

Let me entertain you

Not quite Robbie but “Supreme” nonetheless, Simon Kemp, executive chef at Cloete’s restaurant, finds a match for a maiden Blanc de Blancs. Jeanri-Tine van Zyl has a taste.



Cloete’s Restaurant at Constantia’s Alphen Country House Hotel in Cape Town has recently renovated its interiors and introduced Simon Kemp to its kitchen. A young Robbie Williams lookalike, with the same undertone of mischievousness as the famous pop star, Kemp is everything but old school.

A career as chef wasn’t the outcome of a long-held dream, although Kemp does remember his mother’s dinner parties, describing her as a “very skilled cook”, and dad, too, was a dab hand at making curry. Born in Kenya, he travelled throughout the continent in his youth before being sent to boarding school in the United Kingdom – the latter being an experience which left less than a favourable impression, with Kemp leaving before being asked to do so. The reason? The Essex boys didn’t take to kindly to the African and his Spanish friend. “My friend got beaten up and I took revenge,” he shakes his head while carefully arranging the presentation of the dish.

His early African food experiences now show up in several dishes, the Mombasa-style prawn curry being just one throwback to his past. But as befits the revived Cloete’s, dishes are also contemporary and made with personal involvement – the latter not only because it is a character trait but also because in-house realities dictate a very hands-on approach. The kitchen is quite small, says Kemp, making it difficult to fit a huge brigade. Add to that other challenges like a six-plate burner and a “salamander that doesn’t work properly” and one has to wonder how the chef manages to prepare dishes that unflinchingly impress.

His professional background includes stints at Simola Hotel, Hotel Le Vendôme, Cape Town International Convention Centre and Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve – a diverse portfolio qualifying him as a good all-rounder who can cope with most things, even managing his shifts to include surf-time at Llandudno beach.

Given his somewhat hedonistic streak, Kemp was the natural choice to find a partner for the maiden Teddy Hall Blanc de Blancs 2005 (rated 4 Stars in this year’s Amorim Cap Classique Challenge, see p. 89). He is also a chef with a conscience, using organic produce as often as possible and trying to avoid foie gras “due to the force feeding [involved]”. Lucky for him, then, that this Cap Classique allowed him to devise a dish made using greens from the garden and fish from trusted resources.

“I liked the very fine bubbles, and I found the acidity to be quite upfront,” he says. “The wine also has quite a bit of fruit character.”

To complement these three elements, he set out to prepare an intricate dish of crayfish and salmon on a creamy risotto. The fineness of the mousse was

delicately matched by the richness of the crayfish tail, king prawn and salmon (the salmon also chosen because it complemented the colouring of the shellfish). The lime and Thai flavours of the baby leaf salad matched the vibrant acidity of the wine and the Chardonnay’s citrus character. And the richness and creaminess of the risotto and Blanc de Blanc reduction added overall balance to the dish.

As of yet, this dish is not available on the menu, but Kemp says he will be more than willing to prepare it if guests request it in advance.

THE DISH

It’s quite a mouthful – exotic crusted crayfish and salmon cake topped with a lime grilled king tiger prawn over saffron and fennel bulb risotto with a salsa dressed baby leaf salad and a rich Blanc de Blancs reduction. But Kemp maintains that it is surprisingly easy to make as most things can be prepped beforehand and just put together before guests arrive.

A rich dish, both in terms of taste and ingredients, the plated combo includes a generous amount of crayfish, Norwegian salmon meat and a king tiger prawn (although this can be substituted by smaller “tigers” to make the dish lighter).

Kemp is also adamant that the salad is an integral part of the dish, so do not plate without the baby salad and a generous amount of lime zest. ■

For the (rather long) recipe visit www.winemag.co.za

Simon Kemp (below) has a hedonistic streak and loved the upfront fruit character of the Teddy Hall Blanc de Blancs 2005.



Cloete’s at The Alphen Country House Hotel, Constantia, Cape Town, Tel 021 794 5011.



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