

# The master of his plate

 By Eugene Yiga 28 May 2014

Former IT specialist Deena Naidoo chats about his experiences since winning the first season of MasterChef S

■ Eugene Yiga: What inspired your love for cooking?



**Deena Naidoo:** My passion for food began when I was a child. My greatest inspiration to begin cooking came from observing the care and love my late mom took when she prepared her dishes. The strange thing is that although my love for cooking kept increasing, I never saw myself becoming a chef when I grew up. It's amazing how life changes!

■ **EY:** *And do you think you'll ever go back to working in IT?*

**DN:** The many years that I spent in IT gave me the opportunity to improve on my analytical thinking and approach to any obstacles or problems. I still do consult for the SAP product at a major financial institution; I had to keep the "day job" as there was too much for me to surrender considering the responsibilities that I have as a sole breadwinner for my family.

I have now secured an amazingly successful partnership with the Tsogo Sun in the running of my restaurant Aarya at Montecasino, [which] hopefully presents me with a clearer view of the road ahead.

■ **EY:** *What do you remember most (fondly or otherwise) from your time on MasterChef?*

**DN:** Our night out in Zanzibar: we called it our confession night when we shared our first impressions about each other. That was the most wonderful evening of the competition. The crew allowed us to explore the city and its nightlife, but gave us a curfew of 11.30pm. What an amazing time spent with friends! We returned to our hotel at exactly 11.30pm, like the well-disciplined contestants that we were.

■ **EY:** *And what have been your experiences now that you have your own restaurant?*



**DN:** We scrapped the existing menu and started from a zero base. I was tasked to present dishes that I felt appropriate for the restaurant's theme and identity that I wished to create at Aarya [named after his daughter] - so all of the items on the menu were recommended by me. I was assisted by the culinary team from the Tsogo Sun to present the menu items so that they were more appropriate for a restaurant environment.

My relationship with the Tsogo Sun keeps maturing and I am pleased to have them support me. Under their guidance I am learning the mechanisms involved in running my own restaurant and, one day, I hope to bring Aarya to Durban, my home town. I intend to dedicate my efforts in strengthening the brand Aarya so as to immortalise my achievements on MasterChef SA.

**■ EY: *What is your approach to cooking?***

**DN:** Simple and least complicated, so that I don't lose the essence of cooking.

**■ EY: *And what do you have planned for the Good Food and Wine Show?***

**DN:** I intend to exhibit some Italian classic dishes using 100% vegetarian and Halal ingredients. I feel that this sector is often neglected and not given much focus and attention. I visited Italy last year and spent some time with some amazing chefs who shared some of their cooking methods with me. I would love those who come to see me cook to take back the lessons learned and try to prepare the meals back home with confidence.

*Johannesburg's Coca-Cola Dome from 31 July to 3 August, and Durban's Exhibition Centre from 24 to 26 October. Book at [Computicket](#) or [www.goodfoodandwineshow.co.za](http://www.goodfoodandwineshow.co.za).*

## ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit [www.eugeneyiga.com](http://www.eugeneyiga.com), follow @eugeneyiga on Twitter, or email [hello@eugeneyiga.com](mailto:hello@eugeneyiga.com) to say, um, hello. View my profile and articles...

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