

PODA tanzania

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INSPIRATIONAL:
**COULD
YOU
CUT IT?**
*Inside the kitchen
that's training our
chefs of the future*

Delicious!



A man with long hair, wearing a blue and white striped short-sleeved shirt, is smiling and holding a metal bowl filled with fresh green vegetables, including fennel and leafy greens. He is standing in a market or grocery store, with various produce like onions, potatoes, and cabbages visible in crates around him. The background shows shelves with more produce and a refrigerator.

The inspirational
INGREDIENT

Axel Janssens started training as a chef at just 12 years old. Today he is one of Tanzania's most exciting chefs and inspiring the next generation of youngsters. But Axel is not taking trainees from the top chef schools, he is teaching jobless youngsters from Arusha - people who previously had little hope. One of his first prodigies has landed a job in a 7-star hotel in Bahrain. Axel spoke to *Annabel Ross* >

PHOTOGRAPHED BY **ELIZA DEACON**

No hope?

I PREFER TO WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD NO HOPE IN LIFE BEFORE. SOMEHOW, BECAUSE THEY HAVE STRUGGLED, THEY WANT TO LEARN. I CAN PASS ON MY PASSION TO THESE PEOPLE EASILY

AXEL JANSSENS

LEFT: AXEL SAYS GOOD FRESH PRODUCE SHOUTS AT HIM WHEN HE SEES IT IN THE MARKET
THIS PAGE: FUSION OF AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN CUISINE





BONIFACE LOINI WATCHES AS ANOTHER DISH IS SERVED

Q Why did you want to become a chef?

My parents often had to entertain for business at home. They would put on great music, light some candles, and my mother would cook delicious food. I enjoyed watching the ritual of all of this, but I never got to see the end of the story as I was only nine and had to go to bed. I made a decision that I would do the same as my parents, I would have a place where I would cook fantastic food for people, and it would not just be about the food, it would be about the whole atmosphere.

Q Did you have any formal training to become a chef?

Yes, I was lucky enough to get a place at The Green Gate in Bruges, Belgium. This school is seen

as a very special place in Europe to study cooking because you can go there from the age of 12. When we arrived there we didn't have a clue and that is what helps with my training now. The young people I train haven't a clue when they arrive.

Q Where did you work in Belgium?

I have been working officially since I was 16, unofficially since I was 12. My father said to me when I was 12: "You want to go to hotel school? Then I want you to find out what life is like as a chef in a restaurant." So he sent me to work for a friend of his who owned a Michelin star restaurant and I worked there every Sunday. I was just a little kid coming

WHEN I GO TO THE MARKET AND I SEE THE VEGETABLES LYING THERE THEY MAKE ME SMILE. IT'S AMAZING

AXEL JANSSENS



FREDERIC NDERANGUSO WHIPS UP A SAUCE



GRACE LEMBRIS MOLELL (23)

Waitress, front of house. Two years at Machweo

Before I went to Jobortunity I was just at home. After graduating I came to Machweo. I like being able to learn so many things at Machweo because I feel comfortable working everywhere: in housekeeping, reception and the restaurant. But I am still improving my English - a new language is difficult. I would like to work in the hospitality industry because I like looking after people.



THIS PAGE: L-R:
BARAKA KIVUYO,
ELIONA KAAAYA,
AXEL, JONAS
MSEMO, FREDERIC
NDERANGUSO



BARAKA JOSHUA (24)

Sous chef at Machweo

It was always my dream to be a chef, I studied food and nutrition in secondary school and I wanted to know more. I enjoy planning menus and giving chef my suggestions. One day I would like to run my own restaurant. I have been lucky to learn so many things at Machweo. My favourite dish is Beef Bèarnaise, I love to taste the sauce.

into a kitchen where there are a lot of big personalities, people who may have been to prison, everyone working together in a stressful situation. But I soon became their mascot, and they adored me. "Hey, our little one is here," they would say. So, instead of having a bad experience in a busy kitchen, I had a new family every Sunday. However, I still had to clean the onions and I was still crying for two hours afterwards. So, at the age of 12 I was really appreciated and that motivated me to carry on and go further and further.

Q What brought you to Arusha?

My cousin came here and wanted to open a little guest house and he convinced me to join him. I was the only one in the family with experience in the hospitality industry, so it made sense.

Q Where did the idea of training young disadvantaged Tanzanians in your restaurant come from?

It was just my cousin, Dirk, and me here. After we started to get a reputation for good food, the restaurant became busy and we needed more help. I needed help in

the kitchen, someone to clean my potatoes and onions and someone to clean my dishes. So we asked our gardener if he knew anyone who could help, and that was really how it started. This was seven years ago, I had people coming in from the road where we are and I had to ask what they could do. I needed my toilets cleaned, the swimming pool cleaned, someone in the kitchen. I had one girl, Susie, who came in and said: "I want to do what you are doing." I told her that what I was doing was very strange, but she said: "Yes, but that's what I want to see because you are a wizard, I never saw somebody doing food like this."

Q How many students have you trained here at Machweo?

I have trained eight chefs from zero, and about ten waiters and waitresses. We work together with Jobortunity who run a training centre near here teaching young adults about the hospitality industry. They don't get much practical experience so that's where I come in, together with several other hotels and restaurants in Arusha.



METHOD RAYMOND (25)

Waiter for two years at Machweo

In my life I didn't know anything about the hospitality industry but now I know a lot of things about people, I have a very good teacher who is teaching me a lot of things. I know a little bit about wines, but I am still learning. I want to work in the hospitality industry and be more professional, like a manager. I want to stand proud and work on my own."



YONAZA JONES (26)

Waiter at Machweo

My Dad was a chef in Arusha many years ago and I have always wanted to work in a restaurant. Sometimes we have challenges with difficult guests, but we work together and solve the problem. I know a bit about wines now, like I would serve a Merlot with beef and a Chardonnay with white fish.

THE CHEF
WHO COOKED
YOUR LUNCH TODAY
STARTED WITH ME TWO
AND A HALF YEARS
AGO AND DIDN'T KNOW
WHAT TO DO WITH
A POTATO THEN

AXEL JANSENS

Q Do you prefer to teach chefs who have no experience at all, or those that have some restaurant experience?

I prefer to work with people who have had no hope in life before. Somehow, because they have struggled, they want to learn. I can pass on my passion to these people easily.

Q What are the biggest challenges when you are training these young people?

The biggest challenge is to keep them focused on the fact that we are busy with a passion, not just a job. Another big challenge is getting them to taste everything. At first they don't want to taste, but then they see that you constantly taste and I tell them, that you can't be a cook if you don't taste. Yes, it has to look good but it also has to taste great.

My cooking culture is European, influenced by African tastes. This is new to them and some of the ingredients are new too. If I ask for balsamic vinegar they might just bring white vinegar, so I need to teach the difference in tastes, to teach the difference in products. It is very difficult to bring that to a culture where people do not eat to have a nice evening, they eat because they are hungry.

Q Where are the 18 students that you have trained?

Most of them are still here. When I went on holiday and came back my cousin said: "Hey, Axel, you can be proud of the training you did. The food was amazing the last fourteen days."



ABOVE:
AXEL JANSSENS
CAN'T HIDE HIS
PASSION FOR
FOOD
BELOW:
MACHWEO

Two of the ladies had to leave to get married, and they were two of my best. If they opened a restaurant in Arusha today, I would have big competition. They are not allowed to work in the restaurant business anymore because they are married. The chef who cooked your lunch today started with me two and a half years ago and didn't know what to do with a potato then.

Zablon, who came to me aged 19 from Jobortunity, is now working in Bahrain as a chef at a 7-star hotel. He came back this New Year and we cooked together. His Tuna Ceviche was one of the best dishes on New Year's Eve. It was out of his head with a little bit of guidance from me. I said: "Be careful not to put in too much lime, the colour will change, it might

become sour." But he already had his idea of how to make it!

Q How would you like to be remembered?

A chef without borders. I like the idea of somebody who does things that other people don't dare to do and it works.

I want to be remembered as the chef that gave you not just the delicious food but an eating experience. It is about love. If you don't have love for your product, you can't make it nice. When I go to the market and I see the vegetables lying there they make me smile. It's amazing. When I get back to my kitchen I have my beautiful green asparagus, my fennel, and I think right, what am I going to do with this? And I start cleaning it. 🌿

FOR AXEL'S RESTAURANT GO TO WWW.MACHWEO.COM FOR MORE INFO ABOUT JOBORTUNITY GO TO WWW.JOBORTUNITY.ORG