

Behind the Eat Out Awards - Q&A with Abigail Donnelly

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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One of the biggest South African foodie events on the map, the 2017 Eat Out Mercedes-Benz Restaurant Awards will be recognising the best local restaurants and chefs this coming Sunday, 19 November at GrandWest in Cape Town. We got in touch with head judge Abigail Donnelly to chat about the new Oscars inspired direction, the addition of 10 more nominees, and food trends.

Can you explain the reason behind the new three-part format and what this entails exactly?



At Eat Out, we like to shake things up a bit every now and then. After two years of amazing Sunday lunch events, we wanted to give people an unforgettable Oscars-inspired event. Guests will be welcomed with drinks and snacks before a cinema-style awards ceremony. Thereafter, they will move into a new space for an immersive food-and-drinks experience, where they will be treated to a flow of mind-blowing bites prepared by some of the country's top chefs.

Why the decision to increase the nominees from 20 to 30?

For the first time, in a move to celebrate more restaurants, Eat Out announced 30 instead of 20 nominees and there will be a count down from 20 to 11 at the awards ceremony, before finally revealing the top 10. The line between fine and casual dining is blurring, and we wanted to recognise more restaurants this year.

What makes an outstanding restaurant for you?

A spectacular restaurant is where the diner receives an entire experience triggered by flavour. For me, seeing a chef's philosophy of food and cooking style is paramount – such as whether they're humorous or classic – and it's important that everything is cooked from the heart and the soul.



2017 Eat Out Mercedes-Benz Restaurant Awards nominees announced

7 Nov 2017



Is there a particular theme for this year's event?

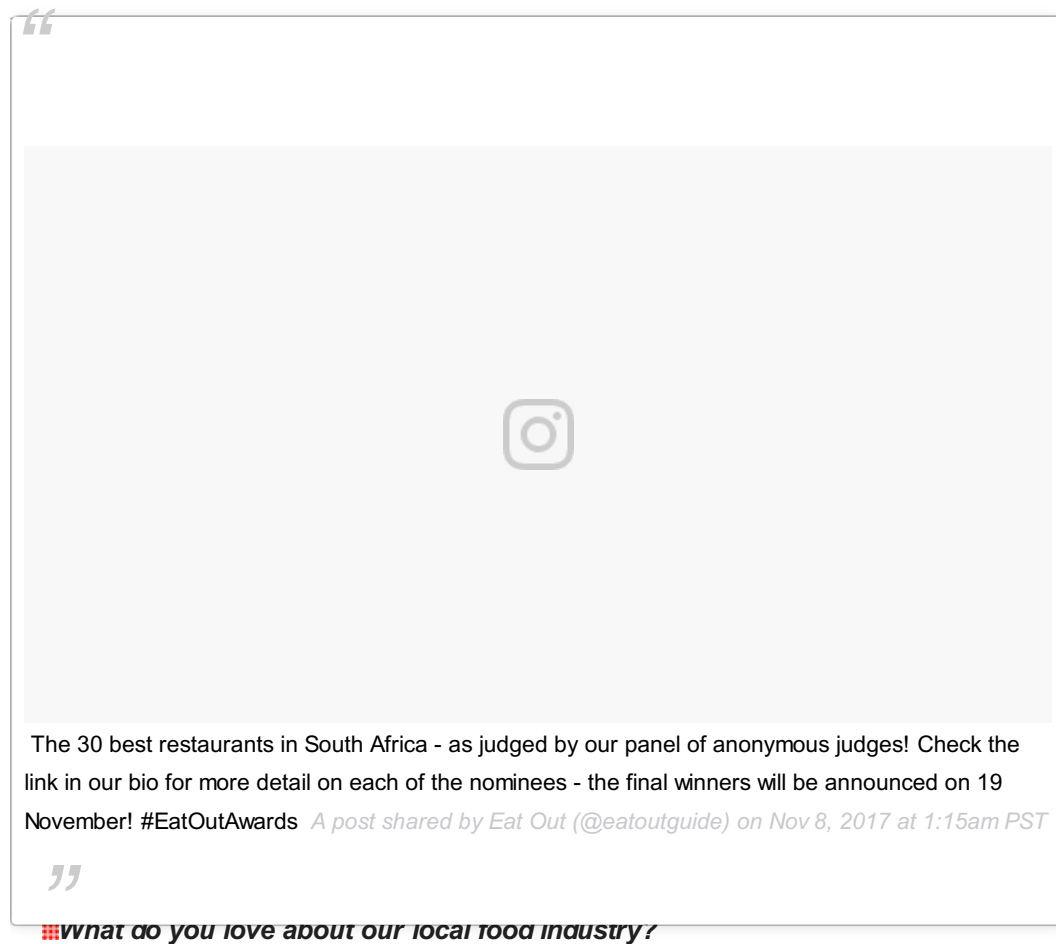
Yes, it's Hollywood glamour.

What food trends are you currently seeing and what trends do you predict for 2018?

Current food trends see vegetables being given a lot of attention. Other trendy elements include hens' eggs, confit, sous vide, mushroom ketchup, fermented food, seaweed, and the use of Japanese ingredients and fruits powders. Above all, the emphasis is on flavour, flavour, flavour.

For 2018, I foresee the abundant use of yuzu, miso, goat meat, samphire and sea veggies, as well as the techniques of

dry-aging fish, creatively using food waste and foraging sand dune plants. I believe the emphasis will be on simple pure flavours and I also predict a rise in the number of chef collaborations.



We have a unique food culture – inspired by the world. Our chefs are generous, showcasing a pure sense of SA on a plate and have a strong sense of camaraderie.

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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