

Top chef to blossom in Hong Kong

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IF THERE'S one thing that chef Chantel Dartnall isn't, it's complacent.

She may have been voted the best female chef in the world recently, but she doesn't let her culinary stardom go to her head.

The Elandsfontein-born chef, who is the owner and head chef of Restaurant Mosaic at the Orient Boutique Hotel outside Pretoria, tells how she pushes herself to reach new heights.

"I always say that if you surround yourself with people who are better at your job than you are, then you are heading towards success.

"You will make sure you work 10 times as hard to be just as good as that person, and that is what my team and I have done. We have surrounded ourselves with people who always push the boundaries."

She has been twice voted as South African Chef of the Year and was recently placed in the top 200 Chefs of the World by the influential La Liste Awards in Paris.

Her restaurant, which offers botanical cuisine, was also voted as one of the top 200 restaurants in the world in the 2019 La Liste, which comprises 1 184 top restaurants on the planet.

This week, the 38-year-old was chosen to become South Africa's ambassador of gastronomy at the Wines of South Africa 360 Years of Winemaking History celebration, which takes place in Hong Kong next month.

The setting is the Skye Restaurant at The Pullman Park Lane, where Dartnall – accompanied by two members of her Mosaic team, Antro Davel and Anna Stoffberg – will join forces with Skye Restaurant executive head chef Lee Adams.

"I'm thrilled to be able to not only



THE WORLD'S best female chef Chantel Dartnall has been chosen to be South Africa's ambassador of gastronomy at the prestigious Wines of South Africa 360 Years of Winemaking History celebration, which takes place in Hong Kong next month. | Supplied

showcase South Africa's booming culinary scene, but also Mosaic's botanical cuisine," she says.

Dartnall is devising some extraordinary dishes especially for the occasion, such as her African Aromas, which consists of beef fillet, kumquat preserve and madumbi puree.

She will also showcase some recent favourites including Under the Veil, a composition of langoustine, white

peach and hibiscus; Francolin Forest Fungi, a risotto and truffle extravaganza and for dessert The Earth Laughs in Flowers, which combines passion fruit, Valrhona chocolate and violets in a riot of colour and flavour.

"It's going to be pretty intense working with Adams in his kitchen. For every single event we have had to custom make a menu, which is going to be paired with selected wines from

the winemakers."

Dartnall looks forward to meeting and working with some of Hong Kong's finest chefs and exchanging ideas. She, too, plans to use the opportunity to showcase what South African cuisine is all about.

"We have immensely talented chefs who are doing great things. I hope that the world will one day see that we can be on par with the very best chefs in the world."

Dartnall has been cooking for as long as she can remember.

"I got most of my inspiration from my grandfather. He spent a lot of time in the kitchen and was an incredible cook. Everything he prepared was done with so much care and attention and it opened my eyes to the possibilities in the culinary world.

"My grandfather's grandfather from my dad's side was the *chef patissier* for the Royal Family. My uncle is passionate about breadmaking, so my father's side of the family is where I got my cooking gene from."

Dartnall was initially a vegetarian, but was forced to change when she began her culinary career at 17.

"Growing up in typical Afrikaans family, that's pretty much unheard of. My mom used to always tell me that there is no problem with being a vegetarian as long as I cook for myself. That inspired me to plant herbs and to enhance the flavour of my vegetarian dishes, and experiment with flowers.

"It was always in the back of my mind to be one of the top chefs in the world.

"We have phenomenal restaurants in the country and our chefs are all pushing the boundaries of what we are creating.

"We have a variety of chef schools we can select from today, many more to choose from than a decade ago."