

**KOBUS'S  
PARISIAN**

**'KOMBUIS'**



TUCKED AWAY IN THE BACKSTREETS OF PARIS LIES A SOUTH AFRICAN SANCTUM OPENED BY OUDTSHOORN NATIVE KOBUS BOTHA. THE SO-CALLED 'BRAAI KING' CHATS ABOUT HIS COOKBOOK, HIS DISHES AND WHY HE LOVES BEING ABLE TO SHARE THE HERITAGE THAT MAKES SO MANY SOUTH AFRICANS SMILE

Story and photographs by JAN HENDRIK VAN DER WESTHUIZEN Recipes by KOBUS BOTHA



**A**s another expat living in France, I simply couldn't wait to visit My Food Montreuil, the community restaurant that is currently on everyone's lips.

The South African eatery, located in the backstreets of Paris, serves braaivleis, boerewors with pep and chakalaka, potbrood and bobotie, kerrievis and malva pudding, alongside home-brewed ginger beer and a pot of good old Mrs Balls. Montreuil is but a few minutes on the metro to Paris's outskirts, and home to a surprisingly diverse community comprising Europeans, Africans,



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Asians, Arabs, movie stars, manual labourers and writers. It is home to the 'bobos' – the bohemian bourgeoisie.

I find myself standing outside 22 Rue Robespierre, the restaurant nestled between two old buildings, staring up at a towering Kobus Botha. The streets of the area remind me of Woodstock in Cape Town, or the 'old Yeoville', filled with vendors selling roots, spices and grains. My Food Montreuil has no signage. "People have to know where it is," says Kobus, who grew up on a farm in Oudtshoorn in the Klein Karoo. He treats me to a welcoming drink – his signature cocktail of brandy and Pongrácz – as we stand in the sunshine next to his large 'bakkie', maybe the only one in Paris, double-parked in the street.

Now known as the 'Braai King' in Paris, Kobus opened his restaurant in 2008, where he serves the food he likes. "It's like inviting guests into my dining room," Kobus says as we walk through the courtyard to find his personally designed structure on which he does all his outdoor grilling over an open fire. Following in the footsteps of a former movie producer and

underwater hunter, his big beard, hat and warm smile make me feel like I'm visiting an old friend. As he begins to light the braai, Kobus fills me in on his former restaurant in Provence, which was all organic and "smart", but he felt it lacked something and, eventually, decided to create a bit of South Africa in France, giving him the freedom to do things the way he likes to in Montreuil.

As the smell of roasted peppers and smoke from the braai fill the air, and South African jazz plays softly in the background, Kobus starts to carve a piece of biltong. He smiles as he tells me he will soon be supplying Paris's world-renowned food store Galeries Lafayette with his famous biltong. Chatting away, we move indoors to the kitchen where the potbrood has just come out of the oven. Running the kitchen is Bangladeshi cook Karim Rejaul, who burnt cold water when he first started working for Kobus. After a few years of training, by Kobus himself, Karim now cooks South African fare "almost better than me," says Kobus.

Kobus's mom, 'tannie Neelsie', visits him for a few months once a year to



make sure everything is going well. He also dedicated his cookbook to her – *Barbecue & autres recettes d'Afrique du Sud* – recently released in France.

While meals are being prepared, Kobus joins his guests at their tables – you'd never find that in a French restaurant, but South African hospitality makes this natural. Kobus knows he is in the food capital and he loves the idea that he can now share the heritage that makes so many South Africans smile.

After the meal, for the first time in my four years of living in France, it does not even cross my mind to stop on my way back at the oh-so-tempting boulangerie on Rue Saint-Denis for a crispy baguette filled with matured Comté cheese and ham, or my favourite vanilla pastry from Pierre Hermé. Nee dankie! I am more than content with my 'braai broodjie' and five-star 'braaivleis'!

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“Following in the footsteps of a former movie producer and underwater hunter, his big beard, hat and warm smile make me feel like I’m visiting an old friend.”



“The chicken should be ready in about 45 minutes. Longer than an hour is called ‘tantric chicken’ and can only be done with low, constant heat, but it becomes dry and shrivelled if you are not experienced.”

KOBUS AND HIS MOTHER, NEELSIE BOTHA



## Bread

*I use a basic bread recipe for all the breads we make in the restaurant (potbrood, roosterkoek, vetkoek, steamed bread, melkkos and snyseels, etc.), but the cooking is just different. It is one of the great joys in life to bake your own bread and I wish I could convince everybody to start doing it. It is like taking care of your baby – you think it is going to be hard, but it turns out to be a huge pleasure*  
Serves 8 EASY 1 hr

### THE FLAVOUR COMBINATIONS

5ml (1 tsp) sugar  
600ml lukewarm water  
5ml (1 tsp) dry yeast  
10ml (2 tsp) salt  
1kg white bread flour + extra, to dust (for roosterkoek)

salted butter, to serve

### HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Heat an iron pot up in the oven at 220°C (for potbrood) or light your fire and leave it to burn to the coals (for roosterkoek).
- 2 Mix the sugar with 250ml (1 cup)





water and the yeast, and let it stand, about 5 minutes. The yeast will activate and start making little bubbles.

3 Mix the salt and flour together thoroughly. Add the yeasty water to the remaining water, pour into the flour, stir and start kneading once it gets too thick to stir. (I advise the use of a machine or an apprentice.) The dough is ready when it becomes supple and velvety to the touch and you can stretch it, without breaking, to form a thin layer that you can almost see through.

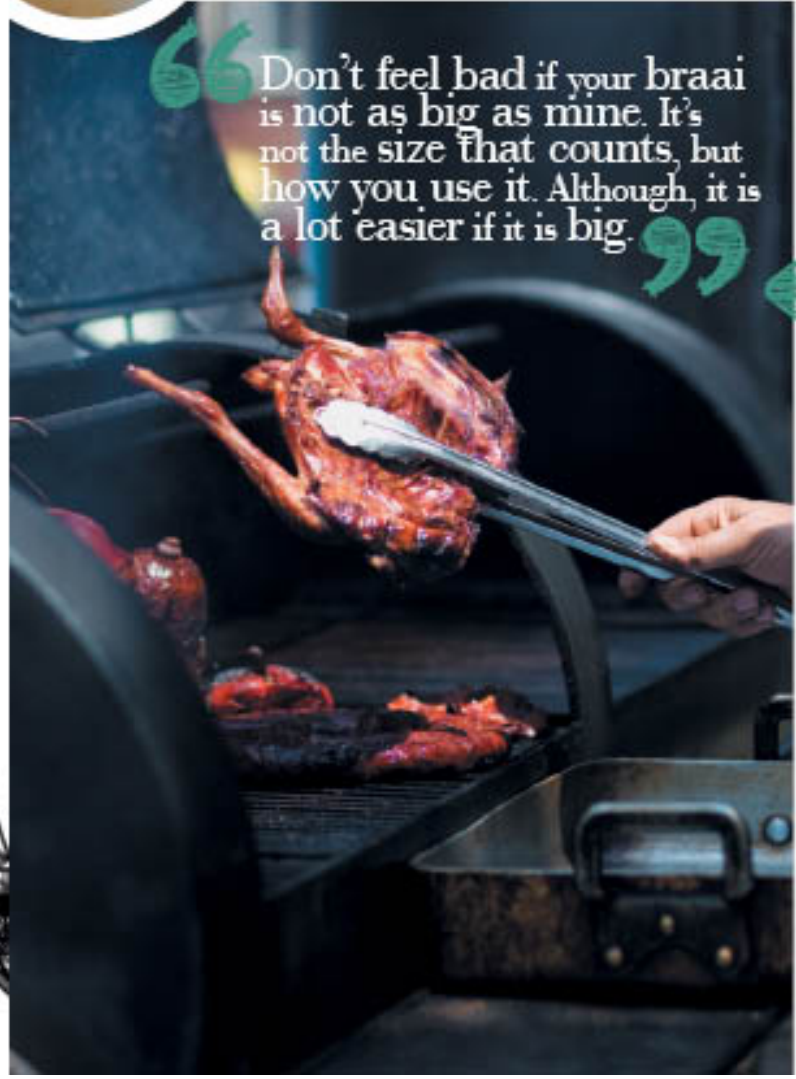
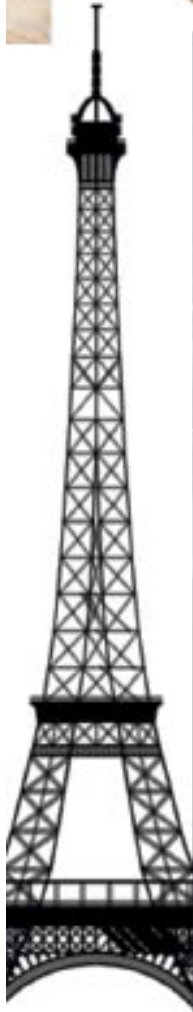
4 Leave the dough, covered, to rise until you are impressed. Form into whatever shape you wish to make – smaller balls for roosterkoek, or a big ball for the pot.

5 For potbrood, take the iron pot out of the oven, put the dough in (your dough should be about a third of the size of your pot), score it a few times in criss-cross fashion – about 1cm deep as this helps the bread to rise fast without having to tear the outer, hard crust – put the lid on and place in the oven, 40 minutes (longer if you have a big pot with lots of dough). Do this quickly, keeping the oven door closed. This makes a spectacular bread because the humidity in the pot stays high and, along with the high temperature, makes the bread rise fast and high, and it results in a golden, thick crust.

6 For roosterkoek, dust the dough balls with flour and braai over medium-hot coals. Turn when they become golden. Once coloured on top and bottom, do the sides too. They are ready when you tap them and they sound hollow.

7 Serve both breads with some salted butter.

“Don't feel bad if your braai is not as big as mine. It's not the size that counts, but how you use it. Although, it is a lot easier if it is big.”



### Chicken

Serves 6 EASY 50 mins

#### THE FLAVOUR COMBINATIONS

- 1 farm chicken
- salt, to dust
- peri-peri mix, to dust

#### HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Cut open the chicken on the breast bone. Press it open until you crack the spine and it is flat. (Us professionals call this a 'flat chicken'.) Loosen the wings if they are tucked in. Remove any extra fat on the inside, cut off the neck skin flaps and other bits of loose skin. Dust the chicken with salt and peri-peri mix.
- 2 Barbecue the chicken indirectly with medium-hot coals – like in a kettle braai, with the fire on one side and the chicken on the other, with the lid closed. Braai for 45 minutes, turning the chicken once halfway through the process.
- 3 When ready, serve with mixed braai'd vegetables and warm roosterkoek.



## Chakalaka

Serves 6 **EASY** 40 mins

### THE FLAVOUR COMBINATIONS

- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, roughly grated
- 3 tomatoes, chopped
- 15ml (1 tbsp) curry powder
- ¼ cabbage, sliced
- salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- pinch cayenne pepper (optional)
- 1 x 410g tin red beans or baked beans
- sugar, to taste

### HOW TO DO IT

1 In a saucepan over medium heat, fry the onion, carrots, tomatoes and curry powder together, 5 minutes. Add the cabbage and season to taste, adding some cayenne pepper if you like it strong. Stir in the beans, cover the saucepan and cook over low heat, 30 minutes.

2 Taste at the end and adjust with a bit of sugar if it is too acidic.

## Pap

*Everybody has a 'right' way to cook pap. This is what we do in the restaurant. It's not stywepap, but it's close*

Serves 6 **EASY** 50 mins

### THE FLAVOUR COMBINATIONS

- 500ml (2 cups) water
- 480g maize meal
- salt, to taste

knob of butter, to serve

### HOW TO DO IT

1 Boil the water in a saucepan, then add the maize meal and some salt. Stir until combined, cover and cook over low heat, 45 minutes, stirring every now and then. Stir in the knob of butter when the pap is ready.



## Butternut, peppers and onions

Any veggie with a thick skin is good for the barbecue, for obvious reasons. Whole butternut is good for indirect kettle cooking, like the chicken, but takes at least 1 hour. The peppers can be direct or indirect; they don't care. Braai them until the skin becomes black. Peel them, but do not wash them – all the good taste will wash away. Whole onions are great too – you peel off the burnt layers and the inside is all sweet and smoky.



FROM LEFT: HEAD COOK KARIM REJAUL, TATIANA LUSSAMAKI AND HER BOYFRIEND, RESTAURANT MANAGER AND 'SERVEUR EXTRAORDINAIRE' STEPHANE FONGA, KOBUS AND HIS MOTHER.



CHAKALAKA AND PAP



THE RESTAURANT'S CAMEROONIAN HOSTESS MAI ASSOHOU







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### Ginger beer

Serves 6 **EASY** 30 mins + 3 days, to sit

#### THE FLAVOUR COMBINATIONS

1L water

95g fine white sugar

5ml (1 tsp) ginger root, freshly ground

10ml (2 tsp) dried yeast  
handful raisins

1 Heat the water with the sugar in a saucepan over high heat, stirring, until the sugar has dissolved, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside to cool until tepid.

2 Add the freshly ground ginger root and dry yeast to the mixture and stir. Taste and add more ginger or sugar or water, as you like. Throw in a handful of raisins and leave the mixture outside to stand until the raisins float to the top, about 2 days. Refrigerate for at least another day and enjoy!



“Drink it with joy! Tell your guests the raisins are special African ginger flies, added for taste.”



### Braai tips

- Start young. I started when I was five years old.
- Do it often – the more you do it, the better you will become. Braai is the jazz of cooking – you have to constantly adapt to temperature, wood, food size, wind, rain and the odd blizzard and snowfall (I used to have a 150-seat braai restaurant on a ski slope in the Alps). So the more you do it, the better you know your art/craft and then you can improvise with the best.
- In the beginning I made all our wors myself, but now we are making hundreds of kilos every month, so a butcher grinds the meat and fills the worsderms. Good wors is roughly ground, with little fat, stuffed in sturdy derms (we use pork). For 25kg wors, I use 17kg beef lower rib meat, 4kg pork shoulder and 4kg pork belly fat. This is very little fat, but it works as the pork derms are thick and it cooks in its own juices. I do make the wors spice mix though with roasted and ground coriander seeds, powdered cloves, some nutmeg, salt, pepper, vinegar and a bit of sugar. More I cannot say, as we started selling this at Paris's Galeries Lafayette Gourmet (along with our home-made bitlong and droëwors) in August, so it is a trade secret... Experiment! Make small batches of frikadelle until you like your mix.

