

Celebrating 21 years of mouth-watering delights from SA's culinary scene

Iconic American Express Dining Awards programme relaunches in a new format to mark its 21st anniversary

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American Express (Amex) is celebrating the 21st anniversary of the American Express Dining Awards by revitalising the programme in an entirely new format. Recognised as one of the leading showcases of South Africa's unique culinary scene, this year the awards will be expanded to feature a number of new categories. The intention is to recognise establishments that excel in a number of different categories, as well as those that tick all the boxes for what an incredible culinary experience is all about.

"We felt it was important to reflect the flavour of an ever-changing food scene in the country and introduce a new twist to the programme," says Chris Wood, Head of American Express South Africa. "The restaurant industry has gone through a number of revolutions since we launched more than two decades ago and we felt it important to highlight these developments not only in how we assess, but how we recognise the restaurants that continue to shine."

Judging will take place in the following categories:

- **American Express Restaurant of the Year:** For the restaurant that receives the highest rating in all categories from the panel of well-known and respected judges;
- **American Express Members' Choice:** For the best restaurant as reviewed by American Express card holders;
- **Best Newcomer:** For the best new restaurant to debut on the Awards list;
- **Best-Kept Secret:** For the restaurant that isn't on everyone's radar, but deserves to be;
- **Pioneer Chef:** For the visionary chef who has introduced creative and ground-breaking innovations;
- **Young Talent:** For an ambitious new talent; a young chef under the age of 30 who is running his or her own restaurant, a sommelier with a unique approach, or a waiter with a special talent for delivering excellent service;
- **Pure SA:** For a restaurant that boldly celebrates inclusivity and community; one in which the both the food and the ambience is uniquely South African;
- **Service:** For service excellence from the time diners make their booking until the time they leave the restaurant;
- **Wine:** For the most comprehensive wine selection and the most knowledgeable and professional sommelier service; and
- **Style:** For an establishment with unique style and flair.

The new format will demonstrate the brand's alignment with the lifestyle interests of its customers, especially focusing on the established presence of American Express in the culinary space.

"The American Express Dining Awards expresses how we do more than provide secure and efficient payments to meet your everyday needs, we give our customers access to entertainment and lifestyle experiences, as well as offering businesses with the powerful backing they need to provide these world class experiences. Our personal and professional lives are more and more intertwined, with food consistently being a central theme across both.," adds Wood.

An experienced panel of foodie and lifestyle judges will already have embarked on the start of a countrywide tour when this article goes to print in order to assess the local dining landscape as it has never been reviewed before. Judging will be done using comprehensive scorecards that will focus on the total dining experience, taking into account the food, wine, level of innovation, service and ambience that make for a truly memorable meal. The awards ceremonies will be held in both Cape Town and Johannesburg in October and will be attended by prominent foodies from around the country.

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