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ISSN 10231763
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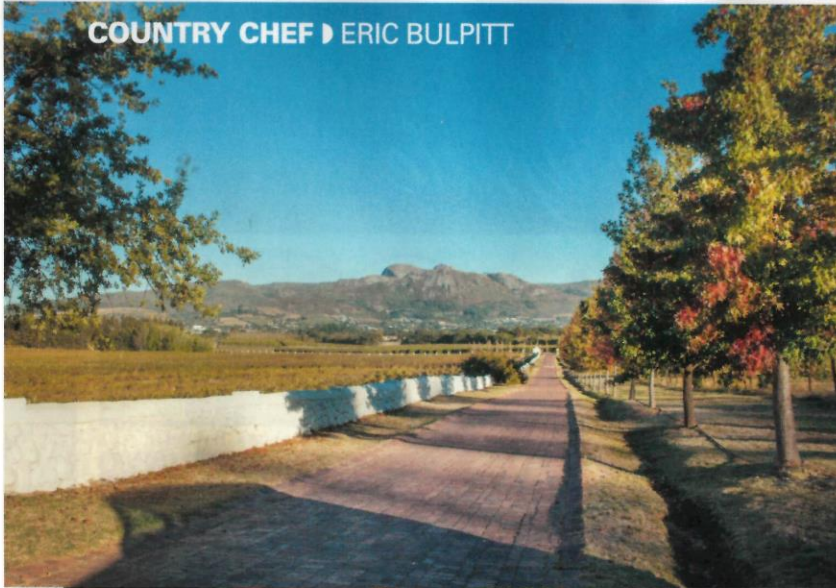
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COUNTRY CHEF ▶ ERIC BULPITT



Late Starter

At Faber restaurant on Avondale wine farm near Paarl, chef Eric Bulpitt is making his mark, elegantly

WORDS TUDOR CARADOC-DAVIES PICTURES JOHAN WILKE



What do Joseph Conrad, Paul Cezanne, Rocky Marciano and JK Rowling have in common? You might guess that the connecting thread is something random like a love for daschunds or a middle name like Francis, but these celebrated figures from different fields of talent share the fact that they were all relatively late starters, only hitting their straps much later than their contemporaries.

Eric Bulpitt of Faber at Avondale near Paarl is the same. Most chefs start young, straight out of school or even earlier for the true runaways and vagabonds. Eric entered the kitchen in his mid-twenties, a veritable pensioner age-wise, but a puppy in terms of experience.

“Chefs tend to go into kitchens quite young whereas I only went into cheffing at the age of 24. Knowing that I was a bit older than the chefs I looked up to when they went into the kitchen

– Danish chef René Redzepi (co-owner of two Michelin star restaurant Noma in Copenhagen) and I are the same age yet he started at 16, and has ten years’ experience on me. I always use that as a comforting factor. I’m playing catch-up. I spent a lot of time studying the *Larousse Gastronomique* and just pushing on, because kitchens are all about what you put in.”

If Eric is playing catch-up, he’s made up considerable ground already. His first kitchen job was at Winchester Mansions in Sea Point,

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Obsessed with the stages of different plants, chef Eric Bulpitt prides himself on taking something as simple as a cauliflower or a mielie and celebrating it as a centrepiece to a dish. ● Eric and his team find inspiration from a small but bountiful garden that is set to expand soon. ● Avondale, a working, biodynamic wine farm in between Franschoek and Paarl. ● Fresh farm eggs from the Egg Mobile, Avondale’s tractor-drawn chicken coop.



arguably home of Cape Town's best-known brunch. Eric worked there under executive chef Jonathan Staley while studying hospitality management at the Cape Technikon in Granger Bay.

"The kitchen was a pirate ship, rough and rugged, lots of ego involved. It appealed to me rather than running around in suit and tie, front of house. I was focused on doing what I was told. If the sous chef told me to sweep the floor ten times, I did it."

It was a good start, but the real education was yet to come, as Eric graduated through successive celebrated restaurants and acclaimed chefs. In order, Eric worked at The Showroom under the late Bruce Robertson, Jardine under George Jardine, The Leadbury in London, Trinity in Clapham, returned to South Africa to be George's head chef at Jardine (with a short stint at Noma in between) before moving to The Roundhouse.

After that, Eric moved out to Newton Johnson Family Vineyards in the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, where he ran The Restaurant. That was his last stop before moving to Avondale and opening up Faber. On the outskirts of Paarl, it's the kind of place that draws the hungry away from the more obvious options of Paarl's nearby ritzy neighbour, Franschhoek.

Eric and his family are happy on the farm. Before he started in professional kitchens,

Eric got to love food while spending time in his grandparents' farm kitchen near Rustenburg. "I'm one of the lucky ones that had a family that lived in the kitchen." With cattle, pigs, geese, gooseberries and the voluntary peeling of potatoes on his part – flora, fauna and hard work – it sounds much like Faber at Avondale where he works today.

At Avondale they're well known for their biodynamic approach to wine, a mindset that runs into the rest of the farm. From rearing their own Black Angus cattle (from time to time), to pest-controlling ducks and the Egg Mobile (a mobile chicken hutch that is driven into different fields each day so the chickens can feed and fertilise the soil); the goal for Eric and farmer Jonathan Grieve and his clan is to work towards self-sufficiency wherever possible.

The vegetable garden where Eric and his team find produce currently only provides a portion of what is needed in the kitchen, but it's enough to spark ideas and there are plans for expansion.

Eric says, "The most exciting stuff for chefs is to be able to come to the garden and see the plants in different phases. Plants have amazing stages. Normally you go to the shops and pick your herbs in a little box from a shelf, neat, clean and whatnot. Take rocket, we see them as they come up. They have small, beautiful tender little leaves and then they become a bit more robust,

start shooting and flowering and make pods – we use the flower, we use the pods. It's the same with parsley and coriander, any herbs really, and all their stages. It's exciting to be able to see that and use it."

That multi-stage approach to a vegetable shows up in his dishes, where something as simple as a cauliflower is elevated beyond the usual – roasting, steaming, boiling – to

TOP: Breaking all the rules of mixing work and pleasure, Eric Bulpitt. BELOW: Faber is set in one of several old Cape Dutch-style buildings on Avondale Wine Estate.



COUNTRY CHEF ■ ERIC BULPITT



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Eric Bulpitt and his wife Celeste (who runs front of house at Faber) met while working at The Roundhouse years ago. ● Avondale is situated surprisingly close to the N2 and is ideal for lunch on a weekend day trip, especially the seasonal Farm to Feast lunches. ● Avondale wines are organic, certified to the highest international standards. No enzymes, softening agents or other additives.

a centrepiece in its own right. For Eric, vegetables are as important as meat and are often the star of the show.

“I always say my philosophy on food is pretty simple. Everything has its rightful place on a pedestal, whether it’s the greatest piece of meat or a leaf of Swiss chard, they all should be respected and honoured for what they are. None of us can reproduce that. You can grow it but you can’t create it. No matter if it’s a lobster or a carrot, they need the same amount of respect.

“Our food is not overwhelmingly vegetarian but, if you take off the protein, I think the dish needs to be able to speak as well as with the protein. So we definitely focus a lot on vegetables, like with the cauliflower dish. The whole plant is used in this dish. We ask our supplier to find cauliflowers with the leaves on that encapsulate this little treasure. We make a powder from the leaves, the leaf ribs we pickle, the stem or heart or marrow of the cauliflower we ferment. The pickled leaf rib is crunchy and acidic, the leaves will be wilted and used in creamed spinach or dried and used as crispies.”

Walking through the garden pointing at or

picking morogo (wild spinach), Swiss chard and many other plants, Eric provides a running commentary of what he wants to do to each vegetable, much like the torture options of the Spanish Inquisition’s Torquemada.

“Squash flowers delicious to tempura, stuff or use fresh. Lemon verbena, dried and fused into teas, we make panna cotta with it, chiffonade it and put it on duck. Sweet potato, more than we could ever dream of using. We also use the leaf to wilt or to garnish a bit like a spinach.”

‘Garnish’ is a bit modest. In terms of presentation, each and every dish at Faber makes a statement. “Our plates are very pretty. I don’t think it was something that I used to do when I was younger, it’s just something that I grew into. And it’s just what we do. We do pretty plates.”

While Eric produces exquisite plates and truly memorable dishes, Faber is not just about fine dining. The farm setting and the harvest lend themselves to celebrations and feasts, which is why Avondale hosts quarterly biodynamic Field to Feast lunches.

“Now that Avondale has a restaurant and a vegetable garden, the story of the farm has

evolved a bit. Field to Feast happens four times a year and is based on a sharing format, two or three starters and an overflowing bread board that go onto big 10-12 seater tables, then the main course gets plated, and dessert.

“It’s just a feast. It’s really about celebrating the farm, the time and place we are in and what we do on the farm, what season we are in, what we are experiencing from the wine, from the lunar calendar and what is coming from the garden to the plate. It’s a very exciting project.”

With a willing farmer, a tight kitchen crew, space to expand his garden, and the freedom to experiment, Eric’s trajectory and that of Faber knows only one direction.

Up. ■

Map reference F2 see inside back cover

Faber at Avondale 021 863 1976
www.avondalewine.co.za

For our Q&A with chef Eric Bulpitt and his steak tartare recipe

Go to
www.countrylife.co.za



Confit Avondale Duck Leg, Sweet-potato Purée, Lentil Salad and Lavender. (Recipe on page 102).

Confit Avondale Duck Leg, Sweet-potato Purée, Lentil Salad and Lavender

Serves 4

- 4 duck legs
 - 100g sugar
 - 1 orange
 - 1 lemon
 - 4 star anise
 - 80g fennel seeds
 - 1kg duck fat
 - 250g coarse salt
- Sweet-potato Crispies**
- 1 small sweet potato
 - pinch of salt
 - 1ℓ canola oil
- Sweet-potato Purée**
- 500g peeled sweet potato
 - 150g butter
 - 1 sprig lavender
 - salt and pepper
- Lentil Salad**
- 1 cup lentils
 - 1 medium onion
 - 20g parsley
 - 20g mint
 - 1 tsp whole grain mustard
 - 2 tbsp white wine vinegar
 - 1 lemon, juiced (use the lemon reserved after peeling for the cure)
 - 50g olive oil
 - salt and pepper to taste

METHOD Clean and trim excess fat off of the duck legs – you can render the fat from the duck legs if you are able to. At the restaurant, we have a no-wasteage policy, so we would render off the fat and use it in the confit. We would also use the *kaaings* (crackling) as a crumb or snack.

Make a cure by peeling the orange and lemon – you will only use the peel, but keep aside the fruit for later use. Toast the star anise and fennel seeds over medium heat in a sauté pan for about 5-8 minutes, continuously stirring. Add all of the remaining ingredients into a food processor and pulse for 2-3 minutes for 5 seconds at a time.

To cure the duck legs, place them on a stainless-steel tray and massage the cure mix into each leg generously. Transfer the duck to a sealable container and cover. Allow to cure for 6 hours – ensure to leave only a single layer of cure on the duck leg, as too much cure will result in a salty leg. Preheat the oven to 120°C. After the 6-hour cure, rinse the duck leg off in cold water to remove excess salt and pat dry with paper towel.

Place the duck legs into a heavy-based ovenproof pot and cover with duck fat. Place the pot on a medium heat and bring to just below boiling point, about 80°C. Cover with a heavy lid or foil and place in the warm oven. Turn the oven down to 100°C and cook for four hours, checking the legs regularly to feel for tenderness. If it needs to go for longer, give it another 30 minutes and check again. What you are looking for is a soft, almost fall-off-the-bone tenderness.

To make the sweet potato crispies, wash the potato and thinly slice (on a mandolin if you have one) to ½ cm thick slices. Lightly salt and leave for 5 minutes for the salt to penetrate and soften the sweet potato. Fry in 160°C oil until crispy.

For the purée, place the sweet potato, butter, lavender and seasoning in a piece of foil, cover with another piece to make a parcel and close up the sides. Place on a tray and bake for 30-40 minutes, until the potato is soft. Open the foil bag, but be careful not to burn yourself on the steam and discard the lavender sprig. Place the sweet potato in a blender and blend until smooth.

Season to taste.

To make the salad, wash the lentils thoroughly, place in a heavy-based saucepan and cover with 1ℓ water – do not season the lentils as the salt will prevent them from softening. Cook the lentils for 15-30 minutes, testing them constantly for softness. It is important to keep testing your lentils, as over-cooking will result in a lentil soup. When the lentils are al dente, remove from the heat and rinse under cold water in a colander.

Finely dice the onion and chop parsley and mint and mix together. Mix mustard, white wine vinegar, lemon juice and olive oil to make a vinaigrette. Mix all ingredients together and season to taste.

To assemble, spoon the lentil mixture onto a plate. Place a confit leg on top, with sweet potato crispies around the duck, into the lentil mixture, to create height. Spoon a cornel (oval) of the sweet potato puree onto the plate. Decorate with lavender leaves and carrot tops or parsley.

Wine suggestion Avondale La Luna 2010



July 2017



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The Whole Cauliflower

Serves 2

This dish is a celebration of cauliflower and showcases how to purée, roast, pickle, ferment and dry what is often called a 'boring old' vegetable.

METHOD For the purée, wash and finely dice cauliflower (reserve 100g of florets for fermenting) and potato and place in a heavy-based pot and cover with milk and cream. Simmer on a low heat for 20 minutes or until cauliflower and potato is soft. Once soft, strain off the liquid and leave to steam dry for 5 minutes (keep the liquid to the side in case you need it to add to make the purée). Blend until smooth, add Parmesan and season to taste. If the purée is too thick, add a bit of the cooking liquid. The remaining liquid can be used to make a cauliflower velouté (soup) to enjoy with another meal.

To roast the cauliflower, in a stainless-steel heavy-based saucepan, heat the oil to hot. Wash and cut the cauliflower in half (lengthways, starting from stem to head and reserving the leaves and stems for pickling and drying), season with salt and pepper to taste and place

Cauliflower Purée

- 1 large cauliflower with leaves and stems (leaf rib) still attached
- 1 potato
- 1ℓ milk
- 50ml fresh cream
- 50g Parmesan cheese
- salt and pepper

Roasted Cauliflower

- 1 small, firm cauliflower head
- 60ml canola oil
- salt and pepper
- 1tbsp butter
- sprig of rosemary
- squeeze of lemon juice

Pickling Liquid

- 100ml white wine vinegar
- 200ml water
- a pinch or two of salt
- 50g sugar

cut side down into the hot oil, being careful not to burn yourself. Sauté (roast) for 2-5 minutes at a medium heat until the bottom has caramelised and is golden brown. Turn down to a low heat and cook for a further 2 minutes. Add a tablespoon of butter and a sprig of rosemary. Cover with foil and leave to slowly roast for a further 5 minutes. Finish off with a squeeze of lemon juice.

To ferment cauliflower, to the 100g reserved florets add salt and mix thoroughly. Place in an airtight container and store in a warm place for two days. The cauliflower will slowly ferment over the course of the next couple of days and will develop lactic acids, the main umami component. To use, dust in cornflour and fry in oil until crispy.

To pickle cauliflower stems, wash stems and remove leaves (reserve them for drying). Peel the stems with a potato peeler. In a heavy-based

pot, bring 2ℓ water to the boil and blanch the stems for 1½ minutes. Refresh in iced water. In a separate pot, combine all pickling liquid ingredients and bring to a rolling boil. Remove and cool down, and pour over the blanched stems to infuse overnight.

For the cauliflower leaf dust, wash and blanch cauliflower leaves in a heavy-based pot for 1 minute. Remove and refresh in iced water. Dry leaves on an oil rubbed oven tray – drying out in a 120°C oven for 20-30 minutes. Blitz to powder in a completely dry blender.

To assemble the dish, spoon 2 tbsps of purée onto the base of each plate. Place roasted cauliflower on top and garnish with pickled stems and lacto-fermented florets (nuggets). Dress plate with roasting butter and oil mixture from roasting the cauliflower, and sprinkle with the leaf dust.

Wine suggestion *Avondale Cyclus 2013*

Pumpkin Tart and Cinnamon Ice Cream

Serves 12

Pie Crust

- 250g cake flour
- 100g icing sugar
- 100g cold butter
- 1 egg

Pumpkin Filling

- 700g pumpkin purée (soft pumpkin)
- ¾ cup condensed milk
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 2 egg yolks plus 2 whole eggs

- ½ tsp salt

Cinnamon Ice Cream

- 10g cinnamon sticks
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup cream

- ½ tsp salt
- 5 whole eggs
- 20g white sugar
- 50g treacle sugar
- 20g brown sugar

METHOD To make the crust, mix the flour, sugar and butter, rubbing with your fingertips until all the butter is incorporated – do not use a machine. Add the whole egg and mix until the dough comes together, making sure not to overwork the gluten in the flour. Wrap and put in the fridge to rest for about ½ - 1 hour. Remove the crust from the fridge and bring to room temperature. Roll out to 5mm thick on a floured surface. Transfer crust to a buttered 26cm pie dish. Make sure to press the dough into the corners of the dish, ensuring that the crust overlaps the edges of the dish. Place in the fridge

for 20 minutes. After resting, cut off the edges using a sharp knife.

To blind bake, lay a piece of parchment paper over the dough and fill with rice, beans or blind-baking stones. Blind bake for 15 minutes at 180°C. Remove the paper and filling and bake for a further 5 minutes. Remove from the oven and cool.

For the filling, mix all ingredients together in a mixing bowl and pour into the tart base. Bake for 35 minutes at 165°C. Allow to cool and refrigerate overnight.

To make the ice cream, toast cinnamon in the

oven for 5 minutes at 160°. Place cold milk, cream, toasted cinnamon stick and salt into a pot and simmer for 10 minutes on a low heat. In a blender, cream together eggs and sugar. Pour the warm milk mixture into the eggs in stages, while constantly whisking. Return to a low heat and cook while stirring. Pour into a large tray and chill in the fridge. Once chilled, churn in an ice cream machine until creamy. Alternatively, place in a tray into the freezer and whisk every 5 minutes until frozen.

Wine suggestion *Avondale Camissa 2016*





Boerenkaas Cream and Goats Cheese Parfait

Serves 3

Boerenkaas Cream

- 30g Boerenkaas
- 50ml pouring cream
- 50ml whipping cream
- a good pinch of salt

Goats Cheese Parfait

- 50g goats cheese of your choice
- 50ml milk
- ¼ tsp salt
- ½ tsp gelatin powder
- 75ml cream, whipped

Strawberry Jellies

- 200g frozen or fresh strawberries
- juice of half a lemon
- 20g sugar
- 1 sheet gelatin or 5ml gelatin powder and 15ml water

Tuile de Pain (8 portions)

- 10g all purpose flour
- 80ml water
- 20ml oil
- pinch of salt
- fresh fruit to decorate

METHOD Grate Boerenkaas with a fine grater. Place the grated cheese and pouring cream into a small saucepan on medium heat and whisk until incorporated. Remove from the heat and strain through a fine sieve. Keep in a medium mixing bowl in the fridge to set. Once set, fold in the whipping cream in stages, making sure there are no lumps. Mix in the salt. Transfer the mix into a piping bag with a large nozzle and keep in the fridge until you need it.

To make the parfait, heat the cheese, milk and salt in a small saucepan over low heat, until all the cheese has melted. Bloom the gelatin with 2 tbsp cold water, add to the milk mixture while hot and mix well. Strain through a fine sieve and chill in a medium-size bowl until chilled but not set.

Whisk very well to remove lumps. Whip the

cream into soft peaks and gently fold into the gelatin cream mixture. Spread mix into sphere molds (bought at any baking supply store) and place in the freezer until frozen. Turn out into an airtight container and store until ready to use.

To make the jellies, cut the strawberries and remove stems. Cook over low heat in a small saucepan for 10 minutes with the lemon juice and sugar. Remove from the heat and blend until smooth. Pass through a fine sieve. Bloom gelatin and add to the warm strawberries and make sure it's thoroughly mixed. Pour the strawberry/gelatin mix onto a tray lined with clingfilm. Refrigerate for up to 6 hours to set. Remove from the tray and cut into bite-size cubes, working quickly so the jelly doesn't melt.

Place in a Tupperware container and refrigerate.

For the tuile de pain whisk together all

ingredients in a mixing bowl. Have a pan at a low heat and grease lightly with oil. Ladle the mixture into the pan and bring up to a medium heat slowly. Leave untouched until all the bubbles have set and the tuile starts turning golden brown. Remove from the pan with a spatula and onto paper towel to drain excess oil. Keep in an airtight container until ready to use.

To serve, pipe the Boerenkaas cream mixture onto the base of a bowl. Top with 3-4 pieces of goat's cheese parfait. Place cubes of strawberry jelly and fresh fruit in between (you can use poached quince or pear if you don't have fresh fruit). Finish with edible flowers and your tuile de pain.

Wine suggestion *Avondale Armilla Blanc de Blanc 2009* ■