



Press Release – Tsogo Sun – 15/03/2018

‘Fun dining’ at Punchinellos from new top chef, Nicholas Froneman

Chef Nicholas Froneman has rejoined Tsogo Sun as Southern Sun Montecasino’s Executive Chef, bringing plans and ideas to introduce fantasy and fun with a contemporary twist and melt-in-your-mouth flavour to the popular [Punchinello’s](#) new ‘Food Theatre’ menu, which, he says, ties in perfectly with the restaurant’s ‘Food and Dreams’ slogan.

“Meals together are about so much more than the food you eat,” adds Chef Nicholas. “The whole experience should be a happy one, nourishing the body, mind and soul. Adding a theatrical touch to the meal can only enhance the whole delightful experience.”

At [Southern Sun Montecasino](#), his aim is ensure that the hotel’s food offering steps up to the next level, delivering five-star cuisine in line with Tsogo Sun’s strengthening food-centric focus across the group.

The signature dish on the new Punchinello’s menu is a ‘Secret Garden’, with a Smoked Beef Tenderloin Log, in spiced pancetta and popcorn dust, pea puree gel, and beetroot Turkish Delight. Yes, it’s a beautiful ‘storybook’ creation, says Chef Nicholas, “but the flavours are even more enchanting, complementing each other and delighting the palate.”

Other tantalising items on the ‘Food Theatre’ menu include Cannelloni of Duck Confit, with peppered strawberry bon bons, peanut saté, *mango and shallot flavours; Olive Oil Baked Salmon Trout, with sweet potato scales, pea textures, and basil caviar; Mediterranean Squid, with ring soufflé, braised tentacles, braised ink risotto, pork airbags, and balsamic truffle pearls; Lamb and Rolled Neck ‘Salami’ and Crusted Loin, with Venetian textures of peas and tomatoes, celeriac potato puree-Sambuca drops; Chilled Oysters and Prawns – butter-poached jumbo tails, roasted corn puree, oyster in Curaçao and seawater en gelée.*

Chef Nicholas’s love of the funky and contemporary ‘fun-dining’ approach to his cuisine has seen many influences in his wide-ranging experiences as a chef around the world.

He says as a child growing up in East London, his interest in ‘doing things differently’ with food stemmed in part from the purely traditional – albeit delicious – fare prepared by his mother and grandmother that he believed could be improved with some imaginative flair. His father was a



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qualified confectioner at Wilson-Rowntree, involved in designing and creating beautiful and delectable chocolates.

He started as a trainee chef with Holiday Inn in East London in the early 90s, achieving his Diploma in Professional Cookery from Technikon Witwatersrand. His training took him to the Elangeni and the Cape Sun, and then his career started as a chef de partie back at the Elangeni. It was there, in the original Punchinello's restaurant at the Elangeni, that Froneman had what he describes as "his biggest kitchen success" – he met his wife Evelynne, also a chef, "and the best one in the family".

He continued moving around within the Southern Sun group, gaining experience and insight. His years at Southern Sun Grayston in Sandton were seminal, says Chef Nicholas. That was where he worked with Chef Kieran Conway who was a strong mentor in his growing career. "He saw potential in me and moulded me into management material. He and Karen Borain (Training and Development Manager Tsogo Sun Academy) together encouraged me and shaped my career. Without their input, I don't believe I would have achieved what I have."

He returned to Cape Town, to the V&A Hotel, and then moved to Fancourt. Back in Cape Town, he was part of the opening team of Sun International's GrandWest Casino. International experience has also had a strong impact on his development as an innovative chef, and he has enjoyed expanding his culinary experience in Singapore, Dubai, Egypt, Tanzania, Botswana, and elsewhere, holding the position of Executive Chef in many of the leading hotels. Back in South Africa, he joined the team at The Palace of the Lost City at Sun City where he set about "revolutionising perceptions of the Palace with a more relaxed vibe and a modern and eclectic menu – making dining at The Palace a lot more exciting".

His return in early 2018 to Tsogo Sun and Southern Sun Montecasino is a happy one for him. "I wanted to come back to Johannesburg and back to Tsogo Sun, which feels like home, and have a positive impact on the food offering here." He is impressed with the group's strong approach to delivering world-class culinary experiences across the spectrum of offerings.

Chef Nicholas says to him the most underrated ingredients are salt and pepper, which has been the downfall for many a chef, and the ingredient he cannot do without is extra virgin olive oil. His favourite dish to prepare is an old classic, such as Cape Malay cuisine, with a contemporary twist; and his best comfort food is boerewors, braai'd, with 'pap en sous' – cooked to perfection.

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