

'New' Mount Grace rates with the best

Franc believes the change in their dining style will compete with the best cuisine found anywhere

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



DIANE DE BEER

Part of the new Mount Grace experience is a new culinary team headed up by executive chef Franc Lubbe.

They have two restaurants – Twist, focussing on country cuisine, and Rambling Vine, the new a la carte restaurant which is what the chef is most excited about.

In the past, the Mount Grace was known as a buffet hotel.

"That's going to change. I want people to travel here for the a la carte menu." It's only an hour's drive from Pretoria and he believes he can compete with any city restaurant.

His food philosophy is a simple one – it's all about the produce.

"I'm passionate about finding the right produce and that is how my meals are planned and why my menu changes on an almost daily basis.

"It depends on what's available," he explains. "The food is only as good as the product!"

Having cooked from the Cape to Scotland and then at Thai and African restaurants in Johannesburg, his culinary preferences run around the world. "My food isn't fusion, but global and I take the best from all the experience I've gained."

He's thrilled that he's working with a team that has been together for a few years. "My senior sous chef, Shaun van Rensburg, has been with me for eight years. I'm lucky to have them around because they understand my work ethics.

On the night we had dinner we had a choice of Scottish Salmon cured with citrus fruits topped with herb crust served with tempuraed Californian Roll; butternut soup with cream truffle oil and black truffle shavings or Cape gooseberry served with micro greens and aged balsamic vinaigrette as starters; beef fillet with mini potato wedges, green asparagus spears and a wild cepe sauce topped with foino gras; chicken supreme stuffed with mushroom duxelles with oxtail cannelloni with a pea and lemongrass sauce; or goat's cheese ravioli with a Basque style stew of vegetables with a parmesan cream sauce as mains. And to end the night on a sweet note pineapple samosa with coconut ice-cream and wild berry compote, vodka and vanilla cheese cake with tuile biscuit and a mixed berry. It wasn't an easy choice but I opted for the salmon which was popping with flavour followed by a cleverly designed ravioli which combined all my favourite tastes with the goat's cheese leading the pack and

finally cheese cake which tops my sweet list. It was an extraordinary meal with the chef coming through on all his promises.

He likes to keep it simple with both the cuisine and the plating and in the end it is the flavours and the textures that do the trick. Franc might have moved on from his oma's menu of koeksisters and vetkoek which initially got him into the kitchen, but he likes to keep his food honest and his foodie customers in heaven.

A wine cellar is also being worked on with the option of your favourite wine by the glass without breaking the bank, following the installation of a wine preservation unit as well as a good selection of French wines in stock. They're pushing for the full fine dine experience and all the signs are in their favour. Check it out.

Prices: Best Available rate varies between R1 600 and R3 500 a night. A buffet lunch will cost R160 per person and an a la carte dinner at the Rambling Vine (which changes menu daily but will expand when the new kitchen is up and running in two weeks time) including starter, main and dessert R280. For more info and maps, google Mount Grace on the internet.



Franc Lubbe has dubbed himself a new age chef because of his youth and his different kitchen and cuisine approach. He likes bringing the whole team on board and they have formed strong bonds that translate into the food they create.

A lovely getaway, yet close to home

An old lady, the Mount Grace in Magaliesberg has been given a fresh look and a younger feel. **DIANE DE BEER** checked it out.

It's always fascinating when a familiar establishment does a huge revamp to see where they go and who they're targeting.

Mount Grace has always been an appealing prospect for Pretorians because of its proximity (only an hour away) and its offer of an escape close by for even just a night. Those of us who have been there before will remember it as an elegant old girl but old, both in age and charm, was part of the appeal.

All of that's gone with a contemporary edge to the interiors, the food as well as the wellness centre which is still in the process of expanding.

Our invitation to experience the revamped Mount Grace for an overnight stay cleverly included arrival at 2pm on a Sunday, beginning with a spa treatment followed by cocktails, dinner and breakfast the following morning before returning to work. It's a great time to slip away from your normal routine because that's when most of us slow down in preparation for a new week. Could there be a more relaxing way to start than with a spa treatment which sloughs off all that stress in the

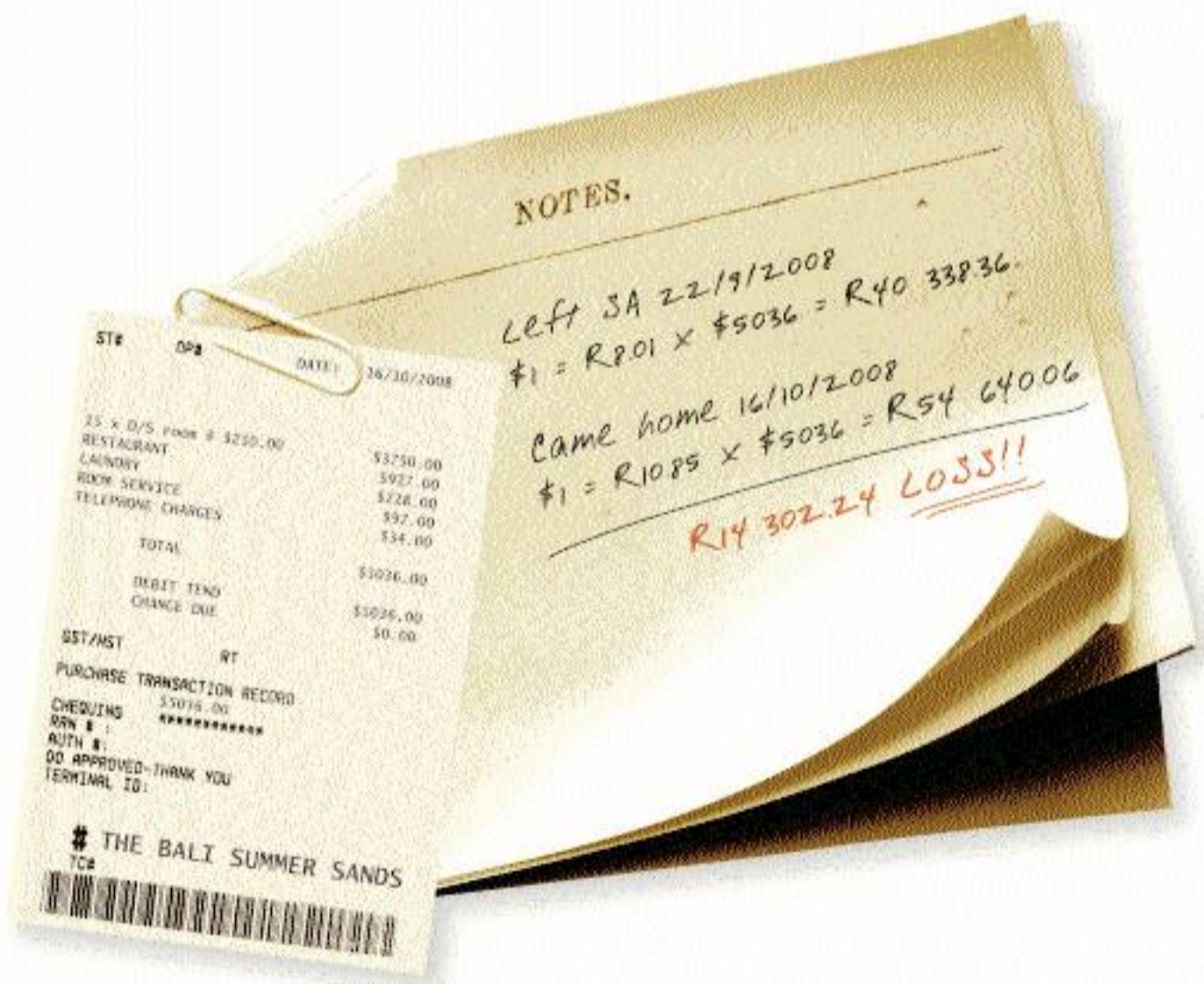
most exuberant fashion. Once that's done, you're in the right mood for a fabulous meal before slipping into bed followed by a healthy breakfast before leaving for work.

The thing about Mount Grace has always been the setting. Stuck away in the Magaliesberg surroundings with a spectacular view yet seemingly far away from the real world, it feels like a quick getaway. The R135 million refurbishment introduces a sassy appeal. Much of it is done with clever splashes of colour in both the rooms and public spaces. Of the new rooms, all of which have balconies, 12 are luxury private villas, each coming with a wooden patio overlooking a private garden, plunge pool, dams and the marvellous Magaliesberg surroundings.

Both management and staff are young and enthusiastic to make this a special stay. I loved the staff who were around to help whether you were trying to find your way to the spa or couldn't decide on a drink. They're never intrusive and there's a confidence that's fun to embrace.



Whether its fillet or cheese cake, the Mount Grace food team like keeping it fresh and simple on the palate and the plate.



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