

2023 Eat Out Woolworths Restaurant Awards is back!

The rigorous selection procedure has started in preparation for the 2023 Eat Out Woolworths Restaurant Awards event in November and the anticipation is palpable with the judging panel being announced...



Photo by Chan Walrus via www.pexels.com

In 2023, Woolworths returns as a partner and headline sponsor whose commitment to quality ingredients and sustainability aligns beautifully with what the Eat Out brand and its celebrated awards stand for.

Once again, the Eat Out Woolworths Restaurant Awards will applaud and recognise excellence in the South African restaurant industry, with its Eat Out Star rating system that was introduced in 2022 and enthusiastically received by both restaurants and patrons as the best way to evaluate the nation's best restaurants. It is these One, Two, and Three Eat Out Star winners, along with a number of prestigious Special Awards (including Restaurant and Chef of the Year), that will be recognised at the awards event in November after an exhaustive six-month judging process.

This year's panel of judges are, again, renowned experts in their respective fields, bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table.

The stakes are high, and the competition is fierce, but one thing is certain: this year's Eat Out Woolworths Restaurant Awards are set to be the most exciting and highly anticipated event in the South African culinary calendar.

Meet the 2023 judging panel

Abigail Donnelly

Abigail Donnelly is a culinary visionary whose expertise and creativity have made her a household name in the industry. Her artistic flair and innovative approach have redefined the way we think about food.



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Donnelly's journey began with her own coffee shop, where her talent and unique style quickly caught the attention of the editor of *Fairlady* magazine. From there, she rose to become the magazine's food editor, showcasing her culinary prowess and setting the standard for what food media would become.

In 2006, she joined *Eat Out* as editor and chief judge, cementing her reputation as a discerning tastemaker with an impeccable palate. Her food writing has been recognised with multiple Galliova Awards, further solidifying her position as one of the foremost authorities on all things gastronomic.

Her mentorship has inspired countless aspiring chefs and stylists to follow their dreams and push the boundaries of what's possible in the world of food. Whether through her styling and writing, her judging, or her mentorship, Abigail's impact on the South African culinary world is nothing short of extraordinary.

Donnelly says, "I am so excited to work alongside and be inspired by the 2023 judging panel, and I look forward to discovering new restaurants around South Africa as well as eating at the established ones that are elevating the standards around the country. I also hope to give diners a good understanding of how restaurants strive for excellence."

Joseph Dhafana

Joseph Tongai Dhafana is a remarkable sommelier, wine judge and founder of Mosi Wines and Spirits. Originally from Zimbabwe, Dhafana's journey is nothing short of inspiring. He grew up in the communal area of Chirumhanzu and in 2009, made the bold decision to move to South Africa in search of better opportunities.



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Starting from scratch, Dhafana worked tirelessly to pursue his passion for wine. He took on odd jobs, working as a gardener, dishwasher, barman, and waiter. Through his unwavering dedication and hard work, he became one of South Africa's most celebrated sommeliers.

Dhafana holds a Wine Judging Certificate from the University of Cape Town and was a member of Team South Africa, which competed in the 2015 blind wine tasting championships in France. He went on to captain Team Zimbabwe in the World Cup in France in 2017 and 2018, respectively. The team's inspiring journey was documented in the award-winning documentary, *Blind Ambition*.

In 2019, he was recognised for his accomplishments when he received the Eat Out Wine Service Award during his time as head sommelier at La Colombe, one of the country's most esteemed restaurants.

Today, Dhafana's wine and spirits brand has grown significantly since he made his maiden vintage seven years ago. His success story serves as a testament to the power of hard work, dedication, and unwavering perseverance in the pursuit of one's dreams.

"This role is both humbling and incredible," says Dhafana. "I have longed to participate, not for fun, but because it's demanding and challenging. I enjoy dining in various establishments and brainstorming with experienced judges, which is similar to my expertise in judging wine. Analytical thinking, without personal preference, is crucial. I enjoy exploring a dish's concept, taste, and technique. And I am committed to delivering a fair judgment without fear or favour."

Marisa Munro

Marisa Munro grew up on a farm in Limpopo. As a child, her love for food was sparked by paging through cookbooks. Since then, her adventurous palate has taken her around the world in search of new and exciting flavours.



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Cooking is a form of therapy for Munro, where she gets lost in the pages of recipe books. And here's the interesting part – she can actually taste a dish just by reading the recipe!

At Woolies, she works alongside a diverse team of creative, dynamic chefs and product developers. With 20 years of experience in product development under her belt, she's attended food, flavour and trends seminars all over the globe.

But her latest adventure is one she's particularly excited about.

"Being an Eat Out judge for 2023 is an enormous honour. I can't wait to explore the local restaurant scene. Being a judge means I get to witness the heart and soul of a chef and experience their unique combination of skills, imagination, and nature's bounty."

Mokgadi Itsweng

Mokgadi Itsweng is an accomplished chef, food activist and author. With more than 17 years of experience in the food industry, she has been a prominent voice in food media, sharing her knowledge and passion for healthy, sustainable eating.



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Itsweng is a champion of ancient grains and indigenous ingredients, using only the finest, freshest in her cooking. She is also a passionate advocate for the benefits of a plant-based lifestyle and her debut cookbook, *Veggielicious*, is a celebration of her love for seasonal produce.

Beyond her work in the kitchen, Itsweng is also a dedicated food activist, working to promote sustainable and ethical practices in the food industry. She is a strong advocate for supporting small, local farmers and for reducing food waste. Through her cooking, writing, and advocacy work, she is helping to promote a more conscious and responsible approach to food.

"I love food and dining at restaurants is one way I get to travel with my palate and experience different chefs' food journeys," Itsweng says. "Being a judge means I get to explore our beautiful country with its diverse culture and taste what South Africans are eating. I get to represent the ordinary South African who loves food and is always looking for a memorable experience that offers both satisfaction and excellent value. I love to see what the chefs have been up to, creatively, and whether there is a consciousness around ingredients, plant-based food, sourcing, sustainability, and indigenous food."

Herman Lensing

Growing up in the town of Upington in the Northern Cape, Herman Lensing had big dreams of becoming a chef. He realised that dream at the prestigious Institute of Culinary Arts (ICA) in Stellenbosch, where he honed his skills and emerged as a culinary powerhouse.



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At just 22 years old, he landed the role of food editor at *SARIE* magazine, where he quickly made a name for himself with his innovative recipes and bold flavour combinations. But Lensing didn't stop there – he went on to become the editor of *SARIE KOS*, and has since published several standalone cookbook magazines under his own name.

Lensing's star power doesn't stop at the page, though. He's a well-known TV personality, with hit series like *Inspirasiekos met SARIE* and *Dit proe soos huis* capturing the hearts and palates of viewers across the country. He's also a co-host on Minki van der Westhuizen's talk show on *VIA*, and has produced some of South Africa's most popular food reality shows.

Lensing has won the sought-after Galliova Award for South Africa's top food writer not once, but three times – in 2010, 2017, and 2022. And if you're a fan of his work, you'll be delighted to know that his next cookbook is due to hit shelves at the end of 2023.

With his boundless talent and infectious passion for food, Lensing is a force to be reckoned with in the South African culinary world.

He says: "I love to eat, it's what makes me smile. I love South Africa and there is no place in the world that offers such a diverse food landscape. We have some of the world's best chefs and restaurants. Being part of this year's Eat Out judging panel is a huge honour and a job that I take seriously. I am looking forward to eating food that tells a story of sustainability, proud use of South African ingredients and that makes me smile with every bite. I can't wait to taste the many dishes that restaurants produce across South Africa."

Karen Dudley

Karen Dudley is a chef, author and food entrepreneur, widely known for her exceptional culinary creations and innovative approach to food – especially vegetables. A born-and-bred Capetonian, Dudley developed an early love for food and cooking. With years of experience at the intersection of how people connect with food, she has insight and perception of what makes food spaces work.



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In 1999, she opened The Kitchen in Woodstock, Cape Town, a catering company that quickly gained a reputation for its delicious, home-style cooking. The Kitchen soon expanded to include a café, which became a popular hangout spot for locals and tourists alike, including Michelle Obama. Her passion for using fresh, locally sourced ingredients and her commitment to the industry's upliftment have been key factors in her success.

Dudley has appeared on CNN and TEDx, and has been featured in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*. She has also been a guest judge on multiple reality cooking shows in South Africa and is a familiar face on national TV channels.

Zyda Rylands, chief executive officer: Woolworths Food, adds: "Woolworths' partnership with Eat Out is important because we believe in rewarding our great talent – and even more so our local talent. We also know for certain that a good dish starts with good ingredients. Our Good Business Journey focuses on sustainable production to deliver innovation and flavour, which are key attributes at the core of our Food business, and these characteristics are what make the Woolies Difference that we are proud of. Our partnership with Eat Out is anchored in the opportunity to celebrate our alignment of values, particularly when it comes to quality, innovation and sustainability. Therefore, following the success of the 2022 Woolworths Eat Out Awards, we are really looking forward to witnessing the incredible creativity and passion the industry has to offer in 2023."

Keep an eye on Eat Out's social media channels over the coming weeks.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>