

QUALITY DINING PREVAILS

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Even though belts have been tightened, quality prevails as consumers with an appreciation of fine dining continue to satisfy their discerning palate. 'It is pleasing to see that independently owned restaurants with innovative, individualistic and superior-quality menus are winning the approval of food lovers across South Africa, evident in the American Express Platinum Fine Dining Programme,' says Vanessa Singh, Head of Card Marketing for American Express®.

Dining in South Africa sees a distinct improvement each year. Victor Strugo, selector for the programme since its inception in 1998 and well-known food critic who reviews restaurants for a number of publications, believes that the winners of the American Express Platinum Fine Dining Awards fall squarely in this category. 'The renewal of 72 awards bears testimony to the fact that restaurants are continuously ensuring that quality is foremost in their menus, and the standards set by the American Express Platinum Fine Dining Awards are a sure source of motivation,' says Strugo.

American Express is committed to growing and recognising talent in the fine-dining industry by affording young, aspiring graduates accelerated training at two of its award-winning Platinum Fine Dining Restaurants. University of Johannesburg graduate Yemurayi Bamhare will be the first to join the inaugural 2010 Fine Dining Mentorship Programme, and will spend six months each at Bellagio at the Bluebird Mall in Illovo and Piccolo Mondo in the Michelangelo Towers.

This programme will assist in fast-tracking Yemurayi's career with a year of experience alongside award-winning chefs in the crème de la crème of South African fine-dining restaurants and providing first-hand experience in the real world of fine dining – something that may take years to achieve the conventional way.

The 2010 American Express Platinum Fine Dining regional award ceremonies held at Bellagio Restaurant in Johannesburg and to be held at the One&Only Hotel in Cape Town on 28 September, honoured two family-run Pretoria restaurants, La Madeleine and Ritrovo Ristorante with their 10th consecutive Platinum Fine Dining Awards. At La Madeleine, one of South Africa's most revered restaurants since the 1980s, Paris-

trained Anne Leusch has now joined her parents Daniel and Karine Leusch, giving meaning to the adage 'quality never goes out of fashion'.

Ritrovo (Italian for 'Rendez-vous') is a perennial favourite among discerning diners, drawn as much by the larger-than-life personalities of father-and-son team Giovanni and Fortunato Mazzone as for their hearty Neapolitan fare, colossal wine cellar and inspiring hilltop views of Pretoria's jacarandas.

Two American Express Platinum Fine Dining Restaurants feature in the World's 50 Best Restaurants list: The Tasting Room at Le Quartier Français came in at number 37, followed by La Colombe in 38th place. Three more American Express Platinum Fine Dining Restaurants are included in the World's Top 100 Restaurants list, namely Aubergine, Jardine and Rust en Vrede.

'This attests to the stature of the American Express Platinum Fine Dining Awards, bringing them in line with top international standards,' says Lannice Snyman, who has been part of the judging process for three years. Snyman is an award-winning culinary expert and Southern African Regional Chairman of The S.Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants. Snyman is also the author of *Tortoises & Tumbleweeds*, which won a 2009 Gourmand World Cookbook Award in the Culinary Travel section.

Just over half of this year's 13 new awards went to the Western Cape: Bizerca Bistro, Gold and Salt in the Cape Peninsula, The Pavilion in Hermanus, Grand Provence and Rust en Vrede in the Cape Winelands and La Locanda in George along the Garden Route. A further five restaurants, spread across the country, received first-time American Express Platinum Fine Dining Awards for 2010, namely Mastrantonio, Osteria Tre Nonni and Sel et Poivre in Gauteng, Harvey's and Roma Revolving Restaurant in KwaZulu-Natal and Orange in Mpumalanga.

'Twelve years ago the awards programme was introduced into South Africa, extending the success of the international Platinum Fine Dining Programme to the African continent. This was developed for our Platinum Cardmembers as a list of restaurants committing themselves to satisfying the superior dining expectations of a discerning clientele by removing any uncertainty when searching and booking gourmet destinations,' adds Singh. The current programme spans 22 urban and rural destinations across six of South Africa's nine provinces.

The selection criteria for the American Express Platinum Fine Dining Awards include cuisine, service (including menu and wine knowledge), wine list, décor and ambience as well as overall excellence and consistency. Standards are checked thoroughly and restaurants are regularly reevaluated. Previous awards are not automatically renewed every year.

In accepting the award, each restaurant guarantees to honour at least one late dinner reservation by American Express Platinum Cardmembers who call before 10:30 on the morning of the reservation date.

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Notes to editors:

The other 72 restaurants that received renewed awards are 96 Winery Road, Auberge Michel, Aubergine, Bellagio, Bellgables, Belthazar Restaurant & Wine Bar, Boschendal, Bosman's at Grande Roche, Bread & Wine, Buitenverwachting, Bukhara (Cape Town and Sandton), Butcher Shop & Grill, Byzance, Catharina's, Caveau Newlands, Cleopatra Mountain Farmhouse, Constantia Uitsig, Daruma, De Oude Kraal, The Dining Room at The Grace, Emily's, Faff, Fino, Food Barn, Fraai Uitzicht 1798, French Connection Bistro, Geet, Ginja, Gramadoelas, The Greenhouse at The Cellars-Hohenort, Hacklewood Hill, Haiku, Hartford House, Haute Cabrière Cellar Restaurant, Hunter's Country House Restaurant, Ile Maurice, Jardine, Jemima's, La Belle Terrasse, La Campagnola, La Colombe, La Madeleine, La Pentola, Le Canard, Linger Longer, Mimosa Lodge, Mosaic, Myoga, Oliver's, Overture @ Hidden Valley, Pembreys, Piccolo Mondo, Pigalle (Sandton), Reubens, Ritrovo Ristorante, Roots, Sand at The Plettenberg, Savoy Cabbage, Saxon, Seafood at The Marine, Serendipity, Sheikh's Palace, Spice on Florida, Stonehill, Sugar Club, Swiss Inn, Tasting Room at Le Quartier Français, Wombles, Yamato, Zachary's and Zafferano.

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