

S.Pellegrino Young Chef semi-finalists signature dishes revealed

Ten young chefs, from South Africa, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon, are honing their skills to perfect their signature dishes for the Africa and Middle East regional final of the S.Pellegrino Young Chef competition, to be held in Cape Town on 14 October 2019. Each young talent will compete in four categories, the winners of each will proceed to the S.Pellegrino Young Chef Grand Finale in Milan next year May to represent their region, competing against the best young chefs from 12 regions.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

Seven out of the ten young chefs from South African, with one each from Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Lebanon.

Signature dishes

The young chefs developed one signature dish for the competition, working with their mentors on improving and fine-tuning it to perfection. It must demonstrate their technical skills, creativity and personal beliefs, conveying a clear message and wowing judges with presentation, technique and of course flavour.

Elissa Abou Tasse – chef de partie at Maroun Chedid SAL, Beirut, Lebanon - "I think gastronomy nowadays is neglecting culture over trends. The flavours of fire, the taste of wood, the erotic scene where fire is in direct contact with ingredients are all essential in my cooking."

Her dish 'Adam's Garden' brings together almost forgotten ingredients from her home terroir with the flavours of the Levant, and a dramatic monochrome plating.

Callan Austin – chef de partie at Le Coin Francais in Franschhoek - "This competition is exciting for me to have the opportunity to voice my message of ethical, sustainable and seasonal cuisine through an art form that is relatable for everyone."

His dish, entitled 'The Ghost Net' highlights the global problem of ocean pollution, using sustainable seafood and foraged local ingredients to build up a picture on the plate of the abandoned fishing nets that together with plastic threaten marine life.

Marcus Gericke - Junior sous chef at Qunu at The Saxon Hotel, Johannesburg - "My dish is a representation of the hours my father spent teaching me how to respect ingredients, the land and most of all the people around me. It reminds me to be proud of my heritage and to never forget where I come from."

Named 'Remembrance' it is a quail consommé, which started as a memory of gardening with his father and has evolved to encompass simple delicate flavours, such as fennel and charred corn, native to the quail's natural environment.

Logan Leisse - chef de partie at Cavalli Estate, Stellenbosch - "There are no limitations to what you can create with food whether it's a specific taste, a feeling or memory. A dish to me is more than perfectly balanced flavour on a plate it is a medium of communication and expression."

Her dish 'Sea Bass Ceviche' is inspired by the rock pools in her home-town of Gordon's Bay, where she hopes to open her own restaurant one day. The dish was created by her as a newly promoted chef de partie at Cavalli, where it was an immediate hit on last summer's menu.

Martim Moreau Maita – chef de partie at The Park Hyatt, Abu Dhabi Hotel - "I believe that in the kitchen we are more artisans than artists. The idea behind this dish is to use products that are underrated and associated with peasant cuisine, and transform them into something creative and refined yet simple and enjoyable."

His dish 'Onion, veal offal, salsify and garden weeds' brings out the possibilities of ingredients that are usually considered banal, inspired by a famous parody of writer Gertrude Stein, "An onion is an onion is an onion."

Kayla-Ann Osborn - executive chef at The Chefs Table, Umhlanga - "I aim to promote the colourful diversity of Durban cuisine on an international, contemporary fine dining level, to do this in the most sustainable way possible, and with our incredible produce. I want to showcase our dishes in an elegant and clever way without losing their authenticity of flavour."

Her dish 'Durban Prawn Curry' is a prawn tartare with prawn chutney, inspired by the local Durban pink prawns, the flavours of growing up in Durban, the spice stalls and local chutneys.

Daniel Payne - head chef at View at the Four Seasons Hotel, Johannesburg - "One of my contributions to the gastronomic world would be to provide underprivileged youth of my country with a platform to develop their culinary skills and the right tools for self-sufficiency."

His dish 'Ekuqaleni', meaning 'In the beginning' in Zulu, is inspired by the hunter-gatherer Khoisan people who were the first indigenous people of southern Africa. It comprises ostrich (hunted by the men) and green mealies (gathered by the women) and reflects a taste of South Africa, showcasing his simple but complex approach to food.

Meshen Pillay – senior chef de partie at Reuben's at Capital Moloko, Johannesburg - "I was taught at a young age to appreciate the ingredients I was exposed to and to identify the best quality. I have been fascinated by using one or two key ingredients cohesively to produce different forms of flavour, texture and taste, ever since my grandmother cooked chicken and onions in foil over an open flame for me when I was young."

His dish 'Chicken, Egg and Everything Onion' uses two key ingredients with many different techniques that allow one to truly appreciate its flavour creatively to the fullest.

Paul Thinus Prinsloo - chef de partie at The Restaurant at Waterkloof, Somerset West - "Classic French Cuisine is the reason we do what we do today. If it wasn't for chefs such as Marie-Antoine Careme and Auguste Escoffier, being a chef would not be a career today."

He aims to be one of the chefs who shape the future of the industry without losing touch with classic French roots. In his dish 'Bouillabaisse 2.0' he does a contemporary interpretation of a classic. "The dish is also describing me as a chef and how I feel about this industry. Simplicity is me."

Aytekin Yamac – junior sous chef at Hezarfen Restaurant, CVK Park Bosphorus Hotel, Turkey - "I am aiming to show the rich Turkish culinary culture and diversity to the world of gastronomy."

Cooking was part of his childhood, catching and cooking fish from the creek, when his mother wasn't home. His dish 'Local Poultry Variation' remembers the ingredients his mother cooked with and their village roots, organic goose bred by his grandfather, crispy baklava prepared with village walnuts for special holidays, bulgar wheat, spices and eggplant.

In addition to the winner of best young chef, three more categories will be awarded - The Fine Dining Lovers Food for Thought Award, the S.Pellegrino Award for Social Responsibility, and the Acqua Panna Award for Connection in Gastronomy.

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