

LOCAL LOVELY

Classical, Italian regional cooking paired with one of the finest international wine lists in the Cape is the reward for those who visit Restaurant Mangiare at Capelands, a new restaurant amongst the vineyards of Somerset West with dramatic views of the mountains and the sea.

There's been a quiet *gourmet* revolution in Somerset West in recent years. So far, it encompasses world-renowned olive oil, wines and cheese, expertly roasted coffee, fresh salmon trout and export-quality fruit, and a clutch of weekend food markets. Award-winning restaurants cannot be far off. The development of a food and wine culture in the Helderberg region is long overdue, according to locals who include not only a well-established German community but, increasingly, young, affluent families as hungry for homegrown, organic produce as they are for authentic dining experiences on their doorstep. Cape Town may have the most sophisticated and cosmopolitan food culture in the country but there are more award-winning restaurants in the winelands than anywhere else in South Africa.

It is by word of mouth that I discover Restaurant Mangiare at Capelands Estate, next door to Waterkloof on the slopes of the Schaapenberg mountains between Somerset West and Sir Lowry's Pass village. From up here, the views across False Bay stretch all the way from Hangklip to Cape Point.

Unlike its smart neighbour – the iconic glass-and-steel Waterkloof winery and restaurant – Ca-

pelands is more of a low key, family affair. The owners are German-Italian Johann Innerhofer, an experienced wine auctioneer and wine investor from Murano in South Tyrol in Italy – a region as famous for its ski resorts as for its food culture – and his fun-loving, Milanese-born wife, Laura.

Johann's love for wine started at a young age, as did his interest in cooking. At various stages of his career, he has studied wine, launched a *gourmet* club, been president of Murano's internationally renowned wine festival, organised numerous prestigious wine auctions around the globe, run an advertising agency and, in between, travelled to almost every wine region imaginable in his quest to educate his palate and extend his knowledge of the world's greatest wines. Like most serious wine collectors, he has detailed tasting notes for every wine he's ever tasted. Wine is an obsession as much as a passion for this man who talks about it with an intensity that is infectious.

Talking to him I realise that it takes skill, experience and gut feel to identify newly released wines that will show exceptional ageing potential. "The first rule of investing is to only buy wines that you really like. If it later ends up selling for a decent

01
THE INTERIOR IS SIMPLE
AND UNADORNED, BESIDES
ORIGINAL ART SUCH AS THIS
PAINTING BY UMBRIAN ARTIST
SILVI LUIGI.





02

02 TAGLIATA, DRY-AGED SIRLOIN SERVED RARE, COMES WITH FRESH ROCKET, PARMESAN AND A TOPPING OF SUN-DRIED TOMATOES, ONIONS, GREEN OLIVES AND EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL.

03 ONCE A FARMHOUSE, THE RESTAURANT HAS HIGH CEILINGS, WOODEN FLOORS, HUGE SASH WINDOWS AND A FIREPLACE AS A CENTRAL FEATURE.

04 THE ORIGINAL JUKEBOX, A COLLECTOR'S ITEM, STARTS THE PARTY.

05 SASSICAIA IS ONE OF THE FINE ITALIAN WINES AVAILABLE ON THE EXTENSIVE WINE LIST.



03

Mangiare means 'to eat', which sounds to me like a gross understatement.



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profit on auction, that's secondary – just a bonus," he smiles. We could just as easily be talking about great art. Whether something has exceptional provenance or great beauty, it will always have an intrinsic value.

Johann and Laura bought the land that was to become Capelands six years ago, but only moved to South Africa in 2009 with their two young sons. Although long-term plans for the farm include the launch of a range of quality wines that display the regional character of this unique *terroir* wedged between mountain and sea, right now the focus is on their restaurant, Mangiare, and a smattering of self-catering cottages, simple but stylish cottages.

Mangiare means 'to eat', which sounds to me like a gross understatement. Anybody who is familiar with Italian culture will know that there is nothing mundane or simple about an Italian's reverence for food or the daily ritual of sitting down to a leisurely meal matched to good wines – it is as essential to life as breathing. "Enjoying food and wine is the most pleasure-filled moment of our day," confirms the vivacious Laura, who is quintessentially Italian with passionate opinions on everything from parenting to what constitutes the perfect *crème brûlée*.

Traditionally speaking, an Italian *ristorante* is more formal than a *trattoria*, while a *trattoria*, in turn, is more formal than an *osteria*. At Mangiare the focus is on classical, Italian, regional cooking rather than *haute cuisine* – more *trattoria* than *ristorante* – with a menu of unadorned, real food made from fresh, seasonal ingredients with outstanding local provenance. Add to this Johann's outstanding wine cellar – an impressive collection that includes many international labels from major European regions including Piedmont, Tuscany, Bordeaux and Burgundy- plus the familiar, relaxed *ambience* and gracious, hands-on owners, and



suddenly it's not unlike a country-style *osteria*. And therein lies its appeal. "What we do here is simple; we try and make it as intimate and welcoming as possible – it's really just an extension of our home," confirms Laura.

If glamorous interiors and designer bathrooms are important to you, then note Capelands boasts neither. Instead, the restaurant occupies an old farmhouse with covetable features such as high ceilings, wooden floors and huge sash windows. The décor is unassuming, plain even. There's a large central fireplace in the dining area to the right of the entrance and a bar, walk-in wine cellar, grand piano and original jukebox to the left with more tables. It feels as if you have stumbled into somebody's home rather than a restaurant, and it's not difficult to imagine a long lunch here turning into an all-night party. The service staff is relaxed and knowledgeable and focused on making you feel welcome.

They enjoy planning and catering for private functions, such as birthday parties for up to 100 guests. It is also worth noting that smaller parties – from 30 guests upwards – may reserve the entire restaurant for private use. Usually the restaurant is open from Thursday to Sunday, for lunch and dinner, but for special occasions it may be booked on any day. Outdoor tables beneath a shaded patio have views of vineyards, mountains and the sea.

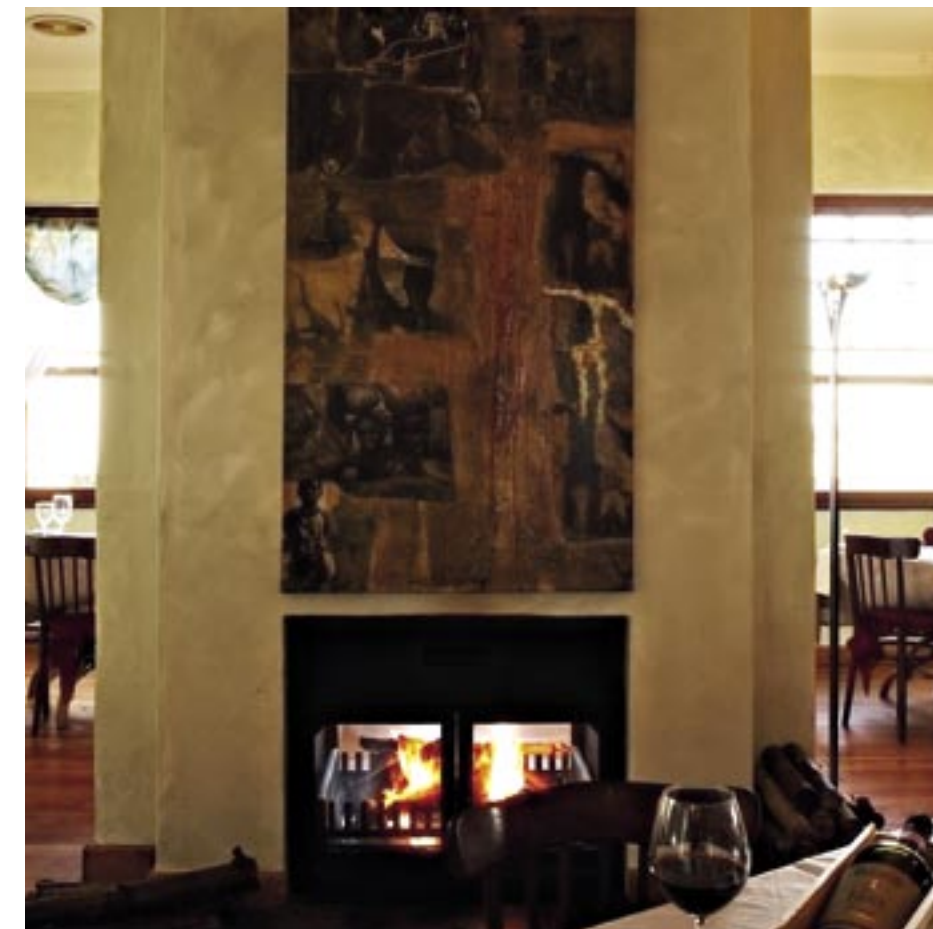
06
THE OWNERS' FAVOURITE
DESSERT ON THE MENU IS
A CLASSIC CRÈME BRÛLÉE.

07
OWNERS JOHANN INNER-
HOFER AND LAURA MAURI
WITH THEIR STAFF.

08
ABOVE THE FIREPLACE
HANGS A FINE EXAMPLE
OF A GÜNTHER EDLINGER,
AN ARTIST FROM SALZ-
BURG WHERE MOZART
WAS BORN.



07



08

Children are completely welcome here, rather than tolerated – even if lunch stretches to dinner.

The underlying food philosophy is one of utmost restraint. Each dish is pared down and simplified, relying on the quality of the ingredients such as organic herbs and vegetables from the garden or *shiitake* mushrooms from a neighbouring farm. The mushrooms are the only embellishment to perfectly cooked kingklip in a lemon crust with spinach and creamed potatoes. There is a rare beef *tagliata* made from grain-fed, dry-aged sirloin topped with extra-virgin olive oil, fresh rocket and Parmesan shavings and a thick, rustic soup of pasta and beans flavoured with fresh rosemary. The menu comes slightly unstuck when it veers away from the Italian specialities. Tuna *tartare*, although sea fresh and beautifully presented, doesn't stand up in terms of flavour against the meltingly tender *gnocchi* with Parma ham, sun-dried tomatoes, onions and green olives. A fresh salad of avocado and prawns with lime dressing doesn't entice me as much as an authentically delicious spaghetti Ragù.

Essentially, there is nothing new at Restaurant Mangiare. But then in my mind, that is the whole point. What you will experience is an abiding respect for quality and tradition within a relaxed, unpretentious setting. Attention to detail extends to the things that really count, such as beautiful stemware to complement the choice of top-quality wines, many of which are highly coveted bottles from famous estates. Not everybody will 'get' Capelands, but those that do will undoubtedly keep coming back for more.

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