

Grande Provence: Where heritage and umami meet

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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The first thing that strikes you about Grande Provence is the tranquillity that not even a gaggle of tourists disembarking from a rumbling tractor can ruffle. Despite its 325-year-old history, the estate exudes an air of youthful energy in the big, bold sculpture in the gardens and the creativity of the estate's head chef and winemaker in their respective fields.



Sculptures by Anton Smit grace the gardens

I was lucky enough to spend a perfect Spring afternoon idling under shady trees, sampling Chef Marvin Robyn's take on heritage dishes paired wines crafted by winemaker Thys Smit.

First off, what Marvin does with traditional South African ingredients is pure alchemy. His favourite word is umami, the Japanese concept of a fifth taste sensation, which best describes his talent for marrying flavours that are pure mouth magic.

We started off with his take on the local favourite, beetroot. But rendered elegant by a pink beetroot puree, honeycomb walnut praline, chevin with sour fig dressing. Thys paired this with the Grande Provence Merlot 2018.



Fire-roasted beetroot with pink beetroot puree, honeycomb walnut praline and chevin with wild sour fig dressing

Another choice on offer is Saldanha Bay oysters with fynbos infused kimchi, fresh plums, oyster kaiings and dune spinach. Now, I'm not a particular fan of oysters, but this was sublime. The Grande Provence Sauvignon Blanc 2018 works well with these flavours.

Chicken is a staple in my household, so it's not something I would normally order when dining out. But Marvin's free range chicken breast with stewed apricot, pickled curried onion, cream cabbage and gingerbread jus won my dish of the day award. Plate-lickingly delicious and well-matched with the Grande Provence Chenin Blanc 2018.



Beef ribeye with biltong dust, asparagus and kapokbos jus

For red-meat fans, the beef ribeye is served with biltong dust, cauliflower, button mushrooms, asparagus and kapokbos (wild rosemary) jus. The wine suggestion is the Grande Provence Shiraz 2017.

Marvin has also managed to take another family stalwart to a new level. His catch of the day is offset by the freshness of papaya, accompanied by sweet corn, grilled cos and a smoked snoek croquette with chilli caramel. The Grande Provence Chardonnay 2018 was Thys' pairing for this dish

No meal is complete without a truly delicious dessert. The 70% Valrhona chocolate fondant with amarula crème, KWV brandy snaps, apricot with chocolate sorbet satisfied my sugar addiction completely.



70% Valrhona chocolate fondant with amarula creme, KWV brandy snap and gingerbread jus

The magic at Grande Provence is not only happening in the kitchen. During a brief cellar tour, Thys revealed something you don't see very often. Nestled among the ubiquitous stainless steel vats and oak barrels are egg-shaped, natural clay Tuscan amphorae. He has been very successfully playing around with ancient, we're talking Greek and Roman old, wine making techniques. The result – the aromatic and ultra-elegant Grande Provence Amphora Chenin Blanc.



Grande Provence winemaker Thys Smit with his Tuscan clay amphorae

Incidentally, Thys' artistry with the fruit of the vine has won him a place as a finalist in the Diners Club Young Winemaker of the Year for his 2018 Grande Provence Chardonnay and 2018 Grande Provence Chenin Blanc. Good luck to him.

The new Spring Heritage Tasting Menu is priced at R495 and R595 for three and four courses respectively without wines and from R780 and R880 with an elegant Grande Provence wine paired with each dish. To book your table, call Tel: (021) 876 8600 or email reservations@grandeprovence.co.za.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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