

BERGHOF



One of the freshest breezes in the Free State restaurant world is a young chef whose dream it is to provide, every day, a feast for a table of eager eaters, much like the movie *Like Water For Chocolate*.

Rinette Enslin (28) of the Berghof Restaurant and guesthouse believes in using the freshest products and, coupled with that, she serves up dishes with a particular

Free State style. Within her dishes, she mixes and matches Mediterranean and traditional cuisine, and seasonal products from the region as important components of her recipes.

The Berghof Guest-house has eight bedrooms that are individually decorated with en suite bathrooms, a honeymoon suite and director's suite. The imposing 32-room main house has a fascinating past. It was built around 1936 as a weekend retreat by Lee, the wife of a German ophthalmic surgeon and spectacle-maker, Dr Glietenberg.

Legend has it that the house was intended as a refuge for Adolf Hitler in case he needed to flee from World War II. Even the architecture is modelled on Hitler's holiday house, Berghof, in the Obersalzberg in Germany.

Materials for Berghof were purchased by Mrs. Glietenberg at auctions of historical Bloemfontein buildings. The roof tiles (still flecked with specks of soot) are from Bloemfontein's old railway station, and the massive Burmese teak windows once graced the old Executors' Rooms buildings.

Rinette commenced her training in Silwood Kitchens. After also working in Europe she started the restaurant *Vinkel en Koljander* in the Lanzerac Hotel just outside Stellenbosch. There she began to experiment with combinations of Mediterranean and traditional South African food. She refers to it as her baptism by fire in the industry.

“What matters most with the food I prepare is that it should not be boring. I would like it to be a journey of discovery for my guests, among flavours, colours and tastes. It must be exciting.

“At the beginning of my career I worked for a while under a French chef in a restaurant in Norwich, England. From him I learned a lot. After this I could develop my own style as I learned how to serve up exciting dishes. It is, of course, a challenge to woo local guests away from steak, chips and starch sauces and to help them to discover a new world in food.”

Before coming to Berghof she worked in Knysna's Belvedere Manor. But in the Free State, in this house and garden with its mystery and character, she could not simply give free rein to her ideas. “I had to set about it a bit more conservatively because most of my guests are from the local community. I began with a small menu with bigger portions.”

She uses, wherever possible, the freshest products – something which can be a problem in the Free State at times. She grows vegetables and herbs herself, and fish is flown in from the Cape twice a week. If she is forced to freeze she uses something like salmon trout, which freezes well.

Rinette's dishes focus on quality rather than quantity and, of course, on good wine. The wines with her menus are selected by herself. It is important to her that the small selection of wines on the wine list should go with the dishes and complement them. "To me it is virtually unthinkable to serve food without wine. They go together."

Berghof regularly receives visitors from overseas who are touring the country. She also caters for corporative functions and occasionally holds a gourmet evening. Here only the best is good enough. She serves excellent food and various wines are then served with a dish. The guest can then decide which best suits a particular dish. Sometimes this leads to long debates between the guests – usually a group of local gourmets.

She finds it difficult to write recipes and says that, like authors, she experiences times of drought when nothing new surfaces. She draws a new recipe on a plate and then, by further visualising flavours and tastes, the recipes are compiled.

"Sometimes I write up to 300 recipes in one month, and then nothing for quite some time. However, it is important to read a lot and you are inspired by ideas from other recipe books. You can expand on this and also adapt it to your own style."

Rinette likes food to be interesting and to have height. With our visit to Berghof she had started working on winter menus and, with venison plentiful in the region, she likes to include this in the recipes. In winter, venison regularly appears in the casseroles and consommés on her menus

In the dining room, where Lee Glietenberg's dream of entertaining the Führer never came true, but where other famous people, including German opera singer Erna Zack and the Dutch prince, William of Orange, were entertained, Rinette often caters for functions. For major functions, a buffet meal serves well and the challenge for Rinette is to serve up something different and to make it interesting and original. If Rinette could have a dream for Berghof and the Free State it would be to plant the fields around Berghof with herbs such as lavender, and to succeed in getting people away from tunnel vision about food – and then to prepare a feast for them.

Berghof [Tel: (051) 433-1944, Fax: (051) 433-1946] is situated on the eeufees road Extension (R700), between Noordstad Centre and the Shell Pitstop, which is approximately 2km from the N1 Bloemfontein.