

HOUSE

AND LEISURE

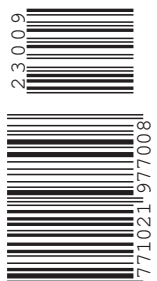
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create

think outside the box

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the magic touch

Chef Mmabatho Molefe of Emazulwini restaurant is expressing nostalgia for her Nguni heritage through the fine-dining menu she serves at her residency at Cape Town's Makers Landing

Recipes & Food by Mmabatho Molefe Words by Senamile Star Shongwe Photography by Paris Brummer & Warren Talmarkes Production by Studio H

Chef Mmabatho Molefe has a gentle demeanour, but her personality boldly comes to life through the stories she tells at her restaurant, Emazulwini. Since opening two years ago, Mmabatho has swept up awards locally and internationally – she was recognised as a hospitality pioneer on *The World's 50 Next* list last year, named African restaurant of the year at the Luxe Restaurant Awards and awarded a star at the Eat Out awards in 2022. While these accolades are industry recognition, it is the intention and execution behind Mmabatho's offering that make this dockside space noteworthy. You will often find her in the

kitchen, head down, delicately plating one of her new creations. Born and raised in KwaZulu-Natal, Mmabatho gravitated to food from a young age. She detoured to study law, philosophy and politics at university, but the culinary calling was too loud to ignore, so she decided to swap her law books for chef's knives and went to culinary school. She started a pop-up gourmet dining experience called *The Long Table Experience*, which sought to turn strangers into friends through communal dining, and sharpened her skills at some of Cape Town's best fine-dining restaurants. Emazulwini was the next step in her trajectory.

Above Chef Mmabatho Molefe's Emazulwini Restaurant is making waves. **Right** The clean-lined, waterside space at Cape Town's Makers Landing.



Below Neutral-toned furniture from Houtlander creates a sense of calm at the water's edge at Makers Landing. **Right** Up-and-coming interior designer Walter Train designed the interiors.



The Location

Emazulwini Restaurant has expanded from a 10-seater to a residency at the new 40-seater 'pop-up' restaurant at Makers Landing, the V&A Waterfront's culinary collective whose core mission is to create a space for food entrepreneurs to grow. The pop-up restaurant residency is the next evolution of this mission, designed to hero South African tastemakers and food talent. Henry Mathys, Food Ecosystem Head, V&A Waterfront, explains: 'The pop-up experience is a commitment and investment from the V&A to create a platform where chefs can access a greater market. The V&A Waterfront puts up the infrastructure, and a chef can test new recipes and grow their business. There was no better person to launch this experience than Mmabatho's Emazulwini, which has been part of our food community since 2020.'



The Space

The new space was designed by Jacobs Parker Architecture, and the restaurant's interiors brought to life by Walter Train under the mentorship of Tracy Lynch in collaboration with the Clout/SA design portal. 'This project was one of those relevant opportunities that give young creatives the space to grow and shine,' says Tracy Lynch. Walter's design lens mirrors chef Mmabatho's culinary point of departure. 'Working with local designers and furniture makers and the incredible Mmabatho has been an amazing experience,' says Walter.

The contemporary interior aesthetic pays homage to its harbourside location, and is complemented by stunning views, creating a calming environment. It features neutral-toned chairs and tables by Houtlander, David Krynauw and Kent & Lane, contrasted with strong blue, red and orange hints of locally sourced furniture and lighting fixtures from Thabiso Mjo of Mash T Design Studio and Siviwe Jali of Umugqa Studio. Upon entering the restaurant, you'll notice a bright red zig-zag motif woven onto the restaurant's entrance by the team from Ashanti Design Studio. A display cabinet showcases ingredients with historical and cultural relevance to the South African food landscape, including preserves, relishes, grains, meats, spices and snacks. It's a compact evolution of a previous 100 Flavours exhibition curated by future food team Studio H and collaborators at Makers Landing.



Above Precise plating echoes the deceptively simple appearance of the food at Emazulwini. **Right** A display cabinet of culturally significant ingredients.



The Food

Nguni cuisine and South African ingredients unapologetically take centre stage at Emazulwini, and Mmabatho incorporates fine-dining techniques to reimagine the food she grew up eating.

Intentional storytelling, from the menu's name to the dishes, is a crucial component of her creative process. She explains: 'The intention behind my food is sharing parts of myself, my history, respecting heritage and how I grew up.' Previous offerings include Memories of my Childhood, Intwasohlobo (a Zulu phrase for the beginning of spring) and, most recently, her relaunched menu, A Letter from Home. Every season offers something to delight the taste buds.

The menu is served as a letter that you open to discover the three dining options, along with an incredible wine selection to pair with your meal. Snacks include bite-sized dishes such as igwinya nopholoni and chicken neck mousse tartlet with vinegar jellies. In addition, patrons can look forward to exciting signature dishes, including a delicious mielie bread, corn custard starter, and amabele – a sorghum genoise, house-churned ice cream, orange-and-banana curd and Amarula Cream dessert.

The Legacy

Considering the great strides made in the past few years, it's exciting to think that this is just the beginning for Emazulwini restaurant and chef Mmabatho's creativity. Hannerie Visser, of Studio H, and Makers Landing lead curator shares, 'The Makers Landing Restaurant residency programme creates a space where South Africa's brightest culinary talent, such as chef Mmabatho, can unapologetically claim their space in the South African food world and showcase our incredible food culture to locals and the rest of the world.'

If you would like to experience Nguni fine-dining in a space that serves as a beacon in celebrating South African innovation, collaboration, heritage and design, Chef Mmabatho's menu will delight and surprise. Its influence on the South African dining scene can't be overstated. [@emazulwini_restaurant](#)



The Meal

Umbila / Corn Custard by Mmabatho Molefe

(Serves 4-6, depending on the mould you choose to use)

Corn custard

3 sweetcorn
¼ onion
400ml cream
600ml milk
1 ¼ tsp salt
½ tsp paprika
5 egg yolks
12g gelatin

Remove the kernels from the corn. Sauté the onions and corn until the corn is cooked. Add the paprika and salt and

cook for five minutes on low heat. Add the milk and cream and bring to a boil. Blend the mixture until smooth and strain with a fine mesh sieve. Whisk in the egg yolks and cook until the custard coats the back of a spoon. Now add bloomed gelatin until it dissolves. Set the custard into moulds and leave in the fridge until firm.

Parsley mayo

20g parsley
300ml oil
3 egg yolks
30ml lemon juice
salt and sugar to season

Remove parsley leaves off the stems. In a blender, add oil and blend until green. Strain the liquid. In a separate container add the egg yolks

and slowly emulsify oil into the yolks until it becomes thick. Halfway through the process, add lemon juice and continue to emulsify the oil. Season with salt and sugar to desired taste.

To finish

Plate the custard and mayo and pair with Ataraxia's Sauvignon Blanc 2020. ●