

Inter-hotel challenge intrigue at the Vineyard Hotel

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

4 Apr 2017

Standing on the grass outside the Vineyard's conference centre, we sipped Pongrácz brut and early cups of cappuccino to ward off the autumnal chill, while an excited buzz grew on the night of the finale regional launch of the Cape Legends & Artisan Spirits Inter Hotel Challenge 2017.

The Cape hospitality's industry finest were treated to canapés of figgy-Woodview waygu biltong and walnut pâté canapés, prepared by Carl van Rooyen of the Vineyard, and little white ladles of lamb on sweet potato cakes with mint purée and cress, created by Roberto de Carvalho of the CTICC.





Once the sun had truly set behind Table Mountain, the night’s esteemed guests – including then-deputy Minister of Tourism Tokozile Xasa and her daughter arrived. The room was elegantly and exquisitely dressed by Flower Walker of Petals who in her inimitable way arranged each table individually, which was a great talking point.

Uplifting, investing and growing

Showcook editor Annette Kesler said 2017 is the fifth year of the inter hotel challenge, partnered by Distell’s fine wines and choice artisan spirits, with 29 hotels across the country competing against each other. The Palace at the Lost City, Hartford House in Natal and the NH Lord Charles launches had already been held with nine hotels more taking part this evening at the Vineyard. It’s fitting as Kesler stated: “The hotel industry is known for its professionalism, while also uplifting and investing in people is part of a huge ripple effect that raises the overall standard.”

Distell’s Carina Gous commented that what was important was supporting, upskilling and growing the youth to play an important role in the hospitality industry.



The menu was a collaborative executive chef's showcase. We enjoyed alternating dishes; Khoisan seaweed salt-cured smoked salmon with Rio Largo olive oil, cured beetroot salad, horseradish cream and ginger presented by Grant Cullingworth of the Westin, paired with Plaisir de Merle Chardonnay; Coal-smoked barbecued beetroot with smoked yoghurt and burnt orange as envisioned by Christo Pretorius of the Twelve Apostles and Spa, paired with Nederburg Heritage Heroes Beautiful Lady (*Gewürztraminer*).

Hibiscus chicken supreme followed with *sous vide* chicken breast filled with wild garlic, cranberry, hibiscus-infused Lancewood cream cheese, lemon-crush potato and hibiscus jus, created by Jocelyn Myers-Adams of The Table Bay and paired with superb Uitkyk Shiraz. The Puy lentil bobotie spring roll: Bo-Kaap dhal curry with lemon coriander, apricot chutney, pickled cucumber and four-onion salsa was presented by Henrico Grobbelaar of the Southern Sun The Cullinan, paired with Bain's Cape Mountain whisky, with the third option a succulent Springbok tortellini on cauliflower purée with toasted sunflower seeds and parmesan, as worked up by Rudi Liebenberg of the Belmond Mount Nelson and paired with Alto Rouge.

Minister of SA Tourism Tokozile Xasa gave the keynote address and spoke about the role hotels play in tourism. She stated that it gives her great pleasure to meet the people who are making the difference. Xasa began by thanking Kesler and *Showcook*'s managing editor Chania Morritt-Smith for championing the challenge: a wonderful initiative that encourages development, challenging and stretching those taking part to ensure the bar is continuously raised.

Tourism: All about the experience

On the importance of the hotel industry for tourism overall, Xasa stated that South Africa saw an 8% increase in tourist arrivals to the country over the past year with a 19% in December alone and roughly 10m tourists over the year. She added that "It's the big hotels that make things happen in the country," so thanked them for the work and service they put into making South Africa a sought-after destination of choice, whether for business or leisure.

Xasa added that tourism is ultimately the heartbeat of the economy, where we can talk resilience and growth in terms of job figures as it is this sector that recently created more than 120,000 jobs last year.

"You are playing in a dynamic, sexy, sassy industry and making it such that even young people entering the market think it is the place to be," praised Xasa. She explained that the culinary niche forms an integral part of the overall tourism value chain and that there's always room to grow the innovation and young talent to be upskilled so that South Africa remains a destination of choice. It is currently ranked 38th globally and in the top 15 as a long-haul destination. For this reason, Xasa looks forward to working with the industry to keep our hotels full, and once they're full to keep them that way.

Xasa ended by pointing out that the challenge lends credence to fact that tourism is about the experience more than it is the destination and that all the participants are winners in her eyes.

The main course was braised Angus beef cheek tart tatin with Shiitake mushroom 'ketchup', braising jus and summer vegetables presented by Carl van Rooyen of The Vineyard, paired with Durbanville Hills Rhinofields Pinotage.

Recognising future talent

Next was the key part of the evening with executive chefs introducing their candidate chefs and wine stewards. There was a clearly friendly yet competitive spirit on display with some having competed before and all wanting to win. That's because it presents a true development opportunity, with the winning chef of the 'hotel Oscars' visiting Dubai to be introduced to large-scale catering for two weeks at the JW Marquis Marriott and one week at The Ritz Carlton Marriott. The winning wine steward will be treated to a stay at the Red Carnation Hotel Group in London working closely with the 67 Pall Mall sommelier team then on to Scotland to visit the top distilleries; Deanston and Bunnahabhain, and to France Bisquit in stunning Cognac and finally an introduction to the world of wines in Bordeaux.

Regional cook-offs will take place in June in Johannesburg and Cape Town at the Capsicum Culinary Studio, and in Durban at the International Hotel School. The judging panel will be headed by Heinz Brunner, honorary lifetime president of the South African Chefs Association and team manager of the Culinary Olympics team; with the remainder of the panel comprising hospitality consultant Horst Frehse; innovative celebrity chef Craig Cormack; Woodview Angus and Waygu Beef's Megan Angus; Cape Wine Academy director Michelle Grimbeek; South African Sommeliers' Association chairman Higgo Jacobs; Sandy Harper (Cape Wine Master); and Mosaic sommelier Germain Lehodey.



What better way to end than with dessert and Avanti coffee: milk chocolate *Sacher torte* with hazelnut praline, raspberry salad, white chocolate vanilla creme, raspberry skin and dark chocolate dried raspberry truffle, created by Alfred Henry of the Southern Sun Cape Sun; or a silky mango mousse with passion fruit glaze and quenelle of banana frozen yoghurt accompanied by berry gel, vanilla crumble and tart pineapple salad presented by Chris Mare of the One&Only Cape Town. A fine finale with Van Ryn's 12-Year-Old, Bisquit VSOP and Bunnahabhain as winners of the generously donated raffle prizes; a luxurious weekend at Radisson Blu Waterfront, fine linen from Debbie Hall of The Hall Collection, pearl drop earrings from the Diamond Works Institute, and choice brandy from Van Ryn's and Uitkyk in aid of chefs' uniforms and replacement computers stolen from the Eziko Cooking & Training Centre in Langa were announced.

Truly a delightful evening filled with laughter, merriment and good cheer – those judges are in for a tough time!

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ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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