Issue 1 Conscious Kitchen
December 2025

SOUTH AFRICAN CHEFS ASSOCIATION

For the Industry. By the Industry.

# SA CHEFS



## THE GIANTS AMONG US

**The Legends Series. Honouring the architects who built this house.**

## THE WARRIOR & THE STORYTELLER Hostex 2026.

**Why the duality of the modern chef is a cultural reset.**

## HERITAGE INGREDIENTS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL KITCHEN

**From the ukhamba to the pass, turning Umqombothi and 'poverty foods' into power on the plate**

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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.**

Bringing this publication back in-house is a significant move for our association. It means we are reclaiming our narrative. We are taking ownership of the stories we tell, much like we are taking ownership of the food we place on our plates. This shift allows us to move beyond standard industry news and focus on what truly matters to the future of our profession.

For this launch edition, we have chosen the theme "The Conscious Kitchen." To me, a conscious kitchen is not just about reducing waste or checking a compliance box. It is about a holistic approach to wellness and sustainability. It represents the intersection where the health of our chefs - both mental and physical - meets the health of our planet and the viability of our businesses.

We recently saw this vision mirrored in a powerful way on the global stage. South Africa just hosted the G20 Leaders' Summit, the first-ever G20 on African soil. Under SA's presidency, the summit emphasized solidarity, equality, and sustainability - values that resonate deeply with our own culinary mission.

At the summit, world leaders tackled major issues: food security, climate resilience, debt relief, and reforming global institutions so that the voices of the Global South are heard.

South Africa's leadership underlined that resilience is not just about weathering crises - it's about building systems and value chains that uplift and protect the most vulnerable.

This has special relevance for us as chefs. Food security was central to the G20 discussions, and our work in kitchens - from sourcing indigenous, climate-resilient ingredients to supporting small-scale producers - directly contributes to that global agenda.

By valuing local, resilient ingredients like sorghum, millet, spekboom, and Bambara beans - markers of our heritage - we are not only preserving culinary traditions, but also aligning with the very same global principles of sustainability and equity.

This commitment to leaving no one behind is also at the heart of Chefs with Compassion, the charity arm of SA Chefs. Their work - rescuing surplus food, reducing waste, and turning what would have been discarded into nutritious meals for communities in need - embodies the essence of a conscious kitchen. They remind us that sustainability is not theoretical. It is practical, urgent, and deeply human. Through their efforts, our industry demonstrates that compassion and culinary excellence are not opposing forces, but inseparable parts of our identity. Their actions show that food waste can become food security, and that chefs can be agents of dignity, nourishment, and hope.

Moreover, the summit's closing remarks reinforced a commitment that no one should be left behind.

That aspiration echoes throughout our kitchens: whether it's designing inclusive menus, reducing waste, caring for the well-being of our chefs, or supporting organisations like Chefs with Compassion - we have the opportunity to live that promise daily.

We recently saw this vision come to life in another powerful way. In partnership with the United Nations in South Africa and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), we launched Roots and Recipes. This book is far more than a collection of dishes; it is a celebration of South Africa's soul and a tribute to the custodians of our culinary traditions.

During the launch, I was reminded that our indigenous ingredients - from sorghum and millet to spekboom and Bambara beans - are gifts of nature that embodied sustainability long before the word became fashionable. These ingredients are naturally resilient and deeply rooted in our culture. By championing them, we are not only preserving our heritage but actively promoting food security and healthier dietary choices.

As MEC Vuyiswa Ramakgopa rightly noted at the event, we must teach the next generation that these ingredients are not “foods of poverty,” but “foods of power” - power that nourishes, heals, and unites us.

This aligns perfectly with our broader mission. Sustainability must be more than a trend; it must be a way of life. The choices we make in our kitchens directly shape our environment and our collective future. Whether it is sourcing local, resilient produce, supporting initiatives like Chefs with Compassion, or creating menus that enhance well-being - every decision counts.

Looking ahead, we are taking this momentum into HOSTEX. We have exciting plans to unveil that will further equip you with the tools to run a truly conscious kitchen. We are preparing to showcase innovations that bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and modern demands, ensuring that SA Chefs remains at the forefront of global culinary evolution.

As chefs, food is our language. Let us use it to tell authentic stories. Let us nurture our roots and celebrate our diversity. I hope this edition inspires you to look at your kitchen - and yourself - with fresh eyes.

As we approach the festive season, I want to extend my heartfelt wishes to all our members, partners, industry associates, and friends. May this period bring you rest, joy, and meaningful moments with the people who matter most. For those working through the season - as many in our industry do - may you find pride in the magic you create for others, and may you also find moments of peace and renewal for yourselves.

Thank you for your dedication, your creativity, and your unwavering commitment to uplifting our culinary community. Here’s to a season of connection, compassion, and conscious cooking - and to an inspiring year ahead for us all.

**Chef Coovashan Pillay**

*President, SA Chefs*

REGIONAL UPDATES

# Regional Committee Updates




## Limpopo Regional Committee Update

**Cultivating a Conscious Kitchen: Supporting Women in Culinary Leadership**

*By Chef Shoki*



Kitchens have long been romanticized as places of passion, artistry, and relentless drive. Yet behind the scenes, the pressure to perform takes a significant toll - especially on female chefs navigating expectation, bias, and emotional labour, alongside personal family dynamics.

A growing movement toward a "Conscious Kitchen" is reshaping this narrative by placing mental and physical well-being at the heart of culinary culture. It begins with awareness: understanding that the environment in which food is created affects the people who create it.

For women in leadership, this means fostering a workspace that values balance over burnout, collaboration over competition, and humanity over hierarchy. Simple shifts - like realistic schedules, mindful breaks, and open communication - reduce the chronic stress many chefs accept as inevitable.

Physical well-being is an equally essential pillar. Long hours, repetitive motions, and intense heat accumulate into long-term strain. Conscious practices include stretching routines, hydration protocols, and access to properly fitted protective gear. These adjustments reinforce that a chef's body is a vital tool deserving of care. Furthermore, social activities outside the workplace build morale, self-esteem, and confidence.

Prioritizing mental health is equally transformative. Female chefs often bear the weight of proving themselves in male-dominated spaces, a pressure that leads to self-doubt and isolation. By integrating mindfulness, offering mental health education, and normalizing conversations around stress, we cultivate a culture where vulnerability is a strength, not a weakness.

At its core, a Conscious Kitchen empowers women to lead with intention. It recognizes that a healthy chef creates healthier food - food infused with the energy of well-being, creativity, and joy. As institutions adopt this philosophy, the industry becomes a place where female chefs can thrive, evolve, and inspire the next generation.

This isn't a trend; it is a commitment to wellness, equity, and a new vision of leadership that nourishes everyone at the table.

Yours in service

***Chef Choki***

## Western Cape Regional Committee Update

**Rooted in Resilience: Wellness, Sustainability & Our Future**

As the South African hospitality landscape continues to evolve, we're seeing a powerful shift toward experiences that prioritise wellbeing, environmental stewardship, and authentic connection. Guests, both local and international, are increasingly choosing properties that align with their values, and our industry is responding with innovation and resilience.

After Cape Town was named the world's best food city in 2024, our chefs and culinary leaders continue to evolve into true masters of their craft. We grow, adapt, and elevate ourselves constantly, showing the world what South Africa is made of.

Wellness has become a core expectation, not a luxury add-on. In our industry, where we often take strain and work under immense pressure, staying healthy, physically and mentally, is more important than ever.

At the same time, sustainability is reshaping the future of hospitality in South Africa. With rising energy costs, water scarcity, and a global push toward responsible travel, sustainable operations are now essential for long-term viability. Many properties are investing in solar power, water-wise systems, waste reduction, and local sourcing, not only to reduce operational vulnerabilities, but also to meet the expectations of eco-conscious travellers.

Our role in this transformation is clear, to create spaces that nurture people, protect the environment, and shape a future where South African hospitality sets the global standard for wellness-driven, sustainable, and deeply authentic guest experiences.

***Chef Ras van Greune***

Group Executive Chef, The OPEN Food Group

SACHEFS Western Cape Chairman

## Gauteng Regional Committee Update

### Spreading Joy: Alexandra Children's Christmas Lunch

*Words by Chef Absa on behalf of the Gauteng Committee*



This December, the spirit of giving shines brightly as the Alexandra Children's Christmas Lunch approaches. On December 13th at 13:00, approximately 200 children from disadvantaged backgrounds will gather at the Alexandra Police Station for a day filled with joy, laughter, and celebration.

Organized by the dedicated SAChefs Gauteng Committee, this event aims to bring holiday cheer to children of all ages, ensuring they experience the true warmth of Christmas. The committee will convene in Sandton to prepare special lunch packs filled with delicious food, guaranteeing that every child receives a nourishing meal. This gesture is a token of love and kindness, intended to light up faces and fill hearts with happiness during the festive season.

Adding to the excitement, the Young Chefs Club (YCC) will be present to enhance the festivities with engaging activities like face painting. The vibrant colours and creative designs will not only entertain the children but also foster a sense of community and shared joy. The smiles on their faces are a testament to the power of small acts of kindness.

The committee and their generous sponsors play a crucial role in making this event possible. Their unwavering support ensures that each child feels valued and celebrated. From organizing meals to coordinating activities, every effort is geared toward creating a memorable experience for these young ones.

As the holidays approach, the Alexandra Children's Christmas Lunch stands as a reminder of the importance of community, compassion, and connection. With warm hearts and open hands, we thank all sponsors for their contributions, making this day a beacon of hope for the children of Alexandra.


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Bidfood

# TO THE CHEFS WHO KEEP SOUTH AFRICA COOKING...

# THANK YOU

From the first prep to the last service, you bring joy to every table. Bidfood proudly stands with you, the chefs, cooks, caterers, and the businesses that support you, including members of the South African Chefs Association.
Through the festive rush and beyond, you can count on us for dependable deliveries, trusted brands, and a team that understands your kitchen and your needs.

Here's to a busy, prosperous season for all and a brilliant start to 2026

**- The Bidfood Team -**



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**Gauteng**

| | |
|---|---|
| Linbro Park | 011 553 9300 |
| Alberton | 011 601 9600 |
| Pretoria | 012 377 0158 |

**Limpopo**

| | |
|---|---|
| Polokwane | 015 297 4200 |

**Western Cape**

| | |
|---|---|
| Cape Town | 021 927 2000 |

**KwaZulu-Natal**

| | |
|---|---|
| Durban | 031 571 2400 |
| Pietermaritzburg | 033 345 4505 |
| Empangeni | 035 787 0536 |

**Free State**

| | |
|---|---|
| Bloemfontein | 051 409 1000 |

**Mpumalanga**

| | |
|---|---|
| Mbombela | 013 755 1038 |

**Eastern Cape**

| | |
|---|---|
| George | 044 874 0717 |
| Gqeberha | 041 486 1900 |
| East London | 043 745 0000 |

**Botswana**

| | |
|---|---|
| Gaborone | +267 392 4284 |

Bidfood South Africa

SA CHEFS LEGENDS SERIES

# The Giants Among Us



In an industry obsessed with "what's next" - the latest trend, the newest technique, the rising star - it is easy to forget the foundation upon which we stand. As the South African Chefs Association celebrates its journey, we are pausing to look back at the architects who built this house.

***Welcome to the SA Chefs Legends Series.***

In every upcoming issue, we will be dedicating these pages to honour one of our past leaders - the pioneers who transformed a fragmented trade into a world-class profession. These are the visionaries who fought for recognition when "chef" was considered a domestic role and who took South Africa to the global stage when the world had turned its back on us.

To launch this series, we pay tribute to two titans of our industry: Manfred Muellers and Dr Billy Gallagher.

Enjoy the read.

LEGENDS SERIES: HONORING MANFRED MUELLERS

# The Culinary Statesman

*Celebrating the man who bridged the gap between the European Meister tradition and the modern South African kitchen.*



In the tapestry of South African gastronomy, few threads are as golden or as enduring as Manfred Muellers. To call him a "Past President" is an understatement; he is the institutional memory of our profession, a figure whose influence is woven into the very constitutional fabric of the South African Chefs Association (SA Chefs). He is not just a part of our history; in many ways, he is the history.

## The Foundation of a Master

Manfred Muellers arrived in South Africa in 1968, stepping into the Edward Hotel in Durban as a Demi-Chef De Cuisine and later being promoted to Sous Chef. The local industry was booming but often lacked the rigorous structure of Europe. Muellers filled that gap.

He brought with him the German "Meister" philosophy - a mindset where a chef must be a disciplined administrator as much as a cook. In those early days on the line, he didn't lecture; he demonstrated. He introduced a new level of industrial logic to the daily operation, enforcing hygiene, cost control, and absolute hierarchy. He walked the kitchen with the authority of a technician, setting the operational standards that would later define his career.



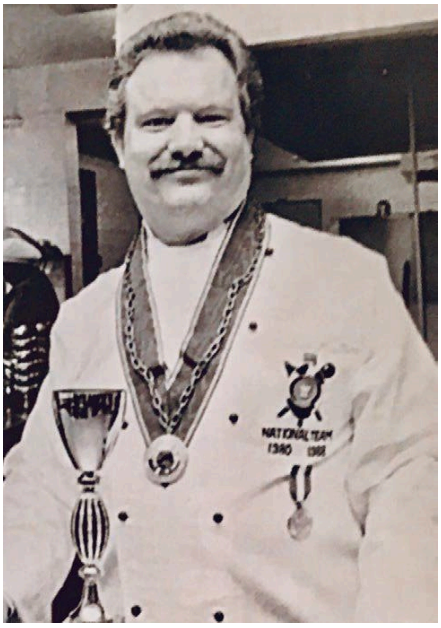

## A Victory Against the Odds (1980)



His influence grew from the kitchen to the boardroom. Elected President of SA Chefs in 1979, Muellers led the association during a time of intense international isolation. Yet, he turned this challenge into his greatest triumph.

In a move that was as much a diplomatic coup as a culinary one, he led the South African National Culinary Team to the 1980 IKA Culinary Olympics in Frankfurt. Against all political odds, the team returned with five gold medals. This victory proved to the world - and to local hoteliers - that South African chefs were not domestic workers, but world-class artisans.

## The Teacher of Teachers (1982–2014)



While his presidency ended in 1982, his most lasting legacy is found in the classroom. For 38 years, Muellers served as a Senior Lecturer at the University of Johannesburg (and its predecessor, Technikon Witwatersrand). This is where the Master truly became the Teacher.

He navigated the transition from vocational diplomas to university degrees, ensuring that culinary arts were respected as a serious academic discipline. He was famous for his "Muellers Standard" - teaching that innovation without foundation is chaos, and that a menu is a binding contract where even a spelling mistake is a breach of trust. His influence on education is so profound that the HTA School of Culinary Art dedicated the "Manfred Muellers Training Room" in his honour - a permanent monument to the "teacher of teachers."



## A Local Legend

We live in an age of the "celebrity chef," where success is often measured in followers rather than foundations. Manfred Muellers comes from a different stock. He understood that true respect is not given; it is forged in the fire of discipline and maintained through the rigor of standards. Every time a South African chef commands a brigade with military precision, costs a menu with economic rigor, or steps onto a global stage without fear, they are walking on the groundwork Muellers laid. He didn't just raise the bar for our industry; for fifty years, he was the bar.

Today, as an Honorary Life Member of Worldchefs - a title held by barely 100 people globally - and a Grand Officier Maître Rôtisseur, he remains a formidable presence. He champions "food with integrity," rejecting industrial shortcuts in favour of the classical excellence he has spent a lifetime perfecting. Manfred Muellers did not just cook for South Africa; he built the stage upon which we all now stand.

## The Muellers Doctrine

The Three Pillars of Success

- Codification: If it isn't written down, it doesn't exist. Skills must be standardized, measured, and tested.
- Internationalism: You cannot be great in isolation. A South African chef must be able to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the best in Paris or Berlin.
- Institutionalization: Talent is temporary, but institutions last. Muellers dedicated his life to building SA Chefs and UJ because they outlive the individual.

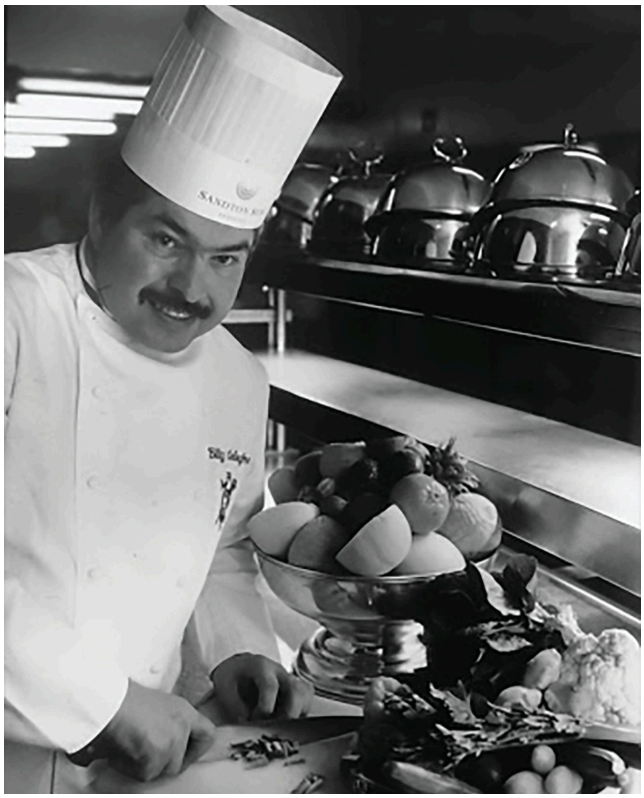
## The Career Timeline

- 1968: Arrives in Durban as Demi-Chef De Cuisine at the Edward Hotel.
- 1979: Elected President of SA Chefs.
- 1980: Leads Team SA to Gold at the IKA Culinary Olympics.
- 2014: Retires from UJ after 38 years of academic leadership.
- Present: Honorary Life President and Industry Consultant.

LEGENDS SERIES

# Bill Gallagher: Our Patron, Our Chef of Chefs

*A tribute from the Hospitality Marketplace team*



## Introduction

For us at Hospitality Marketplace, Bill Gallagher was not just an icon of the global culinary stage - he was family. A patron, a mentor, and a dear friend, Bill walked alongside us in the founding of our Culinary Artist brand. That brand still carries his spirit today, a living tribute to the vision and generosity he shared with us.

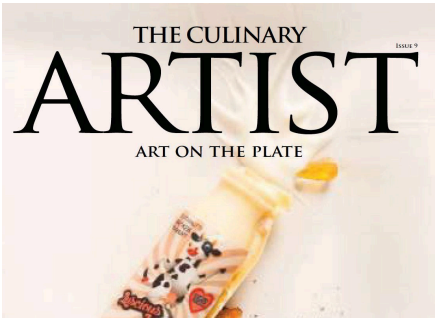
When we speak of legacy and heritage, we don't only mean recipes and restaurants. We mean people like Bill Gallagher - people who shape an industry and leave a mark so personal and profound that it continues to guide us long after they are gone.

## The Man Behind the Title

The world called him the Chef of Chefs, a title earned through decades of service as President of the South African Chefs Association (SA Chefs) and later the World Association of Chefs Societies (WACS). But to us, he was simply Bill - warm, approachable, and deeply invested in seeing others shine.

He could command a congress hall with authority and still take the time to encourage a young chef finding their feet. That balance of stature and humility made him unforgettable.

## The Birth of Culinary Artist




In the early days of Culinary Artist, Bill was there. He believed in the idea of spotlighting chefs, telling their stories, and creating a platform where talent could be celebrated. His guidance and support gave us confidence to grow the brand into something lasting.

That is why, every time Culinary Artist features a new chef or celebrates culinary excellence, it carries a part of Bill's legacy forward. He is, and always will be, at the heart of what we do.

## His Industry Legacy

- **SA Chefs Leadership:** Transformed the South African Chefs Association into a professional body of influence and mentorship.
- **Global Reach:** As WACS President, he ensured South Africa was seen, heard, and respected internationally.
- **Mentorship:** Thousands of chefs recall his encouragement as a turning point in their careers.

## Resilience in Adversity

Even after his accident in 2003, Bill never stopped giving. Paralysed from the neck down, he remained an active voice, a mentor, and a motivator. His strength in adversity was a lesson in resilience that continues to inspire us as individuals and as a team.

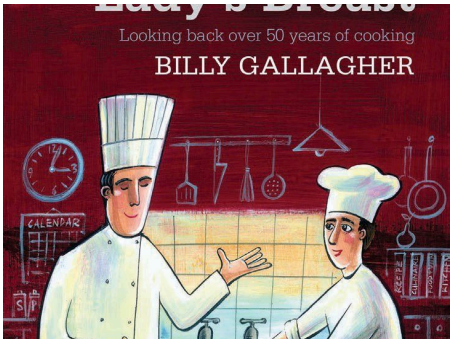
## Our Tribute

Bill Gallagher passed away in 2016, but his presence remains with us every day. For Hospitality Marketplace, he is not only part of South Africa's hospitality heritage - he is part of our story, our family, and our future.

**“Culinary Artist was born with Bill by our side. Every success we celebrate today carries his signature.”**










## A Legacy in Motion

**While Bill’s name is etched in history, his spirit is most alive when it is moving, exploring, and teaching. Since 2015, the Billy Gallagher Young Chefs Tour has been the vessel for this enduring influence, held biennially to honour his belief that the future of cuisine depends on young chefs seeing the world beyond their own kitchens.**

**This year, that vision brought the global culinary family to our doorstep, uniting Chef Olav Tennfjord from Norway and Chef Shin Jiwoong from South Korea for a two-week odyssey across the South African landscape.**

## From the Cradle to the Kitchen

The journey began where humanity did - at Maropeng, the Cradle of Humankind - before paying a moving visit to Chef Gallagher’s resting place in Fourways, grounding the tour in gratitude. But as Bill would have wanted, the solemnity quickly turned to industry dynamism. The group immersed themselves in the operational excellence of the Palazzo and Pivot Hotels at Montecasino and the luxury of The Saxon Boutique Hotel and Sandton Sun.

The spiritual anchor of the Gauteng leg, however, was the HTA School of Culinary Art. Gathering in the Billy Gallagher Boardroom - surrounded by a lifetime of his citations - the chefs shared a South African-themed lunch, a reminder that they are part of a lineage that transcends borders.

## The Cape: A Taste of Terroir

Moving to the Cape, the narrative shifted to the artistry of ingredients. The chefs dove into the supply chain with cheese-making at Ciao-Ciao, wine tastings at Perdeberg and Spier, and explorations at Wild Peacock.

The dining experiences read like a “Who’s Who” of the province’s talent. The group was hosted by Chef Greg Henderson at Palm House Boutique Hotel and experienced the refined excellence of Chorus Restaurant by Chef Bertus Basson. They embraced the local pulse at the Oranjezicht City Farm Market and Makers Landing, and even tackled the famous Gatsby sandwich. The Cape chapter closed with a dinner at Terrarium Restaurant, hosted by Chef Chris Erasmus, Jodi Gillespie, and Anlou Erasmus, leaving the group inspired by the harmony between nature and innovation.



## KwaZulu-Natal: The Universal Language

In Durban, checking into the legendary Beverly Hills Hotel, the focus turned to heritage and education. Visits to CTIA Culinary School and the Jackie Cameron School of Food & Wine offered rich cultural exchange, highlighted by a demo where Chef Shin shared Korean techniques, Chef Olav presented Norwegian flavours, and local Chef Sbu prepared a traditional Durban Bunny Chow.

The coastal journey concluded with a distinguished dinner hosted by Chef Coovashan Pillay (President, SA Chefs Association) and Chef Heinz Brunner (Worldchefs Honorary Life Member) - a meaningful homage to professional legacy.





## The Spirit Lives On

The tour's finale took place far from stainless steel kitchens, under the open sky of the Dinokeng Game Reserve. Cooking over open flames, the young chefs reflected on a journey made possible by the coordination of Duane Riley, Worldchefs, Southern Sun, and the SA Chefs Association.

As plans begin for 2027, we are reminded that this is more than a tour. It is Bill Gallagher's dream in action - fuelled by mentorship, discovery, and the belief that food can change lives.

EVENTS

# THE DUALITY OF THE MODERN CHEF

*Why Hostex 2026 is tearing up the floor plan to save the soul of our industry.*

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




For forty years, we have gathered in the same halls, walked the same carpeted aisles, and had the same shouted conversations over the hum of refrigeration units. Hostex has always been the engine room of our trade - a place of commerce, handshakes, and hustle.

But if you stand in the pass of any restaurant in South Africa tonight, you will realize that the "engine room" is only half the story.

The modern South African chef is living a double life. There is the Warrior: the technician who survives the heat, the pressure, and the brutal hours of service. And then there is the Storyteller: the custodian of heritage, the artist who translates memory into flavour, and the human being seeking connection in an increasingly digital world.

For too long, we have tried to cram both of these identities into one noisy exhibition hall. It hasn't worked. The noise drowns out the nuance. The sales pitch kills the story. That ends in 2026.

Alongside Bidfood, we are orchestrating a cultural reset. We are physically splitting Hostex 2026 at the Sandton Convention Centre into two distinct worlds. This is no longer just a trade show; it is a recognition of the duality of our craft.

## THE UPPER LEVEL: THE ARENA

### Where Iron Sharpens Iron

If you are looking for the adrenaline, you will find it upstairs. We are reimagining the traditional "Skillery" into something far more visceral: the Chef's Village Activation Area.

This is not a place for polite observation. It is a high-performance arena designed for the Warrior. We are stripping back the velvet ropes to create a raw, industrial environment where the only currency that matters is skill.

Imagine the energy of a professional kitchen during peak service, amplified by the thrill of competition. This is where the Bidfood partnership comes alive, not on a brochure, but in the pan. We are building full-scale demo kitchens where the country's sharpest talent will engage in Ready Steady Cook-style battles.

The Upper Level is about the tangible reality of our job:

- The Gear: This is where we test the equipment that claims to be "chef-proof."
- The Produce: It is where we taste, smell, and critique the ingredients that fuel our menus.
- The Fight: It is where young apprentices and seasoned executive chefs stand shoulder-to-shoulder, sweating under the lights, proving that they have the hands to match the ambition.

It is loud. It is fast. It is technical. If you want to sharpen your edge, this is your dojo.






## THE LOWER LEVEL: THE SANCTUARY

**Where the Story Takes the Stage**

But a chef cannot survive on adrenaline alone. Walk down the stairs, and you will feel the frequency shift. The clatter of steel fades. The lighting softens. The pace slows to a human rhythm.

Welcome to the SA Food Stories Lifestyle Stand.

In partnership with Nicci Robertson, we are launching a concept never before seen at a South African trade show. We have scrapped the sterile booth design in favour of a "living room" aesthetic. Picture the warmth of the Expresso Breakfast Show set - plush couches, a domestic-style kitchen, and an atmosphere of intimacy. This is where the Storyteller lives.

We are inviting the giants of our industry to step out of the kitchen and onto the couch. We aren't asking them for a quick demo; we are asking for their truth. This is a broadcast-style space dedicated to deep, uninterrupted dialogue about the things that actually matter.

- The Heritage: We will sit down with Abigail Mbalo-Mokoena to trace the lines of township cuisine and how it is redefining fine dining.
- The Business: We will speak to Grace Harding and David Higgs about the economics of survival, leadership, and building an empire in a recession.
- The Culture: We will unpack trends with Anna Trapido and explore the sustainability of our food systems with Mokgadi Itsweng.
- The Icons: We will host legends like Siba Mtongana and Chef Nti, blending conversation with casual, intimate cooking moments - the kind of food you make for family, not for customers.

The Lower Level is a sanctuary. It is a place to sit, to listen, and to remember why we fell in love with food in the first place. It is where we talk about mental health, about burnout, and about the "Ubuntu" that holds our kitchens together.




## THE BRIDGE: THE SA CHEFS PORTAL

**Democratizing the Future**

Bridging these two worlds - the skill upstairs and the soul downstairs - is the future. Hostex 2026 marks the official Phase 1 launch of the SA Chefs Portal.

For decades, success in this industry often depended on who you knew. The Portal changes that. Situated at a dedicated, tech-forward launch stand, this platform is the great equalizer.

Whether you are a student in a rural culinary school or a sous chef in a 5-star hotel, the Portal is your digital passport. Our ambassadors will be on the floor, not just selling memberships, but onboarding you to a network that connects talent with opportunity. It is a tool for education, for job placement, and for mentorship. It is how we ensure that the next generation doesn't just survive the industry, but evolves it.



## THE INVITATION

So, this is my challenge to you.

Do not come to Hostex 2026 just to walk the floor. Come to find your place in the ecosystem.

If you need to reignite your passion, spend your morning downstairs listening to the stories that shaped our culinary heritage.

If you need to test your mettle, spend your afternoon upstairs in the heat of the Village.

If you need to secure your future, stop by the Portal and get connected.

We have built the house. We have set the table. Now, we need you to bring the life.

See you at Hostex 2026.

PROFILE

# THE MARATHON CHEF

*How Brad Kavanagh Runs South Africa's Culinary Future*

BY **CHANTELLE BALSDON, HOSPITALITY MARKETPLACE**



Some culinary icons burn with the explosive fire of a flash-pan, redefining our palates with a single, volatile moment of creation. But there is another kind of icon, one whose influence is a slow, powerful current. Their work is measured not in one perfect plate, but in the steady elevation of an entire industry - the quiet, foundational work upon which future generations will stand.

This is the story of Chef Brad Kavanagh, an ode written not with fire, but with the quiet reverence reserved for the discipline of the long run.

Enjoy.






## THE TWO STARTING LINES

The air is thin and cool in the pre-dawn stillness of the KwaZulu-Natal hills. A lone figure moves with a steady, metronomic rhythm. This is Brad Kavanagh, the ultra-marathoner, his focus a quiet negotiation between will and muscle.

Hours later, the scene shifts. The air in a gleaming innovation kitchen is quiet with focused energy. Here, Chef Brad Kavanagh stands not in a spotlight, but where he is most comfortable: "behind the scenes." His focus is on a new product, a quiet collaboration, "stretching himself every day in his gain of knowledge."

These two starting lines are not parallel paths; they are the same race. To understand Chef Brad Kavanagh is to understand this duality. Whether on the open road or in the development kitchens of a corporate giant, he is guided by the unwavering philosophy that true excellence is born from discipline, sustained effort, and the relentless pursuit of a distant finish line.






## FORGING A FOUNDATION: THE UNSEEN KILOMETRES

Brad Kavanagh's professional ascent began in 1992, and his journey was not an episode in a trendy kitchen, but a quiet, deliberate acquisition of deep expertise.

After graduating with a Hotel Management Diploma and a City & Guilds Diploma in Culinary Arts (UK), he chose a path away from the traditional spotlight. He spent six years working overseas - three in Guernsey and three in Jersey - where he held a Head Chef position at a four-star hotel.

**"THIS PATH WAS THE CULINARY EQUIVALENT OF CROSS-TRAINING. HE WAS LEARNING HOW THE ENTIRE SYSTEM BREATHES, BUILDING THE DEEP, VERSATILE FOUNDATION..."**

Instead of climbing a single ladder, Chef Kavanagh spent decades logging his professional miles across an unusually diverse spectrum of the industry. He served two stints under Chef Shaun Munro, including as a Culinary lecturer, before moving into corporate under Chef Craig Elliott. He spent nearly 14 years as Regional Customer Chef at Unilever, gaining experience in the demanding realities of restaurants, caterers, hotels, delis, QSR, wholesale, and bakeries. It was here he showed his passion for nurturing chefs in the competition arena, from Chef of the Year at Unilever to the RCL Young Chefs and Bakers competitions.

This path was the culinary equivalent of cross-training. He was learning how the entire system breathes, building the deep, versatile foundation that would later enable him to operate as a true industry specialist.



## THE CORPORATE CHEF: A PURPOSE-DRIVEN PACE

In May 2019, Brad Kavanagh stepped into another corporate kitchen, this time as Head Chef of RCL FOODS. His domain isn't a single restaurant but a company with a vast portfolio of iconic South African staples like Yum Yum, Nola, Piemans, and Ouma.

Though he is a humble, "behind the scenes" person, here he gets to work in a creative innovation space and add value to customer offerings. This role was a purpose-driven choice, one he saw as the final, fulfilling stage of his career. It was a choice made with his deepest personal values in mind, as it perfectly aligned with his "extreme commitment to being around for his sons as they navigate through schooling."

He achieves this balance by maintaining a strong focus on "consumer-driven insights," stating that "the heart of everything we do is putting the consumer first." He is driving change from the inside out, finding his professional fulfilment while honouring his personal commitments.

## PACING THE NEXT GENERATION: THE GOLDEN THREAD

At the heart of Brad Kavanagh's career is a deep, "behind the scenes" commitment to mentorship, a value he inherited from his own leaders. He himself grew into the industry through powerful guidance. There is a "golden thread" that binds him to figures like SA Chefs President Chef Coovashan Pillay; they were "brothers in arms," learning and growing together under the leadership of Shaun Munro.

This experience of being mentored is precisely why he is so passionate about developing talent. His philosophy of "leading by example" is most evident in his work. He is a vocal advocate for mental health and fostering a "positive kitchen environment" for all chefs - a stark contrast to the high-pressure environments of old.

"He champions the idea of continuous learning - 'be a sponge,' - emphasizing to the next generation that true expertise only comes from time, experience, and hands-on growth."

He encourages young chefs to “plan their careers... and remain authentic,” noting that in an industry where loyalty is less common, adaptability and a commitment to personal growth are critical. He believes that “experiences - personal, professional, and competitive - shape the chef and the leader.”

## THE SOUL OF A RUNNER: THE COMRADES MINDSET

To truly understand the chef, one must first understand the runner. Kavanagh is an accomplished ultra-marathon athlete and a member of the Hillcrest Villagers Athletic Club. A runner since 1992, he has completed an astonishing 20 X 100-milers and 17 Comrades Marathons - an 89-kilometre pilgrimage of pain and perseverance.

The discipline required to run 89 kilometres is the same discipline he applies to his career and his role as a parent, managing his work-life balance with “conscious life choices” to be present for his family. Victory is achieved through meticulous preparation, strategic pacing, and an almost supernatural ability to endure for a long-term goal.

## A LEGACY OF ENDURANCE

Chef Brad Kavanagh is a blueprint for a different kind of leadership. In an industry often defined by the volatile brilliance of “celeb status,” he has chosen the gentle, steady path of the “behind the scenes” innovator.

He demonstrates that the most profound impact isn’t always the loudest, but the quiet, consistent effort that builds stronger foundations. His ultimate contribution to South African cuisine will not be found on a single plate or in the pursuit of personal glory. It will be seen in kitchens across the country for decades to come - in the higher standards and greater resilience of the industry he has quietly helped to build.

He champions the belief that leadership, like expertise, requires time; “there are no shortcuts to success.”



OPINION

# Chefs, Daring Greatly



BY **STEPHEN HICKMORE**

*"It's not the Critic that counts; not the person who points out how the strong person stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the person in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood..."*



The famous 'Man in the Arena' speech was delivered by Theodore Roosevelt in 1910. If read in full, and every line digested, it rings as loud today as it did 115 years ago.

Most chefs experience the spirit-crushing commentaries of the armchair critic, the Twitter trolls, the self-appointed experts. Your sweat and stress penalised by a bigoted review. Little wonder that a chef feels overwhelmed from time to time.

"There can be no courage without vulnerability," to quote TED Talks' Brené Brown. If a chef is to be successful, she must put herself in the arena - apron on, knife in hand - hoping for praise but knowing she is one precarious ingredient away from a body blow. It's an occupational hazard. Chefs are vulnerable to the opinions of those who don't have the courage to dare greatly. The people who would rather self-validate by pointing out shortcomings and errors. Those unadventurous, timid, cynical souls who indulge themselves in your discomfort - or, at worst, revel in your downfall.

But vulnerability is not weakness. It is, in fact, the birthplace of innovation and authenticity. The great chefs of the world - those who have truly left a mark - did so not by playing it safe, but by daring to be different. They risked failure with every dish they sent out, balancing on the knife-edge between genius and disaster. If one builds a shield to deflect hurt, a chef will soon become just another backroom cook who once was fearless. Worse still, one may end up joining the ranks of the baying mob who will never know the agony of defeat or the glory of triumph.

I suppose one must find the inner strength to cope with the inevitable jibes of the 'cold souls' who haunt the pages of TripAdvisor, Zomato, Facebook and Twitter. To find the fortitude to mentally compartmentalise their declarations of "The worst meal I've ever had in my life, like, ever." Every creative soul must wrestle with this modern reality. The digital world has made criticism easy, anonymous, and often cruel. Yet the arena remains - real, hot, loud, and filled with the clatter of pans and the pounding of hearts.

Still, we shouldn't mind the constructive and helpful criticism given by those who are brave enough to engage directly. The people who deliver this news help us to grow and improve. These folks you need on your team - the mentors, the honest customers, the colleagues who taste your sauce and tell you the truth.

To be a chef is to live in a world of daily risk. Service is theatre without rehearsal. Each plate is a performance, fleeting yet full of meaning. So, we must start daring greatly. A chef will never know the triumph and achievement of true success without risking both victory and defeat. It is only by stepping willingly into the arena - dust, sweat, and all - that we find the courage to create something truly extraordinary.

EDUCATION

# Beyond the Knife

*Teaching Soft Skills & mental resilience in South African Culinary Schools*

BY **ELSU GERICKE, SA CHEFS HEAD OF EDUCATION**



The key conversations around training successful chefs have always centered around techniques and culinary skills. The introduction of management and supervisory skills has brought many culinary graduates closer to stepping into higher positions and this has intensified the demand on these young chefs. Industry is waking up to a truth that is seldomly addressed. Culinary skills are no longer enough.

Across South African culinary schools, from private academies to TVET colleges, accredited for the OCTO Chef and Cook qualifications, we are seeing an urgent need for a different kind of training. One that reaches beyond the knife and into the heart of what it means to thrive as a chef today.

## The unspoken curriculum: Understanding burnout early

Chefs burn out. It is an occupational hazard that can no longer be ignored. In professional kitchens the culture of endurance has been romanticised for decades. Chefs were told, it is what it is, it has always been that way. Long hours, high pressure, emotional intensity, takes its toll.

We can do better for the next generation entering the workforce. Especially students that study structured QCTO occupational qualifications, there is a change to intervene sooner. Soft skill inclusions into curricula ensure that we can help students understand stress cycles, emotional regulation, and realistic expectations of industry life, ensuring young chefs enter the industry better prepared, empowered, and more resilient.

## Soft skills are not optional: They are foundational

Soft skills have been viewed as 'nice to have' skills in training, but today they are competencies that put employers at risk. Speaking to chefs in hotels, restaurant owners, and culinary academies, the same themes keep emerging:

*"We need cooks and chefs that know how to communicate"*

*"Time management are challenging for the younger generation"*

*"We need chefs who can lead themselves before they lead a team"*

Embedding these skills into the curriculum is no longer a luxury, it is a requirement.

For chefs these include:

- Creativity
- Conflict resolution
- Problem solving
- Time management
- Effective Communication
- Leadership skills
- Teamwork
- Cultural sensitivity

These skills improve employability for the young chefs but most importantly, these adequately prepare chefs who can stand the heat without losing themselves.

## Wellness initiatives: Caring for the Student before the Chef

A meaningful shift in culinary education in recent years is the focus on student wellness, with may culinary institutions introducing programs and initiatives to create students that are workplace ready. Some of these include:

- Wellness check-ins
- Mindfulness sessions
- Peer support groups
- Access to counselling
- Workshops on self-care, nutrition, and work-life balance
- Conversations about financial literacy and personal boundaries

These are not extras, these are lifelines for our future leaders, entrepreneurs, and custodians of our food culture.

## What "Beyond the Knife" really means

Teaching young chefs to hold a knife is important. Teaching them how to hold themselves together in a high-pressure environment is transformative.

The culinary landscape is at a turning point, with the national occupational qualifications aligning to what we need in the industry, and what competence really means, we can embrace a more holistic vision of what a chef can be.

Going beyond the knife is not about softening the profession but strengthening it. Shaping chefs that are technically excellent, emotionally resilient, self-aware and grounded.

The future of South African kitchens belongs to those who can cook with skill, lead with empathy and can withstand the heat. In the kitchen and in themselves.

YOUNG CHEFS

# The Power of the White Jacket

*Taking Up Space on the Global Stage*

BY **ZANDILE MAKHOBA, YCC CHAIR KWA ZULU NATAL**




Walking into a venue filled with over 500 delegates from five continents is overwhelming in the best possible way. It was a moment that redefined my career - representing SA Chefs as an Ambassador at the Worldchefs Congress & Expo 2024 in Singapore.

My journey of fate began in service, starting on the KwaZulu-Natal SA Chefs committee and eventually leading the KZN Young Chefs Club. I applied for this ambassadorship hoping simply to learn and fly our flag high. Thanks to the incredible support of the SA Chefs team and Chef Coovashan Pillay, I gained something far greater; a global family.




## Finding a Global Home

As a first-time attendee, I made it my mission to attend every session. I quickly found my rhythm in the global version of the Young Chefs Club - a space dedicated to nurturing international collaboration and leadership.

The congress is where the industry comes to breathe, network, and grow. Between the Worldchefs Educators' Forum, the prestigious Global Chefs Challenge, and the trade exhibitions, the energy was palpable.

However, the most profound moment was personal. Sitting in the sessions honouring the late Chef Billy Gallagher - an icon who raised hospitality standards in South Africa and abroad - I felt a deep sense of responsibility. As a young South African chef, his legacy reaffirmed my purpose; to uplift and empower the next generation.

## Lessons in Resilience

A highlight of the event was meeting culinary icon Chef Martin Blunos. His presentation, "From Kitchen to Global Stage," resonated deeply, but it was our brief conversation afterward that shifted my mindset. His advice was simple yet powerful: Young chefs must not be afraid to take up space. Whether we find success or failure, both are vital in shaping our journey.

We also witnessed history as Chef Andy Cuthbert was elected the new Worldchefs President, and I watched with pride as Team South Africa competed on the global stage.

## Turning Inspiration into Action

The congress was not just about networking; it was a catalyst for tangible projects back home. The "Feed the Planet" program was particularly moving, offering tools to champion sustainable food systems.

This experience has directly birthed my new initiatives:

- Mzansi Meets Italian: Inspired by the cultural exchange in Singapore, I am launching a culinary concept that blends indigenous South African ingredients with Italian techniques.
- Global Collaboration: I am partnering with Italian Chef Paul Dukai to explore regional ingredients and promote local sourcing from farmers and fishermen.
- Roots and Recipes: I am proud to contribute to this cookbook by the UN and SA Chefs Association, showcasing indigenous foods and sustainable cooking practices.





## The Road Ahead

The Worldchefs Congress & Expo 2024 was more than an event; it was a renewal of my commitment to serve. From strengthening ties with the SA Chefs Board of Directors to building international bridges, I am ready for the next chapter.

I look forward to continuing this journey and representing South Africa again at the 2026 Worldchefs Congress in Wales.



TECHNOLOGY

# Hospitality Rewired

*How AI is Reshaping Service, Strategy, and Systems*

## 1. GUEST ACQUISITION GETS SMARTER - PROFITROOM

Profitroom's AI booking engine doesn't just respond - it anticipates. The platform analyses behavioural data in real time: how long a guest spends on certain pages, which room types are clicked, time of day, even abandonment signals. That data feeds into predictive algorithms that tailor offers on-screen - from urgency prompts ("Only 2 left at this rate!") to dynamic discounts. Its AI Agent further enhances engagement by using natural language processing to field guest queries via chat or WhatsApp - then delivers contextual answers, nudges them to book, and logs data for follow-up marketing.

This is not automation for the sake of efficiency - it's intent-driven conversion engineering.

## 2. STREAMLINED OPS VIA CLOUD & AI - ORACLE SIMPHONY (MICROS SOUTH AFRICA)

Oracle Simphony's cloud-based POS is more than a billing system - it's an analytics engine plugged directly into daily operations. Here's how it works:

- Menu intelligence: It tracks real-time ingredient costs and suggests price adjustments for low-margin dishes.
- Sales modelling: It pulls from historic sales, current bookings, weather patterns, and daypart trends to predict sales volume.
- Labour forecasting: It analyses footfall and transaction times to recommend staffing adjustments per shift.

The system syncs data across outlets and devices, giving group operators a live dashboard of operational health and profitability triggers - no spreadsheets required.

## 3. SPA INTELLIGENCE - SPAGURU

SpaGuru's appointment scheduling isn't just reactive. The platform maps out service durations, staff availability, booking histories, and guest preferences - and uses rules-based logic to suggest optimal time slots.

The AI behind it identifies high-demand service windows, recommends therapist allocation based on skill and speed, and flags inefficiencies in service duration. The result? More clients served, better pacing, and improved therapist utilisation.

## 4. SCALABLE PAYMENTS - MOBIPAID

Mobipaid's intelligence layer monitors payment patterns for anomalies - flagging duplicate attempts, location mismatches, or uncharacteristically high transaction values. These are assessed

using AI-based rules to prevent fraud in real time.

It also reconciles payments with guest CRM data and booking flows, tagging each payment with source, method, and context - streamlining admin and giving GMs better financial visibility.





## 5. AI THAT MOVES WITH YOU - FCM'S SAM FOR CORPORATE TRAVEL

Sam uses machine learning to absorb travel behaviour over time - learning from how travellers respond to alerts, what channels they use, how often they book last-minute, and more. Its model then preempts needs:

- Sends visa reminders when flights are booked to high-risk destinations
- Suggests alternative flights based on route patterns when delays occur
- Adjusts support tone and timing based on the user's device and location

For travel managers, Sam aggregates data from multiple travellers to offer visibility on location, safety risks, spend anomalies, and duty-of-care compliance. It's AI with operational empathy - and business context baked in.

## 6. GLOBAL INNOVATIONS MAKING WAVES

Across the globe, AI is being integrated at the infrastructure level:

- QR menu tech uses real-time purchasing data to recommend dishes and drinks that pair well, increasing average order value.
- AI agents deployed in modular systems can be trained for guest check-ins, front desk support, and back-of-house alerts.
- Facial recognition technology enables seamless check-in experiences while automatically surfacing loyalty profiles and VIP preferences.

These are not gimmicks - they're productivity tools with measurable impact.

## 7. THE INTELLIGENCE BEHIND THE PLATE - HOW AI IS TRANSFORMING FOOD SERVICE

AI is reshaping food service - behind the scenes and in full view. From smarter menu engineering to predictive back-of-house systems, operators are using AI to drive efficiency, reduce waste, and enhance service quality.

Here's how the tech works - not just what it does. In South Africa, foodservice AI is beginning to show promise with real deployments and early adoption trends. Johannesburg's Tang Palace made headlines with Africa's first robot waiters - Ginger, Pepper, and Rocky - now assisting with orders and service on-site. Meanwhile, regional QSR chain Hungry Lion has implemented predictive staffing and inventory tools to better match demand cycles and reduce waste.

While platforms like Presto and AI-driven voice ordering remain largely global innovations for now, they offer an inspiring look at what's to come - and where local operators could scale soon.



## KITCHEN AUTOMATION & ROBOTICS

Robot chefs are no longer sci-fi. Ventures like Moley Robotics and Spyce Kitchen have introduced systems that mimic chef gestures, automate cooking sequences, and standardise plating. While not yet mainstream, they point to a future where volume production doesn't mean loss of craft.

## COMPUTER VISION & OPERATIONAL OPTIMISATION

Tablets using vision and voice AI - such as Presto - analyse guest behaviour and streamline service. These tools reduce wait times, enable on-demand orders, and alert staff to tables needing attention. More importantly, they gather performance data that supports real-time adjustments.

## INVENTORY, WASTE & COST CONTROL

AI algorithms forecast ingredient demand based on sales velocity, seasonal-

ity, and current stock levels. This reduces spoilage, avoids over-ordering, and automates supplier triggers. The result is a tighter kitchen - both financially and operationally.

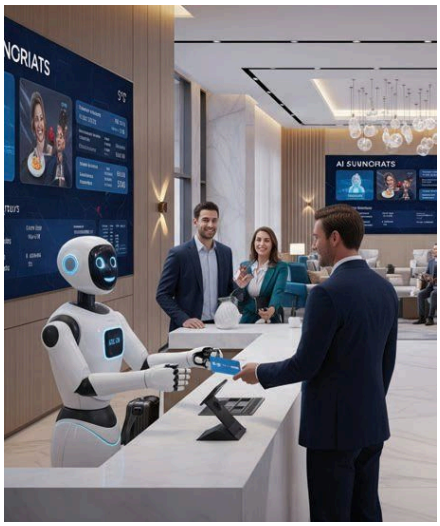
## DYNAMIC VOICE ORDERING & UPSELL AI

In quick-service restaurants, voice AI systems are now taking drive-thru orders, recognising speech patterns, suggesting upsells, and flagging inconsistencies. These systems learn from every transaction to better anticipate preferences and improve throughput under pressure.



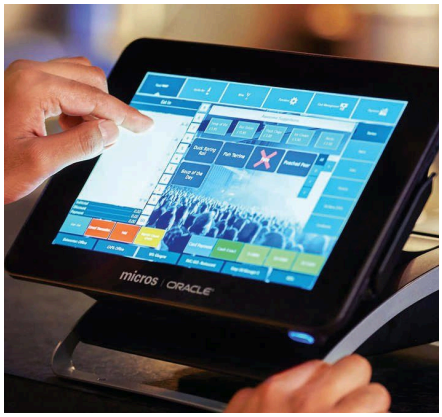

## PERFORMANCE & STAFF ANALYTICS

Tools like Riley, already used in global franchises, analyse service interactions using audio and video. They identify top-performing staff, common missed upsells, and bottlenecks - feeding that data into team coaching and training modules.




## WHY IT MATTERS FOR FOOD SERVICE OPERATORS

1. Efficiency Gains: Automates repetitive work, letting teams focus on hospitality.
2. Accuracy & Consistency: Eliminates variance in dish output, service pacing, and ordering.
3. Stronger Margins: Reduces waste, controls cost, and sharpens upsell potential.
4. Smarter Planning: Empowers operators to act on real-time, predictive data - not just gut feel.





BOOKS

# Soil, Soul, and Sustainability

*The Book Reclaiming Our Food Future*

**Roots & Recipes is more than a cookbook - it is a movement. Here is why South Africa's indigenous pantry is the key to our health, our wealth, and our climate survival.**

There is a specific, grounding comfort found in the smell of rain hitting the dry African earth. It is a scent that speaks of survival, of cycles, and of the land that feeds us. For too long, however, the true bounty of that land - the hardy sorghum, the nutrient-dense morogo, the creamy bambara nut - has been sidelined, often whispered about as "poverty food" while we filled our plates with imported trends.

But the tide is turning. We are witnessing a homecoming.

The launch of Roots & Recipes: Indigenous Foods for a Sustainable Future marks a pivotal moment in South Africa's culinary timeline. Launched amidst the natural splendour of the Nirox Sculpture Park in the Cradle of Humankind, this publication is a collaboration between the United Nations in South Africa, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the South African Chefs Association (SA Chefs), and the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

This is not merely a collection of instructions for dinner; it is a restoration of dignity. It is a love letter to the nine provinces and the generations of grandmothers who kept these seeds alive in their aprons.



## More Than Just A Cookbook

At its core, Roots & Recipes serves as a bridge. It connects the ancient wisdom of the past with the urgent sustainability needs of the future. It captures the essence of South African identity, moving

beyond the braai to celebrate a diverse pantry that includes millet, amadumbe, marula, and rooibos in ways that feel fresh and modern.

The book represents a powerful alignment between chefs, policymakers, and the farmers who work the soil. It is a declaration that our indigenous ingredients are not relics to be viewed in a museum, but vibrant, viable solutions for a modern world grappling with climate change.



## The President's Call

The launch event was charged with emotion, moving away from bureaucratic speeches to heartfelt storytelling. Chef Coovashan Pillay, President of the South African Chefs Association (SA Chefs), was a central voice, framing the book not just as a culinary guide, but as a mirror to our national soul.

"As we turn the pages of Roots & Recipes, we are not merely reading about food, we are reading about ourselves," Pillay noted. For him, ingredients like spekboom and bambara beans are "gifts of nature" that embodied sustainability long before it became a global buzzword.

Speaking with the authority of the industry's highest office, Pillay's message to the culinary fraternity was clear: the wisdom we seek is already here. "Our association is more than just a collective of chefs; we are a family united by our love for food, culture, and creativity," he said. He emphasized that the "old" ingredients are actually the new frontier for chefs who want to cook with integrity and identity.



## The Science Of The Soil: Is There Space For Regenerative Farming?

You might ask: does this book fit into the modern conversation about regenerative farming? The answer is a resounding yes. In fact, indigenous crops are the original regenerative tools.

Regenerative farming is not just about sustaining the land; it is about healing it. It is a method of farming that restores soil health, captures carbon, and increases biodiversity rather than stripping the earth bare.

South Africa's indigenous crops - like sorghum and millet - are naturally suited to this. They have deep root systems that hold the soil together and require far less water and fertilizer than commercial maize. By eating these foods, we are supporting a farming system that works with nature, not against it. This is "climate resilience" on a plate.

## The Call To Action: Support Small Farmers

This brings us to the most critical point: the economics of your dinner. Gauteng MEC Vuyiswa Ramokgopa delivered a stirring reminder of the power dynamics on our plates. "Let us teach our children that umngqusho, morogo, and amadumbe are not the foods of poverty, but the food of power," she said.

But that power is only real if we buy it. Every time you choose local sorghum over imported rice, you are directly supporting a smallholder farmer. You are putting money into the hands of rural women and seed savers who are the custodians of this heritage.

Buyiswa Twala, founder of Agrigreat Soiltech, argued that we must "uplift the farmer" by integrating these indigenous methods with modern technology. The call to action is simple: Buy local. Buy indigenous. Support the small guys.






## A Taste Of The Book:

## Umbhako (Baked Sorghum Bread)

To give you a glimpse of the book's philosophy - simple, nutritious, and proudly

local - here is a preview of a beloved traditional favourite. Umbhako is prepared in both rural and township households, usually served with stews, curries, or simply with butter and tea.

### The Ingredients

- 4 cups (500g) sorghum flour
- 2 ¼ tsp (1 packet) active dry yeast
- 2 tbsp sugar
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 ½ cups (360 ml) warm water
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter, melted (plus extra for greasing)

### The Method

- Activate: In a small bowl, combine warm water and sugar. Sprinkle yeast on top and let sit for 5–10 minutes until frothy.
- Mix: In a large bowl, combine flour and salt. Make a well in the centre and add the yeast mixture and melted butter. Stir until the dough comes together.
- Knead: Transfer to a floured surface and knead for about 10 minutes until smooth.
- Rise: Place dough in a greased bowl, cover with a clean towel, and leave in a warm place for about 1 hour (until doubled in size).
- Shape & Bake: Punch down gently, roll into a smooth loaf, and place in a greased loaf tin. Let rise again for 30–40 minutes. Bake at 180°C for 25–30 minutes until golden brown.

## Where To Find It

Roots & Recipes: Indigenous Foods for a Sustainable Future is available as a digital publication through the United Nations South Africa and FAO online platforms, ensuring that this knowledge remains accessible to all South Africans.



## The Revolution Starts In Your Kitchen

The launch of Roots & Recipes is an invitation. It is a call to stop looking overseas for superfoods when we have our own.

We encourage you to take this message home. Buy indigenous ingredients from local markets. Cook them for your family. Teach your children the names of the plants that grow in our veld. Share your food stories on social media and make our heritage trend.

The future of food is not found in a laboratory; it is found in the roots of our past. Let’s eat with pride.



FROM THE UKHAMBA

# Cooking with Umqombothi

*A local ingredient, reimagined for the professional kitchen*

For centuries, umqombothi has been brewed and shared across South Africa - not poured into glasses, but ladled from the ukhamba, the clay pot passed from hand to hand. Thick, malty, lightly sour, and communal by nature, this sorghum beer is woven into celebrations, rituals, and gatherings.

For professional chefs, umqombothi offers something rare: a heritage-rich flavour with modern potential. Its fermented tang cuts fat, its maltiness balances sweet and savoury, and its earthy depth opens doors to both comfort and innovation. Though still underused in restaurant kitchens, umqombothi deserves a place in local menus as more than a drink - as an ingredient that bridges memory and reinvention.

This series presents five recipes - meat, vegetarian, fish, poultry, and dessert - plus a professional brewing guide. Each dish shows how umqombothi can move from the pot to the plate, carrying culture with every bite.

## 1. Charcoal Oven Short Rib with Umqombothi Glaze



### INGREDIENTS

- 2.5–3 kg beef short rib, bone-in
- 2 tbsp smoked paprika
- 2 tbsp crushed coriander seeds
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- Coarse salt, cracked black pepper
- 1 L beef stock
- 2 onions, quartered

### GLAZE

- 500 ml umqombothi (strained)
- 150 g brown sugar
- 80 ml soy sauce
- 1 tbsp apple cider vinegar

### METHOD

1. Rub ribs with spices, garlic, salt, and pepper. Place in roasting tray with onions and beef stock.
2. Roast low and slow in charcoal oven (160°C) for 2.5–3 hours, maintaining steady coals.
3. Skim fat from braising liquid and whisk a spoonful into glaze for extra beef depth.
4. Reduce glaze ingredients until syrupy.
5. Remove ribs, brush with glaze, and caramelise over direct coals for 5–10 minutes.

6 Rest, slice, and serve with charred mielies or coal-roasted veg.

**CHEF'S NOTE:**

Umqombothi's tang cuts through fat, while its sugars caramelise into a sticky crust. Adding skimmed beef fat deepens flavour and gives the glaze a glossy finish.

**PLATING:**

- **Fine Dining:** Slice rib into neat portions, glaze lightly, serve with maize purée and charred baby mielies.
- **Casual Trade:** Present bone-in, glazed, with roasted mielies and slaw on a wooden board for sharing.

## 2. Coal-Roasted Butternut with Smoked Yoghurt & Umqombothi Reduction



**SERVES: 6 | TIME: 1.5 HOURS**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 2 large butternuts, halved
- Olive oil, salt, pepper
- 1 tsp cumin, 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 200 g Greek yoghurt
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp smoked salt
- Fresh coriander leaves

**GLAZE**

- 400 ml umqombothi (strained)
- 80 g honey
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 clove garlic

**METHOD**

1 Rub butternut with oil, spices, and salt. Roast cut-side down in charcoal oven at 180–200°C for 50–60 minutes.

2 Reduce umqombothi with honey, vinegar, and garlic until syrupy.

3 Mix yoghurt with lemon and smoked salt. Cold-smoke yoghurt just before service.

4 Plate butternut over smoked yoghurt, drizzle with reduction, garnish with coriander.

**CHEF'S NOTE:**

Butternut's sweetness is balanced by umqombothi's tang, while smoked yoghurt adds acidity and fat. Cold-smoking yoghurt tableside or à la minute gives theatre and intensity

**PLATING:**

- **Fine Dining:** A wedge plated on smoked yoghurt with reduction in a circular frame, coriander oil dots.
- **Casual Trade:** Serve halves family-style, yoghurt on side, reduction poured over.

## 3. Wood-Fired Yellowtail with Umqombothi & Citrus Marinade



**SERVES: 4–6 | TIME: 45 MINUTES + 1 HOUR MARINATING**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 1 whole yellowtail (2–2.5 kg), scaled and gutted
- Zest & juice of 2 lemons
- 2 tbsp fresh ginger, grated
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 250 ml umqombothi (strained)
- 2 tbsp honey
- Fresh thyme

**METHOD**

1 Score fish and marinate in lemon, garlic, ginger, honey, thyme, and umqombothi for no more than 1 hour.

2 Brush cavity with thyme, citrus zest, and olive oil paste before roasting.

3 Prepare wood fire oven to medium-high (200°C), with fruitwood for aroma.

4 Roast fish directly on grill rack or in fish basket, basting with reduced marinade.

5 Serve whole, garnished with lemon wedges and charred greens.

## 4. Charred Spatchcock Chicken with Umqombothi Mop Sauce



**SERVES: 4–6 | TIME: 1.5 HOURS**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 2 medium chickens, spatchcocked
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp chilli flakes
- 250 ml umqombothi (strained)
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp smoked paprika

- Salt, pepper

GLAZE

- 200 ml umqombothi (strained)
- 50 ml apple cider vinegar
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tbsp mustard seeds
- Pinch smoked salt or chilli flakes

METHOD

1. Marinate chicken in garlic, chilli, paprika, olive oil, and umqombothi for 2 hours.
2. Roast over indirect coals at 180°C for 45 minutes, basting every 15 minutes with mop sauce.
3. Finish skin-side down over direct coals for crispness.
4. Rest 10 minutes before serving.

## 5. Umqombothi & Caramel Milk Tart



SERVES: 8 | TIME: 1.5 HOURS

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pre-baked tart shell (sweet pastry)
- 500 ml full cream milk
- 250 ml umqombothi, reduced by half and strained
- 100 g sugar
- 40 g cornflour
- 2 eggs + 2 yolks
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tbsp caramelised sugar shards
- Citrus zest ash for garnish

GLAZE

- 400 ml umqombothi (strained)
- 80 g honey
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 clove garlic

METHOD

1. Heat milk with reduced umqombothi. Replace 10% of milk with unreduced umqombothi for freshness.
2. Whisk eggs, yolks, sugar, and cornflour. Temper with hot liquid.
3. Return mixture to heat, stir until thickened. Add vanilla.
4. Pour into tart shell. Bake in charcoal oven at 160°C for 25–30 minutes until set.
5. Cool, garnish with caramel shards and citrus ash.

CHEF'S NOTE:

Reduction brings malt depth, while a touch of fresh umqombothi keeps brightness. Caramel adds sweetness; citrus ash adds bitterness and visual drama.

## Brewing Umqombothi in a Professional Kitchen

INGREDIENTS

- 2 kg sorghum malt
- 1 kg maize meal
- 1 kg maize malt
- 10 L water
- 25 g dry brewer's yeast (controlled)

METHOD

1. Mash: Boil 5 L water, whisk in maize meal until smooth. Cool slightly.
2. Add Malts: Stir in sorghum malt, maize malt, and remaining water.
3. Ferment: Transfer to sanitised vessel. Add yeast. Cover loosely.
4. Wait: Ferment 2–3 days until thick, slightly sour, and aromatic.
5. Strain & Use: Strain through muslin for smooth reductions, glazes, or marinades.



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TECHNIQUE

# MASTERING FIRE

*Controlled Burn, Precision, Not Nostalgia*

Fire has always been the backbone of the South African culinary identity. But in a professional kitchen, it is not nostalgia - it is discipline. It demands precision, consistency, and vision.

For the home cook, fire is atmospheric. For the chef, it is a tool of texture. It is about taking a primal element and interpreting it with the same technical rigour applied to a sous-vide bath or a combi-oven.

## FUEL DYNAMICS: THE VARIABLE

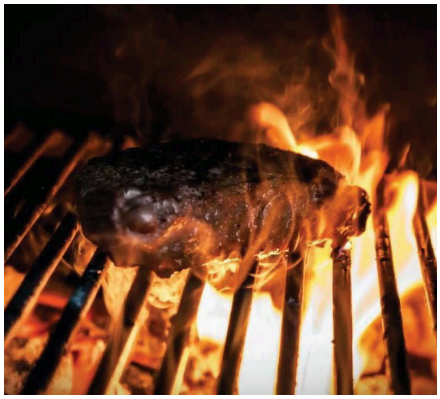
Solid fuel systems do not simply replicate a braai; they redefine it. The choice of fuel dictates the outcome.

- Charcoal is the reliable workhorse. It delivers steady, intense heat with minimal smoke. It is the baseline for consistency, allowing chefs to sear with precision and maintain service flow without unpredictable flare-ups.
- Wood is the artist. It burns hotter and wilder, offering layers of aroma that change with the species - rooikrans, oak, or fruitwoods. It is best suited to dishes where smoke is a primary ingredient, not just a byproduct.

The most effective kitchens stage both: charcoal for thermal control and wood added selectively to layer depth.

## THE ENGINE ROOM: OPEN STAGE VS. SEALED CHAMBER

Integrating fire requires choosing the right engine for the line. The two primary systems - open grills and enclosed charcoal ovens - offer vastly different experiences for the brigade.



### 1. THE OPEN GRILL

There is a seductive quality to the open grill. It is theatre. It connects the diner to the process and offers the chef a visceral connection to the heat. The cooking happens via direct radiant heat, moving from the bottom up.

- The Payoff: It allows for continuous basting, easy access for multiple chefs, and that distinct, charred crust that only comes from direct flame contact.
- The Price: It is an energy thief. The open grill bleeds heat, raising the ambient temperature of the kitchen and forcing extraction systems to work overtime. It is also slower; without a lid to trap heat, thicker cuts require patience and careful rotation.



### 2. THE ENCLOSED CHARCOAL OVEN

This is a different beast entirely. It functions as a hybrid, a high-pressure chamber that seals heat inside. Temperatures often exceed 400°C, cooking food via radiant heat, convection, and conduction simultaneously.

- The Payoff: The speed is unmatched - often 40% faster than an open grill - and the pressure seals moisture into

proteins instantly. The insulated door means the heat stays in the oven, not in the kitchen.

- The Price: It requires a recalibration of skill. You cannot see the food constantly. Opening the door dumps heat, so chefs must trust their timing and intuition. It has a steep learning curve, but the reward is efficiency and succulence.

## OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION

In a high-volume kitchen, fire cannot be a bottleneck. The choice of equipment dictates the workflow. An enclosed oven allows for "finish-in-oven" techniques, where proteins marked on a plancha can be finished in the smokey chamber in minutes, freeing up burner space.

But fire is unforgiving. It drives juices to the centre of the protein, making a dedicated, warm resting station non-negotiable. Whether using the open stage or the sealed box, the grill is not just a heat source. It is a testament to skill, proving that in the right hands, fire is the most sophisticated ingredient of all.

MASTERCLASS

# From Plantation to Plate

*Malaysia's Palm Oil Story Inspires a Greener Culinary Future*

BY **ELSU GERICKE**



Malaysian quietly takes the lead in redefining what sustainable excellence in the global kitchen looks like, proving progress and preservation can thrive.

90% of all Malaysian Palm Oil is certified sustainable under the Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil (MPSO) scheme, which is a national mandatory standard that safeguards the environment, supports the farmers, and ensures traceability from plantation to plate.

This remarkable achievement reflects decades of innovation, government commitment and a belief that the palm oil industry can be an economic powerhouse as well as a force of good. Malaysia chose responsibility over rapid expansion, science over speculation, and education as the cornerstone of lasting change.

In 2025 the Malaysian Palm oil story expanded through the partnership of the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC) and the South African Chefs Association (SA Chefs). A journey that focused on bringing together Malaysian Pam oil products with chefs and business to educate the South African industry on the benefits of palm oil and using it in their establishments.

A series of 9 Masterclasses were hosted at the Centre for Culinary Excellence at the University of Johannesburg, growing in popularity with every class, the following was covered:

## April – The Art of Frying with Chef Absalom

The first masterclass of the year focused on frying techniques using Malaysian palm oil. Chef Absalom demonstrated how palm oil's high smoke point and neutral flavour profile make it ideal for achieving consistent results in professional kitchens. Attendees explored temperature control, oil reuse, and flavour retention in deep- and shallow-frying applications.

## May – Baking Brilliance with Chef Andile

Chef Andile led an engaging session on baking with palm oil, exploring how it can replace traditional fats to produce tender, moist bakes with improved shelf life. Participants created an array of sweet and savoury pastries, discovering palm oil's stability and nutritional value in modern bakery production.

## June – Vegan and Plant-Based Creations with Chef Doug

Chef Doug showcased the plant-based potential of palm oil, crafting vegan dishes that celebrated balance, sustainability, and texture. The session explored palm oil's role in creating rich, flavourful meat-free recipes and discussed its environmental benefits within a broader context of sustainable eating.

## July – Chocolate Innovation with Chef Karen and NORTÉ Eurocao

Partnering with NORTÉ Eurocao, Chef Karen led a decadent chocolate and confectionery-focused session. Participants learned how palm oil enhances mouthfeel and stability in chocolate coatings, ganache's, and fillings. A masterclass that perfectly blended science, sustainability, and indulgence.

## August – South African and Malaysian Fusion with Chef Zana

Chef Zana's session celebrated culinary fusion, pairing traditional South African ingredients with Malaysian flavours.

Using palm oil as the common thread, she created vibrant dishes that reflected shared cultural values of community, flavour, and hospitality. Highlighting how palm oil bridges global culinary traditions.









## September – Cooking for the Masses with Chef Zola

Chef Zola presented practical insights into bulk cooking and catering with palm oil. Focusing on cost-effectiveness, flavour retention, and sustainability, the session demonstrated how palm oil performs exceptionally well in large-scale cooking without compromising on nutrition or taste.

## October – Future Trends in Cooking with Chefs Charles and Bongani

This masterclass looked ahead to new culinary trends involving palm oil. Chefs Charles and Bongani explored innovative applications, from emulsions and infused oils to contemporary plating and health-forward cooking. Showing that palm oil remains relevant and adaptable in modern gastronomy.

## November- A festive Feast with Chef Pinky Maruping

This penultimate masterclass focuses on the wonderful flavours we all associate with the festive time. Both sweet and savoury treats and dishes prepared expertly by Chef Pinky Maruping will inspire chefs to create festive tables where sustainable Malaysian Palm oil will feature in every recipe.



The 2025 Malaysian Palm Oil Masterclass Series reflected MPOC's ongoing commitment to promoting sustainably produced palm oil and advancing culinary education in South Africa. Each session blended technical learning with creative inspiration, empowering chefs, educators, and businesses to integrate sustainable practices into their culinary craft. We look forward to what 2026 will bring.

NEW




INTRODUCING NEW

# MARVELLO WHITE:

## The New Standard for Flawless Bakes



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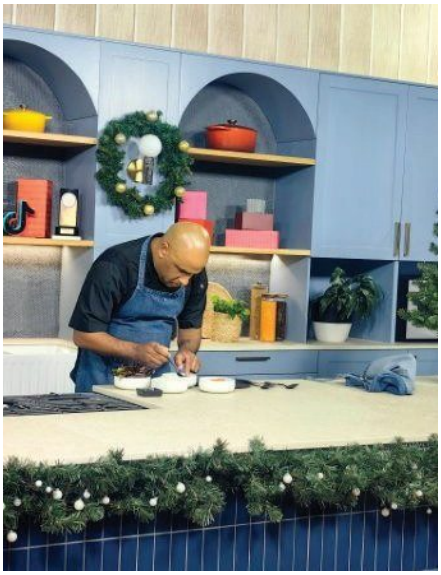
SIQALO FOODS

CULTURE

# Korean and South African chefs unite in a culinary celebration of culture and connection



The South African Chefs Association (SA Chefs) and the Korean Cultural Centre in South Africa (KCCSA) have announced an exciting new collaboration that brings together the culinary traditions, creativity, and philosophies of two rich food cultures. The initiative will culminate in a three-day Korean–South African Culinary Exchange, to be held in January 2026, featuring demonstrations, masterclasses, and a joint Chef's Table experience hosted in Johannesburg and Pretoria.



Ahead of the 2026 event, this collaboration took centre stage on the Expresso Morning Show on 17 November 2025, as part of the programme's G20 Summit series. Representing South Africa, Chef Raynor Damons, former SA Chefs director and Food & Beverage Manager at Accor, joined forces with the Korean Cultural Centre to introduce South African viewers to the beauty, philosophy, and harmony of Hansik, the traditional cuisine of Korea.

## A philosophy of balance and harmony

At the heart of Korean cuisine lies Obangsaek (오방색) - the philosophy of the five cardinal colours: blue/green, red, yellow, white, and black - representing the natural elements of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. This philosophy guides the balance of colour, flavour, and nutrition in every Korean meal.

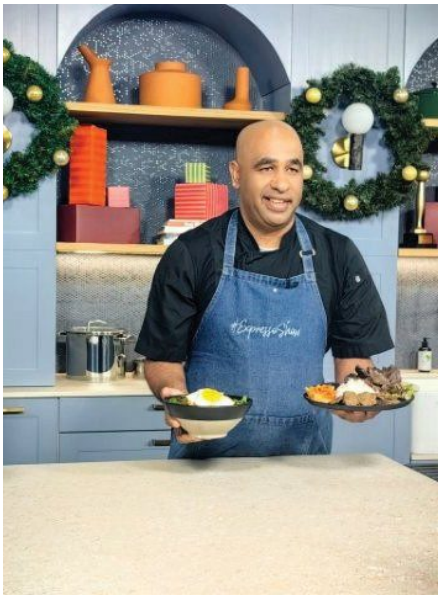
During his Expresso appearance, Chef Raynor demonstrated four iconic dishes that capture the soul of Korean cooking:



- Bibimbap (비빔 밥) – meaning "mixed rice", this colourful dish combines vegetables, meat, egg, and gochujang (red chilli paste) to achieve perfect harmony in taste, texture, and nutrition. Each colour and ingredient represents balance and unity - principles deeply rooted in Korean culture.
- Bulgogi (불고기) – marinated Korean BBQ beef, dating back to the Goguryeo Kingdom, embodies the warmth and hospitality of Korean dining. Grilled and shared at the table, bulgogi represents togetherness and the communal joy of eating.



- Bibim mandu (비빔만두) – pan-fried dumplings filled with minced meat and vegetables, then tossed in a spicy-sweet gochujang sauce. This vibrant street food reflects the lively and social side of Korean cuisine.
- LA galbi (LA 갈비) – Korean BBQ short ribs marinated in a balanced blend of soy sauce, garlic, pear, and sesame oil, offering a perfect expression of the Korean art of marination and the country's belief in harmony between sweet and savoury flavours.



## Building bridges through food

Founded in 2021, the Korean Cultural Centre in South Africa operates under Korea's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and believes that culture is the ultimate bridge connecting people and advancing humanity. Through its partnership with SA Chefs, the Centre aims to deepen cultural exchange and mutual understanding through the universal language of food.

"Food is one of the most powerful expressions of who we are," says Chef Raynor Damons. "This collaboration reminds us that while flavours may differ, the joy of sharing a meal is something every culture understands."



## A shared table, a shared future

The upcoming Korean–South African Culinary Exchange in January 2026 will see approximately ten Korean chefs travel to South Africa to work side by side with local chefs. Together, they will host demonstrations of authentic Korean cuisine, share techniques and ingredients, and create innovative fusion dishes that celebrate both nations' culinary heritage.

Sample fusion ideas already being explored include Bulgogi Bunny Chow, Japchae-stuffed Dombolo, and Kimchi–Atchar Slaw – playful, flavourful combinations that reflect the creativity and warmth shared between both countries' culinary communities.

This partnership between SA Chefs and the Korean Cultural Centre marks the beginning of a long-term collaboration designed to foster professional exchange, friendship, and shared learning between chefs and food enthusiasts across both nations.

NEW

Introducing

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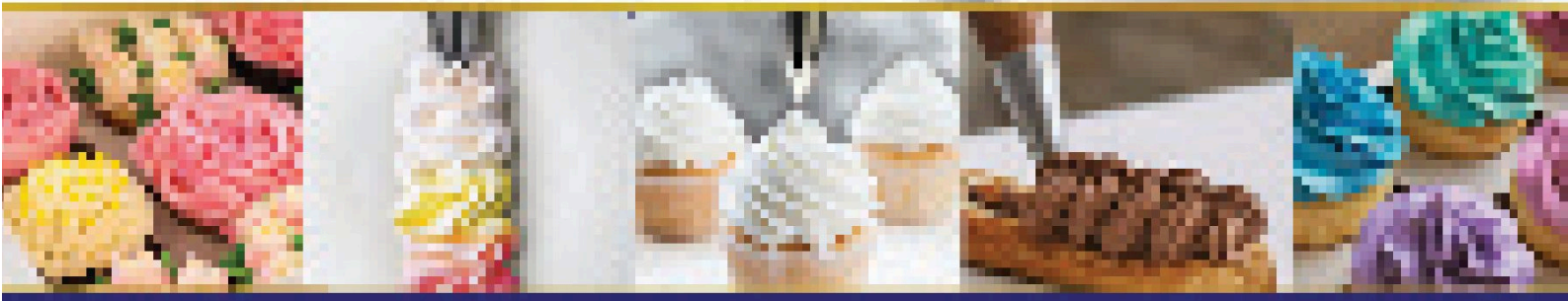
## The New Standard for Flawless Bakes






### Experience the Difference

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EDUCATION

# 1000 Hills Chef School



*In the heart of KwaZulu-Natal's rolling landscapes, tucked into the renowned "Valley of 1000 Hills", lies 1000 Hills Chef School - a place where culinary aspiration meets immersive training, holistic development and real-world experience. From its founding in 2004, the school has built a reputation as one of South Africa's leading private culinary institutions, committed not just to technique, but to attitude, character and professional readiness. With a motto of "Attitude Is Everything!", 1000 Hills Chef School emphasises that success in the kitchen springs equally from mindset and skill.*

## Courses & Training

The school offers a full-time, industry-relevant programme that spans two years, during which students earn four internationally recognised diplomas from Highfield International, as well as a range of specialised certificates. These globally accredited qualifications ensure that graduates are ready to pursue careers both locally and abroad.

**Students graduate with the following diplomas:**

- Highfield Level 2 Diploma in Food & Beverage Service
- Highfield Level 3 Diploma in Culinary Arts (Professional Chefs)
- Highfield Level 3 Diploma in Patisserie, Confectionery & Bakery
- Highfield Level 4 Diploma in Culinary Supervision & Management

The curriculum is designed around "kitchens not classrooms": emphasising practical, hands-on experience across culinary arts, pastry, food and beverage service, and management skills. Classes are small (maximum of 12 students) so each individual receives mentoring and attention.







## Real-world experience through the on-site restaurant

What sets the school apart is the in-service training built into the curriculum. Students practise in the on-site training venue - the school's own Classroom Café restaurant - preparing menus, serving guests, managing FOH and kitchen operations. They engage with real paying customers and explore seasonal menus, production, service, and even profit and loss review. The second-year management diploma students rotate through leadership roles in the restaurant environment, putting supervision and management into practice.




## A holistic approach to education

At 1000 Hills Chef School the philosophy reaches beyond cooking. The programme nurtures confidence, leadership, creativity, adaptability, and a service-oriented attitude. From the start, students are encouraged not just to follow recipes but to think, innovate and manage. The presence of guest lecturers and off-campus experiences, combined with full equipment sets, uniforms and materials, signal a commitment to total preparation. The institution sees each student as an emerging professional and supports not only culinary technique but the mindset of a chef, the discipline of a team, and the business awareness of hospitality.

In the fast-evolving global food industry, where trends shift, guest expectations rise and operations demand more than just a good dish, this layered, immersive

training gives graduates a head-start. The school's track record of competition success and graduate placements speaks to its effectiveness.

## Why choose 1000 Hills Chef School?

- A unique "living-learning" environment: stay on-site, learn in the kitchen, serve in the restaurant, live the lifestyle.
- True industry immersion: the in-service restaurant experience means you are not watching from the sidelines - you are doing.
- Holistic development: your technical skills, your professional attitude, your service mindset and leadership potential are all cultivated.
- Accredited international diplomas and a curriculum built for today's global hospitality world.
- A beautiful, inspiring natural setting that fosters focus, community and creativity.

For aspiring chefs seeking more than simply to cook - but to step into a vibrant chef-career with confidence and depth - 1000 Hills Chef School offers training that is as much about character and mindset as it is about cuisine..




For more information visit our website thechefschool.com or call us on 031 777 1566



EDUCATION

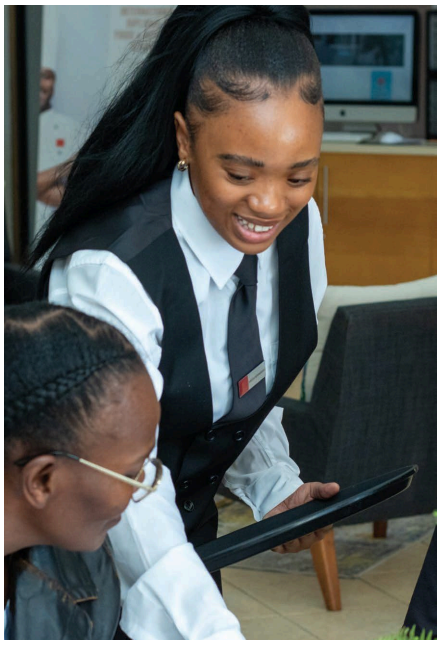
# Johannesburg Culinary & Pastry School

*A Hub of Culinary Excellence*

**Nestled in the heart of Johannesburg South, the Johannesburg Culinary & Pastry School (JCPS) is where passion, precision, and creativity come together to shape South Africa's next generation of chefs. Known for its dynamic, hands-on approach, JCPS offers aspiring culinary professionals more than just training - it offers transformation.**

## Where Learning Meets Real-World Experience

At JCPS, students don't just watch from the sidelines - they create. Every class is designed for immersive, practical learning, guided by experienced chefs who bring industry insight straight into the kitchen. The school's modern facilities mirror professional restaurant environments, ensuring that graduates step confidently into the fast-paced world of hospitality.



JCPS also operates three student-run coffee shops, including two branches of its signature café Cinnamon - located at the University of Johannesburg's APK and DFC campuses - and another in Sandton. These vibrant cafés give students invaluable real-world exposure to customer service, business operations, and the pace of working in a live hospitality environment. Each space showcases the talent and creativity of JCPS learners while reinforcing the school's strong link between education and industry.

Beyond the classroom, JCPS partners with leading hotels, restaurants, and hospitality brands, offering internships and mentorships that prepare students for meaningful careers across the industry. The result? Graduates who are not only technically skilled but career-ready from day one

## Recognised Excellence Across Africa

In 2021, the Johannesburg Culinary & Pastry School was proudly ranked number three in Africa, a reflection of its commitment to excellence, innovation, and continuous growth. This recognition celebrates the school's unique ability to balance technical mastery with creative flair - empowering students to make their mark in both local and international kitchens.

## A Venue with Vision: The Eye of Jozi

Expanding its creative footprint, JCPS is also the proud owner of The Eye of Jozi - a breathtaking events venue boasting panoramic city views and the Eye of Jozi Hiking Trails. It's where nature, creativity, and culinary artistry meet - a destination that celebrates food, community, and experience.

**Johannesburg Culinary & Pastry School**

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WOMEN IN FOOD

# Stirring the Pot

*Women in Service - Capsicum Culinary Studio*

In a world where the kitchen has long been considered a woman's place - but rarely her stage - the tides are finally turning. As Women's Month takes centre stage this August, Capsicum Culinary Studio offers a powerful reminder that the culinary industry is not just evolving, it's being redefined by the women in it.




With seven campuses across South Africa and a proud legacy of training top chefs, Capsicum is home to a passionate team of women who are not only shaping the world of food but also challenging outdated norms and carving new paths of leadership. We caught up with several of the school's powerhouse chef lecturers to hear what it means to be a woman in the culinary world today and what the future could taste like if equity were finally on the menu.

The irony is not lost on Chef Andile Magwaza, who reflects on growing up in a culture that expected women to cook, but not professionally. "Traditional values taught us women belong in the kitchen," she says, "so it's an eye-opener to see that professional kitchens are still male dominated. But being a nurturer helps me make the kitchen a creative and kinder space."

Chef Cassey Goliath echoes this sentiment, noting how women are challenging the status quo.

"The culinary world is tough and often male- dominated, but we rise above. We lead, inspire and break barriers," she says. Whether it's Chef Larozaan van Zyl using her platform to "challenge stereotypes and shape a more inclusive food system" or Chef Sharon Pye, who finds her culinary joy in the simple act of gathering people at a full table, the women at Capsicum are proof that the definition of a chef is growing more inclusive by the day.

For Chef Tendani Tshikovhi, the kitchen is not just a workplace, but a powerful place to push for change: "Being a female chef in a male-dominated industry means I challenge stereotypes and strive for equal opportunities. Women play a significant role across the food system, from production to consumption."

Despite the progress, many of the chefs admitted the road to where they are today was far from smooth. "Yes, it was definitely tougher," says Chef Magwaza. "I had to let my work speak for itself before I was even allowed a voice at the

table." Chef Nandile Mtshaha adds: "Kitchens are still not a good place for women. We weren't considered for promotions. Men climbed the ranks quicker and easier."

It's a reality that Chef van Zyl believes is slowly changing but only because women have refused to accept less. "The industry has historically excluded us from leadership. I've had to prove myself more, navigate bias, and build resilience. But now, I use my position to pave the way for others." Some, like Chef Sharon Pye, faced a different hurdle: age. She entered the culinary world later in life, inspired by legends like Julia Child. "It wasn't my gender that made the journey hard, it was starting later. But passion drove me. And the kitchen welcomed me, eventually."

For others like Chef Tendani, the strong female presence in recent years helped ease her path. Still, the stats don't lie and more than 50% of the food industry workforce is female, but less than 25% rise to leadership.

What makes women indispensable to the culinary world? The answers are as varied as the chefs themselves, but a few themes shine through - empathy, collaboration, creativity and emotional intelligence. "We bring nurturing, empathy and a diversity of emotions that help us navigate challenges without conflict," says Chef Magwaza. "We lead with empathy, intuition and collaboration," adds Chef Van Zyl. "These are vital in high-pressure kitchen environments." Chef Cassey Goliath believes it's time to recognise the value of these skills not as soft, but as powerful. "Compassion, rooted in emotional intelligence, can greatly improve team dynamics."

Still, Chef Mandy Sing offers a balanced perspective: "It's not about which gender is better, it's about what each brings to the kitchen. We need diverse strengths to create healthy, collaborative spaces."








So how do we get more women into top-tier positions in food? It starts with access, support, and structural change. "We need mentorship, training, and intentional advancement," says Chef van Zyl. "It's not about talent but rather it's about access to opportunity."

Chef Magwaza believes confidence is key: "Women need to believe they are capable. The workforce can't see us as leaders if we don't."

Chef Mtshaha takes a more radical stance: "We need movements and organisations that support, protect, and amplify women, especially women of colour. Right now, men are still running the show."

Chef Pye offers a clear vision: "Fair policies, equal pay and respect for skill - not age or gender - are essential. The future of food is diverse and full of flavour."

## So what's cooking in the future?

Looking ahead, the chefs at Capsicum are united in their hopes for the next five years. They want to see not just more women in leadership, but a transformation of the kitchen culture itself. "Introduce soft skills programmes to help women find their voices and boost their confidence," says Chef Magwaza.

**"Support startups led by women," adds Chef Goliath. "Let's invest in female leadership and innovation."**

Chef van Zyl envisions a future where young women entering the industry won't feel the need to "toughen up" to be taken seriously. "I want kitchens to be places where women thrive because of who they are, not despite it."

And finally, Chef Sing leaves us with a powerful metaphor: "In the past, we asked for a seat at the table. Now, we're building our own. And this time, we decide what's being served."

This Women's Month, it's clear that Capsicum Culinary Studio isn't just training chefs, it's nurturing changemakers, women who are reimagining the food industry from the inside out, with courage, creativity and a call to action that can't be ignored.

Here's to a future where the kitchen belongs to everyone and where every voice has a place at the table.

### Fast Facts

- Women make up over 50% of the food industry's workforce yet hold less than 25% of senior leadership roles.
- The hospitality industry is among the top five employers of women in South Africa.
- Capsicum Culinary Studio is South Africa's largest chef school, with over 20 years of training excellence.

**For more details contact:**

chef@capsicumcooking.co.za 086 111 2433 or capsicumcooking.com. Social media: @capsicumcooking



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# BEYOND THE PASS

Brian McCune

BEYOND THE PASS

## *Starting Over*

BY **BRIAN MCCUNE**

So here it is guys, the shiny new South African Chefs Association publication, hot off the press like a fresh batch of croissants nobody ordered. They're calling it a "fresh start," which, let's be honest, is just a polite way of saying, "We're winging it, and nobody is quite sure what we're doing yet." From the bustling kitchens of Cape Town to the far-flung canteens of Polokwane, this magazine is for anyone who's ever donned a chef's jacket, sold a chef's jacket, taught some poor youngster how to flambé without scorching their pristine chef's jacket, or my personal favourite, those shadowy figures you come across at food shows wandering around in chef's jackets in every colour of Joseph's Amazing Technicolour Coat who mumble, "I'm in the food business,". So, dive in, give us your two cents worth and don't take it too seriously. I sure as hell won't. New ventures like this are like opening night with a brand-new menu, thrilling, adrenaline-pumping, utterly terrifying, and guaranteed to send someone sprinting to the store for emergency supplies. But with a bit of warmth, patience, and the occasional stir just like a good sourdough starter, something delicious might just rise.

Now, as an "experienced" chef (that's code for old enough to grumble about back pain and the price of olive oil), I've seen enough new beginnings to fill the Big Hole in Kimberley. Most of them start with big dreams, end with bigger bills, and feature more finger-pointing than a bunch of trainees standing around a collapsed soufflé destined for the GM's wife. But this one? It feels different. Maybe it's the fresh wind blowing through the Association, or maybe because someone promised free wine at the meetings. A new start in this industry is like walking into a kitchen mid-service, there's chaos, there's shouting, someone's dropped a tray of glassware, but every now and then, it all comes together in a moment of pure, unadulterated brilliance. That's when you plate up something perfect, and everyone forgets the part where you yelled, "Who stole my f'ing mise en place?!"

As for me, I'm just along for the ride, slouched in the comfy back seat of the vehicle, tuning out the chitter-chatter from the front and staring out the window at the glorious, ridiculous world whizzing by. Every so often, I spot something, a quirky trend, a bizarre ingredient, a waiter tripping over their own ego and think, "Well, there's my next article." This publication though has got all the energy of a busy Saturday night service, the creativity of a chef with too much time and not enough budget, and just the right amount of panic to keep things interesting. So now it's over to you, forward this issue with a click of a button to your staff, your colleagues, your cousin who once made a decent sandwich and now calls himself a "foodpreneur." Share the love, spread the word, and let's see where this thing goes.

Meanwhile, this grumpy old chef will be over here, sinking back in my chair, serving up Beyond the Pass with a pinch of sarcasm, a dash of cynicism, and a whole lot of grudging affection for this wild, messy, delicious industry we call home. Bon appétit, or whatever.

*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*

AT THE BACK

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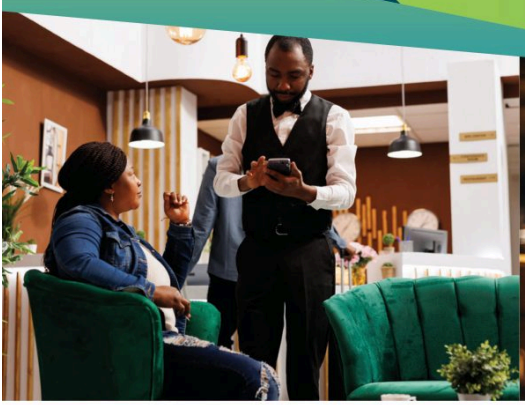
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