



The Adriaan Boshoff Museum is influenced by galleries abroad. Picture: Supplied

A feast for the eyes, tastebuds at Restaurant Mosaic

By Valerie Boje  Sep 22, 2020



Pretoria - A Friend on Facebook shared that she was at Restaurant Mosaic to celebrate her birthday and wedding anniversary. Anyone who has been fortunate to visit this acclaimed restaurant, situated in a beautiful natural area west of Pretoria, will know it is the kind of place one goes to for special occasions.

For its award-winning chef, Chantel Dartnall, there is plenty to celebrate as the restaurant and Orient Boutique Hotel reopened after lockdown with a new menu and a theme of renewal titled "Nasturtium": an Ode to Mother Earth.

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A media group was invited by Dartnall and her mother, Mari, to experience the venue and the spring menu, and I was excited to join as I had not been before.

The hotel is situated in the Francolin Conservancy in the Crocodile River valley, a 40-minute drive from Pretoria east on the Magalies toll road or the R104 past Atteridgeville.

As one heads up the winding path to the entrance, the towers of the Moorish-style

building emerge, and it is hard to believe one is still within the boundaries of the metro.



Chef Chantel Dartnall. Picture: Supplied

The greeting at the huge wooden doors of The Orient is warm and sets the tone for the afternoon to follow. Covid-19 protocols we have come to expect are handled discreetly yet meticulously, and we have time to wander through the beautifully-maintained gardens with a glass of champagne.

I am keen to see the Adriaan Boshoff Legacy art museum which opened last year, and have as my guide Chantel's mother Mari who is its custodian. It is world-class in design and, while the focus is on Boshoff there are also fine works by many other pre-eminent South African artists in the collection.

The ambiance of this gallery is enhanced by the spaciousness of the rooms, lighting and interesting furnishings, and, of course, its stunning setting.



An artistic creations on the plate at Mosaic. Picture: Supplied

We are called to move to the restaurant for lunch, and again the protocols required by law have been smoothly integrated into the experience. I am seated with long-time friend of Dartnall, Marina Smithers, and she shares more about this extraordinary chef and the equally extraordinary place the family calls home.

Chantel attended Pro Arte Alphen Park and Prue Leith's Chef's academy before working in London, among other places. She dreamed of her own restaurant so where better than at her parents' stunning hotel-home developed by her stepdad, businessman Cobus du Plessis.

Mosaic, a name which reflected a rich tapestry of its European influences, opened in 2006 and Chantel's botanical cuisine has won her numerous awards since, including Eat Out's SA Chef of the Year and International Best Female Chef while, thanks to wine-master Du

Plessis, the restaurant features on the Fine Wine World's Best Wine List.



An artistic creations on the plate at Mosaic. Picture: Supplied

The restaurant is perfectly suited to the new normal in dining with booth seating and private dining rooms. As I admire the detail, Smithers explains the art nouveau style chosen by the Dartnalls is influenced by famous Belle Epoque restaurants in Paris.

Plans this year were curtailed by Covid-19, but the family usually travels regularly to Europe, dining and wine tasting, and this provides much of Chantel's inspiration.

Dégustation is a tasting menu with a range of small dishes, served at a leisurely pace, and adding up to a meal, and there are four options - Vegetarian Dégustation, Market Dégustation, the Grande Dégustation or the Descatarian Dégustation - ranging in price from R1560 to R2125 per person. We were spoiled with wine pairing with our meal.

The menu comes in a beautiful folder of notes or cards in a box, with titbits of information behind the immaculately-presented dishes.

Individual courses have romantic names like "Tidal Pool" (a seafood first course that references childhood memories of the Bloukrans Kloof) to "Hidden Gem" (a beetroot pot that references Greek mythology); "Rungis Market" (a reference to a fresh food market in Paris) and so on.

At the end there's a lemony dessert with a dainty dragonfly called "Summertime Daydreaming" (a reminder of family holidays) or the Blink-Blaar-Wag-* -Bietjie (Charles Arnaud cheese Comté with bees wax honey cream and pumpkin seed granola inspired by the garden of The Orient).

Each dish was greeted enthusiastically by our group spaced out around the restaurant, and Chantel took time to stop by each table and chat to her guests.

I asked to see one of the rooms and Mari guided me to two of the suites above the restaurant, explaining the protocols which are being observed to ensure guests' health and safety while at The Orient.

The rooms are sumptuous, with carved doors, oriental rugs, plush cushions and works of art on the wall. I could imagine nothing nicer than a night or two in the Marrakesh suite - in fact, I commented I could have cheerfully spent the whole of lockdown there.