

Grand culinary indulgence at Grande Provence

 By Leigh Andrews

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There's nothing 'historically stuffy' about this 47-acre heritage wine estate dating back to 1694. In fact, it's the perfect blend of aching chic design touches that complement the elegant Cape Dutch architecture. And the food? My goodness, the food!

Grande Provence has a highly spirited past, dating back 300 years to when French Protestant Pierre Joubert hid his bible in a loaf of bread to avoid religious persecution and fled by ship with other Huguenots from his hometown in Provence. He eventually ended up in 'Elephants Corner', later to be renamed Franschhoek – at the Manor House of Grande Provence Heritage Wine Estate, to be precise, estimated as one of the very best preserved homesteads of the Cape.



Fast-forward to April 2004 and new owners, the Huka Retreats label, purchased Grande Provence Estate to indulge their passion for fine food, superb wine, extraordinary hospitality and their love of Africa.

Refined French relaxation at The Restaurant

The breadcrumbs of this tale are as fresh as ever, with The Restaurant at Grande Provence epitomising refined French relaxation at its best, with white-leather high-backed chairs lit by the flickering light of a crackling log fire to set your culinary expectations at an all-time high. The deeply recessed windows draw your eyes to the lush landscaped gardens and vineyards while soft jazz tinkling in the background rounds out the relaxing experience.

We were seated and warmly hosted by the super-attentive Jacobus, who also arranged a wine tasting post-meal. Executive chef Darren Badenhorst made a personal appearance at our table to note our likes and dislikes and made recommendations from there, explaining each item on the menu in great detail, which ultimately made our decision that much trickier, as absolutely everything sounded like a must-try.

Choose we did but first, the complimentary breadboard...

Breadboard of my dreams

This is not your average 'tiny hard rolls and foil-wrapped marge' breadboard – in fact, I'd go back just to sample these delights again. The butteriest, flakiest cheese straws were served with a glass pot of lemony mayo, along with an espresso tub of basil pesto and a pat of warm rosemary-sprigged butter. These were ideal for lightly slathering on the perfectly anise-y *mosbolletjie* domes and tiny slices of seeded fruit loaf that made up the rest of the breadboard.



And then the starters came. My 'Millionaires' bacon and eggs' dish was described by Badenhorst as a 'challenge' as it comprises a hen's egg cooked for an hour at 62 degrees, on a bed of *sous vide* pork belly with crispy potato shards, wild mushrooms, winter truffle and an aerated Hollandaise sauce. It was the butter-poached BBQ lobster for my husband, accompanied by 'xo quinoa sea sand', pickled kombu courgette, *ponzu*-infused cucumber and dill gel, with sweet *miron gribiche*. Each mouthful is moreish, exactly what you need when followed by the most comforting mains – we went for the slow-cooked options – the 12-hour beef cheek for me, nestled beneath a cloud of the creamiest smoked pommes with elements of foraged mushrooms and confit of pearl onions and wagyu jus. For my husband, the 18-hour *sous-vide* Karoo lamb neck that literally fell apart at the merest glance of the knife, along with bright cubes of pickled butternut, bright pea purée, toasted pearl barley and local river cress and wild sprouts paired with the Grande Provence Cabernet Sauvignon 2012.

We both went for the 'chocolatey desserts' on offer – the hot fondant sphere for me, which came with set *anglaise*, aerated espresso, red velvet crumblets, salted cocoa twig and a pipette of Amarula. This was all washed down with a Terbodore cappuccino and accompanying chocolate truffle. The 'chocolate forest' at the other end of the table was just as appealing, with surprisingly dessert-y sweet Madagascan vanilla poached shimeji mushrooms nestled among kisses of 80% hazelnut *pot au crème*, hidden by a disc of

tonka bean semi-freddo dusted with white chocolate snow, pistachio brittle, apple moss and micro basil. Simply sublime.

Finest wine designing

Smiling and completely sated, we opted for a quick tour of the lovely grounds. We saw the Jonkershuis or 'young master's house', which serves as a meeting venue and has the most amazing wine-bottle chandeliers. The sculpture garden is another visual treat as all artwork on display is up for sale, so visiting from one season to the next may result in a completely different look and feel. We also had a private tour of the art gallery and shop that displays a range of South African jewellery and design that's the perfect reminder of any overseas trip to our shores.

Then there's the wine tasting room; an experience in itself with another inviting fireplace, quirky tractor-seat bar stools and the only place to purchase Grande Provence's own label. You can also take part in an hour-long blending session to create your own unique blends from three different wine varieties.

With a [special lunch option](#) for Father's Day next Sunday, I'd suggest you make a booking ASAP. Though it's winter, the outdoor eating area is just as lovely, with a built-in fire place providing a magical orangey glow and the softest blankets available to keep your outsides as toasty as your insides!

**Leigh Andrews was a guest of Grande Provence's The Restaurant. [Click here](#) for the current Winter menu, on offer for R295 per person. Situated on Main Road Franschhoek, Grande Provence is a convenient stop for the newly constructed Franschhoek wine tram that offers a leisurely tour of Franschhoek's finest vineyards. Contact Grande Provence on restaurant@grandeprovence.co.za or call 021 876 8600 to make a booking.*

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.

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