

# A MAN *for all seasons*



EXECUTIVE CHEF OF  
THE FOUR SEASONS  
WESTCLIFF, DIRK  
GIESELMANN, INVITES  
US TO HIS NEW JOBURG  
HOME TO SHARE IN  
HIS PASSION FOR THE  
SOUTH AFRICAN BRAAI

By KATE LIQUORISH  
Photographs by GRAEME WYLLIE  
Recipes and styling by  
DIRK GIESELMANN



I am about to meet with Dirk Gieselmann, the newly appointed Executive Chef at The Four Seasons Westcliff – the imminent opening of which has Joburgers atwitter – and ex-Chef de Cuisine of L'Auberge de l'Ill, an illustrious three Michelin-star restaurant in Alsace, France. I've been invited to Dirk's home for a braai... yes, a braai. You see, he has fallen in love with our South African "barbecue" and wants to give us his take on it.

I ring the doorbell and am immediately greeted by Oscar: a gorgeous black labrador with more charm than George Clooney. Dirk welcomes me into his picturesque Parkhurst home; the homely kitchen opens out onto a quaint garden framed by lemon and avocado trees and a big braai burgeoning with flames.

We begin to talk while Dirk starts to prep our feast. He tells me about growing up in Germany and his dalliance with engineering before studying to be a chef. After finishing at the top of his class, he was offered the position of Chef de Partie at L'Auberge de l'Ill and, after a year and a half there, was approached by the Intercontinental Luxury Resort in Tahiti to be their Sous Chef. He then moved

between France and New York, working at top establishments before settling back at L'Auberge in 2007, this time as the Chef de Cuisine.

Dirk continued at L'Auberge for a further seven years. While there, he was so busy that the only way to kindle romance was to meet people on internet dating sites. After a year, he still hadn't met anyone so he decided not to renew his membership but, just before deleting his page, he saw a picture of a girl in a golf cart in what looked like Tahiti.

"We started chatting, but my membership expired before she could complete typing in her phone number and there was a number missing, so I began trying each of the possible numbers and luckily she was the fourth one. She's also from Germany and was working for The Four Seasons. We'd lived in the same places and had done many similar things, but had never met. She was in Paris at the time, so I took a train to meet her." They began a long-distance relationship. "It was lovely," he beams, "and we wanted to start something together."

The project to establish The Four Seasons in SA presented itself and they jumped at the opportunity. The Four Seasons Johannesburg is now in the midst of a US\$60-million renovation, which includes the creation of five dining venues. View, which will offer sensory seasonal dining, will be Dirk's passion project – "a fine-dining expression of my food: modern-traditional cuisine that will be very French, because that's my style." There's also Flames which will be Dirk's take on our local braai scene, featuring artisanal flavours and craft beers. The Westcliff Deli will offer exceptional deli products, gourmet sandwiches, a dish of the day as well as catering for dinner parties.

While casually chatting to me, Dirk has effortlessly deboned and stuffed the baby chicken, made the marinade and massaged it into the ribeye, whipped up the pesto and prepared his trout, mussels and calamari... We move outside. "I love to barbecue or 'braai' as you say. It's the oldest tradition in cooking, and learning how to handle the fire and the heat is very complex – it's extremely interactive cooking – and the flavour is amazing. It's smoky, so I like

balancing that with acidity: fruity, citrus flavours and fresh salads." I ask him about what tips he might give to novice braaiers. "Too many people burn things. Cooking on the fire, like most other things in the kitchen, is about timing, technique and patience." He adds, "There's a saying in Germany: 'Eine gute küche braucht zeit' – 'A good kitchen needs time'. You have to rest the meat – if you don't, all the juices will run out and the texture will be tough. In theory, you should rest the meat for the same amount of time that you cook it."

Dirk begins with the trout, placing it gently on the braai and surrounding it with the calamari, new potatoes and mussels. I ask where he's sourced his ingredients. "The produce in SA is great; you're very blessed in terms of climate and produce, I'm still discovering so much," he replies.

The fish is cooked through, the calamari white and perfectly charred, the mussels have opened. He sets them aside, cleans the grill and lays out the ribeye. I enquire about his views on seasoning meat and he agrees that if you season it too early, the salt will dry it out, so you should only season just before cooking. I then ask about marinating. "It's a combination of salt and other ingredients, so while the salt draws out moisture, the other ingredients soften the meat."

I ask him about trends – the notion of 'umami', for example, and Dirk replies, "U-what?" His belief is that trends can be exciting, but that they never last: "I am more for traditions, I don't know why people are always looking to trends, for a 'fifth taste' as you say. Most people I know have trouble distinguishing three..."

I ask him to define his food philosophy. "I think you have to really respect the ingredients – their flavour, their texture – not try to transform them so much that they become unrecognisable."

He lays out the crayfish and turns his bread before adding the finishing touches to each. He then makes room for the chicken and adds the water-soaked hay, which smokes it beautifully. "I'm not really sure what I'm doing sometimes, because I work from my gut. When you're cooking, it needs to come from your heart – that's what cooking is." [viewrestaurant.co.za](http://viewrestaurant.co.za); [flamesrestaurant.co.za](http://flamesrestaurant.co.za)





## TIME TO BRAAI

### Marinated salmon trout, calamari skewers and mussels with vegetables en papillote and mango virgin sauce

Serves 4 **EASY** 1 hr 30 mins

#### THE FLAVOUR COMBINATIONS MARINADE

handful fresh tarragon, chopped  
100ml olive oil  
10ml (2 tsp) sherry vinegar  
½ garlic clove, peeled and grated  
5ml (1 tsp) fresh ginger, grated  
zest and juice of ½ orange  
zest and juice of 1 lemon  
Maldon sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
allspice, to taste

#### FISH

1 whole salmon trout (350g – 400g per person), scaled and cleaned  
small handful fresh fennel leaves, to stuff  
1 sprig fresh thyme, to stuff  
8 small calamari tubes with heads, cleaned  
4 sprigs fresh rosemary, soaked in water  
500g mixed mussels  
1 shallot, chopped  
olive oil, to drizzle  
100ml dry white wine

#### VEGETABLES

4 small artichokes  
4 spring onions  
8 baby carrots  
8 baby fennel  
8 small baby marrows  
8 Rosa tomatoes, halved  
handful fresh snow peas  
200g spelt, buckwheat or corn, cooked  
salt, to taste  
olive oil, to dress  
pinch fennel seeds, to taste  
allspice, to taste  
12 fresh bay leaves  
12 baby potatoes, cooked and cut in half  
olive oil, to drizzle

#### MANGO VIRGIN SAUCE

2 ripe tomatoes, blanched, skinned, seeded and diced  
1 small red onion, chopped  
¼ mango, diced  
small handful fresh mint, chopped  
30g pine nuts, toasted  
1 lemon  
1 lime  
200ml olive oil  
5ml (1 tsp) coriander seeds  
5ml (1 tsp) balsamic vinegar  
salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
allspice, to taste

#### HOW TO DO IT

- 1 For the marinade, mix the tarragon with the olive oil, vinegar, garlic and ginger in a large rectangular dish. Add the orange and lemon zests and juices to the marinade. Stir to combine and season with salt, pepper and allspice.
- 2 For the fish, stuff the salmon trout with the fennel leaves and sprig of thyme and place in the marinade. Thread 2 calamari tubes onto each rosemary skewer, add to the marinade with the trout and refrigerate, 30 – 40 minutes.
- 3 Clean the mussels. Place a casserole dish on the hot braai and sweat the



shallot in some olive oil. Add the mussels and the white wine and cook, 1 minute. Cover with a lid and leave to cook until all the mussels are open, about 3 minutes. Discard any mussels that do not open. Remove from heat, set aside and keep warm. Keep the mussel jus for the mango virgin sauce.

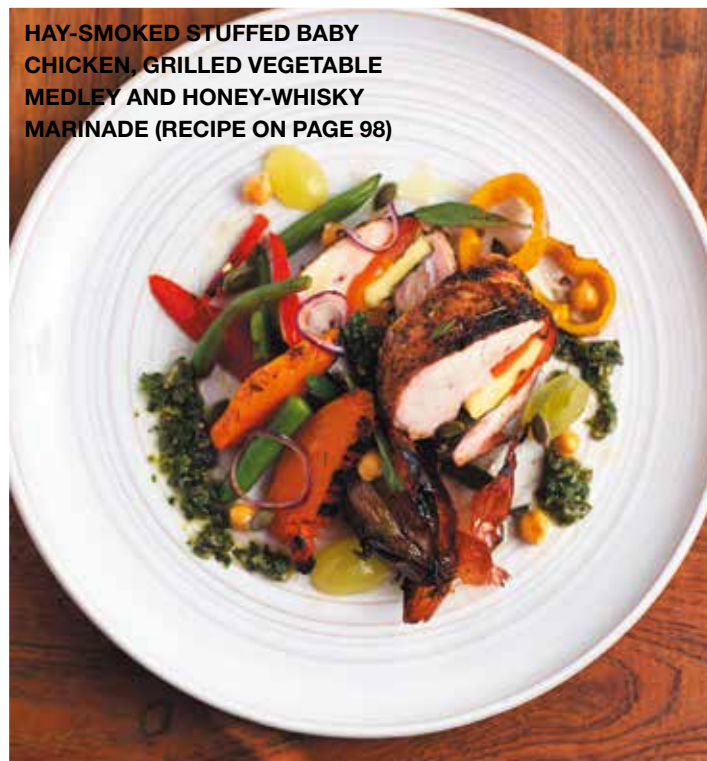
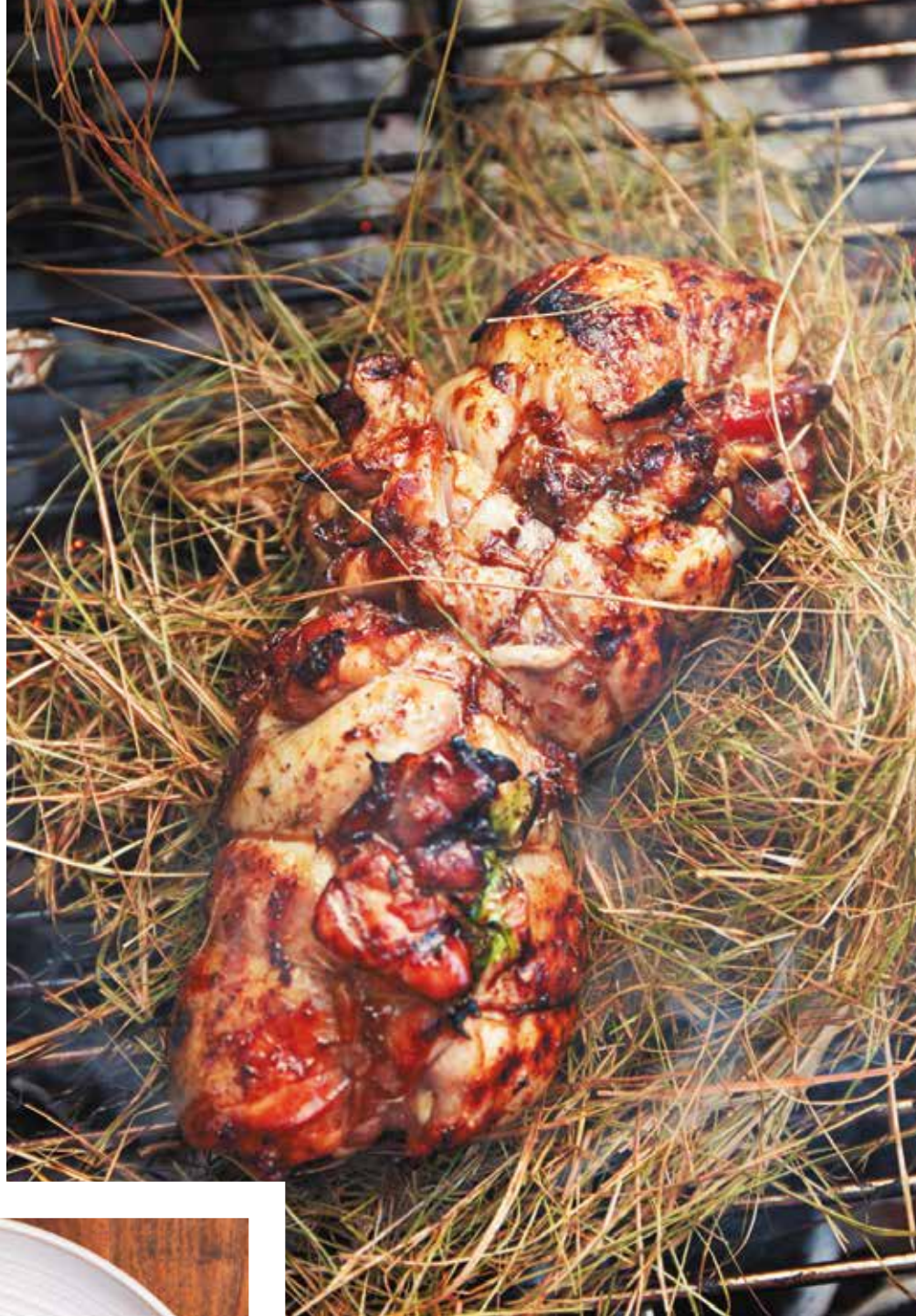
**4** Enclose the salmon trout in a steel fish basket (if you do not have one, take care when moving the fish around) and grill on the braai, 3 – 4 minutes on each side. Halfway through the cooking time, add the calamari skewers and cook quickly.

**5** For the vegetables, clean and chop the artichokes and spring onions into equal sizes. In a large bowl, mix all the vegetables together with the salt, olive oil and spices. Place the vegetables, per portion, in foil, add a spoonful of water and close in papillote (parcel) form. Place the parcels on the hot braai and cook, about 20 minutes.

**6** Insert a piece of bay leaf into each half potato, drizzle over the olive oil and brown them on the braai.

**7** For the sauce, stir all the ingredients together and season. Add 10ml (2 tsp) of the mussel stock just before serving.

**8** Serve the marinated grilled salmon trout, calamari skewers and mussels with the vegetable papillotes and mango virgin sauce.



**HAY-SMOKED STUFFED BABY CHICKEN, GRILLED VEGETABLE MEDLEY AND HONEY-WHISKY MARINADE (RECIPE ON PAGE 98)**

“Fire is one of the most exciting elements I remember from childhood. And, still today, I love watching fire glowing away, keeping us warm.”



## TIME TO BRAAI

### Hay-smoked stuffed baby chicken, grilled vegetable medley and honey-whisky marinade

*This is a wonderful way to use the first and quite aggressive energy of the braai to cook vegetables like potatoes, squash and beetroot, protected by foil. Actually, it's a good mix of French techniques and the South African lifestyle*

Serves 4 **EASY** 60 mins

#### THE FLAVOUR COMBINATIONS big bunch clean, dry hay

#### HONEY-WHISKY MARINADE

10ml (2 tsp) honey  
10ml (2 tsp) teriyaki sauce  
30ml (2 tbsp) bourbon whisky  
zest and juice of 1 lemon  
20ml (4 tsp) olive oil  
salt and allspice, to taste  
small handful fresh rosemary leaves  
small handful fresh thyme leaves  
small handful fresh sage leaves

2 baby chickens, deboned

#### VEGETABLE MEDLEY

½ butternut, peeled and seeded  
1 garlic head  
4 shallots  
fruity extra virgin olive oil, to taste  
salt, to taste  
150g white grapes  
2 small bell peppers  
200g green beans, blanched  
100g chickpeas, cooked  
freshly ground black pepper, to taste

#### CHICKEN STUFFING

1 red bell pepper  
200g mozzarella  
pinch freshly ground Szechwan pepper  
1 preserved lemon, chopped  
small handful fresh basil leaves  
salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

#### TOASTED GARLIC AND PARSLEY PESTO WITH PUMPKIN SEEDS

200g fresh flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped  
100g pumpkin seeds

salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
200ml olive oil

fresh baguette, roasted, to serve

#### HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Light your braai and soak the hay in water. For the marinade, whisk together all the ingredients in a bowl. Place the deboned chickens in the marinade and set aside.
- 2 For the vegetables, wrap the butternut, garlic head and shallots individually in foil, drizzle with olive oil and season with salt. When the flames are out, add the wrapped vegetables to the ashes. They will need 15–20 minutes to cook in their own juices. Once they are cooked, let them rest in the foil. Peel the grapes, cut them in two, seed them and put them aside.
- 3 For the chicken stuffing, roast the red bell pepper on the grill until the skin is black. Place the pepper in a bowl, cover with cling film and set aside to sweat, 10 minutes. Peel the skin off, seed the pepper and cut into large strips lengthways. Slice up the mozzarella.
- 4 Lie the chickens, legs towards you, on a board. Season with Szechwan pepper and sprinkle over the preserved lemon. Place a layer of pepper, mozzarella and basil in the middle, roll them up tight and tie with kitchen string to retain their shape. Season lightly and place on the braai with medium heat. The chickens will need at least 30 minutes, turning halfway.
- 5 For the toasted garlic and parsley pesto with pumpkin seeds, squeeze the flesh out of 4 garlic cloves (from the roasted garlic head) and add to the parsley and pumpkin seeds. Season with salt and pepper and grind in a pestle and mortar. Work them well together by adding the olive oil a little at a time. Fresh roasted garlic is just delicious – spread the remaining cloves over the toasted baguette.
- 6 After the chicken has cooked for 15 minutes, roast the small bell peppers and the precooked butternut on the grill. Add the grapes, beans and chickpeas to the roasted shallot parcels and place in a corner of the braai to heat up before serving seasoned with salt and pepper.
- 7 Once the chickens are cooked, take

the hay out of the water and put it on the braai. Lay the chickens on top to smoke, 3–4 minutes. Remove from the hay, cut off the string and carve. Dress with the vegetables and serve with the pesto and a roasted garlic baguette.

### Surf and turf beef and crayfish pita bread with coriander mayonnaise and home-made BBQ sauce

*I was intrigued by this combination since first tasting it in Catalonia, Spain. They call it "monte y mar" over there and, when I travelled from Joburg to Cape Town and had a burger stop somewhere in the middle of nowhere, I was thinking about this*  
Serves 4 **EASY** 1 hr 30 mins  
+ overnight, to chill

#### THE FLAVOUR COMBINATIONS BBQ SAUCE

3 medium onions, chopped  
4 garlic cloves, peeled and chopped  
10ml (2 tsp) olive oil  
1 small red chilli, chopped  
1 shot (40ml) espresso  
5ml (1 tsp) honey  
5ml (1 tsp) hoisin sauce  
5ml (1 tsp) soya sauce  
5ml (1 tsp) Worcestershire sauce  
5ml (1 tsp) hot paprika powder  
15ml (1 tbsp) tomato sauce



5ml (1 tsp) Dijon mustard  
5ml (1 tsp) sherry vinegar  
salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
5ml (1 tsp) ginger powder  
5ml (1 tsp) caraway seeds  
5ml (1 tsp) coriander seeds, crushed

#### SURF AND TURF

2 x 200g ribeye steaks  
Kalahari salt, to taste  
handful hickory chips, to smoke  
2 crayfish (or 600g prawns if crayfish is not available)  
olive oil, to drizzle  
salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

#### CORIANDER MAYONNAISE

2 egg yolks  
5ml (1 tsp) water  
5ml (1 tsp) red wine vinegar  
5ml (1 tsp) Dijon mustard  
salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
400ml sunflower oil  
80g low-fat plain yoghurt  
1 pinch ground coriander seeds  
1 bunch fresh coriander, finely chopped

dash fresh lemon juice

#### GARNISH

seasonal fresh vegetables (rocket, tomato, cucumber, avocado, small red radishes and sprouts)  
olive oil, to dress + extra, to drizzle  
fresh lemon juice, to season

4 pita breads, warmed on the braai

#### HOW TO DO IT

- 1 For the BBQ sauce, sweat the onions and garlic in the olive oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir in the chilli and the espresso. Remove from heat, allow to cool and stir in the remaining ingredients. Pour into a jar and refrigerate overnight.
- 2 For the surf and turf, marinate the ribeye steaks in the BBQ sauce before cooking, 1 hour. Keep some marinade to brush onto the crayfish or prawns.
- 3 For the coriander mayonnaise, whisk the egg yolks with the water, vinegar, mustard and salt and pepper. Slowly add the oil, whisking continuously, until the sauce becomes thick. Whisk in the yoghurt, ground and chopped coriander and season with lemon juice.
- 4 Season the steaks with Kalahari salt.

Add some hickory chips to the hot, glowing ashes and pop the steaks on the braai. A 200g steak will need 3 – 4 minutes on each side for medium-rare, starting at a high temperature and cooling down to medium. Brush some marinade over the steaks while cooking, then cover with foil and allow to rest in a warm place, 10 minutes. Keep all the juice that comes from the meat to add to the garnish.

- 5 Cut the crayfish in two, clean them thoroughly and season with olive oil, salt and pepper. Cook over high heat, starting on the fleshy side, about 4 minutes.
- 6 For the garnish, toss the seasonal vegetables in the olive oil, lemon juice and the rested steak juices.
- 7 To assemble, remove the shells from the crayfish or prawns and brush with the BBQ marinade. Open the warm pitas and spread with coriander mayonnaise. Add the seasoned vegetable garnish, slices of warm steak and the crayfish or prawns. Drizzle with extra olive oil and serve.

#### COOK'S TIP

If you don't have pita bread, you can also use ciabatta bread and grill it.

