

The Eat Out Restaurant Awards are back with a celebrated new chief judge

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It's time to officially acknowledge what the industry has achieved amid all the challenges.

After extensive consultation with the restaurant industry, Eat Out is excited to announce a reinvented and transformed Eat Out Restaurant Awards for 2022, with Abigail Donnelly returning as chief judge.

"When South Africa went into hard lockdown on 26 March 2020, few of us could have imagined just how tough the road ahead would be for our restaurant industry," says Eat Out brand custodian Aileen Lamb. "While there is no doubt that there are still many challenges and unknowns ahead, one thing we know for sure is that the resilient people of our industry deserve to be celebrated. We are, therefore, incredibly excited to look towards the future and announce an all-new Eat Out Restaurant Awards with award-winning food writer, critic and recipe author Abigail Donnelly returning to the helm as chief judge. The revamped approach for 2022 will have inclusivity as its focus, with new awards being introduced that celebrate the industry's unsung heroes across all categories. And, significantly, we will debut a new judging process whereby restaurants will be rated rather than ranked. I would like to take this opportunity to also acknowledge and sincerely thank outgoing chief judge Margot Janse for her professionalism and dedication to the Eat Out Restaurant Awards and her continuous upliftment of the South African restaurant industry."

The Eat Out Restaurant Awards will return in November 2022 after a two-year hiatus. On 1 April 2020, Eat Out made the difficult decision to pause restaurant reviews and postpone the next awards, which were due to take place in November 2020. Just a few days into the Covid-19 lockdown, it was clear that eating out would not be the same for the foreseeable future and it would not be fair to judge restaurants while they were going through their toughest period in living memory. For the same reason, there were subsequently no awards in 2021 either.

Instead, Eat Out focused on the Eat Out Restaurant Relief Fund and Food School projects. The Eat Out Restaurant Relief Fund injected R2.7 million into the industry in 2020, helping restaurants all over South Africa collectively produce over one million meals for those in need. In 2021, the Eat Out Food School provided a fully funded learnership for 10 students, all of whom are now permanently employed in the industry or furthering their studies.

As Eat Out reinvents the Eat Out Restaurant Awards, Abigail Donnelly's long history with the brand and intimate knowledge of the industry make her the perfect choice to lead the judging process.

Says Donnelly: "I am delighted to be back as chief judge and to be a part of this new era of the Eat Out Restaurant Awards. We have listened to the diverse voices of our industry, and we have done our research and spoken to both chefs and patrons. With the new Eat Out Restaurant Awards, we want to celebrate the incredible resilience of the industry, while still rewarding the abundance of excellence. Judges will continue to review and judge top restaurants and will continue to dine unannounced and pay for all of their meals. The judging and reviewing process will maintain its high standards but, at the same time, we want to celebrate bravery and survival, recognise resilience and strength, pay tribute to legends, and raise a glass to what we have achieved together as an industry and society.

"The pandemic has changed eating out – perhaps forever. The simple act of coming together with family and friends to share a meal was something we took for granted. Now we cherish these occasions. As we face the harsh realities of a fourth wave in South Africa, we stand shoulder to shoulder with the chefs, the waitrons, the kitchen teams, restaurant owners and the front-of-house staff who greet us with a smile no matter how tough things are. Supporting our local eateries has been key to keeping our industry alive and we encourage patrons to continue to do so in a responsible manner. The new Eat Out Restaurant Awards honours all the passionate and resilient food heroes who have inspired us over the past two

years and who are showing us the way to a thriving future for our industry."

Eat Out will announce the team of judges working alongside Donnelly and the new judging methodology early next year, before judging commences in the first quarter of 2022.

Limited sponsorship opportunities are available and interested parties can contact jeanine.boshoff@newmedia.co.za.



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