

# THE RESTAURANT

CAFÉ HEMINGWAY'S,  
JOHANNESBURG

The sun also rises on this eatery, despite its odd location, **Shanthini Naidoo** found

**F**LAVOUR is to food as irony is to literature. Both should be plentiful to satisfy a discerning consumer. Irony, flavour and bites of literature are all to be found at Café Hemingway's.

The irony is that this elegant spot, with its fine attention to detail (French butter is one of the few ready-made ingredients they use) is at the edge of a dust bowl.

The restaurant produces artistic meals with delicate touches, in a shopping centre more suited to a mechanic looking for spare parts who might grab a bunny chow on his way out. Luckily, an avid reader knows not to judge a book by its cover.

A sunny, circular deck that warrants a drive along the R55, near the Kyalami race track, is walled by tall glass covered in muslin curtains and lit by fairy lights at night. The menu is a treat of literary references and cheekiness, each dish named after a famous character. Modern like Katniss, a meaty, robust dish, or age-old Voltaire, the perfectly French croissant. The menu's quotable quotes



A MOVEABLE FEAST: Literary touches abound on the menu and the walls; above right, 'Sally Phelps' crispy tofu with flavour pearls

and poems might keep a person busy, such as the Polish proverb: "Fish, to taste right, must swim three times — in water, in butter, and in wine;" which my companion took the time to recite.

But there is food to be tried from the menu of enthusiastic young chef Shaun Janse van Rensburg. We started with the juices of the day, freshly squeezed and served in petite Consol jars (R32). A super boost of carrot, ginger and pineapple.

Breakfasts look lovely, particularly the English (Mr Darcy, R78). Gourmet burgers are signature dishes, including veg options like the Zhivago, a falafel and quinoa burger with grilled mushrooms and tomato, topped with smoky mozzarella (R78).

Hannibal is a grilled rare sirloin topped with rocket, brie, Hemingway's savoury marmalade and toasted pine nuts (R84).

We chose a *Huckleberry Finn* character, Sally Phelps: "crispy tofu with Shaun's artisan Asian dipping sauce" (R85) which did not make mention of the best touch: flavour pearls.

Usually, these spherified pearls are annoying to eat, slip off your fork, taste of nothing and burst weirdly. These were deeply flavoured with soy, wasabi and seaweed, which meant we did not need much of Shaun's reduced gingery soy sauce, good as it was.

Mains take a while, the chef says, because they make their own "everything". But people seem happy to linger, to Google the characters and work out if the dish refers to the Horton Who Heard a Who! or some other Horton; or to read the wall which is redone every three months with more clever quotes in pretty fonts.

Our handmade linguine was slightly heavy, but delicious in both versions: coriander and lime prawns, which came with unannounced but tasty cream and parmesan, and basil pesto with seasonal veggies and napoletana sauce.



Desserts are named after temptresses. Lisbeth, a chocolate mess, was delivered with a note to eat all of it — the ice-cream bowl was made of white Belgian chocolate. It came with a slice of rich, dark cake and a dreamy sauce. No wonder pastry chef Engela Hennig's high teas are booked as far as Easter next year.

We hear Jane Austen — scones dripping with butter, organic cream and artisanal strawberry jam — is a reason to return.

Janse van Rensburg says there are exciting things happening. Along with their craft beer selection, flower teas and fine dining and wining at personalised chef's tables, they will be holding gastronomy events. "What we are about is a dining experience, for people to feel the creation and processes that go into making interesting but delicious food."

I'm told the reason for the odd location is that a coffee shop and its employees were rescued after it was forced to close its doors. No more judging book covers.

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