

WINE
TALK

The Winelands is Cooking

Jacqui Latimer visits three winelands 'cookery' getaways and finds there is a lot on offer in winter

Renowned chef, **NIC VAN WYK** is deftly peeling the stalk of a porcini mushroom and explaining how to cook fungi. A group of wine-sipping journalists stand around, mouths open. "With porcini," says Nic, "you should separate the stalks and the caps. Always peel the stalks and cook them for a little longer than the caps, which are more delicate and need less cooking time."

We're enjoying a sneak preview of the Culinary Adventure at **KLEINE ZALZE LODGE**. After three years at the estate's award-winning restaurant Terroir and a stint at the Barnyard Brasserie, Nic is back at Kleine Zalze to head up the Lodge Restaurant. Eager to share his passion for good food and wine, Nic is celebrating his return with an innovative mid-week culinary adventure that runs from Tuesday evening till Friday morning at specified dates during June, July, August and September.

"What I am trying to do with our classes is demystify some of the more fussy foods people are afraid to tackle in their own kitchens. I also want to introduce home chefs to the wide range of fresh produce and quality products available in the winelands.

We visit local farms and producers in the mornings, use the produce we've bought to cook up a storm in the afternoon, and dine on the result in the evening. We take it from the farm to the table," explains Nic.

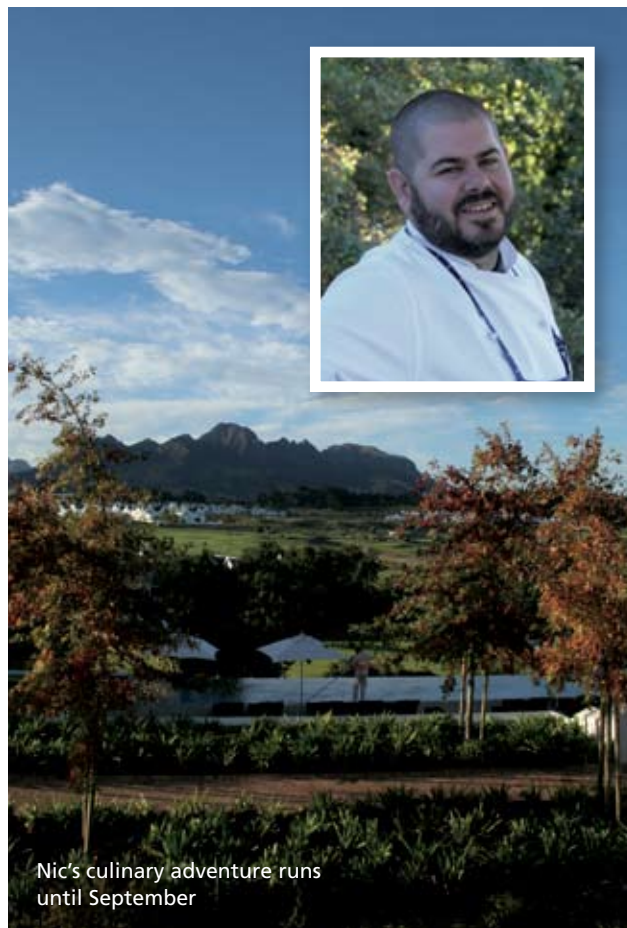
Blanc 2005 and Family Reserve Shiraz 2005.

The spittoons don't see much action and soon we retire to our suites before dinner. I browse my recipe collection: Veal Escalopes, Prawn Wontons,

Moorish Lamb Skewers and Gnocchi, Mushrooms and Fontina Truffle Sauce. The recipes, percale linen, king-sized bed and under-floor heating work their magic. Rejuvenated, I trot off to dinner. More wine flows and the fruits of the afternoon's instruction disappear to appreciative grunts and smacking lips.

Later I visit the little *dorp* of Darling to chat to another chef with a passion for sharing her culinary know-how. When I arrive at **TRINITY LODGE** I can practically see the aromas floating out of the kitchen. Buttery onions and freshly baked bread have me sniffing the air greedily as **SHAUN** and **DEBBIE MCLAUGHLIN** welcome me to their four-star guesthouse.

Debbie is making Caramalised Onion and Blue Cheese Tartlets and I join her in the kitchen to find out more about the two-day cookery getaways she runs in June and October. "This is where it all happens," she says. "I do demos in the morning and then everyone gets a



Nic's culinary adventure runs until September

Ganache follows risotto and by the end of the afternoon's cookery demo I have to wipe chocolate from my chin. Under the oak trees, we're guided through the estate's wines, enjoying the highly decorated Vineyard Selection Barrel Fermented Chenin

chance to try their hand at the recipes during practicals in the afternoon.”

Debbie, a Prue Leith-trained chef, loves modern country cooking and likes to share her passion for fresh produce and quality ingredients.

“Over the two days we learn to cook dishes like Lamb, Mint and Pea Pie, Pear and Polenta Cake and an assortment of tarts, ranging from Salmon and Rocket, to Roast Tomato and Aubergine, to Lindt chocolate and Pear. We have a lot of fun and it’s great to see people enjoying cooking and, of course, eating,” says Debbie.

In the evening guests dine on the day’s creations accompanied by local wines selected by Shaun, who, as head of the Darling wine route, is something of a connoisseur.



Besides cooking, activities are arranged showcasing Darling at its quaint and quirky best. “We try and cater for the tastes of each specific group,” explains Shaun. “If the

guys want to go and play golf in the afternoon or everyone wants to see Pieter Dirk Uys perform as Evita se Peron, we arrange everything. We also organise wine and olive tastings at the cellars and guests can visit the local galleries and crafters.”

Before departing, patrons are treated to lunch at Hilda’s Kitchen, the restaurant Debbie runs from an old Cape Dutch homestead near the winery at Grootte Post.

At **BOVLEI VALLEY RETREAT** in Wellington, Abbi Wallis isn’t offering cookery courses ... yet.

But at her four-star guesthouse I was delighted by Abbi’s hands-on approach to cooking for guests. The accommodation is impressive and so is the handmade lavender shortbread,

which sets the tone for the rest of the Bovlei Valley Retreat food experience.

Breakfast is a full English affair, served alongside a cold buffet of local cheeses, smoked salmon and ham and freshly-baked bread. It's all rather indulgent and, fortunately, the vineyards and guava orchards are perfect for a leg-stretching walk. To appease any walk-induced hunger pangs, tea with fresh scones and cream is served on the veranda at 4pm, followed a few hours later by supper in the homestead's dining room.

Abbi prepares the evening's meal from her open-plan country kitchen overlooking diners clustered around the fireplace. "I like to use seasonal ingredients and make everything from scratch, from the breads and pâtés to



Abbi enjoys chatting to guests from her open-plan kitchen

the pasta," she explains. "I cook in front of the guests and chat to them during the evening ... if they're in a chatty mood. I'm good at gauging that sort of thing. Some people love to talk, others don't."

Conversation is optional, but good food is always on the menu. Freshly-baked bread is followed by Camembert and Dolce Cheese Filo Parcels on a Salad Bed with Strawberry Coulis, and a main course of Beef Medallions served in Red Wine and Rosemary Jus on Parsley Mashed Potatoes. Dessert is Hot Chocolate Soufflé. It's all delicious and paired well with the farm's award-winning Dunstone Shiraz.

Warm hospitality and impeccable service meets good wine and great food in a beautiful setting. Bovlei Valley Retreat brims with good things, including dogs. By the time I leave, my heart has been stolen by the family weimaraner, Shiraz, and their ridgeback, Merlot. And, of course, Abbi's fine food. **GT**