

The Goods

THIS MONTH'S WHO,
WHAT, AND WEAR

TASTING THE FIELD

Wolfgat is the next restaurant
you'll be traveling for.

DENMARK HAS René Redzepi, Brazil has Alex Atala, and South Africa has Kobus van der Merwe. You can be forgiven for not knowing that last one, but the chef behind Wolfgat (wolfgat.co.za), a 20-seat restaurant in the sleepy seaside village of Paternoster, a scenic two-hour drive from Cape Town, is about to be the next meal you hop a plane for. >

Kobus van der Merwe
forages for veldkos
or "field food," in
pastural Paternoster,
South Africa.

JAC DE VILLIERS



South Africa isn't exactly new to the culinary scene—foodies are already well acquainted with stars Luke Dale-Roberts and Reuben Riffel—but van der Merwe is doing the country's hyper-local food movement some real favors with his *veldkos*, a term that means “field food” in the Afrikaans language and refers to produce gathered in the wild. And his efforts are winning over admirers, as Wolfgat being crowned Restaurant of the Year at the first World Restaurant Awards this past February can attest.

“I cook intuitively with what inspires me from my surroundings: the landscape, the weather, the seasonal transformation,” says van der Merwe, who regularly edits his elegant seven-course menu. Along with fresh seafood from local fishermen and mussels and oysters cultivated in the nearby Saldanha Bay, the chef forages for ingredients found along the rugged Atlantic coastline that aren't found anywhere else in the country (or the world). “The landscape has a dramatic transformation from semi-desert in summer to a lush green edible carpet in winter,” all of which, of course, yields incredible diversity.

“I cook intuitively with what inspires me from my surroundings.”

Open just two nights weekly for dinner and five days for lunch—with only one seating each—Wolfgat makes for a languid affair. Delicate dishes like rooibos-smoked angelfish and dune spinach are distributed inside a snug cottage, under a low-slung wooden ceiling, or on the outdoor patio that spills out toward the glinting ocean. No small detail has been neglected: Breadsticks are served with *bokkom* butter, a regional delicacy made with salted, dried Cape horse mackerel; biodynamic wines come from nearby wineries; and the soundtrack is either Sufjan Stevens or, more simply, the crashing sound of waves. For a moment, it may even feel vaguely Noma-esque, but here, there's no brigade of chefs frantically fermenting and pickling—just a handful of hushed staff making and serving dishes full of straight-from-the-earth ingredients like *klipkombers* (a seaweed similar to Japanese nori) and *tjokka* (Cape Hope squid not unlike calamari). It's a guaranteed adventure for your taste buds, not to mention your vocabulary. **Mary Holland**



Chef van der Merwe serves sea lettuce, samphire, and other hyper-local ingredients at his Cape Dutch cottage (above).

ROBB RECOMMENDS...

Nightshade's Bloomin' Onion

Mei Lin didn't exactly grow up in a culinary mecca. The chef-owner of LA's recently opened Nightshade (nightshadela.com) was raised on big-chain cuisine—Applebee's, Olive Garden, and the like—in her hometown of Dearborn, Mich. Though her palate has evolved considerably since, Lin is bringing a taste of nostalgia to her new restaurant with her bloomin' onion, an upmarket homage to the kitschy appetizer that first appeared on the menu at Outback Steakhouse in the late '80s. Her version—a Maui sweet onion dipped in buttermilk, dry dredged, and fried to a golden crisp—is a vehicle for Nightshade's housemade tom yum seasoning featuring lemongrass, kaffir lime, and tamarind. The ode to suburban dining is surprisingly sophisticated, yet it doesn't ignore what made the original so successful. "It's about creating a good experience and having fun with the people at your table," Lin says. **Jeremy Repanich**



Q&A



Bill Lumsden

Glenmorangie's director of distilling is making whisky a little bit wilder.

To mark the 10th anniversary of its coveted Private Edition series, Glenmorangie has introduced Allta (glenmorangie.com), the first single-malt Scotch whisky crafted from yeast growing wild on the distillery's own barley. The master maker behind its creation reveals the granular details. Dan Dunn

It's often said that whisky is made in the barrel. Is fermentation an unsung aspect of distillation? It's massively underappreciated. If you don't have the right type of fermentation, guess what? You'll have nothing worth putting in the barrel. I'm focusing on fermentation with Allta because it's been such a neglected part of the process.

How did you discover the wild yeast used to make Allta? I recalled a story from a great whisky writer, Michael Jackson, about a unique "house" yeast the Glenmorangie property was said to have possessed. This story led me to collect Cadboll barley in the fields near the distillery, which later led to discovering the *Saccharomyces diaemath*, a species of wild yeast unidentified up until that point.

How does the yeast affect the flavor of Allta? It's going to sound like I've made this up to fit the style of whisky, but honestly, it's this whole thing about baking bread, sourdough bread, and fresh pizza crust. Add a little water to the Scotch, and this lovely bready, cereal-y, yeasty note just leaps out of the glass. More than anything else, that's the key point of difference compared to the original.

Do you anticipate wild yeast someday becoming as prevalent in whisky-making as it already is in fermenting wine and beer? I know a lot of my peers are working on it, which is why I was so keen to launch Allta when we did. I'm a great fan of James Bond, and one of my favorite films is *Thunderball*. In the theme song to the film, sung by Tom Jones, there's a line in there about Bond that really strikes a chord with me: "He acts while other men just talk." With Allta, we've acted.