

# BETWEEN

## THE BOUNDARIES OF TASTE

Jackie Cameron School of Food & Wine



PHOTO KATHY PITOUT



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The Midlands food scene would not be the same without the renowned Jackie Cameron. From putting Hartford House on the national culinary map to writing international award-winning cookbooks, she has many accolades under her belt that earn her the title of the best of the best. However, one of her most significant contributions to the local area is without a doubt her passion for sharing her talent and skill with aspiring chefs at the Jackie Cameron School of Food & Wine.

First opened in April 2015, Jackie Cameron School of Food & Wine offers internationally and nationally recognised culinary programmes that produce chefs who are thoroughly trained and set for success. "Everything in my life has led to teaching,

right from when I taught my younger sister everything I learnt at school every day. I think that I know how to cook, but my calling has always been teaching." She also felt that the industry needed more chefs who have received high-calibre, intense training that is up to her sought-after standards.

Only 15 students are accepted into the school's programmes per year. As the founder and principal, Jackie believes in working hands-on with the students daily, personally teaching them her craft. They offer two options for students: an 18-month course and a three-year course.

The school guarantees permanent job placement after graduation, and they have stuck to this promise, with previous

students landing positions at prestigious restaurants like Fyn Restaurant in Cape Town and Restaurant JAN in France. "I cannot fill the requests that I get daily. Top chefs in the industry personally message me, requesting my past students," adds Jackie. Not only do her students land jobs, but they excel in their fields. 73 graduates of the school have achieved 164 internationally recognised distinctions, with many others running their own successful foodie businesses. This is a testament to the demand for graduates from this school and the high standards of their training.

A large part of attending the Jackie Cameron School of Food & Wine is functions. Students participate in at least 40 functions per year, which serves as a fantastic opportunity for them to expose themselves to and understand what the culinary industry is all about. The courses start with more theoretical and practical classical learning, but by the end of their first year, functions take up most of their time. "We are 'getting their legs ready', as I say. My students stay in the industry because they are mentally prepared. I believe if you are mentally prepared for anything, you can do everything you set your mind to," Jackie says. A highlight is the sundowners event when students work with a winemaker and create a pairing dish. They can experiment with flavours and cuisines, and this is always a sell-out event!



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This exposure also allows students to decide what type of position they want as their first placement. "All of my students start the course knowing they love to cook, but they must figure out whether they want to work in a restaurant, a bakery, catering, food styling... I want their first placement to be a success. They are ultimately responsible for this, but I steer them in a direction that will best suit their personality."

You can't talk about Jackie's successes without starting at the very beginning and understanding why she chose to have her school in the Midlands. After being at Hartford House for nearly 12 years, Jackie knew she wanted to teach in the Midlands, an area where quality dishes are produced every day because of the fantastic local produce that is available from amazing suppliers in the area. She believes that the

tranquillity of the area is an ideal atmosphere in which to learn and focus on what is truly important. Students from afar also end up falling in love with the area, often moving back to KZN to open their own foodie eateries, such as Courtney Stuart's Dough Girl (Durban), Connor Benn's Tippy Cup (various local Tops) and Jordin Shelley's Cocoa Africa (Kloof).

With change comes innovation, and after Jackie gave birth to her daughter (her newest inspiration), she started the Jackie Cameron Baby Food range - single-ingredient foods with no added preservatives, salt or sugar. Only seasonal ingredients are used and the range is freezer-friendly, perfect for moms who want to feed their babies only the best quality meals.

To end off, Jackie adds: "Often people say to me, 'I don't think I can do your course - your students do so well and are phenomenal.' and I always say to them that our excellent results should not turn you away - they should excite you! I'm here to teach you and get your skills to that same high standard."

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