

FOOD REVIEW

It's cooking north of Durban

Things are hot at this table, writes **Shelley Seid**

A CHEFS' Table is generally a pretty fancy affair: a table in a corner of a smart restaurant kitchen that seats a few VIPs who can sample a tasting menu and chat to the head chef while watching cooks work the line.

At the new Chefs' Table in Umhlanga, a bevy of talented cooks, headed by Kayla-Ann Osborn, who, at 24, is almost a child prodigy, construct the most gorgeously arranged works of art made from fresh seasonal produce.

When our eager waiter places a complimentary bread platter on the table, he tells us it's an offering from the "bread chef", not the head chef.

He apparently meant the chef in charge of the cold kitchen, but the chewy sourdough, served with a scoop of home-made cottage cheese, a serving of fennel butter and a little mountain of mushroom salt, made "bread chef" a far more appropriate title.

I could have stopped eating then and there. It was a staff-of-life experience of the highest order.



MAESTRO: Executive chef Kayla-Ann Osborn is turning the tables in Umhlanga. Picture: JACKIE CLAUSEN

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

When to go: Breakfast Sundays, lunch daily, dinner Monday to Saturday.

Who to take: Anyone from Johannesburg

What to drink: A seasonal cocktail, or something from their compendium of wine

Whatever you do: Book. It's really taken off.

How much do you need: It's not cheap, but then again it is Umhlanga, where no one blinks an eye at forking out almost R300 a head for starters and mains, drinks not included.

Address: Chefs' Table, First Floor, New Tower Protea Hotel, Chartwell Drive, 031-001-0200.

Happily, both the starters and mains managed to meet the bread's lofty standard.

The menu is very short: six starters, six mains, three puds, that all change regularly. The wine list, on the other hand, is very long. Both offerings are meticulously and intelligently compiled.

We had a starter of beetroot prepared in ways I never dreamed possible. For mains, I had salmon;

“The sourdough was a staff-of-life experience

my partner had pork belly.

Both mains were good, but the accompaniments were spectacular, particularly the

roasted crackling and a carrot tortellini that on its own could have been the headliner. My partner also stole one of my "bonbons", little croquettes that had paddled in with the salmon.

The restaurant is huge, it must seat well over 100, and reminded me of the early years of the steakhouse phenomenon, with its leather seats and wooden tables, coupled with a quick slap of

industrial chic.

It's a fine-dining experience in an easy-going, informal environment. In fact, it is so laidback that most of the middle-aged male patrons were dressed, really badly, in inappropriately coloured shorts. Never mind. They were ordering gargantuan tomahawk steaks that could have doubled as cultural weapons and having an excellent time.

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