

Franschhoek's finest dining at Le Quartier Français' Tasting Room

 By Leigh Andrews

1 Jun 2016

Franschhoek is known as South Africa's culinary capital, for good reason. That artsy French influence is positively everywhere in the village, but as part of Le Quartier Français' Dine-A-Stay package, we got to experience something more true to our heritage: the once-in-a-lifetime African inspired eight-course offering LQF's The Tasting Room is known for.

On a gorgeous winter's day, after a morning of experiencing Franschhoek for the first time that involved wine-tasting and crunching along leafy cobbled sidewalks, marvelling at the impressive churches and pretty buildings that all beckon you over to breathe in the history, we slowly turned into the gates of the 21-room Le Quartier Français boutique hotel. Part of the Leeu Collection's hotel portfolio [from 1 September 2015](#), we were greeted at the car with a warm handshake and the reassuring words "We've been expecting you", and walked through the tranquil grounds – all lush groomed hedges and bright walls of purply-pink bougainvillea, as well as the most inviting dark almond of a pool that's solar-heated to 20°C – just a little too chilly for a relaxing swim, but oh-so-perfect for gazing at and getting your work-taxed mind into relaxed screensaver mode.



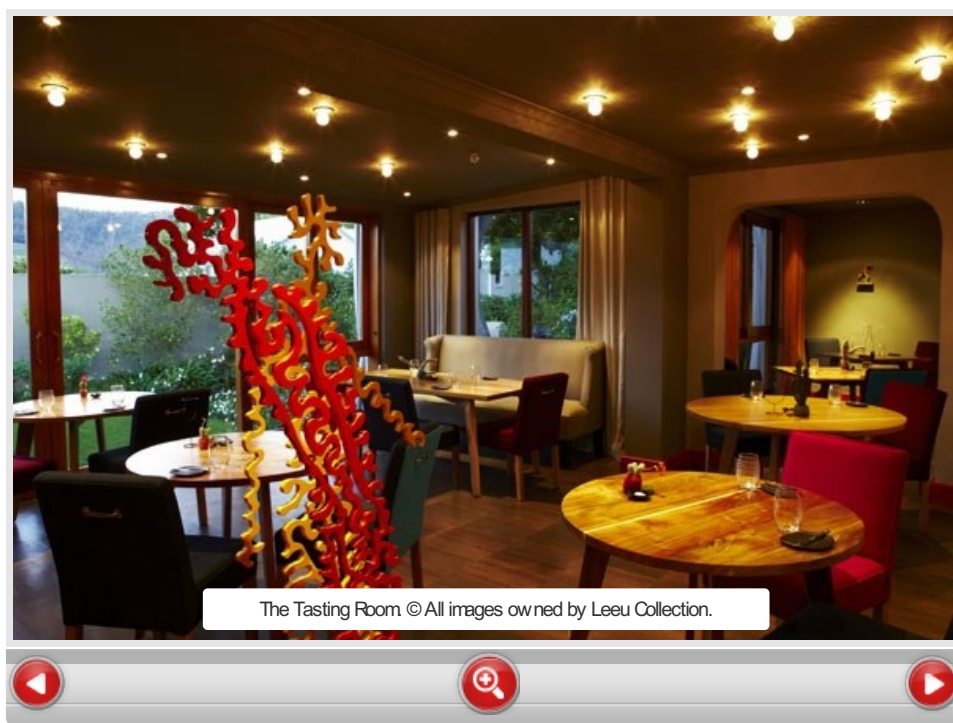
Our room itself was a quaint delight, decorated in tasteful greys with splashes of lime and cerise, warmly enhanced by a Lavazza espresso machine and pods that were magically restocked the second we left the room, as well as extremely covetable Le Creuset crockery (which is on sale with an all-too-tempting 10% discount on the property) and all manner of delightful snacks in the fridge and coffee station complimentary. It is the perfect winter accommodation as the rooms are equipped with underfloor heating that will have you purring at the pleasure of watching TV with toasty feet from padding around barefoot, and heated towel rails that make the usual rush of drying off after a lengthy soak in the tub or shower an absolute pleasure.

But the best bit? The delightful wood-burning fireplace that the staff lit in our absence after we strolled down to the Tasting Room for our leisurely 3.5 hour, 8-course dinner. Yes, those figures are accurate, as is the fact that its list of accolades is as long as my arm – most [recent shiny highlights](#) including third-best restaurant in SA and Service of the Year by the

Mercedes-Benz *Eat Out Awards* in 2014 and repeated in 2015, as well as San Pellegrino's World's Best Restaurant Award in 2013 and 2014. It's all based on executive chef Margot Janse's 'African inspired' surprise tasting menu, for which she's often quoted as saying: "I have no signature dish, South Africa is my signature" – that's all too evident if you're lucky enough to book a table in the acclaimed restaurant.

That Tasting Room experience

By no means imposing, it is warm and welcoming, with wooden tables and diners "dressed for the experience they want to have". While classed as a mobile-free zone for your own enjoyment and that of diners around you, we were by no means the only ones snapping shots as reminders of each and every course. Here's why: Before we even started with the eight-course meal, our tastebuds were prepped for the delicacies ahead with a complimentary flute of Moreson Brut Rosé Pink MCC; as well as raspberry-and-lime-coloured, lime-and-onion flavoured tulle and the fluffiest white black pepper (yes really, the black pepper was white), meant to be scooped up together and magically disappear on the tongue. Then we were served the amuse bouche breadboard, featuring mini terrarium bowls of curry that made for a stunning focal point. We left the board clean apart from the decorative rocks and natural fynbos that purely served as a visual aid. And then, the first big surprise of the night – a Lucky Star pilchards can that's whipped away to reveal a tiny loaf of sweet corn bread, baked in the can, accompanied by a pat of brown butter churned from the milk of chef Margot's adopted cow, Daisy.

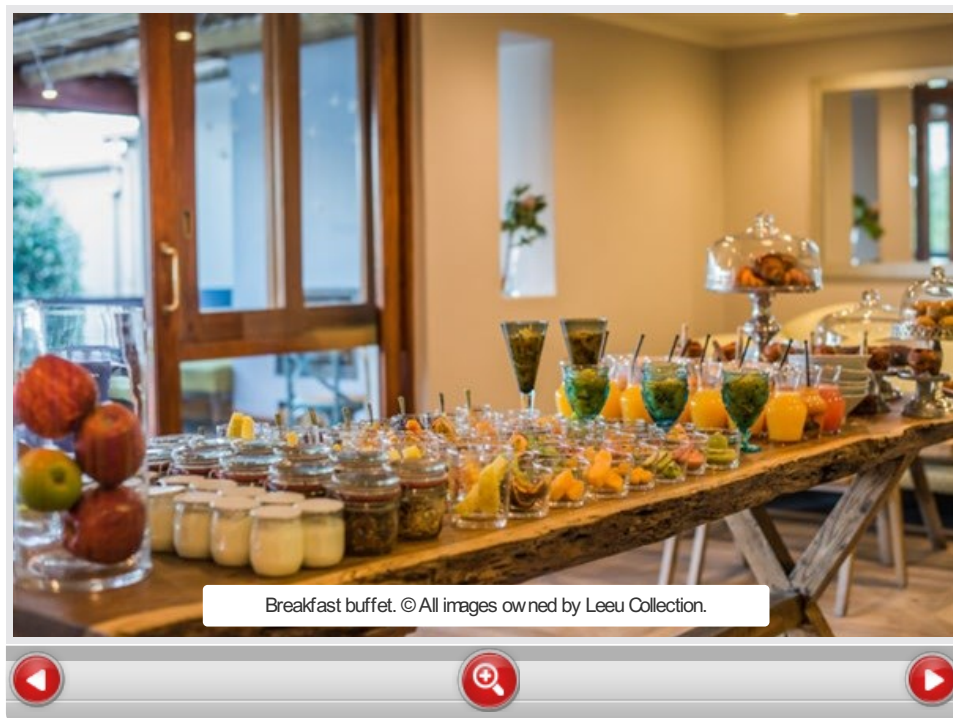


Tastebuds tempered, we were ready to begin, with each of us served from separate menus that made the local ingredients obvious. These were presented with a flourish and carefully explained in full on presentation, with precise wine-pairing ranging from the delightfully dry Graham Beck Brut Zero 2011 to the Lynx Golden Natural Sweet Viognier 2016, and extra-special care taken when it comes to allergies and dislikes. The courses that followed featured everything from a sweet corn custard-potjie to aromatic buchu herb, known locally for its medicinal properties. We ate broccoli in three incarnations; a cold soup that required smashing the back of my spoon against red blobs of beetroot gel; an octopus-radish dish topped with sorrel nori seaweed that softened and melted when drenched in warm lemon; a tiny blackened potato-coated quail's egg yolk; pipping goat *skilpaadjies* and gemsbok; and petal-fluffy Huguenot cheddar. But the *piece de resistance* for us was the dessert: For me, a snowglobe to crack open with a mini mallet, along with *num num* slices, ginger and rice pops. At the other end of the table? The innocent-sounding 'grenadilla, chocolate and buchu' – the presentation left us slack-jawed as the sorbet was plated at the table to resemble a potato, nestled among chocolatey roots and 'soil'.

All eight courses done there was still more to come: A choice of wine glass coffee or Rooibos tea with 'sweets', including an amazing dark chocolate nutty crunch bar, mini meringues and liquorice sweetie pies. A true treat in every sense of the word.

Warm nights and breakfast delights

On returning to our room we found the fire lit and crackling away, the bed cover corners turned down invitingly and a little jar of almonds to snack on, along with a 'Good night, sleep tight' note posted to the bathroom mirror and white terry cloth robes and slippers to slip on.



After a dreamy sleep we breakfasted at the Living Room, also on the LQF property and displaying a continental buffet table just begging to be photographed from every angle, as well as a cooked option of egg benedict (note that's singular), as well as salmon scrambled eggs or your traditional bacon, eggs and mushrooms served with a wide variety of hot drinks.

All in all a simply sublime weekend stay. Take up Le Quartier Français' **Dine-a-Stay** package before they close for winter break and you'll soon see why the Leeu Collection staff beam with a lion's pride. Alternatively, try something different by walking to Leeu House also firmly nestled in the village – it's just a block down the road in the direction of the must-see Huguenot Monument and equally impressive, just past Leeu's Tuk Tuk microbrewery (of course we did a tasting of their CBC ales and vowed to return and try all the tapas at some stage!) For something a little more exclusive, drive further up the road to the brand new property Leeu Estate set amongst the Franschhoek valley's vineyards, officially opening on 15 June.

**Leigh Andrews was a guest of Le Quartier Français and The Tasting Room. The Dine-A-Stay special package runs from 25 April to 18 June 2016 and again from 15 July to 31 August 2016, including a night's accommodation as well as the eight-course African-inspired surprise tasting menu, with the option of wine pairing. Le Quartier Français is located at the corner of Berg & Wilhelmina Streets Franschhoek, 7690, South Africa. The Tasting Room is only open for dinner from Tuesday to Saturday and reservations must be made 30-days in advance if not part of the accommodation package. Contact them on +27 21 492 2222 or res@lqf.co.za for rates and availability.*

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

- Make Ocean Eeven luxury guesthouse your Hermanus homebase - 20 Mar 2020
- Savour Hemel-en-Aarde's harmoniously matched food and wine at Creation Wine Estate - 18 Mar 2020
- Next-level pairings with Stellenbosch Hills' popcorn-and-Polkadraai - 30 Jan 2020
- Haute Cabrière brightens Franschhoek mornings with breakfast - 15 Jan 2020
- Feel charmingly rejuvenated at Kove Collection's renovated The Marly - 14 Jan 2020

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>