

ago that I don't want to be the person keeping my staff from their kids and family over Christmas. But I'm lucky that I'm in a position where I can, so we are all off, we all party, and then in the new year we're back to business."

With plans to tie get married in April, Basson says he'll also be sharing the festive season with his own and his fiancée's parents.

As a young child, "heavy" Christmas lunches were the norm, but now he prefers lighter meals – including platters of smoked meats, breads, braai and wine.

"Christmas is supposed to be comfy... taking it easy. Rather have less variety, and instead have one dish of great food in the sun with an open fire," he suggests.

One of Basson's favourite dishes is smoked trout, combined with fenel salad, cream cheese and lemon rind.

"I love trout. It's on South Africa's green list and at home you can buy it and just slice it up yourself."

Trout is among a group of fish species on the green list of Southern

African Sustainable Seafood Initiative that are fished and farmed in a sustainable manner.

And what's he hoping for for Christmas?

"Some more time off?" he jokes. If not, a book or a bottle of riesling, his favourite local wine.

Peter Tempelhoff, 43, executive chef at The Collection, whips up a pumpkin pie, that favourite Thanksgiving dessert.

With a side of pumpkin seeds and vanilla mascarpone, an Italian cream cheese, and scattered with white chocolate shavings, Tempelhoff says it's a good way to get children to eat vegetables.

Stuffed turkey is a "special" part of his Christmas tradition.

"Cook it slowly so you avoid it drying out," he says. For stuffing? Sage, onion, breadcrumbs and chestnuts.

On Christmas Day, Tempelhoff says he will probably be at his new Mondial restaurant at the V&A Waterfront, but he'll go home to share lunch with his wife and three children.

"The kids get so excited and still believe in Santa.

"Christmas is a celebration of family and getting together around the table in a spirit of sharing," he says.

On his inspiration, Tempelhoff points to Cape Town's scenic surroundings – and finding love.

"When I fell in love with my wife, my ingredients became more luxurious, and I believe I started cooking with more passion."

His Christmas list includes "a new car", or a camera to take "great food shots", he laughs.

Despite working on Christmas Day, the Cape Grace Hotel's head pastry chef, Lorraine Meaney, 34, says it's always festive in the kitchen. Staff sit down to enjoy lunch together, and exchange gifts.

"Everybody would love to be at home, but sharing it with my 'extended' family is not a bad second," she says.

With an Irish background, her family would import Irish salmon for Christmas to serve as a starter. A roast lunch would follow, then her

favourite dessert, Christmas pudding, "well soaked in brandy".

"We've been eating the same Christmas meal for as long as I can remember, and it's usually a team effort," Meaney says.

A special addition to their meal would be mince pies, which her mother would stock up on in November.

Meaney's offering this Christmas is an unconventional red-and-white vanilla cheesecake, with each element displayed individually rather than stacked in layers.

Decorating the plate is red velvet cantuccini, a type of biscotti, surrounded by scoops of white chocolate cheesecake cream, raspberry sorbet, cocoa streusel and a variety of berries.

As you grow older, says Meaney, being around the table with your family becomes more important than receiving gifts.

"I don't want anything, unless it's something someone has made themselves, or if they're just giving of their time."

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PUMPKIN PIE, WITH VANILLA MASCARPONE AND PUMPKIN SEED BRITTLE

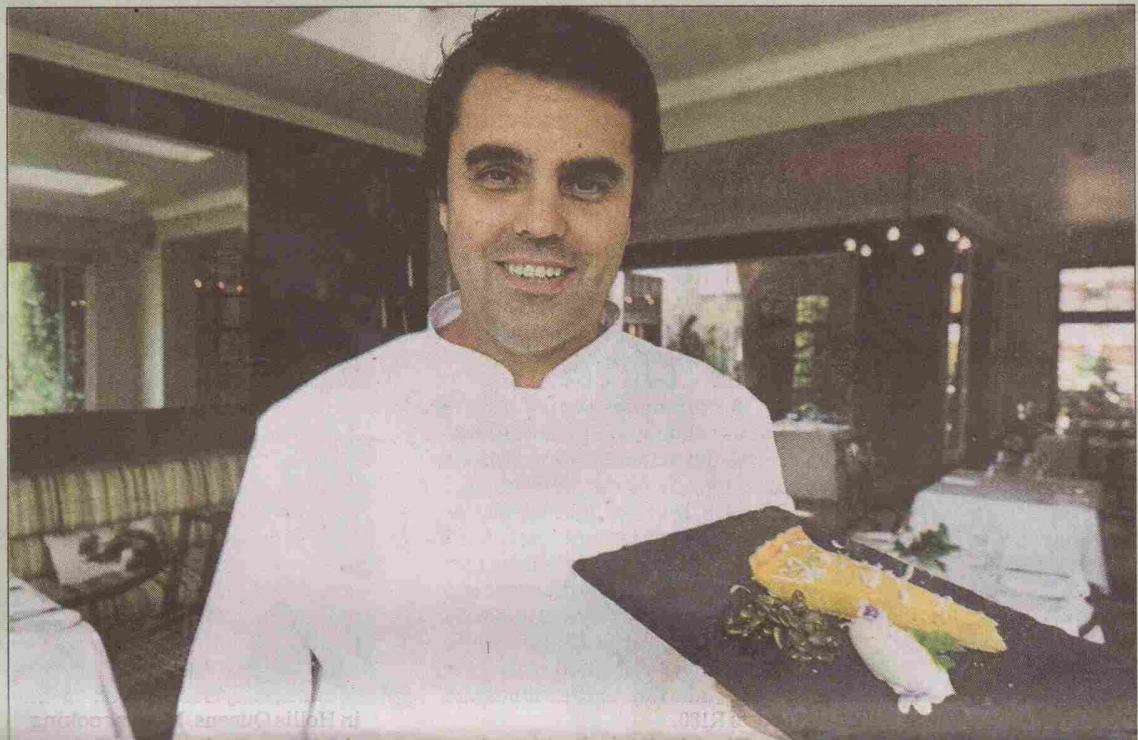
The Collection by Liz McGrath, a group of five-star hotels in the Western Cape, executive chef Peter Tempelhoff

Pie:
454g pumpkin puree, consistency of thick mashed potato
454g sweetened condensed milk, tinned
2 large eggs
1g ground ginger
2g ground cinnamon
2g ground nutmeg
3g salt

Method:
Preheat oven to 220°C. Using a large bowl, mix the pumpkin puree, sweetened condensed milk and eggs. Stir in the cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and salt. Pour into a pie shell and bake for 15 minutes, then reduce the heat to 175°C. Bake for another 30 minutes until set.

Pumpkin seed brittle:
40g sugar
100g toasted pumpkin seeds
Pinch of salt

Method:
Add sugar to a pan and place on a moderately heated stove, stirring continuously until it turns to a golden caramel. Remove from the heat and add the pumpkin seeds, stirring until they are evenly coated. Tip the brittle on to a



PIE PLEASURE: Executive chef for The Collection by Liz McGrath, Peter Tempelhoff, presents one of his favourite Christmas desserts – pumpkin pie. It's decorated with white chocolate shavings and a side of mascarpone, an Italian cream cheese, and pumpkin seeds.

surface to cool. Add the salt.

Vanilla mascarpone:
150g mascarpone cheese
1 vanilla pod – scraped
50g icing sugar
20ml cream

Method:
Add scraped seeds to the mascarpone cheese, as well as the icing sugar. Whisk together thoroughly with the cream. Store in the refrigerator until needed.
1 pie crust each (9 inch), unbaked

To assemble the dish:
Place a slice of pumpkin pie on a plate. With a warm spoon, scoop some mascarpone on to the plate. Finish with the pumpkin seed brittle and some grated white chocolate.