

HEIRLOOM STATUS

PIONEERING WINE ESTATE
SIMONSIG CAPTIVATES ALL THE
SENSES WITH A LAVISH
SPLURGE OF TRADITION AND
MODERNITY SERVED UP IN ITS
NEW RESTAURANT, CUVEE

PHOTOGRAPHS GREG COX PRODUCTION SUMIEN BRINK TEXT ALMA VIVIERS



ASPARAGUS WITH
BEURRE BLANC,
DRIED APRICOT
AND SALMON ROE



This page: The clever use of mirrors and glass
invite the scenic outdoors inside.

CUVEE

is a wine term used, among others, to denote the very best juice from grapes tenderly pressed for making the finest wine or champagne in the cellar. As the pioneers of South Africa's first Méthode Cap Classique, wine estate Simonsig baptised its new restaurant with the name in order to speak not only of the establishment's superior standing, but also of the esteemed heritage of its owners, the Malan family.

Concept Design's Neil Stemmet and Jacques Erasmus were tasked with developing the concept for the restaurant, in its entirety. "I started working on the interior and ended up in the garden," muses Neil. "The whole design process was an organic one that evolved naturally from the 'soul' of the restaurant."

In order to unearth an authentic character for the space, Neil delved not only into the history of the Malan family, but also into that of the whole Stellenbosch region, with the result that the restaurant has the look of a cherished heirloom – stately yet graciously restrained.

Here, old meets new with genuine family treasures – an installation of ceramic plates that once belonged to the Malan brothers' late mother – consorting happily with more contemporary pieces, such as a series of vacant white picture frames. Items from the family's collection of glassware have also found their way into two of Jacques' signature chandeliers, while Tokyo pop chairs sit comfortably with more traditional heavy-set wooden furnishings.

The table settings, by contrast, are an impossibly glamorous affair, where stylish Arthur Krupp cutlery rubs shoulders with fine French-linen napkins, and crystal vases are filled with overflowing with fresh-cut garden roses.

The food is approachable and honest, yet not without a modern edge. Here, you'll be hard-pressed to find precariously balanced stacks of this and that drizzled and dotted with all manner of unidentifiable sauce. Instead, expect familiar Cape Dutch favourites that not only pay homage to their own unique heritage, but are also made from the freshest local ingredients – think Franschoek trout, Winelands berries and cheeses, and fruit, nuts, herbs and vegetables from the estate itself.

"All the dishes have been created to offer layers of clean flavours and textures, and the estate's wines played a significant role in the development of the menu," explains Jacques, who is quick to add that, far from competing with one another, food and wine coexist in a delicate balance.

So, take a traditional starter of asparagus, which, in this case, is reinterpreted with a dried-apricot *beurre blanc* and salmon roe – the unexpected saltiness of the roe complements the sweet-sour creaminess of the apricot *beurre blanc* and is beautifully balanced with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc. Or the way smoked Franschoek-trout terrine with smoked brinjal, pear and cream cheese served with caper berries becomes the perfect partner to Simonsig's Brut rosé. Then there's the restaurant's signature dish of a classic fillet of beef, served Café de Paris style in celebration of the Malan family's French-Huguenot heritage. Here, the wonderfully fragrant gratinated butter sauce (conjured from no fewer than 32 ingredients) is complemented by a glass of Merindol Syrah. Sommelier Elbie Theron recommends an unwooded Pinotage to celebrate the berries in the Franschoek trout, encrusted in dried cranberries, estate nuts and Italian parsley. For dessert, the slow-sugar-roasted strawberries served with gold leaf and sorbet are perfumed with Vin de Liza, the estate's Noble Late Harvest.

Although the style of cooking has European undertones, and despite the wine-matching prerogative, there is abundant room for local and modern interpretation, with alternatives driven by the changing of the seasons and the availability of fresh produce rather than prevailing trends. And, like the music, which has been carefully scripted by composer David Patrick to create distinct morning, afternoon and evening moods, the menu and the ambience in general make for a setting that encourages the longing to linger. **W**

Cuvée Restaurant, Simonsig Estate, Kromme Rhee Road, Stellenbosch; open Tuesday to Thursday, 9 am to 5 pm, Friday to Saturday, 9 am to 10 pm, and Sunday for lunch. For bookings, tel: (021) 888-4932 or e-mail cuvée@simonsig.co.za.



This page: Cuvée is the brainchild of "food artist" Jacques Erasmus (left) and designer Neil Stemmet (right) of Koncept Design. Previous spread: The retro-inspired light fittings mimic the bubbles of the famous Simonsig Kaapse Vonkel sparkling wine; the decor speaks of timeless Stellenbosch elegance with whimsical touches; tasty morsels are served with a tasting of Simonsig's sparkling wines; Karl-Heinz Beukes serves Simonsig's best from behind the impressive bar counter; floor-length curtains give the otherwise contemporary space a nostalgic feel; pan-grilled chicken-breast fillet stuffed with spring onion and cream cheese, in vine leaves with stewed dried peach.

“THE FOOD IS APPROACHABLE AND HONEST, YET NOT WITHOUT A MODERN EDGE”



BEEF TARTARE WITH HOLLANDAISE SAUCE, TRUFFLE OIL AND SHAVED PARMESAN

ASPARAGUS WITH BEURRE BLANC, DRIED APRICOT AND SALMON ROE

Serves 4

Preparation: 15 minutes**Cooking:** 25 minutes

200 g fresh asparagus, peeled and blanched
12 dried apricots, poached, until soft
4 t salmon roe

For the *beurre blanc*

1 onion, chopped
3 cups white wine
a few sprigs of thyme
2 cloves of garlic, crushed
1 cup cream
2 t Dijon mustard
125 g butter
a pinch each of sugar, salt and white pepper
nutmeg, grated

To make the *beurre blanc*: In a saucepan, bring the onion, white wine, thyme and garlic to a boil, and reduce to 1 cup. Add the cream and reduce a little more. Add the mustard and whisk in the butter. Season with the sugar, salt, white pepper and nutmeg. Just before serving, blitz with a stick blender, until thick and frothy.

To serve: Distribute the asparagus among four serving plates then pour over the *beurre blanc*. Plate the apricots and top with the salmon roe.

BEEF TARTARE WITH HOLLANDAISE SAUCE, TRUFFLE OIL AND SHAVED PARMESAN

Serves 6

Preparation: 25 minutes**Cooking:** 5 minutes

caper berries, for garnishing
crisp fried onion rings, for garnishing
Parmesan, shaved, for garnishing
aniseed bread, toasted, for serving

For the beef tartare

450 g beef fillet, cubed
1 T chopped gherkin
1 T chopped Italian flat-leaf parsley
1 T chopped spring onion
1 T chopped caper
½ t truffle oil
2 t Dijon mustard
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

For the hollandaise sauce

4 free-range eggs
3 T white-wine vinegar
2 t Dijon mustard
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
500 g butter, melted
truffle oil, for seasoning
a little cream, for thinning (optional)
nutmeg, grated, for seasoning

To make the beef tartare: In a mixing bowl, combine all the ingredients then spoon into six small moulds.

To make the hollandaise sauce:

Place the eggs, white-wine vinegar, mustard, and salt and pepper to taste, in a blender, and blend until light and fluffy. Pour the hot butter in a thick stream into the blender while running. Season with truffle oil, a little cream, if necessary, and the grated nutmeg.

To serve: Carefully remove the beef tartare from the moulds and place on serving plates. Spoon over the hollandaise sauce and place under a hot grill for a few seconds. Garnish with caper berries, crispy onion rings, Parmesan shavings and toasted aniseed bread.

WINELANDS BERRIES WITH CAP CLASSIQUE AND CREME FRAICHE

Serves 6

Preparation: 5 minutes**Cooking:** 10 minutes, plus setting

3 cups Simonsig Cuvée Royale sparkling wine
300 g sugar
7 gelatine leaves
300 g berries
3 T crème fraîche

In a saucepan, bring the wine to a boil then set aside. Add the sugar and stir until dissolved. Soak the gelatine leaves in cold water for 5 minutes then add to the warm wine mixture. Pour into red-wine glasses, to half fill. Allow to set. To serve, garnish with fresh berries and dollops of crème fraîche.



Opposite page, from top: The table settings are a simple celebration of fine linen, flowers and splashes of red; the unique chandeliers by Jacques Erasmus are eclectic collections of the Malan family's heirlooms.

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