

Food for thought at the Spier Secret Festival

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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Perfectly poached eggs, ox heart tartare, blue cheese braai broodjies, sun-dried tomato silkworms, Sriracha soft serve, unorthodox wine tastings, cheese-making demos, and insect appreciation was just a fraction of what was consumed and absorbed at the fourth Spier Secret Festival Conference, which was held at the idyllic [Spier Wine Farm](#) last Friday, 30 October.



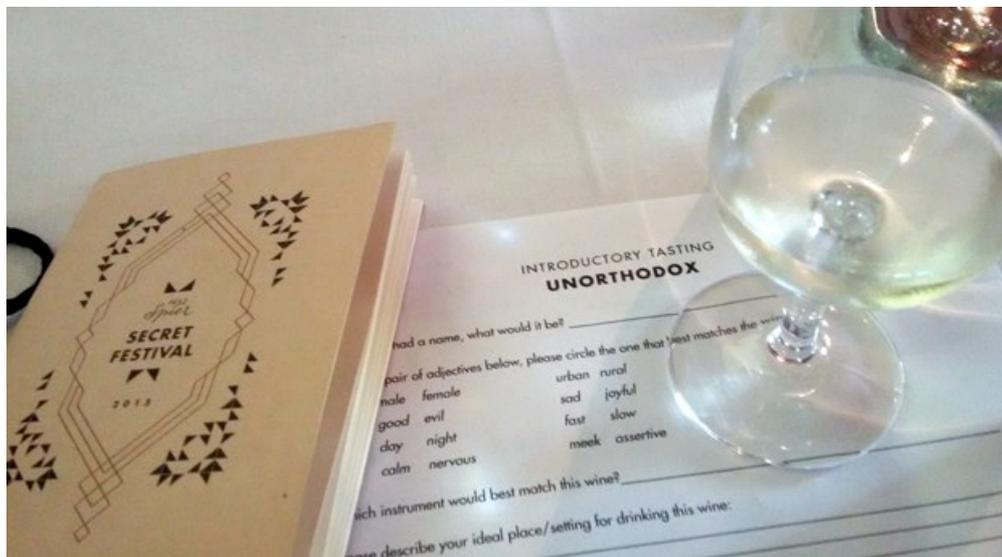
I was lucky enough to attend last year (read all about it [here](#)) and was super inspired and taste bud tantalised by the great speakers and delicious food. However, this year, the [Studio.H](#) team turned up the sizzle factor and created a truly unique and mouthwatering event. Think less conference and more interactive and intimate workshop experience.

After an outstanding breakfast of poached eggs with wild herbs, crusty bread and tangy cheese, candied orange with creamy yoghurt and chunks of juicy ruby grapefruit prepared by chef and speaker Frederik Bille Brahe at Spier's pastures, we were split into groups. I was with the *tjoppies*, all branded by our cute little chop brooch, we rotated through the four stations and different speakers throughout the day.



Audio meats oral

The first stop was an unorthodox wine tasting with Janice Wang, a PhD student at the Crossmodal Research Lab at Oxford University. This was the talk that most piqued my interest and appetite when reading the speaker line-up - and Janice didn't disappoint. After explaining the heady influence of different styles of music on the taste of food and wine we conducted our unorthodox wine tasting. Sure you may have swirled, sniffed, sipped and spittooned wine, proclaiming its creamy palate and fresh grass notes, but have you ever considered if that wine is masculine or feminine, good or evil, calm or nervous? I decided the 2014 Woolworths Windy Peak Single Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc was a well-behaved but nervous young lady. This was followed by a soft-serve ice cream tasting. Maple and salted caramel with a hot sauce topping anyone? I could have spent the whole day with Janice tasting and listening; however stop two: a cheese tasting and making workshop with Luke Williams, owner of [Culture Club Cheese](#) in Cape Town was next.



Followed by a wine tasting of the 2, 3 and 5 Spier Creative Block wines (named by the number of varietals included) with Frans Smit, Spier's Cellar Master. These wines were paired with three different braai broodjies (which included Luke's cheeses sampled in the cheese tasting). Of all the delicious items I consumed that day, the thought of that crispy bacon and Bavarian blue cheese broodjie has currently got me the most mouth watery.

Food politics

Next on to the more mentally meaty part of the programme, with talks from international speakers Jackson Boxer, Andrew Merritt and Paul Smyth from Something & Son and Chef Frederik Bille Brahe. All three expressed ideas of sustainability and ingredient integrity when it comes to food production.

In his quest to question if we're doing enough when it comes to addressing sustainability concerns, Chef Boxer now owns a small farm utilising bio-dynamic principles to supply the bulk of the produce he uses in his restaurant, [Brunswick House](#). He feels we should be asking broader questions when it comes to food politics, but believes - at the end of the day - food is really about sharing and expressing a shared humanity.

Paul and Andy, the duo from [Something & Son](#), are experimental artists/architects who address social and environmental issues through their works. Some of their more food- and sustainability-angled projects include [Farm Shop](#), an actual farm that has been created inside a shop, which aimed to re-establish a tangible connection to food that we usually are so often far removed from. While another project; [Compost Tea](#) harnessed the heat from compost to boil water to make a tea shop at the V&A Museum in London.



Image sourced from www.theecologist.org

Chef Frederik Bille Brahe, the brains and hands behind the brilliant breakfast served to us that day, spoke to us about how limitations (they can only be open during the day, don't have a liquor licence and can't store or serve meat) that he encounters while working at his restaurant, [Atelier September](#), made him and his team far more creative.

Feast for the soul

The last two workshops included organic gardening tips and recipes by Chef Mariana Esterhuizen from [Marianas](#), the award-winning country restaurant in Stanford Village; and a talk by the passionate Zayaan Khan, South Africa's leading expert in entomophagy, which is the practice of eating insects. High in protein and fairly sustainable, this is a practice Zayaan is hoping we will see more and more of. I couldn't quite bring myself to sample the chocolate covered mopani worms, but did try some dried silkworms and crackers made from mopani worm flour from her Insect Cafe.



You would think with all the brain and body consumption that had already taken place there might not be room for much more, but the most epic of lunches by PJ Vadas, chef of the newly launched [HogHouse Bakery and Café](#), signalled the end of this one-day food-and-wine conference. And was the chocolate-covered mopani worm on top of my salted caramel ice cream. It was a sit-down meal in the dappled shade where we were served dish after dish of amazing food: pretty-as-a-picture pickled vegetables, spicy pineapple salsa, whole baked fish, tongue, ox heart tartare, a whole pig's head, ginormous bone marrow, asparagus and mozzarella. My belly hated me for it, but I had to sample it all. This was then rounded off with strawberry sorbet and Spier's new Secret Sparkling wine.



Bursting goodie bag, brain and belly I left Spier enriched in every sense. Can't wait to see what they do next year!

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ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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