-pairing options curated by Du Plessis, sommelier Moses Magwaza and his team. Two pairings are offered: the "Enthusiast" at \$31 or \$41 (depending on which food menu is selected) and the "Connoisseur" at \$37 or \$45, the latter generally featuring more unusual wines.

"People trust us because they know what lengths we go to when we make these pairings," explains Magwaza. "Also, it gives the customers exposure to wines they probably wouldn't order by themselves. Eating and drinking with us is always an adventure."

By infusing the restaurant with their personal passions, Chantel, Du Plessis and Dartnall (who acts as general manager) have created a distinctive dining experience full of whimsical intrigue. Outside, leopards, zebras and giraffes roam; inside, you exist in a little slice of Paris set down in a Kashmiri palace. Mosaic takes you to a dreamlike world you won't soon forget.

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inspired by India and furnished with beautiful original pieces collected by Du Plessis over the years. The restaurant, by contrast, is French art nouveau, an intimate space suitable for the special occasion dining that draws most of the clientele.

This East-meets-West style is reflected in the food at Mosaic. Chantel graduated from prestigious Prue Leith Chefs' Academy and worked in Michelin-starred restaurants in the United Kingdom and the United States before returning to South Africa and opening Mosaic. Her food, inspired by her travels, is delicate and balanced, marrying elements of different world cuisines. The plates are a visual feast, often decorated with edible flowers and herbs, and there is always plenty of theater served along with the meal. Two set menus are offered: the five-course "Market Dégustation" (\$75) and the "Grande Dégustation" (\$114), which has an additional three courses.

The Sea Mist starter comprises a succulent scallop and sweet lobster tail covered in a delicate saffron potato foam. Some Birds



Clockwise from left:
sommelier Moses
Magwaza, chef Chantel
Dartnall, and owners
Mari Dartnall and
Cobus Du Plessis