

S.Pellegrino Young Chef Academy reveals jury for 2022/23 competition

The S.Pellegrino Young Chef Academy has revealed the jury for the Africa, Middle East and South Asia region, who will be judging the signature dishes of the young chefs at the regional leg of the competition to be held in the city of Cape Town in January 2023.



Spanning two continents, the jurors are three female chefs who have achieved global recognition in their careers: Tala Bashmi from Bahrain, Selassie Atadika from Ghana, and Siba Mtongana from South Africa.



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The jurors share their insights on what they will be looking for when judging the competition:

Tala Bashmi

Bahrain-born and Swiss-trained, Tala Bashmi made her name internationally known with her appearances on Top Chef, and at home in Bahrain at her restaurant Fusions by Tala on the rooftop of the five-star Gulf Hotel, where she drives the renaissance of Arabic food and is building a thriving modern culinary scene from the ground up.

She says she will be looking for the young chefs' unique perspective, connection to their food history, and original take on food, rather than trends: "Being a region so rich in ingredients, spices, flavours, and culture, it will be great for the chefs to showcase the uniqueness of their region. Also, I believe that sustainable cuisine will play a big role for the new generation of chefs to have longevity in this industry."

Tala is looking forward to: "Uncovering what the next generation is bringing to the table, and in sharing my experiences, perspective, and how I've adapted to challenges and changes in the industry."

Selassie Atadika



A former United Nations humanitarian, Selassie Atadika completed her culinary education at The Culinary Institute of America. Her company Midunu, a nomadic private dining enterprise in Accra, Ghana embodies 'New African Cuisine', employing local, seasonal, and underutilised ingredients including traditional grains and proteins to deliver Africa's bounty to the table. She was also a finalist in the 2019 Basque Culinary World Prize.

"There are so many exciting trends, ingredients, and ways of interpreting dining coming from regions of Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, which have had limited attention in international gastronomy," she says. "With a plethora of traditional preservation techniques like smoking, fermenting, salting, and drying in these cuisines, I'm looking forward to them coming through in the competition."



Selassie is looking for a sense of place in the young chefs' signature dishes and for a chef discovering their voice and adding to the culinary world, with innovation and a fresh approach to tradition. "I'm interested to see the young chefs bring more diversity to the gastronomic world in this competition! With many eyes on new frontiers in gastronomy, young talent from this region will be necessary for these conversations"

Siba Mtongana

South African celebrity chef and star of the award-winning Siba's Table on Food Network, Mtongana is also a best-selling cookbook author, a business-savvy entrepreneur, and the force behind Siba The Restaurant at the Table Bay Hotel in Cape Town.

Apart from technical skill she will be looking for thoughtfulness, creativity and lots of authenticity: "Those are the key ingredients to create something outstanding," she says. Another criteria that will help her judge dishes from perhaps very different food cultures in this diverse region, is taste. "Ultimately as chefs, we must cook food that people will love, enjoy and come back for - and tell the whole world about that experience."

Mtongana sees Africa and Afro-fusion as one of the upcoming trends in world gastronomy. "It's important that the finalists keep both local and international audiences intrigued and wowed when using ingredients that may not yet be known in the West."

And what she's looking forward to: "I'm super excited and proud that South Africa is the host country for this edition of the competition and feel so honoured to be part of the very first only female judging panel! I look forward to seeing young, pure and raw talent through these young chefs showcasing their skills. I think it's important to impart and share our knowledge with the younger generation to inspire them to be the best now and in the future!"

