

The Shortmarket Club expands with The Commissary

By  Eugene Yiga

12 Dec 2018

At the recent *Eat Out* Mercedes-Benz Restaurant Awards, The Shortmarket Club in Cape Town was ranked as one of the 20 best in the country.

“It was brilliant watching The Test Kitchen and The Pot Luck Club develop and grow,” says manager Simon Widdison. “We put a lot into them and we’re excited to try a new concept at The Shortmarket Club. We pinned it as ‘accessible fine dining’. It’s not as structured as The Test Kitchen with its tasting menus and wine pairings, and not as casual as The Pot Luck Club with its tapas. It fills the gap between the two.”



Celebrating South Africa's culinary rock stars at the *Eat Out* Mercedes-Benz Restaurant Awards

Eugene Yiga 21 Nov 2018



Pushing boundaries

In the role of head chef is Wesley Randles, who first fell in love with the industry while working as a busboy and sculler in Durban restaurants from the age of 14. The Silwood School of Cookery graduate has worked with Dale-Roberts for a decade: at La Colombe (recently ranked sixth in the world from TripAdvisor), as sous-chef at The Test Kitchen, and as head chef at The Pot Luck Club, which he describes as “exhilarating and fast-paced.”



Wesley Randles

“He’s an amazing mentor,” Randles says. “He pushes boundaries so it’s a matter of trying to keep up, which is a challenge because I’m just a kid from Durban standing next to one of the best chefs in the world.”

Randles's biggest lesson from Dale-Roberts has been to enjoy "constant progression" instead of being stagnant or afraid of change. And even if the first iteration isn't ideal, the result evolves into something better than before.

"I've enjoyed change no matter what," he says. "Whenever Luke says 'Let's do something different', I say 'Let's go for it'. It makes it easier to let go of things. The Pot Luck Club was my baby for so long but leaving has allowed other chefs to expand their careers. It's opened up the rankings and allowed them to strive, progress, and grow."



The Commissary Team

Playful, exciting, and fun

Widdison and Randles first became aware of the new venue when a friend at The House of Machines (described as "a consummate fusion of café, custom bike workshop and fine purveyor of essential menswear and accessories") told them that the space next door would be available once the "dodgy nightclub" reached the end of its lease. They wanted respectable neighbours and a classy restaurant was the perfect fit.



Shortmarket Club reintroduces popular Prix Fixe winter lunch menu

Ruth Cooper 5 Jul 2018

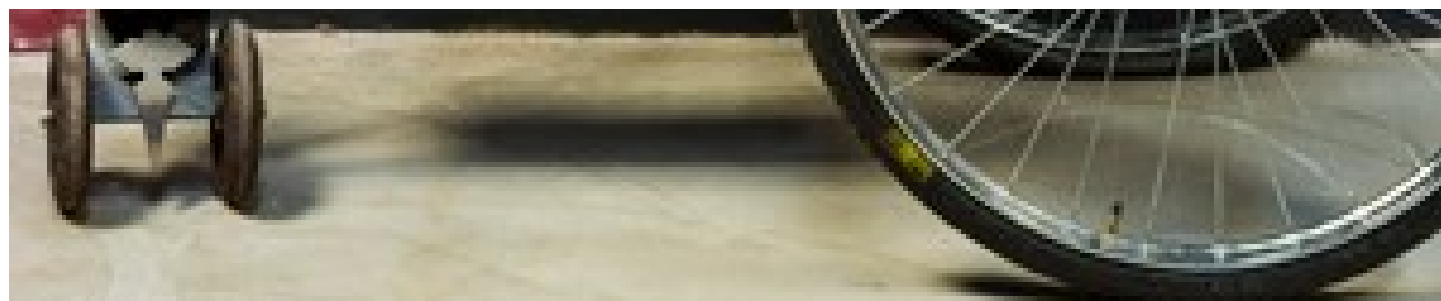


"There's a lot of foot traffic so we encourage people passing by," Widdison says. "Because it's disconcerting to

continuously book and not get a table, we make it more accessible. The bar area is informal dining – we don't take reservations for those tables – and the main dining area is what we book out."

The restaurant serves lunch and dinner. Widdison believes that this encourages people to linger, perhaps for business meetings, especially because the menu is designed for the luxurious space.





Shortmarket Club





Shortmarket Club

“I didn’t create things in a different space and then bring it here,” Randles says. “I wanted the food to suit the environment, which is ‘old-world chic’ with modern industrial hints. We’ve taken an old-world dining experience and made it cool by modernising some of the elements that go into it.”

Cape Town, SA’s foodie haven

Patrons are raving about original dishes that Randles describes as “playful, exciting, and fun.” Indeed, as a chef who doesn’t allow food fads to influence his cooking, he believes South Africans should look at what’s in front of us instead of copying what the rest of the world does.





The Commissary bar





The Commissary kitchen

“We have something special in Cape Town,” he says of the city voted as the world’s best in the *Telegraph* Travel Awards. “We can evolve the market and set the trends. And I think Cape Town is doing that, even though people don’t recognise it. But it’s only a matter of time before the rest of the world realises that Cape Town has its own trends and is progressing fast.”

Indeed, Widdison was confident from the start that restaurant would be popular; not just because Dale-Roberts and Randles have strong followings but because Cape Town, voted by readers of Condé Nast *Traveler* as the world’s best food city, love eating out.

“Being located just off Bree Street, we’re adding a different aspect to what everyone else is doing,” he says. “There’s an element of pressure, which is good because it forces us to push harder and make it work.”





The Commissary entrance





The Commissary bathroom

Back to basics

And they certainly have made it work, so much so that they've decided to expand. While Dale-Roberts has opened Salsify in Camps Bay, Widdison and Randles have opened The Commissary under the same roof The Shortmarket Club. With small plates and big flavours inspired by street food, *Eat Out* describes it as "like nothing you've seen before."



Contemporary class at Luke Dale-Roberts' Salsify

Ruth Cooper 21 Nov 2018



"A commissary is a basic provisions store which you'll find in the army, hospitals, and prisons," Randles says. "And while we definitely won't be serving prison fare, we're taking things back to basics in a big way."

The Commissary serves dinner from Monday to Saturday but doesn't take any reservations so your best option is to come early to secure a spot, either at a communal table or at the bar overlooking the chefs. Then get ready to savour the likes of pizza oven seared tuna tataki, panko crumbed octopus sliders and Korean fried chicken wings.

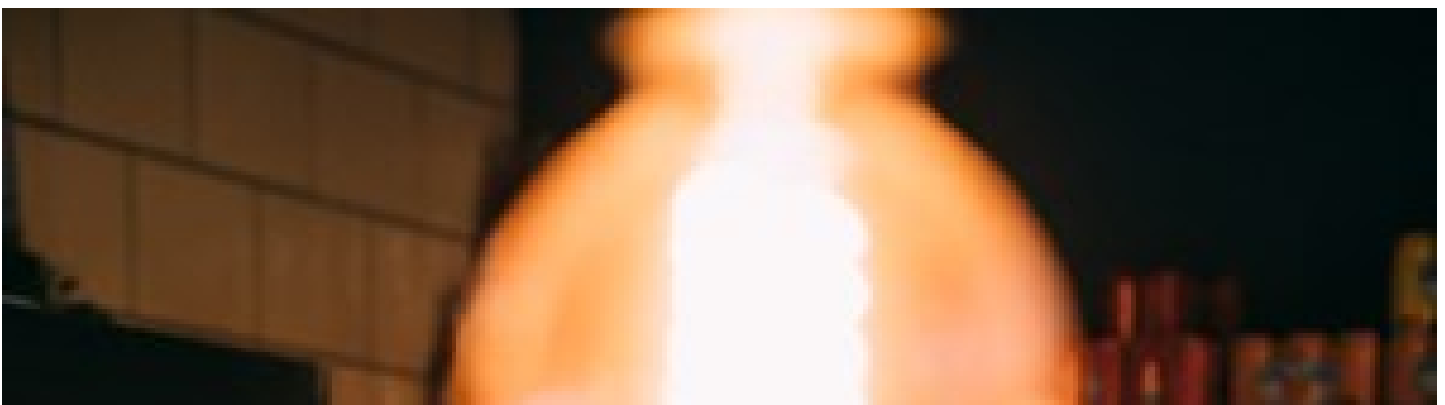


The Commissary

"I've had the idea in my head for a while," Randles says. "It's a space where people can come and enjoy seriously approachable, affordable food with big, unapologetic flavours."

As a mentor to the chefs he works with, Randles doesn't put pressure on himself to fill Dale-Roberts's shoes. Instead, he's excited to work with people that he describes as "strong kids with huge potential to grow."

"With the restaurant industry being so shaky and people struggling to find staff, it's important that we put more into our chefs," he says. "Pushing them and making them progress makes them happier and makes the food better."





Chef Wesley Randles





Randles values the awards the restaurants have won for their role in recognising staff and boosting morale. But he believes that chasing prizes for their own sake puts one in a bad mental state. He prefers to focus on creating food that, while he's in the kitchen making it, he knows will make him happy.

“You should be happy with what you’re producing every single day,” he says. “And if you love what you’re doing, that’s all that matters.”

The Shortmarket Club is located at 88 Shortmarket Street in Cape Town. Call 021 447 2874, email , or visit www.theshortmarketclub.co.za.

The Commissary is located at 88 Shortmarket Street in Cape Town. Call 021 422 2902, email , or visit www.facebook.com/thecommissaryct.

Photography by Andy Lund

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneiyiga.com, follow @eugeneiyiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneiyiga.com to say, um, hello.

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