

With the help of the MyLife Project and the Fifteen Foundation, Gollie Booysen and Zimasile Mzamo recently had the opportunity to work in Jamie Oliver's Fifteen restaurant in London

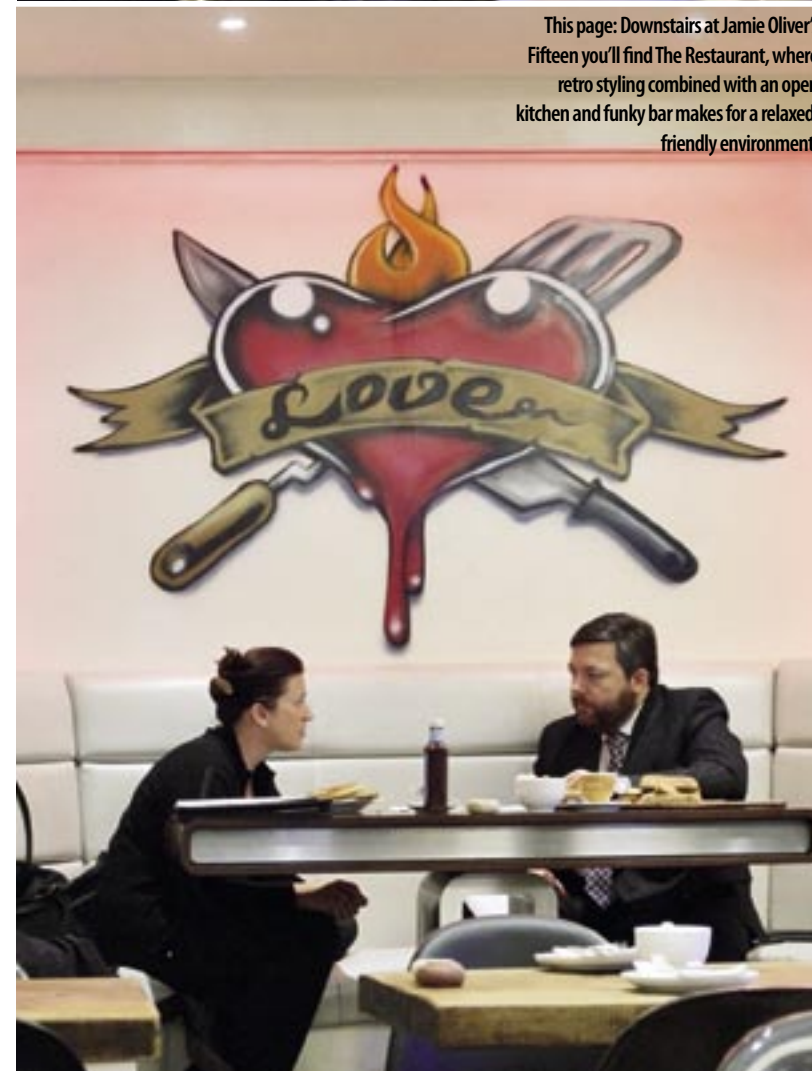
HAPPY DAYS



PHOTOGRAPHS JACQUES DE VILLIERS PORTRAIT BRETT RUBIN PRODUCTION MARK SERRA  
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This page: Downstairs at Jamie Oliver's Fifteen you'll find The Restaurant, where retro styling combined with an open kitchen and funky bar makes for a relaxed, friendly environment.



## LIFESTYLE

"The first thing I noticed when I arrived here was the friendliness of the people – accepting you for who you are, not what you are. It was amazing," says 26-year-old Gollie "Gollie" Booyesen. He reclines triumphantly in a booth in Jamie Oliver's Fifteen restaurant in London, the navy blue apron of his chef's outfit casually draped across his large frame. By any estimation, he shouldn't really be here, but here he is all the same.

An assistant winemaker at Cloof wine estate in Darling on the West Coast, Gollie was swept up by the MyLife organisation, which has allowed him to be here, in this inspiring environment, with another young South African, Zimasile Mzamo (known as Mzamo), a 21-year-old waiter from Khayelitsha. Both have been given the opportunity to come to London for six weeks to work in a professional kitchen and learn about great food, complex wines, and, perhaps, about themselves.

Gollie started making his own wine last year – a blend of Shiraz, Cabernet and Merlot – but his tastes have expanded immeasurably during his time at Fifteen. He is being guided by Jamie's wine protégé and close friend Matt Skinner. "I didn't know anything about French wine. It was here that I tried sweet wines from France for the first time," says Gollie.

Visits to Borough Market have also been an eye-opening and welcome distraction. "I've been three times!" Gollie enthuses. "Good fresh food and a lot of different things, like meat and fish, all together in one place!" He finds it difficult to contain his appreciation for this great London



institution. And what of the offerings at Fifteen? "The desserts are good. My favourite is the cheesecake. They serve it to you in a small carafe," he says, and his thoughts drift off at the recollection.

Mzamo is working with ingredients he's never tasted before. "Every time I step through that door, I learn something new," he says. "This place is brilliant for people like me – people who want to learn." In learning about great food, he has also found a sense of peace previously unknown to him. "Being in the kitchen makes me happy. It's where I think properly and where I feel comfortable – comfortable in myself and with the people around me." But his thoughts are tinged with sadness as he brings us back to reality: "Sometimes when I try something, I wonder if it'll be for the first and last time."

To hear of Mzamo and Gollie's experiences in London is gloriously uplifting. Their appreciation of good food and wine has increased and their characters deepened. Their stories are testament to the power of belief and of opportunity. "This was one of the biggest things that could have happened to me," says Gollie. "It has allowed me to accept myself for who I am, not for who people want me to be." Mzamo agrees, "It is everything I was hoping for. I believe this is the beginning of my life. I always knew there was something good in me, but I didn't know what my place would be. I was only dreaming. Now I feel like my dream just came true." **W**

**This page: Inside Fifteen's kitchen (top); Gollie Booyesen and Zimasile Mzamo with the renowned Jamie Oliver (left); Jamie Oliver's original Fifteen restaurant in Hoxton, London (right).**

### JAMIE OLIVER'S FIFTEEN

Jamie's first restaurant opened in London in 2002. A charitable enterprise, its success has spawned siblings in Cornwall, Amsterdam and, most recently, Melbourne.

At the London Fifteen, a relaxed ground-floor trattoria offers accessible prices, and the downstairs, retro-styled restaurant ups the ante. The culinary style throughout is modern Mediterranean with Italian influences – all stamped with characteristic Jamie heartiness. Expect pared-down homely specialities in the trattoria – cured hams, fresh pastas and fine cheeses. At the restaurant in the evening you will find only a seasonal tasting menu.

**Fifteen, Westland Place, London; +44 870 787 1515; [www.fifteenrestaurant.com](http://www.fifteenrestaurant.com)**

### MYLIFE

MyLife is an aspirational organisation established to prevent and divert young people from entering a "cycle of destruction" on the streets, in communities and in the prison system. It aims to create future leaders through a process of emotional regeneration, skills development and job placement and creation. MyLife is focused on partnering with innovative organisations like the Fifteen Foundation in order to bring exciting opportunities to young South Africans from previously disadvantaged backgrounds.

Support MyLife by sending an SMS to 40030. (Each SMS costs R20.)

**MyLife; (021) 462-1212; [www.mylife.org.za](http://www.mylife.org.za)**

### TASTE GETS INVOLVED

Woolworths is showing its support for the work of MyLife and the Fifteen Foundation. Zimasile Mzamo and Mkhanyiseli Kapa (a MyLife graduate featured in TASTE 16) are currently employed part-time as trainee TASTE chefs, as part of a programme to broaden their skills, knowledge and experience in the food industry.

