

Bottles of bubbly

It's a weekend of fine wine,
fine food and fine company in
South Africa's gourmet capital.

Franschhoek. The breathtakingly beautiful valley that lies nestled between the towering mountains of the Cape was first settled by the French Huguenots in the 17th century. When the Huguenots came here to escape religious persecution in France, they brought with them the age-old French wine and food culture. So it's no surprise that the Franschhoek Wine Valley is now world famous for its wine and therefore an ideal place to hold a festival dedicated to the consumption thereof.

"The Magic of Bubbles" (officially called "The Franschhoek Investec Private Bank Cap Classique & Champagne Festival") was held in the town over the first weekend in December 2007. It showcased the very best bubbly produced in the Western Cape, allowing one to indulge in a wide choice of tastings and to purchase and take home at cellar prices. Bubbly that is produced in South Africa cannot officially be called 'Champagne' so it falls into the Cap Classique category according to Methode Cap Classique (MCC) – the South African term used to describe a sparkling wine made following the classic French Champagne method.

The festival is not only about fine wine but also its accompaniments. As the gourmet capital of South Africa, Franschhoek has an array of fine eating establishments. Eight of the country's top 100 restaurants are found here and the high street is literally littered with great places to indulge the palate. Luxury accommodation is another of the town's talents. Blend the lodgings, wines and food together with the festival and you have a gourmet tour of note.

Such a tour was organised to run in conjunction with the festival by Samp & Soufflé, a specialist South African gourmet Tour Company. It's the brainchild of Cheryl Adamson and Zhana Ramalho, who have been arranging and running regular 'foodie' tours to some fascinating areas all over South Africa.

The basic concept is:

- Put a group of people together in a luxury guest house for the weekend.
- Invite a couple of prominent local chefs to the party.
- Procure fresh organic ingredients from local farms or stores.
- Let the guests loose in the kitchen to

prepare their own delectable gourmet lunch or dinner under the guidance of the chefs.

- Add plenty of wine and simmer gently...

However, as this event was happening in Franschhoek with all its superb restaurants, procurement and cooking would have less of a focus.

For this weekend, Samp and Soufflé chose Rustof Country House, a classic Cape Dutch styled home, which lies in the heart of Franschhoek. The scenery around Rusthof Country House is spectacular, with magnificent mountains, endless vineyards and shady oak trees that dominate this beautiful valley. Rusthof is an exclusive Country House catering to no more than 16 guests, ensuring a warm, friendly personal service in gracious and elegant surroundings.

Once the guests had checked into their gracious accommodation, they were taken on a gentle stroll down the high street to one of Franschhoek's



Franschhoek Valley

most unique eating establishments. The Tasting Room at Le Quartier Français offers a 'nouveau cuisine' experience of note. Seven 'miniature' courses were served, each paired with a glass of wine. Unique dishes created by Chef Margot

Janse included "36-hour 'sous vide' lamb neck with spiced aubergine pomme pure & cep jus" as well as "chocolate mint marshmallow soup with Turkish delight ice-cream and banana gel". A memorable dining experience indeed.

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Outside The Tasting Room at Le Quartier Français

After a good night's sleep in comfortable beds, guests woke on Saturday morning and after a quiet breakfast, were invited to a tour of the Franschoek Motor Museum which is located just outside town on the L'Ormarins Estate – a Private Cellar and home of classic vintages.

And when they say classic vintages, they're not only referring to the wine.

The Motor Museum is housed in four massive barns on the farm and it's a priceless collection of classics that will get your motor running. Rows of gleaming metal in mint condition all the way from early vehicles like the Model T, right up to the newest Ferrari Enzo. If you're ever in Franschoek, make time to see this.

After catching collective breath, the party moved inside to enjoy a special Cap Classique tasting led by Peter Ferreira, winemaker at Graham Beck. Peter, who's been described as "the finest maker of fizz in South Africa", gave a fascinating presentation and took the group on a personalised taste tour of some of the vineyards' best sparkling wines. Three Cap Classique varieties were sampled from the Graham Beck cellars – all greeted with approval from the guests.

Samp & Soufflé gourmet tours are becoming famous for their hedonism, so after this mid-morning 'bubbly blitz', it was no surprise that the party headed back into town to sample another of Franschoek's delights. Now, if you're on a diet, don't walk down the high street past the windows of the Huguenot Fine Food and Chocolates. Don't go inside and gaze through the glass counter at the delicious delectables on offer. Don't go through to the room behind where the chocolatier will give you a short demonstration of how these

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Litha Communications, established in 1999, has grown from a small company to a leading player on the South African landscape of Marketing with Andile Ncontsa becoming the BEE partner and Executive Chairman in January 2005.

The Litha team specializes in Public Relations, Conference and Event creation and management and their commitment to marketing excellence has taken them from being involved with the WSSD 2002 to international and national conferences, project management and gala events for the National Heritage Council, SAB Miller, Robben Island Museum and the Department of Arts and Culture. The pinnacle of 2006 was their appointment as Project Managers for the 50th Women's anti-pass March Commemoration at the Union Buildings and their appointment as conference organisers for sixteen EU funded, Civil Society conferences.

The Litha Communications team is inspired, freethinking and results driven and covers various areas of expertise.

delights are made. And for heaven's sake! Don't leave with a goodie bag filled with chocolates to eat in bed late that night.

Chocolate is serious business. A thing to be savoured and enjoyed. So we recommend you do all of the above when visiting the town.

After a quiet afternoon, guests assembled in the gardens at Rusthof Country House for a Sabrage display – the technique of using a sabre or sword to open a champagne bottle with great ceremony. The sabre is slid along the body of the bottle toward the neck. The force of the blade hitting the lip breaks the glass to separate the collar from the neck of the bottle. Guests were treated to a fascinating display of Sabrage, which included an array of 'Champagne anecdotes' from cellar master Achim von Arnim from the Cabriere Estate and some sparkling wines from the Pierre Jourdan range.

And so to main course.

Saturday evening. The guests are in the



Guest preparing gourmet food with a little help from chef Neil Jewell

homely kitchen at Rusthof Country House facing a rather charming man behind the counter. He is Neil Jewell, chef at Moreson

Bread and Wine – a vineyard restaurant and farm grocer located outside town on the Moreson Estate.

Neil's obsession is charcuterie – a French term used to describe the art of smoking and curing meats. He has come to do a short tasting of some of his delicious produce, after which he will lead the guests in an interactive cooking display during which they will prepare their own gourmet meal for dinner. Tonight they will be making Chicken and Champagne boudin with shallot tarte tatin, paired with Glenwood Chardonnay, followed by Whole baked fish with artichoke and greens, paired with La Chataigne Sauvignon Blanc, and lastly Berries sabayon and biscuits paired with Morena MCC. Our guests prepare all this with a little help from our gourmet chef.

The fascinating thing about a Samp & Soufflé cooking event is to watch as ordinary people become really handy in the kitchen. Menial tasks like chopping and cutting, handled with flair. More complex preparations such as feeding minced meat into sausage skin, tackled with abandon. There's a comfort in the

knowledge that with a capable chef like Neil around, no matter how many cooks there are in the kitchen, it'll all work out perfectly in the end. And so it did. After all the preparation and cooking was complete, dinner was served and enjoyed all round. Guests then retired for the night to the comfort of their suites.

Anyone for Sunday morning brunch? Bouillabaisse – a trendy Champagne & Oyster bar – serves a starters menu of over 30 taster dishes with an Asian seafood slant, prepared right in front of you by a group of vibrant chefs led by owner Camille Haas.

Guests were seated at the counter and the dishes were laid on along with a couple of glasses of Morena Cap Classique from the Franschhoek Pass Winery. Starting with oysters, on to smoked salmon strips, through to spring rolls, abalone and black pudding, the dishes just kept coming – much to the delight of all. Camille and his wife Ingrid were the perfect hosts for this exotic Sunday morning taste trip.

Although the whole town of Franschhoek played host to the Magic of Bubbles festival, the main tasting area was located at the Huguenot Memorial at the end of the high street. It was here where the party headed to next to get a taste of the action. Over 26 local wine estates and more than 15 local restaurants offered tastings under the marquee in the glorious Cape sunshine. Live music played, the crowd buzzed and the sound of fizz filled the air.

Perhaps the weekend is best summed up by the following scene: One of the guests was last seen inside the marquee clutching a glass of Champagne in one hand, a bowl of strawberries in the other and a plate of oysters under the arm. Samp & Soufflé excess indeed! ☺

Useful contact 

For more information about upcoming Samp & Soufflé events, visit www.sampsouffle.com or telephone +27 (0) 11 728 4032.



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