

Flaming good al-fresco dining

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Staff reporter

ANDRÉ Venter of Smokey Flame Catering is in the early stages of creating a mobile horse-float restaurant specialising in al-fresco fine dining.

Mr Venter's passion for cooking started when he was in the army in South Africa, taking ingredients back to the bunks and creating meals with his friends. After the army, he travelled the world for five years working in various restaurants, to learn "how different societies cook and prepare food in different ways". He went on to own and operate his own over-land travel business in Africa, in which he cooked three meals a day for his guests, and then a catering company in the wine region of South Africa for eight years.

Mr Venter immigrated to New Zealand and has now been running Smokey Flame Catering for the past two years.

As he caters mostly for weddings and corporate functions, he said the main purpose of the float restaurant was for people to taste the Smokey Flame menu before their event.

However, he also wanted to supply an "out-of-the-box experience" unlike anything else available in the region.

"So much has changed in the world in the past two years," Mr Venter said.

"I noticed that some people have a desire (including myself) to experience something different in these restricted times. I looked at a horse float and thought why not make a tiny restaurant from it?"

Since promoting the concept on social media he has been "blown away" by the interest, with people loving the idea of a tiny restaurant that travels to them.

The horse float restaurant accommodates up to six people, providing a four- to six-course meal at a location of the customer's choosing within an 80-kilometre radius of Whakatāne.

Mr Venter can cook many types of cuisines, from Middle Eastern to Mexican, and is keen on also doing takeaways. He will develop a menu based on the desires of his customers.

"The only cuisine I don't do is Japanese," he said. "I'd rather let the Japanese do it as they do it best."

His favourite dish he recommends for customers is slow-cooked beef cheeks in a reduced red wine sauce, as it has "intense flavours, and can be served with most veges and salads".

While meat is the "most common" feature of his cooking, he can easily adapt and cater for vegetarians and vegans if requested.

Mr Venter is passionate about using local produce – he uses 90 percent local ingredients in

his cooking.

He also supports "urban farming" as a way for communities working together and living off the land.

"For example, I will take out the entire lawn and I will plant vegetables such as corn, but my neighbour will plant potatoes, and the next guy will swap tomatoes, and then we will all swap vegetables ... this is to self-empower people to have food all the time, without going to get groceries."

Win a meal

TO launch the horse float tiny mobile restaurant, Smokey Flame Catering is giving Eastern Bay people a chance to win a dine-in experience for six valued at \$480.

The winner and their friends will enjoy a delicious multi-course menu that includes smoked pork belly, slow-cooked beef cheeks and a variety of salads, finishing with popular South African malva pudding – served in the horse float restaurant at a place of their choosing within 80km of Whakatāne.

For details on how to enter, go to the Smokey Flame Catering Facebook Page or the website www.smokeyflame.com



NO HORSEING AROUND: André Venter of Smokey Flame Catering has travelled the world learning cuisines.

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