

Behind the Kirton at Foxcroft Restaurant



By Eugene Yiga

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One of the big winners at last year's Eat Out Mercedes-Benz Restaurant Awards was [La Colombe](#). The restaurant, ranked second place for the second time, won the inaugural Eat Out John Psillos Award for Outstanding Contribution to Service for front-of-house manager [Jennifer Hugé](#) as well as the Eat Out Nespresso Service Excellence Award. Scot Kirton, who won the S.Pellegrino Chef of the Year Award in 2015, was also the first ever winner of the Retail Capital New Restaurant Award for [Foxcroft](#).



Created in partnership with pastry chef Glen Foxcroft Williams, Foxcroft is rightly described as “a casual, welcoming and carefully considered experience”. Highlights on the tapas menu include yellowtail ceviche, tuna crudo, and lamb ribs. Meanwhile, main courses boast the likes of chalmar beef (with duck fat chips, carrot, brussels and café au lait) and seven-day dry aged duck breast (with turnips, fermented plum, gem squash and kale). And if you don't have room for dessert, stop by the on-site bakery for some sweet treats to take home.



Born to be a chef

“From the early days, as far back as I can remember, I’ve always been cooking,” says chef Scot Kirton. “There was pretty much nothing else I was really good at. I tried a couple of other things after school, but everything always drew me back to food.”



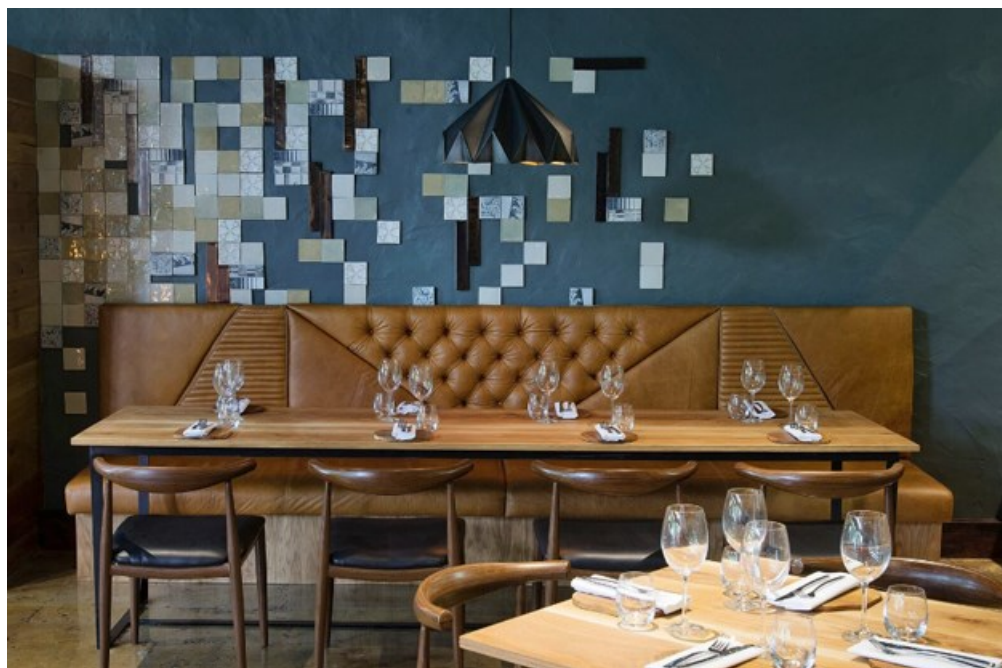
Scot Kirton and Glen Foxcroft Williams

Rather than embark on formal study to hone his culinary skills, Kirton went straight into the world of restaurants. In 2001, he began at Haute Cabrière in Franschhoek and worked his way up to sous chef. Six years later, he found himself at the acclaimed Savoy Grill in London (one of Gordon Ramsay’s restaurants). And two years after that, he came back to South Africa to work alongside Luke Dale-Roberts as sous chef at La Colombe.

“Luke is probably the biggest inspiration in my life,” he says. “From the moment I went for a trial with him at La Colombe, we decided that we wanted to make it the number one restaurant in the country. That was always the aim and that’s what we did.”

Moving into a new venue

The restaurant received the top honours at the Eat Out Awards in 2008 and 2009. But in 2010, Dale-Roberts left to open The Test Kitchen, which won the title of best restaurant in the country for the fifth year in a row at last year's annual event. La Colombe went through another major change when, in October 2014, it moved from Constantia Uitsig Estate to Silvermist Organic Wine Estate at the top of Constantia Nek.



“It was quite a risky move in the beginning,” says Kirton, who is now a part-owner of La Colombe. “People didn’t think it was the best idea. But it’s been an incredible move. The patrons have taken to it and we’ve been almost fully booked since day one. It’s also given us a new lease on life and inspired us to be better.”

Indeed, Kirton says that the new venue has done “wonders for everyone” and that he’s never been happier as a chef. Perhaps it’s not surprising. After all, with its panoramic views of the Constantia Valley and its own organic garden, the new La Colombe gives him a chance to feed his creative muse every day.

“The hardest thing about being a chef is finding inspiration and coming up with new ideas,” he says. “Sometimes you get trapped in a shell where you can’t be creative. The hardest part is coming out of that shell and coming up with different flavour combinations to evolve the restaurant and keep guests coming back for more. If you can get that right, you can do anything.”



The source of Kirton's inspiration

Fortunately for Kirton, inspiration comes from many different places and in many different forms. It could be as simple as a new set of crockery, new books, or new ingredients as the seasons change throughout the year. He also finds inspiration from his travels, having created a pine-smoked trout dish after a walk in the forest and changing three-quarters of the menu when he returned from a recent trip to Spain.



"We start by looking at what the season holds and then we try to think outside the box," he says. "Every dish has to be unique and original, [which] sometimes means that it takes weeks to master. But with every dish, we try to do something special that guests can remember for a lifetime. It's not just a meal; it's an experience."

The belief that anything is possible is a philosophy Kirton celebrates, as is his view that one should cook from the heart. And besides creating incredible dishes that satisfy guests, one of the things he loves most about his work is teaching the younger generation and seeing them grow. He describes it as a "great honour" to watch them come up through the ranks and evolve into talented chefs.



"It doesn't matter how good you think you are; you can always make things better," he says. "That's what I keep telling myself. You should never stop learning, because it's never good enough. It's the only way to keep going forward and to keep evolving."

Learn more at www.foxcroft.co.za.

Photography by Claire Gunn Photography

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneyiga.com, follow @eugeneyiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneyiga.com to say, um, hello.

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