

Small plates, big success

By  Eugene Yiga

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If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. Unless we're talking about Ryan's Kitchen, in which case I suggest you come right in!

"Most of my career has been spent in Michelin schools worldwide, so with the concept of Ryan's Kitchen I was adamant that I wanted to serve modern South African cuisine in my restaurant," says Ryan Smith, who came back to the country almost a decade ago. "It would be driven by local and indigenous ingredients, historical and cultural references, and, I would like to think, imagination, flair and ingenuity."



Subtle décor

Ryan's Kitchen opened in Franschhoek in 2010 and recently relocated to an expanded home in the Place de Vendôme. He decorated the new space with his wife Lana, who he met while working at the Royal Astoria in St Petersburg, as well as with the help of their friends who own the [Ebony store](#). (Paintings of butterflies from the local art gallery adorn the walls and are also for sale.)

"Having made some respectful changes to the original heritage building, there are clear distinctions between the old and new in the space, which flows seamlessly as an open-plan area, aided by vast windows on all sides," Smith explains. "Pale teal walls have created something of an oasis inside, and the décor is subtle. Wooden chairs and tables are unfussy, but there's drama in the choice of light fittings, which add a contemporary kick to an otherwise classically festooned space."



Smaller plates

While the new location features a bigger open plan kitchen - initially a concern for Smith, given that they were one of the first restaurants to go this route - the latest concept is that of smaller plates. Offering a little of a lot means more variety and encourages sharing too.

"What we did before was more traditional, and it worked well," Smith says. "But being able to serve smaller versions of what we did for dinner is a lot more approachable and sociable."

For me, that meant seared tuna slices with seaweed ash (Quoin Rock Sauvignon Blanc 2013); Mielie 'Momo's' with green chilli and red pepper creamed corn (Lynx Viognier 2013); Cape Malay Pickled Seafood cooked in a bag (Rickety Bridge Semillon 2011); slow-cooked warthog with sweet potato crème caramel and cashew nuts (Lynx Xanade 2013); and strawberry sugar cannelloni with coconut mousse and strawberry sorbet (Mulderbosch Sauvignon Blanc Late Harvest 2011).



Scientific alchemy?

"I wonder how restaurants figure out wine pairings," my friend asked somewhere around our third course. "Is it trial and error or some sort of scientific alchemy?" I wonder indeed. But whatever the answer, Lana's selection of predominantly Franschhoek labels (with some Swartland, Stellenbosch, Wellington, and foreign wines) is spot on.

At the end of our meal, we walked through the beautiful bar area that leads to a courtyard with surrounding galleries and boutiques. It was then time for our drive back to Cape Town, where we got lost on an estate under construction and almost collided with a wine tram crossing the tracks. Given that Ryan's Kitchen is set to open for afternoons, perhaps next time we'll be in less of a rush to get home!

Eugene Yiga was a guest of [Ryan's Kitchen](#) (Number 1, Place Vendôme, Huguenot Road, Franschhoek). Call +27 (0)21 876 4598, email info@ryanskitchen.co.za, follow [@ryans_kitchen](#) on Twitter, or go to www.ryanskitchen.co.za.

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneyiga.com, follow @eugeneyiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneyiga.com to say, um, hello.

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