

Media Release: Executive Chef Profile

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Stefan Schmidt – strives for only the best!

Driven by inspiration, Stefan Schmidt, executive chef at Cape Town's Townhouse Hotel & Conference Centre, has always strived to become the best chef he can be.

Becoming a chef was his childhood dream, having followed in his brother's footsteps. "As a child, I was inspired by my brother to become a chef. He was a chef and I always wanted to be able to cook the same beautiful things he cooked," Stefan said. Born in Dresden, Germany, he went on to Oberkirch in Baden Wuertember where he started his three year apprenticeship at the Win Gasthof/Hotel Lamm. He was trained in all sections of the kitchen while attending the hotel school. After successfully completing his apprenticeship in 1995, he moved to Freiburg where he joined the Colombi Hotel as a commis de cuisine. This hotel holds a one-Michelin-star. He cooked at the Colombi as entremetier and later became chef poissonier.

"After two years at the Colombi, I worked for a year in Berlin at the hotel Brandenburger Hof as gardemange, where we were awarded with one-Michelin-star for the first time for that restaurant." Stefan left Germany in 1998 to join the team at the Grande Roche Hotel in Paarl, South Africa where he worked until 2004 and left in the position of sous chef to become head chef at the barouche restaurant on Blaauwklippen wine estate in Stellenbosch, where he stayed until October 2008. Since then he has been in charge of the kitchen at the Townhouse Hotel & Conference Centre. Stefan said: "I am very excited to be involved with the new Townhouse Hotel and its state-of-the-art conference centre.

Both the restaurant and the conference centre will take some time to be firmly established in Cape Town for their culinary experience. "I have already started looking at ways to increase the volumes by fine-tuning the menus and learning from the events we stage and broaden our offerings and packages. The bottom line is, in a couple of years my goals will be to have a well recognised conference centre, as well as a restaurant which will be well established on the hectic Cape Town scene, where diners from the hotel, as well as outside, will enjoy a relaxed and unforgettable dining experience." He loves what he does and said there is always a new challenge and never a dull moment. Stefan said the position is more than just cooking, as there is the broad subject of responsibilities and duties.

"Besides dealing with a variety of conference breakfasts, lunch buffets or finger lunches, cocktail parties and dinner parties, all changing on a daily basis from 10 – 150 delegates, and the business from the hotel, there are also administrative duties." Stefan said one of the main challenges he is seeing is the trend of smaller budgets for conferencing, but expectations are growing. "Also, turnaround times are getting very short, tomorrows' conference might only get booked today. This leads to another challenge - conferences don't always stick to the proposed agenda which means they do not adhere to the allocated time slots." From a food perspective, he said there is a big Asian influence in choice of ingredients as well as in cooking style. "Slow cooking is another trend that is coming up in the culinary scene."

On a global stage, he said there is a definite increase in the use of organic produce and a move to sustainability, which means chefs are moving to proudly local produce.

Stefan is married to Carmen and has three children. Gewanno, 16, is the big brother to twin girls, Sascia and Skye, who are seven. For leisure, Stefan enjoys lounging at the pool with a glass of wine and a book or magazine. He also enjoys taking the kids to the beach, visiting wine farms and enjoying wine tastings.

His advice to those who would like to become a chef: "It takes much more than great cooking skills to become a good executive chef. Good organisational, mathematical and management skills are essential in this job."

Questions and answers...

WHAT IS YOUR SIGNATURE DISH?

On the conference centre side, it seems our foccacia with sun-dried tomato, buffalo mozzarella and pesto and herb pancake filled with smoked salmon trout and cottage cheese, are definitely the two favourites. The accompanying wine would be Springfield "Life from Stone".

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE BEVERAGE?

To be honest, Savannah, but I am a big fan of South African wine.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE FOOD?

Do not have one specific favourite food.

WHAT IS YOUR PET HATE?

Definitely snakes and spiders. I can do without them.

WHAT IS YOUR GREAT LOVE?

My family and kids are definitely Number One, but I also love doing my job.
Other loves include the Winelands and Cape Town, as it is a beautiful city.

WHAT TRENDS ARE EMERGING IN THE CONFERENCE INDUSTRY IN REGARDS TO FOOD?

The clients are getting more health conscious, demand fresh fruit, healthy teas and snacks, and finger lunches are more popular than sit-down meals.

ARE YOU ADVENTUROUS?

Not really, but I have paraglided in the Swiss Alps.

ENDS
