

<https://winedineandplay.blogspot.co.za/2014/01/aubergine.html>

Innovative Fine Dining Blend Of South African Cuisine

Cape Town, South Africa

Cuisine Style: African, Cape Malay

Average Price: \$\$

Overall Rating: 5/5

Dined in December 2013

By Sean Overpeck (CFE)

Rated #12 in the [Wine Dine and Play's Top 100 Best Restaurants In The World](#)

Executive Chef: Harald Bresselschmidt

*** A note to the reader...This article was revised and updated on December 6, 2017, from the original publication to include new content, information, and updates on the business and its products. ***

Aubergine, or in America as we know it, an eggplant, is a unique name for a restaurant as there are so few with that name, but my god, the food was wonderful, and the atmosphere was even better. This was my first dinner meal after arriving in South Africa, and the restaurant was recommended to me by a friend that lives in Cape Town. Also the fact that they were on the top 100 restaurants of the world list in 2009 made it very attractive. The Chef is German, but the food is South Africa / Cape Malay with an international twist, that will twist your taste buds to a phenomenal gastric extreme. This is [Aubergine Restaurant](#), and I am so glad that while visiting, I was able to stop here and eat. Here are my thoughts on the total experience.

Aubergine Restaurant opened its doors in September 1996 with a vision to create a gastronomic haven in an atmosphere of timeless elegance where diners can enjoy innovative and creative combinations that excite the senses and pique curiosity. They have gained a significant following from both within South Africa and abroad sharing their passion for good food and wine. Aubergine has received numerous local and international awards and been consistently rated among the top restaurants in the country.

[San Pellegrino Top 100 Restaurants in the World \(2009\)](#)

[Eat Out Top 10 \(2010\)](#)

[Rossouw's Restaurants 3 stars \(top award\) in the Sophisticated Category \(2005 - current\)](#)

[American Express Platinum Fine Dining Programme \(member\)](#)

[Diners' Club Wine List Diamond Award \(current\)](#)

[Top 100 SA Wines Inspirational Wine List Award \(2012 - 2013\)](#)

I researched the menu and restaurant months before my planned visit to South Africa, and made my reservation knowing that this would be one of the top restaurants that I would visit when in Cape Town. There was secure parking where two gentlemen watched your vehicle while you ate to make sure no one broke in. Though Cape Town is a wonderful city, it does have a criminal element like most large cities in the United States or Europe do. The building was of older design, with a nice gate near the entrance that was opened as soon as I approached.



Entrance to Aubergine

The Front of House Manager at Host Catherine Poole greeted me by name and title, confirmed my reservation, and then escorted me to the table. At the table she asked if I wished to start with a cocktail as she placed down the menu and wine list. I started with a White Russian cocktail. I had already decided before arriving that I wanted the Chef's tasting called the Degustation Menu, but I wanted to see everything else that was available. The Degustation Menu consisted of 5 courses. Johan my server, and another Johan who was the back or secondary server, introduced themselves and started me with some still Italian [Fonteviva](#) water, and had them begin my coursed menu.

The service of bread began first with an assortment of brioche, whole wheat, and pumpkin-seed bread, with two butters beginning with a lemon-thyme black pepper butter and a sun-dried tomato crème fraîche butter. After the bread service, I was presented with the Amuse course of a gazpacho with red cabbage, and a celery mustard ice cream.



House made breads

The first course was a quail and foie gras [paupiette](#) with amaretto, winter fruit, spinach, micro greens, and an almond puff pastry. This dish, pictured below, just melted in my mouth. A paupiette is a piece of meat, beaten thin, and rolled with a stuffing of vegetables, fruits or sweetmeats. This course was served with a glass of 2012 [Avondale Camissa Rosé](#), from Paarl wine region, South Africa. Camissa is made from 60% Muscat de Frontignan and 40% Mourvedre grapes. According to the winemaker, the vines are 26 years old, naturally cultivated and certified organic. Camissa arrests the nose with rose petals, scented pelargonium and fresh red fruits of the earth. Hints of Turkish Delight and lemon zest attest to the perfect acidity of this wine; for Camissa may appear sweet but it finishes completely dry.



Quail and foie gras

So far from what I had seen, the presentation of the food, the servers clearing from the right and serving from the left, replacing dirty silverware, cleaning the tables, put them way above [La Petite Maison](#) in Dubai that I had just recently ate at before coming to South Africa. La Petite could learn a thing or two from Aubergine that is for sure. La Petite was on the 2013 top 100 restaurant of the world list, (#98) and in my opinion, why aubergine is not at that spot in its place, I will never know.

The second course was a dialogue of [Kabeljou](#) (*Daga Salmon*) and tempura of crayfish [mousseline](#) which was served with a [stinging nettle dome](#) and dressed with crab vinaigrette. The Kabeljou fish is a member of the Kob Family and is very popular from Namibia down to the Cape of Good Hope. The wine served with this course was a specialty 2011 Chenin Blanc wine from Stellenbosch made specifically for Aubergine by [Teddy Hall Wines](#). The winemakers list it as a zesty refreshing wine with great balance and length. Stone fruit, hint of vanilla and apple aromas. On the palate it is lively, fresh yet complex palate that finishes with a lingering sensation of tropical fruit and wild honey.



[Kabeljou](#) (*Daga Salmon*) and tempura of crayfish

The third course served was a venison dish cut into medallions, medium-rare, served with poppy seed and pumpkin gnocchi, [kohlrabi](#) (*cabbage turnip, similar to a crossed broccoli or in the African language, "ugly root"*), plums, shiitake mushrooms, and topped with cured ham crumbs and a venison stock. The wine with this course was a 2008 Pinotage from [Vriesenhof Vineyards](#), Stellenbosch. Created in Stellenbosch in 1925, Pinotage is a crossing of Pinot Noir and Cinsaut. The 'Pinot' half of the name was given priority because of the prestige associated with Burgundy's great red grape, although many South Africans shun the variety because of its polarizing, 'un-European' flavor profile and the care it requires both in the vineyard and the winery. On the palate the winemaker notes that it is warm, with ripe aromas of sour cherries, raspberries and plumb with strong flavors of peach and red fruit are well balanced by leather and smokiness from the 2nd fill barrels.



Venison with kohlrabi

At this point in the meal, it was time for Mother Nature to take its course on the kidneys. After returning from the restroom, a new napkin was presented at the table, and the back server pulled my chair out or me to sit down. A wonderful addition that makes all the difference when dining out. At this time I also began a conversation with the folks sitting next to me, who were French. The table directly in front of me was several girls not older than 25 who were American and were a classic example of why some people look down on us. They were ignorant to their server, had very little table etiquette, and showed their inexperience in food and fine dining every time they asked for something.

The fourth course was a Petit Bouchon (or *small cap portion*) of ['Pepe Charlot'](#) goats' cheese served with artichokes, aubergines, tomato chutney, and a fennel crostini served with a glass of 2007 [Jack & Knox Frostline Riesling](#). The owner's notes indicate the wine to be austere and reductive, with faint hints of green lime, aeration, green herbs almost pyrazine type of Sauvignon character, and green peas, with some floral notes as the wine warm up. The palate is thick in texture and showed flavors of lemon and lime and just enough of a petrol note to lend interest. Tight structure, well defined acidity, some oiliness and mid palate weight, touch of phenolic bitterness.



Aubergine with ['Pepe Charlot'](#)

The fifth and final course for the evening was a composition of fresh coconut with Chinese [litchi](#), white chocolate, and peaches. A beautiful plate presentation served with a 2007 [Joostenberg](#) Chenin Blanc NHL, Paarl wine region. The winemaker says there is loads of apple and tropical fruit aromas on the nose, with a crisp, fruity lingering acidity on the palate.



Coconut with Chinese [litchi](#)

Following the tasting menu, I had some Coffee Americano, and was also presented with some 'petit fours' of assorted chocolates, fruit, and pastry bites. This was a wonderful experience for my first South African / Malay dinner and I highly recommend it to anyone if you are visiting the Cape Town area or even if you're a local and live here. Job well done Chef Bresselschmidt and to the entire crew front and back.