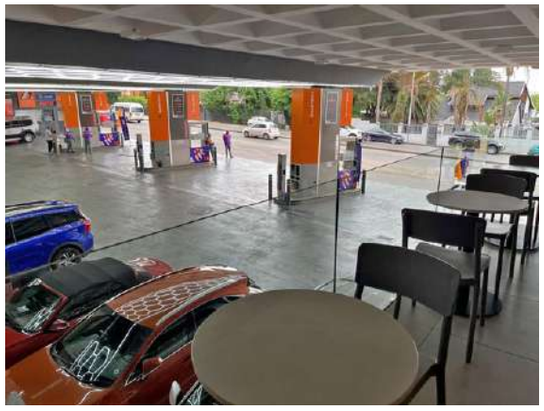
By Muneeba Jaffar

Independent and Inspired

Relish on Astron Energy Rosebank



Opened: April 2025 / **Location:** Jan Smuts Avenue, Rosebank /
Retail Partner: Relish (Independent) / **Coffee Partner:** Relish in-store

South Africa's forecourt industry is having a moment on the global convenience stage. After years of predictable formats and fast-food familiarity, a wave of innovation is redefining what 'convenience' looks and feels like. Last month, we featured Freshstop Oaklands on Astron Energy, shortlisted for the Foodvenience 2025 Global Competition. Less than five kilometres away, another site is making its mark: Relish on Astron Energy Rosebank, an independent retailer redefining what premium, locally inspired forecourt retail can be: another disruptor site, and a confident one at that.

Lower shelving at the store's front allows natural light from the forecourt to flow inside.

Independent, intentional and impressive

Opened in April 2025 on bustling Jan Smuts Avenue, Relish brings together an ambitious mix of upmarket aesthetics, artisanal food, and independent flair. For a moment, you could imagine you're in an international flagship – but it's proudly South African. This isn't a cookie-cut rollout. It's a statement store. I asked whether it could be replicated elsewhere (at another premium location, of course). The answer was a confident yes!

From the moment you walk in, the attention to detail is obvious. Polished fixtures, natural textures, and carefully chosen lighting elevate the retail experience well above what many would expect at a fuel station. The layout intentionally separates the Fresh Food zones, the wood-fired pizza oven, Hot Foods Eatery, Bakery, Juice and Dessert bar, and the Coffee Bar, from the rest of the store. Every department, even the coffee counter, proudly carries the Relish name. No external QSR brands, no franchise presence – just a confident independent asserting its identity.

Building an in-house food and beverage brand allows Relish to control quality, creativity, and customer experience from start to finish. It's a bold move that reflects the growing confidence of South Africa's independent forecourt retailers.

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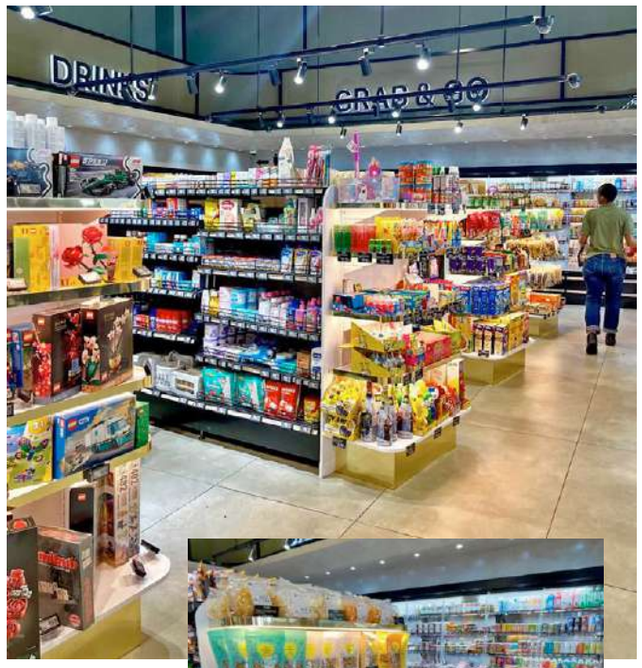
A celebration of local craft and culinary skill

Relish doesn't just serve food – it showcases local skill. Behind the counters is a team clearly trained to deliver service excellence, producing Wagyu burgers, Tandoori chicken wraps, and prawn pizzas that could rival any urban café. Yes, familiar favourites like toasties and pies still make an appearance, made and served with pride. A reminder that 'regular' doesn't have to mean ordinary.

The Bakery deserves its own spotlight. Think artisanal loaves, croissants so buttery, they might just have 27 layers, and perfectly shaped macarons, details that speak to craftsmanship rather than convenience. Alongside these are home-industry biscuits and other locally made snacks, a subtle but powerful nod to community entrepreneurs.

The inclusion of Karak Tea on the menu, one of only two South African forecourts I've come across to do so shows that this team isn't afraid to step outside of the expected box. It's a small but distinctive addition that gives the site personality.

Grocery aisles rise to full supermarket height, showcasing a mix of local and international brands across many categories.



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Local meets international: A retail range with depth

What stands out most is the product mix. Relish Rosebank has one of the largest selections of local small-business brands I've seen on a forecourt. It's not a random assortment; it's a deliberate blend of local and international products that gives customers meaningful choice. You can grab a Bashew's cooldrink (a nostalgic Cape Town favourite rarely seen outside the Western Cape) right next to premium imported beverages. That mix tells a story about where South African retail is heading: confident, inclusive, and full of local flavour.

The Grab & Go selection is equally thoughtful. From poke bowls and gourmet wraps to salads and sandwiches, the prepacked meals cater to customers on the move without compromising on freshness or appeal. Paired with an in-store Relish Coffee Bar, the setup fits perfectly with the hybrid consumer, someone grabbing lunch between meetings or catching up on emails from the mezzanine level.

Refrigeration is concentrated in one area of the store framing the grocery aisles

From the wood-fired pizza oven to the curved Coffee Bar, the layout flows naturally for smooth service and customer comfort.

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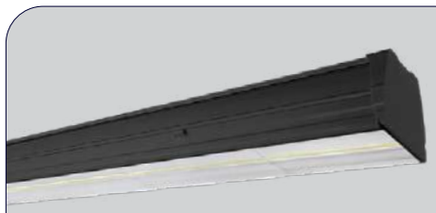

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A space designed for experience, not just efficiency

Relish Rosebank doesn't just sell products; it sells atmosphere and lifestyle. The mezzanine seating area feels almost like a boutique café with glass walls overlooking the forecourt and Jan Smuts Avenue, offering space and energy. Downstairs, the cosier seating keeps you close to the hum of the food counters and the rest of the shop floor. This store wasn't designed only to move the community through quickly; it was designed to invite them to stay.

Parking is tight, but management has handled it smartly with overflow areas nearby, so customers can sit down and enjoy their time without watching the clock.

Retail surprises and a hint of humour

Among the premium groceries and basic fresh produce, one display made me pause: a gondola end stacked with LEGO® sets. This is the second forecourt store in Johannesburg to do so. It made me wonder which site would be bold enough to host the first Brickfair on a forecourt, proof that even the smallest surprises can make a store memorable.

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A broader signal for South African retail

Relish Rosebank is more than just an impressive site; it's part of a growing movement. This independent is showing that forecourts don't need big franchise names to stand out. They're proving that a strong food identity, great design, and genuine local connection can build loyal customers and elevate expectations and importantly, enhance lived experiences.

The move from pumps to plates is well underway, and independents like Relish are proving they can lead the change.

I'm curious to see how independent operators in other community-based and township locations will interpret disruption within their own spaces, because innovation looks different in every environment, and that's what makes this sector so exciting.

Final thoughts

If Freshstop Oaklands showed that South Africa can compete on the global forecourt stage, Relish on Astron Energy Rosebank proves that independents can lead the next phase of that evolution. If independents can sustain this level of quality, they'll define the next chapter of South Africa's convenience market. It's a clear reminder that when creativity meets commercial intelligence, a forecourt can become far more than a stop – it's a destination.

And if they ever do host that Brickfair, I'll be first in line and probably with a Wagyu burger in one hand and a Bashew's in the other. **SR**

Muneeba Jaffar is the founder of MSI-J Consulting, driving forecourt convenience store growth and helping SMME vendors become retail ready. Backed by years of retail experience, she offers strategic insight and practical expertise. She can be contacted at muneeba@msi-jconsulting.co.za.

Serves: 6
Preparation time: 10 minutes
Cooking time: 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

Chicken:

12 chicken mixed portions

1 Tbsp (15ml) chicken spice,
you can substitute with half
a cube of chicken/veg stock, optional

1 cup (250ml) Amasi

Tomato Relish:

1 Tbsp (15ml) oil

1 onion, sliced

3 tomatoes diced,
or 1 can of tomatoes

2 carrots, grated

1 tsp (5ml) of sugar

1 tsp (5ml) of salt

To serve, 8 Slices of stale bread

Tasty & Delicious

Ideal for a family meal

AMASI BRAAIED CHICKEN WITH CHARRED LEFTOVER BREAD & TOMATO RELISH

The longer the chicken sits in the maas, the juicier and more tender it becomes.

Method:

Chicken:

In a bowl, combine amasi and chicken spice, or ½ stock cube if using. Mix until the chicken spice is incorporated.

Add the chicken pieces to the amasi and evenly coat. Marinade for 2 hours, and a minimum of 30 minutes.

Remove chicken from marinade, shake off any excess marinade, but keep the amasi for basting.

Over a medium hot fire, place chicken bone side down. Cook for 12 minutes (if possible covered). Turn chicken, baste, and cook for a further 8 minutes. (to test if the fire is ready; hold your hand above the coals for 5 - 8 seconds, if you have to pull your hand away sooner, the fire is too hot.)

While the chicken is cooking, make your tomato relish. In a cast iron pan over the fire, or on a stove, add oil to the pan, and gently fry onions for 8 minutes, until golden in colour.

Add your chopped tomatoes, sugar, salt and grated carrots and let simmer for about 2 minutes.

Lightly char bread over the fire.

To serve, add a dollop of the relish to bread and top off with chicken.

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Astral

Serves: 4
Preparation time: 30 minutes
Cooking time: 40 minutes

INGREDIENTS

Chicken
2 Tbsp (30ml) lemon juice
1 tsp (5ml) lemon zest
2 tsp (10ml) fresh parsley, finely chopped
1 tsp (5ml) fresh rosemary, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, finely grated
1 Tbsp (15ml) olive oil
8 chicken drumsticks
salt and pepper

Grilled cos lettuce
2 cos lettuce, quartered
1 Tbsp (15ml) olive oil
salt and pepper

Lemon yoghurt
200ml plain yoghurt
4 tsp (20ml) lemon juice
1 tsp (5ml) lemon zest
1 tsp (5ml) honey
2 tsp (10ml) wholegrain mustard
salt and pepper

Tasty & Delicious

Ideal for a family meal

HERBY DRUMSTICKS WITH COS WEDGES AND LEMON YOGHURT

This is a wonderfully light way to enjoy braai chicken.

Method:

Chicken:
Combine the lemon juice, zest, parsley, rosemary, garlic, olive oil, and a generous pinch of salt and pepper. Toss through the drumsticks and leave to marinate for 30 minutes.Braai the chicken drumsticks over medium-hot coals, turning occasionally, until charred and cooked through. This takes about 20-30 minutes.

Grilled cos lettuce:
Brush each wedge with olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Over a high heat on the braai, quickly grill the lettuce on both cut sides until charred. They should cook fast, or else they go limp. Serve immediately.

Lemon yoghurt:
Combine all the ingredients together. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Serve the hot chicken drumsticks with the grilled cos lettuce on the side. Drizzle with your delicious lemon-yoghurt dressing.

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