



TYRES AND TASTES

Being awarded Michelin star status is no easy feat, says Hasmita Nair

Depending on whether you're more interested in cars or food, the word "Michelin" evokes very different things. Ironically, the world-famous Michelin star – a measure of excellence awarded to only the best restaurants in the world – was developed by the very same tyre manufacturer which is familiar to most.

More than 100 years ago, the brothers who founded the Michelin Tyre Company created a guide containing useful information for French motorists. Over the years this evolved into a restaurant guide, with a hierarchy of one, two or three stars awarded to restaurants throughout the world.

While some accuse Michelin of favouring classic French cuisine and old-fashioned eateries, as opposed to fresh, trendy restaurants, the system remains the only international one for testing and grading haute cuisine,

so the Michelin star is arguably the most coveted accolade for any chef.

Michelin goes to extreme lengths to maintain the anonymity and integrity of its reviewers, who are bound by confidentiality contracts and visit restaurants anonymously up to as many as 10 times before assigning a rating. In an average year, these reviewers (many of them chefs themselves) work from 7am-11pm, eating at around 240 restaurants and sleeping in 150 hotels. Nice work, if you can get it!

Stars are awarded (or removed) annually and reviewers consider everything from the way patrons are greeted when they enter a restaurant to the shininess of the cutlery and crispness of the tablecloth.

Le Diane, the signature restaurant at Hôtel Fouquet's Barrière in Paris, was awarded its first Michelin star in 2012, after carefully selecting suppliers who could offer rare, seasonal

products of a very high quality and then matching the dishes created with these ingredients to wines of different vintages and from diverse regions. The idea is for the guest to enjoy a total experience, so lighting, decor and music all need to complement the food. At Le Diane, a three-course lunch will set you back around €90.

Until 2006, Michelin only focused on Europe, but has since extended its coverage to the UK, the USA, China and Japan. There are no current plans to enter Africa, despite several South African restaurants having Michelin star potential. Chef David Higgs, of the award-winning Five Hundred Restaurant at Jo'burg's Saxon Hotel, religiously uses the Michelin star guide to decide where to eat when he's abroad and believes that having a Michelin presence in a country not only creates awareness of its food, but increases tourism too.

Chic chocs



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