

Orient, the pearl in the oyster

RESTAURANT MOSAIC: A BUCKET-LIST DESTINATION

» Hotel and lauded eatery are near Hartbeespoort Dam.

LA DOLCE VITA



Adriaan Roets

It's almost like starting an Asterix adventure. "The year is 50 BC. Gaul is entirely occupied by the Romans. Well, not entirely... one small village of indomitable Gauls still holds out against the invaders."

Driving to The Orient in Elandsfontein, just a few kilometres from Hartbeespoort Dam, that's how my friend explains the private hotel.

We were talking about the Western Cape's dominance when it comes to culinary and stay-over experiences. It makes sense. There's winelands and mountainous vistas.

But The Orient and Restaurant Mosaic have become a destination outside of the maelstrom and the Western Cape that is even packed on a cold Wednesday night.

Why? The Orient is warmly opulent. The hotel with its India-inspired rooms and decor caters to hedonistic escapes that should threaten those without power suits shouting into smartphones, or food connoisseurs with a palette that will identify even the faintest flavour.

It doesn't. It's a place of fantasy. Inside the walls of the Franklin Conservancy where this great escape sits, nothing feels out of place, and nobody will either.

The lavish decor, double staircase, the little nooks in the gardens and the endless pieces of art that fill almost every wall feel like some mythical creature placed there as a gift to humanity to create serene calm.

Maybe that's why the hotel and restaurant have built such a following and became a bucket-list escape for anyone following food culture in South Africa.

Chef Chantel Dartnall quips about the fact that in her kitchen there's no shouting.

The calm is there to make each dish better, because where there's calm there's more focus on the emotions captured in a dish.

"When chefs from other countries visit they always find it surprising," she says.



The restaurant is modelled after the Belle Epoque restaurants in Paris. The Art Nouveau richness is a step away from minimalism.

Is that it? Is the fact that Restaurant Mosaic is just completely different that it has diners in the middle of the week? No, because many people become return customers, now used to the spot. In fact, loyalists visit twice a year for each menu change.

Then it must be the food. Each dish presented like a swarthy canvas from a master painter, carefully tested and paired with a wine from Africa's largest wine cellar.

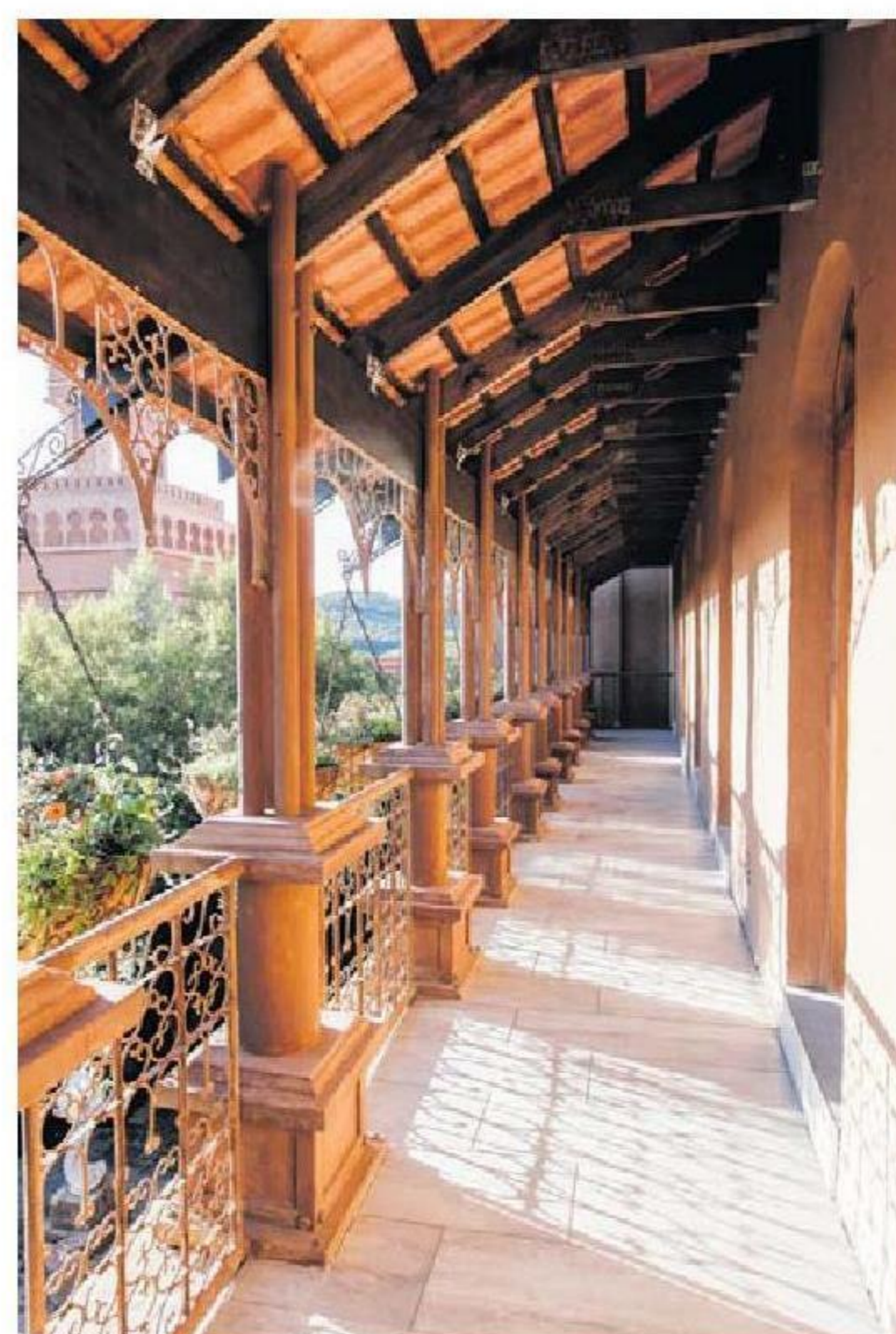
It's beautiful, rich and special. But that's to be expected. The restaurant is highly lauded and has become one of the country's best because standards never slip.

Then Dartnall reveals all. It's respect.

From visiting each farm where products are stocked with the staff, importing ethical *foie gras* and taking each step to ensure nothing but the best reaches you when you enter the gates of the conservancy, there's such commitment that suppliers are even listed where possible.

But the team at The Orient and Restaurant Mosaic are not indomitable Gauls, rather, as Dartnall puts it: "We're the pearl in the oyster."

How wonderful to see the jewel right before Restaurant Mosaic takes its annual break from June 17 until July 12.



Pictures: Supplied and Marsel Roothman for *Wine Spectator* magazine