

Canteen
goes

green

Canteen is proof that Stenden is working hard at its vision: *'Serving to make it a better world'*, both literally and figuratively. This apparently ordinary university restaurant is the domain of SHV master chef Albert Kooy and his New Dutch Cuisine. It means applying the term 'sustainable' to everything, from the tomatoes on your plate and the benches you are sitting on.

"As far as I am concerned, it's all or nothing."

“Fair, seasonal food straight from the soil.”

Mainstream food

At first sight Canteen is a normal restaurant at a normal school. The light interior with the long wooden tables and benches makes it look stylish and modern, without it being too formal. It's an ideal setting for a simple French bread and cheese lunch and that is exactly what Albert Kooy wants: mainstream. He wants to cook for anyone and everyone. Having said that, the way his menu is put together is anything but mainstream. It consists for the most part of vegetables and all the dishes are seasonal. This is his response to the current eating and living culture which is not conducive to people's health, nor to the worldwide environment. Although his message is very specific, he does not want it to be aimed at a specific target group, but rather at everyone. “And that includes students in digs.” He explained his philosophy in his book entitled ‘New Dutch Cuisine’ [De Nieuwe Nederlandse Keuken]. Although the book was written first and foremost for chefs, an everyday version is currently being worked on. Stenden is a wholehearted supporter.

Albert Kooy wrote his book in 2006 while introducing traditional, honest and sustainable principles at the hotel and catering college in Den Bosch. It can be regarded as his ‘protest song’ against falling cookery standards. He personally bears the title of ‘SHV Master Chef’, the highest possible honour in his sector. Although he himself does justice to the title, he realises that many of his colleagues interpret things differently. “Chefs are no longer passionate about cooking. They copy trends and ignore their own culture. They have almost no idea what is in the food they prepare. Hardly any cooking goes on in restaurants any more. These days everything comes out of packets. Food tastes the same everywhere you go. Of course I'm not talking about restaurants with Michelin stars where proper cooking still goes on.” What the master chef is concerned about is the trend for food to become further and further removed from mother nature. That was the reason for his book, in which he advocates healthy and modern cuisine which is sustainable and animal and environment friendly. It is cuisine which continues to build on



the centuries-old culture in the Netherlands. Despite all this, he is far from being an uncompromising purist and is more than ready to use exotic ingredients and cooking techniques which enrich Dutch cuisine.

‘Carte blanche’

Stenden gives Albert Kooy a magnificent platform on which to display his art of cooking. In 2007, when the Stenden university Hotel was looking for a chef for its restaurant, he submitted his book as a kind of job application. His approach perfectly matched the Stenden vision of ‘serving to make it a better world’. Albert Kooy was given ‘carte blanche’ to implement his principles. This allowed him to set a good example to the hotel visitors and to the students training there to be the hotel managers of tomorrow. By appointing Albert Kooy, Stenden was making a clear statement.

Fair trade

After the Stenden university Hotel had been transformed, it was time for a new phase. In 2009, preparations were made for a rigorous metamorphosis of the university restaurant, the teaching company of the International Hospitality Management programme. As with the hotel restaurant, everything was subjected to thorough scrutiny: the menu, the ingredients, the cooking techniques, the list of suppliers and the interior, right through to the coffee cups and the salad bowls. Everything had to have been sustainably produced, wherever possible in accordance with the ‘fair trade’ principle. The fewer fossil fuels used to get the food onto people's plates, the better. However, the master chef also warned, “If vegetables are cultivated in the Netherlands in greenhouses, this still means that fossil fuels were used in the process.” He therefore advocates “fair, seasonal food straight from the soil”.



The opening of Canteen has received a lot of attention in the national and regional press. NRC Next carried the following headline on 15 March 2010:

*All the food is biological.
And the remainder
is degradable.*

A chef with a vision

Fair also means with a minimum of additives. As Albert Kooy explains, "We have grown up with so many chemical tastes and colouring agents that we can no longer survive without them. We have to start cooking food which would be familiar to our great grandmothers." Before Canteen was opened in March 2010, the chef stated in an interview, "I don't want any cancer in my food." Yes, he is provocative, but that is because he is a chef with a mission. He wants to jolt people awake. If we carry on with food like we have been doing, our health will soon be going downhill. Research into the effects of certain foodstuffs and additives may not yet be 100% watertight, but these days science does link our eating habits to illnesses like diabetes type 2 and heart and vascular diseases. Albert Kooy believes the solution is to eat differently. It is with this in mind that he promotes "Not 80% meat and 20% vegetables on your plate, but 20% meat and 80% vegetables." What is more, this approach is cheaper because you can replace the expensive meat with biologically cultivated seasonal vegetables. Seasonal vegetables are always the cheapest because they are available in abundance.

Fervent meat eaters

However, Stenden and the master chef are not just motivated by money and health. On the contrary. "People are egotistical. They should stop thinking only about themselves. In order to produce a kilo of meat you need a lot more farming land and water than you do to produce a kilo of grain." A drastic reduction in meat consumption would help world food production keep up with the increase in population. This being the case you could argue that meat should be banned from the menu altogether, but Albert Kooy thinks that is going too far. "Vegetables are still boring. Generally speaking the standard of vegetarian cooking is poor. I try to find different techniques to make vegetables more interesting. I can prepare a barbecue with vegetarian dishes in such a way that fanatic meat eaters eat them as if they are meat." In this way he is trying slowly but surely to win over fervent meat eaters to vegetables. He is also an ardent supporter of the optimal slaughter strategy whereby the whole animal is used and not just the favourite bits. "If you eat pork tenderloin, you should also be prepared to eat pig's ears. I myself only buy residual meat. Using Chinese techniques I can prepare almost an entire cow in a way that it tastes like steak."

Almost extinct

Albert Kooy's cuisine clearly goes beyond food with an 'organic' or 'healthy choice' stamp. He is quick to get angry with organisations that refuse to see the bigger picture. "People say that fish is healthy, but they do not say which fish you should eat. There are hardly any eels left and fish oil capsules are made from tuna, a species that is almost extinct!" The opening of Canteen does not, therefore, represent a fulfilment of the mission embarked on by Stenden and its master chef. In fact it is only the beginning. The aim now is to have sustainability become the norm. Starting with Stenden students and employees.

Stenden integrates sustainability into the curriculum

Huge momentum

As Elena Cavagnaro explains, “We used to offer a course in business ethics but it never really caught on among students. At the end of the 1990s, the focus shifted to sustainable business. That is a lot more tangible. We hope that students

It is no coincidence that Albert Kooy was able to achieve so much in such a short period of time. He knew exactly what he wanted because he had already done it before. What is more, he had introduced his plans in detail at three different levels.

Service Studies lecturer, Elena Cavagnaro, is keeping a close eye on developments at Canteen. One of her tasks is actually to integrate sustainability into the entire curriculum of the programmes for the service-providing sector. It eventually has to become a permanent core value of all the Stenden programmes.

who now use the restaurant understand why Stenden has made this choice. We want to confront students with the world in which they are going to work. The focus on sustainable business started in the tourism programmes and gained huge momentum once Albert (Kooy, ed.) had been appointed.”

Menu, ingredients, colour styling

Even while Albert Kooy’s selection procedure was still going on, Elena Cavagnaro received a tip-off that ‘something very interesting’ was about to happen. “I was asked to perform a zero measurement in the hotel restaurant. We had to analyse the menu, the ingredients, the colour styling, everything. That all had to be done really quickly before Albert’s concept was introduced. This measurement showed that the hotel and restaurant had not been operating sustainably before Albert arrived. We carried out a similar analysis after six and twelve months. Two things caught our attention. Firstly, people assumed beforehand that customers would find the new menu to be too expensive. However, after a year it was clear that there had been no increase in prices. Secondly, Albert managed to achieve 60% of his goals within six months. This is an amazing achievement and something I have never witnessed before in transition projects.”

Firstly, to the Executive Board, then to lecturers and lastly to the team he was going to be working with. He wanted everyone, at all levels, to know exactly what he intended to do and to be prepared to cooperate. Elena Cavagnaro’s research clearly showed that communication was a factor for the success of such a large-scale conversion.

The next step

In cooperation with Albert Kooy, Elena Cavagnaro is making sure that sustainability is becoming fully integrated into the hotel management programme. “Students now come into contact with the concept of sustainability in almost every module. More and more students want to engage in sustainability-related projects.” However, Stenden is going one step further. “We want to know whether it is possible not only to increase students’ knowledge of this subject, but also to bring about a change in their behaviour. We have developed an instrument to measure this. If the measurements show that student behaviour has not changed, we can then assess what alterations we should make to a module. It may be that we are offering too much knowledge and focusing too little on actions.” After all, what is the point of new theories and ideals if behaviour stays as it was?