

FOOD

# RAISE YOUR GLASSES!

*In a first for the African continent, South Africa's Restaurant Mosaic at The Orient has received the Wine Spectator Grand Award.*



Eric Botha, Taryn Nortjé, Chantel Dartnall and Moses Magwaza

It would be a dream come true for any passionate oenophile: the chance to be accidentally locked in overnight in the wine cellar of Restaurant Mosaic at the Orient, with time to discover its great names, vintages and hidden gems. It truly is a magical place and reputedly the most comprehensive cellar in Africa.

It's a vault filled with some of the best wines from around the world, with more than 75 000 bottles of wine under 5 500 different local and international labels.

And so it was hardly surprising when Mosaic – in a triumphant first for the African continent – received a 2018 Wine Spectator Grand Award from the highly regarded American publication for its impressive wine list, one of only 85 Grand Award winners in the world.

Says Mosaic's cellar master Cobus du Plessis: "This is the first time a restaurant on the African continent has taken this prestigious

**"This is the first time a restaurant on the African continent has taken this prestigious *Wine Spectator* award..."**

*Wine Spectator* award and this with a team that largely consists of members who were never exposed to formal training in the hospitality industry, not to mention fine wines of the world. Several years of committed study, hard work and perseverance by all the members in the team brought this achievement home to South Africa."

Mosaic's sommelier brigade includes 36-year-old Moses Magwaza, who hails from KwaZulu-Natal, and is the current holder of the coveted Eat Out Wine Service Award.

Magwaza says he was introduced to the wonderful world of wine via a simple glass of rosé. "I started off 12 years ago as a gardener at the restaurant and, under the guidance of our cellar master, focused on my studies and wine knowledge, never realising I would become part of the team winning this coveted international award."





Photo: Dylan Swart

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Photo: Dylan Swart

Encouraged by the close-knit restaurant team, Magwaza has since passed several courses and is currently completing his Level 3 at The Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET), a British organisation regarded as one of the world's leading providers of wine education.

Also in the Mosaic wine team is one of the country's most exciting female sommeliers, 28-year-old Taryn Nortjé, who is currently busy with her WSET Level 4 Diploma, preparing to join the exclusive small group of female Cape Wine Masters, as well as Eric Welile Botha, who has worked at top establishments including Durban's The Big Easy.

During June the entire crew spent time in France, expanding their knowledge during visits to some of the country's finest estates. Focusing this year on the Champagne region, they returned with some of the world's rarest champagnes from Krug, Salon, Egly-Ouriot and Diebolt-Vallois, especially for guests of Restaurant Mosaic.

Du Plessis discusses some of his favourites in the Mosaic cellar: "One of them is our near complete flight of Klein Constantia Vin de Constance vintages, in total 25 vintages, dating back to 1988. Another rare collection is the

Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, now counting 35 labels, including different vintages of all the wines produced by the estate. We were given an annual allocation by owner Aubert de Villaine after his visit to Restaurant Mosaic," Du Plessis explains.

He's also partial to a very special nectar from Hungary: "I have a sweet tooth and one of the exceptionally rare sweet 'wines' in the cellar is the Tokaji Essencia, some with sugar content as high as 800g/l. It is irresistible sipped off a silver spoon."

Is there any wine not in the Mosaic collection that Du Plessis would really like to get hold of? "For a very long time we were hoping to buy a bottle or two of Petrus and Le Pin from Pomerol, France. Now we are very fortunate to have the odd bottle of Le

Pin in the cellar, and we are on the allocation list with Petrus to receive their Grand Vin every vintage. We still have our fingers crossed for an annual allocation from Le Pin."

Part of Restaurant Mosaic at The Orient's international success is that they take their food and wine pairing extremely seriously, with the team meeting every Tuesday to choose the perfect wines to match award-winning Chef Chantel Dartnall's extraordinary culinary creations.

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Photo: Lisa Hnatowicz

Moses Magwaza and Taryn Nortjé

One of Du Plessis's favourite pairings on Dartnall's current degustation menu *Samsāraṇa* – from the ancient Sanskrit text depicting the ever-continuous cyclicity of life – is Indochine Fragrance. Dartnall's dish, inspired by a trip to Vietnam, is suckling pig served with fragrant coconut curry and hints of star anise and is accompanied by Trimbach Gewurztraminer Reserve 2007 from Alsace in France.

Dartnall has serious credentials. Trained here in South Africa, she has worked in some of the UK's finest establishments and was named the world's Best Female Chef at The Best Chef Awards in Warsaw, Poland last year.

And she's as passionate about wine as she is about food, sometimes tasting a specific wine and then creating a dish around it.

"After tasting the Domaine Henri Bourgeois Jadis Sauvignon Blanc 2010 from Sancerre we started to experiment with St Nectaire cheese and came up with a creamy risotto drizzled with a light honey and orange glaze, which we called Honeycomb. Each complemented the other; for me it was a perfect pairing," she reveals.

Du Plessis, Dartnall and Magwaza will be flying the South African flag high when they attend the New York Wine Experience Grand Awards Banquet in New York in October to receive their prestigious award.

The last word goes to Du Plessis: "Winning this award is huge for Restaurant Mosaic, but we have had a lot of fun making friends with every winemaker we have met over the course of this remarkable journey – both here in South Africa as well as overseas. I never thought something that has given us so much pleasure would actually be considered for such a prestigious award."



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