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A taste of travel

This Joburg restaurant embraces destination dining

The gastronomic journey of two friends has taken them from a cooking school in Pretoria to the culinary academies and Michelin-star kitchens of Italy. On their days off, while drinking cheap Lambrusco, Tyeya Ngxola and Tim Stewart would talk about opening their own restaurant: the menu would be a map of South Africa, with dishes representing places that hold cherished memories or associations.

With La Petite Maison, they've done it, opening their little bistro and wine bar (it seats around 20 people) in Melville earlier this year.

'Conveying a sense of place through food is all about telling a story,' says Tim. 'Often we'll sit down and share a childhood memory or an interesting aspect of SA food culture. Sometimes it's about the ingredient and where it's found. We hope that this message is relayed when people eat here.'

When he makes the quail dish, for example, it takes him back to his grandfather's farm in Rooigrond. There, the old man is stalking and hunting down the birds that feast on his precious mielies. On the plate, the pan-roasted

quail and buttered mielies come together in harmony.

Tyeya's South African take on risotto features Cape Malay spiced prawns and squid. 'The dish comes from my heart. It reminds me of the time I spent in Italy learning to make it.'

Beyond the culinary techniques, the duo were also inspired in Italy by 'the reverence for regional products and dishes. They form the basis of the Italian identity. You are what you eat. We wanted to take this idea of regionality and put our own spin on things.'

Diners at La Petite Maison map their own route through the menu, each course giving a few options of where to head next. 'South Africa has such a broad spectrum of cultures and communities, and we like to give people the choice of where to go.' The journey is not a fixed one – the map will change according to the season and new inspiration. Who knows where their appetites may take them next?

1 Seventh Street, Melville, 010-593-7986



CHEFS ON HOLIDAY



Ina Paarman, founder of Paarman Foods

One of the best holidays I've had was a trip on the Orient Express train from Turkey to Italy. Next up is a cruise from Copenhagen to St Petersburg. That's my type of holiday – get up, have breakfast and do whatever I feel like. No PT.

My favourite food destinations are France and Italy, but England is good for supermarket trends. London always has something new because there are so many immigrants there.

When I had the chance to taste the butter in France, it dawned on me that all these things we thought were so much better than ours weren't actually better. SA's raw ingredients are vastly underrated.

The place that surprised me most was Morocco. One would imagine the food to be very hot, but it isn't. It's just a very clever, gentle use of spices.

The best meal I've had was in Copenhagen. The seafood is amazing, especially the herring.

I enjoy cooking when I'm on holiday, especially if I have somebody nice in the kitchen with me. You want someone who is in harmony with what you're doing.

The place in SA everyone should visit is Bushmans Kloof in the Cederberg. So beautiful.

I always enjoy going to Stilbaai to visit a good friend of mine. It's an absolute pleasure to cook with him, and the name says it all – it's so quiet and restful there.

Ina Paarman has been stocking SA pantries for almost three decades. Look out for the new antipasti range. paarman.co.za

Supplied: Siveshen Chettyar

MORE GLOBE TROTTING

» **The Turbine Hotel** in Knysna is having a monthly dinner inspired by various countries. On 4 July, it's a typical American Fourth of July feast; on 1 August it's the unique cuisine of Korea; Germany's hearty comfort foods are in the spotlight on 5 September; discover Madagascar on a plate on 30 October; and tuck into the Tuscan cuisine of Italy on 7 November. Each meal is R165 pp. Booking essential, 044-302-5746 » **Durbanville Hills** wine estate in Cape Town has also been serving up global cuisine at its 'Winter of Wander' evenings – coming up is Austria on 11 July and Spain on 8 August. Expect three-course meals paired with wine. R325 pp. Booking essential. 021-558-1300

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