

HASMITA NAIR

Jozilicious

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FIRMLY believe that Jozi's best asset is also what Joburgers appreciate least. It's not our skyscrapers, sprawling malls or the Sandton business district – it's our weather. There are few other places in the world where sunscreen and a sunhat are needed at midday in the middle of winter.

Too many of us see the colder seasons as an excuse to stay indoors; we reserve venturing into the countryside for the first and last quarter of the year. Yes, winter mornings and evenings are icy, but we have beautiful, sunny days that should be enjoyed.

Dany Schoon and Danielle Strydom allow you to do just that, with the creation of Farm Feasts. With degrees in fine art and education respectively, the duo grew up next to each other and have been best friends "forever", soon realising that they also complement each other as business partners.

Both are still involved in their "day jobs" in the property development industry, and dreamt about making their passion project come to life for ages.

Farm Feasts stemmed from a US project called "Outstanding in the Field", which consists of various people, including food enthusiasts and a creative chef, who travel around searching for passionate farmers and interesting farms.

The chef creates an original menu daily, which varies according to the seasonal produce available from the farm he finds himself on.

Dany and Danielle loved this idea and started visiting producers and farmers in and around Gauteng, soon realising the true value of commercial terms such as "organic", "free-range" and "natural". They then formed Down to Earth Farm Feasts.

The most important aspect of Farm Feasts is the mobile kitchen. They spent time in a truck graveyard before finding a dust-covered old bullnose Mercedes truck, which they painted green and beige after installing complementary red leather interiors.

They then had a wooden canopy and a kitchen built, and the mobile set-up allowing them to host feasts in the most remote areas.

They take turns to drive the truck, and plan to hit the road and visit the variety of farms and landscapes South Africa has to offer.

The Farm Feast I attended was hosted at Babaroots Farm in Skeerpoort, a leading supplier of herbs



The table set-up, where diners become friends, and business cards and stories are exchanged.

PICTURES: RISHAV NAIR

The table is set for an organic, free-range meal that's complemented by the Highveld outdoors and new friends



Appetiser: beer battered roosterkoek with mature gouda, kumquat preserve, roasted pine nuts and fennel



Dessert: Riesling-poached pear tart with a chai-spiced custard

and salad leaves. Initially growing only basil and rocket, the farm has now expanded into producing everything from mint and coriander to edible flowers.

Babaroots is part of the "Farming for the Future" movement, which has a vision to pioneer a new approach to growing food sustainably and in harmony with nature

so that South Africa's farms will be able to provide enough food for future generations, without compromising on quality or adding to cost.

After a long drive out of the city, an obligatory wrong turn and a few bumpy kilometres on a dirt road, we arrived at the farm, welcomed by Dany, armed with a bucket containing bottles of iced tea, served with or without gin, and enhanced with herbs from the farm.

Guests were mingling around the spectacular long dining table, set up banquet style with overhanging lights, surrounded by herb tunnels.

We ambled over to the craft beer table, where the Dog & Fig Brewery – the partners for this feast – had their products on tap. There was also a selection of red and white wines available. Every feast has a different beer and wine partner, and all beverages are included in the price of R550 per person. Costly? Maybe. But think of it more as a fun day out rather than just a meal.

The menu for every feast is original, because the focus is always placed on the produce from the hosting farm, keeping things interesting for regular guests. Previous feasts have taken place at Sunherbs Herb Farm, The Cradle, Nirox and Riverfields.

Each feast lasts four to five hours, and by the time our appetisers were served we'd already moved past pleasantries with our neighbouring diners and were exchanging travel stories.

For appetisers, we had beer battered "roosterkoek", with a choice of two toppings, the first being crushed herb mayonnaise with braised blue wildebeest and smoked salt and the second, a vegetarian option, being mature

gouda, kumquat preserve, roasted pine nuts and fennel.

For starters, we were served a curried tomato soup with herb-filled vetkoek, while mains were served family style: baby chicken (free-range, from a farm in the area) roasted in a lemon mustard sauce with baked baby potatoes, sweet chilli creamed spinach with red peppers and butter braised spring onions with chives.

Platters were placed along the table and guests helped themselves to the food, which was flavourful and succulent.

Dessert was a Riesling-poached pear tart with a chai spiced custard, also scrumptious. Instead of plating each slice of tart, an entire tart was given to each group of people, continuing the family theme.

By the end of the afternoon, the sun was setting and strangers had become friends, with many business cards and phone numbers having been exchanged. If there's anything that can bring people together, it's food, wine and the Highveld sunshine.

For more details, visit www.downtoearth.travel.

Nair was hosted by Down to Earth Farm Feasts for the purposes of this review.

For more ideas of things to do in and around Jozi, visit Nair's blog: www.joziliciousblog.co.za

How a Portuguese girl built her own Taj Mahal

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DIRECTED by Emmy-nominated John Trengove and starring Sonia Esgueira of the *Porra* trilogy, *Love and Prozac*, a "one-(wo)man show", is a hilarious look at the dating dilemmas of a sassy thirtysomething Portuguese woman who is looking for love, or the "Taj Mahal" as she puts it.

Deeming it the naughty girl's (mis)guide to bonking, dating and other disasters, Esgueira opens the show as herself at a speed dating

event, then seamlessly switches from one character to the next.

This chameleon-like shape-shifting is more of an attraction than the story itself, which is pretty much standard romantic comedy material: a showcase of disaster dates before finding The One, alongside generalised characters: an overbearing Portuguese mother, a gay best friend and a Sandton soccer mom.

Esgueira's ability to switch from one generalisation to the next is remarkable; she convincingly shifts

from a married-with-kids condescending kugel to a husky-voiced sugar daddy by the mere addition of a jacket and a change in posture. At times she plays two characters at once, alternating accents and voices without skipping a beat.

The script is definitely targeted at Joburgers, who will relate to her partying at Sandton nightclub Taboo, as well as her dream of living in Dunkeld West.

A multi-skilled actress, voice artist, playwright and theatre producer,

Esgueira stars in the soon-to-be-released *Spud 3* and is working with award-winning director Zaheer Goodman Bhyat on her first South African screenplay, in which she will play the lead.

Love and Prozac is running at the Auto & General Theatre on the Square at Nelson Mandela Square, Sandton City, until August 17.

Bookings can be made through the theatre on 011 883 8606 or Strictly Tickets on 082 553 5901 or online www.strictlytickets.com.



Funny girl: Sonia Esgueira