

The new delivery menu model - Q&A with James Gaag of La Colombe

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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As part of our #LockdownLessons series, Bizcommunity is reaching out to South Africa's top industry players to share their experience of the current Covid-19 crisis, how their organisations are navigating these unusual times, where the challenges and opportunities lie and their industry outlook for the near future.

Executive chef James Gaag of the award-winning fine-dining restaurant, La Colombe, shares his lockdown lessons and how he and La Colombe are navigating and responding to the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent nationwide lockdown.



Chef James Gaag

■ What was your initial response to the crisis/lockdown and has your experience of it been different from what you expected?

To be honest, I never thought it would affect us as directly or as quickly as it has. We were travelling when we heard about the speed at which Covid-19 was spreading - returning home, shutting down the restaurant all happened very quickly and felt quite surreal. The fact that we had to be tested due to our recent travels also reiterated the severity of the circumstances.

■ Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the hospitality industry?

It has been absolutely devastating to the industry, not just locally but globally. South Africa was among the first to be locked down and will be one of the last to reopen. As many businesses depend on good summer tourism, which was cut incredibly short this year, we will likely need quite some time to recover. We really can't overstate how tough circumstances currently are, both for business owners and staff.



■ *How is La Colombe responding to the crisis and current lockdown?*

We have launched the La Colombe Dine-In Experience, a nine-course tasting menu for diners to enjoy at home. This initiative was developed by our team, with all profits going towards trying to keep them afloat during this difficult time. It's also a chance for diners to enjoy a special meal that they could otherwise only experience in our restaurant - including the signature Tuna 'La Colombe'.

■ *Comment on the challenges and opportunities.*

It was particularly challenging to create a fine-dining tasting menu that could not only withstand being transported but also delivers the taste, presentation and overall experience diners have come to expect from us. We are trying to create a memorable meal for our diners, that is as close to dining at the restaurant, in the comfort of your own home, which meant the skill and execution of each dish needed to be perfectly executed, as we don't have the dining room atmosphere or front of house team, which usually are huge contributing factors to the dining experience.



■ *How have you had to change the way you work?*

Apart from face masks and strict hygiene and sanitation protocols, we are still having loads of fun doing what we do. We haven't changed much of how we work - the focus is still on serving the very best food we can, in the most creative and delicious way.

■ *Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of the hospitality industry?*

I am optimistic the hospitality industry will bounce back and be even stronger than before.

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▣ ***Any trends you've seen emerge as a result of the crisis?***

I think people are trying to stay true to their brands, at least, that is what we're trying to do at La Colombe.

▣ ***Your top tip for staying sane during the lockdown?***

Find a hobby. Do all the things you've always wanted to do but have put off. Spend time with your loved ones, if possible.



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▣ ***How do you hope restaurants and the hospitality industry and humanity, in general, can come out of this pandemic better and stronger?***

I hope that restaurants have taken the time to reassess their businesses, streamline them and reinvent themselves. Perhaps they are now discovering or being forced into new ways that they have not had the time or the opportunity to explore before. Many may find this is the new normal going forward and do incredibly well at it. I think we will all need to adapt and change to come out of it stronger.

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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