



No jacket required

Chef Christophe Dehosse champions classic French bistro cooking at The Vine Bistro

WORDS & IMAGES: KIT HEATHCOCK

If French cuisine makes you imagine sophisticated dining, incomprehensible menus, intimidating waiters and a jacket-and-tie dress code, The Vine Bistro defies those stereotypes.

Two years ago when Glenelly Wine Estate's redoubtable 93-year-old French owner May de Lencquesaing was talking to chef Christophe Dehosse of Joostenberg Bistro about a food offering to do justice to her flagship wines, he was definite about the style they should go for. "I wanted people to come and feel comfortable, relaxed, convivial," he says. "Our food is classic French food, but what is classic French? It's a big subject, a big country with three or four different climates and many regions."

At the Vine Bistro, Christophe cooks the unapologetically robust and classic fare of the old-school French bistro. Everything is made in-house. It's the food of the Gallic countryside, where nose-to-tail is a way of life, not a fashion, where local ingredients have always been the focus and where the crusty bread isn't a separate course but stays on the table to mop up those last delicious drops of sauce from your plate.

We happily devoured the excellent home-made sourdough and baguette, first to do justice to creamy spiced

piccalilli that went with beautifully smoky grilled octopus and chermoula, then to savour the last vestiges of intensely lemon risotto with succulent chunks of porcini mushroom, topped with crispy lemon verbena leaves – love at first bite.

Plating is generous and unfussy: tender springbok loin surrounded by light and herby gnocchi Parisienne and a fresh, crunchy kale and almond salad; and superb braised pork cheeks and trotter, rich and groaning with flavour, a classic done to perfection, with more bread to soak up the gorgeous gravy.

You could sit on the peaceful terrace all day, dallying with frozen berry parfait and meringue, and lingering over coffee, butter biscuits and chocolate truffles, with stunning views over vine-clad hillsides and Stellenbosch mountains, but leave time to wander through Madame de Lencquesaing's incredible glass collection – from Roman vessels through art deco to contemporary art pieces. Also visit the upstairs tasting room to sample more of the estate's excellent wines. The award-winning flagship Lady May single vineyard cabernet sauvignon blend sums up the whole ambience at Glenelly – classic French elegance well-rooted in its vibrant South African setting.