

KLEIN JAN

a culinary celebration of time and place

The joy of dining at Klein JAN starts from reservation. The highly anticipated world-class destination dining is worthy of a flight... from anywhere in the world. It's a taste trek like no other.



Photograph by JAN Innovation Studio

THE TRUE APPRECIATION OF DINING AT KLEIN JAN IS elongated; anticipation builds

from reservation, and the gastronomic experience becomes an indelible memory, sitting in your heart forever. After a short game drive and chat to our now-favourite meerkats, we stopped in what felt like the middle of nowhere. A warm welcome followed that included hand-washing, and we took our seats in the nostalgic Boscia House.

The culinary journey began with a trilogy of delectable bites that each told a story – a braai broodjie macaron, gemsbok biltong and Boscia lamington and goat's cheese-stuffed Augrabies Kalamata olive. We sipped on Orange River Cellars sparkling wine from Upington, the first of many local wines to be paired with artfully plated dishes, appreciating the décor of yesteryear.

Ingredients of the veld

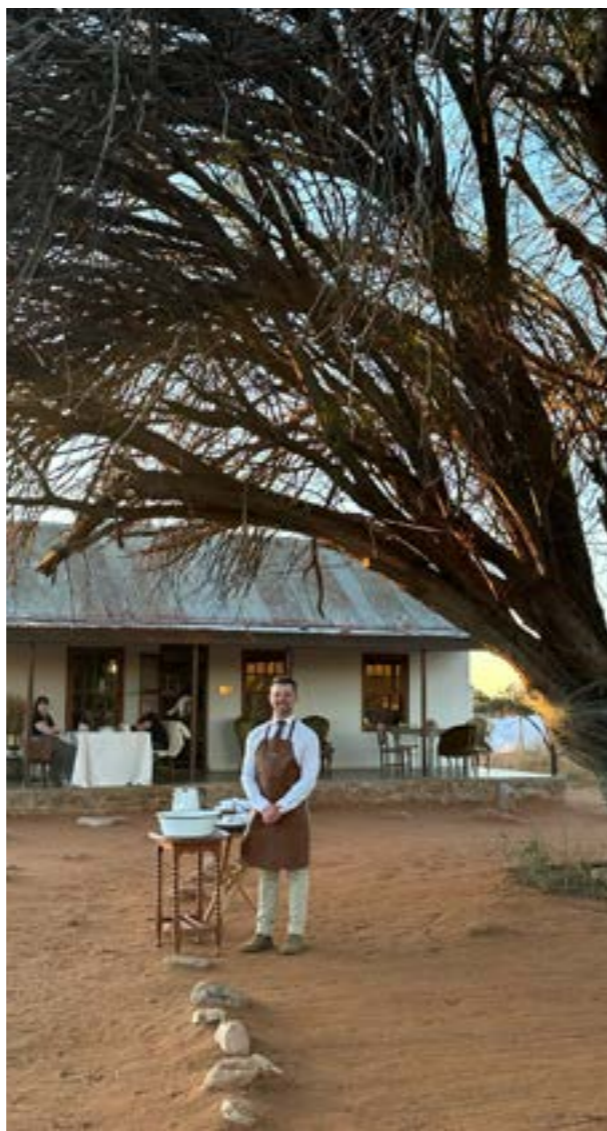
As the sun set behind the windmill we were led into what looked like a rudimentary metal building, then down the helix stairwell, gaping, into the root cellar, this architectural feat a reminder of the value of water. It was in this 'fridge', four metres below the red earth, that we drooled on the vast array of local ingredients, preserves and cheeses. All too soon we moved into the 'room of a thousand delights' to sip on veggie soup whilst admiring chef Jan Hendrik's vast cookbook collection and his Ouma's stove.

The juxtaposition between what reminded me of my granny's kitchen and the modern, sleek Infinity Room (named for the vastness of the view) was extreme. Here chefs were putting the final touches to the pap, kaiings and Kalahari truffle. It was a joy to watch them at work, and to interact with them as they served their dishes to the tables, widely spaced apart for guests to continue enjoying the intimacy that Tswalu offers.

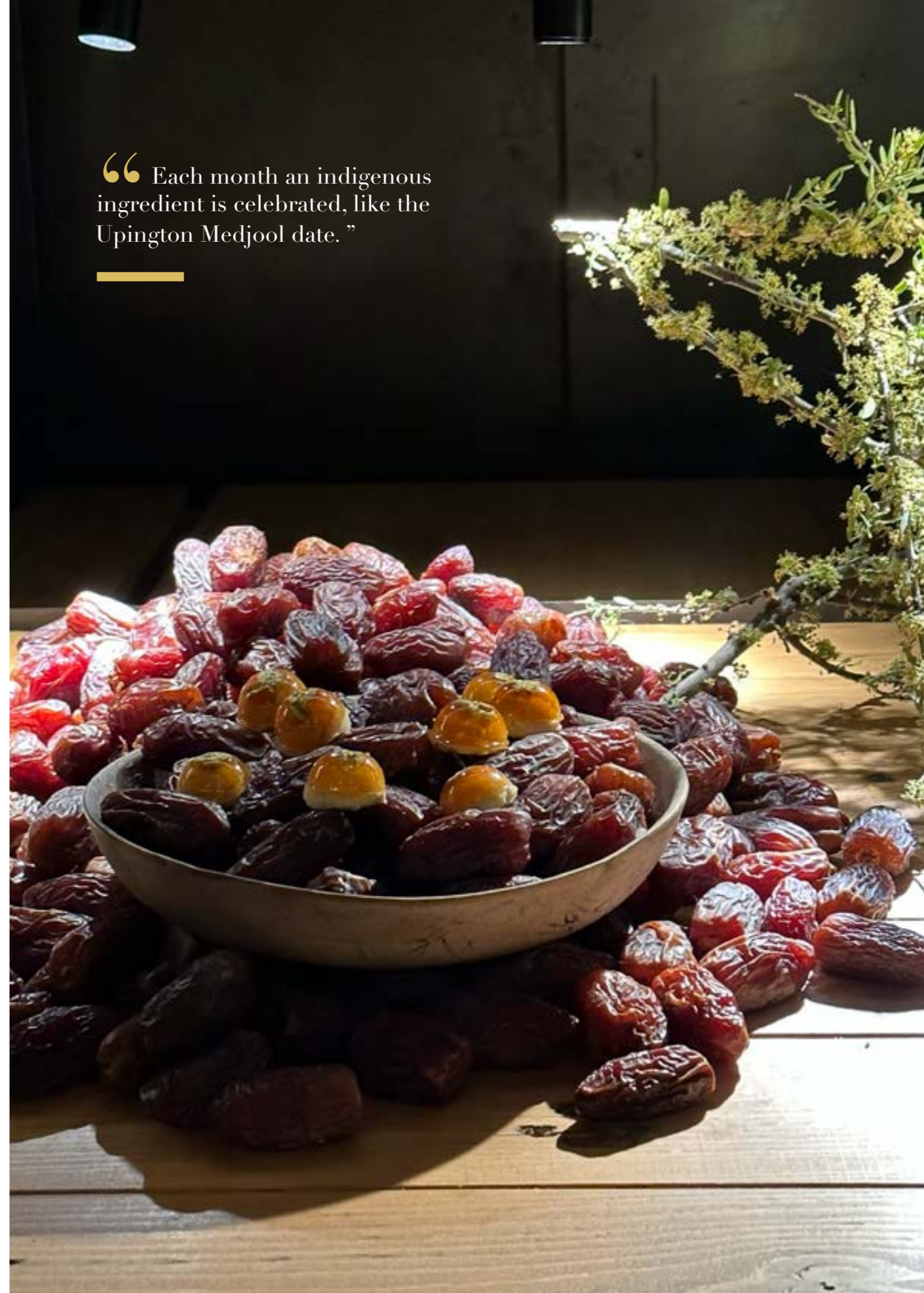
“ The Kalahari truffle is rare, only appearing every four years because they depend on climatic events. They have a mild, earthy taste and light, mushroom perfume.

The main course of Bonsmara beef with hard red barley, cauliflower and ruby grapefruit, was as aromatically arresting as tasty. We returned to the 'room of a thousand delights' to choose from the wide selection of unique local cheeses made by Oom Tiaan, to be enjoyed with amagwinya and dombolo breads, and root cellar preserves like makataan.

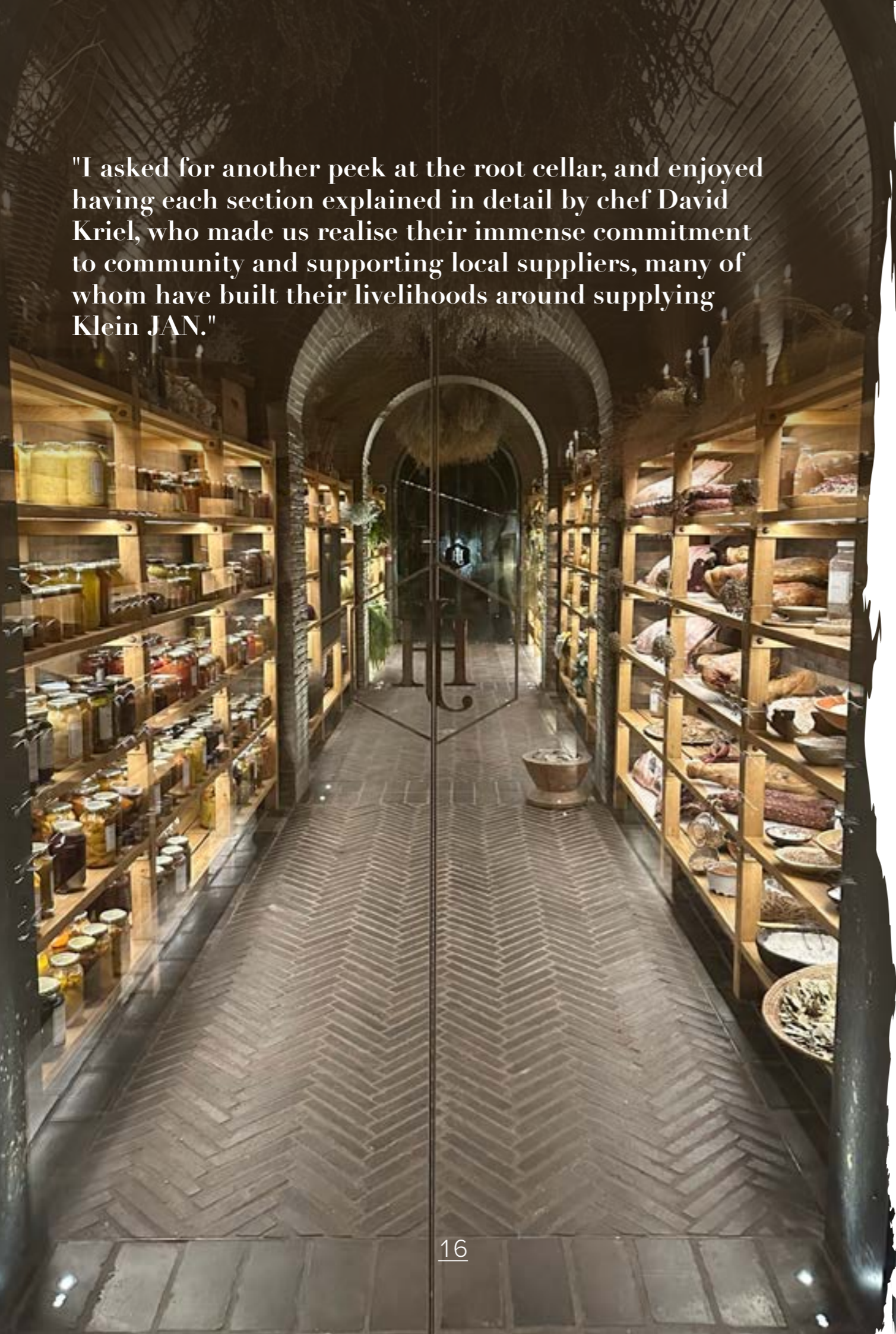
“ Makataan, wild watermelon, is not eaten fresh but instead preserved as candied melon or poached in kombucha....delicious when enjoyed with cheese.



“ Each month an indigenous ingredient is celebrated, like the Uppington Medjool date.”



"I asked for another peek at the root cellar, and enjoyed having each section explained in detail by chef David Kriel, who made us realise their immense commitment to community and supporting local suppliers, many of whom have built their livelihoods around supplying Klein JAN."



“The inspiration behind Klein JAN did not come from a desire to create a fine-dining experience in the middle of the Kalahari. It came from the heart – from the tables of my childhood.”

JAN HENDRIK VAN DER WESTHUIZEN



A fitting finale

It was back to the table, where our featherlight napkins had been replaced. The grass bread was presented with grasses in a jug for us to ‘harvest’ – another special touch. The odyssey involved using all your senses. An all-white dessert labelled ‘sweet saturn’ was an enchanting ode to the women in Jan Hendrik’s life, exhibited in flavours of naartjie, cinnamon and aniseed. We broke through the light meringue to reveal naartjie compote and fresh naartjie, melkkos ice cream and cinnamon-infused sago pudding. Cream from the camel thorn pods, roasted to give it a coffee flavour, was poured on top as the crescendo.

The Mesquite tree coffee, sans caffeine, brought the unforgettable culinary drive of the delights of the Northern Cape to a close, served with Orange River brandy raisins. The drive back under the light of the full moon gave us time to discuss and appreciate our stellar dining experience.

A VISION AND DREAM REALISED

It takes true leadership and talent to harness the energies of other chefs to live your dream, consistently. Jessica Fourie, executive sous chef, takes her role of cooking and serving appreciative diners, seriously. She is a local lass from Olifantshoek 200 km away, who studied at the Warwick Culinary School in Hermanus. “Every season comes with different challenges, and everything that grows is dependent on rain. The menu is a representation of the land; a light needs to be shone on it. The menu represents all cultures. It’s experimental, a storytelling of new ingredients. It’s a team effort, we are in the middle of nowhere, so one needs to be an all-rounder. I was an introvert, but working here I have grown as a person. It was initially hard to be in the open kitchen, but when you are in the room you can see the joy on peoples’ faces.”

OLD AND NEW

Klein JAN is an expression of old memories that create indelible gastronomic experiences for the diners. It’s the story of new ingredients and a celebration of heritage that pays homage to Mother Nature. Some guests enjoy it as part of the Tswalu experience, others drive in for Sunday lunch to witness the tale of an iconic, passionate chef and those who bring his vision to life with emotion and flavour. 🍷

