Issue 2 Conscious Kitchen
April 2026

SOUTH AFRICAN CHEFS ASSOCIATION

For the Industry. By the Industry.

SA CHEFS



Forget the oysters

The real science of romantic dining.

Mastershisanyama

From Smoky Grill to Tourism Destination

Township food culture, taken seriously.

Global Spice, Local Fire

Reflections from India

CONTENTS

In this issue

SA CHEFS · APRIL 2026

The Conscious Kitchen issue. Indigenous intelligence with Kobus van der Merwe, the no-show tax, and why Zululand is a model for scaling culinary impact.



46

Global Spice, Local Fire: Reflections from India

COVER STORY



40

FROM TOWNSHIP FLAMES TO TOURISM FAME

UPSKILLING



38

The Neuro-Plate: Beyond the Aphrodisiac Cliché

FOOD

4 **Owning The Narrative** — EDITOR'S NOTE

5 **Welcome to The Conscious Kitchen** — FROM THE PRESIDENT

7 **Beyond The Hype** — PROFILE

9 **The Engine Room of Culinary Excellence** — PARTNERS

10 **Vulcan Catering Equipment** — ADVERTISEMENT

11 **A Pause for Peace: The Africa Culinary Cup Moves to 2027** — NEWS

13 **SA Chefs Experience, Africa Food Show** — ADVERTISEMENT

14 **The 2026 Vision: Inside the SA Chefs Business Breakfast** — EVENTS

16 **The Babel Effect** — BUSINESS

18 **Stop Fighting Over the Tip Jar** — BUSINESS

20 **We Pulled the Plug** — TECHNOLOGY

22 **The Sober Chef** — WELLBEING

23 **The Chef's Body** — WELLBEING

25 **Limpopo Chefs Academy** — ADVERTISEMENT

26 **The Veldsman Syllabus** — PROFILE

27 **Kobus van der Merwe: Indigenous Intelligence in Practice** — FOOD

30 **The Chemistry of the Pass** — TECHNIQUE

32 **Ice Plant Precision** — TECHNIQUE

34 **Kapokbos and Wild Rosemary: The Chef's Technical Cheat Sheet** — TECHNIQUE

35 **The Art of the Sour Fig** — TECHNIQUE

37 **The No-Show Tax: Protecting Your Table**
BUSINESS

38 **The Neuro-Plate: Beyond the Aphrodisiac Cliché**
FOOD

40 **From Township Flames to Tourism Fame**
UPSKILLING

43 **Flor-Do-Tejo**
ADVERTISEMENT

44 **Shaping the Future of Culinary Education**
EDUCATION

46 **Global Spice, Local Fire: Reflections from India**
COVER STORY

50 **Beyond the Plate**
EDUCATION

53 **Beyond the white jacket**
INDUSTRY

55 **Hostex 2026 records 16.5% growth in visitor numbers and 60% increase in exhibitors**
EVENTS

59 **Engineering Margin and Magic: The Global Pizza and Flatbread Strategy**
MENU STRATEGY

64 **The Culinary Equalizer: Engineering the Future of the Pass**
TECHNOLOGY

66 **The Wors of a Nation**
EDUCATION

68 **SA Food Stories**
ADVERTISEMENT

69 **Dubai Crockocrap**
BEYOND THE PASS

70 **SA Food Stories**
MEDIA

72 **Index**
ADVERTISERS, PARTNERS AND NAMES IN THIS ISSUE

EDITOR'S NOTE

Owning The Narrative



There is a distinct shift that happens when you stop asking for permission to speak. For years, the story of the South African chef has been told by observers rather than the operators. We have been the content, but rarely the curators.

That changes now.

This issue is different because it is personal. For the first time, SA Chefs magazine is produced entirely in-house. We have taken back the pen to ensure that the stories of our industry are told by the people living them. Unfiltered and authentic.

This ownership empowers us to define the 'Conscious Kitchen'. We are moving beyond the pass to address the intersection of mental health, sustainability, and our collective future. It is a shift from a mindset of survival to one of thriving. We are setting a new standard where excellence includes the wellbeing of the chef and the planet.

But to thrive, we must be connected.

We are proud to announce our strategic partnership with Hospitality Marketplace. By bridging the gap between the professional kitchen and the broader trade ecosystem, we are amplifying our voice where it counts. This collaboration moves us into the boardroom to connect culinary passion with commercial power.

We are done waiting for others to tell our story. This is our narrative to own.

Welcome home.

SA Chefs Magazine *For the Industry. By the Industry.*

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to The Conscious Kitchen



BY **CHEF COOVASHAN PILLAY, PRESIDENT OF SA CHEFS**

Welcome to a milestone edition of SA Chefs Magazine.

As we welcome 2026, I extend my warmest greetings to every member, partner, sponsor, and friend of the South African Chefs Association. A new year brings renewed purpose, fresh opportunities, and a chance to reflect on the role we play in shaping the future of our profession. Our commitment remains steadfast: to uplift the standards, status, and skills of chefs across South Africa while ensuring our voice is heard on the global culinary stage.

This first issue of the year is also our special HOSTEX edition - a fitting platform to showcase innovation, talent, and industry progress. As proud anchor partners, we were honoured to present the SA Chefs Village at HOSTEX 2026, held from 8–10 March. The Village proved to be a vibrant and engaging space, filled with exceptional interaction, networking, and meaningful connections. From dynamic activations and exciting Iron Chef challenges to impactful product demonstrations and showcases, the energy and enthusiasm truly reflected the strength of our industry.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the Gauteng Regional Committee and the SA Chefs office team for their dedication and hard work in bringing this platform to life. A special thank you to our strategic premium partners, Montgomery Group Africa and Vulcan Catering Equipment, for their continued partnership and for playing a key role in delivering the SA Chefs Village experience. We are equally grateful to all our partners whose valuable contributions ensured the success and impact of the Village.

We were also incredibly proud to be part of the launch of SA Food Stories, in partnership with First National Bank Business and Bidfood South Africa, an initiative that celebrates and elevates the rich narratives within our culinary landscape.

Congratulations to Hope Lucciano Msibi on being awarded the Bryan Montgomery Study Bursary of R35,000 towards her studies at Capsicum Culinary Studio. This prestigious bursary was presented on the final day of HOSTEX, following a highly competitive selection process from hundreds of applications. We wish Hope every success as she continues her culinary journey and completes her studies.

2026 has already begun with strong international engagement. Through collaboration with the Indian Federation of Culinary Associations and participation at Indus Food 2026, we are strengthening cultural exchange and global learning opportunities for South African chefs. Later this year, we will proudly represent our nation at the Worldchefs Congress in Wales, reinforcing our connection to Worldchefs and ensuring our members remain aligned with international standards and trends.

On home soil, we look forward to hosting the SA Chefs Experience at the Africa Food Show at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. This dynamic platform brings together renowned chefs, leading brands, and exceptional products to craft a truly distinctive culinary journey, where thoughtfully paired dishes meet engaging conversations and meaningful industry connections.

More than an experience, it is a celebration of excellence, collaboration, and the power of food to unite cultures, inspire creativity, and showcase the very best of our vibrant culinary landscape.

We at SA Chefs extend our absolute best wishes and warmest congratulations to

Nicci Robertson and the entire team at Bidfood on the outstanding achievement of SA Food Stories being nominated for Best Cooking Show. This YouTube series and podcast has rapidly become an essential platform dedicated to supporting the voices behind the dynamic food and hospitality scene in South Africa. As proud supporters of this initiative, we find it immensely rewarding to see such rich culinary storytelling receive this level of prestigious industry recognition. We are fully behind Nicci and Bidfood as we await the final results and celebrate this remarkable milestone together.

Bringing the SA Chefs Magazine back in-house marks another important milestone. This publication is not just a magazine - it is the voice of our community. It belongs to you, our members, and I encourage you to share your achievements, insights, and stories so that together we can document and celebrate the evolution of our industry.

At the heart of everything we do are our members. Across all regions, chefs continue to demonstrate resilience, creativity, and professionalism despite the challenges facing hospitality. Your passion fuels this association and shapes the future of our craft. As we move through 2026, let us continue to collaborate, mentor emerging talent, and uphold the highest standards in our kitchens and beyond.

May this year be one of growth, courage, and excellence. Dream boldly, cook with purpose, lead with integrity, and remember - the future of South African cuisine is not something we wait for; it is something we create together.

Yours in service,

Chef Coo

PROFILE

BEYOND THE HYPE

The Daily Grind of Chef Raiyen Chetty



He is an entrepreneur, a private chef, and the Chairperson of the SA Chefs Limpopo committee. Chef Raiyen Chetty is proof that in the culinary landscape, talent is just the baseline: discipline is what keeps you in the game.

How did your journey in the kitchen originally begin? My name is Chef Raiyen Chetty. My journey began 12 years ago when I volunteered at a local restaurant in Polokwane for six months without pay. At the time, I was simply a passionate young man, hungry to learn, with a deep love for food and the culinary industry. That experience laid the foundation for everything that followed.

Walk us through a typical day. What does your everyday reality as a chef actually look like? A typical day starts early, around 5:30am. I get ready, have a quick coffee and toast, and head to the Limpopo Chefs Academy Polokwane campus. My mornings are spent in the kitchen teaching and mentoring classes of up to 15 students. I guide them through health and safety, hygiene standards, cooking techniques, and plating. After practical sessions, I assess and taste around 18 dishes, providing detailed feedback to help each student improve.

By late afternoon, I head home and shift into my second role as the owner and chef of my cloud kitchen business. Evenings are focused on managing the dinner rush as orders come in through delivery platforms. After service, it is time to reset, rest, and prepare to do it all again the next day.

How would you describe your personal cooking style? My cooking style is best described as fusion cuisine. I draw inspiration from my diverse cultural background as well as my travels, blending different techniques, flavors, and ingredients to create dishes that are both familiar and innovative.

When you are completely off duty and away from the pass, what is your absolute favourite thing to eat? It has to be sushi and a really authentic pasta. Simple, well executed dishes like those always hit the spot.

You are an active part of the SA Chefs Association. What exactly is your role on the committee? I currently serve as the Chairperson of the Limpopo Committee of the SA Chefs Association.

The industry is demanding enough as it is. What made you decide to volunteer your time and get involved with SA Chefs? I have a deep passion for the industry and a desire to make a broader impact beyond my immediate workplace. Through SA Chefs, I can collaborate with like-minded individuals to drive meaningful change, especially in Limpopo. It is important for chefs and aspiring professionals to know that there is support available whether through training, workshops, or exposure to competitions. Being part of a community is something I wish I had earlier in my career, and now I want to help create that for others.

How do you manage to balance the crazy hours of running a kitchen with your duties for the association? When you are truly passionate about something, it does not feel like a burden it becomes part of who you are. That said, I am fortunate to work alongside a strong and committed Limpopo committee. Their support makes the workload manageable, and we share the same vision and energy for growing the industry.

What is the hardest part about being a professional chef today that the general public does not understand? One of the biggest challenges is staying authentic in an industry that is heavily influenced by trends and hype. It is easy to fall into the trap of chasing what is popular instead of staying true to your own style and passion. Another major challenge is balance. Being a chef today goes beyond the kitchen you are expected to build a personal brand, stay active on social media, network, and still maintain a personal life. It can be physically and mentally demanding, especially early in your career.

On the flip side, what is the one thing about this industry that makes all the stress and long hours completely worth it? Seeing the smile on a client's face after they have enjoyed a meal you have prepared makes everything worthwhile. In that moment, all the hard work, pressure, and long hours feel meaningful.

What is the most honest piece of advice you have for a young cook stepping into a professional kitchen for the very first time? This career is not easy. You will face criticism, pressure, and moments that test your confidence. But if you remain teachable, disciplined, and develop a thick skin, you

will grow. That mindset will take you further than talent alone ever could.

THAT MINDSET WILL TAKE YOU SO MUCH FURTHER THAN RAW TALENT EVER COULD

PARTNERS

The Engine Room of Culinary Excellence

A heartfelt thank you to Vulcan Catering Equipment for their unwavering support of SA Chefs

At SA Chefs, we thrive on robust relationships and shared visions. Today we are taking a moment to recognise a true cornerstone of our culinary community. We are extending a massive thank you to Vulcan Catering Equipment for their all-encompassing and long-standing relationship with SA Chefs.

Partnerships of this magnitude are rare. Vulcan has continuously stepped up to ensure our professionals have exactly what they need to succeed. The themes driving this collaboration are rooted in a deep commitment to the culinary arts. They have supplied world-class equipment and hands-on support for every show and exhibition we undertake.

Elevating Every Experience

Their footprint is visible across all our high-profile initiatives. Whether it is the intense environment of national culinary competitions or the engaging atmosphere of live cooking demos, Vulcan is always present. The success of these events is proudly powered by Vulcan Catering Equipment. They understand the demanding nature of our profession and consistently deliver solutions that elevate our craft.

Empowering the Next Generation

Beyond the spotlight of exhibitions, their premium equipment forms the backbone of our training outlets. By ensuring students learn on the best gear available, Vulcan plays a direct role in building brand loyalty with the next generation of chefs. Furthermore, their comprehensive onsite equipment and physical presence at SA Chefs facilities showcase a level of dedication that goes far beyond standard corporate participation.

A Partnership Built to Last

We appreciate your relentless dedication to the culinary arts in South Africa. Thank you to the entire team at Vulcan Catering Equipment for being an integral part of the SA Chefs family. Your ongoing support is a cornerstone of our association and we look forward to achieving even greater heights in collaboration with you.

To discover more about their world-class culinary solutions or to book a consultation, please visit their website at www.vulcan.co.za or reach out to their national team on 011 249 8500.

Vulcan Catering Equipment

Behind Every Great Chef

Is Equipment That Delivers.



Empowering Kitchens since 1954.

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NEWS

A Pause for Peace: The Africa Culinary Cup Moves to 2027

Standing with our global family

We have spoken extensively about the Africa Culinary Cup and the incredible platform it provides for our continent's top junior teams. The plan was to bring the heat to Cape Town this June, setting the stage for the next generation of culinary leaders. However, leadership is not just about pushing forward; sometimes, it is about knowing exactly when to pause.

SA Chefs, in consultation with the organising committee and key stakeholders, has made the necessary decision to postpone the Africa Culinary Cup to 2027.

Right now, several of our Worldchefs Africa and Middle East member countries are navigating severe unrest and conflict. As a fraternity, we cannot in good conscience host a massive continental celebration while our fellow chefs and their communities are facing such devastating realities.

Food transcends borders

The late Dr Billy Gallagher always championed the role of the chef as an ambassador of peace. He fundamentally believed that the culinary profession transcends borders, politics and divisions. SA Chefs President Coo Pillay echoed this exact sentiment this week, reminding the trade that we are part of a global family bound by a shared purpose to nourish, connect and uplift. In times of conflict, our most powerful response is solidarity.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the sponsors and partners who had already pledged their backing for 2026. Your understanding and alignment with this decision speak volumes about the integrity and humanity of our local industry.

To our colleagues, friends and fellow chefs in the regions affected by the ongoing wars, please know that the South African hospitality community holds you in our hearts and prayers. The kitchen has always been a place of refuge and family. We stand with you, and we look forward to the day we can all welcome each other back to the pass, united and at peace.

Keeping the fires burning in Cape Town

While the Cup is paused, our commitment to youth empowerment and the trade remains absolute. The Africa Food Show is still taking place at the CTICC from 10 to 12 June 2026. We strongly encourage the industry to keep the momentum going. The event will feature the Worldchefs endorsed Econofoods Game

of Chefs competition. This ensures our emerging talent still has a dynamic, high-pressure environment to test their skills under official international standards. The scouting ground is still very much open, and these young cooks still need your support and mentorship.



Looking ahead to 2027

We look ahead to 2027 with optimism and the shared hope of hosting the Africa Culinary Cup in a spirit of true unity.

THE SA CHEFS Experience

PRESENTED BY

SOUTH AFRICAN
CHEFS ASSOCIATION

A LIFESTYLE AREA AT THE AFRICA FOOD SHOW

A premium, repeatable format that turns live culinary theatre into exclusive brand takeovers, VIP/buyer hosting, and high-value content capture. Each 90-minute session is built around a partner's hero product, demonstrated by a leading chef, then served immediately to an invited audience in a controlled hospitality setting designed for meaningful commercial conversations.

Sponsorship Packages Available

contact thandeka@sachefs.co.za
for further details

AFRICA FOOD SHOW — CAPE TOWN

10 - 12 June 2026

EVENTS

The 2026 Vision: Inside the SA Chefs Business Breakfast

Strategic alignment for the year ahead



On 12 February 2026, the School of Tourism and Hospitality Protea Auditorium did not just host a morning gathering; it hosted the strategic alignment of the South African culinary trade. As executive chefs, hospitality operators and supply chain partners convened, the objective was clear. This was a dedicated forum to define the operational and strategic vision for SA Chefs in the year ahead.

While the morning began with locally sourced, sustainable fare that reflected the association's commitment to ethical gastronomy, the atmosphere quickly shifted to business. The trade is navigating a complex economic landscape, and this breakfast served as the platform to reconnect, share business intelligence and align on the required industry narrative.

Setting the operational tone

Guided by MC Hudson Masondo, the morning established a rigorous tone. Operations Manager Thandeka Feliti delivered the opening address, focusing directly on professional growth, inclusivity and technical innovation within the sector. Her message framed the event as a critical strategic forum required to strengthen the commercial and operational collaborations across the entire hospitality supply chain.

The global stage and the talent pipeline

The core of the 2026 vision was delivered by Chef Coo Pillay during his keynote address. Outlining the year ahead and the specific roadmap for the African Culinary Cup, his message focused heavily on the necessity of mentorship. For the modern brigade, nurturing young talent is no longer just a responsibility but a baseline survival metric for the industry. He reinforced the role of SA Chefs in driving local excellence onto international stages, ensuring South African operators remain globally competitive and recognized.





Securing the supply chain and trade narrative

Strategy requires execution, and Chef Doug Momberg provided the operational roadmap through the 2026 Events and Calendar Spotlight. By unveiling the upcoming competitive initiatives, Momberg highlighted the non-negotiable reliance on local partnerships and sustainable sourcing. His presentation showcased how the collaboration between chef and supplier is the bedrock of a resilient culinary ecosystem.

This theme was unpacked further during a dedicated panel discussion focused on shaping the industry narrative and the power of collaboration. Respected trade voices analyzed the evolving role of the chef as a leader and educator, proving that the modern kitchen requires collective effort and shared business intelligence to thrive.





A unified fraternity

The 2026 SA Chefs Business Breakfast concluded with a clear mandate and a final round of high-level networking. It was a demonstration of a fraternity moving forward with a singular focus. With renewed energy and a defined strategic direction, the association continues to equip its members with the tools, connections and vision required to lead the South African hospitality sector.

Together, the trade is shaping the future of South African cuisine.

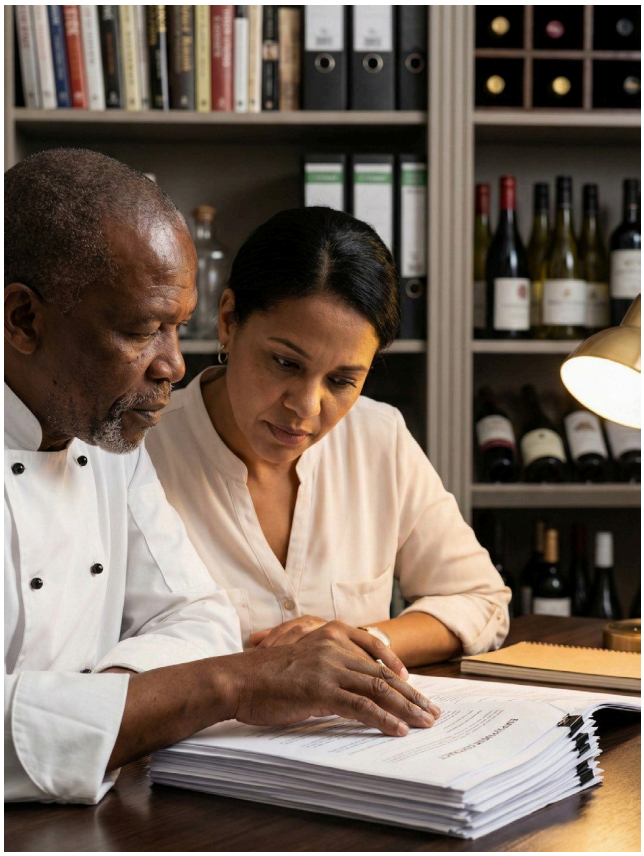


BUSINESS

THE BABEL EFFECT

A Survival Guide to Labour Inspections

BY **CHANTELLE BALSDON, HOSPITALITY MARKETPLACE**



WHY LABOUR INSPECTIONS ESCALATED IN SOUTH AFRICAN HOSPITALITY IN 2025 AND 2026

The intensification of labour enforcement across 2025 and early 2026 stems from a nationwide mandate to formalise the hospitality sector. High profile enforcement actions, most notably the Babel Menlyn inspection, served as a catalyst for the Department of Employment and Labour to increase the frequency of unannounced raids. These interventions aim to address systemic compliance gaps in wage practices and employment documentation that surfaced during recent audits in Gauteng, the Western Cape, and KwaZulu Natal.

WHAT INSPECTORS ARE LOOKING FOR IN RESTAURANTS AND KITCHENS

Wages and minimum wage compliance

Inspectors are meticulously auditing payroll records to ensure strict adherence to the national minimum wage and hospitality sectoral determinations. Any deviation from these rates is flagged immediately for enforcement action.

Employment contracts and working hours

Valid, signed employment contracts must be present on site for every staff member. Inspectors verify that recorded working hours and overtime align with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act.

Foreign national documentation and verification

The verification of work permits and visas for foreign nationals is a critical focal point. Employers must maintain a live file containing certified copies of valid documentation and proof of original verification.

Illegal deductions and wage practices

The practice of using tips to subsidise base wages or making unauthorised deductions for uniforms and breakages is being heavily scrutinised. Inspectors look for signed, legally compliant agreements for any deduction made from a staff member's pay.

INSPECTION PROCESS EXPLAINED STEP-BY-STEP

An inspection typically begins with the arrival of officials who present identification and an inspection notice. They have the legal right to enter the premises and interview any employee privately to verify working conditions. Officials will then demand immediate access to the compliance file, including payroll, contracts, and UI-19 forms. The process concludes with the issuance of an inspection report or a compliance order.

Consequences of non-compliance on finances and operations

Non-compliance in 2026 carries severe financial penalties, including orders for the immediate back pay of underpaid wages. Beyond the financial hit, operators face significant reputational damage and the risk of temporary operational shutdowns or criminal exposure for documentation failures.

Preparation checklist for chefs and operators

- Ensure every staff member has a signed, up to date employment contract in their file.
- Maintain certified copies of IDs or valid work permits for all employees, including casual staff.
- Keep the last three months of payroll records and proof of payment easily accessible on site.

- Verify that all UIF and COIDA registrations and payments are current.
- Review all deduction agreements to ensure they are signed and legally defensible.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive chefs and operators should treat compliance as a daily mise-en-place. Conducting monthly internal audits ensures that the on-site compliance file is always raid ready, moving the business from a state of risk to a state of protection.





RAID-READY FILE CHECKLIST

Core Employment Documentation

- Signed employment contracts for every staff member on site, including part-time and casual workers.
- A comprehensive staff list including full names, ID numbers, and job titles.
- Certified copies of South African IDs or valid, unexpired work permits for all foreign nationals.
- Proof of original document verification for foreign national staff to satisfy Home Affairs requirements.

Payroll and Wage Compliance

- Payroll records for the most recent three months showing gross pay, all deductions, and net pay.
- Proof of payment for all wages, whether through bank statements or signed cash receipts.
- Latest hospitality sectoral determination wage tables to prove current minimum wage compliance.
- Signed deduction agreements for any non-statutory deductions like staff meals, uniforms, or breakages.

Working Hours and Leave

- Daily attendance registers showing actual clock-in and clock-out times.
- Overtime records and proof of correct compensation for additional hours worked.
- Leave records for all staff, showing annual, sick, and family responsibility leave taken.

Statutory Registrations

- Proof of registration and up to date payments for the Unemployment Insurance Fund via UI-19 forms.
- Valid Letter of Good Standing from the Compensation Fund regarding COIDA.
- Visible display of the Summary of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act in a common staff area.

BUSINESS

Stop Fighting Over the Tip Jar

Why tipping has become a flashpoint in South African restaurants



Tipping in South African restaurants during early 2026 has evolved from a simple gesture of gratitude into a complex operational flashpoint. As economic pressures mount across major hubs like Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban, the lack of transparency in how gratuities are handled is driving a wedge between staff and management. In many independent establishments and large groups, the traditional handshake deals regarding tips are no longer sufficient to maintain a stable and motivated workforce.

How SARS treats tips and pooled gratuities

The South African Revenue Service maintains a strict interpretation of tips as taxable income that must be accounted for. Whether received as cash or through modern electronic tipping systems integrated into POS hardware, these funds must be correctly declared to ensure the business remains compliant. Failing to distinguish between a personal gift from a diner and income collected through a formal pool can lead to unexpected tax liabilities during a revenue audit.

When tips become remuneration and why that matters

A critical line is crossed when an employer takes direct control over the distribution of a tip pool or a tronc. If the management determines the split, the law may view these funds as remuneration rather than discretionary gifts. This shift is significant because it impacts the calculation of overtime, leave pay, and even severance, potentially exposing the business to major payroll risks and labour disputes.

Kitchen versus front of house conflict

The divide between the kitchen and the front of house often deepens when waiters walk away with significant cash while the back of house receives nothing. This imbalance is a primary driver of resentment and high turnover in South African kitchens during 2026. Creating a system that recognizes the contribution of the entire brigade is essential for a unified and professional service environment.

Designing a transparent tronc system

Point based distribution models

A fair system assigns specific points to various roles based on their impact on the guest experience. This model ensures that every staff member, from the senior sous chef to the sculler, has a clear and fair stake in the success of a busy service.

Fair Distribution Example

Role | Points | Role Impact Weighting

- Waiter | 10 | Primary direct service incentive
- Chef de Partie | 5 | Technical quality control
- Commis Chef | 3 | Essential production support
- Sculler | 2 | Infrastructure and hygiene maintenance



Visibility and trust

Trust is built through absolute visibility of the numbers. Weekly or monthly reports that show total tips collected and exactly how they were shared help eliminate the suspicion that management is skimming off the top.

Handling card fees and admin costs

Transparency is equally important when dealing with the bank fees and administrative costs of processing digital tips. Teams must be clearly informed of any deductions made to cover transaction fees so they understand the net amount being distributed.

Operational recommendations

To formalise your approach, adopt an integrated electronic tipping solution through your POS to automate tracking and reduce manual error. Establish a formal tronc committee including staff representatives to oversee the distribution and ensure that every deduction is legally defensible. By moving away from informal cash handling toward a structured, digital system, you protect your business from SARS while proving your loyalty to the entire team.

Managing the tip jar is no longer about just counting cash at the end of the night. It is about building a system of equity that values the sweat in the kitchen as much as the smile on the floor.

TECHNOLOGY

We Pulled the Plug



BY **CHANTELLE BALSDON, HOSPITALITY MARKETPLACE**

In the early months of 2026, the South African hospitality sector is breathing a cautious sigh of relief. With load shedding effectively suspended for nearly a year, the hum of generators has faded into the background. But for the modern restaurateur, a new and more silent threat has emerged: the digital blackout.

While the lights stay on, our dependence on the cloud has reached an all-time high. We have traded power outages for fibre breaks and digital load shedding. These are the moments when a terrestrial cable is severed or an undersea fault sends local latency through the roof. In this landscape, a POS system that relies entirely on a live heartbeat to the cloud is no longer just a technical choice: it is a gamble with your Friday night service.

The Myth of Permanent Connectivity

The global shift toward cloud adoption is built on the assumption of always-on infrastructure. In South Africa, we know better. Even in a 2026 where the grid is stable, a localized fibre outage in a major urban hub or a surge in network congestion on 5G can turn a sleek digital operation into a chaotic mess of manual slips and system down apologies.

Resilient operators have moved past the cloud-only hype. They are prioritizing fail-safe hybrid models. These systems treat the cloud as a vault for data, but the local network remains the engine of the kitchen.

The Friday Night Test

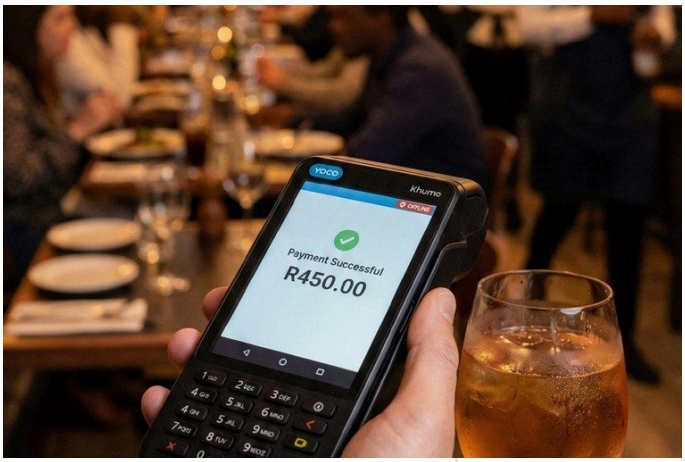
Picture the peak of a weekend service. The pass is a forest of tickets, and the floor is buzzing. Suddenly, the offline notification flashes on your terminal. In a legacy cloud system, this is where the wheels come off. Orders stop printing, payments hang, and the rhythm of the kitchen is shattered while the system reboots.

A truly fail-safe system makes this transition invisible. The data stores locally on your hardware the millisecond the connection drops. The tickets keep firing, the mains away calls keep coming, and your servers do not lose a second. Resilience means that whether it is a power surge or a severed fibre line, the guest experience remains untouched.

Data Integrity and the Silent Sync

The real danger is not just the outage; it is the recovery. When the external world finally reconnects, a surge of pending data hits your servers. This is the moment where ghost orders and duplicate billing occur.

For management, this is a legal and reputational minefield. Under the 2026 regulatory environment, with SARS finalizing its transition to fully digital real-time tax reporting and the Information Regulator tightening POPIA enforcement, your data must be immutable. A system that forgets a round of drinks or overlaps transactions during a sync creates a trust deficit with your guests and a compliance nightmare for your books.





Your 2026 Fail-Safe Checklist

Do not wait for the next digital load shedding event to test your limits. Audit your setup against these non-negotiables:

- **Invisible Failover:** Your system must switch to local storage in under two seconds without requiring a manual logout or a system restart.
- **LAN-First Printing:** Ensure your kitchen and bar printers are hardwired to a local area network so they function perfectly even if the outside internet is dead.
- **Redundant Backhaul:** Consider a dual-WAN setup with fibre as your primary and a high-speed satellite or 5G failover that triggers automatically.
- **Offline Payment Buffering:** Your integrated card machines must be capable of storing encrypted transaction data for later processing if the bank gateway is temporarily unreachable.

The Hybrid Heavyweights

Top 3 POS Systems Built for the SA Grid

- GAAP POS: The veteran choice. Their Unity architecture was built for South African conditions from day one. It does not just handle offline mode: it operates natively in it.
- TallOrder: A leader in local-first sync. It keeps your front-of-house and back-of-house in perfect harmony, even when the external connection is a memory.
- Yoco Khumo Suite: The gold standard for agility. With standalone 4G and offline processing capabilities, it is the go-to for high-volume bistros that need a plug-and-play fail-safe.

The Final Word

Planning for the worst is not pessimism: it is professional excellence. Your technology should be like your sous-chef: reliable, invisible, and ready to take the heat when the pressure peaks. Pull the plug on fragility. Invest in a system that respects the rhythm of your service, whether the world is connected or not.

WELLBEING

The Sober Chef



Redefining kitchen performance through sobriety

The traditional culture of post-service drinking in South African kitchens is undergoing a critical reassessment in early 2026. Long regarded as a harmless way to decompress after a high-pressure shift, workplace drinking is now recognized as a primary contributor to volatile leadership and inconsistent performance. The reliance on alcohol to manage stress often masks deeper burnout and directly compromises the safety and technical precision required in a professional brigade.

Voices from South African kitchens

Across culinary hubs like Cape Town and Johannesburg, a growing number of executive chefs are choosing public sobriety to lead by example. These leaders report that removing alcohol from their lifestyle has resulted in sharper palate clarity, reduced emotional volatility on the pass, and a significant increase in their capacity for complex operational decision-making. Kitchens that have actively pivoted away from a drinking culture report tangible improvements in team retention and morale. By eliminating the expectation of alcohol-cantered socializing, these brigades foster a more inclusive environment where performance is measured by skill and consistency rather than the ability to keep up during late-night drinking sessions.

The data behind the shift

To understand why this change is necessary, we must look at the numbers. South Africa ranks as the fifth-highest country in the world for alcohol consumption when looking at drinkers only, with an average of approximately 30 litres of pure alcohol consumed per drinker annually.

- **Workplace Burden:** In the South African workforce, one in four employees suffers from depression, yet 80 percent will continue to work while struggling. In high-pressure environments like kitchens, alcohol is frequently used as a maladaptive coping mechanism.
- **The Rise of Choice:** There is a growing market for conscious consumption. Non-alcoholic beverages in South Africa are forecasted to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 6.84 percent through 2030 as more professionals prioritize health.
- **National Context:** Substance abuse disorders are the second-highest mental health challenge in South Africa, affecting roughly 13.3 percent of the population.

Building a supportive sober culture

Professionalizing the kitchen means establishing clear, firm policies regarding substance use that focus on support rather than immediate punishment. Providing access to confidential counselling and creating an environment where staff can discuss struggles without fear of losing their position is essential to maintaining a healthy workforce. By partnering with organizations like the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) and the Fair Kitchens initiative, operators can provide their teams with the tools and resources necessary to navigate the stresses of the industry without relying on substance use.

Action points for kitchen teams

- Audit your current staff reward system and remove alcohol as a primary incentive.
- Ensure the staff room has clearly displayed contact details for mental health support networks like SADAG.
- Transition staff meals and service debriefs to include premium non-alcoholic options.
- Foster a management style that rewards emotional intelligence and calm communication on the pass.

The shift toward sobriety is not about moralizing but about protecting the most valuable asset in the kitchen: the people. A sober brigade is a sustainable brigade.

WELLBEING

The Chef's Body



Protecting the industry's most vital asset

The physical toll of a culinary career is no longer a silent burden. In 2026, the industry has recognised chronic pain as a primary threat to professional longevity. Long hours spent standing on hard surfaces, repetitive chopping motions, and lifting heavy stockpots contribute to systemic issues such as lower back strain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and varicose veins. Ignoring these warning signs leads to a shortened career and a diminished quality of life.

The data of the grind

The numbers reveal the true weight of the profession. Musculoskeletal disorders are the second largest reason for disability globally, and the kitchen is a high-risk zone.

- **The Back Burden:** Approximately 80 percent of chefs suffer from lower back pain due to prolonged bending and lifting.
- **Repetitive Strain:** Issues in the shoulders and wrists affect 52 percent of the workforce, primarily driven by repetitive knife work and static postures.
- **The Long Walk:** With 65 percent of chefs working between 9 and 12 hours a day, the ankles and feet bear a massive load, with 64 percent reporting chronic ankle pain.

Ergonomic gear for the long game

The most critical investment for any chef is footwear that prioritises orthopaedic support over brand aesthetics. Leading local suppliers now offer high-traction, shock-absorbing clogs specifically designed to maintain spinal alignment and reduce the impact on knee joints during long shifts. Proper arch support is a requirement for anyone spending twelve hours a day on their feet.

Beyond footwear, strategic placement of anti-fatigue mats at fixed workstations, such as the pass and prep benches, can reduce lower limb strain by up to 30 percent. These mats encourage micro-movements in the legs, which improves circulation and prevents the blood pooling that leads to deep vein thrombosis.

Routine practices to protect bodies

Protecting the body continues after the shift ends. Encouraging the use of compression socks during service and ensuring staff have access to hydration stations are simple ways to combat physical exhaustion and inflammation.

- **Pre-Service Stretching:** A structured five minute dynamic stretch routine before the first order arrives significantly reduces the risk of acute muscle strain.
- **Wrist and Forearm Release:** Focus on opening the hip flexors and releasing tension in the wrists to combat the strain of knife work.
- **Workspace Audits:** Conduct an audit to ensure prep bench heights are optimised for the height of the brigade. Small adjustments can prevent the constant bending that leads to chronic back injuries.

Gear vs. Professional Outcome

Gear | Primary Physical Benefit | Long Term Professional Outcome

- Orthopaedic Clogs | Spinal alignment and arch support | Reduced lower back and hip pain
- Anti-fatigue Mats | Joint pressure reduction | Lower risk of chronic knee issues
- Compression Socks | Improved venous circulation | Prevention of varicose veins and swelling
- Wrist Splints | Neutral joint positioning | Reduced risk of carpal tunnel syndrome

A chef who takes care of their body is a chef who stays in the game. By investing in the right gear and adopting protective routines, you ensure that your physical capacity matches your future ambitions. Health is wealth.

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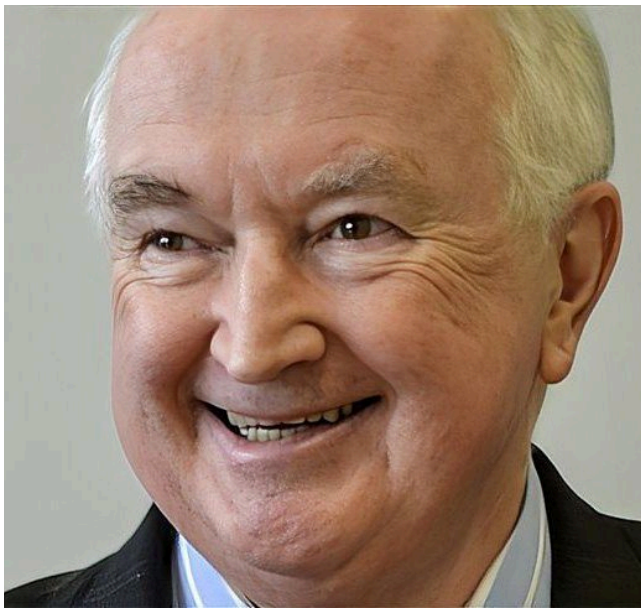
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PROFILE

The Veldsman Syllabus

Palate lessons from a legend,

BY **CHANTELLE BALSDON**



Peter Veldsman remains the definitive authority on the South African palate, a titan whose influence continues to shape the industry. As the food editor of Sarie magazine for nearly two decades and the founder of the Culinary Art Institute of Africa, he did not just teach recipes; he codified a national identity.

His approach to tasting was a rigorous, technical discipline rooted in the belief that a chef must understand the structural components of an ingredient before they can manipulate it. This syllabus is more relevant than ever as local kitchens move away from international imitation toward a technically grounded national soul. For Veldsman, taste was an analytical exercise where balance was a requirement for professional integrity.

The legacy of balance

The foundation of his impact lies in The influence of Veldsman is most sharply felt in the modern execution of Cape Malay cuisine, a style he championed with academic precision. He advocated for the sophisticated use of acidity to provide a counterpoint to the deep, warm spices of the Cape. Today, leading kitchens apply this syllabus by using acidic elements like tamarind, local vinegars, and fermented fruits to brighten heavy stews and curries.

This technical application ensures that the rich complexity of traditional flavours remains vibrant rather than becoming cloying. This shift toward authentic, local profiles is supported by market data showing that 51 percent of South Africans now actively seek out locally sourced products. Furthermore, research indicates that culturally specific South African dishes, such as lamb knuckle curry, consistently outperform European-style counterparts in fine-dining environments.

Texture as design

Texture was a cornerstone of the Veldsman philosophy and a hallmark of his legendary restaurant, Emily's. He famously advocated for the distinct separation of textures within a single dish, such as the precision required to serve samp and beans where every maize kernel remains clean and separate.

Contemporary chefs use these lessons to layer ingredients with intentionality, pairing soft purées with crisp indigenous elements to create a multi-sensory experience. This understanding of mouthfeel as a deliberate design choice aligns with a growing ethnic food market in South Africa, which is projected to grow at a compound annual rate of 6.72 percent through 2033.

Practice drills for the brigade

Training a brigade to taste collectively is the most profound way to honour a master's teachings. These drills remove the guesswork from the pass and replace it with a shared technical language.

- Morning Stock Analysis: Every member of the brigade must taste the base stocks to verify clarity, salt levels, and depth before production begins.
- Component Blind Tasting: Conduct weekly sessions where junior chefs identify local herbs and spices by scent and taste alone to build an internal flavour library.
- The Balance Drill: Task chefs with balancing a simple tomato base using only salt, sugar, and vinegar to master the triangle of seasoning.
- Texture Verification: Review prep work specifically for grain and cut consistency to ensure mouthfeel meets the technical standards of the menu.

While the man himself has passed into history, Peter Veldsman's palate remains the benchmark. Every time a chef balances a Cape Malay curry or perfects the texture of a traditional grain, they are participating in a living tribute to the master who saw the true potential of our plates.



FOOD

Kobus van der Merwe: Indigenous Intelligence in Practice

Philosophy of indigenous ingredients

BY **CHANTELLE BALSDON**

The work of Kobus van der Merwe at Wolfgat represents a fundamental shift in the South African culinary narrative. We have moved beyond the superficial garnishing of plates with local weeds toward a deep, technical integration of our landscape. Van der Merwe's philosophy is rooted in indigenous intelligence, a discipline that treats the West Coast as a primary source of complex seasoning. By harvesting only what the immediate ecosystem provides within a specific seasonal window, the plate becomes an honest, raw reflection of the terroir. It is a direct challenge to the traditional European reliance on imported aromatics, proving that our biomes speak a sophisticated culinary language.



Global recognition and local growth

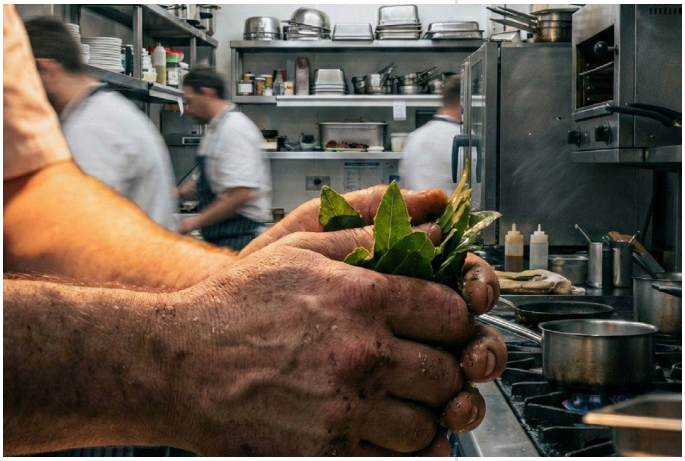
The impact of this approach is validated by global benchmarks. When Wolfgat was named Restaurant of the Year at the World's 50 Best Restaurant Awards, it signalled to the global culinary community that South Africa's hyper-local, foraged cuisine is a world-class standard.





This movement is reflected in shifting consumer behaviour and economic data:

- There is a growing appetite for heritage flavours, with the South African ethnic food market projected to see continued growth as more diners prioritize authenticity and local origins.
- Research shows that over 50 percent of South African consumers now actively seek out locally sourced products, a trend that is forcing a major rethink of supply chain logistics in professional kitchens.
- The bioprospecting industry in South Africa, which includes the commercial use of indigenous plants, contributes significantly to the national economy, highlighting the untapped potential of our wild flora for professional culinary use.





Technical applications of wild flora

Technical mastery requires an understanding of the cellular architecture of our wild flora. For a professional chef, ingredients like Soutslaai and dune spinach are more than just food; they are structural components.

- **Soutslaai (Mesembryanthemum crystallinum):** Managed with extreme precision to protect its water-storing bladder cells. This ensures a singular crystalline crunch and a naturally occurring salinity.
- **Dune Spinach (Tetragonia decumbens):** Utilized for its thick, succulent leaves that offer a distinct mineral profile, allowing chefs to reduce added sodium levels without losing umami.
- **Coastal Succulents:** High saline content is being leveraged as a natural seasoning tool to enhance the inherent flavour of local proteins.





Innovative preparation methods

Preparation has moved toward capturing volatile oils through modern extraction, moving away from the bitterness of traditional boiling toward precision methods.

- **Vacuum Infusion:** Used for aromatics like Buchu to capture bright, herbaceous notes without the astringency.
- **Low-Temperature Oil Extraction:** Isolating the essence of Kapokbos to create stable, reproducible flavour profiles for high-pressure service.
- **Fermentation and Dehydration:** Foraged seaweeds are being processed into concentrated seasoning powders, serving as local alternatives to dashi or miso.

The adoption of indigenous intelligence is a move toward supply chain resilience. By building menus around the tactile reality of the local environment, chefs reduce their dependence on broadline distributors and heavy logistics. This creates an agile form of menu development where the landscape dictates the dish. The result is a singular South African culinary identity that is technically rigorous, geographically authentic, and globally competitive.

Our culinary future is not found in distant ports but in the soil beneath our feet and the salt on our shores. By mastering our own environmental context, we are not just cooking; we are claiming our place at the global table. We are finally learning to trust the wisdom of the land that has always fed us.

TECHNIQUE

THE CHEMISTRY OF THE PASS

Philosophy of indigenous ingredients



In the modern professional kitchen, pH is no longer a theoretical concept reserved for laboratory scientists. It has become a vital operational metric that dictates the safety, shelf life, and technical success of a menu. Mastering the power of hydrogen is essential for preventing microbial growth - specifically the risk of foodborne illnesses in fermented or bottled goods - and for ensuring the structural integrity of advanced culinary gels and emulsions.

THE SCIENCE OF THE SCALE

The pH scale, ranging from 0 to 14, measures the concentration of hydrogen ions in a substance. A value of 7 is neutral, while anything below is acidic and anything above is alkaline. In a high-stakes culinary environment, precision is everything.

Food safety remains a primary driver for this technical rigour. Research indicates that foodborne diseases cost the South African economy billions annually in lost productivity and healthcare expenses.

By maintaining a pH level of 4.6 or below in acidified foods, chefs create a hostile environment for pathogens like Clostridium botulinum, ensuring that artisanal ferments and bottled sauces remain safe for consumption.

PRECISION TOOLS FOR THE BRIGADE

To maintain a technically rigorous kitchen, the right equipment is non-negotiable.

- **Digital pocket testers:** These are the most common tools found on the pass due to their portability and speed. Waterproof and battery-operated, they provide a digital readout of acidity levels with an accuracy of up to 0.01 pH units. They are ideal for quick checks of sauces, marinades, and pickling brines.
- **Specialized puncture electrodes:** For solid and semi-solid ingredients like meats, aged cheeses, or thick doughs, handheld meters equipped with robust puncture probes are used. These probes pierce the surface to measure internal acidity without needing to liquefy the entire sample.
- **pH test strips:** While cost-effective, these rely on subjective colour interpretation and are generally used as a backup. For products where a specific pH threshold is a legal safety requirement, digital meters are the industry standard.

THE CHEF'S REFERENCE GUIDE: CRITICAL PH BENCHMARKS

Understanding the baseline for your raw materials is the first step toward scientific certainty. Below are the common thresholds that dictate quality and safety in the brigade.

Fresh Proteins and Seafood

- Fresh Beef: 5.5 to 6.2. (Values reaching 6.5 indicate the onset of decomposition).
- Pork: 5.4 to 5.8. (Maintaining this range is critical to avoid pale, soft, and exudative defects).
- Poultry: 6.5 to 6.7. (Highly neutral and susceptible; requires the strictest cold chain management).
- Fresh Fish: 6.6 to 6.8. (The high pH of seafood is why it spoils faster than terrestrial proteins).

Ferments and Preserves

- The Safety Ceiling: 4.6. (The absolute maximum pH for shelf-stable acidified foods).
- Kimchi and Sauerkraut: 3.5 to 4.5. (The target range for peak lactic acid development).
- Artisanal Yogurt: 4.5 to 4.6. (The point where protein networks stabilize into a perfect gel).
- Pickling Brines: 3.2 to 3.5. (Ensuring deep penetration and long-term microbial stability).

PROTOCOLS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL PASS

Accuracy is only as good as the calibration of the tool. A kitchen that knows, rather than guesses, adheres to strict measurement protocols.

- Digital meters require daily calibration using standardized buffer solutions, typically at pH 4.0 and 7.0, to ensure the electrode is reading correctly before service begins.
- The pH of a substance is highly sensitive to temperature. Use meters with Automatic Temperature Compensation (ATC) to account for the heat of the kitchen environment.

- When testing chunky or solid foods like salsa, blend the solids into a uniform slurry using a small amount of distilled water to ensure a stable, homogeneous reading.

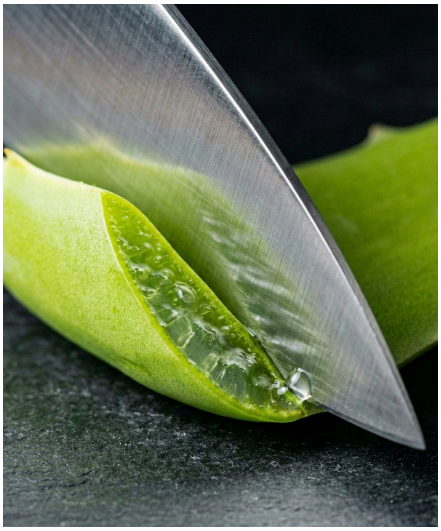
Understanding the chemical balance of your ingredients is the difference between a kitchen that hopes for success and a kitchen that guarantees it. By integrating precise pH control into your workflow, you protect your brand, your diners, and the integrity of your craft.

The era of guessing by taste alone is over. Scientific certainty is the new standard of excellence.

SPEKBOOM REIMAGINED

Techniques and chemistry for the modern pass

Portulacaria afra, or spekboom, has graduated from a carbon-sequestration miracle to a high-performance chemical asset in the professional kitchen. Its flavour profile is a moving target governed by Crassulacean Acid Metabolism (CAM) photosynthesis. This biological clock causes malic acid levels to surge and retreat throughout the day. To master spekboom is to master the clock. Harvesting at 06:00 yields a sharp, lemon-like acidity, while a 16:00 harvest offers a milder, vegetal crunch. Beyond the tang, its dense mucilaginous structure provides a natural, clean-label thickening power that allows chefs to replace synthetic stabilisers with raw botanical performance.



APPLICATION AND PROCESSING

The modern spekboom chutney is a departure from the brown, over-sugared preserves of the past. Chefs are now utilising the plant's natural pectin to create vibrant, translucent condiments. By employing a rapid-maceration technique, the integrity of the leaf is preserved, ensuring a characteristic pop upon mastication. This texture-first approach uses spekboom as both a structural base and a souring agent, allowing for a significant reduction in added vinegar and sugar.

When reduced, spekboom juice undergoes a technical transformation into a high-gloss, self-emulsifying glaze. The malic acid acts as a biological degreaser, slicing through the heavy lipid profiles of proteins like pork belly or Karoo lamb. The current trend focuses on the naked glaze - a reduction of cold-pressed juice and finely sieved pulp that achieves a mirror finish without the cloying stickiness of honey or glucose. It is a technical solution for chefs demanding high-impact acidity with zero textural compromise.

SALADS AND ACID STRATEGIES

In the cold kitchen, spekboom is deployed as a structural acid. Rather than drowning leaves in a vinaigrette that inevitably leads to wilting, chefs are using a spekboom brunoise - precision-cut 2mm cubes that act as internal acid bombs within a dish. This strategy ensures the dish remains turgid and fresh throughout a long service. Spekboom's resilience is its greatest asset; its cells remain swollen and crisp even when dressed, protecting the aesthetic integrity of the plate from the pass to the table.

PAIRING LOGIC FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN PALATE

- **Coastal Seafood:** Early-morning harvest leaves provide a sharp, citrus-forward finish that mimics the profile of yuzu or finger lime.
- **Red Game Meats:** The late-afternoon harvest offers a deep, vegetal note that grounds the iron-rich intensity of springbok or kudu.
- **Indigenous Dairy:** The acidity is a perfect foil for the creamy, lactic density of traditional amasi or artisanal goat's cheese.
- **Roasted Root Vegetables:** Spekboom provides a bright, lemony lift that cuts through the caramelised sugars of roasted beetroot or parsnips.

OPERATIONAL PROTOCOLS AND RISKS

Executing spekboom at a professional level requires a rigorous technical protocol to mitigate its volatile nature.

- **Oxidation Control:** High enzyme activity can lead to rapid browning once the leaf is bruised. Ascorbic acid or immediate vacuum sealing is mandatory to lock in the neon-green hue.
- **Harvest Synchronisation:** Do not mix morning and afternoon harvests in a single batch. The resulting pH imbalance will shatter the consistency of your sauces.
- **Mucilage Management:** Excessive blending triggers a slimy texture. Pulsing or hand-chopping is required to maintain the desired snap.
- **Sourcing Safety:** Use only food-grade suppliers. The risk of heavy metal accumulation from urban-foraged spekboom is a primary food safety concern for professional operators.

By understanding the biological rhythm of the plant, we transform a local staple into a sophisticated tool. The future of our national soul lies in our ability to apply world-class science to the ingredients that have always been right in front of us.

TECHNIQUE

Ice Plant Precision

Managing texture and salinity in the modern brigade



Mesembryanthemum crystallinum, known as soutslaai or the ice plant, has moved from a coastal curiosity to an essential technical tool. It provides a mineral salinity and structural pop that no other leaf can replicate. Modern chefs use it to replace traditional salt finishing, offering a burst of oceanic air delivered via a succulent, crunchy vessel.

The science of the shimmer

The frosted appearance is created by Epidermal Bladder Cells (EBCs). These specialized, translucent hair structures function as pressurized water reservoirs, storing sodium, magnesium, and organic acids.

These cells are hypersensitive. High heat causes internal pressure to exceed structural limits, leading to a melted appearance. Traditional salt-based dressings trigger osmotic collapse, drawing water out and turning the leaf limp within minutes.

Protective cooking: The tempura paradox

While soutslaai is heat-averse, protective cooking allows for the application of warmth without sacrificing integrity.

By using an ultra-cold, low-gluten tempura batter, chefs create a rapid-set thermal barrier. Flash-frying at 180°C for 15 seconds crisps the exterior while the internal bladder cells remain cool and pressurized. This creates a sensory paradox: a warm, crispy shell followed by a cold, saline burst.



Actionable guidance for the brigade

- **Hand-tear only:** Metal blades accelerate oxidation. Hand-tear or use whole sprigs to keep pressurized cells intact.
- **Late-stage dressing:** Add to the plate last. Apply acid in droplets rather than a heavy coating to prevent cell wall degradation.
- **Restore turgidity:** Submerge limp plants in a 5 percent ice-water bath for 60 seconds to restore the crystalline snap via osmosis.
- **Thermal guarding:** Never place directly onto hot sauces or resting meats. Residual heat will deflate the bladder cells before the plate reaches the guest.
- **Precision tools:** Use silicone-tipped tweezers for placement. Metal tongs will rupture the delicate droplets.



Waste utility and sustainability

In a professional environment, zero waste is a mark of technical mastery. Use bruised leaves to infuse oils or vinegars. The natural sodium and chlorophyll create a vibrant, saline finishing oil that carries the essence of the coast.

Trusting the wisdom of the land means understanding its biology. When the brigade respects the science of the plant, soutslaai becomes more than a garnish; it becomes a signature of South African technical excellence.

TECHNIQUE

Kapokbos and Wild Rosemary: The Chef's Technical Cheat Sheet

Beyond flavour: Harnessing the biological shield of indigenous fynbos



Kapokbos (Eriocephalus africanus)

Kapokbos, or the snow bush, is your most potent antimicrobial tool. It isn't just a flavour; it's a biological shield for the professional kitchen.

- **Antimicrobial Powerhouse:** The plant is loaded with artemisia ketone, an essential oil that is lethal to Staphylococcus aureus. Use it as a technical seal in the early, high-risk stages of dry-curing to kill pathogens before they start.
- **The Stress Secret:** For maximum technical impact, source material from drought-stressed regions in the Northern Cape or Namaqualand. Stressed plants produce up to 50% more flavonoids and antioxidants, providing a superior chemical safety net for lipid stability.
- **Lipid Protection:** The tannins and polyphenols in Kapokbos prevent fat rancidity during long aging periods. If your kitchen temperature fluctuates, this plant provides the thermal stability traditional herbs lack.
- **High-Shear Salt Hack:** For even distribution, high-shear your dried leaves into coarse sea salt at a 1:10 ratio. Let it cure for 48 hours to lock the active ketones into the salt crystals for a precision rub.



Wild Rosemary (The Aromatic Identity)

While botanically identical, the culinary identity of Wild Rosemary focuses on volatile aromatic extraction and mouthfeel.

- The Diurnal Acid Shift: Like other fynbos, its chemical profile moves with the sun. A morning harvest provides a sharp, antiseptic profile, while an afternoon harvest is milder and more woody.
- Succulence Control: Plants growing near the coast have more succulent leaves than those inland. Use the coastal variety for fresh salads or tzatziki where you want a mineral snap; use the inland variety for deep reductions and marinades.
- Aromatic Barrier: When roasting lamb or game, use the whole needle-like sprigs to create a structural barrier. This regulates moisture loss while releasing oils only under direct high heat, ensuring the aroma is at its peak when the plate hits the pass.
- Low-Temp Dehydration: Never dry this plant above 35°C. High-heat commercial drying destroys the volatile ledol content, stripping the plant of its antimicrobial heart and aromatic depth.

Technical mastery requires a shift from assembly to a deep understanding of botanical intelligence. When we respect the chemistry of the veld, we move beyond the trend and into the realm of true culinary craft.

TECHNIQUE

The Art of the Sour Fig

Beyond the Jar: The Technical Soul of the Vygie



Carpobrotus edulis, known to most as the humble sour fig or suurvygie, has undergone a sophisticated evolution. Long relegated to the realm of syrupy jams and roadside preserves, it has emerged as a high-utility technical asset for the professional pass. This coastal powerhouse offers a singular combination of malic acidity, dense tannins, and natural mucilage that acts as a biological alternative to synthetic thickeners and imported vinegars. It provides a puckering, mineral salinity that bridges the gap between land and sea, making it indispensable for any kitchen demanding technical precision from local flora.

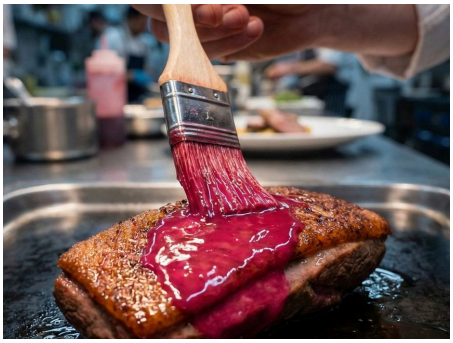
Technical Applications

The brilliance of the sour fig lies in its versatility. Here is how to harness its biological properties for modern plating:

- **Self-Glazing Gastriques:** The internal mucilage of the fruit provides a natural glazing quality, eliminating the need for added honey or glucose. When reduced with a light caramel, the tannins slice through the lipid profile of heavy proteins, providing a persistent, bright top note that keeps the palate refreshed.
- **Controlled Ferments:** Fermentation transforms the raw, aggressive astringency of the vygie into a complex, floral umami. A 2% lacto-ferment breaks down the dense fibrous structure, creating a high-impact seasoning liquid. This is the preferred local alternative to citrus or verjus for finishing delicate crudo and emulsions.
- **Fluid Gels and Stabilisation:** High pectin levels in the pulp allow for the creation of stable gels without the use of commercial hydrocolloids. By processing the fruit at specific temperatures and utilizing high-speed shearing, you can produce pipeable, heat-stable gels that maintain their integrity even under the heat of a busy pass.







Pairing Logic: The Technical Bridge

The sour fig acts as a flavour anchor on the South African menu, balancing intensity with acidity:

- **Rich Proteins:** Use it to cut the iron-heavy notes of ostrich and venison.

- **Cape Malay Aromatics:** It provides a sharp counterpoint to the warmth of toasted cumin and coriander.
- **Fermented Dairy:** The acidity slices through the density of labneh or traditional amasi.
- **Oily Line fish:** The fruit's properties emulsify with fish oils for a balanced, mouth-coating finish.

Operational Notes and Pitfalls

Precision is paramount when working with this wild ingredient. To ensure consistency, keep these factors in mind:

- **Oxidation Control:** High enzyme activity leads to rapid browning. The use of ascorbic acid or immediate vacuum sealing is mandatory to preserve the vibrant pink hue.
- **Tannin Management:** Avoid over-reduction. Excessive heat turns the flavour profile from pleasantly tart to punishingly bitter.
- **Harvest Timing:** Source only full-maturity fruit during the dry summer months. Under-ripe fruit lacks the natural sugars required for successful technical processing.

The Chef's Workshop: Technical Recipes

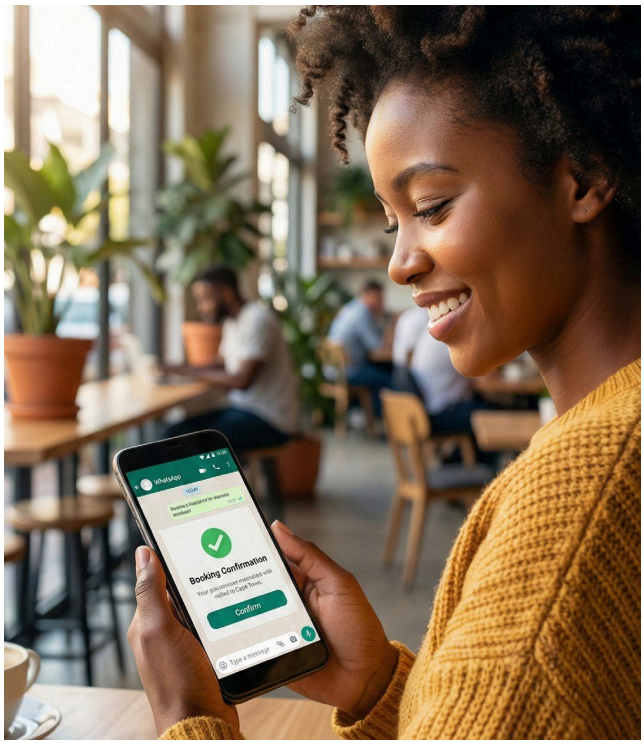
- **2% Lacto-Fermented Liquid:** Pack 500g halved figs in a 2% salt brine (10g salt per 500g water). Ferment for 7 to 14 days until the pH reaches 3.5 to 3.8. Use this to finish raw line fish crudo or bright emulsions.
- **Self-Glazing Gastrique:** Reduce a white sugar caramel with fynbos vinegar and 200g of sour fig pulp. Simmer for 45 minutes to a pH of 3.2. This is ideal for brushing onto seared duck or ostrich fillets.
- **Heat-Stable Fluid Gel:** Simmer 300g of pulp with 1g of ascorbic acid; blend at high speed and chill to set. Once set, use a high-speed shear to reach a pH of 3.2 to 3.5. This provides stable piping for hot plate service.

The sour fig is no longer just a memory of a coastal road trip; it is a sophisticated tool that allows the modern chef to plate the very essence of the South African landscape with scientific rigour.

BUSINESS

The No-Show Tax: Protecting Your Table

Why commitment-based bookings are the new industry standard



In the current trading climate, a no-show is no longer a minor annoyance. It is a direct assault on your bottom line. Data from major South African booking platforms shows that while average no-show rates hover around 20%, establishments that fail to secure their bookings often see that number spike during peak periods in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

This is the no-show tax, a hidden drain on your resources that costs South African restaurants hundreds of thousands of rands annually in wasted stock, inefficient labour, and lost opportunity. When a table for four ghosts a Friday night service, you aren't just losing that bill; you're losing the net profit for the entire shift.

The rise of the commitment-based model

We are seeing a massive shift in 2026. Requesting a deposit has moved from high-end fine dining into the casual sector, with a 120% increase in adoption over recent cycles. The reason is simple: the psychology of having skin in the game works. Restaurants using automated deposits through platforms like Dineplan report a drop in no-show rates to as low as 1.6%.

For the professional operator, this is about mutual respect. When you secure a booking, you are ensuring the sustainability of your business and the job security of your brigade.



Operational Implementation: How to secure your floor

- **Set a reasonable threshold:** Under the Consumer Protection Act, your deposit must be fair. The local standard is R100 to R250 per person for casual dining, while high-demand Cape Town spots often secure R500 or more for dinner slots.
- **Target your enforcement:** You do not have to tax every guest. Impose deposits only on high-risk tables, such as Friday and Saturday nights, public holidays, or groups of six and larger.
- **Adhere to the 24-hour rule:** The current industry standard for a full refund is a 24-to-48-hour cancellation window. This gives you enough time to fill the seat from your waitlist without losing revenue.
- **Prioritise automation:** Use SMS and WhatsApp reminders that include a one-click cancel or reschedule link. This removes the friction for the guest while keeping your system updated in real-time.
- **Focus on the human angle:** Explain that the deposit is not a penalty. It is a tool that allows you to pay your staff fairly and keep your menu prices stable by guaranteeing the table's viability.

The difference between a restriction and professionalism is how you frame it. When you respect your own time and resources, your guests will too. By securing your bookings, you are not just protecting your profit; you are honouring the soul of your service and the hands that prepare the food. Our industry survives on the promises we keep to each other.

FOOD

The Neuro-Plate: Beyond the Aphrodisiac Cliché



The days of leaning on a dozen oysters and a prayer are over. For the modern diner, date night has evolved from a mandatory romantic gesture into a search for emotional resonance. As chefs, we are no longer just masters of the Maillard reaction; we are the architects of our guests' neurochemistry.

In the current landscape, the global culinary vanguard is moving toward Functional Gastronomy. We are not looking for magic roots with legal red tape; we are looking at the molecular potential of our daily pantry. The goal is to move the guest from the fight or flight of a busy workday into a rest and connection state before the first course is even cleared.

The Science of the Spark: A Chef's Toolkit

To master this menu, you must understand the three chemical pillars of a romantic evening: Dopamine (Anticipation), Oxytocin (Connection), and Serotonin (Contentment). Here is how to engineer them using world-class technique and everyday ingredients.

1. The Opening Move: The Charred Avocado Steak

The Objective: Trigger Dopamine and lower cortisol.

Forget the mushy guacamole of the past. We are treating the avocado like a premium cut of Wagyu.

- **The Technique:** Take a firm-ripe, large-format Hass avocado. Peel and halve it. Score the flat surface in a tight diamond cross-hatch. Hard-sear it on a high-heat cast iron or Konro grill until the ridges are blackened and carbonised, while the interior remains a buttery, cold custard.
- **The Application:** Serve with a Pumpkin Seed Brittle - rich in magnesium for muscle relaxation - and a chilli-lime gel.
- **The Detail:** Tyrosine in the avocado is a direct precursor to dopamine. The contrast of the bitter, crunchy char against the creamy, cool fat sends a sensory jolt to the brain, snapping the guest into the present moment.





2. The Main Event: The Omega-3 Emulsion

The Objective: Foster Oxytocin through physical lightness.

Heavy, cream-laden sauces lead to lethargy, which is the enemy of romance. We want high-vibration fats.

- **The Technique:** Slow-poach Kingklip or Salmon at 42°C in a bath of extra virgin olive oil and lemon zest. This preserves the delicate Omega-3 chains.
- **The Application:** Pair with a Shiitake and Lion's Mane duxelles. Mushrooms contain ergothioneine, a potent antioxidant that clears brain fog.
- **The Detail:** High-quality Omega-3s improve vascular health and blood flow. By keeping the protein light and the fats clean, you ensure the guest feels energised, not exhausted, by the time the check arrives.



3. The Finale: The Tryptophan Transition

The Objective: Stabilise Serotonin for a lasting glow.

The final course must be a calculated downshift that leaves the guest feeling safe and satisfied.

- **The Technique:** Create a 70 percent dark chocolate ganache aerated with a nitrogen siphon to produce a cloud texture, paired with fermented honey and caramelised banana puree.
- **The Application:** Dust with a hint of Maldon salt and crushed pistachios.
- **The Detail:** Bananas are a powerhouse of Vitamin B6, the essential cofactor for converting tryptophan into serotonin. Dark chocolate provides Phenylethylamine (PEA), the same chemical the brain releases when we first fall in love.



Actionable Guidance for the Pass

- **Vagal Tone Reset:** Start the meal with a small, intensely cold amuse-bouche followed immediately by a warm, aromatic broth. This temperature shift stimulates the vagus nerve, physically forcing the guest's heart rate to slow down.
- **Aromatic Anchoring:** Spritz your linen or menu with a dry mist of sandalwood or neroli. These scents bypass the rational brain and head straight for the limbic system, which governs emotion and memory.
- **The Texture Narrative:** Ensure every dish has a snap, smooth, and grain element. Engaging multiple tactile receptors in the mouth keeps the brain occupied and prevents mind-wandering back to work or stress.

Romance is not found in a heart-shaped garnish. It is found in the meticulous balance of amino acids, the strategic use of temperature, and the chef's ability to manipulate the guest's physical state. When you master the neuro-plate, you don't just feed the body; you command the mood. You become the catalyst for a connection that lasts long after the table is cleared.

Enough thinking.



UPSKILLING

FROM TOWNSHIP FLAMES TO TOURISM FAME

How the Mastershisanyama Upskilling Programme is Redefining South Africa's Food Culture

In the heart of South Africa's townships, where the unmistakable aroma of braaied meat fills the air and communities gather around open flames, a quiet transformation is taking place. The Mastershisanyama Upskilling Programme is turning informal food outlets into professional, tourism-ready culinary destinations, one grill at a time.

Implemented through a strategic partnership between the South African Chefs Association, SA Chefs, and EDTEA, Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, the programme is more than just training. It is a movement aimed at professionalising local food businesses and unlocking township tourism potential

A PROGRAMME ROOTED IN PURPOSE

Across the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years, the programme has reached 20 small businesses in eThekwini and Zululand, equipping them with the tools to thrive in an increasingly competitive and experience-driven food economy.

At its core, the initiative focuses on empowering grassroots "chefpreneurs" with a blend of:

- Culinary expertise
- Food safety and hygiene compliance
- Business and financial management skills
- Customer service excellence

Beyond the curriculum lies a deeper mission. It aims to elevate township food culture into a recognised and respected tourism offering.

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN: ETHEKWINI PILOT



The journey began in eThekwini during the 2024/25 financial year, where 24 beneficiaries from six businesses underwent intensive theoretical and practical training. Participating businesses included: Groutville Shisanyama, Gidela Lounge, Busy Corner Butchery, Izwelethu Butchery, Juicy Lounge, and T and P Butchery Place.

The results were almost immediate.

Businesses that once operated informally began to reflect structure, consistency, and professionalism. Izwelethu Butchery, for example, embraced innovation by introducing an online ordering system and professional packaging. This move significantly improved both customer experience and revenue.

For many participants, the transformation felt dramatic. As one observation noted, “The difference is like East and West.”

SCALING IMPACT: ZULULAND EXPANSION

Building on this success, the programme expanded into Zululand during the 2025/26 financial year, training 38 beneficiaries from 14 shisanyama enterprises.



Participating businesses included: 3 Sisters, 3838 Shisanyama, De Link, Ecembeni, Ekhaya Africa, Kwa Sbali Shisanyama, Malitar Corner, Mingling, MK Pub and Grill, Rocka Feela, Russels Shisanyama, Ta Nesh Shisanyama, Uphanakho, and Village Shisanyama.

By the time the cohort concluded in November 2025, with its official closing held on 5 March 2026, the improvements were clear.

From visible hygiene compliance charts and sanitation stations to improved staff grooming and the correct use of protective clothing, these businesses began operating at a level aligned with formal hospitality standards.





One standout, Rocka Feela in Nongoma, demonstrated a remarkable shift. The business embraced cleanliness, structure, and customer facing professionalism, positioning it strongly within the tourism value chain.



CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

What makes the Mastershisanyama programme unique is its ability to shift mindset as much as skillset.

Participants move from survivalist operations to structured enterprises. They begin to see their businesses not just as places to sell food, but as brands, experiences, and economic drivers.

This is where the partnership between SA Chefs and EDTEA becomes critical. It links skills development with tourism growth and ensures that township establishments can confidently welcome both local patrons and international visitors.

MORE THAN JUST A PROGRAMME

At its core, the Mastershisanyama initiative is about dignity, opportunity, and transformation. It is about taking what already exists in communities, the passion, the flavour, and the culture, and refining it into something powerful and sustainable. From smoky township grills to tourism ready destinations, these businesses are not just cooking food. They are shaping a new future.





A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE

As South Africa continues to position itself as a diverse culinary destination, township food experiences are gaining increasing recognition. The Mastershisanyama Upskilling Programme proves that, with the right support, grassroots businesses can meet global standards without losing their cultural authenticity.

It is a model that supports:

- Inclusive economic growth
- Sustainable small business development
- Job creation at community level
- The celebration of local food heritage



Flor-Do-Tejo

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EDUCATION

Shaping the Future of Culinary Education

The SA Chefs Education Committee 2026



The SA Chefs Education Committee continues to play a critical role in shaping the future of culinary education in South Africa. As we move into 2026, the committee stands as a collective of passionate, experienced professionals committed to driving standards, strengthening systems, and ensuring that culinary education remains relevant, credible, and aligned with industry needs.

This is not a passive committee. It is a working body made up of leaders who actively influence training, assessment, and professional development across the country. With representation from private academies, public institutions, and workplace training environments, the committee brings together a balanced and practical perspective on what the industry truly requires.

At the helm is Chef Tommie Hurter, Owner and Director of Limpopo Chefs Academy, Vice President of SA Chefs, and Chair of the Education Committee. His leadership brings strong industry insight and a clear commitment to advancing culinary education. Supporting him as Vice Chair is Elsu Gericke, Head of Education at SA Chefs, who drives the committee focus on accountability, structure, and meaningful impact.

The committee proudly includes Jeanne Jacques Scheepers (Academy Principal, Sondela Academy), Hendrik Jansen van Nieuwenhuizen (Faculty Head: Culinary Arts and Hospitality, Sondela Academy), and Evert Fourie (Hospitality Manager, Sondela Academy), all contributing to academic excellence and operational relevance.

Public sector representation is equally important, with Ashnie Soorajpal, Campus Manager at Ekurhuleni East TVET College, ensuring alignment with national training frameworks and accessibility. Similarly, Charmaine Mokoena from MRTT (Hospitality and Tourism Academy) and Penelope de Villiers, the committee secretary from the College of Cape Town, bring depth in academic governance and administration.

From the private education space, leaders such as Suzanne Crozier (Head of Academics, The Capital Hotel School), David Steyn (Head of School, Steyns Culinary School), and Jackie Cameron (Owner, Jackie Cameron School of Cooking) contribute strong insights into curriculum relevance, student development, and industry readiness.

The committee impact is further strengthened by Jim Thobakgale, Kelly Fowlds, and Adriaan Jacobs, all of whom are directly involved in training and developing young chefs at campus level. Their input ensures that decisions made at committee level translate into real impact in the classroom and kitchen.

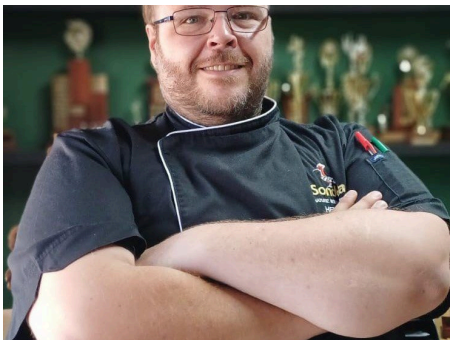
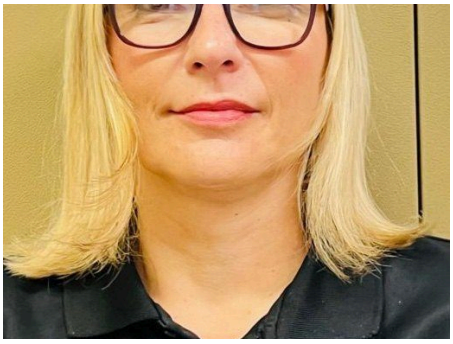


Additional expertise is brought in by Jarine Mostert (Campus Manager, Francois Ferreira Academy), as well as Michele Fourie and Charl Crause from FBI in the Free State, reinforcing the committee commitment to quality teaching, assessment, and mentorship.

What makes this committee particularly powerful is not just the calibre of its members, but the shared understanding that education must evolve. The focus for 2026 is clear: strengthening professional designations, improving training pro-

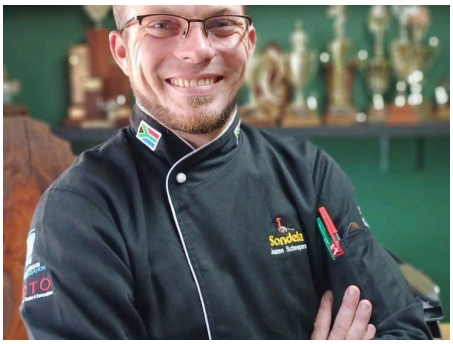
vider recognition, enhancing assessment and moderation practices, and ensuring that graduates are workplace ready.












COVER STORY

Global Spice, Local Fire: Reflections from India

BY **CHEF COO PILLAY, SA CHEFS PRESIDENT**

My recent journey to India was far more than an official visit - it was a powerful immersion into one of the world's most layered and spiritually grounded culinary cultures. India does not simply serve food; it serves heritage. Every spice blend, every regional preparation, every shared meal carries centuries of history and identity.



I extend my sincere gratitude to Manjit Gill Singh, President of the Indian Federation of Culinary Associations, and his exceptional executive team for their warm hospitality and meticulous organisation of the World Culinary Heritage Exchange Programme. Their leadership reflects a deep commitment not only to Indian gastronomy but to global culinary collaboration. The professionalism and generosity shown to all international delegates exemplified the true spirit of chefs' camaraderie.



The programme brought together 26 delegates from across the world, each representing their nation's culinary voice. Among them was our very own Gauteng Young Chefs Club Chair, Chef Seham Beriche, whose presence made South Africa incredibly proud. Watching her engage with global peers, absorb knowledge, and contribute meaningfully to discussions reaffirmed the importance of investing in our young leaders. She represented our country with passion, humility, and excellence.



The forum itself was a masterclass in regional diversity. India is not one cuisine - it is a continent of flavours. From the coconut- rich curries of Kerala to the tandoor traditions of Punjab, from delicate Bengali sweets to the robust vegetarian heritage of Gujarat, each region carries its own agricultural logic, climate influence, and cultural narrative. Sessions went into depth on indigenous ingredients, spice tempering techniques, fermentation methods, and the medicinal philosophy underpinning Ayurvedic cooking.



Attending Indus Food 2026 further showcased the balance between tradition and innovation. Cutting- edge food technology stood proudly alongside artisanal spice traders and heritage producers. It reinforced a powerful message: modernisation does not mean abandoning authenticity - it means amplifying it.



One particularly memorable moment was our visit to Agra to experience the iconic Taj Mahal - one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Standing before that architectural masterpiece alongside Andy Cuthbert, President of Worldchefs, and fellow international delegates was profoundly symbolic. The Taj Mahal represents legacy, craftsmanship, devotion, and timeless beauty - values that resonate deeply within our culinary profession. Just as the monument was built with precision and passion, so too are great cuisines constructed through dedication, patience, and artistry.













What struck me most throughout the journey was India's mastery of spice layering. Spice is not used for heat alone; it is used for balance, harmony, and storytelling. It warms without overwhelming, elevates without dominating. This philosophy mirrors South Africa's own culinary identity - diverse, expressive, and rooted in cultural fusion. We, too, are a mosaic of influences, traditions, and modern reinvention.

For the South African Chefs Association, this exchange strengthens international ties and opens doors for future collaborations, youth development programmes, and shared platforms. It reminds us that global engagement is not about imitation - it is about connection and mutual respect.

As I returned home, I reflected on the theme that best captures this experience: Global Spice, Local Fire. India offers the depth of ancient spice wisdom; South Africa brings innovation, resilience, and bold creativity. When these elements meet, new ideas ignite and new opportunities emerge.



May we continue to explore the world with curiosity, represent our nation with pride, and build bridges through food. Because in every kitchen - whether in Johannesburg, Mumbai, or beyond - excellence is born from passion, heritage, and the courage to share our story with the world.

EDUCATION

BEYOND THE PLATE

Why Sondela Academy is Redefining Culinary Education



For many aspiring chefs, the transition from a quiet classroom to the high-pressure environment of a professional kitchen can be overwhelming. At Sondela Academy, we believe the best way to learn the realities of the kitchen is to be in it from day one.

Our 36-month Occupational Chef Certificate is not just a qualification. It is a three-year professional immersion designed to bridge the gap between student and seasoned culinary professional.





A CAMPUS LIKE NO OTHER

Located within the pristine Sondela Nature Reserve and Spa, the academy offers an environment where education meets real-world application.

We integrate traditional learning with interactive lectures and practical training in a state-of-the-art industrial kitchen. Students work through modern online workbooks, activities, and assessments to ensure strong theoretical understanding.

However, the true value of the programme comes to life across our seven fully operational kitchens.

Accommodation is available both on and off campus, and a canteen service provides convenient daily meals.







FROM PRIVATE CHEFFING TO BANQUETING: A 360-DEGREE EXPERIENCE

What sets a Sondela graduate apart is the diversity and depth of their experience. Unlike traditional institutions that rely on simulated environments, our students rotate through a range of real-world culinary settings:

- **Luxury Tented Camp** Master private cheffing and intimate, high-end service
- **Country House** Execute formal cuisine and bespoke dining experiences
- **Bakery and Deli** Develop precision in artisanal baking and retail hospitality
- **À La Carte and Pizza Station** Manage the pace and pressure of a busy restaurant environment
- **Banqueting** Gain experience in large-scale events and function catering

Sondela hosts major events annually, including the kykNET Buite Ekspo in July, which attracts more than 20,000 visitors over the course of the weekend.



THE SONDELA EDGE: THREE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE FROM DAY ONE

Our seamless integration of learning and working ensures that students begin serving paying guests from their first week.

By graduation, students are not simply new entrants to the industry. They leave as professionals with three years of documented work experience, supported by written testimonials and service letters.

Sondela Academy is accredited by CATHSSETA, QCTO, City and Guilds, and Highfield, and is a registered South African Chefs Association training provider.

A STRUCTURED JOURNEY FOR GROWTH

The programme is carefully designed to support progressive development:

- **Year One: Foundational Skills** Master knife skills, food safety, and flavour principles
- **Year Two: Specialisation** Build expertise in specific culinary disciplines and techniques
- **Year Three: Kitchen Management** Develop leadership capability and understand the business of running a successful kitchen

VALUE-ADDED TRAINING FOR THE MODERN CULINARY LEADER

We go beyond technical training to develop well-rounded industry professionals. Included in the qualification are essential certifications:

Health and Safety

First Aid Levels 1 and 3, as well as firefighting training

Education and Development

Training in assessing, facilitating, and workplace coaching

Leadership and Business

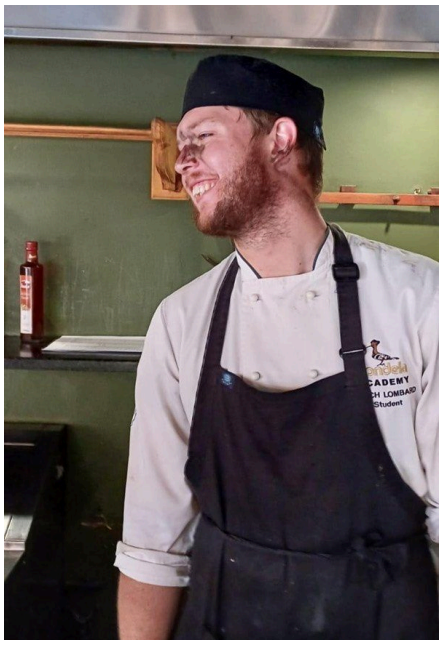
Leadership training through ILM, an entrepreneurship programme, and personal development modules

Wellness

A focus on psychological well-being to help students navigate the demands of the industry

YOUR FINAL MILESTONE: THE TRADE TEST

At the end of the programme, students complete their Trade Test on-site in our accredited testing kitchen, assessed by NAMB-approved assessors and moderators.



START YOUR JOURNEY

Book an open day or begin your enrolment:

info@sondelaacadmey.net

014 736 8860 | 060 748 5886

https://linktr.ee/sondelaacademy

Sondela Nature Reserve and Spa

Bela Bela, Limpopo

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Join Sondela Academy and turn your passion into a professional legacy. For over 20 years, Sondela Academy has been creating careers as a leading hub for hospitality, conservation, events, and culinary training.

INDUSTRY

Beyond the white jacket

What today's food industry really needs

BY **TREVOR BOYD, OPERATIONS GENERAL MANAGER: FOOD & BEVERAGE, CITY LODGE HOTELS**



When people think about chefs, the picture is often incomplete. There's the white jacket, the apron, the intensity, and sometimes the ego. What's far less visible is the human reality behind that façade: people operating under pressure, balancing creativity with operational systems, and carrying responsibility for food as well as staff.

Trevor Boyd, Operations General Manager: Food and Beverage at City Lodge Hotels and Hostex 2026 ambassador, notes that misunderstanding often sits at the heart of how the food industry is misjudged.

"Behind that hard exterior is someone trying to deliver standards: standards of food, consistency, and leadership, all while managing daily pressure," he explains. "Kitchens demand precision, pace, and resilience, and sometimes that means firmness – what often gets labelled as ego is, in reality, accountability."

Trevor is cautious about using the word "passion": "Passion comes and goes; it doesn't sustain you. What keeps chefs in the industry, especially through its toughest moments, is respect: respect for your craft, your team, and the responsibility that comes with feeding others. This distinction matters in an industry increasingly challenged by burnout, skills shortages, and shifting expectations."

Like many chefs, Trevor entered the profession with a romanticised view of what it would be. Reality arrived quickly. Early roles didn't align with his aspirations, and a decisive shift into the hotel environment forced him to rethink his trajectory.

"Once I made the decision, I planned the journey," he explains. "Hotels are both rewarding and unforgiving. It's a bit like golf – you can have an awful round, but one perfect shot brings you back. Kitchens are the same. A brutal day can be redeemed by a flawless service, when the team moves in sync, guests are happy, and the chaos briefly turns into beautiful harmony."

That understanding of pressure and payoff shaped Trevor's leadership philosophy when he took on the challenge of transforming the food and beverage offering and experience at City Lodge Hotels.

Scaling food without losing its soul

When Trevor stepped into his role, there was no playbook. Food and beverage made up a small fraction of the business, and capability varied widely across the group's then 59 hotels. The mandate was simple but daunting: improve the offering, without disrupting the business or inflating costs.

Instead of imposing a final vision, Trevor focused on progression. Menus started out simple and teams learned the fundamentals first. Early use of convenience products created consistency, which built confidence, and only once the foundation was solid did complexity follow.

Crucially, Trevor didn't lead from head office, he led from the floor. He explains, "I packed fridges, prepped mise en place, cooked services. If you only tell people what to do, you gain nothing, but if you show them, you gain trust."

That hands-on approach allowed him to identify natural leaders within the teams, tailor staff development, and support those who needed more time without leaving anyone behind.

The results have been tangible. The food and beverage department now contrib-

utes roughly 20% of the business. Revenue growth became a measure of maturity and menus continued to expand.

"If the food wasn't better, the numbers wouldn't move," Trevor explains. Social media told the same story, tracking the visible evolution of dishes, confidence, and pride across the group's properties.

As hotels have been refurbished and footfall increased, food offerings have evolved organically. Courtyard Hotels feature the Club Lounge restaurant, City Lodge Hotels have #Café restaurants, and Town Lodges and Road Lodges offer Eat-in restaurants, with menus tailor-made to each brand's guests.

Some properties have developed their own restaurant identities and menus, including:

- Courtyard Hotel Waterfall City opened in 2021 featuring The Protea restaurant with a sophisticated, contemporary menu serving breakfast, lunch and dinner, and The Highline gourmet lounge on the 9th floor specialising in delicious light meals for lunch and dinner.
- City Lodge Hotel V&A Waterfront has recently refurbished, launching the new Atlantic Lounge bar that champions local wines and spirits paired with a small plates menu, and Atlantic Social restaurant offering relaxed dining that stretches outside onto the deck overlooking the canal, plus a second bar for casual enjoyment
- City Lodge Hotel Umhlanga Ridge has also been revamped and now features Umoya restaurant and Umoya @ The Deck, also offering alfresco dining on the deck outside the front of hotel.

Trevor is clear that independence must follow readiness: "You crawl before you walk, walk before you run. It's not fair to give people or businesses responsibility before they're ready to manage it."

What the modern food industry must get right

Trevor's journey highlights several hard truths about food leadership today:

Leadership is earned on the floor, not declared in head office. Credibility comes from shared effort, not just instruction manuals.

- Consistency builds confidence before creativity can flourish. Teams need stability before innovation becomes sustainable.
- Data informs decisions, but guests define success. Sales mix, feedback, and repeat visits matter more than trends.
- Comfort food wins because it connects emotionally. Dishes that "hit the spot" outperform complexity every time.
- Progression beats perfection. Sustainable growth happens in stages, not in leaps and bounds.
- People don't resist change, they fear failing. Psychological safety is as important as technical training.
- Food is never just food, it's trust, memory, and care served on a plate.

Ironically, when Trevor steps out of his professional role and heads to his favourite restaurants, his tastes are unapologetically simple: curry, pizza, steak on the braai. Years in the industry haven't necessarily made him adventurous – although he has eaten some extraordinary food on his international travels – rather, they've made him decisive. He knows what works, what comforts, and why people come back.

This clarity is perhaps the most important lesson for the food industry today. Authenticity, not complexity, equals progress. Leadership is not about control, but about trust. And great food – whether in a flagship hotel or a local neighborhood joint – exists for one reason only, and that is to make people feel looked after.

In an industry defined by pressure, Trevor reminds us that lasting success is built slowly, led visibly, and sustained by respect. That's not just good leadership, that's good hospitality.

As Trevor returns as a Hostex ambassador for the second time, he brings these insights and the hard-earned experience behind them directly to the industry conversation. From 8 to 10 March at the Sandton Convention Centre, visitors will be able to meet him in person and explore what it really takes to grow food and beverage operations in a way that is both commercially sound and people-led. In its 40th year, Hostex 2026 continues to create the space where leaders like Trevor share practical wisdom, challenge assumptions, and help shape what comes next for hospitality.



EVENTS

HOSTEX 2026 RECORDS 16.5% GROWTH IN VISITOR NUMBERS AND 60% INCREASE IN EXHIBITORS

Johannesburg, South Africa - Hostex 2026 marked its 40th anniversary by opening doors to innovation, collaboration and business growth across the hospitality sector, welcoming 7 935 visitors to the Sandton Convention Centre - a 16.5% increase from 2024. Exhibitor participation rose by just over 60%, enabling the show to return to two floors of exhibition space and restoring it to pre-COVID scale, clearly signaling renewed confidence across the industry.

Visitors engaged with a diverse mix of global brands, local suppliers and emerging businesses. An International Pavilion representing seven countries brought global products to market, while the SME Pavilion featured more than 30 small businesses, creating valuable opportunities to connect with buyers and decision-makers.



▸Liquid Concepts stand at Hostex 2026

Hostex 2026 was officially opened by Mrs Gugu Motlanthe representing the Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation, setting the tone for three days of meaningful engagement across the sector.

“Celebrating the 40th anniversary of Hostex made this year’s show particularly meaningful,” said Lerato Nako, Events Manager of Hostex. “The theme ‘Opening doors’ truly came to life, creating new opportunities, strong connections and renewed energy across the hospitality industry.”

CONVERSATIONS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HOSPITALITY

The Bidfood Industry Hub Theatre hosted a focused seminar programme addressing key industry themes, including beverage innovation, technology adoption, sustainability and business resilience. The theatre also hosted the launch of South African Food Stories, a new YouTube series and video podcast presented by Nicci Robertson.



▸The Bidfood Industry Hub at Hostex 2026

Live watch parties and book signings introduced visitors to episodes featuring chef-authors Naqiyah Mayat and Kenneth Tebogo Middleton, sharing the stories behind South Africa's evolving food culture. The series is supported by Bidfood, FNB and the SA Chefs Association.

The FNB Business Lounge, sponsored by FNB Business Banking, provided a dedicated space for SMEs and entrepreneurs to connect and explore growth opportunities.

CULINARY ENERGY ON THE SHOW FLOOR

The SA Chefs Village, curated by the SA Chefs Association and sponsored by Vulcan Catering Equipment, delivered high-energy demonstrations and competitions that drew consistent crowds. Coffee culture was equally prominent, with the Gauteng Regional Barista Championship, delivered in partnership with SCASA, showcasing top local talent.



▸Competitor in the SA Chefs Iron Challenge

EXHIBITORS REPORT STRONG ENGAGEMENT AND QUALITY BUYERS

Exhibitors across the show floor highlighted strong engagement and valuable business outcomes. Nick Köntos of Clearworld said, "The quality of leads coming through over the three days has been phenomenal... the level of interest on our stand has been incredible."

Brigid Jaucot of Wiesenhof added, "We had good quality buyers walking through, made strong connections and a load of leads, and the decision-makers we had appointments with all came through."

For Deleane Luzzotto of Rebel Safety Wear, the diversity of visitors stood out: "It's been very busy with executive chefs, hotels, guest houses and schools coming through."

Kulthum Abrahams of Ice Team noted, "We actually made sales, not just leads." Annellee Mulder of Fanel Restaurant & Catering Supplies added, "We've had visitors coming specifically to see us, including buyers from outside South Africa."

VISITORS INSPIRED BY INNOVATION

Visitors echoed the positive sentiment, highlighting both inspiration and networking opportunities.

Chef Zana Alvarado noted, "There was so much innovation... it gave me a lot of ideas about how to take my business to the next level."

Sizwe Cebekhulilu, Culinary Ambassador for Tork, added, "It was the most amazing show in terms of networking and business engagements."



▸Mrs Gugu Motlanthe (Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation) in conversation with Hostex Ambassador Gustav Pieterse (FEDHASA Inland)

INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND PURPOSE

Hostex 2026 also reinforced its commitment to industry development and social impact. The Bryan Montgomery Bursary was awarded to Hope Msibi of Capsicum Culinary Studio, recognising emerging culinary talent and supporting the next generation of chefs entering the profession. In parallel, Hostex partnered with Chefs with Compassion, giving visitors the opportunity to contribute during the registration process. This initiative supported the organisation's ongoing work to address food insecurity in Gauteng, extending the impact of the show beyond the exhibition floor.

STRONG SUPPORT FROM SPONSORS AND PARTNERS

Hostex 2026 was supported by leading sponsors including Tork (Nala Restaurant), FNB Business Banking (FNB Business Lounge), Bidfood (Industry Hub Theatre), Vulcan Catering Equipment (SA Chefs Village), Unilever Food Solutions and Unilever Professional (Official Registration Sponsor), THIRSTI Water, Thokoman, Doubleshot and supported by Malaysian Palm Oil Council.

Industry partners included FEDHASA, the National Accommodation Association of South Africa, the SA Chefs Association, SANHA, and SCASA.

LOOKING AHEAD

As Hostex marks 40 years of connecting the hospitality industry, the success of the 2026 edition reflects strong momentum and renewed confidence across the sector. "Hostex has always been about bringing the industry together," said Nako. "This year showed just how powerful that connection can be."



▸A wine exhibitor in the SME Hub, supported by the dtic



▸Competitor in the SCASA Gauteng Barista Championships



▸Judges of the SCASA Gauteng Barista Championships



▸Hostex exhibitor – The French Press



▸Hostex exhibitor – Tork



▸Officially launching SA Food Stories at Hostex 2026 are cookbook author Naqiyah Mayat; President of SA Chefs Coo Pillay; Terry-Anne Solomons of FNB; host of SA Food Stories Nicci Robertson; and Bidfood's Lauren-Leigh Porter



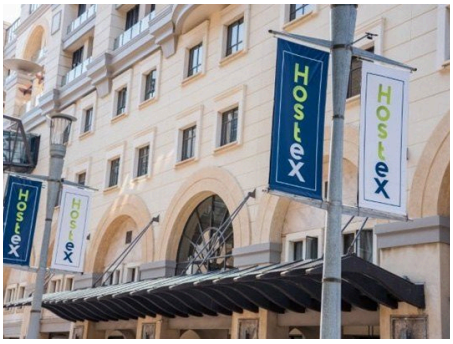
▸Speakers in the Bidfood Industry Hub seminar theatre: Gustav Pieterse (The Saxon), Carmel Rubinstein (Hospitality Suite Hotel Supplies), Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa (TBCSA) and Martin Cody (Four Seasons The Westcliff)



▸A warm welcome to Hostex 2026, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2026



▸Hostex exhibitor – Ambience Hospitality Brands



▸Hostex 2026 took place at Sandton Convention Centre from 8 to 10 March



▸Hostex exhibitor – BCE



▸Competitor in the SA Chefs Iron Chef Challenge



▸An exhibitor in the SME Hub, supported by the dtic



▸Hostex celebrated 40 years of opening doors to the hospitality and food & beverage industries in 2026



MENU STRATEGY

Engineering Margin and Magic: The Global Pizza and Flatbread Strategy

Hospitality Marketplace Insights in partnership with Chef Professional

The modern commercial kitchen is an uncompromising environment. Balancing soaring food costs with the demand for constant menu innovation requires clever planning and a highly strategic pantry. The Bounty Brands Foodservice division supplies a wide range of ambient food and care products tailored specifically for the entire hospitality and food service industry. Under this division sit two formidable brands built explicitly for the pass.

Liberty Select reliably delivers exceptional quality and value across a comprehensive catalogue of canned vegetables, fruit, pickles, and olives. **Chef Professional** is trusted by talented culinary teams countrywide for its premium oils, condiments, and pizza accompaniments. Together, these ranges provide the exact tools needed to engineer high-margin, on-trend dishes that protect the bottom line while thrilling the diner.

Margin Drivers for the Modern Menu

Diners actively seek experiential eating and communal sharing formats. The pizza and flatbread trend shines as a clever, innovative, and highly budget-conscious menu solution to meet this demand. Globally, flavour profiles are shifting towards rustic Mediterranean sharing plates, complex sweet heat combinations, and elevated plant-forward offerings.

By anchoring your dough with reliable, high-yield ingredients from the Chef Professional range, you can transform cost-effective Liberty Select ambient goods into premium menu features. This strategy drastically reduces active prep weight and minimises perishable waste. It also guarantees absolute consistency during your most demanding services, removing recipe dependency so that junior staff can execute with the same precision as your head chef. Utilising shelf-stable pantry items allows for scalable menu planning without sacrificing creativity or visual impact on the plate.

“Standardising your prep does not limit creativity. It protects it. It ensures that any cook can execute with the same precision as your head chef, on every single shift.”



Menu Inspirations

Here are four menu inspirations to rethink the traditional pizza offering, elevate your table sharing options, and maximise your gross profit.

Diners are not just hungry for food. They are hungry for connection. The communal flatbread is no longer just a starter; it is the anchor of the modern sharing economy.”



Menu 1

The Mediterranean Sharing Flatbread

A highly manageable rustic flatbread designed for table sharing without overwhelming your oven capacity. We layer rich tomato sauce with artichoke hearts, sweet piquanté peppers, and sliced olives. Finished with crumbled feta and a glossy pour of Chef Professional Olive Oil Blend, this creates a highly profitable alternative to the standard, labour-intensive charcuterie board. This specific oil blend is perfect as a finishing drizzle to bring the rustic Mediterranean flavours together effortlessly.

[Download the full recipe]



Menu 2

The Skillet Fire Popper Deep Dish

This deep-dish cast-iron experience leverages sweet heat, a massive global trend. Built on a flawless non-stick prep technique to guarantee the perfect crispy crust release every single time, which removes technique dependency and allows junior cooks to manage the prep station flawlessly. We load the base with cream cheese, chorizo, roasted peppers, and sliced jalapeno chillies for a fiery, highly marketable sharing starter.

[Download the full recipe]

"Elevating your menu should not inflate your prep budget. The true magic of a modern pizza strategy lies in transforming shelf-stable pantry staples into premium, high-margin experiences."



Menu 3

Charred Pineapple and Pulled Pork Flatbread

We elevate ambient fruit by flash-charring pineapple pieces in a hot pan to bring out a deep, smoky caramelization. Paired with slow-cooked pork on a crispy flatbread base, this delivers a complex flavour profile with absolutely zero seasonal sourcing issues.



Menu 4

Earthy Mushroom and Goat Cheese Focaccia

A thick, dimpled focaccia base acts as a sponge for the rich tomato sauce. Topped with drained mushrooms and finished with fresh rocket and soft goat cheese, this offers a premium vegetarian option built almost entirely from your dry store, securing an incredibly low food cost.

Elevating your menu does not require inflating your prep budget or complicating your operations. By integrating these high-quality, shelf-stable products into your daily prep, you can deliver exceptional dining experiences that consistently drive revenue.

"Stop prepping away your profits. Smart kitchens know that integrating professional-grade, ambient ingredients is the fastest route to reducing perishable waste and increasing table turnover."

Menu Mechanics: The Stats Behind the Slice and Share Trend

Profitability: Pizza and flatbreads consistently rank among the highest gross profit menu items in commercial kitchens, frequently yielding margins exceeding 80 percent.

The Sharing Economy: Over 60 percent of millennial and Gen Z diners actively seek out shared dining experiences over traditional individual entrees, driving up average check sizes per table.

Skills Gap Support: Standardising base ingredients like pizza sauce and non-stick sprays reduces training time and allows junior cooks to deliver professional output from day one.

Mise-en-Place Efficiency: Utilizing ready to use ambient toppings like canned olives, peppers, and artichokes can reduce active prep time by up to 30 percent.

The Swicy Surge: Consumer demand for sweet and spicy flavour profiles continues its rapid climb, with menu mentions of these contrasting combinations growing by nearly 40 percent globally over the last three years.

Plant-Forward Premiums: Premium vegetarian flatbreads command price points almost identical to meat options, while operating on a significantly lower food cost structure.

Speed to Pass: Optimized flatbread stations utilizing pre-prepped ambient ingredients increase kitchen output speed, directly correlating to a 15 percent increase in table turnover during peak service hours.

Cross-Utilization Gold: Incorporating versatile pantry staples across both pizza stations and general prep reduces perishable ingredient waste by an average of 20 percent.

Calculate your kitchen's potential savings.

Speak to a Bounty Brands representative today.

Bounty Brands Chef Professional Pizza and Flatbread



The Mediterranean Sharing Flatbread

Ingredients

- Chef Professional Easy Cook Non-Stick Spray
- 150g Chef Professional Pizza Sauce
- 1 large rustic flatbread base approximately 40cm
- 80g Liberty Select Artichoke Hearts drained and halved
- 60g Liberty Select Red Roasted Peppers sliced
- 50g Liberty Select Black Sliced Olives
- 70g crumbled feta cheese
- Chef Professional Olive Oil Blend for drizzling
- Fresh basil leaves for garnish



Method

1. Preheat oven to 220 degrees Celsius.
2. Prepare a large baking tray with an even coating of Chef Professional Easy Cook Non-Stick Spray.
3. Place the flatbread on the tray and spread the Chef Professional Pizza Sauce evenly across the base, leaving a small border.
4. Distribute the Liberty Select Artichoke Hearts, sweet piquanté peppers, and Black Sliced Olives evenly over the sauce.
5. Scatter the crumbled feta cheese across the top.
6. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes until the flatbread edges are crisp and the cheese has softened.
7. Remove from the oven, garnish with fresh basil, and finish with a generous drizzle of Chef Professional Olive Oil Blend to bring the flavours together.
8. Slice into irregular shards for sharing.

TECHNOLOGY

THE CULINARY EQUALIZER: ENGINEERING THE FUTURE OF THE PASS

The Pacojet 4 is not a blender. To a professional chef, it is a precision production engine.





The term PacotizingTM describes a process that does not exist elsewhere in the culinary world: the micro-pureeing of fresh, deep-frozen foods without thawing.

A titanium-hardened blade rotates at 2,000 rpm, shaving a micro-thin layer off a frozen block at minus 20 degrees Celsius. This preserves the molecular structure, vibrant natural pigments, and volatile aroma compounds usually lost during traditional cooking. By selecting Overpressure Mode, the machine pumps air into the beaker at 1 bar, creating a volume expansion of up to 30 percent. This delivers a velvety texture that mimics the addition of expensive fats or cream, without adding a single cent to your food cost.

THE WORKFLOW SHIFT

The Pacojet 4 acts as an invisible commis chef, servicing the entire hospitality and food service industry by bridging the gap between boutique bistros and large-scale hotel banqueting. The machine removes the stress of daily prep. Chefs can build a frozen inventory well in advance and process exactly what is needed for each service. The new Jet Mode processes a full beaker in just 90 seconds, bringing high-speed standardization to volume catering.

WHAT KITCHENS ACTUALLY WANT TO KNOW

At a practical level, the value comes down to workflow efficiency and cost control.

- **Guaranteed Consistency**: Produces identical results regardless of the operator.
- **Increased Yield**: Expands volume and extracts maximum flavour without raising ingredient costs.
- **Labor Reduction**: Eliminates repetitive manual tasks like sieving and straining.
- **Automated Maintenance**: Display-guided cleaning sanitizes the machine at the press of a button.
- **Beyond the Kitchen**: Bartenders use its quieter operation for frozen cocktails, generating revenue across the venue.

For food and beverage directors, the return on investment is often realized within the first year through reduced unit costs, lower food waste, and optimized labour hours.

Featured Theme:

ZERO WASTE MALVA PUDDING ICE CREAM

Hotels and restaurants often manage high volumes of leftover pastries. By soaking leftover Malva pudding in a custard base and freezing it, the machine pulverizes the sponge fibres into the frozen structure. It transforms potential food waste into a premium, dense, and highly profitable signature dessert.



Yield: 1 PacotizingTM beaker (approx. 10 portions)

Ingredients:

- 400g leftover baked Malva pudding, roughly torn
- 400ml vanilla anglaise or pouring custard
- A pinch of sea salt

Prep: Soak the torn Malva pudding in the custard for 20 minutes until the sponge absorbs the liquid.

Fill and Freeze: Pack the soaked sponge tightly into the beaker. Freeze at minus 20 degrees Celsius for at least 24 hours.

Process: Pacotize on standard mode with Overpressure to create a light, creamy volume expansion.



BRING PACOJET TO YOUR KITCHEN

Culinary Equipment Company is the sole distributor for South Africa. Connect with their team to explore how the Pacojet 4 can transform your operations.

info@culinary.co.za

www.culinary.co.za



EDUCATION

The Wors of a Nation

Chef Jeff and the Blueprint for Culinary Unity

The fire and the classroom

The fire has always been the centre of the South African culinary experience, but for Chef Schueremans, it is also a classroom.

Known across the trade as Jeff the chef, his journey did not begin with a desire to simply cook; it began with a need to protect the DNA of our street food culture. Growing up surrounded by the rich, smoky environments of township braais, he recognized a fundamental disconnect. The boerewors sizzling on the street corners held the heart of the nation, yet it lacked the technical protection, consistency and respect afforded to classical European charcuterie.

While the professional kitchens of Cape Town and Johannesburg were refining imported techniques, the street-level operators were left without standardized training. This realization birthed The Wors of a Nation project. It is an initiative driven by Chef Jeff to elevate our most democratic ingredient into a fiercely protected, high-margin culinary asset.

Chef Jeff is proving that when we apply technical rigour and deep respect to our local staples, we do not just feed a nation. We empower its economy and protect its legacy.

Technical mastery and the 90 percent standard

For the executive chef and the professional operator, consistency is the only metric of survival. Chef Jeff identified that the informal market was being diluted by substandard fillers and inconsistent meat ratios. His project establishes a definitive technical baseline that demands respect from the entire industry.

- **Meat Integrity:** A strict adherence to a minimum of 90 percent meat content, ensuring the protein remains the primary structural and flavour carrier.
- **Spice Calibration:** Standardizing the traditional triad of toasted coriander, cloves and black pepper, perfectly balanced with high-quality vinegars for regional authenticity.
- **The Physics of the Grind:** Training the brigade on exact fat-to-lean ratios and strict temperature control during preparation to prevent fat smearing, ensuring a succulent and open texture.

Professionalizing the informal sector

The true power of Chef Jeff's vision lies in its economic impact. The Learn the Art of Boerewors programme is a direct intervention to address the 2026 skills gap. It is a technical masterclass designed to upskill youth and informal street vendors, transforming them from survivalist traders into professional meat technicians.

- **Skills Transfer:** Moving beyond basic cooking to teach portion control, yield management and food safety protocols aligned with commercial kitchen standards.
- **Economic Empowerment:** By teaching vendors to produce a premium, consistent product, the project instantly increases their market value and profit margins.
- **Corporate Lifelines:** Through strategic engagement with brands like Coca-Cola, Toyota and Tiger Brands, Chef Jeff is securing the corporate backing necessary to scale this educational infrastructure across the republic.



How the industry must get involved

This project is an invitation for the South African culinary fraternity to support an initiative that builds the nation through the plate. The industry cannot afford to leave the upskilling of our youth solely to chance.

- **For Executive Chefs:** Adopt the Wors of a Nation technical standards in your kitchens to ensure you are serving a product that honours our heritage.
- **For Culinary Institutions:** Integrate the Learn the Art of Boerewors syllabus into your butchery and heritage modules.
- **For Corporate Partners:** Provide the logistical infrastructure and funding lifelines needed to expand this training footprint into rural and under-resourced communities.





Connect and Collaborate

To partner with Chef Jeff, bring the training programme to your region, or align your brand with the Wors of a Nation project, connect with the initiative directly:

Project Lead: Chef Jeff Schueremans

Email: info@worsofnation.co.za

Digital Profile: @ChefJeffSA on all professional platforms

Partnership Enquiries: Available for corporate sponsorship and culinary school integrations throughout 2026.

SARA

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SOUTH AFRICAN CHEFS ASSOCIATION



BEYOND THE PASS

Brian McCune

BEYOND THE PASS

Dubai Crockocrap

BY **BRIAN MCCUNE**

You ever notice how every six months the food world coughs up a new "miracle"?

One minute it's cronuts, next it's charcoal ice cream, and now we've got Dubai Chocolate. A few years ago, the very creative Dominique Ansel came up with the novel Cronut, a croissant-doughnut hybrid and immediately the scavenging hyenas and vultures of the food world swarmed in to imitate, replicate and in almost every case debase his creation. It's the way of the world, I understand, but the sad result is that the hype driven consumer salivates for the Cronut and ends up with a substandard overpriced piece of crap. Apparently regular chocolate was too simple. It needed a passport, a gold wrapper, and a TikTok account and now that the viral chocolate craze Dubai Chocolate has taken social media by storm, we're off on another "have you tried....." bullshit trip. So, here's the need-to-know. Dubai Chocolate is a chocolate bar created by FIX Dessert Chocolatier of Dubai blending Middle Eastern flavours like pistachio, kunafa (a crispy Arabic pastry), and tahini, basically everything that fell out of the pantry during a sandstorm. These handcrafted treats, have ignited a frenzy on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, turning them into a must-try item for tourists and locals alike, fuelled by influencers unwrapping bars like it's the Holy Grail. "Ooooh, limited edition!" a perfect storm of luxury chocolate, Middle Eastern flavour, and social-media storytelling. This is the hook that makes these chocolates so desirable, apart from their unique ingredients, their exclusivity because FIX's artisanal bars are produced in limited batches - often selling out within minutes on food delivery apps in Dubai, such as Deliveroo.

Now its game on as global chocolate makers quickly tapped into this "luxury nostalgia" market with major players Laderach and Lindt in Switzerland, Rococo Chocolates in the UK and Knipschildt in the USA marketing variations of the original. And of course, it didn't end there as every chocolatier and restaurant joined in featuring their "Dubai Chocolate" inspired desserts. "Introducing our Dubai Chocolate Lava Soufflé Sundae Crème Explosion!" The waiter brings you something that looks like it escaped from Willy Wonka's lab, and glancing at the outrageous price on the menu you're thinking to yourself: Is this dessert, or did I just join a pyramid scheme? So now the average Joe is totally confused and hasn't a clue exactly what the hell Dubai Chocolate is, where he can experience the Real McCoy and more importantly whether he is being ripped off! Is it a bar? A dessert? A lifestyle statement? It's a bit like buying a Rolex watch from a guy in the pub for the bargain price of R300. It'll tell the time and has the name Rolex on the watch face but that's as far as it goes. So, after all the hype and ignoring the influencers what's it really like? I don't know because I don't live in Dubai and can't afford it anyway but according to one chef whose opinion I do value "It's got about as much substance as carrot air.... you'd zbe better off with a bloody Snickers Bar! But hey, didn't it look great on Instagram.

Brian owns The Food Biz a consultancy business in Cape Town and instead of working he tells other people how to work. He can be contacted at foodwizard@iafrica.com or 0824929239

MEDIA

SA Food Stories

SA Food Stories: Supporting the Stories That Shape Our Food Industry



▸Host: Nicci Robertson

SA Food Stories exists to celebrate and amplify the human stories that have shaped South Africa's food industry. It shines a light on the people whose ideas, resilience and commitment have influenced how food is produced, prepared, shared and experienced across the country.

Founded and hosted by Nicci Robertson, the series goes beyond recipes and trends to explore the real journeys behind South African food culture. Through thoughtful, in-depth conversations, SA Food Stories uncovers the individuals behind the brands, businesses, kitchens and cookbooks that make up our rich and evolving food landscape.

For chefs and food professionals, these stories matter. They reflect the realities of our industry, its challenges, its resilience, and its deep interconnectedness.

A Series Rooted in Diversity and Industry Contribution

Series One launched with 12 carefully curated episodes, representing the diversity of South Africa's food ecosystem. Guests come from different backgrounds and disciplines across the food value chain, united by a shared commitment to contributing meaningfully to the industry.

These contributors include chefs, cooks, food entrepreneurs, business leaders, cookbook authors, content creators and cultural voices. Their collective influence extends beyond individual titles, shaping how food is cooked, commercialised, celebrated and passed on.

The conversations explore four key pillars:

- Women in food
- The business of food
- South African food culture
- Sustainability

Running through each pillar is a powerful undercurrent of perseverance, resilience and motivation, qualities that would resonate strongly with those working in the foodservice and hospitality sectors.

Why These Stories Matter to the Foodservice Industry

The foodservice industry and value chain is not defined by a single role or profession. It is a complex, interconnected ecosystem that includes farming, production, manufacturing, logistics, finance, education, media, hospitality, retail and foodservice operations.

Cookbook authors shape how people cook and think about food. Food creators influence culture and behaviour. Entrepreneurs build businesses that create employment and drive economic activity. Chefs and operators translate ideas into real-world experiences that connect people through food.

SA Food Stories recognises this interconnectedness. It celebrates contribution rather than category, ensuring that no single voice defines the industry, but that many voices are acknowledged as part of its growth and progress.

A Shared Commitment to Supporting the Industry

SA Food Stories is proudly supported by FNB Business, Bidfood South Africa and the SA Chefs Association. While each organisation serves the industry in different ways, all share a common commitment: supporting the people and stories that move South Africa's food industry forward.

For the SA Chefs Association, this partnership reflects our belief that chefs are part of a broader food ecosystem. Food begins long before the kitchen, shaped by farmers, producers, authors, educators

and everyday cooks who sustain our culinary heritage.

By supporting SA Food Stories, the Association reinforces its leadership in championing food as both a cultural and industrial force, strengthening our role as a forward-thinking, inclusive voice shaping the future of South African food.food.

Be Part of the Movement

SA Food Stories is an open invitation to the industry. If you have a story to share, a journey shaped by food, or insights that could inspire others, the platform welcomes your voice.

Stories are deeply woven into South African culture. They connect generations, preserve knowledge and help us understand where we come from, and where our industry is going next.

Get in touch or submit your story:
https://safoodstories.com/contact-us/

AT THE BACK

Index

ADVERTISERS AND PARTNERS

Bounty Brands 59
Culinary Equipment Company 64
Flor-Do-Tejo 43
Limpopo Chefs Academy 25
SA Chefs Experience, Africa Food Show 13
SA Food Stories 68, 70, 73
Sondela Academy 50
Vulcan Catering Equipment 9, 10



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