

# A taste of what to expect from the American Express Dining Awards

 By Leigh Andrews

23 Sep 2019

If you've never been to the perfectly named Isola restaurant at the One and Only Hotel, you're in for a surprise as it's not in the main hotel but a true island of its own, along a wooden pathway that feels like you're in a tropical resort, with flowing water features, inviting wooden pool loungers and an impressive pool at your feet. That's where the 72 candidates for the 21st American Express Dining Awards were revealed.



Images supplied.

Cape Town's finest media foodies mingled before the 2019 American Express Dining Awards media launch on Friday, 13 September.

Tiny mugs of cold, spicy tomato soup, flutes of bubbly and mini melba toast rounds – some topped with beef, others with cream cheese and strawberry slices – were just delicious and kept us going until we could take our seats indoors, out of the chilly wind.

## Introducing the American Express Dining Awards, reimagined

Warmed by heaters and a view of that gorgeous pool through the wall of windows, MC Steve Steinfeld, founder and content creator of The Joburg Foodie, explained that he was one of the judges on the panel, along with food-loving youth-focused media channel creator Greg Maloka and Clive Aaron, who trained at the first independent chef training school in South Africa and managed the launch of the farm-to-fork eatery, La Tête.

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HEAD JUDGE | THE AMERICAN EXPRESS DINING AWARDS Excited & honoured to finally announce that I have been appointed head judge for the American Express Dining Awards. The reimagined iteration of these awards - marking its 21st year - will take place on the 14 October in Johannesburg and the 21 October in Cape Town. #DoAmExSA #AmExExperience

*A post shared by [Steve Steinfeld](#) (@thejoburgfoodie) on Sep 14, 2019 at 12:06am PDT*

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While judging took place since July, their names were kept under wraps until the media event, so as not to compromise the process. And while the panel had initially been more inclusive, a judge had to step down for personal reasons, leaving the three-man judging panel to their task.



## Celebrating 21 years of mouth-watering delights from SA's culinary scene

OnPoint PR 5 Aug 2019



And what a meaty task they had, in selecting the 72 finalists for the awards. The main entry criteria? Restaurants need to be 'Amex accepting', and while last year's final event features all the winners, this year is anyone's guess who actually made the cut from the wooden chopping block.

The judges confirmed that they don't order from any special menus when they go through, as it doesn't give them a full idea of what the chef is capable of.



## American Express Dining Awards - More gourmet gallantry from South Africa's most trusted lifestyle companion

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So while many of the restaurants featured last year have certainly retained their quality, categories have since been reshaped and refined as Chris Wood, head of American Express South Africa explained that Amex is a relationship brand.

This means the Amex Dining Awards effectively serve as a vehicle to build secure and enhancing those relationships with customers, merchants and partners alike, especially in today's pressured environment where quality entertainment, lifestyle and business experiences are top-of-mind when it comes to where customers will swipe their cards.



## #BizTrends2018: Conscious consumption

Andy Fenner 9 Jan 2018



Wood added that food tastes have changed dramatically over the past two decades of the awards, as has best practice in the restaurant industry – not to mention the influence of ambience and social media, which is integral to the overall dining experience today.

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BEAUTIFUL BLOOMS | 💎💎💎💎 Gorgeous table decor and SA media's brightest asking all-important Qs at the @americanexpress #DiningAwards2020 #medialaunch at @oocapetown today. All will be revealed on @bizcommunity

soon! 💎💎 . . . . #DoAmexSA #AmexExperience #SAmedia #SAfoodies  
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#medialaunch #AmericanExpressDiningAwards #foodie #foodstagram

A post shared by Leigh Andrews (@ramblinglitchi123) on Sep 13, 2019 at 6:09am PDT

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So, to stay up to date with the times, ten new categories have been included to celebrate the food revolution of recent years, effectively ‘reimagining’ the awards in line with the World Restaurant Awards’ categories to include the likes of pure SA; best-kept secret; and card members’ choice, as a restaurant is really only as good as how well its tables are filled.

But I digress. The main menu for the afternoon at Isola included a starter of Norwegian salmon with crispy onions, fine herb salad, cauliflower purée, bruschetta and jalapeño dressing or cold, spicy tomato ratatouille as the vegetarian option, complete with various leaves and onion rings.

## Top tastes on the cards

This was followed by mains of Karoo lamb loin, confit garlic, *pommes fondant*, aubergine caviar, spicy tomato ratatouille, cauliflower purée, olive and caper jus, or a vegetarian curry and rice topped with a big popadum cap.

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TASTE TEASER | 💎💎 This afternoon I attended the media launch of the @americanexpress #DiningAwards2020 at @oocapetown ahead of the gala winner dinners in October. Finalist info on @bizcommunity soon! 💎💎 . . . . #bizcommunity #bizlounge #doamexsa #AmexExperience #diningawards #foodmedia #bestjob #myofficetoday #salmontartare #Norwegiansalmon

#Karoolumb #medialunch #caramelpannacotta #capetownfoodies #joburgfoodie  
#SAfoodies #pearsorbet #oneandonlyhotel #isolarerestaurant #mosaictable  
#onpointpr #prettyplating #americanexpress #foodie #foodstagram  
#oneandonlycapetown #smallplates #nomnomnom

A post shared by Leigh Andrews (@ramblinglitchi123) on Sep 13, 2019 at 5:54am PDT

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we wrapped up with what vwoods called “the best way we know how – dessert.”

This was a delicious plate of caramel *pannacotta* with coffee sponge, roasted nut crumble, vanilla cremeaux and pear sorbet – photographed by almost everyone before we dug in, and paired with perfectly frothy cappuccinos, of course.



Images supplied.

Fitting with the overall experience, the wine options were just as delicious, with flutes of Methode Cap Classique NV One & Only Brut from Stellenbosch served on arrival, followed by a choice of 2016 Mulderbosch Sauvignon Blanc from Stellenbosch or 2018 De Wetshof Chardonnay Unoaked Limestone Hill, the 2018 Haute Cabriere Pinot Noir Unwooded from Franschhoek, the 2016 Backsberg Merlot from Paarl, 2015 Hidden Valley Pinotage from Stellenbosch, or 2014 Noble Hill Estate Red Blend.

Gin and tonics and non-alcoholic options were also on offer.



Images supplied.

Tickets to attend the main awards were included in attendees' goodie bags, along with wooden chopping boards from Laidback. Crossing fingers and tongues for this year's finalists! Click through for the full list below...



### In search of foodie heaven

OnPoint PR 18 Sep 2019



*The American Express Dining Awards 2020 winners for Gauteng will be announced on 14 October, and for the Western Cape on 21 October 2019. For more information, follow the #AmexExperience and #DoAmexSA hashtags.*

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh\_Andrews.

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