

# WVG

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## LEADING WOMEN

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CHANTEL DARTNALL



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**R**enowned not only in South Africa but in culinary circles around the world for her innovative and meticulous approach to modern fine dining – has twice been named South African Chef of the Year at the annual Eat Out Restaurant Awards.

Trained at the Prue Leith Culinary Academy, Dartnall has gained a huge wealth of knowledge from her extensive annual travels to some of the world's finest restaurants, in Italy, Portugal, Madeira, Spain and France.

Ever since she can remember she has always been very passionate about cooking and always wanted to be a chef. Inspired by the environment in which she grew up, her home (and Restaurant Mosaic at The Orient) is situated in the beautiful Francolin Conservancy with its abundance of wildlife, birds and indigenous plants. This was her playground where she could experiment and explore. After she completed her studies locally, she travelled to London to gain practical experience and was lucky enough to work with some of the world's best chefs. On her return from London it seemed only natural for her to open the restaurant of her dreams in an environment that is so close to her heart and blessed that her parents have always supported my passion and helped make her dreams become a reality.

She explains: "As a chef it is important for me to know what is happening in my industry across the globe and I enjoy meeting with other chefs, sometimes working with them, and experiencing their creativity. It inspires me to work harder and harder at what I do to ensure that our quality at Mosaic is parallel to what you would encounter in the best restaurants in the world."

But despite her extensive travels, Chantel also takes inspiration from Mosaic's gorgeous setting in the lush Francolin Conservancy in the Crocodile River Valley. Dartnall and her team have built longstanding relationships with local farmers and suppliers in the area and also grow some of their own produce. Restaurant Mosaic has always been a supporter of sustainable food practices.





Dartnall is known for producing nuanced, nature-inspired food to rival the best of French fine dining. She believes it is vital to serve visually appealing dishes that tell a story and start stimulating diners' senses from the moment the food arrives at the table. She produces dishes that are extraordinarily elegant while bursting with flavour. Flavour pairings are original, unusual and carefully engineered: think rainbow trout served with lime, vanilla and chervil. Sauces are perfectly executed: from classic bisque to a rich jus, all perfectly seasoned and textured. A West Coast lobster dish with citrus beurre blanc and morels, for instance, features a rich sauce that is delicately flavoured to permeate and complement the lobster – an “absolute knockout”, according to Eat Out judge Andy Fenner, who continues “There’s amazing attention to detail, radical technique on display and surely some of the most beautiful plating in South Africa.”

The prestigious Eat Out Awards, which celebrate the best of the South African restaurant industry, also placed her renowned venue Restaurant Mosaic at The Orient in the Top 10 Best Eating Establishments in South Africa. “Both times I received this wonderful award were truly unexpected. There was absolutely nothing different about the feeling of pure adrenaline and excitement of hearing my name announced. In 2009 I was still the new kid on the block and Restaurant Mosaic had only been open for three years. Five years later and I believe that both Mosaic and I are better known and established. I believe I am now more deserving of the title than I was in 2009” adds Chantel.











WG Magazine catches up with Chantal Dartnall...

*What was it like starting out as a chef...*

When I began working in London I was fresh out of college. I had worked in some wonderful kitchens in South Africa during my practical placement such as Ellerman House with Chef Craig McCormack and then Ile de France with Chef Marc Guebert. I was very excited to begin working in the Michelin starred kitchen of Chef Nico Ladenis at Chez Nico Ninety Park Lane and thereafter with Chef Michael Caines at Gidleigh Park. The working hours were intense but it taught me about stamina, dedication and perseverance. The most important lesson I learned, not only in London but also from the local chefs that I trained under, was in regard to consistency. The saying that you are only as good as the last plate you send out of the kitchen was drilled into us at every service in every kitchen I have ever worked in. Nothing except "perfection" was allowed to go out of the kitchen. They were all incredible learning experiences.

*Your cuisine tells a story which is nature inspired, elegant while bursting with flavours, her attention to details which is visually appealing...*

I believe it's vital to serve visually appealing dishes that tell a story and start stimulating the diners' senses from the moment the food arrives at the table.

Botanical Cuisine using only the best seasonal produce and featuring Mother Nature on a plate. Each dish is designed to reflect the beauty, balance, harmony and purity that you find in nature. It is not only about capturing nature's natural nuances but to also focus on how I can improve the experience for my guests by studying the medicinal properties of the edible herbs and flowers I include in the menu to aid in digestion, promote blood circulation and a general feeling of wellbeing.

One of the great masters of Botanical Cuisine, Chef Michel Bras has always been a great inspiration to me. His restaurant is on the top of the Aubrac plateau in Laguiole France, about four hours from Paris in the middle of nowhere. You get there by driving along long, winding roads in the country side. One salad has 29 different vegetables. You can feel you're starting to glow with health after eating it!



SEA MIST



SONG OF THE SEA



SIMPLY SHOOTS

CHANTEL DARTNALL





*Produce, creativity or technique...*

Definitely produce. More and more chefs are now focusing their attention on nature and the question of how best to capture the perfect balance of each ingredient presented on the plate. More focus is being placed on the sourcing, origin and consistency of ingredients - the ingredients themselves being seen as the ultimate dictator of the quality and success of the dish.

*You were awarded Chef of the Year in 2009 and again in 2014, what motivates you?*

It is always a great honour to receive acknowledgement for your hard work, especially in an environment filled with so many passionate and talented chefs. I find what motivates me and my team most is making our customers happy. There is no greater reward than having a customer get up from the dinner table and immediately make another reservation. They are settling the bill while planning to come and visit again.



*Your greatest influences in the kitchen...*

It is all about passion, perseverance, perfection and produce! It is important to focus on every aspect of the dish, not only the visual appeal and the perfect balance in taste and texture, but also about the entire experience that the chef is creating for the diner. What is the story that you want your dish to tell?

Sometimes assessing something as simple as the cutlery that is presented to eat the dish with can either make or break a perfect dining experience. I have always believed that it is not only the quality of the produce you use that ultimately affects the outcome of the dish but also the passion and energy with which the dish is prepared.

When it comes to sourcing my produce it is important to focus on sustainability and sensibility. It is very important for any chef to create a strong bond with his or her suppliers especially the farmers, and the best way to do this is to personally visit the farms where the fresh produce is grown or the animals are raised. Chefs need to have intimate knowledge of their suppliers. We as chefs need to support our local farmers who focus on sustainability, farm free range and organically in spite of the fact that their produce might be a bit more expensive.





