



AVELINOKENPHOTOGRAPHY

## CHEF'S TABLE

**Vusumuzi Ndlovu's determination to "kick ass" takes the 28-year-old chef to Italy in June, representing the continent at the San Pellegrino Young Chef Awards**

One of the earliest memories for me and all those that I grew up with is my cousin's butternut soup. The whole family would get together and feast on an impressive spread. I remember being in the kitchen helping with scones and just watching the soup being made. What blew my mind is how such a simple act made everyone at the table feel.

Growing up, my aunts and cousins made yummy food and everyone loved it. They would be the most popular people at the family gatherings; everyone knew that if you got on their bad side you would be getting a small portion or nothing at all.

After I matriculated in 2009 there was an idea to study engineering but I wasn't too keen for it. So I just applied for a bunch of jobs, the Sheraton Hotel in Pretoria called and I thought I'd give it a bash. Since then I've worked at Greenhouse at The Cellars-Hohenort (Cape Town), Five Hundred (Johannesburg), De Wulf (Belgium), and now at The Pot Luck Club pop up at The Marabi Club in Johannesburg.

When I first started working, it was far from love at first bite. In a nutshell, it was a "deer in the headlights" kind of feeling. Everyone was speaking in code and

shouting at me to go faster. I remember ending my first shift and just watching chef videos on YouTube. I was determined to kick ass the next day.

Right now, my routine varies. On a normal day, we come in, greet the guys, and tackle the most time-consuming jobs and the technical stuff: making sure the guys are on track, calling a supplier who promised to send something but didn't, and so on. There'll also be a meeting about something so I sit in on that. Then as the day winds down we make it a point to have our guys sit down for a bit. In our kitchen the senior guys will be in trenches so I'll push on with service then end the day with a gin and tonic.

People would be surprised by the intensity that goes into preparing something seemingly simple. The trial and error we go through before a dish is put on the menu is also crazy. But the emotions you can evoke with food always excite me. Also, the people you get to meet are surreal; you make friends for life in this world. I always pay respects to Peter Tempelhoff, David Higgs, Kobe Desramaults, and Luke Dale-Roberts. The things I've learnt from these great chefs vary but these are lessons I'd never trade for anything. So I make it a point to thank them.

Anyone who knows me can confirm that I hate waking up in the morning, that's a major personal challenge. But the ability to continue to evolve is something I welcome. We can go on about knife skills and the like, but I think your mentality and attitude need to be on point to do well. Everything else follows after that. ●

Interview by **Eugene Yiga**