

ENTERTAINING

# Zululand romance

When Lawrence Anthony and Francoise Malby entertain friends at Thula Thula Private Game Lodge, it's with Franco-Zulu flair

By TRACY GIELINK Photographs by SALLY CHANCE Drinks? Please turn to page 150





## ENTERTAINING



Grilled peri-peri calamari on olive polenta

**I**t was a chance meeting. Lawrence Anthony and Françoise Malby crossed paths in London while queuing for a cab which, in itself, may have been an unglamorous event. However, love and the intoxicating magic of Africa proved to be a heady mix and Françoise ultimately traded her Parisian lifestyle for the beautiful bush of KwaZulu-Natal.

Lawrence, a highly regarded conservationist and humanitarian, is also known as an “elephant whisperer” for his work with the prehistoric mammals. With her beguiling French accent and magnetic personality, Françoise fitted into the bush environment with unceremonious ease, as did her beloved Maltese poodle, Bijoux. The pair run the family-owned Thula Thula game reserve and it is at the Elephant Safari Lodge that Françoise has invoked a French influence on the cuisine. Aside from training all the kitchen staff from local communities, she continues to oversee the food in both lodges on the property and her epicurean nature takes her to the Cape once a year to select wine.

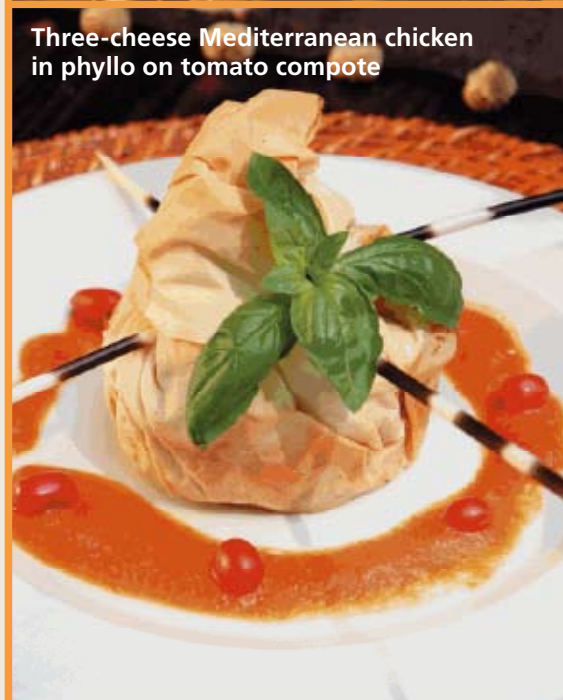
Today Lawrence and Françoise are hosting an informal Sunday lunch before heading off on diametrically opposed missions. He is off to Congo with a cameraman on a humanitarian initiative and she is taking her annual trip to Paris to attend cooking classes.

The gathering is a small one that blurs the lines of work and friendship as one tends to lead to the other. Business partner John Wise and Soekie van Rensburg are visiting from Tzaneen while colleagues Lesley Miles and Kate Polley are enjoying a three-day sojourn from Cape Town. They are all staying at the Elephant Safari Camp, and the lunch is a short, refreshing drive away at the more casual tented camp.

Despite the threat of late afternoon showers, the table has been set up outside and the sun peeks through shyly. A wooden deck jutting out jauntily from the camp’s lounge area has become the entertaining platform. Ensnared by trees, two



Three-cheese Mediterranean chicken in phyllo on tomato compote



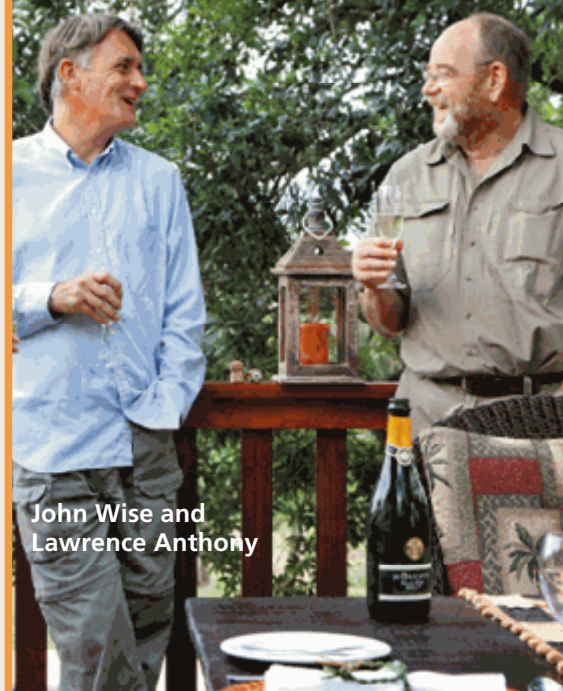


chunky tables account for six roomy place settings. The tables are set on woven grass mats and are flanked by wicker armchairs, the look playing with organic textures and colours. Soekie, who owns Lifestyle Classics in Tzaneen (they import decor items and offer an interior design service) has supplied a striking checked Cuban table runner and the large orange beaded aloe centrepiece. This accent colour is picked up with orange placemats and candles, while white napery is tied with plaited rope made by game rangers with leaves from nearby trees. The African influence is not forgotten and a wooden mortar and pestle serves as an ice bucket for bubbly (what French occasion would be complete without it?), and three wine glasses per person complete the table setting.

When it comes to entertaining guests, Francoise is an unstoppable force. Her love of cooking (and the ongoing challenge of sourcing fresh ingredients in the bush) saw her establish a substantial herb and vegetable garden, but it was destroyed by Lawrence's elephants who obviously share her love of freshly grown produce. "They didn't like the lemons so we still have those," she laughs.

How does Francoise describe her style of cooking? "It's a bit Mediterranean obviously, but I try to adjust my knowledge of French cuisine with South African products," she explains bandying about the term "Franco-Zulu". She has a penchant for cooking seafood and today has focused on peri-peri calamari served on olive polenta, which also pays tribute to the Creole influence in her cooking.

In between Francoise's forays into the kitchen to check on the main course – a three-cheese Mediterranean chicken in a phyllo parcel served on a tomato compote – conversation inevitably turns to Lawrence's area of expertise and he is drawn into discussion without a hint of self-importance. The book *Babylon's Ark* (released in New York in March this year and in South Africa two months later) has immortalised



**John Wise and Lawrence Anthony**



**The "elephant whisperer", Lawrence Anthony**



**Nougat glacé and red berry coulis**



**Francoise Malby and Lawrence Anthony**

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his internationally acclaimed rescue of the animals in Baghdad Zoo during the onset of the coalition invasion of Iraq, and the story is currently being developed into a Hollywood movie.

The afternoon warmth is dispelled by a delicious nougat glacé that remains one of Thula Thula's most popular sweet temptations. Lawrence ultimately has to excuse himself to attend to burning firebreaks while the remaining quintet engross themselves in conversation and more wine.

### GRILLED PERI-PERI CALAMARI ON OLIVE POLENTA

Serves 8 **EASY**

30 mins excluding cooling of polenta

#### POLENTA

200g polenta

50g olives, pitted and chopped

50ml olive oil

50g Parmesan, grated

40ml sundried tomatoes, marinated in olive oil to soften

salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

#### PERI-PERI SAUCE

1 small red chilli, seeded and chopped

4 garlic cloves, crushed

juice from 1 lemon

40ml olive oil

salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1kg calamari, cut into strips

5ml chilli powder

fresh herbs, to garnish

1 To cook the polenta, bring a pot of salted water to the boil. Add the polenta and stir constantly until cooked, about 5 minutes. Mix the remaining ingredients and stir into the polenta. Pour the mixture about 2cm thick into a flat dish and leave to cool in the fridge. Cut into rounds and set aside.

2 Mix the peri-peri ingredients well. Place the calamari in a dish and pour over the peri-peri sauce. Marinate for about 1 hour.

3 Grill the calamari for a few minutes until golden. Sprinkle with the chilli powder and half of the peri-peri sauce.

4 Roast the polenta rounds on the griller.

5 To serve, place the polenta rounds on serving plates. Place the grilled calamari on top and drizzle with the remaining peri-peri sauce. Garnish with fresh herbs and serve immediately.

### THREE-CHEESE MEDITERRANEAN CHICKEN IN PHYLLO ON TOMATO COMPOTE

Serves 8 **A LITTLE EFFORT** 1 hour

2 garlic cloves, crushed

60g feta

60g mozzarella

60g Parmesan, grated

60ml olive oil

3 sheets phyllo pastry, cut into 25cm squares

1kg chicken breasts, cubed

30ml olive oil

100g ready-made pesto

fresh thyme or rosemary, to garnish

#### COMPOTE

100g Rosa tomatoes, cubed

100g baby Rosa tomatoes

1 garlic clove, finely chopped

1 onion, finely chopped

20ml olive oil

1 Preheat the oven to 180°C.

2 Mix the garlic, cheese and olive oil well, divide into 2 bowls and set aside.

3 To make the compote, cook the tomato, garlic and onion in the olive oil over medium heat for 10 minutes.

4 Line a greased baking dish with the phyllo pastry.

5 Grill the chicken in the olive oil for about 3 minutes. Mix the chicken with half of the cheese mixture, a third of the tomato compote and the pesto, and place inside the phyllo.

6 Spoon a third of the tomato compote on top, close the phyllo pastry and hold together with cocktail sticks. Bake in the oven for about 20 minutes.

7 To serve, place the remaining

tomato compote on a serving plate and place the phyllo parcel on top. Remove the toothpicks. Sprinkle with the remaining cheese mixture and serve immediately. Garnish with thyme or rosemary.

### NOUGAT GLACÉ AND RED BERRY COULIS

Serves 8 **CHALLENGING**

2 hours plus extra for freezing

#### NOUGAT

200g sugar

80ml honey

200g blanched almonds

8 egg whites

100ml fresh cream

#### COULIS

fresh or frozen red berries

juice of 1 lemon

4 sheets phyllo pastry

40ml butter, melted

fresh berries, to garnish

1 To make the nougat, heat the sugar slowly in a non-stick pot until the sugar completely melts. Add the honey and almonds, taking care not to burn, and cook for 5 minutes. Put aside to cool in a non-stick dish. Once the nougat has cooled, break the nougat into small pieces.

2 Beat the egg whites until firm. Beat the cream until firm. Gently mix the egg whites, cream and nougat pieces. Put into a terrine dish and freeze for about 12 hours.

3 For the coulis, blend the berries and lemon juice, and refrigerate. Preheat the oven to 180°C.

4 With a 7cm round cutter, cut 32 rounds of phyllo pastry, brush with butter and place on a baking tray in the oven for about 10 minutes until slightly golden. Allow to cool in a dry place.

5 To serve, place 2 rounds of phyllo pastry on a plate and top with a ball of nougat glacé. Top with another 2 rounds of pastry. Garnish with fresh berries and drizzle with the coulis. Serve immediately.

Thula Thula Private Game Lodge and Safari Lodge, Zululand.  
Visit [www.thulathula.com](http://www.thulathula.com) or call 035-792-8322