

A jolly good time!

WRITER & PHOTOGRAPHER:
Hedda Mittner

There is no denying the sublime pleasure of food and wine pairings, but for those seeking an exciting new taste adventure, a food and spirit pairing is sure to exceed your expectations. This novel experience is offered by the Fynbos Distillery in Stanford, at their funky tasting facility called The Jolly Rooster.

Situated in the industrial area of Stanford, in the same road as Martin's Deli and Overberg Honey Company, the Jolly Rooster has a shaded under-cover stoep where customers can kick back on a hot day, and a cosy interior reminiscent of an old-fashioned saloon, complete with an upright piano and a small stage. Here you are invited to indulge in a unique experience – an eight-course food and spirit pairing that showcases this award-winning distillery's exceptional range of craft spirits.

Distilling is as much an art as it is a science, not unlike winemaking. Years of experimenting with different ingredients and recipes have culminated in Fynbos Distillery's unique range of products that have consistently won a slew of gold and double-gold awards at the Merit Wine & Spirit Challenge, Spirits Trophy Awards, Vitis Vinifera Awards and SA Women's Wine & Spirit Awards since 2018.

The best way to acquaint yourself with all the different products – and to discover your favourites – is to taste as many as possible. To help you make it all the way through eight tastings, a bite of tasty Portuguese-themed food is served with every round, making for a most enjoyable and fun experience.

You'll kick off your tasting adventure with the Jolly Rooster Purple Haze Gin, infused with a blend of botanicals, including wild dagga and lavender blossom, paired with beef trinchado on crostini. Next up is a taste of the Arabian Rose Gin with intoxicating (literally and figuratively!) hints of botanicals and spices, including rose and saffron, accompanied by fried calamari. This is followed by the Citrus Bomb Gin, infused with a citrus blend that includes dried orange, lemon and lime peel, orange flower and lemon verbena, complemented by spicy chorizo with cheese and

tomato. (By the way, this gin also goes down a treat with any seafood dish.)

Number 4 on the tasting menu introduces you to the classic Jolly Rooster Grappa, paired with a mini Mediterranean pizza, followed by a taste of Lemoncello alongside a shrimp rissole. (This is usually the point, I am told, where you are no longer the same person who walked through the door! Customers have been known to start singing, dancing, playing the piano, or wrapping themselves around the dancing pole on the stage. But I did mention this is a fun experience, right?)

On with the menu. Only three more shots to go: Oaked Apple Mampoer with hot and sticky chicken wings, Strawberry Liqueur alongside meatballs with smoked paprika and marinara sauce, and finally, Apple Crumble Liqueur served with a bitter chocolate brownie. Shew, you made it, and although you have not tasted each and every product (yes, there's more!), this experience should serve as a comprehensive introduction to the Jolly Rooster magic. A recommended add-on to this immersive experience is watching the Stanford Heritage Show, a visual and audio interactive tour through Stanford that winds its way from past to present without you having to leave your seat.

The people behind the brand are no less colourful than the robust cock-fighting roosters they had seen in Panama and which inspired the name. The idea of establishing a distillery had first occurred to owners Perlé and Mike Crole, based in Johannesburg, when they visited Sir Robert Stanford Estate more than a decade ago. With a holiday home in Franskraal, they often spent time in the area and enjoyed having lunch at the old Madré's Kitchen on the estate. "One Sunday we went for a walk and followed a pathway that ended up in this charming little tasting room of a distillery that produced an exceptionally good grappa," says Perlé.

On a subsequent visit, however, they were dismayed to find that the distillery had closed down and immediately tracked down the owner of the farm. Their business proposal was accepted, and together they set out on what felt to them "like a hugely exciting venture". The only obstacle was that they knew nothing about distilling, so they



ABOVE: The Jolly Rooster's gin range is a grape-based spirit combined with juniper berries and unique blends of botanicals and spices.



RIGHT: Perlé aka GiGi and her husband, Mike Crole have been each other's best friend for almost three decades.

invited a knowledgeable professor to train their staff, while Perlé and Mike enrolled in a distilling course. Fynbos Distillery was born and soon they were producing not only grappa but also witblits, mampoer, limoncello, and their own gin range.

In 2019 they bought their own premises in the industrial area of Stanford and moved the distillery to its current location, adding a kitchen so that they could serve food in their tasting room. Their product range kept expanding, with the addition of calvados, tequila, rum, liqueurs and cream liqueurs. With other business interests in Johannesburg, Perlé and Mike regularly travelled to and fro, but have made the Overberg their base since August last year, when they took over the running of the business full time. Mike has immersed himself in his new role as master distiller, which he clearly relishes, and they both love their new life far away from the hustle and bustle of Johannesburg.

In fact, Perlé has had a life-long love affair with the Overberg. Growing up as a meisie van Paarl, some of her happiest childhood memories are the camping holidays with her family (mom, dad and two sisters) in Uilenkraalsmond and Pearly Beach. That is, incidentally, also where her unusual name comes from (pronounced Purr-lee) and yes, she was named after the local delicacy, perlemoen.

Perlé studied drama at Stellenbosch University and after graduating she got a job with the Performing Arts Council of Transvaal (PACT), per-

forming networks for high schools in the province. Now living in Hillbrow, earning what she calls "a pitiful salary", she was intrigued one day by a newspaper advertisement for showgirls and went for her first audition. She was an instant hit and GiGi the showgirl was born.

Perlé aka GiGi had a spectacularly successful career and demonstrated astute business acumen along the way, culminating in ownership of her own club, The Lollipop Lounge in Randburg, which she took over in 2004. One of the first investments she made in the late 1990s was to buy her first property in Franskraal, where she later built her home. And working by her side, through all these years, was her long-time friend Mike, whom she had first met back in 1996 when he was working as a bouncer. But they were both married to other people over the years and only, finally, got around to tying the knot (with each other, that is) in December 2018.

GiGi, with her big smile and equally big heart, and Mike with his more serious and gentle demeanour, are gracious hosts who, together with their staff (all locals who have been trained by them) offer a warm welcome to all their guests. At the Jolly Rooster you are guaranteed to have a jolly good time!

You'll find the Jolly Rooster @ Fynbos Distillery at 32 Kleine Street Stanford Industria. Pensioners receive a 10% discount every Thursday, and children and well-behaved pets are most welcome. Call 076 320 3092 to book. ■

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