



Restaurants

GREG LANDMAN indulges himself in Stellenbosch and Helshoogte Pass

Makaron Restaurant at Majeka House, Paradyskloof, Stellenbosch

021 880 1512

Beryl is going through a 'French' stage. She has always loved France and goes there as often as she can, speaking terrible French as she travels blithely through the country she calls 'my second 'ome, *cheri*'. She can

parlais Franglais with the best of them but, being a horsewoman, draws the line at eating *cheval*.

When she heard that Tanja Kruger, the talented young chef at Makaron in Stellenbosch, had spent time with Alain Passard in Paris at L'Arpège, it got her radar going. Beryl was in her winter mode, which means no diamonds, no silver, only warm stones like amber,

lapis and topaz, all in gold settings, and with flowing red and orange scarves she looked like a flame.

Tanja's food is imaginative, great to look at and even better to eat. Her menu is continually evolving and changes regularly. Beryl started with the terrine of game birds (R75) with pan-seared quail breast, roast onion purée, curried dahl

and *slaphakskeentjies* (a traditional pickled onion salad), the tangy ingredients setting off the terrine perfectly. I had the hot potato fondant, with vichyssoise and chive sour cream (R65), rich and very French.

Tanja's take on chowder is far from the creamy soup one usually associates with this dish. She uses the chowder as a dressing on fat, smoked mussels and fish, countered with gnocchi, nuggets of chorizo, on a bed of corn velouté (R125). Beryl pronounced it "*tres formidable*". I had the palette of pasture-reared chicken (R125) with a nasturtium beignet, barley and pea risotto, and lemon velouté, as colourful as a spring meadow, and delicious.

The Asian-style pork belly and fillet with pickled vegetables going to the table next to us looked so good I had to restrain Beryl from ordering it, "just to try, darling". Just as well, as the desserts were fabulous. We shared lemon tart (R55) with lemon and lime meringues and citrus gel, and a lemon and honey 'Grappababa' (R65) with rooibos panna cotta, ginger ice cream, and poached pear, rich, slightly alcoholic, and very satisfying.



Tokara Restaurant, Helshoogte Pass

021 885 2550

Richard Carstens, *Eat Out* Chef of the Year 2005, continues to make the most wonderful food at Tokara Restaurant on the Helshoogte Pass between Stellenbosch and Franschhoek.

His time spent in the East and in Australia, where Asian cuisine is big, translates into some really interesting Asian spins on French and local classics. Beryl loves going there for the wonderful bar that overlooks the valley and for the spectacular views from the deck when the weather is good. She is not averse to their great wines either, and once she starts eating always says, "I had forgotten how good this is! Why don't we come here more often?" That woman is a mystery to all but her closest friends.

I started with salt-crusted, baked sweet potato (R75) with butternut, goat's milk cheese, orange, yogurt, hazelnuts and wasabi, a delicious mix of flavours and textures. Beryl, who is "avoiding meat – for now, dear; you should, too", had the nan-fried calamari with crisp nrawn risotto.



almond gazpacho, parsnip and vanilla velouté (R80), which was pronounced "yummy".

My main course was the most superb slow-roasted pork belly I have eaten in many a year (R140), melt-in-the-mouth, served with sushi rice, apple pickle and tamarind coconut sauce, very Asian. Even Beryl looked as if she was going to ditch the no-meat stance, but she steeled herself (she can do it, when she really wants to make a point).

Her main was another starter, a good idea

when you aren't feeling too hungry or are saving yourself for dessert, which she was. Her mushroom ravioli served with lemon-glazed and confit mushrooms, brussel sprouts and mustard sauce was, "Wonderful – very fungi," said she, laughing loudly at her own joke. Throwing all good intentions out the window, she chose the silkily delicious chocolate pavé (R55) with Cointreau ice cream, confit orange and vanilla. I had coffee. I know when I have had enough. ■