

Justice Malala



Take a break from despair

Potato-loaded menu is just one part of a delightfully invigorating dining and shopping experience at Newtown Junction Mall

I have seen the future, people, and it is bright and beautiful and gorgeous. Forget the dire political climate. President Jacob Zuma? We will survive him saying that the reaction to firing Nhlhlanhla Nene was an exaggeration. Anyway, so many knives in the ANC are out for him now that I have no doubt that after December 2017 he will be mooning about in his flip-flops at Nkandla, looking after his goats and cattle.

The tanking rand? Think back to 2001 – we survived a similar experience then. The drought? The rains will come. The global economy? The US will help us spend our way out of this recessive period. I hope.

What makes me feel better about all this stuff is my visit last weekend to the new shopping mall in Newtown, Johannesburg. Guys, go there now. It's fabulous.

Things might be somewhat depressing for SA Inc, but every so often you come across people who are thinking long-term and can see beyond the current noise. I like those guys. They are optimistic. They know things are tough today. They also know

that tomorrow might be harder, but things will turn.

So they look at the dilapidated Jo'burg city centre as an opportunity rather than a source of misery. They go in there and build. The Newtown Junction Mall has all the big mall suspects: restaurants like News Café and Ocean Basket, clothes shops such as Truworths, retailers like Pick n Pay and so forth. And people love them. Last weekend there were loads of people shopping and dining there.

Then there's Work Shop Newtown. This is a trendy design space where young fashion designers, jewellery makers and an eclectic mix of entrepreneurs

have set up beautiful shops. Housed in the historic potato sheds first built in 1911 as part of Jo'burg's original fruit and vegetable market in Newtown, it's a gorgeous space with gorgeous people. My daughter got her hair done at The Perfect Hair while I bought a pair of nice Maria McCloy shoes.

You can visit in the evening too. The workshop is right behind the Market Theatre, where James Ngcobo has been doing a fabulous job since he took over as artistic director. After a bit of theatre you can walk to the mall for some food at the Potato Shed restaurant.

This is a beautifully decorated restaurant which serves so many variations on the humble potato that you want to stop and applaud.

The potato has been under siege since the likes of Tim Noakes started punting the no-carbohydrate diets. Well, this place goes the other way.

The "potatoes from the earth" section of the menu has 10 different potato dishes – from "honest fries" (triple fried Van der Plank chips with saffron mayo) to the also pakora battered bread with mustard mash potato, achar, coriander yoghurt

and tamarind chutney).

The rest of the menu has some exciting offerings, from the salads to crackling cornbread to the beer butt chicken (apparently a drunken bird) to steaks and fish – served with even more delicious variations on the spud.

I should have been more adventurous. I had the beer-battered hake and chips, which was delicious and fresh. My daughter went for the fries, also delicious, while my lovely wife went for the baked sweet potato with butter beans and coconut mayo. We also ordered a "garden box salad".

We were very happy with the restaurant, as we were with the neighbourhood. The salad is a bit too big, and there were too few waiters, meaning that our waitress, Gugu, was run ragged.

Other than that, the place was lovely. I am going back. ■

★★★★ The Potato Shed

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★★★★ Thuli Madonsela
★★★★ Excellent ★★★★★ Good
★★★ Poor ★ Nkandla