

Self-taught chef scoops top national title

Chef Petrus Madutlela's drive to succeed took him from being a part-time cleaner at a catering company to becoming the country's top young chef.



Petrus Madutlela cooks up a storm – and the smile's brilliant as well!

“I can already smell the gold.” Confidence in his skills and keeping cool in the heat of battle are just some the elements that made Petrus Madutlela of Aqua Restaurant, Sun International's Sibaya Casino in Durbar the clear winner of the 2007 Jeune Commis Rôtisseurs (young chefs) national competition.

Petrus pitted his skills against winners of other regions in the Young Chefs Competition, one of the toughest culinary battles in the hospitality industry. The daunting marathon session took place at the Institute of Culinary Arts, Stellenbosch. Petrus will now represent South Africa at the Jeune Commis Rôtisseurs international competition in Frankfurt, Germany on 6 September 2007. The event is rated as one of the most prestigious culinary competitions in the world.

Also contending

Also competing for the national title were:

Jason Goldsmith- Plettenberg Park Hotel, Bailliage Outeniqua (2nd place)

Izanne Mocke - Restaurant Mosaic, Bailliage Pretoria (3rd place)

Allistair Lawrence - Cape Grace, Bailliage Du Cap

Lindy Pretorius - Sandton Sun & Towers, Bailliage Johannesburg

As if four hours to plan and prepare a three-course menu for four diners - to be judged by a panel of chefs and gastronomes - were not challenging enough, Petrus had to conjure up culinary magic from a 'mystery market basket' with compulsory ingredients. He took the race against time in his stride, saying that everything comes down to “planning, planning, planning - and attention to detail for extra measure”.

His first step into the food world was in December 2000 as a part-time cleaner at a catering company, but wasn't content with that and with no professional qualifications has been able to meet – and beat – the country's best.

His philosophy to food is a spiritual one: “I believe that the food I cook defines me. The respect I show for ingredients, show my respect for people and for life.” His favourite food in the whole world? A slice of bread and a hot cup of tea! In his spare time, he will be reading cook books if not on the soccer field.

Mystery basket 2007:

Compulsory ingredients (everything must be used):

Seafood: Hake fillets, Fresh mussels, fish stock.

Meat: Whole Quail, smoked bacon, chicken stock

Vegetables: Broccoli, potatoes, sugar snap peas, spinach, fennel bulb, sage

Extras: Dried prunes, almonds, dark chocolate

Petrus' winning menu:

Appetizer: Honey and sage glazed quail with broccoli and smoked bacon ravioli and napped with chervil a lime sauce

Main course: Pan fried hake fillet, topped with white wine braised mussel, basil mash and crispy snap pea with mushroom sauce

Dessert: Symphony of dessert – a lemon meringue and truffle chocolate parcel, prune compote finish with tomato coulis

Judges:

Tasting judges: Monty Friendship, Carol Wicht, Niel Els, Kobus Prinsloo, Peter Templehoff, Craig Cormac Armin Hallerman, Clayton Howard, Evan Alexander, Bertus Basson, Hugo van Zyl, Mike Basset

Kitchen Judges: Bruce Robertson, Peter Goffe-Wood. Gerhard van Staden

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