



AT LARGE



Tanja Kruger heads up the culinary team at Majeka's restaurant

TAKING IT EASY Majeka House

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Majeka House, a petite 22-roomed hotel and spa, lies on the outskirts of Stellenbosch. Its decorator, Etienne Hanekom, formerly director at *Visi*, has brought a commendable South African twist to the contemporary communal areas, but situated as it is in the suburban backwoods it all feels a bit self-conscious – like a city stepmother all dressed up in Versace at the country fête.

I arrived in the midst of a true South-Eastern tantrum – which was in the process, that afternoon, of ripping down the heated pool's roofing. Fortunately the next morning dawned still and hot.

Before breakfast I headed out on a jog; a few streets away is the entrance to the aptly named Paradyskloof nature reserve – miles of forest and *fynbos*, backing up against the mountains. I reached the edge of the tree line; a few cyclists were taking a break among the gum trees – otherwise it was mostly quiet.

I was staying in a spacious pool suite, looking out onto a pool shared with the neighbouring room. Nothing could beat the sublime chilly submersion after my jog, followed by soaking up the lazy quietness with a book on one of the loungers.

Breakfast has the usual continental buffet, but with a bit of extra attention (fresh chocolate-and-almond croissants – though one does wish they were bigger); a few homemade juices – I had a fiery beetroot, ginger and celery concoction that seemed more rocket-fuelled than a double espresso. And then a small selection of cooked breakfasts (including an exquisite omelette – cheesy, with juicy cherry tomatoes and mushrooms).

But it is at dinnertime that Majeka's restaurant, Makaron, really excels. There is a genuine determination to establish this as a serious Winelands culinary destination, and the team, headed by chef Tanja Kruger, are well on their way.



Josephine Gutentoft, the restaurant manager and sommelier, is your charming and knowledgeable host. Her wine list is biased towards the surrounding area, but she is passionate about ferreting out lesser-known – and sometimes surprising – gems.

One of these was The Foundry Viognier 2010. Made by Chris Williams of Meerlust, this was quite bold with golden fruitness and yet an admirable restraint. It was paired with grilled prawns spiced up with a gentle laksa curry sauce.

From the Helshoogte valley's Rainbow's End came a Cabernet Franc – fresh berried and yet with a bodied gravitas that held well against the rib-eye on the bone it accompanied. The latter was grass-fed beef from Angus McIntosh's Spier Biodynamic Farm. It was interesting to note several other organic options on the menu – and exciting to see the restaurant's commitment to ethical sourced produce.

Five kilometres from Stellenbosch's buzzy village centre, Majeka House is an ideal retreat from which to launch explorations of the Stellenbosch and Helderberg wine routes.

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