



*Reviewed by
Derek Taylor*

The International Wine and Food Society at

Mundo Vida

*Umdloti Beach Centre, South Beach Rd.
031 568 2286. (Closed Tuesdays)*

A night out with the International Wine and Food Society is always a great pleasure in my experience but this week's gathering for dinner at Don Wilkinson's new beach venue began like a scene from one of those wonderful old MGM musicals.

On the deck between a few zillion stars in black velvet above and the surf gleaming as it murmured in below...with a cold glass of kir petillant in your hand and a soft warm breeze on your cheek...this was a very high wow-count indeed.

I think there was an extra zest in the pre-dinner buzz, a reaction to the rather tense times we are getting through these days, as the classic mix of sparkling wine and the blackcurrant essence of the kir went down.

First on the table was an elaborate little taster of wild mushroom tortellini with a truffled bean purée. Under them the mustardy pungency of a little rocket salad and, on top, a clever garlicky citrus foam. Most enjoyable.

Then came the starter of queen prawns, plump in their crisp beer-batter jackets. Supporting them was a flavourful salad of peppered mackerel, a sharp-edged ginger and citrus velouté sauce and a contrasting potato purée. The prawns were perfectly, moistly cooked within the batter – not an easy achievement for a roomful of people.

With these two courses we drank a 2008 Groote Post sauvignon blanc: A sprightly young wine with enough stone and edge to make it as interesting as the food.

An elaborate palate cleanser of vividly flavoured fresh orange and Cointreau granite was more of a little course of its own rather than something to separate the fish and meat courses: deliciously smooth and a clever construction.

The main course was a formidable portion of loin of venison wrapped in pancetta and cooked medium rare. This was a great flavour, accompanied by little fondant potatoes and perfectly cooked -- still crunchy -- asparagus spears. A well-judged sour cherry jus set off the venison.

A 1999 Steenberg merlot partnered the venison. This ten-year-old had retained its big rounded flavours and seemed set for another few years of full health. A memorable merlot.

A superbly balanced vanilla and coconut pannacotta starred in the dessert. Around it an interesting coulis of pineapple with a little zing of chilli and a big crisp tuille biscuit. Alongside it an eight-year-old Nuy white muscadel stood up to the dessert flavours with a good edge of dryness within the raisin tastes.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable, convivial evening. With that kind of company the food takes on an extra dimension of enjoyment. Don Wilkinson, partner Joni and son Duke led an exceptional brigade performance. Duke, who has a lengthy hitch at the prize-winning La Colombe restaurant in Constantia behind him, was the menu designer of the night and its success was evident on his audience's happy faces.

After some fifteen years of reviewing his restaurants, the Wilkinson experience is still one of the best real-food experiences in the region. And with this marvellous new venue, I can't recommend it too highly: it's well worth the trip to Umdloti.

And so out and across that magic deck again while the stars swung majestically overhead and I swung – rather less majestically – down the stairs and off home.

If you are interested in the Society's gormandising jaunts, contact Chair Katherine Reardon at kreardon@iafrica.com or Events Co-ordinator Val McGreal on 083 679 9529