



# *fierce female force*

Between a photoshoot and a grand Nigerian dinner, Lorna Maseko pauses to chat persistence, inspiration, what's coming next and how to get there. And food, of course

words **JOËLLE DAVIDSON**

**Lorna Maseko is a woman on a journey, and not just around South Africa like in her groundbreaking BBC Lifestyle show *Homegrown Tastes South Africa*. Once SA's first black ballerina to perform a principal role, Lorna hasn't stopped moving forward with tenacity and a good helping of star power. Now, years later, she's bringing some heat on the international foodie scene as a renowned chef and spokeswoman for South African flavour.**

### **What Lessons From Being A Professional Ballerina Do You Carry With You Today?**

The art of perseverance and the pursuit of perfection, which can never be reached. In ballet, you are looking at the mirror for eight hours of the day, trying to perfect a position, jump or pirouette. These traits have carried me through my career as a TV host, celebrity chef and entrepreneur.

### **Now You're In The Chef World. What Life Lessons Have You Gained From The Kitchen?**

I've had to work really hard to solidify my position in the culinary space. I did not have the typical 'went to chef school, worked in a kitchen, and so on'. I'm a chef-school dropout. I left after three months because I didn't like it and I wanted to learn in a better way. I think that we all thrive in different learning circumstances and for me, school wasn't one. I decided to teach myself how to cook and better myself. So, life lesson? I think it's being persistent. Continuing and not giving up.

### **In *Homegrown Tastes South Africa*, You Explore Our Local Dishes And The Cultures They Emerge From. What South African Dish Would You Like To See Get More Recognition?**

There are many local ingredients that need to be showcased around the world! Recently on social media I saw someone [in America] post about having just bought spekboom. I thought, 'This is an ingredient we featured on *Homegrown Tastes South Africa* and it's becoming known globally'. Things like spekboom, *madumbe* (which is very popular in KZN)

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and Karoo lamb! I've learnt that they feed off rosemary shrubs, hence the lamb in the Karoo is so delicious and fragrant and you don't need a lot of seasoning or herbs to highlight the flavours.

### **Is There Anything Happening In The SA Food Industry Lately That Is Really Exciting You?**

I think there's a lot of interest in the continent of Africa right now. People want to know what we are eating, the music we are listening to. It's a great time to be showcasing our ingredients and using them in a way that elevates the ingredients. For example, people love tripe, but you don't have to cook it with just salt and water. You can add other spices and herbs to make it taste and look really good. You don't have to cook samp with just salt and water either. You can add cream or coconut! I saw someone making it into a paella – you could even make a risotto-type dish with it. There's plenty of local things that should be highlighted more. And not removed from the traditional sense, but done with an added spark.

### **Each Episode Of Your Show Is Fabulous, But Do You Have A Favourite Episode?**

I have two! One was with Chef Adél Hughes at Oep ve Koep, in Paternoster. Eating food like that was a first for me. Everything was foraged from the sea and the surrounding land. Another episode I loved was when I met Chef Charné Sampson from Epice in Franschoek. She is a superstar in the kitchen! But then there was also Chef Daphne Phasumane of Walkerson Dullstroom in Mpumalanga who made me a trout dish that was just amazing. They're all such talented South African woman! Overall, interacting with all of the chefs and farmers was amazing. There hasn't

## **WHAT DOES YOUR ULTIMATE DINNER PARTY LOOK LIKE?**

### **WHO IS ON THE GUEST LIST?**

Definitely Oprah Winfrey! Michelle Obama, because I love her story, and Ndidi Nwuneli, because she's an advocate for food sustainability. I'd actually invite Kim Kardashian – she's such a powerhouse – look at what she's been able to do with her career. And Chrissy Teigen, she's so funny. I'd probably include a close friend just so that I can feel comfortable around all these people as well.

### **WHERE ARE YOU GATHERING EVERYONE?**

In Camps Bay, Cape Town, in a beautiful home overlooking the sea. I would have said Hollywood Hills, but Camps Bay is better than that!

### **WHAT IS THE DECOR LIKE?**

Rustic glam, understated and pretty, but when you look into the details, there's lots going on.

### **AND DRINKS?**

I'm a gin and tonic girl, so G & Ts. But people love bubbly, so some Champagne, darling!

### **LASTLY, THE MENU...**

Definitely a plated menu, something hearty and delicious. Something that has a touch of South Africa because of course that's who I am.

cover story





## DOWN TIME

### WHAT DOES SELF-CARE MEAN TO YOU?

Self-care to me is just hanging about, chilling on the couch, watching Netflix! I do my nails and hair, but I don't consider that self-care, it's more like a job. I wish I didn't have to do it all the time, but I do.

### WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE WAY TO INDULGE IN SOME TLC?

Travelling and visiting restaurants is how I indulge. By the time this comes out, I would have recently celebrated my birthday. Going to a place like La Colombe for that would be amazing. Or going to Noma in Copenhagen – it's number one in the world, that would be a treat!

### IF YOU HAVE FREE TIME, HOW ARE YOU USING IT?

I spend a lot of time with my family. But work never stops, I'm constantly thinking about what I can do better, how I can improve myself.

been a show in South Africa that really does a 360 of farm-to-table in that sense. So to have done it like that, and have it work, was amazing. The quality of the food on the show allowed my palate to grow, to explore and see what other flavours can be achieved at home. I like to eat fine-dining meals, but when cooking I try to make those kinds of meals easier and more attainable at home.

### Which Episode Surprised You The Most?

I have an open mind to learn, particularly with food, so I learnt something on each episode. How to cook something, how things are farmed – like the Karoo lamb and foraging. I also enjoyed finding out about mebos – how it's made from the apricots that aren't good enough to

be sold, so they are used to produce something really tasty that gets exported for the international market.

### You Were Recently In England For Taste Of London...

This is my second time at Taste of London. The first time was in 2019, just before the pandemic. I love it, it's such a vibe. London feels a little bit like home because there are so many South Africans there. I cooked a cheesy pap croquette with a creamy puréed chakalaka. To make something nostalgic, that reminded the South Africans of home, it was absolutely amazing.

### When Women's Day Comes Around On 9 August, Who Are The Women You Will Be Celebrating?

I will be celebrating moms. I think moms are dynamic and phenomenal. They do and achieve so much. And women in general! When God made women, he was really attentive. With all of the issues happening around the world, especially in relation to women and their choices over their bodies, the best thing we can do is stand together and unite. Let's stop taking about it, let's do it!

### You're in A Rather Male-Dominated Environment, Both In Entertainment And The Culinary World. What Has Helped You Hold On To Your Sense Of Femininity?

I'm female, it's the core of who I am. I guess being in a male-dominated world, you have to have more chutzpah! I work hard and am constantly wanting to achieve more, to be more. I look at other females who have gone before me, who have led the way to allow women to do what they do today and know that we just have to keep working and keep pushing those boundaries. Because what else are you meant to do? You can't sit back and just watch. At some point, it will change.

### Are There Any Local Or International Women Who Have Really Inspired Your Own Story?

Dominique Crenn – she's a phenomenal international chef and advocate. There's

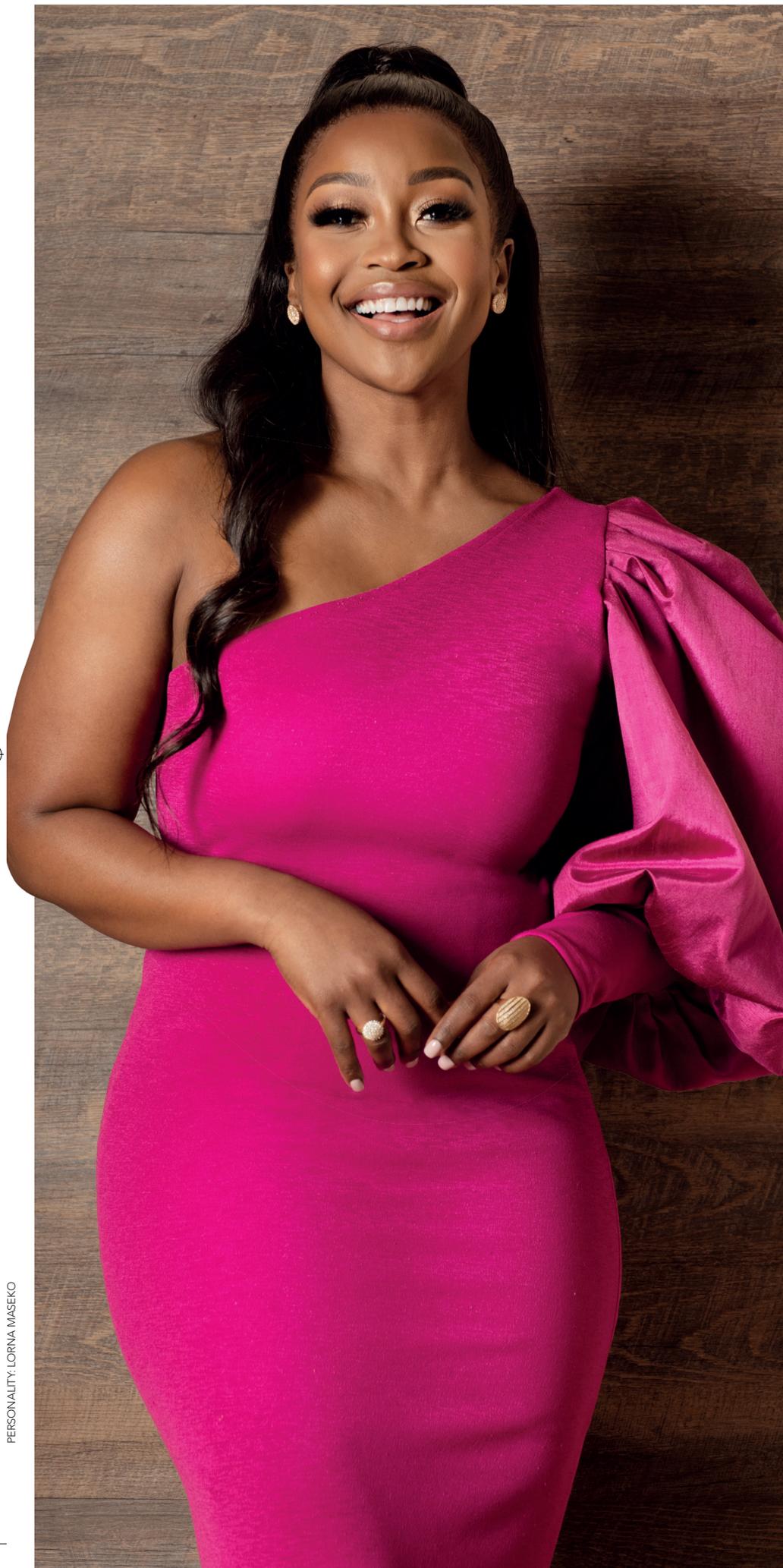
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PERSONALITY: LORNA MASEKO

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Siba [Mtongana], a black woman now opening her own restaurants, which is just fantastic. Zoe Adjonyoh is also such an inspiration for me. She's a Ghanaian based in the UK, is part of the James Beard Foundation and has a cookbook called *Zoe's Ghana Kitchen*. They're just killing the game when it comes to food and it's so great to watch.

***We Are Always Interested  
In What's Coming Up  
Next! Do You Have  
Any Future Projects  
In The Works?***

Yes! This month, I start shooting a show for recipe.tv – a broadcaster in the US – called *Celebrating with Lorna Maseko*, which I am super excited about. I've got a huge project launching in the US early next year, which is going to allow people to have a piece of me with them. I've just started my foundation, called Bophelo Foundation. Our goal is to bring nutritional wealth into schools, one meal at a time. It's a project I am really passionate about, and now that it's kicked off, it's keeping me busy. It requires a lot of work and support from people who will hopefully get behind us and to help us achieve our goal.



PERSONALITY: LORNA MASEKO