



HOTEL REVIEW

ORIENT BOUTIQUE HOTEL, ELANDSFONTEIN, PRETORIA
SHANTHINI NAIDOO

SO MANY STARS The Orient is home to the Restaurant Mosaic. Pictures: © Marsel Roothman

FINE-DINING FORTRESS

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LOCATION

This citadel is just outside Pretoria, on a 280ha reserve. The experience is a mind-bender, and it starts at the gate. Drive along a twisting pathway and try not to be distracted by buck and zebra popping their ears up. A palace emerges suddenly, complete with turrets and red-brown walls straight out of Marrakesh.

STYLE

This Moroccan-style fortress was designed as a “restaurant with rooms” – just nine ornate suites, custom-built for award-winning chef Chantel Dartnall and her mother, Mari, who manages the space.

Mari and Chantel say Restaurant Mosaic at the Orient is a combination of all their loves. Moorish, Indian and Moroccan features with a bit of art nouveau on the restaurant side.

The hotel is a trove of baroque furnishings recalling colonial India and 19th-century Provence, with a hint of traditional Afrikaner heritage and plenty of local art thrown in.

Each suite is decorated according to its name. Our Constantinople room featured an original, 180-year-old carved bedstead, floating several feet off the ground with an intricate, heavy coverlet in dizzying oriental design. At bedtime, I found a crackly book of poetry by Persian poet Rumi, and a little teddy bear with good-night chocolates.

SERVICE

The team travels internationally for our local winter season, creating new menus and bringing back special ingredients.

In the restaurant, expect treatment that is reminiscent of five-star European dining: friendly-formal, but not a hair out of place.

The restaurant seats fewer than 50 people and is open just a few nights a week.

ACTIVITIES

You could try your hand at pétanque, (a ball sport from the early 1900s). Check out the bronzes by Tienie Pritchard around the gardens. An art gallery dedicated to Adriaan Boshoff will open soon.

On a balmy night, sit by the pool, look up at the moon and dream you’re in Morocco.

HOW’S THE GRUB?

The main attraction is the eating. The menu is presented in prose, a page of couplets to go with each course, which Dartnall recites to you at the table. There are probably a hundred interesting elements, like fairytale mushrooms and “toadstools” (made of meringue, or was it a savoury macaron?) that went with a wild mushroom risotto.

The menus range from five to 10 courses with several surprises in between. One was tomato pearls with aged balsamic vinegar, served in an eye dropper.

A pea is not a pea. It was decanted, the shell filled with a pea purée, before the

delicate, steamed baby peas were replaced.

The new menu, Natura Naturans, includes a langoustine and peach dish with edible pearls, inspired by Dartnall’s Ouma.

BEST TIME TO GO

Any time, except when they take their annual break in the European summer. The hotel and restaurant are adults-only.

RATES

About R3,000 per room per night, menus start at R900.

CONTACT

See restaurantmosaic.com

Naidoo was a guest of Restaurant Mosaic at the Orient.



PRETTIEST PLATE
“Under the Sheets”
is langoustine with
white peach