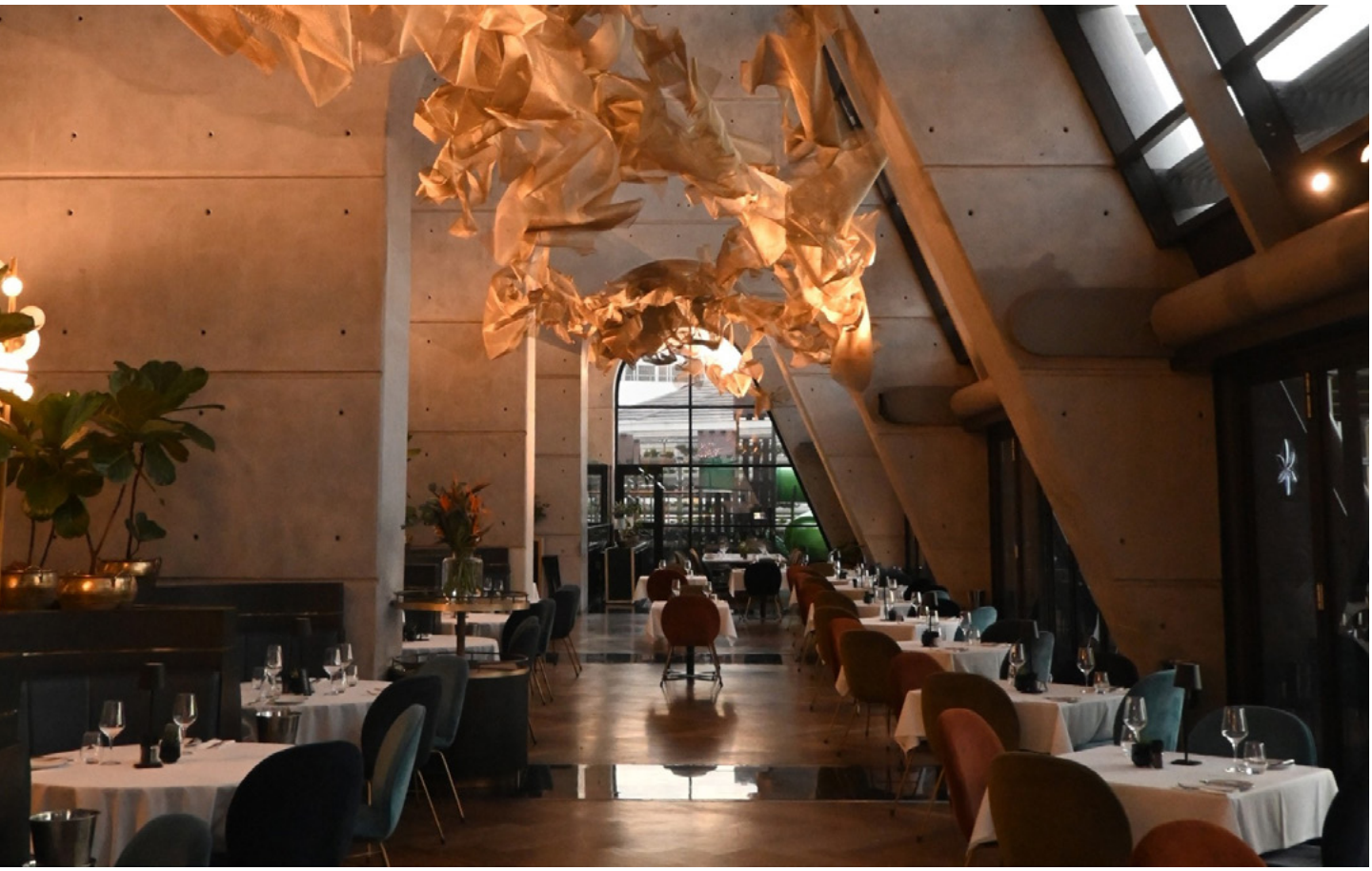


SUMMER DINING **AT ITS BRIGHTEST**

AURUM Restaurant at The Leonardo

High above Africa's richest square mile, on the seventh floor of The Leonardo, AURUM delivers far more than a spectacular address. Thoughtful service, beautifully executed contemporary cuisine and one of the city's most delightful wine selections combine to create a dining experience that lingers long after the final course.

Some restaurants begin the occasion when you take your seat, others start much earlier. At AURUM, it began with the booking. From that first interaction, the service was warm, efficient, and genuinely accommodating, setting an encouraging tone for what would become a thoroughly memorable evening.

The setting, of course, is impossible to ignore. Located within The Leonardo, Africa's tallest building, AURUM enjoys one of Johannesburg's most enviable locations. Yet the restaurant never feels as though it is relying on its address



alone. Even though it was not particularly busy on the evening of my visit, the artfully designed dining room exuded an unmistakable sense of warmth and intimacy. Soft lighting, contemporary décor and attentive service create an atmosphere that feels luxurious and welcoming.

AURUM's culinary philosophy is rooted in contemporary cuisine inspired by French technique and Italian influences, while allowing seasonal ingredients to take centre stage. Complementing the menu is an extensive wine list that showcases some of South Africa's finest estates alongside carefully selected international labels, giving diners plenty of opportunity to discover a new favourite or revisit an old one.

The evening began with sourdough bread accompanied by jalapeño and teriyaki butter. It is an easy detail to overlook, but a good bread service often provides an early glimpse into the kitchen's attention to detail. The earthy



sourdough paired beautifully with the rich umami of the teriyaki butter, while the subtle warmth of jalapeño added just enough intrigue to elevate what could easily have been a simple prelude.

EXQUISITE LINE-UP

For my starter, I selected the Duck Arancini, a dish that showcases the kitchen's ability to balance comfort with refinement. One of several updated dishes on AURUM's new summer menu, it features three perfectly crisp golden arancini concealing a rich duck filling, complemented by a vibrant pea purée and pickled watermelon that introduce a welcome burst of freshness and acidity. Every bite offered contrast, from the crunchy exterior to the indulgent centre, making it a wonderfully satisfying opening to the meal. A glass of Graham Beck Brut proved an inspired pairing, its lively bubbles and crisp citrus character effortlessly cutting through the richness of the duck.



The new summer menu offers no shortage of temptation elsewhere. The Lamb Ragù, featuring Spanish-spiced lamb, pappardelle, exotic mushrooms, Fior di Latte mozzarella, and pancetta, sounds like the sort of dish one orders on a crisp Joburg evening, while the signature Duck, served with barley, pistachio dukkah and apricot mostarda, promises an elegant interplay of savoury and sweet. This variety is what makes AURUM feel like a restaurant worth repeat visits, not a once-off special occasion.

For the main course, I chose AURUM's Beef Fillet, served with oxtail ragù, exotic



mushrooms, potato, and Madagascan pepper jus. This is contemporary fine dining at its most confident. Rather than overwhelming an excellent cut of beef with unnecessary flourishes, every accompaniment has a clear purpose. The slow-cooked oxtail ragù contributes depth, the mushrooms lend an earthy richness, and the pepper jus ties everything together with precision. Paired with Springfield Whole Berry, whose vibrant fruit profile and elegant structure complemented rather than competed with the beef, it became one of those combinations where food and wine blended in delicious harmony.

Dessert arrived as The Chocolate Proposal, a fittingly theatrical finale to an evening defined by thoughtful presentation. Layers of chocolate in varying textures and intensities were combined with fresh fruit and crisp elements to create an indulgent dessert. Beautifully plated, it created a sophisticated conclusion rather than simply a sweet ending.

What impressed me most about AURUM, however, was not any individual dish. It was the consistency of the experience. From the professionalism shown before I even arrived to the seamless service, carefully considered wine pairings, and beautifully executed cuisine, every aspect of the evening reflected attention to detail.

In a city increasingly blessed with excellent restaurants, AURUM distinguishes itself by understanding that memorable dining is never about a single spectacular plate or an impressive view. It is about how every element comes together to make guests feel looked after. On that score, AURUM shines every bit as brightly as the building it calls home.

*by **bernie hellberg jr** /*
*photography by **aurum restaurant***