

# Imparting a Little French Flair

## *Chef Aurélien Gransagne*

*In the world of restaurants and high cuisine, Michelin Star Chefs are the European equivalent of culinary royalty or Hollywood superstars, and so it was with great excitement that Stellenbosch's Majeka House recently welcomed French Michelin Star Chef, Aurélien Gransagne, to impart his extensive expertise and culinary flair in their restaurant kitchen.*

Text: Nicky Furniss  
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At age 30, Chef Aurélien is very possibly one of Europe's youngest Michelin Star Chefs – many chefs only ever dream of acquiring such an accolade much later in their careers – but his youthful appearance and demeanour belie not only a great respect and love for food, but also a steely ambition and determination to constantly improve his art. “What makes a good chef great, is if he is constantly thinking ‘how can I do everything better next time,’” explains Aurélien, who adopts this philosophy himself on a daily basis in his own restaurant, Burgundy's numerous Michelin-graded L'Esperance Restaurant in France. It is also because of this constant striving for improvement that Aurélien says that he cannot claim any one moment in his career as his proudest. “You can only be proud when you reach your supreme, but in the culinary world you can never reach your supreme because you can always be better – every day you can improve on the one before,” he explains.

It is this kind of dedication and attention to detail, that Majeka House's resident Head Chef, Anri Diener, will no doubt take away from her time working under the tutelage of Aurélien. The two chefs already have a love of the French style of cooking in common, as well as a belief in allowing the quality and flavour of the products they use in their dishes to speak for themselves. “The most important part of cuisine is in the strength of the ingredients and I like to cook these ingredients in such a way as to enhance them and bring out the best in them – not to overcomplicate them by adding 20 different flavours, as was the trend ten years ago,” says Aurélien. Anri follows a similar philosophy in her own cooking, preferring to keep her dishes simple, yet elegant: “A plate full of intense flavours doesn't work for me. Rather the elements on the plate should together compose the full flavour of the meal,” she explains.

In order to use only the best produce in season, Anri changes the menus at Majeka House Restaurant every couple of months and favours the use of only the best of local Western Cape ingredients, including fine seasonal fruit and vegetables and of course, fresh seafood. Everything on the menu is prepared in the traditional French style,

but most of Anri's dishes exhibit something of a South African influence, such as the highly recommended seared Springbok loin with turned potatoes, minted pea puree, mushrooms and saffron sauce.

Aurélien has also used his trip to South Africa as an opportunity to sample new flavours and look for local South African products that he may be able to introduce to his own restaurant patrons in France. In particular, he has been very impressed with local wines and loves the flavours of South African fruit, Kingklip and Rooibos tea.

On the whole, Aurélien has thoroughly enjoyed his first visit to South Africa. “It's very nice here – the weather is lovely and the people are very friendly,” he explains, and he has also enjoyed working with Anri and her staff at Majeka House. “Anri is a very good chef and the staff is keen to learn and improve. Even though the restaurant only opened a couple of months ago, the customers really like the dishes that are served here,” he adds.

While Aurélien says he is sad to leave Majeka House, he is looking forward to a well-deserved holiday when he returns to France – that he will most likely use to explore some of the other fine dining restaurants in the country, as well as to hone his skiing skills. Then, later this year, Anri will travel to France to learn more from Aurélien – but this time on his own turf. While Aurélien acknowledges that Anri may not be able to bring him some of the South African sunshine he says he will miss the most when he leaves, perhaps there will be space in her luggage for a couple of bottles of wine and a box or two of Rooibos perhaps.

*Majeka House offers elegantly-appointed five-star accommodation in a tranquil garden setting just outside the historic town of Stellenbosch in the Western Cape. An indoor swimming pool, Jacuzzi, sauna and steam room, as well as a thoroughly pampering Spa menu ensure the ultimate in relaxing getaways, while meals are certainly an occasion to be savoured at the Majeka House Restaurant. ??The restaurant is open to non-residents for lunches and dinners daily.?? For restaurant and accommodation bookings, call +27 21 880 1549 or email [reservations@majekahouse.co.za](mailto:reservations@majekahouse.co.za). For more information, visit [www.majekahouse.co.za](http://www.majekahouse.co.za). ■*