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AUTUMN 2020

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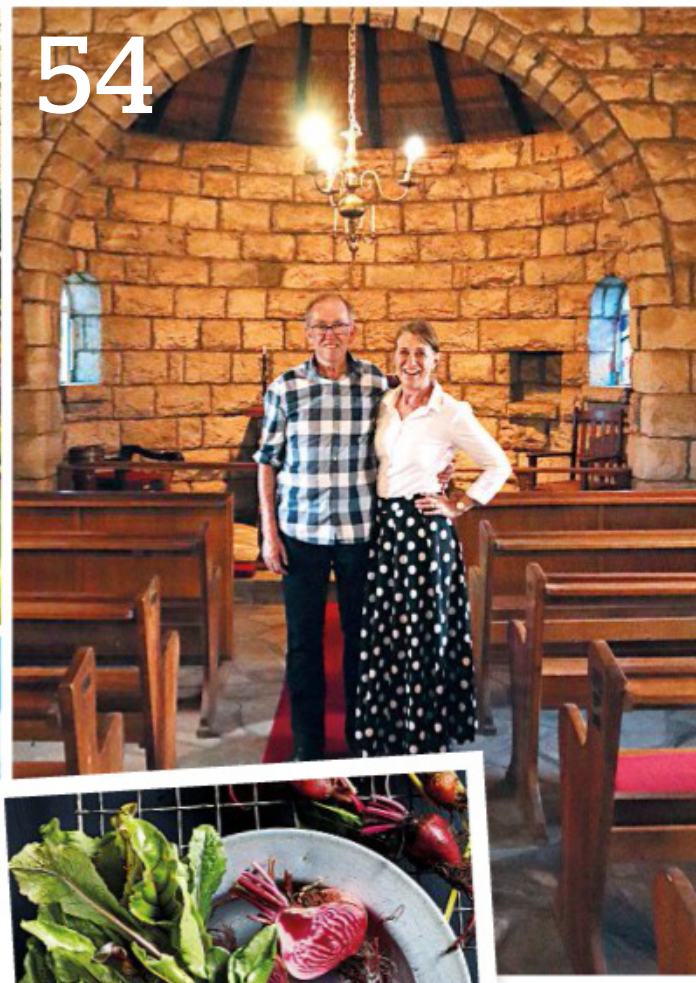

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PHOTO **CHRISMARI VAN DER WESTHUIZEN**

PHOTO TAKEN ON UITSPANKOLK FARM, 100 KM NORTH OF LOERIESFONTEIN IN BUSHMANLAND, NORTHERN CAPE

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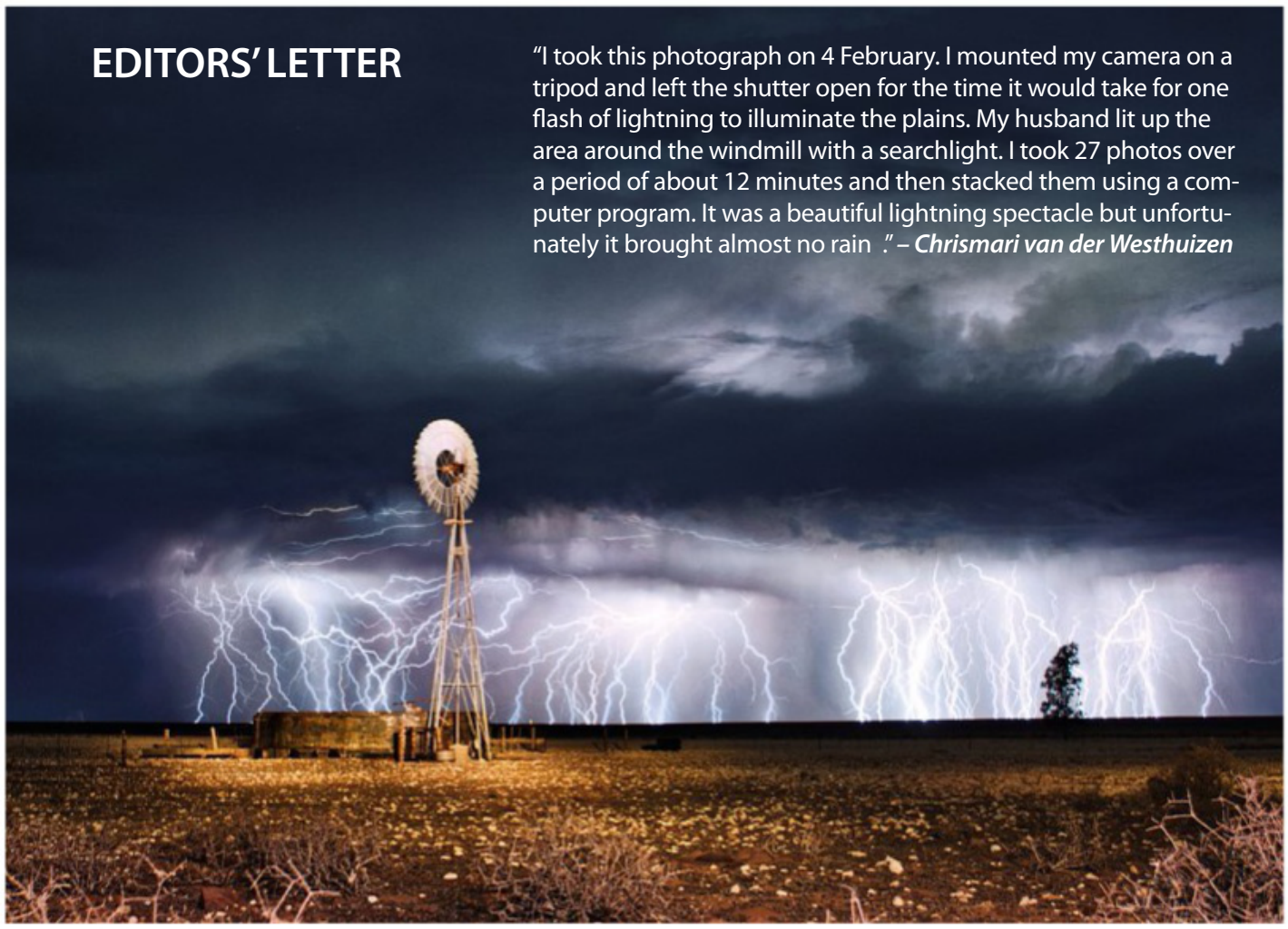
PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT) GREG COX, CHRISMARI VAN DER WESTHUIZEN, PETER VAN NOORD, MYBURGH DU PLESSIS, GIDEON SMITH, RIËTTE MOUTON



EDITORS' LETTER

"I took this photograph on 4 February. I mounted my camera on a tripod and left the shutter open for the time it would take for one flash of lightning to illuminate the plains. My husband lit up the area around the windmill with a searchlight. I took 27 photos over a period of about 12 minutes and then stacked them using a computer program. It was a beautiful lightning spectacle but unfortunately it brought almost no rain ." – ***Chrismari van der Westhuizen***

Abundance and scarcity

Water remains one of the biggest blessings, of which we were again reminded when we travelled to Mpumalanga, Gauteng and North West in November 2019 to gather stories for this issue and upcoming ones. We felt properly spoilt when we were treated to a lovely thunderstorm for five consecutive days – read our feature on the hamlet of Val on page 54.

Of course no one can order the rain when they need it, or in the exact dose that suits their needs. Throughout summer we read reports of flooding in the eastern parts of the country, especially in KwaZulu-Natal and more recently in Gauteng. It is simply dumbfounding, the violence and destruction of water.

Yet with a flood it is usually a question of recovering from the shock, getting back up, rolling up your sleeves, banding together and persevering.

Then there is drought… Towards the west, particularly in the Karoo and the Northern Cape, an ongoing tragedy is unfolding. Have a look at Chrismari van der Westhuizen's gripping photo essay on page 40. In her beloved Bushmanland, they have not had more than 25 mm of rain over the past three years. It is a daily battle for humans and animals, and with the Bushmanland rain season nearing its end, once more without any sign of relief, they remain positive. Feed the animals. Plant vegetables. Make do. Teach the children to live with it. Giving up simply is not an option.

Our proofreader, Alan Dove, used the word "powerful" to describe Chrismari's photographs and writing. We agree wholeheartedly. But then he asked a valid question: where do these people get their drinking water from?

Chrismari replied: "All our water on the farm comes from boreholes. Although the water is brackish, the supply at our home is potable and that is all we use. Tell him that coffee made with brackish water is the best you can get!"

LET US TRY to make a difference in the lives of these people in the form of a financial contribution – all the details are on page 53. We realise money could never feed the parched earth, but it would help them to pay bills, put fuel in the tanks of their vehicles, keep the kids in school, and buy feed.

Until we chat again in winter (distributed from 29 May), we hope everyone receives the rain they need.

Johan & Peter

go! Platteland
The slow life is the good life

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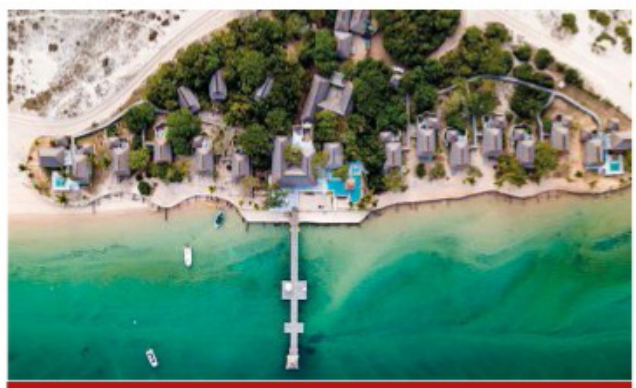

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Chitchat

Winning letter

It's the *people* who make a dorp

Since *Platteland* came into being, I have bought every single issue and they are all – from #1 tot #24 (now #25) – stacked neatly on my bookshelf.

With regard to the letter "Why these negative things?" in the Summer 2019/20 issue (#25): people who live in small towns carry an indescribable feeling in their hearts. Those who pass by look but do not see! It is a feeling of loyalty and love, and it is the very reason why these dorpies capture one's heart. Even if the streets are pocked with holes. Even if the little shops aren't perfect. Even if at times there is no water. Even if not everybody is like you.

Here, neighbours still chat over the fence. Here, you find silence. Here, you find peace. Here, we phone one another to arrange a time to meet for sundowners. Here, you can wander that same street full of holes without fear. Here you can socialise in the local bar till deep into the night and hear the loveliest, most interesting and sincere stories. In the bar, the guitar comes out and the whole town sings along. In the same bar you would drink your coffee and eat chocolate cake. You can just be yourself and laugh at yourself without end, and at at silly jokes.

Here in the small town, with all its faults, you live!

This is the life a passer-by would never experience. It is the life that is perfect, even if the dorpie is run down. The perfection of a dorpie is a feeling in your heart. To the Karoo residents who are worried: on my next Karoo holiday I will make an effort to visit the mentioned dorpies. As a plattelander, I know every dorpie has the cutest coffee shop, usually in the oldest building in town. These coffee shops would be decorated with genuine platteland love – the same love you would be able to taste in the coffee and chocolate cake.

In short: it is the people who make a dorp.

Salome Botes,
SWAKOPMUND

Salome Botes from Swakopmund wins an Ina Paarman gift hamper, worth more than R1 200. It contains a selection of products, a durable denim apron, a stainless steel rack with 14 spice blends, and a complete set of Ina Paarman's mini cookbooks. When it comes to Ina Paarman's products, convenience is key, but never at the expense of flavour, aroma or wholesomeness. The products are all made the traditional way, using fresh seasonal ingredients to give a gourmet flavour to every meal Visit **paarman.co.za** for more information and a wide variety of recipes. And do try the delicious smoked beetroot and yoghurt salad on page 111.

WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Write to us and tell us about your move to the platteland, the characters in your town, the things you love, the things that bug you… Send an email to **helloplatteland@gmail.com** or post your letter to *Platteland* Letters, PO Box 526, Moorreesburg 7310. We give preference to letters of fewer than 300 words. Remember to include your name and surname and, very importantly, the town where you live. *Platteland* reserves the right to edit and shorten letters.

Our towns need *your* help!

This week I bought *Platteland* for the first time in my life. I adore the Karoo and wanted to read more about the beautiful dorpies of the Karoo – and then I saw the letter "Please give us a break".

After reading through all of it, I would like to add the following: I think a very important debate has been started by the original letter "Dorpies that make you cry". I, too, have noticed the decline in some of the most beautiful towns and have often been saddened by it. However, that decay is not limited to platteland towns but also happens in large cities. Here where I live in Pretoria East, some houses are not maintained at all any more. Newspaper and black bags are taped over windows. The houses are no longer painted and there are no gardens to speak of. A few kilometres from my home, shacks have mushroomed on an open property and absolutely nothing is being done about it.

The problem is thus a national one, and I think it is time we stop hiding our heads in the sand like ostriches. We have to tackle this problem now.

I would like to challenge Johann and Irma – and all the other people who are complaining about the decline – to get involved in a town and to see where they can help. My brother and sister and I are busy renovating a little house in Richmond that is nearly 200 years old. It is important to us that this gem is preserved for our descendants so that our children will be able to see how people lived back then.

Folks, please do not merely drive through a dorpie and assume to know what's going on there. Stay over for one night at least, and look around. Talk to the locals. Johann and Irma missed out on a lot when they passed through Richmond, and I'm convinced this was the case with several of the other towns too.

To the plattelanders who are so unhappy about Johann and Irma's letter I would like to say: if your town is as great as you say it is, then you don't have to worry about this letter. Word of mouth is much stronger when it comes to recommendations for places to overnight or drive through. The letter was placed in *Platteland*, which is read by people who love the platteland. I am sure the readers know better.

Antoinette Schaafsma-Strydom
PRETORIA

Come on, assist the platteland!

First and foremost, thank you all for a most informative and enlightening magazine. I have all 25 editions so far and will continue buying them for a very long time. This is much more than one of the plethora of magazines on the shelf trying to glean one's "hard-earned bucks". To me this is an all-encompassing education tool.

You provide us with such a lot of information about our platteland, about the people who make up the platteland community. About their own likes and dislikes. One can see why the platteland is alive and well regardless of the hardships faced by all the communities. I find the stories of how the various communities go about working together inspiring.

I can almost see a bit of jealousy from those not out there living that sort of life. It is a far cry from being a "city" community. I am a so-called city person who cannot wait to get out of the rat race on a Friday afternoon. The platteland call is very strong.

Controversy is the name of the game in this world where the human race seems to have developed a "block" regarding fact, hearsay, opinions and interpretations. Some folk seem to believe the use of certain words and/or phrases are taboo. Others appear to believe that criticism is the way to attack an issue.

Being a very English South African, I have a very English sense of humour and chuckle at the way issues are portrayed in newspapers and on radio and TV. People like to jump to conclusions without having heard the full story – they have already made up their minds. Relax, readers, things are never as bad as they first seem.

People can say what they like about me, they can call me what they like, they can use any form of language. I will accept it all. After all, it is their opinion. There is only one thing I would ever take exception to, and that is being called late for dinner.

Maybe people should learn to be humble and accept that everyone reading and commenting on the magazine content might not have the complete story and do not quite understand the entire situation. To these people: get out there and assist the platteland. Its communities need our overseas and local visitors. They need a positive "us".

Platteland team, keep up the good work. This is a great education tool to many of us who can understand the hardship and friendliness of the platteland. I salute you, the platteland and its communities.

Harvey Tuckett
CRESWELL PARK, ROODEPOORT >

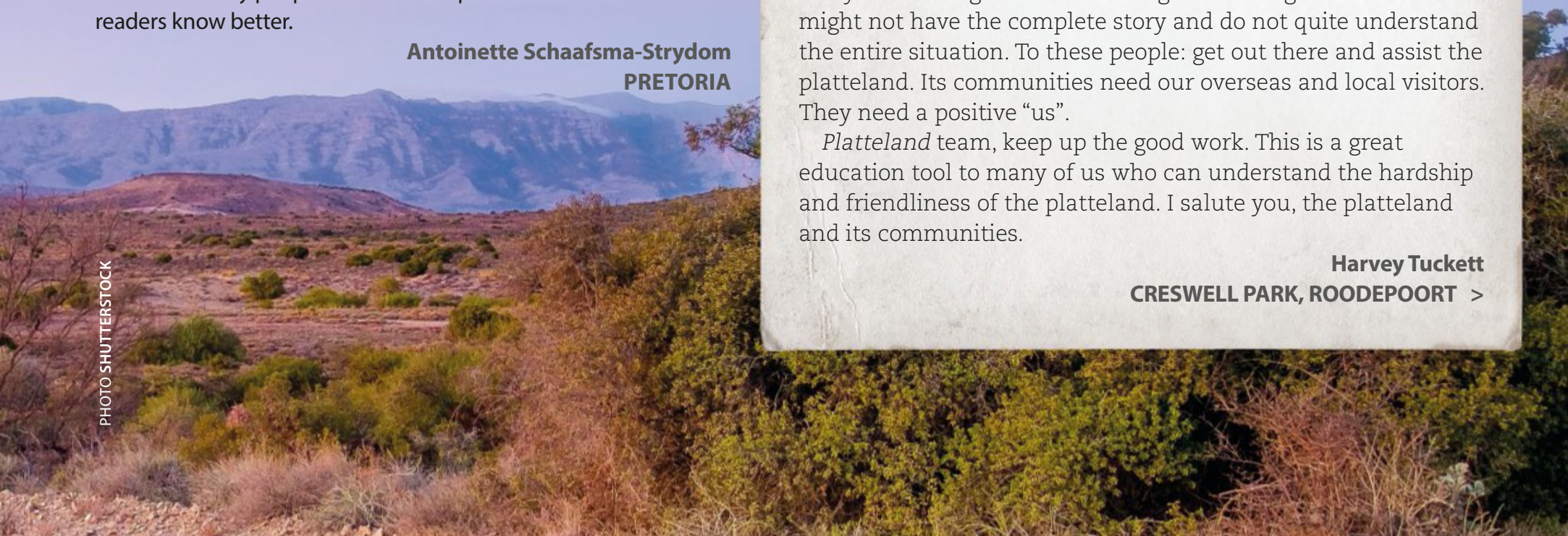


PHOTO **SHUTTERSTOCK**

Art inspiring art

Ever since I saw Willem van der Berg's striking photograph in your Summer 2019/20 issue, my fingers have been itching to draw it. However, I'd like to first ask for permission to show it to people.

Ryno Eksteen
WORCESTER

Thank you for your letter, Ryno. It's a beautiful drawing. Show it to the world, but also tell people about the excellent photographer and the inspiring magazine in which the photo was published! – Eds.

PICTURE-PERFECT KAROO

We spent the December holidays with Ouma in Mossel Bay and, as always, tried to make the most of every day. So it came to be that my brother-in-law, Pieter Botha, took us to Sutherland for two days to do some stargazing and explore a part of the beautiful Karoo.

Pieter had told me about the charming town of Merweville, and we agreed to stop in on the way back from Sutherland to Mossel Bay.

After the wonderful star expedition, we drove into Merweville. On one property I saw the back end of an old car wreck, and I knocked on the door of the house to ask whether I might photograph it from the front. I was pleasantly surprised when I saw the front: a rusty old Beetle! I was fortunate, because right hind the wreck stood a lovely windmill that I hadn't seen until then. It was the perfect finishing touch to this beautiful Karoo picture.

For a freelance photographer like me, this photograph was the diamond of the holidays. Our beautiful country truly holds treasures that have yet to be discovered!

Johan Jooste,
PRETORIA

All rise!

I always enjoy trying out your recipes, but I think there was an omission in your apricot pudding recipe on page 124 of the Summer 2019/20 edition, as the raising agent was left out. I guessed a heaped teaspoon and it seemed to work out.

I also tried the Elberta ice cream recipe on the same page – it was a huge success and I look forward to trying it with other fruit to see how it turns out.

Denise Hopkins
HOUT BAY

Our previous food editor, Aletta Lintvelt, responds:
Dear Denise, I'm so glad you have tried this and the ice cream recipe! The apricot pudding is based on a classic French dessert called a clafoutis, which is a thick, batter-like pancake pudding that contains no baking powder. The eggs act as the raising agent and during the cooking process the pudding will puff up a bit. As it cools down, it will sink in and retain a creamy, dense consistency inside. I hope it was delicious. Try it the French way, with cherries, for a real treat.

Life in the past lane

Here in the Swartland, you come across not only funny stories but also stirring events and people with big hearts. Even in my collection of recipe books from my great-grandmother's farm kitchen, I find half-overgrown footpaths from the hardship of yesteryear – and every footprint tells a story.

When I page through all my yesterdays and open the window to the past, it is as though I can smell Ouma's aniseed rusks, freshly baked pot bread and chicken pies. In my mind's eye I can hear the tick-tock of the grandfather clock… and the grinding of the wheel of the old windmill in the southerly wind.

When a bank of fog tumbles down Zebraskop like a snow-white waterfall; when the flock of guinea fowl on the koppie promise one another eternal bliss at the top of their voices and ibises quietly graze on the lawn, I think of the words of the late Afrikaans linguist Dr Anton Prinsloo when he travelled through the Swartland for a TV shoot: "Here, the Creator took his time to create everything so perfectly. So much peaceful beauty just couldn't have been created in an instant."

Proudly South African, these are my people, my heartland, the attic of the Swartland. I can almost hear my ancestors praying (like Moses in Psalm 90:17): "Establish the work of our hands for us, yes, establish the work of our hands."

Paging through *Platteland* magazine I get the same feeling of days gone by and I still smell Ouma's farm cooking – that is when you forget all the stress, tension, concerns and worries. Thank you for keeping our platteland pot simmering and steaming. You take us on an unbelievable journey!

Annette van Tonder,
PIKETBERG

An entire stack of Annette's letters arrived in our postbox at once – yes, several handwritten letters that must have been written over a long period but had been gathering dust somewhere in a post office. We will be sharing more of Annette's throughts with you in future issues. – Eds.

I have always dreamt of Africa

In June 2019 we were on our way back to Belgium – our holiday was over. In the departures hall at Cape Town International Airport, a sign with the words "Montagu approved" caught our eye. Those words spoke to our hearts and we knew it was time for a new direction in our lives.

Our South African love story started 15 earlier, when friends invited us to visit them here. They showed us the Garden Route and Route 62, and we fell in love with a whole new culture, lifestyle, and flora and fauna. The panoramic views, delicious food and particularly friendly people won our hearts. My family and I have been holidaying here every year since then.

We started seeing the special potential in the people and their resources. We saw a pioneering spirit, and the kind of courage, leadership and creativity that make this country unique. Seldom have I seen a nation that loves its country so deeply. It stirs deep emotions and gives you courage to do the impossible – like transporting tanks of water from the north to the south of the country, thousands of people who gather to pray for rain, entire communities who stand together in times of natural disaster.

From the age of nine, I knew the Lord was calling me to Africa. I imagined I was a nurse, travelling alone by motorbike. Well, Africa and I had to wait until I met my wonderful husband, Johan. I had to bring two exceptional children into this world and live for 55 years before the doors would open. (The dream of the motorbike I had to let go!)

My husband is a medical doctor and I am a doctor in Christian counselling, and we often work together. We are concerned with different problems – I specialise in anxiety disorders and panic attacks; my husband likes to help medical doctors with burnout.

We often visited Montagu and both felt this town could become our home. We bought Montagu Rose, formerly a bed-and-breakfast, with a view to restore it and use it as our consulting rooms. Our daughter, Anne-Laure Knockaert, oversees the restoration. She moved to South Africa in November 2019 and lives in Montagu. She specialises in restoration and renewal, and loves the architecture of Montagu.

We arrived last month and experienced the strangest Christmas, with high temperatures and mosquitoes on the stoep. "Jingle Bells" in shorts, and palm trees decorated with Christmas trinkets, as our own Christmas decorations were still at the Port of Cape Town.

Montagu is a precious diamond: we have a tidy and well-organised municipality, a very friendly post office, a kind congregation that, in my book, gives new meaning to the concept of hospitality. There is a large variety of shops and restaurants, farms that produce excellent wine, and large fruit farms. There is the Avalon Springs resort, sporting events, hobby clubs and schools in a peaceful, safe environment. The residents are proud to live in Montagu.

We are being invited to dinners and braais, and for drinks. Hospitality is not just a gift here in Montagu, but a way of life. The congregation takes care of its people.

We would like to thank Montagu for this warm welcome and for all the help. We love you and welcome you in our hearts.

Dr Isa Declercq
MONTAGU >

This is the view from Drs Johan and Isa Declercq's new home in Montagu in the Little Karoo. They recently moved here from Belgium; the moving van only arrived after Christmas.

YES TO A MOON CALENDAR…

Platteland is the best magazine for the whole family and is always full of new ideas and wonderful reading. We love it – first my husband reads it "*stukkend*", then I get my chance to enjoy the articles.

In response to Ria Putter's request for a moon calendar: fantastic idea! I grew up in Kirkwood in the Sunday's River Valley, and my late dad had the most beautiful vegetables in his garden. He used the moon and the four seasons to time the planting of his vegetables – those that grow under the ground and those above the ground – by the new moon and the full moon. The same principles were applied to my late mother's flower garden.

My dear dad also taught me how to cook fig and peach jam, preserve watermelon pieces, and bake bread. These are the basic skills of life that should be taught at school *and* at home.

The boys at our school kept vegetable gardens and were taught how to grow produce. The girls had domestic science classes and we were taught to cook, bake, make jams and so on. Also, the basics of cleaning and setting a table. Accolades to Kirkwood High School.

Please make the moon calendar a regular seasonal insert. The whole country will enjoy this.

Joan van der Merwe
HALFWAY GARDENS, MIDRAND

… BUT NO TO SUDOKU

You asked for reader feedback to Ria Putter's sudoku request. Please don't pollute *Platteland* with irrelevant content such as sudoku, which is readily available elsewhere. It's bad enough that politics already creeps into your publication.

As a subscriber to several of your other offerings, such as *go!*, *go! Drive & Camp*, *go! Hiking* and *go! Botswana*, I feel there is more than enough in the way of crosswords, etc.

A moon calendar is a different matter and would likely be of interest to many.

Ian Morison
PARKVIEW

A new view of spiders

While lying low over the holidays, I flipped through my Autumn 2019 copy of *Platteland* again and read the article about spiders (page 73).

It is a great feature with the most beautiful photographs. There are so many interesting facts that I handed it to my husband and daughter to read right away. From now on, my family and I will make sure we don't use insecticide spray unless it really is needed – the remark that insecticides cause spiders to suffer unnecessarily was very insightful.

I have always taken large spiders outside carefully, but for some reason I simply used the vacuum cleaner to get rid of daddy-longlegs. Sorry, that was a big mistake! From now on each and every little spider will be handled with care.

Thank you for the outstanding, informative article!

Yolanda Burger,
BOKSBURG

This mag is worth every cent!

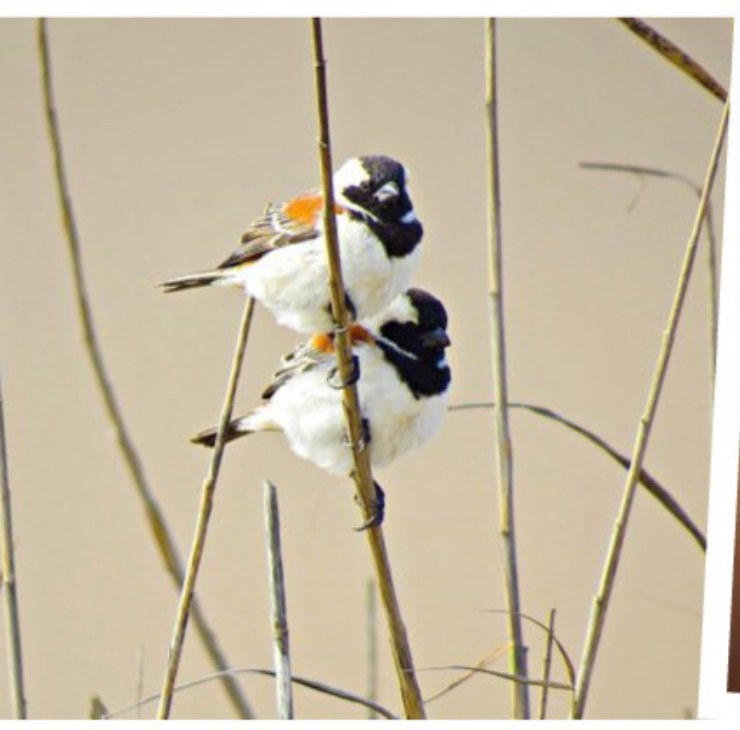
I'm on holiday at the coast and I'm reading and reading and reading… It feels as though this magazine goes on forever! Yay, more morning coffee and page tourism. Great magazine. No worries about your new pricing … It's worth every cent!

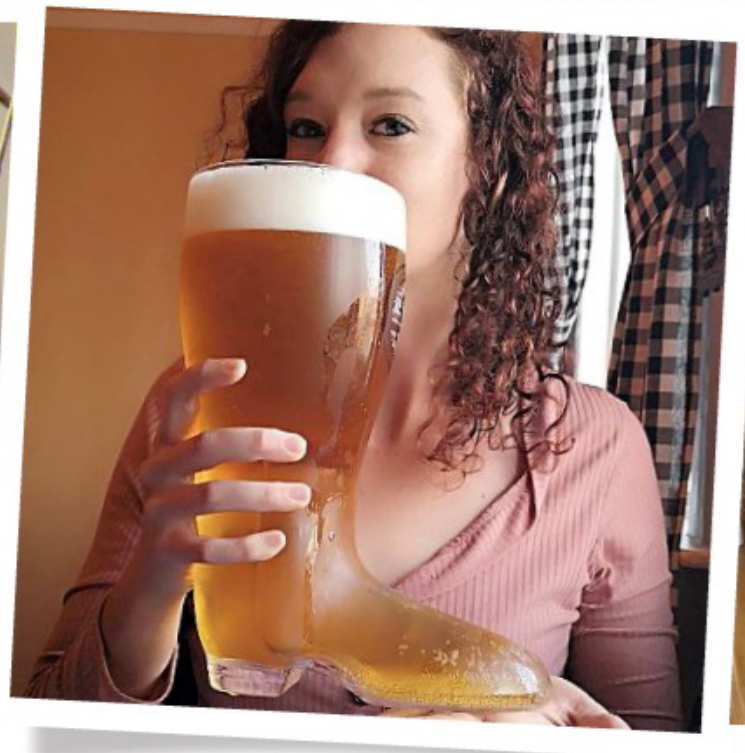
Zoe Merson-Davies,
JOHANNESBURG P

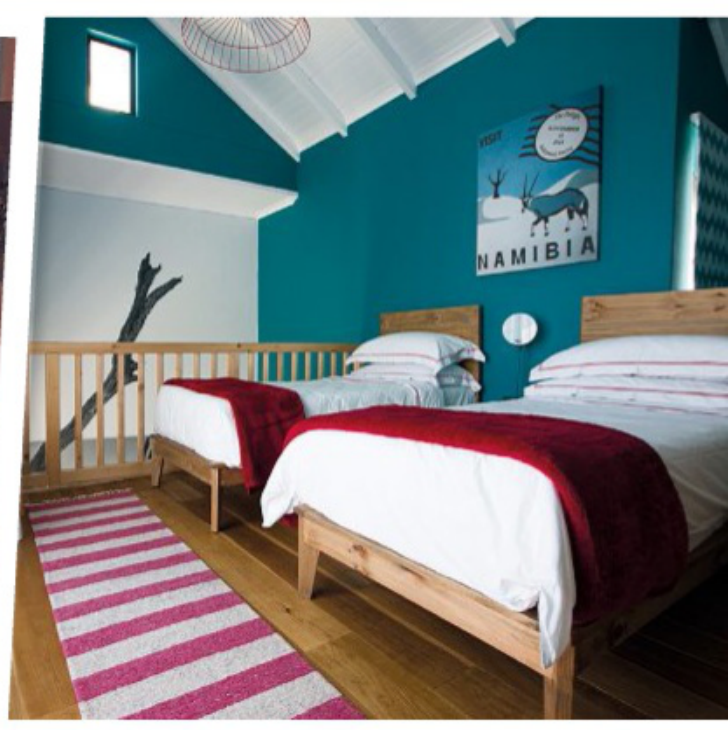
Swakopmund is a delight

Most Namibian journeys lead to the coast, where the Atlantic Ocean meets the windswept dunes of the Namib Desert. It is a magnificent sight to behold for those who have the privilege of stopping over in Swakopmund.

TEXT **ANNELIEN ROBBERTS**







Namibia might surprise you with its historical riches – the country offers tourists much more than the world's oldest desert.

When you first set foot in Swakopmund, you're bound to be enchanted by the town's old-world charm. It resembles a Bavarian village thanks to the German-influenced architecture – without the snow, of course, a big plus in our books.

Swakopmund was founded in 1892 as the main harbour for the German colony. Interestingly, the first civilian homes were prefabricated in Germany and transported to Namibia by ship, which explains the half-timbered structures.

When the international harbour was moved to the town of Walvis Bay during the South African occupation, Swakopmund became a coastal resort.

Now for the fun stuff: boot beers. Yes, it's a glass boot filled with beer. If the shoe fits… pour your cold brew in it. Raise your glass and say, "*Prost!*" That is, if you can manage to lift your giant glass off the table – or is it a jug?

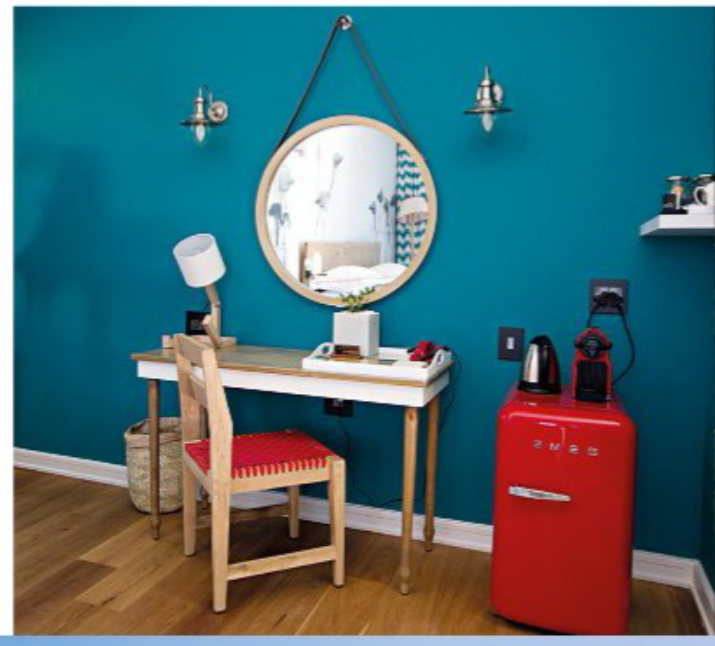
Pair your draught with delicious German cuisine, including fresh seafood, premium-quality Namibian meat and vegetarian options. There is no shortage of fabulous restaurants and cafés in Swakopmund. You are sure to find a place that will please every member of the family. >

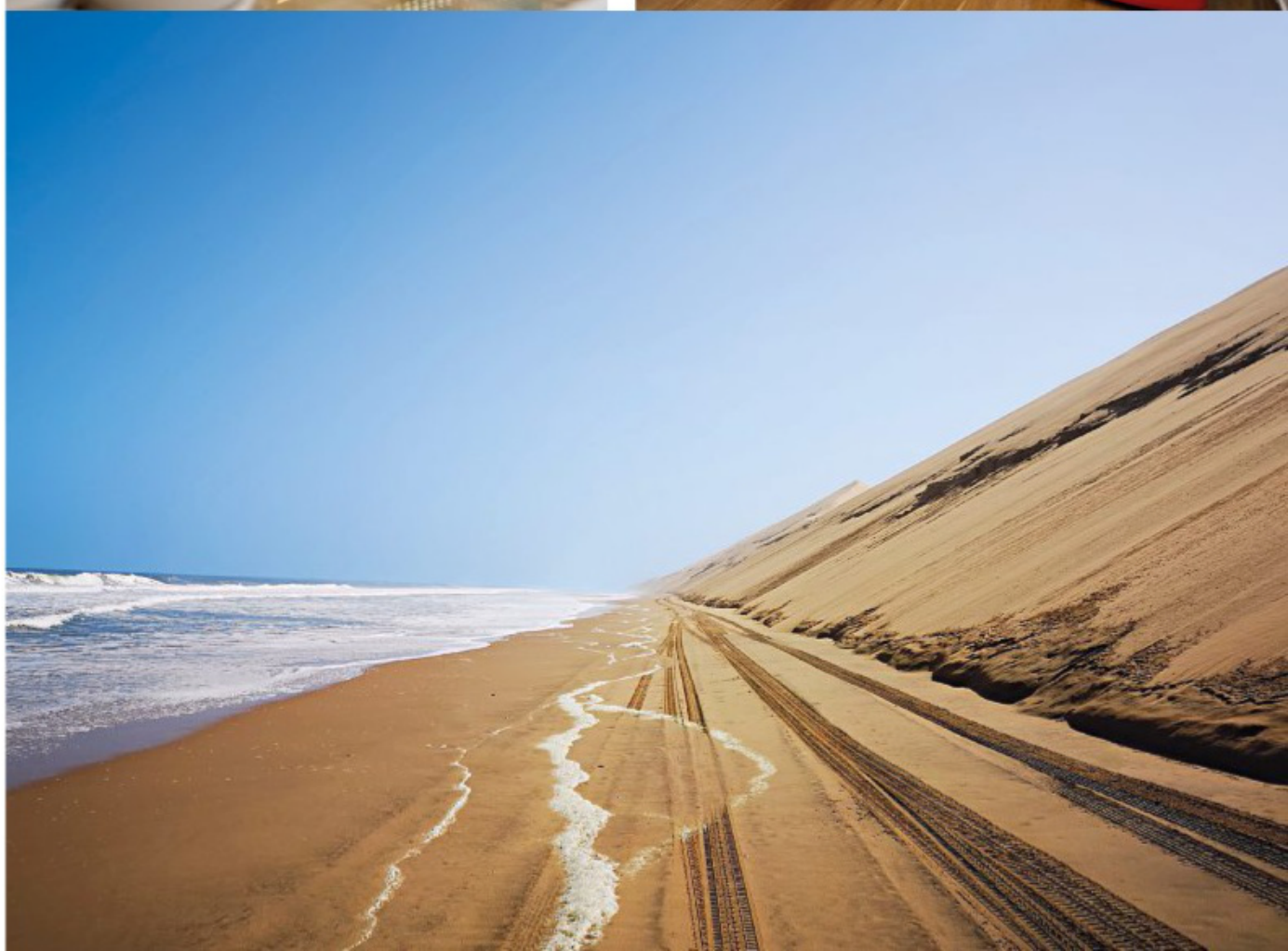
SWAKOPMUND IS WELL KNOWN as the activity hub of the country. One of the Namibian coast's biggest drawcards is its ample fishing opportunities. Local and international travellers flock to the coast in the summer months, with December being the peak season. But there is so much on offer year round. Kayak among dolphins and seals; jump out of a plane; paraglide high above the magnificent landscape; sandboard or sand-surf down some of the highest dunes; go on a thrilling Sandwich Harbour tour and a dune-driving adventure…

And if you need your trembling legs to calm down after all that action, take an educational desert tour to discover the most incredible creatures that call the Namib home. Go for a beer tasting at one of the many breweries that have popped up here over the past few years, or sample some of the local artisanal gin. On colder days, a coffee tasting will warm you up.

A walk through this town is a treat and all roads lead to The Delight Swakopmund. This modern hotel was developed by one of the leading names in the Namibian tourism industry: Gondwana Collection Namibia. Staying at The Delight is an experience in itself.

From the moment you are met by smiling faces at reception, you'll experience Namibian hospitality at its best. The stylish





interior is absolute eye candy, and the "We are here" sign with the map of Africa makes for an awesome Instagram shot.

The drinks menu at the bar in the reception area is on par with any of the bars you will find in town. It's a great place to hang out while planning your adventures for the upcoming days. Ask a staff member at reception to assist you with your bookings, or even to make restaurant reservations on your behalf.

The spacious rooms are decorated in blue, green and red. They have all the creature comforts one could ask for, including comfortable bedding, a tea/coffee station with a Nespresso machine and biscuits, a flat-screen TV and a bright-red mini fridge.

In the words of one traveller, "The Delight is exceptional. Take the red fridge, for example. It's not just a fridge – it talks to you."

The breakfast buffet is a generous affair featuring fresh, delicious food. Enjoy the traditional eggs, bacon and sausage; try the yoghurt and muesli; or go French with fresh pastries, jams and cheeses. Decorating your own waffle and ice cream with the colourful sweets on display will make you feel like a kid again. The highlight, however, is the freshly harvested oysters accompanied by a glass of sparkling wine.

The Delight is a hotel with character, one that tells a story, and it is shared with guests wholeheartedly. Will you experience your first or your next Namibian story here?

YOU CAN PAY LESS!

With a Gondwana Card, available to Namibian and other SADC residents, it is impossible not to be tempted. The Gondwana Card offers SADC members 40% discount on accommodation (bed & breakfast), including camping and Camping2Go; 25% discount on dinner; and 25% discount on activities. Apply online at gondwana-collection.com.

News & diary

From Riebeek West to Koringberg, from Paternoster to Elandsfontein, in the platteland there is always something new to taste or see.

COMPILED BY **JOHAN VAN ZYL**
PHOTOS **PETER VAN NOORD**

This is how you smile when you open a business which is inundated with customers. Corné Pretorius and André Beaurain pose by the summer cymbidium orchids in full bloom. Yes, they're for sale.

Riebeek's new drawcard: a treehouse

André Beaurain and Corné Pretorius's new Riebeek Valley Garden Centre on the main drag of Riebeek West is guaranteed to make your jaw drop. Locals describe this plant paradise as a "destination" – it also boasts an art gallery, a coffee shop and restaurant, a deli and gift shop (with Karoo lamb all the way from Prieska). It's a destination that is already attracting interest from far and wide.

If the names of these green-fingered lads ring a bell: we featured them in *Platteland* #8 (Spring 2015), and in the same issue they shared practical advice on how to keep orchids happy.

In August 2015, before the foundations of the new garden centre were dug, these two planted a baobab that had germinated in 1969 and nearly died in the 2000s (owing to the wet Cape winters) on the premises, and planned the buildings around it.

Almost everything except the cement and the bricks was recycled, says Corné, standing under the baobab, which now grows in an airy central entrance hall, better known as the Treehouse, under a glass roof made from old Coca-Cola fridge doors. The enormous front door, which is more than 400 years old, came from an ancient Moorish town in Spain.

Put aside half a day and head for 47 Church Street in Riebeek West with a full wallet. There is something here to tickle every fancy, from bonsais to orchids, but do make sure not to

The entrance hall, as seen from the restaurant (it's the baobab's trunk on the left). The stained glass is by Koringberg artist Ebert Nieuwoudt.

Corné and André in front of the baobab in the Treehouse, which has reached the glass ceiling already.

miss the interesting collection of seed and bulbs. They sell, among other things, heirloom seed from Tortoiseback, the holistic veterinarian Brett Bard's small permaculture farm at the foot of the Swartberg in the Karoo, and the loveliest winter bulbs that occur naturally in the Swartland.

CONTACT riebeeknursery.co.za
022 461 2002

You can stick these flowering bulbs in the soil and forget about them, says André. After rain, they sprout and bloom, and during the dry season they die back until the next rains. It's the easiest form of gardening ever!

SWELLENDAM PHOTO **SHUTTERSTOCK**

Escape to Swellendam (and grow wise)

South Africans, especially those in the Cape, are sun worshippers who sink into a deep indoor hibernation at the slightest drop in temperature, usually only to consider venturing out again in spring.

This challenge led Johan Paisley and other members of the community in the Overberg town of Swellendam to come up with a brilliant plan: the Swellendam Winter School. Over a period of four months – from May to August – when the number of visitors to the third-oldest dorp in South Africa drops dramatically, more than 50 practical courses for adults are offered in these beautiful natural surroundings – and no, everyone will learn something without needing to stress about an exam.

Several artists, writers, hobby enthusiasts, crafters, soap makers, bakers, distillers, yoga and meditation instructors, gardeners, adventurers and experts in a variety of fields live in the area. John wants to use this "fleet of talent and skills" to transfer traditional skills while creating jobs at a time when most of the shops, eateries and accommodation establishments are rather quiet. The courses are divided into Creative Arts & Design, Mind & Body, Food & Wine, Nature & Heritage, and Home, Craft & Design.

Visit the website for a complete programme and dates, as well as places to stay and dine.

CONTACT winterschool.co.za
admin@winterschool.co.za
078 778 5365 >

New sections for the Cape Camino

The Cape Camino pilgrimage route, divided into four sections that will eventually cover about 850 km, saw the light in 2015, when the fourth section, the circular route of 160 km in the Cape Peninsula, was launched. Now, the very first group of pilgrims completed the first and second sections totalling 222 km, known as the Limietberg and Berg River sections, respectively, and *Platteland* caught up with them over lunch at Die Rooi Granaat in Aurora. Have a look at the website to find out how you can walk the trail on specific dates in a group or on your own.

Watch a short YouTube video about the launch of Section 1 and 2 that was filmed by a pilgrim, Sandra Korse of the Netherlands: type in "Cape Camino launch of sections 1&2" at youtube.com.

CONTACT capecamino.co.za
peggy@capecamino.co.za or gabrielle@capecamino.co.za
083 997 7404 (Peggy) or 084 844 7996 (Gabrielle)

At the back are Peggy Coetzee-Andrew of Cape Town and her mother, Gabrielle Andrew of Hopefield, who manage and market the Cape Camino. With them is the first group of pilgrims who completed the Limietberg and Berg River sections: from left are Lee Zoeller from Kalk Bay, Jolene Nell from Windhoek, Sandra Korse from the Netherlands, Colin Gale from Newlands, Naadir Vorajee from Durban, and Chantel Barnard, also from Kalk Bay.

Take your fermentation (or pottery skills) to the next level

The Korean kimchi recipe on page 79 was made in what must be the most flamboyant fermentation pot in the country. This functional sculpture is the handiwork of Leon Potgieter, formerly from Pretoria (and Cape Town). Under the name Leon Potterbakker, he also makes beautiful vases, fruit bowls, plates, bowls and oil jars. We particularly love his large slow-cooking clay pots, which you can use on the stovetop and in the oven. Leon makes all these products to order – have a look on his website and place your order online.

There is more good news for Swartlanders and those living in the Western Cape: Leon and his partner, Izak Ferreira, last year swapped their flat in the Mother City for Koringberg, where Leon now offers pottery classes for anyone from beginners to old hands. One course, which comprises four evening classes over four weeks, will make a great outing for a group of friends wishing to learn a new skill. Once the N7 road-widening project wraps up soon, Koringberg will again be just an hour's drive from Cape Town.

CONTACT potterbakker.co.za

Leon with his fermentation pot that *Platteland* used to make kimchi; and more of his work below.

Bubbly personality

As *Platteland's* home-made kombucha was happily fermenting away in Consol jars in the pantry for our fermentation story on page 74, the founders of Happy Culture Kombucha, Mark Jones and Manon Colmant, sent us samples of their two new products, Cherry CBD and Zesty Energy.

With the former, which is enriched with CBD oil (cannabidiol) derived from *Cannabis sativa*, they join the growing wave of businesses using this active compound in the cannabis plant to lend "healing properties" to various products. The Zesty Energy variety has a kick of guarana and ginseng that promises to put a new spring in your step (and your mind).

Happy Culture Kombucha's fermented organic green tea full of bubbles is available in 340 ml (R25–R30) and 850 ml (R55–R62) recyclable PET bottles. It contains less than 4 g sugar per 100 ml. The range can be found at Spar, Pick n Pay, Food Lover's Market, Wellness Warehouse and many coffee shops, health stores, delis, farm stalls and restaurants.

CONTACT happyculture.co.za
hello@happyculture.co.za

PHOTO JAC DE VILLIERS

Kobus van der Merwe

Taste the platteland

The eateries acclaimed in the annual competition of the restaurant guide *EatOut* are almost always in the Boland, in Cape Town and sometimes in the City of Gold – but for *Platteland*'s two biggest favourites you would have to head out to the platteland. Naturally!

Start saving today and book a table at Kobus van der Merwe's internationally renowned Wolfgat in Paternoster, where you will taste the essence of the West Coast in astounding combinations on your plate. Wolfgat was named Restaurant of the Year at the World Restaurant Awards 2019, and ranks fourth on *EatOut*'s list of best South African restaurants.

In ninth place is Chantel Dartnall's Restaurant Mosaic at The Orient hotel deep in the thickets of the Francolin Conservancy in Elandsfontein. Here, your tongue is sent on an unforgettable flight of fancy where Mother Nature inspires every dish. Months after our visit in November 2019 we are still dreaming about every course and those *mosbolletjie* fingers that you dip into a creamy cheese sauce…

And unlike at so many other top restaurants, you'll find both these chefs hard at work in the kitchen – and you can really taste the difference. Booking, preferably online, is essential at both restaurants.

CONTACT Wolfgat wolfgat.co.za
Restaurant Mosaic restaurantmosaic.com >

Events for your diary

WESTERN CAPE

SpiritFest, Swellendam

5–8 MARCH

Yoga, dance, meditation and community are the order of the day at this festival of the spirit in the natural beauty of the Overberg.

Where? Somerset Gift, Sparrebosch Road

Hours From 14:00 on the Thursday

Cost Several options for day or weekend visitors, with or without accommodation, at webtickets.co.za

Contact spiritfest.co.za

WESTERN CAPE

Ambeloui Harvest Festival, Hout Bay

14 MARCH

In *Platteland* #22 (last year's Autumn issue) we featured the Christodoulou family of Hout Bay and the excellent MCC they make. Now it's time once again for their annual harvest festival, where you can buy sparkling wine by the glass (or bottle or case), delicious Greek souvlaki grilled over the coals, and all sorts of Greek snacks – cooked or frozen.

Where? Ambeloui Wine Farm, 4075 Valley Road, Hout Bay

Hours 11:00–18:00

Contact ambeloui.co.za

wine@ambeloui.co.za

WESTERN CAPE

Plaasfees, Durbanville

14 MARCH

Experience the delights of rural life, including food, music, a wire-car grand prix, more than 100 stalls and entertainment for the kids. Visit the Facebook page for the latest info.

Where? Meerendal, Vissershok Road, Durbanville

Hours 09:00–17:00

Cost R70pp (R30 for kids aged 2–18) from Computicket

Contact durbanvilleplaasfees.co.za Durbanville Plaasfees

WESTERN CAPE

SA Cheese Festival, Stellenbosch

25–27 APRIL

Taste the best South African and international cheeses, outstanding alcoholic drinks (wine, beer, gin…) and much more at this popular festival, which is being held for the 19th time this year, and over the Freedom Day long weekend to boot.

Where? Sandringham, off the N1 (exit 39)

Hours 10:00–18:00

Cost R240pp per day (R200 for pensioners; R20 for kids aged 2–13) through Computicket

Please note No tickets will be sold at the gate

Contact cheesefestival.co.za

WESTERN CAPE

Fragrance Fest, Great Brak River & Friemersheim

14 MARCH

Pop in at all the lovely stopovers to catch up or shop along the 40 km-long Fragrance Route between Great Brak River and Friemersheim. The full programme is on the Proe Mosselbaai website, or read our feature on the route in the previous issue of *Platteland* (Summer 2019/20).

Contact proemb.co.za nelmar@vodamail.co.za (Nelma Ruschioni)

MPUMALANGA

Wakkerstroom Music Festival

20–22 MARCH

The programme of this annual classical music festival with baroque, chamber music and jazz performances is crammed with soothing comfort for the ears. Full programme on the website and Facebook page.

Where? Various venues in around the town

Contact wmfestival.co.za Wakkerstroom Music Festival

WESTERN CAPE

Giant Pumpkin Festival, Heidelberg

27 & 28 MARCH

Aside from the search for the largest pumpkin in South Africa, this festival features lots to look forward to for runners, mountain-bikers, golfers, music lovers and gourmands.

Where? Heidelberg Showgrounds

Contact pumpkinfestival.co.za

MPUMALANGA

Boer & Brit Day, Val

28 MARCH

The "whisky train" incident of 1900 is re-enacted, followed by all the festivities you'd expect from a hamlet like this. Find out more in the feature on page 54.

Contact valhotel.co.za

082 550 5540

GAUTENG

Autumn Garden Show, Midrand

3–5 APRIL

A fun outing for the entire family is guaranteed, with free talks and demonstrations, stalls selling the latest plants, handiwork, gardening paraphernalia, food and drinks, as well as a labyrinth garden to explore and a jungle gym and pony rides for the little ones.

Where? The Herb Farm, 264 Summit Road (R562), Bridle Park

Hours 09:00–17:00

Cost R20–R70pp at webtickets.co.za (prices increase by R10 at the gate)

Contact gardenshow.co.za

WESTERN CAPE

Gifberg Spookfees, Vanrhynsdorp

3–5 APRIL

Only 200 tickets are available for this Namaqualand music festival, where the likes of Koos Kombuis, Abel Kraamsaal and Glaskas are set to perform.

A cash bar and food will be on offer. Take along your tent and camping gear, swimwear and walking shoes.

Where? Gifberg Holiday Farm, about 30 km outside Vanrhynsdorp

Hours From 10:00 on the Friday to 13:00 on the Sunday

Cost R750pp (campsite included) at quicket.co.za

Contact Gifberg Spook Fees tweemusiek@gmail.com

GAUTENG

Easter Market, Pretoria

11 APRIL

Young and old, women and men, and two- and four-legged children are welcome at the Irene Village Market's special Easter Market with food, deli products, art and handiwork. Other dates are 7 and 28 March, 4 and 25 April, and 2 and 30 May.

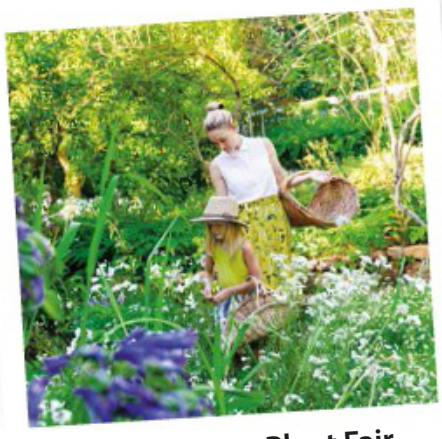
A "Christmas in July" market is

being planned for 25 July.
Where? Big Red Barn, 7 Nelson Road, Olifantsfontein
Hours 08:00–13:30
Contact irenemarket.co.za
info@irenemarket.co.za
060 965 4894

WESTERN CAPE

Easter Market, Langebaan

11 APRIL
Browse, shop, eat, drink and socialise.
Where? City Hall
Hours 10:00–15:00
Contact Langebaan Market



Tokara Rare Plant Fair

WESTERN CAPE

Tokara Rare Plant Fair and Autumn Open Garden, Stellenbosch

18 APRIL
Tokara opens its magnificent indigenous garden to the public and this year a new range of handmade linen inspired by the garden (pillowcases, tablecloths, aprons…) will also be for sale. Stroll along the many winding paths, past sculptures by local artists, to the large dam, the cork oak forest, the vegetable garden or the mountain stream with lily-lined pools. The annual sale of rare plants is held on the same day and entrance proceeds will be donated to a local charity. You could also buy refreshments, wine and olive oil.
Where? Tokara, Helshoogte Pass
Hours 09:00–16:00
Cost R50pp (children under 10 get in free of charge)
Contact tokara.com
opengarden@tokara.com or info@rareplantfair.co.za

EASTERN CAPE

Karoo Food Festival, Cradock

24–27 APRIL
If you love the Karoo – especially the food and people of the region – you'll regret missing this gourmand festival. Highlights include good food and drink, music, demonstrations and master-classes, a mountain-bike race, a trail run and lots of fun for the kids.
Contact Karoo Food Festival
karoofoodfestival@gmail.com

FREE STATE

Bloem Show, Bloemfontein

24 APRIL – 2 MAY
Agriculture, culture, top-notch entertainment and trade meet at this show, now in its 136th year!
Where? Bloemfontein showgrounds
Cost R90pp per day (R60 for pensioners, students and children aged 12–18; R40 for children aged 6–11; under-6s get in free of charge) from Computicket, Shoprite Checkers Money Market counters or at the gates
Contact bloemskou.co.za

GAUTENG

Protea Cullifest, Cullinan

25–27 APRIL
This family festival of the NG Church Premiermyn and the Christelike Maatskaplike Raad is putting on a special celebration, because it's the 20th anniversary of the festival and the 100th anniversary of the church. There will be top musicians, an amusement park, a beer tent, stalls, flowers and much more.
Where? NG Church Premiermyn festival grounds, Plot 12, Zonderwater Road
Cost R100pp (R80 for pensioners; R50 for children over 6) at plankton.mobi.
Contact cullifest.co.za
Protea Cullifest Cullinan

NORTHERN CAPE

AfrikaBurn, Tankwa Karoo

27 APRIL – 3 MAY
The plains of the Tankwa Karoo National Park throws on a colourful coat over the Freedom Day long weekend for the annual AfrikaBurn festival.
Cost Visit the website for details, to register and to buy tickets
Contact afrikaburn.com

WESTERN CAPE

Pink Loerie Mardi Gras and Arts Festival, Knysna

30 APRIL – 3 MAY
This rainbow celebration of art, culture and entertainment was cancelled last year but promises to be bigger and brighter than ever before.
Contact pinkloerie.co.za

GAUTENG

Tierlantynkies Design and Food Fair, Pretoria

30 APRIL– 5 MAY
Food and wine, toys, clothing, jewellery, décor, deli products…
Where? 56 Saal Street, Zwavelpoort
Cost R35pp on the website
Contact tierlantynkies.co.za

KZN

Splashy Fen Music Festival, Underberg

9–13 APRIL
South Africa's top musicians take to the stage over the Easter Weekend at this lively gathering, held for the 31st time in the beautiful Drakensberg this year.
Where? Splashy Fen Farm, about 20 km from Underberg
Hours From 10:00 on Thursday to 12:00 on Monday
Cost Ticket prices vary – book on the website
Contact splashyfen.co.za

LIMPOPO

Food, Wine and Beer Festival, Haenertsburg

1–3 MAY
The name of this outdoor family festival says it all, and according to those who've been, no foodie in Limpopo should miss it.
Hours From 09:00 on the Friday to 16:00 on the Sunday
Cost R50pp (free for under-16s) at quicket.co.za
Contact magoebaskloof tourism.co.za Haenertsburg Food Wine and Beer Festival
079 686 6535

WESTERN CAPE

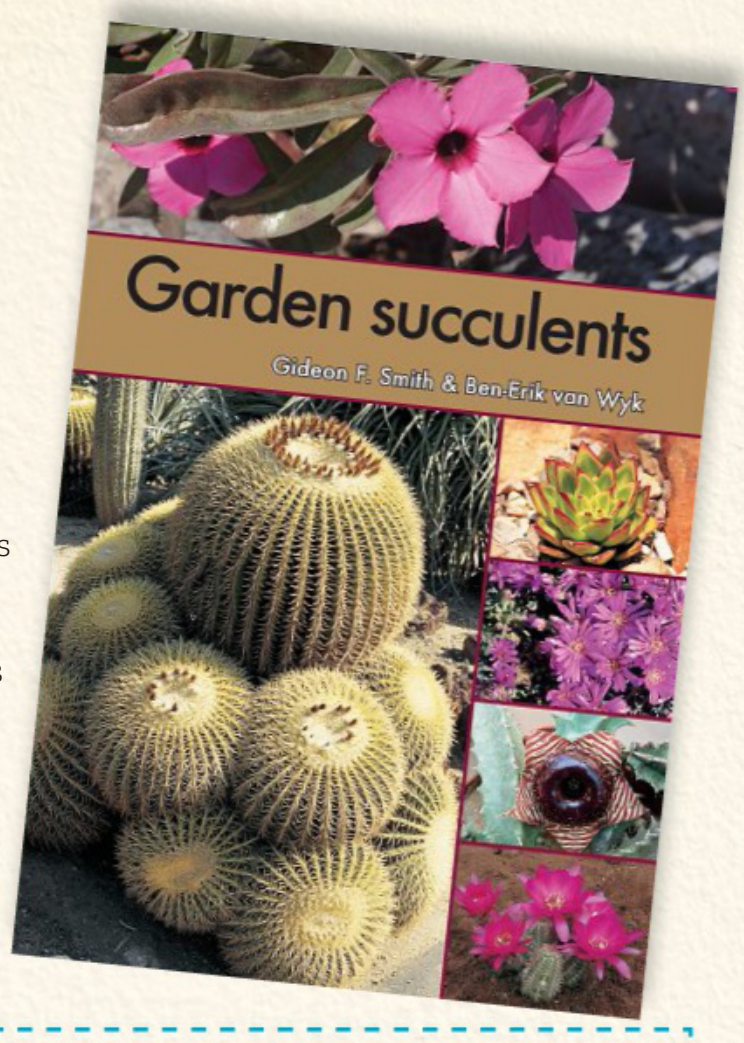
Art in the Nature Garden, Montagu

25 & 26 APRIL
Montagu is home to a wealth of plants that are endemic to the Little Karoo. Now, the Montagu Art Association is exhibiting the work of more than 20 local artists in the town's nature garden. Workshops, talks about art and nature, and a tea garden with refreshments form part of the programme.
Where? Montagu Nature Garden, Van Riebeeck Street
Hours From 10:00 (25 April) and from 16:00 (26 April)
Contact Montagu Art Association 082 712 8770 (Janine) P

PHOTOS SUPPLIED

Read on!

Will you take them to the kitchen, to the garden or to bed? Here are 10 of our favourite new books to brighten autumn days and nights.



***Garden Succulents* by Gideon F Smith and Ben-Erik van Wyk**
In a country like South Africa where drought is reaching disastrous proportions in some areas, it makes sense to plant succulents that are able to store water and survive such hard times. Moreover, succulents are easy to grow and are available in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and colours. Written with gardeners and horticulturists in mind, this guide contains descriptions of more than 400 of the best-known garden succulents, and information about the most important succulent families to help you identify plants fast. More than 600 full-colour photos complete the offering. *Platteland* compiled an article about this book – read it on page 92.
R395 Briza 012 329 3896 briza.co.za
WIN 1: Succulents

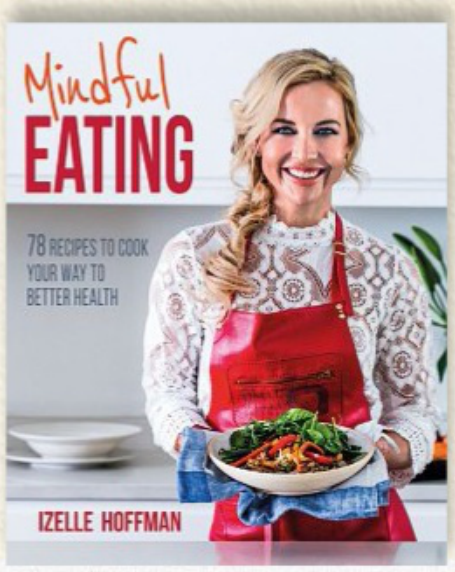
How to enter

To be in line to win one of these books, send an email to helloplatteland@gmail.com. Write "Autumn" followed by the keyword for the book in the subject field, and your name and home address (not postal address) in the message field. The closing date is 29 May 2020, and the winners will be announced on the *Platteland* Facebook page. ("Like" *Platteland* to see our posts.) For *Platteland*'s standard terms and conditions, go to weg.netwerk24.com/go/terms-and-conditions-20160518

***Cook and Enjoy for Kids* by SJA de Villiers and Eunice van der Berg**
This companion to the top-selling *Cook and Enjoy* has been revised, updated and redesigned for a new generation of young cooks. Containing more than 55 recipes, with step-by-step instructions and full-colour photographs, it's just the recipe book for novices in the kitchen.
R280 Human & Rousseau
021 406 3033 nb.co.za
WIN 2: Kids

***All Sorts of One-dish Wonders* by Chantal Lascaris**
With this collection of about 80 recipes, self-confessed messy cook Chantal Lascaris proves that cooking in one pot or pan can make for meals that are delicious, healthy and even dinner-party worthy. Breakfast, mains, side dishes and dessert are all covered.
R240 Struik Lifestyle 011 327 3550
penguinrandomhouse.co.za
WIN 1: One-dish

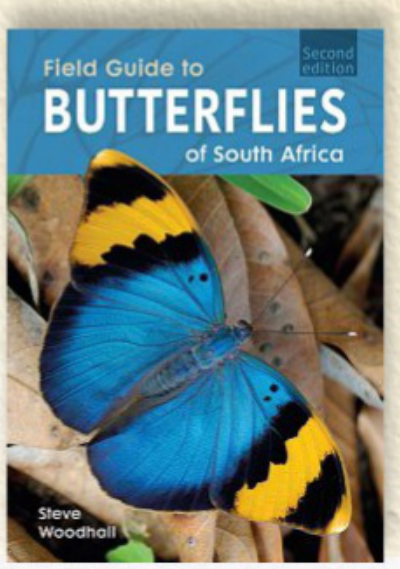
***Super Natural: Over 130 Plant-based Recipes* by Sarah Graham**
The recipes in this lovely hard-cover book by blogger and TV presenter Sarah Graham revolve around the abundance of vegetables and natural unprocessed seasonal foods that don't contain refined carbohydrates or sugar. Visit the publisher's website for three free recipes.
R320 Struik Lifestyle 011 327 3550
penguinrandomhouse.co.za
WIN 1: Super



***Mindful Eating: 78 Recipes to Cook Your Way to Better Health* by Izelle Hoffman**

The author is on a mission to change perceptions of healthy eating. In this inspiring motivational guide with recipes, she shares ideas for nutritious breakfasts to give you an energy boost, quick weekday meals, pastries, classic dishes and old family favourites with a healthy twist.

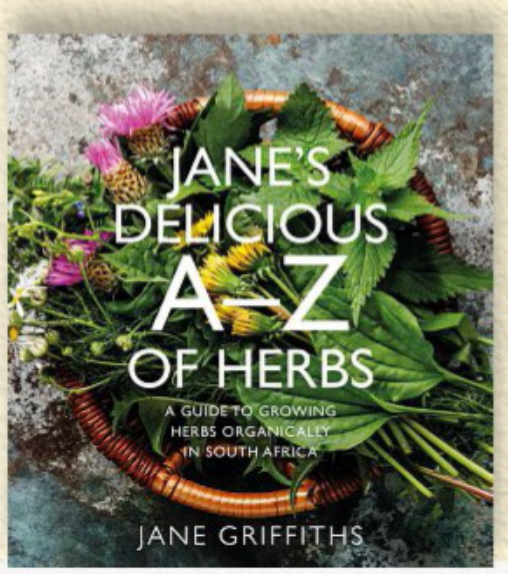
R350 Struik Lifestyle 011 327 3550
penguinrandomhouse.co.za
WIN 1: Mindful



***Field Guide to Butterflies of South Africa* by Steve Woodhall**

The fully revised second edition of this popular field guide features a wealth of information about the 671 butterfly species that occur in South Africa. Besides updated distribution maps, more than 70% of the full-colour photos are completely new. It is the ideal gift for entomologists, gardeners and nature lovers.

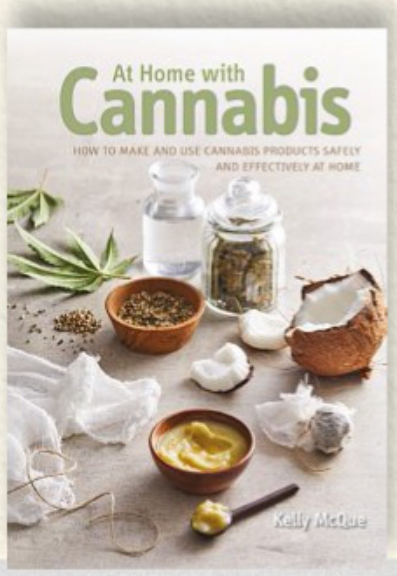
R390 Struik Nature 011 327 3550
penguinrandomhouse.co.za
WIN 1: Butterflies



***Jane's Delicious A–Z of Herbs* by Jane Griffiths**

At *Platteland* we are huge fans of Jane Griffiths, and in this best-selling guide she focuses on more than 80 types of herbs, how to grow them organically (in the garden or in containers) and how best to use them medicinally and in the kitchen. Initially, sales exceeded 8 000 copies, and now the book is finally in print again with a new cover.

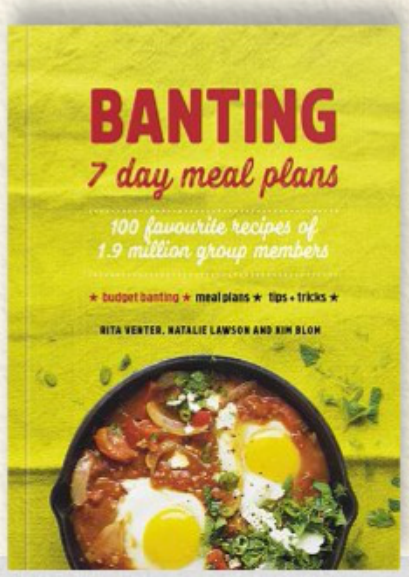
R285 Jonathan Ball 011 601 8000
jonathanball.co.za
WIN 1: Jane



***At Home with Cannabis* by Kelly McQue**

These days, many South Africans are growing *dagga* in the garden, so the time was ripe for a book subtitled "How to make and use cannabis products safely and effectively at home".
The author is a cancer survivor and cannabis consultant from Durban.

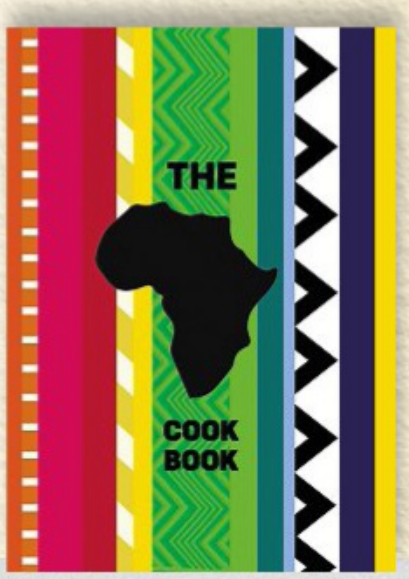
R200 Struik Lifestyle 011 327 3550
penguinrandomhouse.co.za
WIN 1: Cannabis



***Banting 7 Day Meal Plans* by Rita Venter, Natalie Lawson and Kim Blom**

In this book, the women behind the popular Facebook group Banting 7 Day Meal Plans narrow down the 100 best and most affordable low-carb recipes shared by the 1,9 million members of the group. Most are easy to prepare and fool-proof.

R350 Quivertree 021 686 6849
quivertreepublications.com
WIN 1: Banting



***The Africa Cookbook* by Portia Mbau**

The author of this visual feast with a focus on African dishes opened The Africa Café, the first restaurant in South Africa to feature only African food on its menu, in Cape Town 27 years ago. Her recipes, from all over the continent, include snacks, salads, vegetarian dishes, meat dishes, desserts and drinks.

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quivertreepublications.com
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OK Foods okfoods.co.za
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Takealot takealot.com

Let's go to town

As the sun sets ever earlier and the leaves show their autumn colours, these cosy items caught our eye.

BY **MARIAN VAN WYK**
PHOTOS **GREG COX**

PVC-free single-deck cool bag
R120 Woolworths
woolworths.co.za 0860 022 002

Gemma Orkin ceramic bowls R450 each
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Woven hyacinth planter with wooden legs (plant excluded) R350
Woolworths woolworths.co.za
0860 022 002

Velskoene R799 per pair
Fish and More Fish and More 028 435 7096
In-Step jbayboots.com >

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Cast-iron tea pot with bamboo handle and **two cups** R699 for the set
Poetry poetrystores.co.za

Bungalow Living ceramic leaf plates R75 each
Present Space PRESENTspace

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Veldskoen veldskoen.shoes

Sorbet Tranquil Fresh Green Tea Body Wash (200 ml), **Hand & Nail Cream** (75 ml), and **Balth Salts** (300 g) with wooden spoon R49, R69 & R89
Sorbet sorbet.co.za
Clicks clicks.co.za

Crocheted cacti in ceramic jars R120 each
Baraka Gifts & Decor barakashop.co.za
021 425 8883

Biogrow Finalsan is a herbicidal soap that controls weeds, mosses and algae in driveways and on stoeps; it is child- and pet-friendly (500 ml) **R152** Starke Ayres Garden Centre
starkeayresgc.co.za

Bonnie Bio Compostable Cling Wrap, under ideal conditions it biodegrades in six months (30 m) **R70**
Spar 021 439 0913 (Sea Point branch)

Scent Skin Cleanser No. 2 and **Skin Awakening Lotion No. 2** with clary sage, grapefruit, cardamom, geranium and lavender (200 ml each) **R135–R265**
Scent thescentuary.co.za

Plant bags made by hand from upcycled billboard advertising material, round (20 cm x 22 cm) **R350**, wall-mounted (29 cm x 35 cm) **R375**
Riley's Wild Bunch Rileys Wild Bunch
062 425 2727 Made in collaboration with Growbag growbag.co.za

Probac biodegradable Dishwashing Liquid (750 ml) R56
Checkers checkers.co.za 0800 01 07 09

Gardener's apron
(tools and seed excluded) R211
Starke Ayres Garden Centre starkeayresgc.co.za

Stasher Reusable Silicone Storage Bags
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Skinny laMinx shop.skinnylaminx.com

Handmade By Me tray R330
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Cape Dutch Dark Thick Hot Chocolate,
unsweetened and free of casein, additives, flavourants and gluten (255 g) **from R34** Natural Health Warehouse naturalhealthwarehouse.com
Coffee mug R60 Woolworths
woolworths.co.za 0860 022 002

Platteland says
Read more about beetroot on pages 108 and 112.

Vegetable seed packets R30 each
Starke Ayres Garden Centre starkeayresgc.co.za

Copper-coloured metal hanging plant holder (plant excluded) R250
Poetry poetrystores.co.za

Solid oak plates
R369–R449 each and **bowl** R399
ARKworkshop arkworkshop.co.za P

OHRIGSTAD

Happy valley

Most residents of Ohrigstad agree that their town has been built on three pillars: the farmers, the school and the church. In this dry, inaccessible part of Limpopo, residents have learnt to adapt and support one another.

TEXT AND PHOTOS **MIA LOUW**

Farm workers are harvesting butternuts on a farm about 2 km outside Ohrigstad in the direction of Pilgrim's Rest. Over the years farmers have experimented with a variety of crops. Today, they farm mainly with citrus, macadamias, seed maize, seed beans and wheat.

The Royal Palm B&B is located high against the mountain, and offers amazing views of the town and valley.

Faith and humour. According to long-time Ohrigstad residents, these are the two essential requirements if you want to thrive in this valley. Their bushveld town can be found 48 km north of Lydenburg, just across the Limpopo border, surrounded by a large farming community.

A group of Voortrekkers under the leadership of Andries Hendrik Potgieter founded Ohrigstad in 1845. It was first named Andries Orieg Stad, but today it bears the name of a Dutch trader who helped establish the village. "But Gregorius Ohrig's role was actually not that significant," says Jan Ferreira, a farmer and history buff. Jan grew up here and farms with macadamias, seed maize, seed beans and sweet potato. "My forefathers came to Ohrigstad with the Voortrekkers," he says. "There are a few families who can trace their ancestors back to those days."

His wife, Ronnie, arrived later, when she began teaching at Ohrigstad Primary School in 1973. She retired in 2014 after a tenure of 15 years as the principal. "I am English-speaking," she says. "When I first moved here, everyone looked at me as though I were a communist!" But she soon learnt to make herself available to a community of people who are always there for one another, and today you can hardly tell she has an English background.

"Farming here is mostly irrigation-based," says Jan. "We are surrounded by mountains, and the area is not well suited to farming with game or cattle."

The valley *is* extremely dry. It hasn't seen much of its 450 mm average annual rainfall in the past three years, and at the end of 2019 the Ohrigstad Dam level stood at 5%. The river has been stagnant for a year. Everyone, including the townspeople, uses bore-hole water, thanks to a farmer.

"As a result of the drought we have fewer farmers in the area now," says Jan. Initially, everyone planted tobacco, until that crop ran its course in the Eighties. Then the farmers planted a variety of crops: coriander, piquanté peppers, paprika, parsley… and these days they mostly plant citrus, macadamias, seed maize, seed beans and wheat. The farms in the valley are small, so for the yield to be worthwhile you have to do intensive farming.

Jan farms alongside one of their sons. "We are free spirits," says Ronnie. "We don't put our children into boxes: one is a farmer, one is a geologist in Johannesburg, and the youngest, >

"We have a saying: In these parts a good neighbour is worth more than a good wife. It's fairly easy to find a new wife, but nearly impossible to find a compatible neighbour."

Rudi Jansen is busy tilling soil before planting. He farms with butternuts and tomatoes. Willson Maimela is sitting on the back of the tractor.

Ronnie and Jan Ferreira live on a farm just outside Ohrigstad. Jan is a farmer and Ronnie is a retired school principal.

Xander, is an artist in New York. He performed in South Africa under the name Gazelle. He sings that song: '*Sorrie, Pappa; ek moes die plaas verlaat, want ek mis die disco-ligte*' (Sorry, Daddy; I had to leave the farm because I miss the disco lights)."

Jan and Ronnie say they have little reason to complain. They do have to drive to Lydenburg for groceries and to Nelspruit if they need to see a specialist. But they agree that water is their biggest concern. "All the disputes in Ohrigstad are about water," Ronnie says, now very serious. "People want to kill their neighbours, and we are dependent on our neighbours here!"

When the dam level is higher, the distribution of river water is a struggle. "We have a saying: In these parts a good neighbour is worth more than a good wife," Jan jokes. "It's fairly easy to find a new wife, but nearly impossible to find a compatible neighbour."

HIGHER UP IN THE VALLEY, 13 km in the direction of Lydenburg and Pilgrim's Rest, you will spot a farm stall on the R36. It is cooler here, and the river flows when there has been some rain.

"On Fridays we put up the signs – you can't miss the Barbie pink – and then everyone knows there will be vetkoek and pancakes for sale," says Amanda Brits of Pure Plaas Padstal. She and her husband, Dennis, sell home-made treats, jam, tins, crafts and aloes here.

"We farm with aloes and have 15 varieties that are unique to Ohrigstad. My older sister and brother-in-law farm with biscuits," she jokes. "On Fridays and Saturdays we all sell the products we made during the week."

Three sisters live on the farm with their children and grandchildren. Amanda's father bought the farm 50 years ago and the sisters inherited it. "We have lived here permanently for 26 years. Before that I lived in Pretoria while Dennis farmed tobacco here, but I came home often."

Amanda says winter is her favourite time of year. "Then our aloe nursery is second to none – there are 3 000 of them in my garden, possibly more," she says as she wanders through the garden with Charlie the Jack Russell and Gracie the cat following her. The garden is lush, and there's more than enough fruit to keep Amanda busy in front of the stove, including lemons, naartjies, grapefruit, figs, pomegranates, kumquats and grapes.

Many junkyard gems can be spotted among the plants, like an old blue Beetle, enamel kettles, and enamel plates as signs. A massive bellows has been transformed into an owl box where a barn owl often roosts. Near a mother-in-law's cushion (*Echinocactus grusonii*) there is an enamel sign that implores the cacti to "Grow, dammit!"

The scene that greets travellers who stop at the Caltex Ohrigstad Oasis features jacaranda trees, row upon row of tomato plants, and mountains.

When the Britses aren't busy with their aloes and bonsai garden, Dennis enjoys sculpting. They are blissfully happy here, but Amanda acknowledges that the platteland is an unfriendly place for the elderly, because services and doctors are a long way away. This is the motivation for the Op-en-wakker (Alive and Kicking) social club for senior citizens, of which Amanda is the chairperson.

"The best thing about living here is that I know the fourth generation of many families. I don't have children and the loneliness can be overwhelming sometimes. But I know some of the great-grandmothers right down to the grandchildren, which gives me a feeling of belonging."

BACK IN TOWN, just beyond the first stop sign, you'll find the Oasis Shopping Complex – "the mall" – on the left. Its offering includes a filling station, a café, a butchery, a restaurant and a liquor store. The general dealership, Try Me Dealers, can be found when you turn right into Potgieter Street at the second stop sign. Higher up, the white spire >

"It's only occasionally that you'll hear some noise. There's a bar higher up in the street, the Joeques Sports Bar, where people get very jolly when there's a rugby match on TV!"

In a nutshell

Distance from the big city 330 km from Pretoria and 360 km from Johannesburg. Much closer are Tzaneen (146 km), Nelspruit (142 km), White River (127 km) and Lydenburg (48 km).

Shops Try Me Dealer is the general dealership, but locals travel to Lydenburg for major grocery shopping. A petrol station, café, butchery and liquor store can be found at the Oasis Shopping Complex.

Nearest hospitals There are a number of hospitals, including private hospitals, in Nelspruit. Kiaat Private Hospital is a little closer, between Nelspruit and White River.

Nearest Woolies White River

ABOVE Branddraai aloes (*Aloe branddraaiensis*) are named after the Marx family farm Branddraai. This where the valley makes a sharp turn, and it gets extremely hot in these parts, hence the name of the farm.

LEFT Amanda and Dennis Brits and their Jack Russell Charlie of Pure Plaas Padstal. They had a busy Saturday morning, baking and selling pancakes.

of the NG church is visible above the trees. This street is also where Sam Mogane lives.

Sam is a history teacher who was born in the valley. He is originally from Rietfontein, 22 km from Ohrigstad, but in 2010 he built himself a house in town. He teaches history to Grade 12 pupils at Matshaile Senior Secondary School.

Sam says he enjoys the tranquillity in Ohrigstad. "It's only occasionally that you'll hear some noise – when the Afrikaners have a party. There's a bar higher up in the street, the Joeques Sports Bar, where people get very jolly when there's a rugby match on TV!"

Sam once played rugby for the local club, known as the Laeveld Ratels. "I used to be fanatical about soccer, but when I arrived here I discovered no one played it. The rugby team started in 2012, and now I enjoy the sport even more than soccer."

Sam doesn't play any more, but he is still involved with the club. "I wanted to retire, but the team wouldn't let me go. Now I'm the chairperson of the Ratels."

Sam says the other great positives in the valley are Ohrigstad Primary School and the *Boerevereniging* (farmers' association). "The *Boerevereniging* keeps us safe. They hold regular patrols – they don't set out to trap anyone; they just want to protect their property," he says.

And the school? Sam rates the education his children are receiving as exceptional. His son attends Ohrigstad Primary and his daughter goes to a high school in Lydenburg. "My children have adapted wonderfully. They play with anyone and don't notice skin colour."

His son and daughter communicate with each other in Afrikaans when they are at home. "I don't know what they are saying; they could easily be gossiping behind my back."

It's clear the youth and education are close to Sam's heart. He takes the time to teach his pupils about the history of the area. "I give the children research projects themed around the Voortrekkers. I arrange for Ronnie and Jan Ferreira to accompany us >

ABOVE Sam Mogane, a teacher, has lived in the valley all his life, but in 2010 he built a house for himself in Ohrigstad. He regularly visits his mother in Rietfontein, 22 km away.

RIGHT A name like Tiezers may give you the wrong impression about this place with its family restaurant and butchery. There's a dam, green lawns, swings and a seesaw, and it's dog-friendly.

Meet the locals

Martie and Shawn Smuts

Marlotti Farm Venue

Martie grew up in the valley, and since 2017 she and her husband have lived on Marlotti farm, 20 km from Ohrigstad on the road to Pilgrim's Rest. This move followed a 13-year stint in Johannesburg, where Shawn was a fresh produce agent and Martie worked in the communications industry. "And then we had two children… and everything changed," Martie says.

Martie's father and brother are farmers, but this piece of land next to the road was not suitable for farming. It is, however, well positioned for exploring the Panorama Route. "Tour buses are our biggest business; they stop here for lunch. But we also host weddings and school and leadership camps on the farm – you could call it a modern veld school."

Martie says this is a talented community. "Trix Crause paints all my signboards and the DJ who plays at our dances also makes gates. And it's always great when you find out that a farmer's wife is also a qualified lawyer."

There are leopards on the farm, and Martie and Shawn often see one of the big cats near the house, in the fields or at the venue. "My daughter, Nina, was two months old when we moved to the farm. Sitting at a coffee shop in Lydenburg and seeing all the cars driving by, she would ask me: "Mommy, what is that?" She doesn't know what traffic is!"

Jannie and Alida Jacobs

Tiezers

Jannie was nine years old when his family moved to Ohrigstad. His father was a farmer, and Jannie worked in the dairy industry for 28 years. "But it became challenging, and today things are even tougher, especially for smaller farmers," says Jannie. Then he and Alida opened Tiezers six years ago. It's a restaurant and butchery with a twist. "Pole-dancing Academy", "Meat en Stripklap" and "Forkenmeat", the signboards read.

"While we were building, every second tannie in town stopped and asked: 'Jannie, what are you doing here?' So I told them I was opening a strip club."

Jannie enjoys exploring the outdoors more than being among people. "If there's a sign saying 'No entry', that's where I want to take a look," he says. "I know this area well. When I served on the school's governing body we would take parents on 4x4 excursions." During the summer months, they make fishing rods from bamboo so the children can try their luck at the Tiezers dam.

Trix Crause

Artist

"Who wouldn't want to live here?" Trix asks. She has lived in Ohrigstad for 20 years. "The city is just too fast-paced for me. While reading *Landbouweekblad* I discovered that there was land available. And when I stopped here, I immediately phoned the agent to say I'll buy it."

Trix paints on canvases and on cars, and she does signs and murals for businesses (the café at Oasis boasts some of her creations). She is also restoring an ox-wagon, which she wants to exhibit at her home as part of an open-air museum. Her paintings are exhibited in a gallery at The Royal Palm B&B, where she and the owner, Peta-Anne Veltman, also make leather products, including bags and cushions.

"The town won't get any bigger," says Trix. "There is no water, and there are no mines or factories to create jobs. If you see two cars on the road at the same time, that's heavy traffic."

Meet the locals

Tillie and Pieter Steyn

Pensioners

Pieter and Tillie retired to Ohrigstad from Phalaborwa 20 years ago. "We wanted to live on a farm, but didn't have money to buy one. So we came here," says Pieter. "In 1977 we bought *two* plots for R2 500," says Tillie.

They love the clean air and say it's a joy to grow old in such a healthy environment.

"Everyone is happy, and you're not stressed. We have Try Me Dealers, we have a liquor store and we have butcheries. If you fall ill, there is a nursing sister to call and there is always someone to help… You're inundated with support."

There is no shortage of opportunities for socialising, including potjiekos gatherings and playing board games with friends. "Sometimes everyone brings along an instrument and we make music and sing together," says Tillie.

Pieter says the farming community truly cares about older people, but you have to be proactive. They are involved in the church and the school. "We are known as Oupa and Ouma," says Pieter. When something needs to be repaired, he's available; and they make pancakes at sporting events. Sometimes they'll even park their 1976 Volkswagen Kombi at the roadside and make pancakes right there. "This is a famous Kombi. When it's parked on the side of the road, everyone stops."

"In the afternoons we sit under a tree and gaze out over the valley. We see the mountain zebras and giraffes in the distance. This is a place where you can relax and find peace."

"Everyone is happy, and you're not stressed. We have Try Me Dealers, we have a liquor store and we have butcheries. If you fall ill, there is a nursing sister to call and there is always someone to help."

Eghardt Nel and Darius de Beer

Hannah Lodge

Eghardt and Darius work and live at Hannah Lodge, an 8 000 ha game farm 17 km from Ohrigstad. Eghardt is the farm manager and has worked on the farm for 18 years. He and his wife, Kuzette, do not have children, but the younger people at the lodge, including Darius, are like their own kids. "Many of the young people here call us their bush father and mother," says Eghardt.

Darius has been at the lodge for three years. Formerly a project manager in Pretoria, he had to travel to Hannah Lodge to oversee the installation of its solar panels. "Once I was finished with the project and had to return to the city, I was deeply unhappy. So I emailed the owner, Oom Fred Kinnear, to see if there was an opportunity here."

Fred pays for the training of all his staff. Darius completed a Level 2 Field Guides Association of Southern Africa (FGASA) course and, along with Eghardt, a professional hunting course.

When Darius has free time, he enjoys visiting friends in Hartbeespoort. He loves the quiet of the farm, but does enjoy going to Pretoria. "You can't spend all your time here. It's great to wander around a mall occasionally," he says.

Darius and Eghardt often go running together, or train in the lodge's gym. "If we didn't exercise, we'd bite off each other's heads," says Eghardt.

Ron van Zyl

Sculptor and owner of The Shoe

On the way to Tzaneen you will spot a gigantic shoe on the left. Ron van Zyl built this place for his wife, Yvonne (next to him dressed in pink), in 1991. "I've built many farm stalls for her. A pumpkin was the first thing that came to mind, but she kept mentioning a shoe. We needed a beacon. Now our address is The Shoe on the R36."

Ron's outsized wooden sculptures of red ivory, red ironwood, wild olive and leadwood, which portray Biblical messages, are on display at The Shoe.

His parents and brother lived in the valley when he came here in 1974. Shortly afterwards he created *The Doomed* at the Alpha Omega Bible Sculpture Garden, a different kind of farm stall on the gravel road to the Echo Caves, where Ron's sculptures on a cliff face reach 16 m high.

Today, Yvonne and their children, Aldo and Michell (on the right), are all involved at The Shoe. They have established a church here and built a restaurant and accommodation out of dolomite rock. "When I arrived and saw the mountains and rocks for myself, I decided I would stay – they give me something to do."

Ron describes this community as people who will grant you the space and freedom to be exactly who you are. "If you want to live here, you must have faith. The farmers have taught me so much about faith. You take all your money and sow it in the soil… and then you believe."

Michael Mmopane

Tour guide at the Echo Caves

"I started these tours in 1994 when I was a 17-year-old schoolboy," says Michael. He was born in the valley and grew up in Mokutung. In 2000 he went to Johannesburg to study marketing management, and five years later he returned to the valley.

Michael, who has three children, says the state of schools on the platteland are his greatest worry. "I want my children to receive a good education, but teachers in the rural areas don't give it their all," he says. Michael is passionate about the future of this country and his children – which is why he is involved in local politics.

Michael's next goal is to "spread his wings in tourism". He and a colleague do not want to be guides forever, but rather tour operators running their own business. "We don't want to leave the caves. We want to guide more tourists through the caves and along the Panorama Route."

Jeff Nkuna

Tour guide and evangelist

When Jeff arrived here in 2000, his life shifted spiritually. He had been a businessman and tour guide in Hazyview, but fled to the valley after he was declared bankrupt.

He wanted to start a Pedi cultural village at Alpha Omega Bible Sculpture Garden, but found it difficult. Then he realised that *The Doomed* and Ron's other sculptures in the garden were already attracting visitors. "This cliff has made me religious. I was like a refugee. I didn't know what to do and I was searching for somewhere to hide."

Jeff founded the Ohrigstad farm mission and preaches in a different location every day: on the farm where he lives, and at Ohrigstad Primary School and other schools in the area. He still runs tours at Alpha Omega and is also involved at the Museum of Man, an open-air display of archeological and palaeontological exhibits. "The local people – the farmers, the community and the town – they all support me. They are always there for you."

Meet the locals

Isabel, Liza and Ilse Saunders

Ohrigstad Primary School

"We moved here from Pretoria in 2011," says Liza, a teacher at the primary school. "It's fantastic to be able to raise your children here. You know everyone in your school and town."

"And you can swim in the dams, climb mountains and ride motorbikes," says 13-year-old Ilse.

Liza and Isabel live on a farm near town, in an orange orchard. It's precisely because of the citrus industry that the school, now in its 110th year, is flourishing.

"With 143 pupils, the school is now the biggest it has been in a long time – but the classes remain small," says Liza. "Everyone is given opportunities and they are taught all sorts of skills. We have mothers who coach rugby and cricket; our parents are actively involved in the school's activities."

There are currently 10 staff members at the primary school, including the principal, Johan Pieterse, who is the only male member of staff. "It's now his fourth year here. He creates a good camaraderie among the staff and is full of jokes," says Liza.

Johan is always happy to share a few rugby stories: how the boys once had to perform all manner of entertaining manoeuvres to avoid a patch of devil's thorns on the field; how they ran like the wind when a black mamba slithered past the goal posts…

One drawback for Liza is that there is no high school in town. This year, Ilse joined her older brother and sister in attending Nelspruit High School.

Simé Jacquet

Owner of the Warthog Pub & Grill

Simé and her partner, At Briel, own and manage the Warthog Pub & Grill at the Oasis Shopping Complex. She has lived in Ohrigstad for 19 years, after studying hotel management and doing her internship at Hannah Lodge. Her parents own Try Me Dealers and have taught her a lot about business, says Simé.

She really enjoys the fact that everyone in Ohrigstad knows one another. Her mother was in hospital for three months in 2019. "That was when I realised what kind of community we are. There were easily 10 people at the restaurant every day to find out how things were going."

Simé remembers running around in the streets in the evenings with her schoolmates; her childhood was carefree. "The Potgieter Memorial Hall is just below the Voortrekker graveyard. On New Year's Eve, we kids would climb through the fence to *jol* in the graveyard while our parents were partying."

Anneke Claassen

Owner of the Echo Caves

The turn-off onto the gravel road leading to the Echo Caves can be found 22 km from town on the R36 in the direction of Tzaneen. "I arrived here in 1972 from a lawyer's office in the city," says Anneke. "My husband, Daan, and I were dating – he was a dentist in Lydenburg."

Enormous wild figs, mogabas (tree wisteria) and a tree aloe form a green roof over and around the restaurant and accommodation, and lime-green garden furniture awaits in the shade of the trees.

Daan's father, Jan Claasen, discovered the caves in 1923 when he went searching for his cattle (and water) on the farm. "He didn't find the cattle, but he did discover water… and the caves," says Anneke. When Daan was practising in Lydenburg, he came to the valley every weekend to develop the caves.

Anneke's biggest challenge is the maintenance of the caves and their surroundings. They once permitted weddings – their son was married here – but guests damaged the caves and left their cigarette butts behind. And it's not easy to keep the large garden tidy. "The bushbuck eat everything, from the beautiful desert roses and strelitzias to the mother-in-law's tongue, that sharp thing!" she says. They don't complain too much, because Narina trogons, black-headed orioles and African wood owls are also frequent visitors.

to the Voortrekker Fort, where they help to explain the history. Artefacts make it a lot more practical; the content resonates with the children and they take more interest in their surroundings."

Fritz and Karin Marx support Sam's observation. "One can see the history of this community is important to our children, because they have loads of questions about it," they say.

Fritz farms with citrus, maize, beans and wheat, and Karin, an accountant, does the farm's books.

As is the case with many other Ohrigstad residents, Fritz's family has lived in the valley for a long time. After the Boer War, his grandfather had a falling-out with his family and moved to Ohrigstad. "My father bought our farm in 1923, and this is where we still live."

Fritz is chairperson of the *Boere-vereniging* and the governing body of Ohrigstad Primary School. The Marxes own two farms in the valley, with 300 ha under irrigation. Branddraai lies 30 km from Ohrigstad, at the bottom of the valley. The other farm is higher up, 5 km from town. "The two farms are very different. Higher up, you are closer to the dam and more likely to get river water, but the boreholes are weaker. As you move down into the valley, it becomes warmer and the river dries up, but the boreholes have a strong flow because of the dolomite formation."

Fritz plants labour-intensive crops, and although machines could do the work, everything is done by hand. There are 300 workers on his farms >

ABOVE Tour guide Michael Mmopane leads a group of German tourists on a 1,2 km walk through the Echo Caves. A wild fig with roots that penetrate120 m deep – the deepest in the world, according to Guinness World Records – can be seen in these caves.

BELOW Fritz and Karin Marx stand in a maize field on their farm 5 km from Ohrigstad with their children, Marika (7), Karla (10) and Gerhard (9). They farm with citrus, seed maize, seed beans and wheat.

during the busiest season, and he has 100 permanent workers, some of whom have been on the farm for 45 years. "We share Oom Jan Ferreira's views about our social commitments."

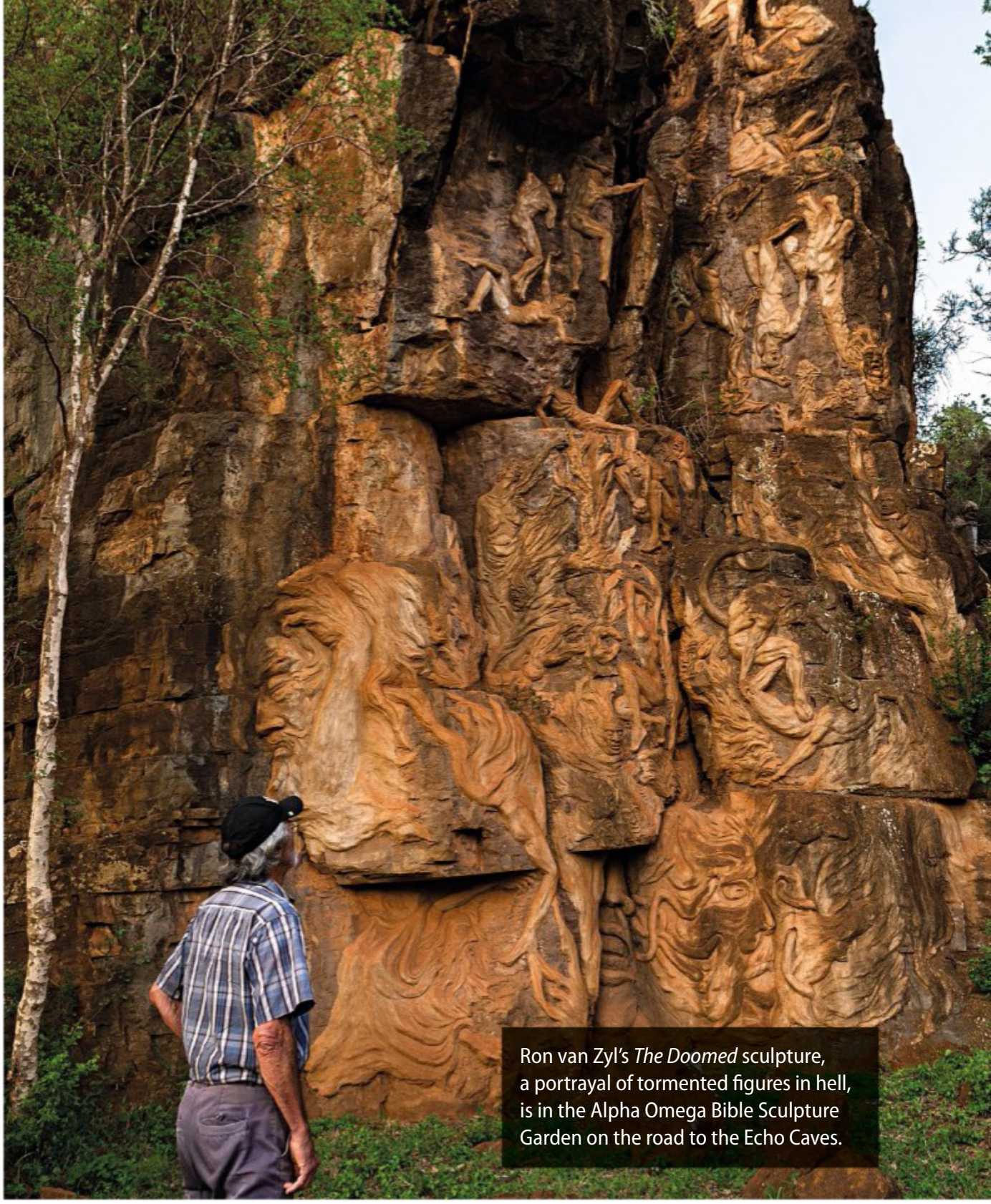
Fritz and Karin feel safe in the valley, but say the community works hard to keep everyone safe on the farms. The *Boerevereniging* has safety representatives, a radio call every night, and patrols in marked cars four times per week. "Some guys wake up at 03:00 to patrol until 06:00."

"I think the only disadvantage for children in a small place is that they don't have the same opportunities for extramural activities as children in the city," says Karin.

"It really is a great little town. We are just far away from a real town," says Fritz, laughing.

"There will always be politics in a town like this," he says. "And gossip," adds Karin with a laugh. "Sometimes it upsets people, but you have to see past it and get on with things."

Fortunately, there's also a lot of laughter. "Recently, one of the big farmers got a new son-in-law. We were on the golf course when I asked him: 'Johan, what is the first thing you learnt about Ohrigstad?' And he replied: 'If you don't have a sense of humour, you certainly won't survive!'" P



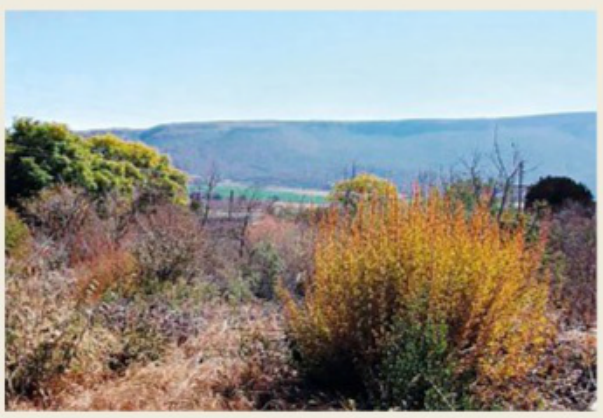
Ron van Zyl's *The Doomed* sculpture, a portrayal of tormented figures in hell, is in the Alpha Omega Bible Sculpture Garden on the road to the Echo Caves.

The price of property in Ohrigstad

We found these properties on the Property24 website: property24.com.

R9,5 million

This self-catering lodge is 10 km from town, on a 1 105 ha farm. It offers lovely views, game *and* accommodation: there are three double bedrooms, one bathroom, a kitchen, a dining room, a braai area and a swimming pool.



R90 000

Build your dream house on this 2 115 m^2 property in Burger Street on the outskirts of town.

R1,195 million

Built high against the mountain, this timber house spanning two properties, covering a total of 5 250 m^2, has two bedrooms and two bathrooms.

Den Lila Hatten Wool & Gifts

Eat, drink and have fun

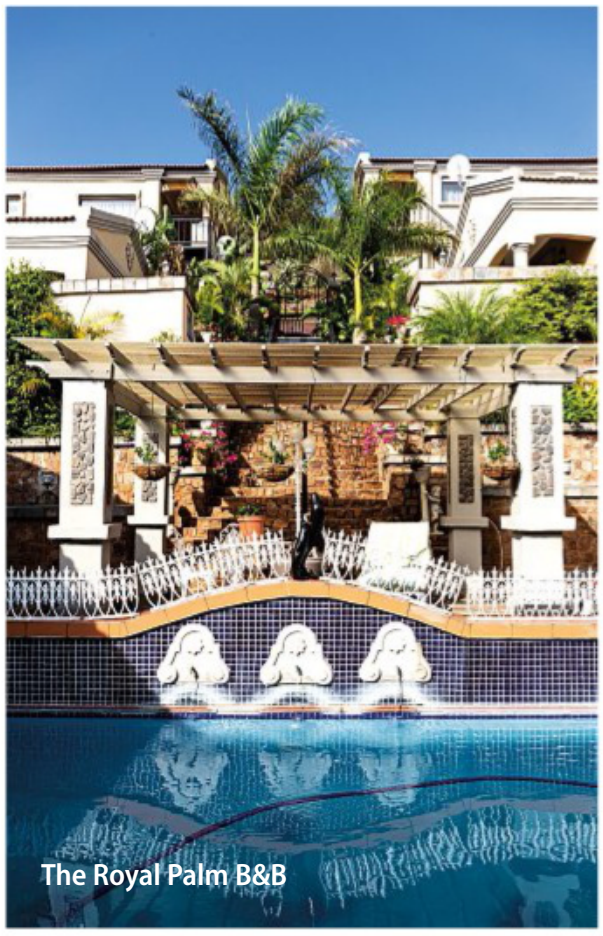
Do, wander and shop

Den Lila Hatten, Wool & Gifts
This little gift shop in the Oasis Shopping Complex sells a little bit of everything: wool, needlework, handmade soap, rusks, jams and preserves. The Honey Badger range of children's clothes is also available here. 084 515 7956

Eat out

The Warthog Pub & Grill
Also at Oasis, this pub offers value for money – its burgers and steaks sell like hotcakes. If you aren't afraid of lots of bacon and cheese, give the crisped potato skins a try. 013 238 0508
The Warthog Pub & Grill

Tiezers
Despite the tongue-in-cheek signage, Tiezers is not a strip club or pole-dancing academy – but there is a red pole for guests who feel like some exercise before ordering a burger. The outside area has a dam, a lawn, swings and a seesaw, making it a great stop for those with children or dogs. 013 238 0461
Tiezers Meat en Stripklap


The Royal Palm B&B

Stay over

The Royal Palm B&B
The name says it all: complete with a swimming pool encircled by palm trees, it's a destination fit for royalty and a veritable oasis in this dry part of the world. The eight units have braai facilities but guests are welcome to order meals too. The guesthouse sits high on the mountainside, offering views of the town and the valley. There is also a gallery, where you can buy paintings by Trix Crause, as well as jewellery and handmade leather products. 083 313 3920
palmroyal.co.za

Ploughman's Rest
This guesthouse is on a farm just 3 km north of the town. There are three units and the house has a wide wraparound stoep as well as plenty of corners for curling up with a good book. The home has been decorated in an elegant yet rustic style, with antiques and restored farm equipment livening up the interior. 082 900 4736

Waiting for rain

When only 25 mm rain falls over a period of three years, we're talking about a serious drought. It is a debilitating drought for humans and animals, one that causes you to wake up with a feeling of dread every morning, says **Chrismari van der Westhuizen** of the farm Uitspankolk, 100 km north of Loeriesfontein.

PHOTOS **CHRISMARI VAN DER WESTHUIZEN**

Exhausted

Today, the wind is blowing in Bushmanland. Again. Not a fresh breeze but a hot, dusty wind. And I am tired. Tired of the dust and the drought. Tired of saying all is well when that is not how I feel. Tired of seeing lambs without their mothers. Tired of seeing hungry sheep and of supplying feed. Tired of searching for cheaper feed and making plans. Tired of hearing there is no lucerne to be found – and if I finally track some down, I cannot afford it in any case. Tired of not finding solutions. Tired of always being positive. Tired of lecturing the kids about thinking of tomorrow. Sometimes you simply want to eat the whole packet of sweets today without worrying about tomorrow. Tired of doing your best to save the day. Tired of finding dead sheep. And no, they didn't die because you didn't feed them – it seems they merely lost their will to live. Tired of duties and responsibilities. Tired of never leaving home because I'm scared something might go wrong on the farm when I'm not around to make more plans. Tired of hearing year in and year out that deliverance will come, and of wondering whether I'd be here to see that day. Tired of looking for blessings to count and things to be grateful for. Just plain tired.

Perhaps tomorrow the wind won't blow in Bushmanland, and then the dust cloud in my mind will settle too.

Bushmanland is wearing her shroud; a veil of dust hides her face. She is mourning the absence of the rains and the demise of her animals. Only the woeful keening of a windmill breaks the deathly silence – a fruitless attempt to suck a drop of water from the depths of the scorched earth. The sun shows the stripped plains no mercy.

Yet there is life here.

A herd of skinny sheep and a few Cape ground squirrels are watching the road attentively. A murder of crows are partying around the carcass of yet another drought victim. A couple of sad-looking springbok nibble at dry bossies… Then, suddenly, it is as if everything comes to life. The ground squirrels stand up straight, the sheep start bleating and a flock of small birds appear out of nowhere. From a corrugated twin track comes the rattling sound of an overloaded farm bakkie bringing feed.

My name is Chrismari van der Westhuizen-Batt. I am a farmer's wife in Bushmanland. My husband Franchwa and I, and our two daughters, Mischa (7) and Mia (6), call the desolate area north of Loeriesfontein our home. But it doesn't really matter where we live. Our story is similar to the stories of farmers from drought-stricken regions across the country.

BUSHMANLAND is bare and barren. I remember how we used to joke about the drought years ago when we ran into one another in town or along the road. As the drought dragged on, the jokes became increasingly fewer. >

More and more empty shells

"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them." Sometimes I feel like shouting: "Lord, have You forgotten about the tortoises? They don't have wings to migrate and look for food. Where would they get water if the earth is bare and scorched? They aren't able to drink from troughs and the succulents died years ago."

Every day there are more empty shells on the farm. At first we assumed the crows were behind this, but they weren't eaten, simply dead.

I often read the comments on social media posts about the drought. There's always someone who would allege that this was God's way of punishing us for our sins. Punish us sinners by all means, but why the innocent animals too? I cannot fathom that God would allow the entire Bushmanland's animals to die from thirst and hunger just to punish humans.

And so our sinful little family of four took it upon ourselves to give every tortoise we find alive a chance to survive. Sometimes we find one somewhere in the road, too tired and weak to climb over the ridges of the dirt track. We pick it up and bring it home. We carefully remove the ticks sucking the last drops of life out of them. Then we give them food and water. The children bring mulberries, green lucerne and lettuce leaves to their den under the mulberry tree. Yesterday we found one that had almost no toes left. It was so light and shrunken into its shell. We immediately gave it water when we arrived home. Later in the afternoon I called Franchwa to come and see: The withered little tortoise seemed to be on the verge of bursting out of its shell from all the water it had drunk.

Sometimes I sit with them under the tree. Then I tell them about the day when we'd need to say our goodbyes. And together we dream of release from the drought and of new growth covering Bushmanland like a green carpet after the rains.

And, sometimes, quiet thoughts

Every now and then, in spite of the gruelling drought that eats at your soul like a cancer, you find peace in your mind. On a Sunday afternoon the lure of Bushmanland coaxes you out of the gloomy room where you just want to lie slumped until the earth is green again one day. And suddenly you realise why you are still here: even though Bushmanland is a desert now and you fight to keep everything alive from day to day, there is nowhere else you would rather be. You know you'll keep fighting this battle, because your dreams and ideals might be ragged at times, but your heart is full.

No rain, no green

One day when we were picking out all the old ewes among our sheep, I suddenly had this thought: I wonder how many of the ewes have ever seen truly lush green veld? With sadness I realised most of them have been kept alive with feed for most of their lives. There are young ewes that have raised lambs already and have never experienced a drop of rain in their lifetime.

I wonder how the lambs would frolic in the damp soil one day when it rains. Would they be as exuberantly joyful as the farmers? Would they also think that nothing beats the earthy scent produced when rain falls on dry soil? I wonder whether they would recognise the landscape when golden grass undulates in the wind and the vleis are full of fresh water. Would the skinny springbok have enough energy to pronk? And how wonderful would it be to drive through the veld without having to take along any feed?

We dream of the day when Namaqua sandgrouse make a racket at the earth dam again and the sheep lie basking in the sun, sated – because the farmers would then be able to laugh again.

A sign of life

Today, Franchwa, the kids and I drove to Tweerivier to feed the sheep. It is a journey of about 60 km from Uitspankolk, where we live, and all you see is dead, bare earth, kilometre after kilometre. Here, among the shale, you really have to look where you're going, and suddenly we noticed something yellow in the road.

"What was that?" I asked.

"A little flower," said Franchwa, and we continued driving in silence. We were in too much of a hurry to stop, because we knew the sheep were waiting for their feed.

On the way back, Franchwa stopped. He took out his water bottle and got out of the bakkie. And there in the road, in the middle of nowhere, where no greenery can be found, stood a devil's thorn with four yellow flowers. Franchwa watered it and the four of us stood silently, watching the thirsty earth absorbing the moisture. As we left, I said to Franchwa: "I hope it doesn't get eaten," to which he said: "I hope at least the animal that eats it, appreciates it."

Drought-stricken carrots and brackish beetroots

Every year as the weather warms up and the nights no longer leave behind a white blanket of frost, we start planting a few vegetables. Bushmanland is not the easiest place on earth to grow vegetables, and when it is as dry as it is now… Well, then we hope and pray. Hungry birds pull out the seedlings, because nowhere else can they find such greenery. Everything has to be covered. The hot sun and dry air wither whatever survives the onslaught of the birds.

But why would we plant at all if it is such as struggle? See, vegetables don't yield overnight. We would only harvest by the end of summer. That is something to look forward to. It means we believe we will still be here by the end of summer to pick our crops. We believe the rain will come and that we will survive the drought.

For the sake of our children we try, amid all the chaos and uncertainty the drought brings, to keep everything as normal as possible. Every year they look forward to the beans, maize and pumpkins. So we will plant, come what may.

Later, they were replaced by quiet despair. Everybody enduring their hardship in silence. Too proud to admit that we were suffering. Or maybe this happened gradually over such a long time that we somehow got used to making do with the minimum. >

And now? We have passed the stage where we try to hide our misery from each other. We talk about our sadness and uncertainty. Every day you hear about another load of sheep leaving Bushmanland, never to return. Another farm deserted. Another person saying there is no hope left of saving their business. Our numbers are dwindling and we are scared. Scared of the day it's our turn.

I have often wondered about the Afrikaans phrase "*moedverloor se vlakte*" (literally, the plain of lost hope). How do you get to this place that you hear people mentioning? Today I know that many of our farmers are standing on that plain of lost hope. It is that feeling of powerlessness that washes over you when you run out of ideas. It is the bank manager shaking his head from side to side without meeting your eyes. It is accounts with high figures printed in red. *Moedverloor se vlakte* is where the feed stores are empty and the co-op account is in arrears. It is the place where you don't know where the money for wages or school fees or food will come from, because every cent is going towards feed. >

OUR FARMERS AND THEIR WIVES are resilient people. But this endless drought breaks something deep inside you. I was convinced I would stand strong and steady. I wouldn't let this get me down… until that fateful day. Like most other farmers, we too decided to get rid of some of our sheep. >

Weeks in advance we started getting together a group of ewes that would end up going to greener pastures and new homes. These are sheep we have known all their lives. Selected as little lambs, they had been destined to spend the rest of their lives in Bushmanland. I told each one that they would be going to a better place now, a place where the veld was green. And I was happy with our decision.

Then the big day arrived when they would leave the farm forever, and still I was strong and steady. Even when we loaded them onto the truck, it didn't bother me…

But when the trucked left through the farm gate, the strong farmer's wife inside me broke down. I cried for our beloved sheep I would never see again. Cried for the little lambs that are being rejected because the mothers themselves are barely able to survive, and for the ewes that simply succumb despite the care and feed. Cried about the drought aid that has turned out to be empty promises, and about the children I have to deny everything they ask for. No one can witness that much death and misery day after day and remain unchanged. >

Thunder

Farmers always look for the beauty in everything, but there are three kinds of beauty that trumps all. The first is fat, healthy animals. The second is lush veld as far as the eye can see.

But probably the most beautiful sight is thunderclouds boisterously chatting among themselves. My husband always says my father and I scare the weather away by watching these clouds too closely. At the first sign of a little cloud, we peer at it. Is it getting bigger? Which way is it heading? Are more appearing? And when the weather finally starts to build up, we report to each other over the telephone.

Thunderstorms are temperamental. The one moment everything is peaceful and the next you'd think the world was coming to an end. This kind of action we have not seen much of over the past few years, and most of the time the clouds are driven away by the wind before a drop of rain can fall.

But when it does rain and the smell of wet earth replaces that of dust, everything on the farm comes to life. The sheep play cheerfully, little birds bathe in the puddles, and the children chase white butterflies that appear out of nowhere. When it rains we walk barefoot in the mud, drink fresh water from vleis, and speed through puddles. When it rains we laugh with abandon and enjoy the moment. And, for that day, our worries are washed away.

Is there light at the end of the tunnel?

At this stage, we take life day by day. We try not to think of what would happen if it doesn't rain soon. For all the farmers, uncertainty about the future is a dark shadow that follows you daily.

Even if the welcome rains start to fall tomorrow, it wouldn't be the end of the fight for a long time. Rain doesn't guarantee instant grazing. Where we are, most of the bossies and grass have died. That means new plants have to come up first and it could take years before they mature – and for that we will need to get regular follow-up rain.

They always say most of a farmer's problems dissolve in water, but, sadly, farmers will need years to work away all the debt they've had to incur to keep their livestock alive.

We don't know what the future holds; we don't even know whether we will still be on the farm to see the first rains fall. All I know for sure is that the emotional scars left behind by the drought will stay with us for a long time.

Priceless

To raise children during a drought is, to say the least, a challenge. But we try to make the best of the situation.

I, too, was a child during the drought of the early eighties. My parents, too, probably wished often for a little bit of extra money for a pretty dress, a sweet or even a toy.

Yet the kids are so happy on the farm in spite of the lack of luxuries. We give them small responsibilities. We are all so busy, and they are tasked with caring for their animals. Keep the water bowls full, feed the chicks, shut the chickens in their coop at night, take the porcupine his food, gather eggs… These are small tasks, but doing them teaches the children if you want to keep animals, it is your duty to take care of them.

The compassion with which they tend to animals amazes me every day, and sometimes when they reek of the sheep pen, barefoot and dressed in their old farm clothes, I am so proud of them. Then I know that no money in the world can buy a child happiness.

So many signs, so few drops

Days, weeks, months, years… To us it seems it will never rain again. That the sheep will never disappear in tall grass again. That they will never fatten up again. That we will never *not* have to worry about having enough feed. That our lives would never just be normal again.

Yet we are always on the lookout for a sign that rain is on the way. Today there was a blue-headed lizard on the post at the farm gate: when these lizards sit on shrubs and posts, the rain is said to be close. Weeks later, still no rain. We saw a puff adder basking on the tarred road near Loeriesfontein, and that definitely is a good rain omen. The drought continues.

European bee-eaters come and go, a variety of plants that are said to bloom just before the rains come into flower and the buds wither – and still the rain stays away. Every possible chance we get, we check a range of weather services' forecasts, only to be disappointed when the few drops promised never fall. Everyone says the rain will come at the right time… For how many of our farmers and animals it will be too late.

And yet, in spite of all this, the drought also brings stories of hope, compassion and caring. Often we are so caught up in our own world of sorrow and despair that we forget about the generous people out there who are willing to lend a helping hand. Often we are too proud to ask for help, even when, deep inside, you are screaming "Just help me, please!" There are people who see through this brave facade and give generously to farmers without being asked. That single bag of maize, feed bale, R10 donation or wrapped bar of soap might seem insignificant to some, but for a farmer or his wife it makes a huge difference. It gives hope. And without hope, our bags would have been packed and the farm gate locked long ago.

Chrismari is an amateur photographer who regularly posts photos on social media; follow her on Instagram ***@xmaryv***

Bucking the trend

A few months ago, seven-year-old Mischa reported she had stroked a little steenbok that approached her when she shut the chickens in for the night. I listened absent-mindedly… Several steenbok have been roaming closer to the homestead in search of food and, although they tend to be relatively tame, the child does have a very healthy imagination.

One cold afternoon, a distraught steenbokkie was standing outside our house as I got home. Franchwa went to pick it up; it was riddled with ticks and had severe pneumonia.

We started to nurse it. During the day we put it outside in the winter sun, and at night it slept among the hay bales in the barn. Sometimes, when it was dreadfully cold, we felt so badly for it that it spent the night in the house with us. The unbelievable part is that it has a notch in one ear, which indicates it had once been someone's tame bokkie. Thanks to much TLC and medication it is has made a near-complete recovery and has remained tame.

It is one of the lucky ones.

King of the plains

The springbok that once pronked proudly have been reduced to sorry shadows of themselves. Skulls decorate the Bushmanland plains like white flowers at a memorial service.

One day we came across this ram next to the road. It didn't even try to run away. The thought crossed my mind that it might have been hoping on a swift death. Once upon a time it had been the king of the plains, but the drought had laid waste to it. We have often tried to bring grown springbok home and give them feed. But by the time they are so weak that you can pick them up and take them home, the drought has already won.

Parched land

On the farm where our sheep graze – or I should rather say, are fed – there is practically no living vegetation left. Even the quiver trees are dying.

In just more than three years, less than 25 mm of rain has fallen here. That's not 25 mm a year – but for the entire period. And the precipitation for the four years before that, too, was far below average.

It is a sight that gives you a knot in your stomach. Where the wide plains were once covered with golden grasses, only black tufts remain, half-obscured by small dunes of sand that engulf everything.

Where will our feed come from?

Our lives revolve around feed: searching for feed, giving feed, fetching feed in town, mixing feed…

Someone asked me the other day, "What do sheep eat when the veld is this bare?" The simple answers is that everything they eat is brought to them on bakkies and trucks. When there is nothing left in their troughs, they wait right there until the farmers bring them more feed. They are not picky; they eat anything you give them. Maize and lucerne are their favourites, of course, but these are expensive. I recall how the sheep did not want to eat certain types of grass bales or wheat chaff at the start of the drought. Now, they eat anything, from teff to rotten potatoes.

My mother always liked to say, "Hunger is the best sauce." Lately, these words have taken on quite a tragic meaning for me.

The inevitable

Arguably one of the most heart-breaking aspects of the drought is the death of livestock. We would not have become farmers if we didn't love our animals.

I often get the idea that people think we allow our animals to die from hunger. This might happen in exceptional cases, but most farmers I know would rather go hungry themselves than let their livestock starve.

On our farm, too, sheep die. It is inevitable in the circumstances we find ourselves. According to veterinarians, the main cause of death is too much dust, which causes the sheep to contract pneumonia.

There are so many other causes, among them incorrect feed formulas, farmers who get desperate because the sheep are too skinny and then overfeed them, and weak immune systems owing to malnutrition.

Sometimes I wonder what would happen if you could gather in a cloud all the tears that farmers shed during a drought. That would be one impressive rain shower.

Dust to dust

One often reads reports of farmers living under inhumane pressure owing to the drought, or of yet another farmer who has committed suicide. I doubt people really grasp the extent of the drought if they haven't seen with their own eyes what it looks like.

This is not just another drought. Farmers have to watch everything they've built up in their lifetime turn to dust. Family farms are sold by banks to cover the debt incurred simply to ensure their survival and that of their animals. Beautiful farms slowly become a desert, even if there are no longer any sheep left. Farmers sell everything they own. Nothing remains of the retirement funds, the little seaside home long gone to a new owner. The same goes for the lorries, bakkies and farm implements. And still that is not enough. It feels as though you are suffocating.

We wake up with a start every morning, dreading what the new day brings. Why not just sell everything? some people ask. What then? Who would buy thousands of sheep so emaciated that they fall over? And the farms where nothing would grow – who would buy them? Farmers are trapped. Even if they sell everything they own, most still wouldn't be able to repay their debts.

Anyone who thinks they have a solution should get into their car and go and see for themself what it looks like on these farms… and take a few bags of maize along. P

Every cent helps

Readers who want to donate money to the farmers of Bushmanland have two options.

• Chrismari started a BackaBuddy crowd-funding campaign to help the farmers of the area. This money is paid directly to Kaap Agri, which distributes it among the farmers. The link is https://www.backabuddy.co.za/chrismari-van-der-westhuizen-batt (Under "Display name", type in your name and the word "Platteland"). For any queries contact Chrismari on 027 662 9826.

• Readers can also donate money to the Loeriesfontein Landbou-Unie. Contact the chairman, Lambert Brand, on 027 662 1525 or 084 637 1379.

Val stands tall

While most platteland hotels have been dying a slow, quiet death these past few decades, one such establishment has become the lifeblood of a Mpumalanga hamlet. The Val Hotel is a place of feasting, drinking, talking, laughing, crying, socialising… and, above all, living.

TEXT AND PHOTOS **PETER VAN NOORD**

The Val Hotel is in Smith Street, the second turn-off from the R547 into Val. When you see the overhead wire with the shoes tied by their laces slung over it and the red tractor with the name of the bar on it, you've arrived. André en Rita Britz, owners of the hotel, asked for the speed bumps to be installed, as cars racing down the street used to be the only major annoyance.

McCORMICK-DEERING
FARMALL
MOEGGEPLOEG KROEG
RECEPTION

Val locals were glued to the TV screen in the Moeggeploeg Bar when there was an inset about their hamlet on the SABC2 programme *Authentiek*. From left are Wessel Oosthuizen, the brothers Norman and Monty Kerslake, and Johann Pistorius. Sitting to the right are André and Rita Britz.

Few things are as spectacular to behold as a Highveld thunderstorm. It begins as a restlessness on the horizon. The brooding starts in the early afternoon with a wind that chases the clouds – high, high, into the pale blue sky, like a litter of Maltese poodle puppies, eyes closed, tumbling over each other to reach the last free teat. There's an iciness to the stirring, and then, when the first deep rumble erupts, a dark greyness starts to enfold the white cotton wool and, before long, serious drama ensues: Lightning flashes. Seconds later, thunderclaps. Wind. And rain. Cats and dogs.

A scene exactly like this played out this afternoon in Val, the smallest hamlet in South Africa to have a postal code (2425). It's not the first rain of the season –it's already green in this part of the world – but it's the first big rain, the type of storm that makes every farmer beam from ear to ear.

On the stoep of the Val Hotel, a few young chaps wearing shorts are watching the spectacle. Their smiles speak of pure joy, because they have just finished sowing this very afternoon. Now, the maize and soya will start to grow in the fertile red soil of Mpumalanga.

"We're going to tie you guys to a pole today," says Johann Pistorius, who is holding a double brandy and Coke. "You've brought us such fantastic rain; we're going to have to keep you here."

Inside, in the Moeggeploeg Bar, it's busy and convivial. Nico Bierman and his wife, Orika, are there. Nico has his own small cloud hanging over him, because he didn't finish sowing before the rain came. "I just needed another half-day…" Over there are the Kerslake brothers Norman and Monty ("They are big farmers" and "Monty… he's a f— fast bowler!"), and their wives, both speech therapists with offices in Standerton and Secunda.

There's Debbie Thixton, who lives in Greylingstad but manages the shop and museum next to the bar. She's here with her partner, Stephen Barrow. And there's well-known newspaper and sports photographer Wessel Oosthuizen, who was in the area this afternoon and decided to spend the night at the hotel. Wessel, now 76, was raised in Val and frequently hears its call from his one-bedroom flat in Allen's Nek, Roodepoort.

There's Kotie Mostert, a teacher with a keen interest in history. She's enjoying a beer after driving through from Balfour specially to join the Val residents, who are getting ready to watch themselves on TV – there is big excitement about the insert on Val that's being broadcast on *Authentiek*, Matthys Roets and Danie Niehaus's travel programme on SABC2.

"Something to drink?" asks a young man beside me. "Yes, a G&T please. A single," I request in Afrikaans." "Oh no, here we only pour doubles. An *enkel* is something we break!"

YOU MAY WONDER WHY Val still exists. Remember, this is the Mpumalanga

André en Rita Britz were married in Val in 1982. The Church of St Francis of Assisi, a former Anglican church, is used by different denominations and for weddings. A fee of R1 000 per wedding is charged (to cover the high cost of insuring the thatched-roof building). Angela Kerslake manages the church – contact the hotel to get in touch with her.

Highveld. The region is pocked with power stations and corruption, with towns giving up the ghost one after the other – including places just around the corner, like Balfour, Greylingstad and Standerton.

You don't see much when you look around you. In Smith Street, a cul-de-sac that ends at the police station, you will find only the hotel; the former Post Office building; the Church of St Francis of Assisi, a lovely interdenominational church where people from the city sometimes come to tie the knot; and the cemetery. On the other side of the railway line, parallel with Smith Street, runs Elizabeth Street, also a dead end. The two streets are not connected at any point; you have to drive back to the main road, double back a few hundred metres and then take the exit at the Latib Janoo & Son shop, which, it turns out, is deserted. Mr Janoo left several years ago following an attack.

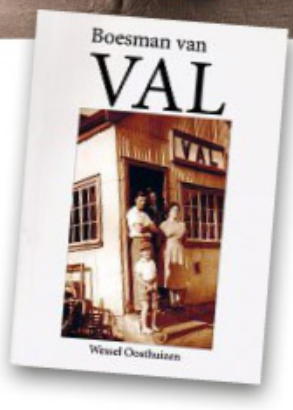
In Elizabeth Street you will find only the former primary school; a general dealer; a bottle store; the silos; and the co-op, AFGRI Agri Services.

But it's the total number of residents that will have you scratching your head: apart from the flock of geese patrolling the streets, only 12 people live here permanently. At one point Val was semi-famous for being the safest town in South Africa because it was also home to 28 policemen. They no longer live here, but you will frequently spot a police van crawling down the street with a hand waving out of the window.

Not even the train – the Shosholoza Meyl shoots past on its twice-daily trips between Johannesburg and Durban – stops here any more.

So why is Val not a ghost town?

Because *one* special person arrived in the hamlet and made a difference by administering mouth-to-mouth resuscitation: Rita Britz, a woman blessed with equal amounts of intelligence, energy, creativity and positivity. Rita has family roots in the area, and a keen interest in the history and marketing of the town. It's Rita who has gathered the locals at >



Wessel Oosthuizen, standing here in front of the former telephone exchange in Val, is not only a renowened sports photographer but also the publisher of 11 books. He launched his book *Boesman van Val,* which he says is sort of his memoirs, in Val in 2017. The late Pik Botha wrote the foreword. In it, Wessel writes about his childhood and his travels around the world to photograph sporting and other events. To order the book from Wessel, send an email to wesoos@telkomsa.net.

the bar tonight to watch the broadcast of *Authentiek*.

She and her husband, André, who has worked at Sasol Mining for 39 years, are the reason Val is still going strong, specifically over weekends. On Friday evenings, locals and young farmers come here to enjoy a meal and to catch up; on Saturday mornings the cyclists arrive for breakfast; and Sundays belong to the bikers, who come here for the traditional Sunday lunch – Rita warns you need to book four days in advance. City dwellers get married at the hotel (Joburg is only 90 minutes' drive away). And various clubs hold their meetings here – *Platteland* spotted a garden club from Standerton on the stoep.

RITA AND ANDRÉ bought the hotel at the dawn of the new South Africa. "The weekend before the first democratic election, I read in the Standerton local paper that the Val Hotel was being sold at an auction," says Rita.

She remembers the auction as if it were yesterday. "It took place on 6 July 1994. It was icy cold. The only people there were me, the sheriff, the guy from Boland Bank, and Tannie Sybil who owned the hotel until some time in the Seventies. Homeless people were using it as a shelter and it was in a terrible state – the people were lighting fires in drums on the wooden floor."

Rita says the sheriff started at R1 500. "We went up and up and up, but then the Boland Bank man stopped and was silent at R18 000. And then it was mine." She laughs. "Suddenly I owned a hotel!"

So many people said, "Are you completely crazy? Who is going to come to this godforsaken place?"

But Rita had a vision and a plan. "We gave notice to the homeless people and in January 1995 started fumigating and renovating. I made my own sheets and curtains, and on 23 August 1995 we opened up with four rooms. And invited the locals to a meal."

Later, in 2003, they bought the butchery next door, as well as the shop that sold sorghum beer – the drunks had been driving them crazy. Five years ago, they built the stoep and the >

RIGHT The small Church of St Francis of Assisi stands in the shade of massive trees that form a colourful canopy in autumn.
FAR RIGHT Latib Janoo & Son was an institution in Val, but after Mr Janoo was attacked, the family moved away. The building is now deserted.
BELOW The mobile clinic was in town during *Platteland*'s visit, serving mainly patients with chronic diseases and pregnant women. Here, staff nurse Lindiwe Mkhaliphi from Standerton takes the blood pressure of Justus Mofokeng from Greylingstad.

ABOVE As you drive into Val, you're likely to be met by a gaggle of geese. After good rains, when there are pools of water in front of the former Post Office, that's where you'll find them, and they like to graze near the hotel's self-catering cottages. Here they are in the lovely garden next to the hotel. On a quiet weekday evening, their honking is a reassuring reminder that there is life in Val.

Soya, so good!

Farmers must be resourceful if they want to survive in the modern era. **Johann Pistorius**, a farmer from Val, has come up with a rather unique business plan.

Johann has maize, soya and cattle on his farm, Paardefontein – but he and his neighbour, Nico Bierman, often joke that here in Val they farm with "grain and women".

Johann and his wife, Elisca, have four children under the age of five – Elizé (4), Wilrich (3), Rianke (2) and Mihannri (almost 1) – yet they still have the energy and courage to start a new business.

"Soya is one of the most valuable sources of protein, and I'm always looking for something that adds value to our farming venture. In November 2017, I suddenly had an idea at 02:00 one morning. I woke Elisca to share it with her – she was not at all happy with me! I dreamt of a FutureLife kind of drink – a drink-on-the-go. It had to be something with a long shelf life, almost like long-life milk.

"We started experimenting with soya and mielies, but how do you prevent it from turning sour? We pasteurised, then double-pasteurised, but it was still so sour…" Johann shakes his head and makes a face. "Our next step was to try the UHT process, but the equipment costs about R20 million."

Then they started working with baby porridge, but soon realised there was too much competition in the market.

"One day, I spotted 'soya nuts' in the catalogue of a well-known health brand and ordered some. But they tasted terrible!"

The Pistoriuses began experimenting in a small convection oven in their kitchen until they eventually created a version of soya nuts that tasted good. Next came the challenge of progressing from kitchen to commercial level without compromising on quality – "and so a whole new spice world opened up to us!"

They realised they were onto something unique. "As far as we could establish, there were no such products on the South African market. Remember, anything with a protein content of 12–13% is considered high-protein. Peanuts contain around 22% protein whereas the percentage in soya is about 36%. This makes it the perfect snack for people who are active and for children's lunch boxes; and it is a great source of protein for people who have to catch a taxi to work at 04:00 and only get home late at night. One 30 g packet lasts you a whole morning and it costs only about R9."

What's more it contains plenty of fibre and unsaturated fat (the product is roasted and not deep-fried). This makes it a healthier alternative to a packet of potato chips or a pie – far fewer carbohydrates. And, of course, those tasteless two-minute noodles that hikers usually have for lunch.

Now, the Pistoriuses are ready for production. The factory is ready and their four flavours – Fruit Chutney, Spicy Tomato, Salt & Vinegar, and Chakalaka – have been perfected to their taste. The plan is to start by selling the product to a few select dealers and perhaps online.

They have also come up with the idea of using the soya beans to create a light meal, almost like two-minute noodles. This product will be available in the flavours Durban Curry, Chicken, and Chilli Beef. It's simply a matter of adding boiling water, stirring and eating.

The biggest challenge, says Johann, was getting the spices to adhere to the beans. "The concept is simple but, in practice, it was a big challenge to make a product that was uniform and visually perfect."

But we already know that a Val resident is never going to be dissuaded when faced with a challenge.

CONTACT WellBean wellbeansoya.co.za
info@wellbeansoya.co.za
071 696 8726

Far left are Johann and Elisca Pistorius and three-year-old Wilrich in the brand-new factory (photo below) in which the soya beans, all from his land, will be processed and packaged. Left, Johann is tending to his soya seedlings. The packets of roasted soya nuts pictured here weigh 30 g and cost R9 each.

The staff of the Val Hotel: From left with Rita (at the back) are Raymond Muvwala, who is originally from the DRC; gardener Amos Mbatha from Val; Tsitsi Joseph, who's from Zimbabwe; Sara Sebiloane, whose family still live in Vrede in the Free State, Selinah Mphuti from Val; Charles Maseko from Malawi; Lindokuhle Buthelezi, who's originally from Nquthu in KwaZulu-Natal, and caretaker Lourens Horn. Rita and André were the first to fling their shoes over the overhead wire across Smith Street with the laces tied over the wire – and it became a local quirk. The hotel is on the left and the former Post Office and telephone exchange opposite.

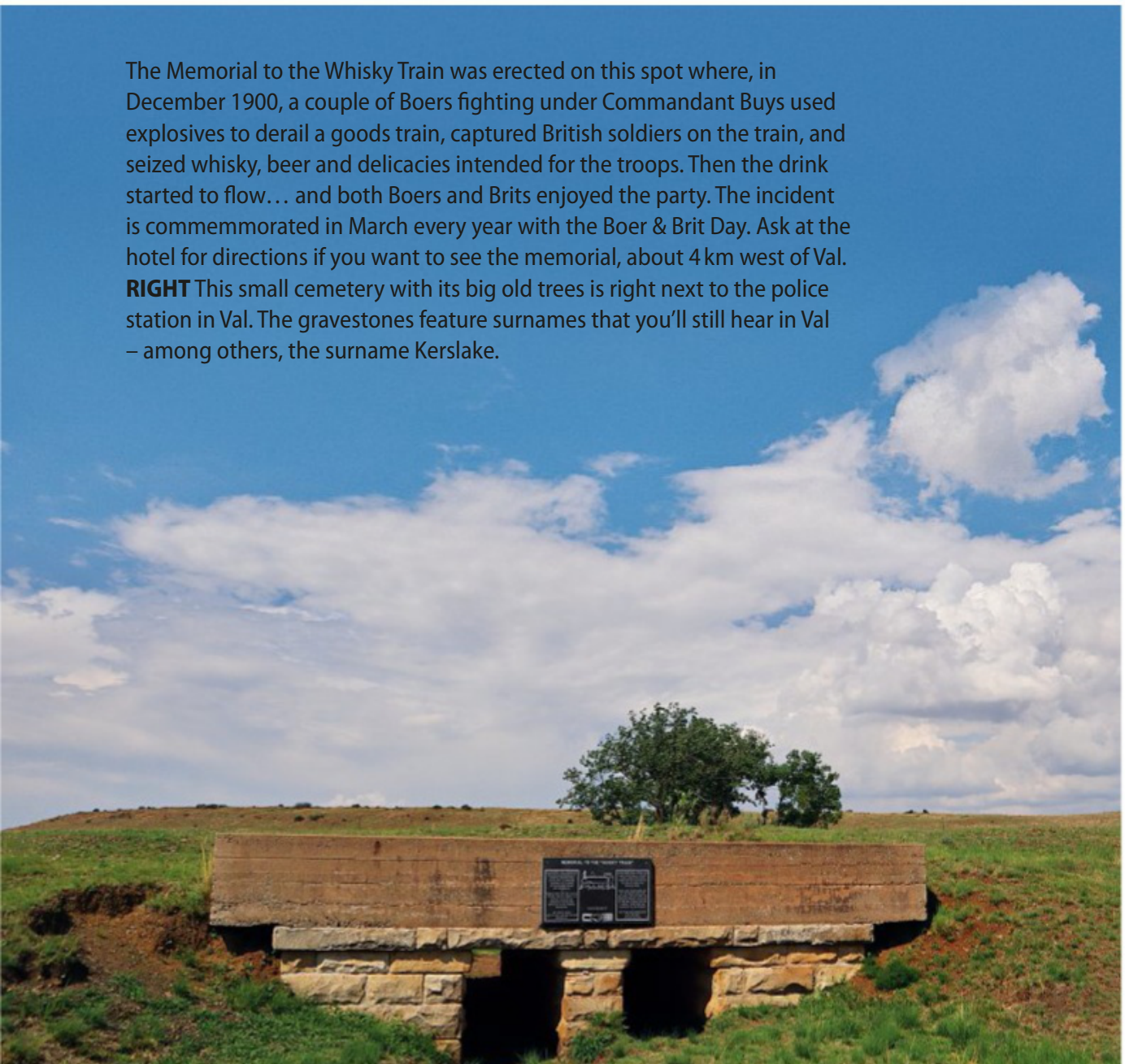
restaurant. "The more people visited, the more we could expand!" Today, the hotel has 12 rooms, six self-catering cottages, and a backpacker's section that sleeps 15 people.

Rita laughs. "I must say, André has always supported me in whatever hare-brained scheme I've come up with!"

"Yes," says André, "it's difficult to keep up with Rita's energy levels, but she's definitely not demanding or high-maintenance. She works incredibly hard for the freedom we have here. She sees opportunities everywhere."

RITA'S ROOTS IN VAL stretch back to the Great Trek of 1838. Her great-grandfather got a farm at Langlaagte, but during the gold rush was afraid that the prospectors would steel his sheep, so he bought the farm Perdefontein in this district instead. "It was one of those three-hour farms – three hours by horse

Maize and soya are two important crops on the Mpumalanga highveld , and at Val the silos are right next to the railway line. In the old days the Eastern Transvaal Agricultural Co-operative managed the silos, but today it's the AFGRI Agri Services logo you'll see at the complex. This photo was taken at dusk from Elizabeth Street – the Val Hotel is behind the silos (and the railway line), slightly to the right.



The Memorial to the Whisky Train was erected on this spot where, in December 1900, a couple of Boers fighting under Commandant Buys used explosives to derail a goods train, captured British soldiers on the train, and seized whisky, beer and delicacies intended for the troops. Then the drink started to flow… and both Boers and Brits enjoyed the party. The incident is commemmorated in March every year with the Boer & Brit Day. Ask at the hotel for directions if you want to see the memorial, about 4 km west of Val.

RIGHT This small cemetery with its big old trees is right next to the police station in Val. The gravestones feature surnames that you'll still hear in Val – among others, the surname Kerslake.

in all directions, although no one knew where their farms started and ended. Oupa Van den Berg eventually divided the farm among his nine children – they were all subsistence farmers and not commercial farmers."

Rita knew Val well. As a child, she loved visiting the farm, where the whole family lived in close proximity to one another. "During peach season, everyone got involved in peeling, preserving, making jam. And when slaughtering took place, they would share the meat with neighbours even though we were poor!"

By 1989 Rita's father had sold his part of the farm and Val was out of her life… until that fateful day in 1994.

For her, the hotel was the ideal place to bring her grandmother's incredible hospitality to life once more. "I think the hotel is a haven again – not for the homeless but for people who are tired of the rat race."

Yet she is realistic about Val. "We cannot try to be a Clarens or a Dullstroom. I can't pretend to be something I am not. In the beginning I couldn't cook, but necessity is the mother of invention, and today I know that simple food made with only the necessary ingredients works the best."

Rita is not done dreaming. She gestures towards the police station: "This piece of land between the hotel and the police station also belongs to us and I would like to build what I call a home of action – the opposite of a retirement home, because who really wants to retire? All the cottages must face north and be off the grid. And the side closest to the police station is where residents will be able to keep their own cows and pigs.

And as everyone knows, Rita turns dreams into reality. As long as she is actively involved in things here, Val will never… well… fall. >

A full calendar

There are more events on the Val calendar than permanent residents in the hamlet! In January, the history group Culture Vultures held a meeting, and in February there was a winetasting. Here's the line-up for the rest of 2020.

28 March Boer & Brit Day
This annual event commemorates the "whisky train" incident in 1900, when Boers derailed a goods train carrying liquor and food for the British troops 4 km outside Val. The Boers and their British captives then got into the whisky…

4 April Impac Film FestiVAL

24–27 April Writers' weekend

30 May Photography Workshop

27 June Kar-na-VAL festival of antique and vintage vehicles

1 July *Boeredag*
We're told the annual *Boeredag* held by the Waterval Boerevereniging is a big deal. Not quite like Nampo, but almost.

9 August Women's Day Fashion Show

24 September International Food FestiVAL

31 October Halloween Ghost Buster Night with Phoenix Paranormal SA

For enquiries about any of these events as well as weddings, other happenings in Val and anything to do with the shop and museum, contact Rita at the Val Hotel.
info@valhotel.co.za 082 550 5540
valhotel.co.za Valhotel

Meet the people

Debbie Thixton

Retailer and museum manager

Debbie prints and sells a large variety of T-shirts for men and women. Our favourites are the Val and the Platteland designs.

Debbie was living in Nieu-Bethesda in the Eastern Cape when she first heard about Val. She says she was not very happy in the Owl House town, because it is far away from everything, the local market is tiny, and she found the winters much too cold.

"Then I came to Val and chatted to Rita to find out if there was a job for me!"

Debbie, who lives in Greylingstad and drives to Val every day, says she is very happy here. "We aren't too far from the city and I can get to a theatre every now and then.

"And the farmers… they really did surprise me. I have seen how hard their life is and how little help they get – and this while they are the custodians of our food! I have deep respect for the Afrikaans farmers in particular: they are down to earth, always ready to help, always have a plan and are just the salt of the earth. They are such decent people!"

She smiles broadly. "I am very happy here!"

Sara Sebiloane

Housekeeper at the Val Hotel

Sara, who grew up in the Free State, has worked for Rita since 29 September 1995. And she still loves her job.

"We get a lot of visitors here, including from overseas. Sometimes it gets really busy when people get married here. I make a lot of food for weddings and the restaurant, things like stew, chicken pie, bacon and eggs, *roosterkoek*…"

Sara radiates happiness and satisfaction. For her, there's nothing missing in Val. "I do sometimes visit my mother in Heidelberg, but I don't worry about what I don't have. Some days are probably a little quiet, especially in winter, but that's fine for me. We must just carry on with our work.

"I am a bit scared of the cold in winter – I prefer summer."

Sara's husband passed away in 2006 after a tractor accident. "It was difficult, but here we stand together and support one another."

Sarie and Andrew van Zyl

Shop owners

The Van Zyls moved to Val from Phalaborwa in 2004 – and they say it really happened by accident. "Andrew was placed on early pension at the mine where he had been employed," says Sarie, "and at that time I was an administrative manager at Checkers. Then we spotted a for-sale advert in *Landbouweekblad* for a shop and bottle store, as well as a house, on two neighbouring plots."

They enjoy living in Val, although Sarie did want to run away on the first day. "I said to Andrew, no, I don't want to live here – but now I don't want to be anywhere else. This place is so tiny that you can't even cough without someone sending over some medicine!"

She smiles. "One, it's so wonderfully peaceful and there's absolutely nothing to make you rush. Two, everyone greets one another. And three, we want for nothing – we listen to RSG, we don't watch TV, we read voraciously. And we make concrete pots and I crochet."

Things have indeed changed over the years. "There were many more people here and we had a lot more customers. But there's no work and a lot of people moved to Greylingstad or Balfour. When it's harvest time, things do get busier – from the end of April to June, July. When I see the lorries arrive to transport the harvest, I make sandwiches for the drivers."

Andrew says crisps are their biggest seller – they buy large bags and make up smaller packets themselves, which they sell for R1 or R2. "We used to have a wider range of stock – Lennon's medicine, soap, toothpaste and so on – but now we only keep the essentials, products that sell. I call them touch-and-go items."

Nico Bierman

Farmer

Like most farmers in the area, Nico farms with maize, soya and cattle. In the living room of his home on the farm Villiera, however, there's another type of farming underway: model tractors. A massive display case contains about 600 different tractors and farming implements, all at a scale of 1:64.

"I was seven when my father gave me my first tractor as a gift," says Nico, who is a member of the South African Model Tractor Association. He is reluctant to say how much his toys cost. "I don't want my wife to know, but it's anywhere from R150 to R5 500."

He specialises in John Deere, but Case, Steiger, Big Bud, Ford and Cat are also represented. And there are tractors, harvesters, planters, trucks… It truly is an astonishing collection. P

Haven on earth

Greyton Farm Animal Sanctuary is a place where about 160 farm animals live the kind of happily-ever-after that few others like them are afforded – and it's all thanks to the good deeds of their fairy godmother, Nicky Vernon.

TEXT AND PHOTOS **BIBI SLIPPERS**

Hamilton basks in the sun in the farmyard. He is notorious for biting.

Goats are inquisitive, playful and naughty creatures, and at Greyton Farm Animal Sanctuary they are free to indulge their whims.

It's not at all difficult to come up with a title for the rather unusual fairy tale that is unfolding at Nicola Vernon's Greyton Farm Animal Sanctuary: *The Showgirl and the Gentle Sow.* Or perhaps *The Bond Girl and the Injured Calf.* Or something along the lines of *The Good Fairy and the Pigs.*

The basic elements of this fairy tale are all there: the adventurous British girl who grew up in Singapore and later worked in Paris as a dancer and as an extra in the Bond movie *Moonraker*; the eccentric businessman who owns a castle in the English countryside where he cares for rescued farm animals… There is a love story, a death, the need to honour someone's memory. And then, finally, a very happy ending for the animals, who are, after all, the lead characters in this story.

THE SANCTUARY can be found on the farm Tabularasa, 7 km outside Greyton. Nicola (better known as Nicky, the adventurous girl mentioned above) bought the 40 ha property in 2005.

She and her husband at the time, Dennis (the eccentric businessman), had visited South Africa for the first time in 1998, when they lost their hearts to Greyton at first sight. They bought a house in the village and for the next four years swapped their freezing English winters for summers in Greyton. When Dennis passed away in 2002, Nicky, who worked in the UK as a consultant for charitable organisations, decided to settle in Greyton.

"I felt that my skills would be useful here in South Africa and, because I receive a widow's pension, I was able to offer my services free of charge."

Nicky later married South African Rohan Millson. They bought the farm Tabularasa together and, before building a house, packed up and went to Arizona in the US to learn how to construct straw-bale houses. While they were building their barn and the two houses on the property, Nicky noticed that lambs belonging to neighbouring farmers were sometimes left lying out in the veld.

"I would pick them up, nurse them back to health, then return them to the owners. I understood that it was not economically viable for the farmers to find and save the lambs that remained behind in the veld, but when I discovered that they didn't really care what became of the little creatures, I decided to start asking them whether I could keep the rescued lambs here on my farm. And that is the story of our unofficial beginning."

NICKY HAD ALWAYS dreamt of honouring Dennis's memory by starting an animal sanctuary similar to the one he had once run at Appleby Castle. Everything changed in 2014 when she was approached to take in a pet pig. That's how Tabularasa officially became Greyton Farm Animal Sanctuary.

"Bella was a beautiful large pig who stepped daintily out of a small car. Her intelligent eyes took in everything around her and she immediately understood that I was the one who would be looking after her now."

Today, the sanctuary is home to 94 pigs. As was the case with Bella, every pig has a name, and Nicky knows each of their stories. The pigs come from back-yard breeders and meat factory farms, and there is even the occasional pig that was born on the back of an abattoir truck. But many of them are pets that breeders sold to unwitting buyers as so-called "teacup pigs". >

The sanctuary, as seen from the gravel road leading to Greyton. A new shed is currently under construction.

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1 Luckie, Ferguson and Pumpkin in the special-needs unit for young pigs. 2 Lemmie the three-legged lamb in an enclosure with Freya. 3 Nova the calf, shortly before a visit to the vet for an upset stomach. Within a day she was back on the farm and up and about again. 4 Pebbles the cat in the courtyard garden. 5 Greyton Farm welcomes visitors by appointment. 6 Charlie the calf is cared for in a paddock for sheep. 7 Luna was rescued from a veal crate and cured of pneumonia. 8 Luckie is an inquisitive little pig with a big personality.

It's a challenge to gather everyone on the team for a photograph, as the work at Greyton Farm is never done. From left are Quintin Phlippies, Johan Jacobs, Angie Hagermann, Nicky Vernon and Rohan Millson.

"There's no such thing as a teacup pig or mini pig," says Nicky indignantly. "Breeders show buyers the immature pigs they bred with to create the impression that the pigs won't grow any larger. But when they do reach maturity, pigs are often far too big to keep in a garden or house. A number of these pet pigs have ended up with us."

These days, it's only under very special circumstances that Nicky will take in pet pigs. The sanctuary first tries to assist owners to find alternative homes via Facebook or other social media platforms. "We only take them in as a last resort and with a contract stipulating that the owners will support their pig financially. But when pigs are rescued under other circumstances, we will always take them in." Nicky's visits to pig farms convinced her that she should focus her rescue operations on these animals. "Pigs need the most help, but they receive it the least."

THE PIGS AT THE SANCTUARY are free to roam the farm during the day, and at night they sleep in paddocks. The ranger, Hendrik Davids, watches over the pigs during the day while they graze, and Paul Cupido takes care of their water supply by keeping mud holes and drinking troughs full. Foreman Johan Jacobs maintains the buildings and facilities, and Quintin Phlippies works around the house and keeps an eye on the animals living in the paddocks in the farmyard to make sure that they are all safe, healthy and happy, and that they want for nothing. Ricardo Deelman has worked on the farm with Nicky for 19 years, and Angie Hagermann is Nicky's housekeeper. The workers' salaries are paid from Nicky's pension and are therefore not an expense for the sanctuary.

Charlotte Billard from France and Tom Deschepper from Belgium are volunteers who came to the farm to help out for a month.

Apart from Nicky and the full-time workers, Rohan (now her ex-husband) is still on the farm and is involved with the care and maintenance of the animals. The other full-time residents are Mike Deall and Christine Streit, and Christine's children, Leo and Ava.

Caring for the animals is hard work and the sanctuary relies largely on the help of volunteers to keep it running. Volunteers from all over the world are referred to the farm by the Workaway website and given free food and accommodation in exchange for their voluntary services.

"We teach the volunteers to work with the baby animals, because these animals require extra care. In many cases the little ones no longer have a mother, >

The pigs at the sanctuary roam free during the day, and for nighttime there is roofed shelter. This is anything but the proverbial pigsty.

Christine Streit and Mike Deall. Mike first came to Greyton Farm as a part-time volunteer and later moved here permanently, and Christine soon followed.

How you can help

You can support Greyton Farm Animal Sanctuary in the following ways:

1 **Woolworths MySchool MyVillage MyPlanet card** Choose Greyton Farm Animal Sanctuary as a beneficiary on your card.

2 **Review vegan food** on the app A Billion Veg. For every 10 products, meals or eateries you review, the sanctuary will receive US $10 from the app creators – and it doesn't cost you a cent!

3 **Sponsor or adopt** You can sponsor or adopt an animal by contributing to the care of a calf (R500/month), a pig (R300/month) or a goat or sheep (R200/month). As a sponsor, you will receive a certificate and an annual birthday or Christmas card from the animal you are helping to support. Sponsors are entitled to free accommodation at the centre and can visit their animal at any time.

4 **Eat at Pure Café** in Greyton – all profits go to Nicky's animal sanctuary.

5 **Donations and gifts** Make a cash donation or give vegetables, fruit, feed or blankets to the sanctuary – details are on the website.

and they need someone to sit with them and pamper them. The animals in the special-care units need extra attention, too." There is currently no shortage of volunteers. People are keen to work with animals, and the sanctuary is fully booked until July 2020.

Apart from the pigs, it also accommodates 42 sheep, a handful of goats and a few calves. And then there are chickens, geese, a few cats and seven dogs. "We limit the number of dogs on the farm to seven, because pigs and dogs are not good friends," says Nicky. A total of 84 of the animals at Greyton Farm Animal Sanctuary are sponsored by people who have opted to support the centre financially. Visitors are often inspired to make a difference themselves. "It was really interesting to see how many people do not realise that pigs, sheep and cattle are really just like dogs. When people come here, they are visibly touched by the sentience of the farm animals."

THERE IS A TOTAL BAN on breeding at Nicky's sanctuary. All the animals are sterilised, and the only babies born here are to mothers who were already pregnant when they arrived. In addition, none of the rescued animals are readily euthanised. "We will only put an animal down if we have tried everything to help it and there's no hope left."

Only 11 or 12 animals have been euthanised over the past 10 years. Even seriously injured or disabled animals can still experience a joyful existence at Greyton Farm Animal Sanctuary.

Nicky tells the tale of Munchkin, a lame pig that spent 14 months on

Bella, Snortie and Ollie in the special-needs unit for older pigs.

The three pigs

MAGIC
This little pig suffers from epilepsy and has to be fed by hand. Nicky initially thought Magic wasn't going to make it and considered euthanasia. But he recovered and now lives contentedly in the special-needs unit for pigs.

ERIC
Eric was rescued from a group of drug addicts in Grabouw who had been pushing him around in a shopping trolley. They reportedly wanted to eat him, but he was already so emaciated he wouldn't have made much of a meal. Eric responded very well to the love, attention and medical care he's been receiving – and he is thriving.

SNORTIE
Snortie's hind legs are paralysed. He was the inspiration behind a massive art installation that was exhibited in the UK. The proceeds were used to manufacture a "wheelchair" for Snortie. This special wagon allows him to "walk around" for a few hours a week.

Rohan's house has guest rooms for visitors and volunteers.

the floor in her living room. "Munchkin regularly received massages and physiotherapy. She was very content to be part of the household and became friends with the dogs and cats." When Munchkin became very sick, it was clear to Nicky that the little pig had lost her zest for life and didn't want to be there any longer. It was only then that she was put down.

The lack of a proper barn has been one of the biggest challenges the team faces, but thanks to a very generous donation from supporters in the UK they have been able to start building one that has been designed by Nicky's architect sister.

And what will happen when Nicky is no longer there to hold the fort? She says a plan is in place for when she "falls under a pig", as she jokingly puts it. Mike and Christine will take over the sanctuary one day, with the support of the board of trustees. In the meantime, she hopes her haven will grow to such a degree that a director can be appointed, which will free her up to raise funds for the animals that will continue to live happily on Greyton Farm for a long time to come. P

CONTACT greytonfarmanimalsanctuary.com nicola@greytonfarmanimalsanctuary.com 082 558 7752 @greytonfarm animalsanctuary

Meals without cruelty

Nicky was 55 when she changed her lifestyle and became a vegan. She knows how difficult it is to make such a decision, but says many more people are following this lifestyle today.

At the sanctuary, Nicky and the members of her team take turns to cook dinner, and all meals eaten at the farm are 100% free of animal products. This commitment to veganism has expanded to a business in Greyton: Only plant-based meals are served at **Pure Café**, which can be found at Unit 3, 41 Main Road, and all profits go to Nicky's sanctuary. She opened the café to serve as a place where animal lovers would be able to enjoy a meal without seeing plates of bacon and eggs being carried past their table.

Vegan products are for sale to take home, too.

Nicky feeds Magic the epileptic pig.

Pure Café

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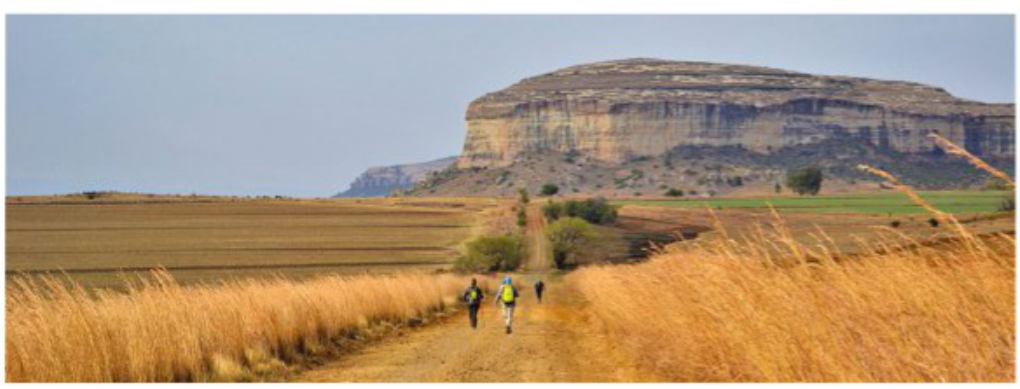

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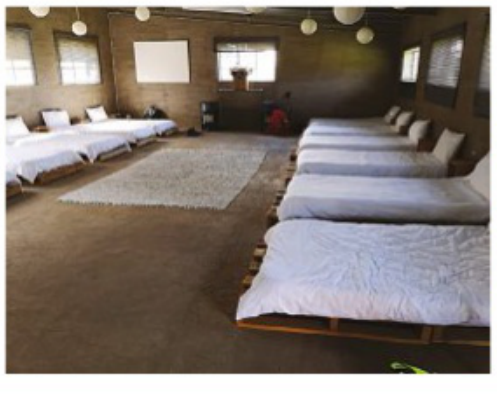


Clued up on culture

The world's going crazy for fermented foods that are packed with probiotics, but in reality this "new" trend is pretty much as old as humankind. It's a good time to do your own research into the claimed health benefits of kombucha, kefir, kimchi, sauerkraut, apple-cider vinegar and wine vinegar. We'll show you how.

TEXT **JOHAN VAN ZYL** PHOTOS **PETER VAN NOORD**

Generally, when the militantly health-conscious, the quacks, the hippies, the hipsters and the woke generation start to sink their teeth into a "new" food or health trend, it becomes almost impossible to separate the ringing cash registers from the truth. Did humans really suddenly forget that sourdough bread, beer, tea, cheese, yoghurt, chocolate and wine are also fermented foods?

At first you might think preparing lacto-fermented vegetables sounds like a serious science project or that dairy is involved, but the "lacto" part of this term simply refers to lactic acid.

Beneficial bacteria like *Lactobacillus* occur naturally on the skin of all vegetables and fruit (and even on your hands). In an anaerobic (oxygen-free) environment, these bacteria convert sugar into lactic acid, which inhibits the growth of harmful bacteria, helping to preserve the food and creating a distinctive pungent or tart taste.

Fermentation has been used for centuries to preserve perishable fresh foods such as vegetables, milk, fish and meat, and to improve their flavour.

During the fermentation process, bacteria break down sugar and fibre in the food (making it more digestible), introduce enzymes and probiotics, and release alcohol, lactic acid and acetic acid. These three "biopreservatives" conserve all the nutrients and prevent the end product from spoiling quickly.

In an era in which bad eating habits and the misuse of antibiotics have become rife, the prophets of fermentation maintain that these nutritious, easily digestible superfoods packed with probiotics will give your digestive system, immune system, energy levels and general health a massive boost.

Some living bacterial cultures apparently act in the same way as antioxidants by neutralising free radicals – "the precursors to cancer" – and helping to detoxify the body. Some people claim that others alleviate high blood sugar, liver ailments, gout, rheumatism, haemorrhoids, constipation, ulcers, heartburn, bad breath and nervous conditions. But unfortunately there is little scientific evidence to back these claims, specifically in relation to humans. More research is being conducted to test some of these claims, but it focuses predominantly on specific strains of probiotics that do not necessarily occur in all fermented products.

Lastly, fermentation requires patience. Unlike fresh produce quickly pickled in an acidic liquid, the sourness of fermented food develops over a longer period. Once it tastes right and delicious, you can store it in a glass jar in the fridge to enjoy every day. And hopefully it won't be long before you feel the benefits.

PHOTOS BELOW AND PREVIOUS DOUBLE PAGE SPREAD **SHUTTERSTOCK**

What you need

CLEAN EQUIPMENT

Ensure that absolutely everything you use is perfectly clean– even the fresh produce and especially your hands – so that the beneficial bacteria can flourish without having to contend with unwanted rivals. (Also make sure that you rinse everything properly to rule out soapy residue.) Always wash vegetables in a weak saline solution, and don't touch the brine with your hands.

Fermentation pot It's not essential to have any special equipment, but an anaerobic environment (one without oxygen) is non-negotiable. Of course a fermentation pot will make this easier – you simply fill the gutter along the top of the pot with oil (or water) to create an airtight seal that will allow the natural carbon dioxide that builds up inside the pot to escape without letting oxygen inside. *Platteland*'s experiments have revealed that oil is a much better choice for creating this airtight seal, because in fermentation pots with a relatively shallow gutter, water evaporates within a day, breaking the seal.

If you choose to use an ordinary 1 ℓ, 2 ℓ or 3 ℓ glass jar with a lid that closes tightly, you should make sure that the vegetables remain covered in brine at all times (for example, by using a cabbage leaf or a plastic lid that is large enough and/or weights to keep them submerged). This is to allow the lactic-acid bacteria to flourish and to prevent undesired bacteria or fungi from taking hold.

From the third or fourth day, you would also need to open the jar briefly to allow the carbon dioxide that builds up inside it to escape, releasing excess pressure (this is called "burping" the jar).

Additional equipment Always use bowls, spoons, measuring jugs, sieves and other equipment made of glass, ceramic, plastic or wood. Never use stainless steel or aluminium utensils.

VEGETABLES

Always use fresh organic vegetables. Wash them thoroughly in a weak saline solution (use 1 tablespoon salt per 1 ℓ water) and shake them dry. Add a few leaves that contain tannins (such as green tea or vine leaves) to the brine, or cut a sheet of seaweed (nori) to the right size size and place it under the cabbage leaf or weights, to ensure the vegetables remain crisp.

Vegetables suitable for fermentation include cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale, pak choi, leeks, green beans, radishes, beetroot, onion, carrot, chilli, ginger, garlic, cucumber, sweet pepper and seaweed. Some vegetables, such as cucumber and sweet pepper, are prone to developing mould and should be fermented in a stronger brine solution. Read more at healthessentials.co.za/fermentation.

WATER

Tap water is out! Use only filtered tap water or bottled water containing as little chlorine as possible, but preferably no chlorine at all.

SALT

Salt – importantly, we are referring to sea salt, rock salt or Himalayan salt that does not contain any iodine or anti-caking agents – improves the flavour, texture and shelf life of fermented foods, and you can adjust it according to your personal taste. The recommended quantity is 2–3 tablespoons (30 ml–45 ml) salt per 1 ℓ water. Use good brands such as Oryx Desert Salt or Khoisan Sea Salt. >

Fermentation pots

This 2 ℓ Fermenta crock pot costs R770 online at faithful-to-nature.co.za.

This beautiful handmade 3 ℓ fermentation pot (R1 800) by Koringberg-based potter Leon Potgieter works like a charm. Visit his website potterbakker.co.za to see and buy his work. Also read the snippet on page 16.

We love this handmade fermentation pot, or crock pot, from Babylonstoren. It comes with a ceramic weight and is available in 500 ml (R690), 1 ℓ (R900) and 2 ℓ (R980) sizes. Buy them online at babylonstoren.com.

Sauerkraut

Sauerkraut (German for sour herb) is probably the best-known type of lacto-fermented vegetable.

Makes **2 medium-sized jars**
Preparation time **20–30 minutes**
Fermentation time **3–8 days**

YOU NEED

- **1 fresh medium cabbage head**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) caraway seeds**
- **1–3 tablespoons (15 ml–45 ml) salt (we used 30 ml)**

THIS IS HOW

Remove any outer leaves that are limp or damaged. If you are not using a fermentation pot with weights, remove one good whole cabbage leaf and set it aside for later use. Slice the rest of the cabbage into thin strips using a very sharp knife, mandolin or food processor.

Place the shredded cabbage, caraway seeds and salt in a mixing bowl. Press and massage the mixture quite firmly with your hands – keep at it for 5–10 minutes – until the cabbage starts to release liquid. Wait 5 minutes and repeat the massage process.

Now pack a handful of the cabbage mixture at a time into a sterilised jar, pressing firmly so that no oxygen is trapped between the strips – use your fingers or a spoon to compact it down. Once all the cabbage is in the jar, pour the liquid over it. Over the next 24 hours you should press the mixture down with a spoon frequently – the cabbage will continue to soften and release more liquid.

Once the cabbage has released enough liquid to cover it, place the cabbage leaf you set aside earlier on top of the mixture and press down firmly to ensure that the all the shredded cabbage remains submerged. (If there is still insufficient liquid after 24 hours, mix ½ teaspoon salt [2,5 ml] with ⅘ cup (200 ml) water and add just enough to make sure the cabbage is completely submerged.)

Now leave the jar to stand in a cool room (no direct sunlight) for 3–8 days. Keep an eye on it: if any of the cabbage starts to float on top of the liquid, press it down to make sure it is fully submerged. Don't be concerned if bubbles or a white foam starts to form on top – these are signs that fermentation is under way. Mould, however, is bad news. Keep in mind that if you are using a glass jar with a tight-sealing lid, you will have to "burp" the jar every day to release the excess gas.

You may start to taste your sauerkraut after the fifth day. The flavour will become increasingly sour, so when you like the taste, you can transfer it to smaller sterilised jars to store in the fridge, where the fermentation process will continue more slowly. It will last in the fridge for 4–8 months.

Did you know?

Over centuries, thousands of sailors succumbed to scurvy on long sea voyages because their diet did not contain sufficient vitamin-rich fresh fruit and vegetables. But in the 1770s, explorer and cartographer captain James Cook took 60 barrels of sauerkraut with him on his second major voyage – the supply lasted for a full 27 months and not a single crew member developed scurvy.

Platteland says

You could also add coarsely grated carrot (about one-fifth of the cabbage quantity). Some also like to add 1 teaspoon (5 ml) whole black peppercorns or chopped garlic.

Carrot sticks with ginger

Serve these carrot fingers as a snack with a dip like hummus, or use them in a salad.

Makes **1 large jar**
Preparation time **10 minutes**
Fermentation time **7–10 days**

YOU NEED

- **1 ℓ water**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) salt**
- **fresh ginger root (5 cm or more, depending on your personal taste), peeled and thinly sliced**
- **6–8 medium to large carrots, peeled and quartered lengthwise**
- **1 whole cabbage leaf (if you are not using a fermentation pot)**

THIS IS HOW

Place the water and salt in a jug and stir until the salt has dissolved. Place the sliced ginger at the bottom of a fermentation pot or a sterilised glass jar and arrange the carrot sticks upright on top. Ensure that the carrot and ginger remain submerged in the brine either by placing weights on top or using a cabbage leaf to keep them under the liquid. Seal the pot or jar tightly and allow it to ferment for 7–10 days. If you are using a jar, open it regularly to allow the gas that builds up to escape. The carrots are ready when they have a delicious sour taste but are still crisp. Leave them in the brine and store them in the fridge.

MORE RECIPES!

Visit our Facebook page at Platteland where we share extra recipes for fermented radishes, cucumber and garlic with a hint of Asian flavour (right).

Kimchi

Kimchi is a tangy Korean side dish of fermented Chinese cabbage, spring onion, garlic and chilli, which is usually served with rice, noodle and pancake dishes (even for breakfast). Many versions include daikon radishes, cucumber and carrot. Chinese cabbage is as scarce as hen's teeth in the platteland, so we simply used regular cabbage. But it is easy to grow Chinese cabbage in a semi-shaded spot in your vegetable garden – buy the seed at livingseeds.co.za.

Makes **2 medium-sized jars**
Preparation time **30 minutes**
Fermentation time **8–12 days**

YOU NEED

- **1 medium cabbage head or 2–3 large Chinese cabbages (napa cabbages), shredded**
- **2 bunches spring onions, sliced into thin rings**
- **2 large carrots, peeled and coarsely grated**
- **1 whole garlic bulb, cloves peeled and finely chopped**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) finely grated fresh ginger**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) dried chilli flakes (use less or more, depending on your personal taste)**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) fish sauce (optional, but it does result in a more authentic flavour)**
- **2–4 tablespoons (30 ml–60 ml) sea salt**

THIS IS HOW

Follow exactly the same steps as for making the sauerkraut. >

Here's what the Theonista 3 ℓ kombucha jar looks like while the contents are fermenting in your pantry. The scoby ("symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast") is floating on top, but sometimes it is suspended in the liquid or lies on the bottom; often, a baby scoby will form on the surface; you can give it away or use it when yours gets too old (it will start to darken, get holes or tear). **PHOTOS LEFT, FROM THE TOP** We used about a ¼ cup fresh raspberries to flavour this batch of rooibos kombucha – for a refreshing drink on a hot day, dilute the kombucha with a little soda water and lots of ice. The bottle of kombucha in the middle went through a second fermentation after we added cubed fresh pineapple. Below are two bottles of honeybush-tea kombucha with fresh ginger (left) and mango.

Kombucha

Kombucha, or fermented sweetened black or green tea, made its way here from China; available these days in most food-stores and markets. To make your own "miracle drink" at home, you will need your own scoby ("symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast"), a jelly-like "starter" or "mother", which you can either get from a friend or buy online. The scoby lives off sugar, which is broken down into acids and alcohol. Don't be concerned if you notice brown "lumps" or slimy yeast strings in your kombucha – these miniature scobies indicate that your kombucha is happy.

Makes **about 2 ℓ**
Preparation time **30 minutes plus cooling time**
Fermentation time **6–14 days**

YOU NEED

- **20 g black or green tea (6–8 bags) – you can also use white, oolong or rooibos tea, but many brewers swear by including at least two bags of "real" black or green tea**
- **200 g sugar (preferably raw cane sugar)**
- **about 2 ℓ boiling water**
- **scoby in starter liquid**
- **flavouring of your choice, such as fruit juice, fresh berries, sliced fruit, spices, fresh ginger, fresh herbs, or lemon peel and juice (optional)**

THIS IS HOW

Use a clean wooden or plastic spoon to stir the tea, sugar and boiling water in a sterilised 3 ℓ glass jar until all the sugar granules have dissolved. Cover the top of the jar with a piece of cloth held in place with an elastic band, and let the tea draw for 20–30 minutes before you remove the tea bags (squeeze out every last drop). Let the tea cool down to room temperature

Stir in the starter liquid (in which the scoby is sealed) or about 1 cup (250 ml) of a previously made kombucha brew. Once again, cover the jar with a piece of cloth and an elastic band and place it in a mild, dark spot (20°C–25°C) for 5–6 days to ferment – don't interfere with it or move the jar. (Some brewers maintain that a dark cupboard is not a good idea, because air circulation is important, but here at *Platteland* we have consistently brewed kombucha in a dark kitchen cupboard.)

From about the fifth day you can start tasting your kombucha daily without disturbing the liquid or scoby too much. Remember that the longer the kombucha is left to stand, the more sugar is consumed by the culture and the more sour and acidic it will taste.

Once you are happy with the flavour, remove the scoby carefully and place it in a clean dish or jar. Pour about 1 cup kombucha into the jar to cover the scoby. You will use the liquid and the scoby as a starter for your next batch of kombucha. (Don't worry if a second scoby developed on top of the remaining kombucha – you can use it to brew a second jar of kombucha, or give it away with a little of your kombucha to someone who can start to make their own.)

The remaining kombucha is now ready to drink. Pour it through a fine plastic sieve into sterilised bottles with tight-closing lids. Store the bottles in the fridge for up to three months.

If you want your kombucha to fizz and develop an interesting flavour, you will have to ferment it a second time.

Second fermentation Fill the bottles with kombucha, but leave enough room for the flavouring of your choice – there should be at least a 2 cm gap at the top. Some people simply add fruit juice. We conducted several experiments with, among others, pineapple cubes, mango, raspberries and chopped ginger. Feel free to experiment.

Close the lids tightly and leave the kombucha to ferment at room temperature, away from direct sunlight, for 2–7 days. The acidic flavour will soften and natural bubbles will form. Once the kombucha is gassy enough for your liking, store the bottles in the fridge. >

Novel ideas

INSECT REPELLENT There are many mentions on the internet of people who use a strong brew of kombucha (without flavouring) as a spray on plants to get rid of ants and greenfly.

VINAIGRETTE/SALAD DRESSING Did you forget about a jar of kombucha, only to end up with vinegar? Make a salad dressing by shaking 1 tablespoon (15 ml) kombucha, salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste, a little mustard if you like, and 3 tablespoons (45 ml) olive oil in a jar.

The Theonista (theonista.co.za) Kombucha Kit consists of a 3 ℓ Consol glass jar, a scoby sealed in starter liquid, a blend of tea leaves and a bag of raw cane sugar (both are sufficient for two brews), a cloth and elastic for covering the jar, a reusable cloth tea bag and two leaflets with instructions. It costs about R350 online – order yours through Faithful to Nature (faithful-to-nature.co.za) or Wellness Warehouse (wellnesswarehouse.com).

Milk kefir

Milk kefir is a fairly runny fermented milk drink crammed with antioxidants, vitamin K12, B vitamins, magnesium and calcium. It looks and tastes like buttermilk and has quite a sharp, sour flavour that has made many people decide that they prefer yoghurt! It is particularly delicious in smoothies or with fruit and muesli.

Makes **500 ml**
Preparation time **2 minutes, excluding activation time**
Fermentation time **1–2 days**

YOU NEED

- **activated dehydrated kefir grains (read the tip)**
- **2 cups fresh full-cream cow's or goat's milk (the kefir feeds off lactose – so if you use coconut, soya or rice milk, you will still have to make every second batch of kefir with cow's or goat's milk in order to feed the grains)**

THIS IS HOW

Pour the activated kefir grains and the milk into a glass jar, cover the top with a piece of cheesecloth secured with an elastic band, and place it in a mild spot (20°C–25°C) away from direct sunlight to thicken and turn sour – this should happen within 24 hours. Pour the mixture through a plastic sieve. The kefir milk that runs through can be stored in the fridge and used within 7–10 days. The grains that remain behind in the sieve can be used to make your next jar of kefir.

Tip Perhaps a friend who is already making kefir would be able to give you a spoonful of the activated grains (they look like small white cauliflower florets). Otherwise follow *Platteland*'s example and order dehydrated milk kefir grains from Crafty Cultures (craftycultures.co.za). This little packet of rock-hard yellowish grains mixed with a little milk powder needs to be activated for 3–7 days – full instructions are supplied.

Novel ideas

DEODORANT Some people use kefir as a deodorant and spread about a teaspoonful under their arms. They believe the bacteria in the kefir "eat" the bacteria that cause body odour.

FACE CREAM/MASK Kefir contains lactic acid, a natural form of alpha-hydroxy acid (AHA), an ingredient in a variety of skin-care products that helps to brighten the complexion.

Crafty Cultures Milk Kefir Grains can be ordered online at craftycultures.co.za or through Faithful to Nature (faithful-to-nature.co.za).

This is what kefir grains look like when they have been activated.

Raw organic apple-cider vinegar

Many commercial apple cider vinegars are distilled, filtered and even heated, which eradicates many of their health benefits. We were inspired by a recipe we found on the blog talesofakitchen.com. It is surprisingly easy to make your own apple-cider vinegar, but you do have to be patient, as the process could take from 6 weeks to 2 months.

Makes **about 800 ml**
Preparation time **5 minutes**
Fermentation time **2 months+**

YOU NEED

- **6 small flavourful apples (remove the stalks but leave the skin and seeds intact)**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) raw sugar (we used light-brown sugar)**
- **filtered water**

THIS IS HOW

Wash the apples and slice each one into about 12 pieces. Place them in a sterilised glass jar.

Dissolve the sugar in 1 cup (250 ml) water and pour this over the apple. Now add more filtered water to cover the apples and use a plastic lid, saucer or cup to keep the apple submerged. Cover the top of the jar with a piece of cloth secured with an elastic band and leave it to stand in a mild, dark spot for 2–3 weeks.

In time it will start to form bubbles and a layer of foam on top.

After about three weeks, pour the slightly milky mixture through a plastic sieve or colander, discard the apple pieces and return the liquid to the jar. Once again, cover the jar with the cloth and now leave the jar to stand for another 4–6 weeks. Stir the liquid with a spoon occasionally and taste it. Once you like the flavour, it's ready for bottling. >

MORE RECIPES!

Go to our Facebook page – Platteland – where we share extra recipes for fermented cucumber, radishes (right), and garlic with a hint of the East.

Wine vinegar

To make your own wine vinegar, you need a starter, which looks like the scoby you use to make kombucha, along with leftover quantities of wine. Vinegar mothers are not available at your local shop, but at the end of 2018 *Platteland* received a white-wine and a red-wine vinegar mother as gift from Franschhoek-based chef Margot Janse, which has since produced many "babies".

Preparation time **2 minutes**
Fermentation time **2 months+**

YOU NEED

- **vinegar mother**
- **leftover white or red wine (or use sparkling wine for the white-wine mother)**

THIS IS HOW

It is really the easiest thing on earth. Place the vinegar mother in a large glass jar with a tap, and pour in about 1 bottle of wine to start with. For every bottle you add to the white-wine vinegar, also add 1 cup filtered water. Cover the jar with a piece of cloth secured with an elastic band so the vinegar can breathe.

And that is that. Simply wait, open the tap every now and then to pour a drop or two in a teaspoon to taste the vinegar, and whenever you have a little wine left in a bottle, add it.

Just look at all the thin vinegar mothers that have formed in this jar! (Actually, they should be removed, as they'll consume all your vinegar. Read below right how you can win one of them.) **ABOVE RIGHT** A jar with red-wine vinegar. **RIGHT** On the plate is the original vinegar mother. And held in hand is a new thin vinegar mother that formed in the jar.

Win Ten readers will win a white-wine vinegar mother and five readers will win a red-wine vinegar mother courtesy of *Platteland*, Die Wit Huis op Koringberg (and Margot Janse!). Send your name, street address and telephone number by email to helloplatteland@gmail.com. Type "Autumn – vinegar" in the subject line and, very importantly, specify whether you want a white- or red-wine vinegar mother. The closing date is 29 May 2020.

Sourdough bread starter

Here at *Platteland* we have worked with countless sourdough starters, or mothers, but this particularly active one from *Hester's Book of Bread* (2012) works like a charm. And you can bake your first loaf within six days, although the starter's flavour will only be fully developed after the second or third use.

The recipe is based on Peter Reinhart's recipe and method from *The Bread Baker's Apprentice*, but has been adapted by the author of *Hester's Book of Bread*, Hester van der Walt, and the artist and baker Niël Jonker, whom we featured in *Platteland* #6 (Autumn 2015).

Makes **1 starter**
Preparation time **30 minutes**
Fermentation time **5 days**

YOU NEED

- **1 cup (130 g) wholewheat or rye flour**
- **4¼ cups (1,06 ℓ) filtered lukewarm water**
- **7 cups (915 g) white bread flour**

THIS IS HOW

Day 1 Mix the wholewheat or rye flour with ¾ cup (180 ml) lukewarm water until it forms a stiff ball (there is no need to knead it). Place it in a clean glass container, cover with cling film and leave it to stand at room temperature for 24 hours.

Day 2 The previous day's dough might have small air bubbles and emit a sharp smell. (If there is no change, leave it for another 12–24 hours or until it starts to rise slightly.) Now mix 1 cup (130 g) of the white bread flour and ½ cup (125 ml) lukewarm water into the dough. Return it to the container, cover it with cling film and mark the level of the dough with a strip of masking tape on the outside of the dish.

Day 3 The dough will have doubled, compared with its size on Day 1. Weigh the dough, divide it into two and either discard or give away the other half. Again mix 1 cup (130 g) of the white bread flour and ½ cup (125 ml) lukewarm water into the remaining dough, cover it and let it stand for another 24 hours.

In the three photos on the left are the sourdough starter, which we keep in an ice-cream container; and close-ups (have a look at the lovely spongy texture in the photo in the middle). We used it to bake this sourdough bread with one-third rye flour.

BAKE THIS BREAD!

On our Facebook page – Platteland – we share a recipe for the sourdough bread in the photo.

Day 4 The dough should definitely have doubled in size by now. Repeat the same process as for Day 3: weigh the dough, either throw out or give one half away, and again mix in 1 cup (130 g) of the white bread flour and ½ cup (125 ml) lukewarm water. Cover it and let it stand once again.

Day 5 Weigh out 130 g (1 cup) of the dough and throw or give away the rest. Now add 4 cups of white bread flour (525 g) and 2 cups (500 ml) lukewarm water to the dough you have kept. Let it stand for six hours and store it in the fridge. You have now "grown" your own sourdough starter and are ready to start baking.

Do a course

- **Crafty Cultures** is offering its one-day Probiotic Diet Workshop on 22 April, 29 July and 7 October 2020 (09:00–17:00). Learn to make kombucha, kefir and lacto-fermented vegetables. The venue is Distillique in Hennopspark, Centurion, and the workshop costs R2 100 per person, including all materials, ingredients, refreshments and lunch. Book at craftycultures.co.za (click on "Events" at the top, and then "Workshops), or 083 601 4532.
- **Annelien Pienaar**, food consultant, author and presenter of *Platteland*'s practical workshops, is offering an online course called Fermented Food & Drinks, which will teach you how to make raw apple-cider vinegar, kombucha, sauerkraut, kimchi and pickled lemons. It costs R790. Visit annelienpienaar.co.za to register – click on "Online Courses". P

Let's go outside

Autumn is the time to slow down in harmony with nature. Plant spekboom, make spekboom atchar, make your garden owl-friendly, and read about people who rescue owls, make succulent arrangements and create beautiful gardens.

COMPILED BY **MAJA PALM**

CONSERVATION

Buy a spekboom and save an owl

Ten years ago, Danelle Murray and her husband, Brendan, recognised the great need to protect owls and started the Owl Rescue Centre in Hartbeespoort. Today, this is the biggest sanctuary for owls in the world.

When the centre opened its doors, the Murrays rehabilitated about four owls per month, which was manageable. But as more people heard about the centre, calls for assistance came flooding in. They soon took care of about 20 birds a month, and now the number has grown to more than 100 a month.

"When Brendan and I decided we would dedicate ourselves to owls, we had no idea what that would mean," writes Danelle in her memoir, *My Dark Country*. "There is no doubt that our lives are unlike anyone else's in the entire world, spending almost every moment of our time in the company of some or other owl."

Danelle says there are numerous reasons owls are brought to the centre, but unfortunately humans are responsible for the majority of cases. "About three owls are admitted to the centre every day because of vehicle accidents, poisoning, barbed-wire fences and deliberate attempts to kill owls because of superstition.

"Every living organism has a place in the ecosystem: owls help to keep rodent numbers in check and they catch insects, geckos and small snakes."

Visitors may watch the owls at night while they are feeding at the various feeding platforms at the centre.

MAIN PHOTO A southern white-faced owl that is being rehabilitated at the Owl Rescue Centre in Hartbeespoort. RIGHT A Cape eagle-owl builds up its strength in the birdhouse – when it's strong enough, it will be released. BELOW Danelle Murray looks at the injured eye of a spotted eagle-owl.

ABOVE Eight-year-old Rebecca Murray with two spekboom plants; it was her idea to propagate and sell them. Since September last year, the Owl Rescue Centre has sold more than 65 000 spekboom plants.

And then came the spekboom

"Our eight-year-old daughter, Rebecca, has a great love of animals and plants," says Danelle. "She learnt that spekboom could benefit the planet and that animals can eat it, so she decided to take cuttings from different spekboom varieties growing at the centre.

"She first gave away the plants as gifts, but the next thing we knew, she had started a small spekboom nursery next to the kitchen!"

"Unfortunately, Brendan and I have to have frequent conversations about money for the centre, because it can cost up to R2 500 to rehabilitate one owl. One evening when Rebecca heard us discussing money, she offered to sell her spekboom plants to help the owls. And that was the start of our spekboom project!"

Rebecca herself taught the women who assist with the project how to take cuttings and propagate the plants. "She knows how to recognise a healthy cutting and understands which ones will find it easier to take root. She also sits with the women every day to plant the cuttings. Spekboom is currently the main source of funding for the centre, of which Rebecca is justifiably proud.

The centre has sold more than 65 000 plants since the project started on 1 September 2019. They use hollowed-out blue-gum logs as pots, which can be planted directly in the soil, where they'll decompose.

The plants cost R10 each and there are always at least 5 000 in stock. They can be couriered countrywide.

It's also possible to "adopt" an owl by paying for the rescue and rehabilitation of a bird. All donations are welcome, but the centre recommends R500–R2 500 to cover costs.

CONTACT owlrescuecentre.org.za
082 719 5463

An owl-friendly garden

Twelve owl species occur in South Africa, of which two are threatened. Spotted eagle-owls and barn owls are most commonly found in gardens. Danelle says if you want your garden to be owl-friendly, your first step should be to stop using pesticides. "No pesticide on the market is safe. Even herbicides are a massive threat to birds of prey in general. Many birds eat insects that eat plants, and when a bird of prey catches another bird that has eaten an insect that has eaten plants treated with herbicides, the bird of prey could die as a result."

Gardeners can create a safe breeding space for owls by putting up an owl box. The centre sells owl boxes made of recycled plastic as a way to raise funds. (In *Platteland* #2 – Autumn 2014 – we showed readers how to make your own owl boxes and included plans for boxes suitable for both barn owls and spotted eagle-owls.) >

ABOVE Loubie Rausch is an expert on indigenous edible plants. She likes to share her knowledge, because she believes everyone deserves to eat healthy and affordable food.

FOOD FROM THE VELD

Make your own spekboom and carrot atchar

Foraging expert Loubie Rauch says she has experimented with various recipes over the years, adapting them with indigenous edible plants. "This recipe is an adaptation of a pickled carrot recipe from the iconic recipe book *Indian Delights*, which has inspired countless domestic and professional cooks. Spekboom works very well for this pickle, because its bright-green leaves and the orange carrot look so lovely together, especially right after you've made the pickle." (The leaves lose some of their colour as the pickle develops.)

YOU NEED

- 2 kg carrots, sliced thinly
- 500 g spekboom leaves
- 20 curry leaves
- cooking oil, for frying

Mixture 1

- 2 tablespoons chilli flakes (or more if you like it hot)
- 1 cup sultanas
- 1 cup white sesame seeds
- 1 cup fine desiccated coconut
- ¾ cup cooking oil

Mixture 2

- 1 tablespoon whole cumin seeds
- 2 tablespoons white sesame seeds
- 2 tablespoons black mustard seeds

Mixture 3

- ¾ cup cornflour
- 2 cups water
- 4 cups white-wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons strong English mustard powder

THIS IS HOW

Make mixture 1 Combine the chilli, sultanas, sesame seeds and coconut in a food processor and pulse until the sesame seeds and sultanas are slightly crushed. Heat the oil in a saucepan large enough to contain all the ingredients for this recipe and fry the sesame-and-coconut mixture until fragrant and nutty.

Make mixture 2 While mixture 1 cools down, toast the cumin, sesame and mustard seeds in a dry pan until fragrant. Add this mixture to mixture 1.

Make mixture 3 Combine the cornflour with enough water to form a smooth paste. Stir this paste into the rest of the water, add the vinegar and heat the mixture in a saucepan. Stir continuously until it thickens. Let the mixture cool down slightly before adding the mustard powder. Stir until well incorporated. Now add mixture 3 to the other mixture.

Stir the carrot and spekboom leaves into the combined mixture.

Heat a little oil in a pan and temper the curry leaves in it until they become fragrant. Add the combined mixture to the pan and stir. Transfer the atchar to sterilised jars, pressing it down so that any trapped air escapes and the liquid rises to cover the pickle. Allow the pickle to stand for at least two weeks before you enjoy it.

Loubie is the owner of Making KOS. She has a passion for teaching people to cook with indigenous plants of the Cape Floral Kingdom. She believes these ingredients can be a valuable source of nutrition. Sign up for one of her cooking classes to find out more. makingkos.blogspot.com
Making KOS

'With freedom, books, flowers and the moon, who could not be happy?'
– Oscar Wilde

For the love of succulents

Corné Burger from Kanoneiland in the Northern Cape has turned her hobby into a business.

PHOTOS **JESS DE SMIDT**

When and how did you come up with the idea for your business, Woestynkind (Desert Child)?
In August 2015 we took our annual seaside holiday at Leentjiesklip in Langebaan. One day, I decided to place a piece of Oasis foam in a wooden crate and arranged some desert roses in it – in memory of my father, who had passed away in 2013.

I was surprised at how long the succulents lasted in the Oasis. During our two-week holiday, my sisters who were there also bought wooden crates and planted succulents in them.

After the holiday I would arrange succulents in a crate occasionally, either for my home or as a gift. People noticed them on Facebook and I started getting orders for my succulent crates. Woestynkind really took off at the end of 2017.

How did you choose the name?
Every crate, cross, heart, wreath or any other container I fill with these succulents feels like one of my own children. I just call them my "*woestynkinders*".

Why did you start the business?
The crates make beautiful and economical gifts. The *woestynkinders* last much longer than a bunch of flowers, because if you care for them, you can replant them – they will grow and multiply. It isn't a large-scale business, because that would require levels of stock that I don't have. I also have a full-time job. Woestynkind is a hobby and a great love of mine.

Who assists you with your project?
My sister Marize and her husband, Dawid, immediately offered to make the wooden crates. They make them from pallets, which works perfectly. They are skilled woodworkers and also make crosses, hearts and a number of other objects people request. Marize has also planted succulents in her garden so she can help me when my stock runs low. And Surine Bezuidenhout, a true gem of a woman, has offered me lots of advice and encouragement.

Do you grow your own succulents or do you buy them?
Initially I did have to buy plants, especially the desert roses and "fillers". But fortunately my path crossed that of Tinkie van Zyl of Upington: she has an incredible succulent garden with a variety of plants that left me speechless. This inspired me even more. She gave me a lot of small plants, which I then planted myself.

When I make the crates, I use every part of a succulent, but I don't throw anything away; there's an area under shade cloth where I stick cuttings in the soil and drop leaves – and new plants start to grow. This is how I have built up a good supply.

Otherwise there's Oom Kobus, who is in a wheelchair; he sells an astounding array of succulents at the traffic circle in Upington. I regularly support him.

It took me about two years to build up a steady supply of 30 different succulent species that I can now use.

Top tips for anyone who wants to make their own succulent arrangement?
I enjoy working with Oasis. It allows you to arrange the plants easily. And don't hesitate to try any succulents. I just don't like the ones with thorns. Spekboom is my saving grace, because it fills all the gaps. I finish off my arrangements with moss or coconut coir, which adds a nice soft touch.

What are the challenges of working with succulents? And what makes it enjoyable?
The birds often cause setbacks in winter, as they literally gobble up the desert roses. In summer, the heat can cause the plants to wilt and, because it is so hot, the succulents don't turn that lovely shade of red you want. Those are the ones that look so striking in the winter arrangements.

Every crate or item I make surprises me, and I'm always amazed at the beauty and simplicity of succulents. When I make a succulent crate, it takes a piece of my heart with it and I really hope the person who receives it will look after it well.

Corné Burger makes and sells beautiful succulent arrangements under the name Woestynkind.

CONTACT Woestyn kind
083 535 4634 >

The beautiful roses below are from Petrus Ngozo's garden in Namahadi (far left). He picked them for Annatjie Truter, in whose garden he works two days a week.

READER'S GARDEN

A tale of two gardens

Growth is something that fascinates her, says Annatjie Truter, a teacher in Frankfort in the Free State – whether it's a plant, an animal or a human being.

Annatjie says the man who helps her in her garden, Petrus Ngozo, has worked for her two days a week for the past 13 years. They work side by side, taking cuttings and planting, and he has a natural affinity for gardening.

"I have an informal garden with a few straight lines, fences and herbaceous borders for structure. The beds are a higgledy-piggledy mix of plants – different lavenders, Inca lilies, arum lilies, roses, herbs, agapanthus, irises, flax, barberry, day lilies, gauras and red-hot pokers. And I love succulents, desert roses and spekboom in particular."

For Petrus, gardening with Annatjie isn't just a job – it has also become his hobby.

"About 10 years ago he started a garden at his own house with cuttings from my garden. He is especially proud of the green lawn and flowering plants in his garden there in the drab, barren Namahadi where he lives. People often take photos in his garden."

The rose is Petrus's favourite plant. "The yellow rose he cultivated from a cutting has just blossomed for the first time!" says Annatjie. "He says he enjoys watching his cuttings grow and loves receiving compliments from his visitors."

Annatjie taught Petrus to plant lavender cuttings, but the rose cuttings were his own initiative. "He plants them in containers in my garden, and then takes them home once they are ready to plant out. He also likes to divide plants. And he believes all gardeners should make their own compost to feed their gardens.

"We often discuss his garden and debate which plants should be planted where. Our favourite ground cover is the yellow creeping Jenny, and Petrus also loves hedges.

"Today, we decided his garden needs a shade tree… He left here with a white stinkwood sapling." P

I meant to do my work today—
But a brown bird sang
in the apple tree,
And a butterfly flitted
across the field,
And all the leaves
were calling me.
And the wind went
sighing over the land,
Tossing the grasses to and fro,
And a rainbow held out
its shining hand—
So what could I do
but laugh and go?

– Richard le Gallienne

Hike an ancient trail

Join us in September 2020 on a slackpacking hike of Japan's 1 000-year-old pilgrimage route, the Kumano Kodo.

The Kumano Kodo is often called Japan's Camino. It's also an ancient pilgrimage route that has been used since the 10th century, and has an official connection with the pilgrimage in Spain. Hikers who have done the Spanish Way can apply for a special certificate in Japan, but you do not have to have hiked the Camino to book your spot on this tour.

Dates 28 September to 9 October 2020.
Price R46 500* per person sharing.
Included in the price Return flights between Johannesburg and Osaka; return train trips between Osaka and Wakayama; 10 nights' accommodation, breakfast included; six dinners at hotels; four lunches; the services of a guide; luggage transfer between overnight spots.

This trail is only 69 km long, but it is not to be underestimated. Beginner walkers are welcome, but everyone is encouraged to do lots of hill training in preparation for the hike.

PHOTOS **GALLO IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES**

BOOK NOW! **For a full itinerary and to book, e-mail wegreis@travelcheck.co.za**

** Flights are from Johannesburg and prices can fluctuate according to the exchange rate at time of booking, and availability.*

The camels of the plant world

Candelabra aloe
(*Aloe candelabrum*)

We live in a country where water will only become scarcer and more expensive due to climate change. That is why it makes sense to plant water-wise succulents in your garden. You'll find everything you need to know in Gideon F Smith and Ben-Erik van Wyk's new book *Garden Succulents*.

PHOTOS **BEN-ERIK VAN WYK, GIDEON SMITH AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY INSTITUTE** ILLUSTRATIONS **MARIETJIE STEYN**

Spekboom
(*Portulacaria afra*)

About 4% of the flowering plants of the world – an estimated 12 500 species – are succulents that use their fleshy leaves, stems and/or roots as an adaptive strategy to overcome brief or prolonged periods of drought.

More than a third of these plants – well over 4500 species – come from Southern Africa, where it forms about 25% of its flora. This succulent wealth of all shapes, sizes and descriptions is distributed over more than 80 different families and nearly 700 genera, but with a significant concentration in about 15 families.

Other regions with high concentrations of succulents include parts of South America, Mexico and the southern US in the New World, and the Canary Islands and Mediterranean Europe in the Old World.

Wax plant (*Hoya carnosa*)

But what *is* a succulent?

Defining succulence can be more complicated than it appears to be at first. One definition states, "A succulent is a plant that stores water in its tissues as a mechanism to survive periods of drought in the growing phase (this therefore excludes tuberous and bulbous plants that usually survive drought in the dormant phase)".

Other scientists prefer the following: "Succulence equates to the storage of usable water in living tissues in one or several plant parts in such a way to allow the plant to be temporarily independent from external water supply but to retain at least some physiological activity."

Writing an identification guide to all the succulents of the world would be a difficult task, but it does become much easier if we restrict ourselves to succulents commonly grown in gardens. Fortunately, most succulent plant families are so distinctive that they are easily recognised – one need not be a trained botanist or horticulturalist to tell a cactus from a carrion flower or an aloe from an agave. Once you know the differences between the main groups (families and genera), it becomes much easier to identify the plant to species level.

Panda plant (*Kalanchoe tomentosa*)

Candle plant (*Senecio articulatus*)

For the layperson, perhaps the most useful subdivision of succulence is according to the plant organ (leaves, stems, roots) that is fleshy. Therefore, reference is typically made to leaf succulents, stem succulents or caudiciform succulents, where the water-storing tissue is in the stem-root continuum. But other, less conventional plant parts can also be succulent, such as the wiry but fleshy twining inflorescences of the climbing onion (*Bowiea volubilis*). Different types of succulence are not mutually exclusive, and plants that combine leaf and stem succulence, for example, are a natural occurrence.

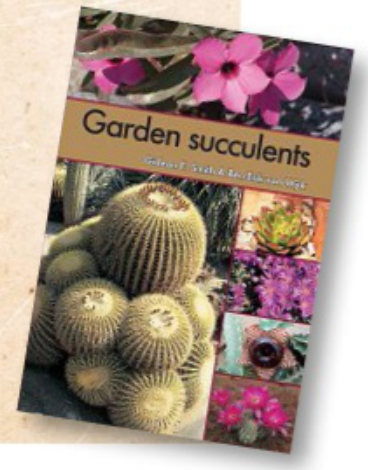
For this purpose, the plants in Gideon F Smith and Ben-Erik van Wyk's book *Garden Succulents* are divided into 10 main plant groups (see page 96).

Fishbone cactus
(*Epiphyllum anguliger*)

Century plant
(*Agave americana*)

Buy the book

Garden Succulents by Gideon F Smith and Ben-Erik van Wyk, a lovely hard-cover book with more than 600 photographs, is published by Briza. Read more about it on page 20 – enter and you could win a copy.



The 3 golden rules

Succulents are some of the most robust growers in the plant kingdom. To be successful with succulents requires adherence to three rules only.

GROWING MEDIUM Make sure the plants are not subjected to wet feet in their dormant phase. If there is one thing that succulents generally cannot tolerate, it is sitting in stagnant water in the "off season", which usually coincides with their resting phase. Depending on the species and the conditions prevalent in their natural habitat, this could be either summer or winter. Take the fan aloe (*Kumara plicatilis*) from the winter-rainfall (Mediterranean) area of South Africa: To be grown successfully in a summer-rainfall area, it should be kept reasonably dry in summer. This is usually best achieved by keeping it in a pot in a greenhouse or on a patio.

Also bear in mind that, generally speaking, succulents can tolerate wet conditions much more effectively in the open ground than in pots, where the soil surface is often covered with a layer of pebbles to prevent unattractive splashing of soil onto the plants. Surface mulch is essential, but in open beds the succulents can better survive wet conditions. One of the safest ways to ensure good soil drainage in pots *and* in open beds is to make sure the soil is friable. This is easy to achieve – just add sufficient coarse river sand to the potting mixture.

LIGHT Succulents usually thrive in bright light conditions, with the exception of small, soft-bodied species, which prefer slightly filtered but still bright sunlight. Only by exposing succulents to bright light will they take on the magnificent leaf and stem colours that you'd find in their natural habitats.

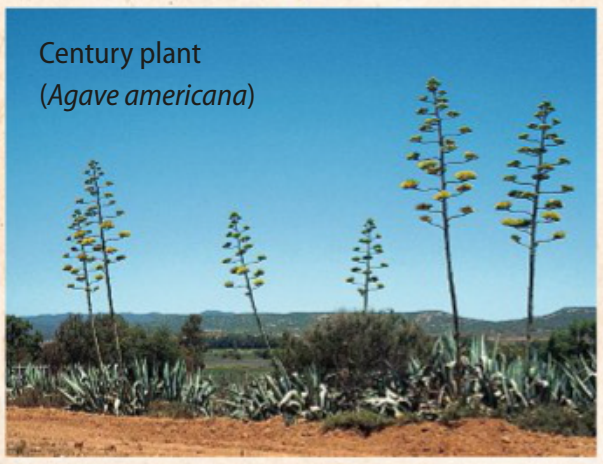
Where they grow in nature, succulents often make use of nurse plants – that is, other plants, often non-succulent, that filter or shade out the most intense rays of the sun – you will, for instance, struggle to grow certain carrion flowers and miniature mesembs, or vygies, unless they are offered some protection from direct sunlight. Plants that have been in a greenhouse and are suddenly exposed to intense direct sunlight will almost certainly be damaged. And if you move plants that are used to growing in full sun into full shade they will develop thin stems or become deformed.

FEEDING Succulents, especially those grown in pots, require a regime of supplemental feeding, as the soil will eventually become leached of nutrients. Take care not to cause damage by excessive amounts of strong inorganic fertiliser – rather try one of the various organic fertilisers. There is also nothing wrong with ordinary good-quality compost – small amounts at regular intervals are far more effective. >

Succulents: the main families

Once the family to which a plant belongs has been identified, the search for the names of the genus and species becomes much easier. We share a few of our old favourites.

The eight main families account for more than 80% of succulents, so the ability to recognise these families is a useful first step to identifying species. The reader is encouraged to focus on the critical characteristic of each of the main families. The last two groups – unusual stem succulents and unusual leaf succulents – were created artificially to give wider coverage to plant families that include only one or two succulent members.



Century plant (*Agave americana*)

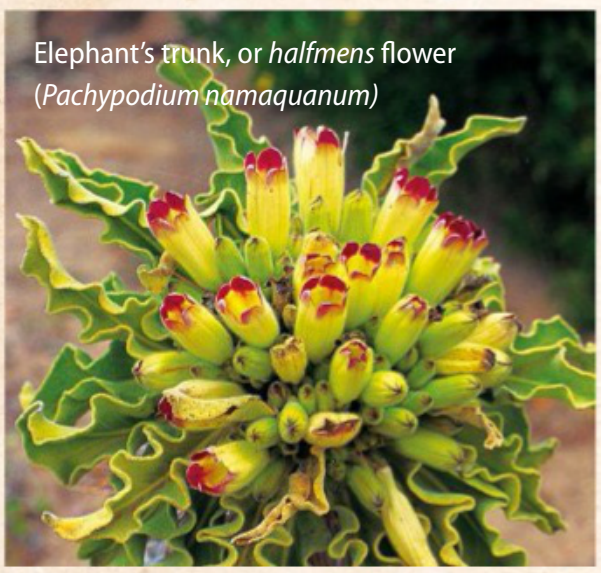
1 Sisal family or century plant family (*Agavaceae*)*

Typical characteristics Leaf succulents; aloe-like plants; fibrous, persistent leaves; flowers usually white or greenish.

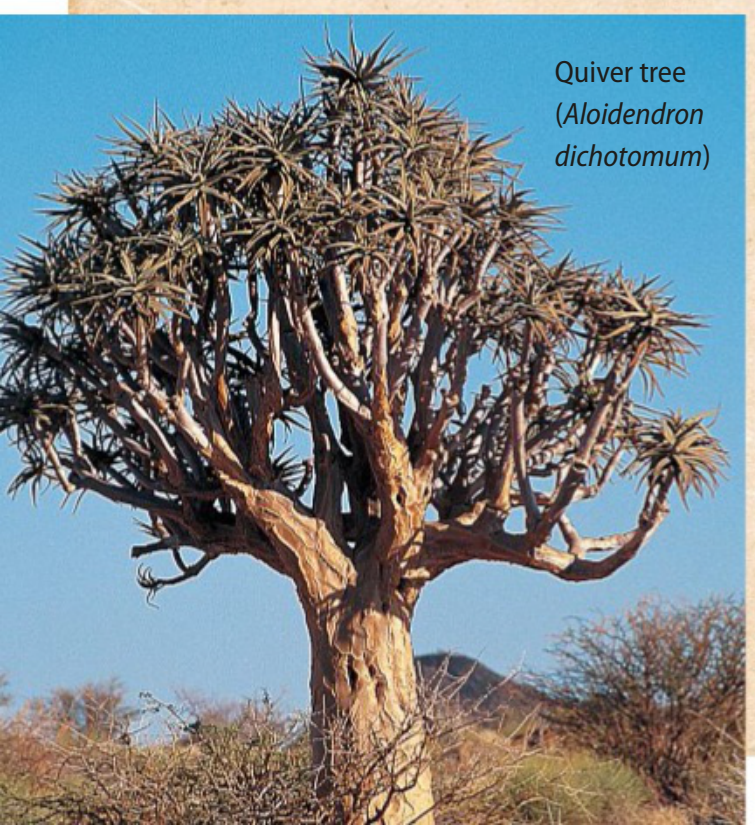
* Including *Dracaenaceae* (dragon tree family) and *Nolinaceae* (beargrass family)

2 Carrion flower family (*Apocynaceae*)

Typical characteristics Stem succulents (often lacking leaves); often with milky sap; waxy flowers (often with a strong smell); flowers often adorned with small hairs; seeds with silky seed hairs.



Elephant's trunk, or *halfmens* flower (*Pachypodium namaquanum*)



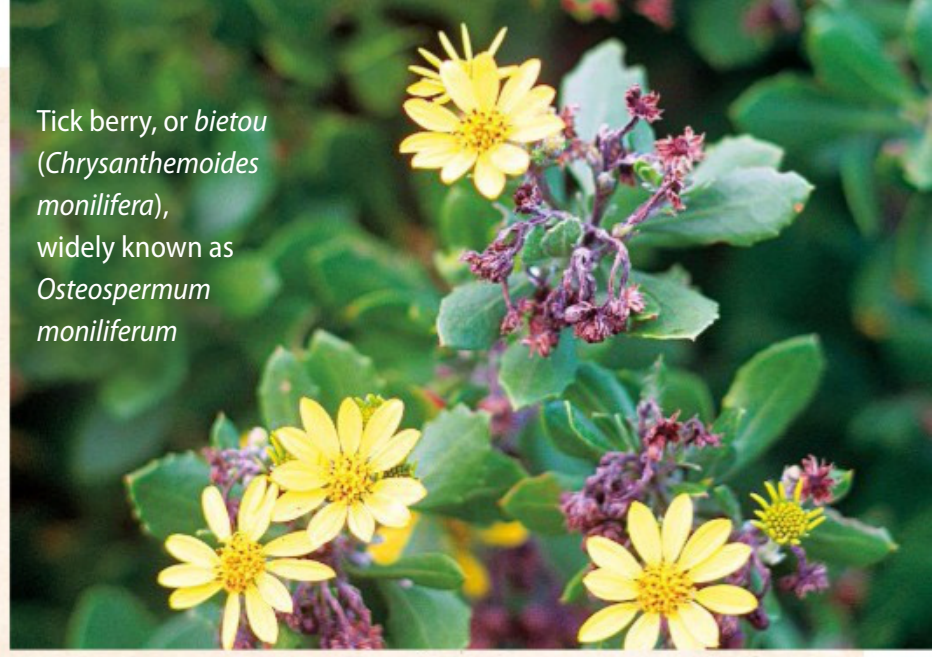
Quiver tree (*Aloidendron dichotomum*)

3 Aloe family (*Asphodelaceae*)

Typical characteristics Leaf succulents; leaves relatively soft, dying back; often with a bitter yellow sap; flowers often red and showy, and borne in a candelabra-shaped inflorescence.

4 Daisy family (*Asteraceae*)

Typical characteristics Stem or leaf succulents; tiny flowers in dense groups (heads); flowers usually yellow, white or red, and showy; small fruits (achenes) with hairy plumes.



Tick berry, or *bietou* (*Chrysanthemoides monilifera*), widely known as *Osteospermum moniliferum*

Easter lily cactus (*Echinopsis oxygona*)

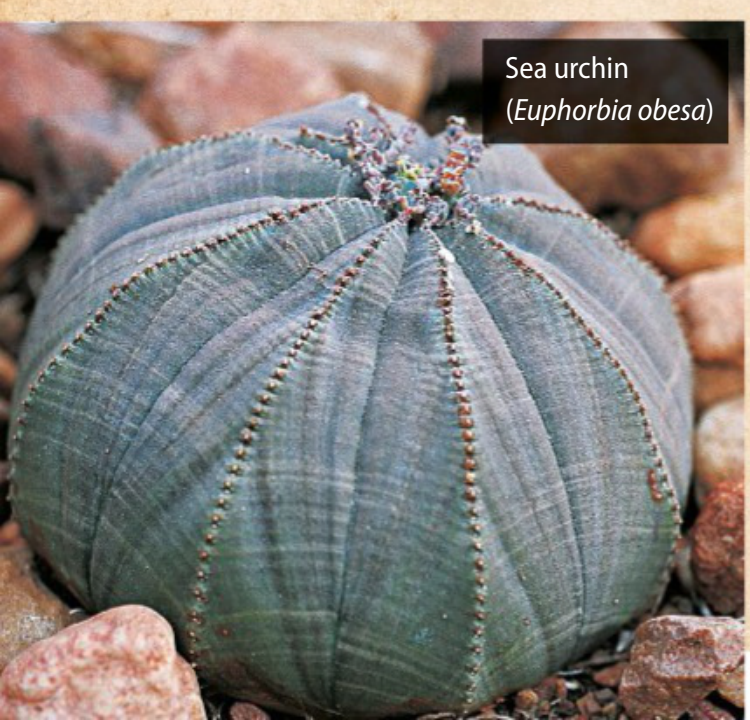
5 Cactus family and prickly pear family (*Cactaceae*)

Typical characteristics Stem succulents; leaves absent (modified into spines); spines borne in star-shaped groups on felty cushions (areoles); stems without milky sap; flowers large, showy and short-lived.

6 Stone crop family and plakkie family (*Crassulaceae*)

Typical characteristics Leaf and stem succulents; leaves in symmetrical arrangements; flowers star-shaped or tubular, with prominent nectar glands and four or five petals (or multiples).

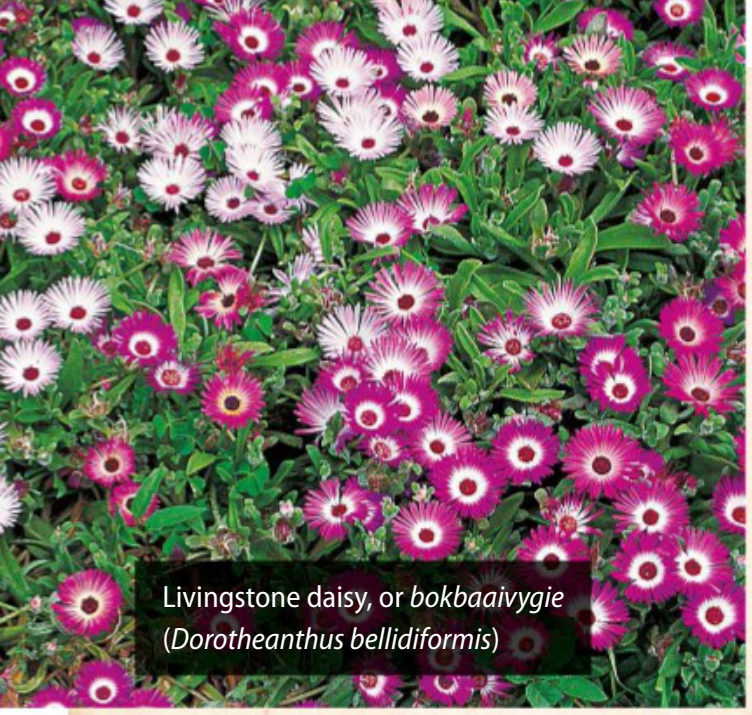
Blue echeveria (*Echeveria secunda*)



Sea urchin (*Euphorbia obesa*)

7 Spurge family and milkweed family (*Euphorbiaceae*)

Typical characteristics Stem succulents; stems with milky sap; flowers usually small and inconspicuous; fruit a small, three-valved capsule. >



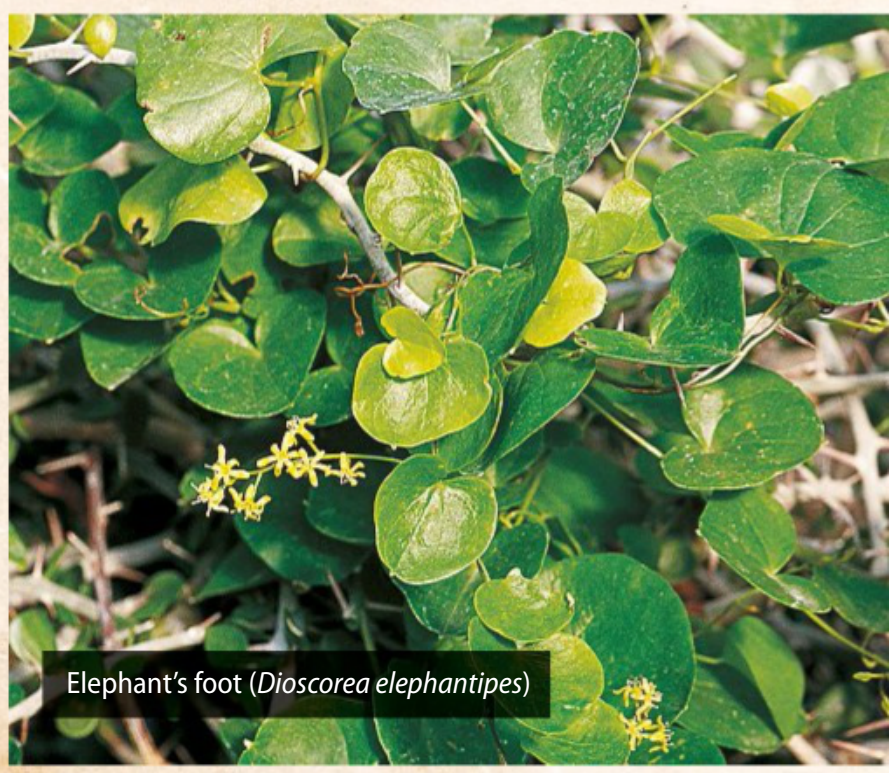
Livingstone daisy, or *bokbaaivygie* (*Dorotheanthus bellidiformis*)

8 Ice plant family, vygie family (Mesembryanthemaceae)

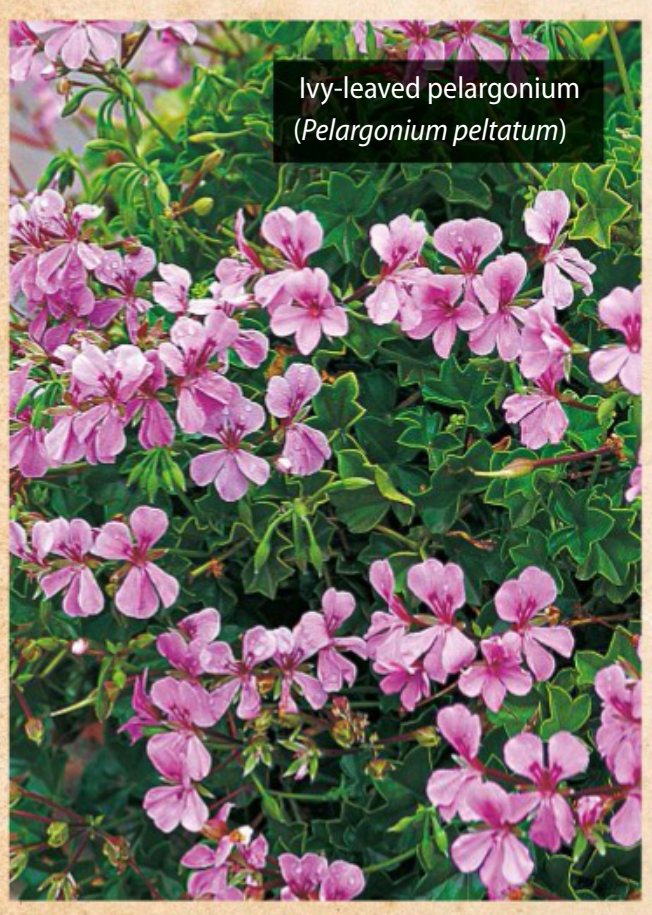
Typical characteristics Leaf succulents with very thick leaves in opposite pairs; flowers single, large and showy.

9 Unusual stem succulents

This group includes various families:
Dioscoreaceae Wild yam family, elephant's foot family
Fouquieriaceae Ocotillo family
Hyacinthaceae Hyacinth family
Malvaceae Cotton family
Passifloraceae Granadilla family, passion flower family
Pedaliaceae Sesame family
Vitaceae Grape family



Elephant's foot (*Dioscorea elephantipes*)



Ivy-leaved pelargonium (*Pelargonium peltatum*)

10 Unusual leaf succulents

Various families are artificially grouped together:
Geraniaceae Geranium family and pelargonium family
Lamiaceae Mint family
Orchidaceae Orchid family
Piperaceae Pepper family
Portulacaceae Spekboom family
Welwitschiaceae Welwitschia family
Zygophyllaceae Devil's thorn family P

ON SALE NOW

With advice from experts (also Fido and Felix!) on pet care.

Animal Antics is a joint project of 11 magazines in the Media24 stable, including *go! Platteland*, and will melt your heart.

"The happiest time of my day is when I'm in my vegetable garden," says Riëtte Mouton of Waterkloof, Pretoria. "It is a place for reflection and a source of energy."

Soul food in the city

In Pretoria, an accountant and tax practitioner with a love of cooking has created a vegetable garden that not only takes her back to her platteland roots but also feeds her family, friends and neighbours.

TEXT AND PHOTOS **RIËTTE MOUTON**

I grew up in the platteland, in Rustenburg in North West, and always kept myself occupied playing in the garden. My parents and grandparents were keen vegetable gardeners and I vividly remember pulling up bright, juicy, tasty orange carrots from my Oupa's veggie garden in Bronkhorstspruit. My mom kept chickens in our garden, and many memories come to mind of roosters chasing me as a little girl.

Today, I am an accountant and tax practitioner with a master's degree in taxation. I have been consulting in accounting, tax and business services for the past 24 years alongside my life and business partner, Kobus. Our practice is at our home in Waterkloof, Pretoria. Our children left the nest a few years ago, and we now live happily with our two dogs, Mika (a Labrador) and Snowy (a Maltese poodle cross). Our children share my passion for cooking, baking and gardening – recipe and seed exchanges are a norm among the members of our family.

ABOUT SIX YEARS AGO, I embarked on a journey to Rawsonville in the Western Cape – initially to learn about pasta-making with Jaco Brand at Picardi Place, but then also digging into a day course in permaculture farming and compost-making with Kobus Kritzinger.

This was the day my life changed. My trip back home was filled with beautiful reflections and lots of new ideas.

What we eat (and how) is directly connected to how we make use of our environment, and what will become of our world. An adequate supply of healthy and nutritious food is essential to the survival of the human race. However, because of the degradation of the environment, climate change, urban development, increasing demand versus supply, and our reliance on imported produce, our supply is under threat. We need to reduce our dependency on established food-production systems. By creating our own sustainable urban and suburban agricultural systems, we can do our bit for the environment while taking back control of what we eat and, ultimately, of our health. With all these concerns on my mind, I started my own urban organic vegetable garden during the summer of 2013. *(At the same time as* Platteland *was born. – Eds.)*

Our home of 13 years in Waterkloof is on a 2 500 m² stand surrounded by beautiful big jacaranda trees. We are fortunate enough to have a borehole, so we can water the garden as needed.

My first vegetable patch had raised beds spanning 40 m², and Kobus built and installed the irrigation system.

Many more organic vegetable gardening courses followed, and soon I realised I had too many seedlings and not enough raised beds. We cleared the area around our pool and built more vegetable beds using concrete terrace blocks. Currently, my vegetable garden covers an area of about 150 m².

I AM A FIRM BELIEVER in organic farming versus conventional farming, because the environment is not degraded and soil health is not >

ABOVE Young tomato seedlings, first sowed in a tray in rows and later transplanted to individual seedling trays.
RIGHT Black nebula carrot flowers, ripened on the stem for seed-saving.

A beautiful bounty of organic vegetables from Riëtte's garden: earthy sweet carrots, beetroot, fresh broccoli, chillies, red peppers, okra, Swish chard, purple cabbages and brinjals.

Young baby leeks, pulled when they are still young for enhanced sweetness.

Freshly harvested Romanesco broccoli and 'Purple Sicily' cauliflower.

Multicoloured Swiss chard, a favourite in the Mouton home for juicing.

In addition to the cheery flowers that marigolds bring to Riëtte's garden, they also attract beneficial insects such as ladybirds, bees and parasitic mini-wasps, which prey on garden pests.

LEFT Nothing beats the pleasure of growing your own peas, says Riëtte. Shelling peas are ready when the pods have swelled and are nearly cylindrical in shape.
BELOW Compost-making is essential for any healthy vegetable garden.

depleted in the long run. From the very start of my vegetable garden, I never used any toxic pesticides. Instead, I rotate my crops and plant edible flowers and herbs as companions to my vegetables to maintain a healthy, beautiful garden – I absolutely adore all the bees and beneficial insects attracted to the flowers and the flowering vegetables and herbs. Echinacea, marigolds, roses, lavender, violet, nasturtium, borage and edible chrysanthemum are all flowering in-between my vegetables.

Regular composting is essential to a healthy vegetable garden – I prefer to do this every four to five weeks, and definitely after every harvest. We make use of a zero-waste principle in our household: all uncooked kitchen waste is composted, and single-use plastic bags, containers and bottles are a no-no. Newspapers, paper bags, garden clippings, cut grass and brown leaves are all added to the compost heap in equal amounts of green and brown, followed by lots of water and daily sunshine. After six weeks, the compost is sifted and stored under cover, ready to be used in the vegetable beds.

I use only organic heirloom seeds to grow my seedlings. I sow a variety of vegetable, herb and flower seeds in planting trays in a mixture of top soil, vermiculite and earthworm castings. Once they have been hardened in the sun, the young seedlings are replanted in the garden when the weather permits. (Few things are more disheartening than spending weeks in the sun feeding and watering the little seedlings only to watch them wilt and dry out in the garden beds once they have been planted!)

Mulching is essential to protect the young seedlings, but is also necessary to conserve the moisture in the soil and limit the growth of weeds. I add bark mulch to my vegetable beds once the seedlings are stronger and have settled in the beds.

I experiment with different varieties of vegetables and herbs. Purple potatoes, black nebula carrots, multi-coloured beetroots and Swiss chard – a rainbow of colours and flavours end up in my kitchen, where I love to prepare interesting new dishes as well as familiar, well-loved ones.

MY JOURNEY WITH FOOD started at a very young age. I have always been inquisitive about flavours, textures and colours. I baked my first cake at the age of five for our local church fair, after which many chocolate and sponge cakes followed for friends and family. Combining my love of growing my own vegetables and herbs with my passion for cooking is an absolute dream come true for me.

Nothing beats the joy of walking in your garden, noticing the vegetables that are healthy and ready to be picked, and then summoning them to the kitchen to be further treasured in a meal.

Artichokes and other root vegetables are brought together in phyllo pastry, then topped with home-made feta for a lunch or light dinner. Everyday carrots are substituted with black >

nebula carrots in a mouth-watering carrot cake with rich cream-cheese frosting. Young leeks are braised in a reduction of white wine, tomatoes and French tarragon until tender.

Juicy, dark-red tamarillos are roasted in the oven for a few minutes and then transformed into a delectable sweet chilli chutney. Rhubarb from my winter garden makes for an old English-style crumble with clotted cream. Italian tomatoes are slow-roasted in the oven with garlic, onions and thyme until soft and syrupy, then blitzed in a food processor to create a lovely pasta sauce. Bright-orange fresh turmeric is added to an Indian curry dish to create a mouth-watering experience.

The latest addition to my vegetable garden is Jerusalem artichokes, which will be ready for harvesting in four to five months.

Lately, I have been experimenting with fermented foods. Every week I bake sourdough loaves using my own wild yeast starter and stone-ground flour – it's exciting to combine different flavours, especially by adding vegetables from my garden. I bake flavourful bread with slow-roasted pumpkin or roasted sweet potato with cardamom.

Kombucha, a fermented black tea drink, is made by blending a scoby, tea bags, sugar and fruit such as berries from the garden – a good source of natural probiotics, which do wonders for healing an unhappy gut. Surplus cabbage, carrots and beetroot end up in fermented, unsalted sauerkraut.

I love to share fresh vegetables, sourdough bread, kombucha and other home-made treasures from the garden with my circle of friends, family and neighbours.

"A garden is a place where people come together for mutual benefit; to enjoy the beauty and to indulge in the fruit of your labour."

I BELIEVE IN SUSTAINABLE LIVING. This means using only as much of the earth's resources as is needed so that we can reduce our carbon footprint and minimise environmental damage. By engaging in the process of sharing we can limit waste; by rethinking our ways of living, how we buy and what we consume, we can be more actively involved in understanding the nutrition our bodies need. As more and more people are moving to live in urban and suburban areas, the cities are becoming culture hubs with dense populations, which means that resources can be reused and shared easily and effectively.

City dwellers can take a leaf from people living in the platteland and in rural or suburban areas. It is not unusual in the platteland to receive a crate filled to the brim with lovely sweet peaches, to be shared in the community and returned as a jar of jam or preserve. Excesses are distributed and zero-waste principles are a way of life.

I believe that by creating my own organic vegetable garden, cooking from my garden, composting kitchen waste

ABOVE Sourdough bread made with black nebula carrots.
RIGHT Braised young leeks in a white wine, tomato and tarragon reduction.

and honouring zero-waste principles I am living the urban dream.

A garden is a place where people come together for mutual benefit, to enjoy the beauty and to indulge in the fruit of your labour. In difficult times, my garden and my kitchen are my comfort and my security.

I hope to return to the platteland one day – to cultivate the land, share in fresh produce and live a full and happy life balanced between work and play.

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LEFT Tamarillos, or tree tomatoes, are grilled before they're cooked to make a lovely sweet chilli chutney.
BELOW Home-fermented kombucha with naartjie rind and cinnamon.
BELOW LEFT Cannelés, custardy confections traditionally from Bordeaux, France, are a favourite dessert in the Mouton house.

Beetroot in the back yard

Fast-growing, virtually pest-free, packed with flavour, versatile *and* good for you and your garden… You have every reason in the world to start growing your own beetroot this year.

TEXT **JOHAN VAN ZYL**

Fresh beetroot sometimes tastes as if you're biting into clean, sweet earth. This earthiness, the sugar content (higher than that of carrots and mielies) and the concentrated jewel-like colour are both a joy and its undoing.

Or, as Nigel Slater puts it in his cookbook *Tender: Volume 1*: "It is sod's law that beetroot should marry so happily with the virginal white of goat's cheeses, mascarpone and thick puddles of crème fraîche, none of whose looks are improved by a pink stain curdling the outer edge. I make a habit of mixing the scarlet roots with dairy ingredients or mayonnaise only at the very last minute, often passing a bowl of sour cream and chopped dill around for everyone to anoint their own salad at the table."

Believe it or not, beetroot is the domesticated form of wild sea beet, which grew around the coastline of the Mediterranean. Cultivated by the Greeks and Romans, their leaves were used as pot herbs, and the swollen roots were used medicinally rather than in the kitchen. Beetroot juice, particularly, is said to stimulate and cleanse the kidneys and help relieve headaches and toothaches.

Often underrated in the kitchen *and* the veggie patch, *Beta vulgaris* is a fast-growing, versatile root vegetable perfect for small gardens and even for containers. Most have deep ruby-red flesh, but white, orange, yellow, purple and striped varieties such as *Chioggia* are becoming more widely available in South Africa. Be aware, though, that beetroot family members are easily cross-pollinated by wind if not isolated or bagged.

Tender young beetroot leaves may be used in salads, stir-fries, stews and soups, or cooked in the same way as spinach. Snip off a few leaves, but leave enough to feed the plant.

The main attraction – the swollen ruby root – is usually boiled in the skin until tender, but is also good roasted or grated and eaten raw.

Beetroot contains significant amounts of magnesium, vitamin C, folic acid and potassium – and in the garden it improves the soil and compost, and accumulates minerals, especially magnesium. >

ABOVE White organic beetroot, which tastes sweeter and less earthy than the red varieties. TOP 'Chioggia' beetroot, also known as candy-stripe or candy-cane beetroot, is an Italian heirloom variety known for its concentric rings.

PHOTOS **SHUTTERSTOCK**

Practical matters

The right spot and soil In general, beetroot does best in a cooler climate, as it has a tendency to bolt in heat, especially if the soil is not kept moist. That said, beetroot does prefer full sun and free-draining soil enriched with bone meal before planting. Do not sow (or transplant seedlings) in freshly manured soil, as this can cause the roots to fork. Beetroot can be grown in containers at least 30 cm deep.

The right time *Jane's Delicious A–Z of Vegetables* lists August to October and January to March as the best times to sow in Gauteng, the Free State highveld and Limpopo. August to October and February and March are best for the western Free State, Northern Cape and North West, whereas KZN Midlands veggie growers can sow from August to April. July to February is a good time for the Eastern Cape and the Little Karoo; and Western Cape gardeners can sow from July to November and again from February to April. In Mpumalanga and the KZN lowveld and coastal areas you should sow from February to July.

Plant like this Sow the seed about 2 cm deep and about 4 cm apart, with 30 cm between the rows. Beetroot can be sown in seed trays – unlike most other root crops, it doesn't mind being transplanted as long as you do it on a cool day and while the seedlings are still small.

Kept well watered, seed should germinate within five to 15 days. Thin out the seedlings to 10 cm apart when they are about 7 cm tall to ensure the development of healthy roots.

Care and watering Water the plants well, especially in dry weather, to prevent bolting, root splitting, or the flesh becoming stringy and tough. A thick mulch layer will help preserve moisture and keep weeds under control. Weed regularly, particularly in the early growth stages, as beetroot seedlings don't like competition.

Good and bad companions Beetroot does well planted with lettuce, green beans, onions, spring onions, garlic and all members of the *Brassica* family. Bad companions are runner beans and mustard.

Pests and problems Beetroot is pretty much a pest-free crop, but cutworm, birds, slugs and snails might try to take a bite, especially while the plants are young.

It's harvest time!

Harvest the roots when they are 2,5 cm to 5 cm in diameter – about six to 12 weeks after sowing. Immediately twist off the leaves, Jane Griffiths advises, otherwise they will continue to draw nutrients from the roots.

Store the roots in a dark, airy place at 4°C, where they will keep for several weeks. P

Those bloody stains…

The juice (and nutrients) that leaches out of a cut beetroot will stain anything it touches – you're lucky if it's only your hands and not your white shirt. Food writer Nigel Slater says much of the leaching can be avoided by leaving the skin on, and leaving the stalk stub and root tail intact while you cook the beetroot. The candy-striped 'Chioggia' variety doesn't bleed as dramatically as the purple-red varieties, and the yellow ones don't seem to bleed at all.

SOURCES *Tender: Volume 1* by Nigel Slater (Fourth Estate, 2009), *Grow to Live: A Simple Guide to Growing Your Own Good, Clean Food* by Pat Featherstone (Jacana, 2009), *Kweek Jou Eie Groente en Kruie* by Mariénne Uys (Human & Rousseau, 1997), *Organic Kitchen Garden* by Juliet Roberts (Conran Octopus, 2005) and *Jane's Delicious A–Z of Vegetables* by Jane Griffiths (Sunbird Publishers, 2017)

Beetroot can be grown from seed either in seed trays or sown directly in the vegetable beds.

To ensure your beetroot has space to grow, thin out the seedlings when they are about 7 cm tall to 10 cm apart in a row.

To harvest beetroots, gently hold the tops and lift while you lever under the root with a hand fork.

In the pink

The sweet, earthy flavour and bold colour of beetroot make this vegetable the perfect choice for a wholesome, flavourful autumn salad.

Smoked beetroot and yoghurt salad

We spotted this delicious, fuss-free salad at the Harrods salad bar on a recent trip to London. The olives are optional.

Serves **4–5**
Preparation time **5 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **1 packet (300 g) Ina Paarman's Roasted Beetroot, halved – reserve ¼ cup (60 ml) of the marinade)**
- **1 cup (250 ml) full-cream Greek-style yoghurt**
- **1 small red onion, thinly sliced into half-rings**
- **½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) Ina Paarman's Green Onion Seasoning**
- **1 feta round, coarsely crumbled**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) pitted green olives (optional)**
- **fresh rocket leaves**

THIS IS HOW

Mix the reserved beetroot marinade with the yoghurt and spread it on a rimmed plate. Top with beetroot. Lightly season the onion with Green Onion Seasoning and scatter over the beetroot, followed by the crumbled feta. Add green olives (if used) and rocket.

PRODUCTION AND STYLING **BERNICE TROOST** PHOTO **MYBURGH DU PLESSIS**

Beet, better, best

Never mind stubborn stains or "bleeding" on the plate – these nine recipes and a harvest of autumn-fresh beetroot in your kitchen will ensure that you taste the clean, sweet earthiness in every mouthful.

RECIPES AND STYLING **BERNICE TROOST** PHOTOS **MYBURGH DU PLESSIS** FOOD ASSISTANT **HETTA VAN DER MERWE**

There's a good reason virtually every cookbook contains at least one beetroot recipe: both the raw and cooked versions of this autumn vegetable are packed with flavour, aroma and nutrients, and it can be kept in the fridge for up to three months and preserved in many ways to enjoy later.

Whenever possible, choose smaller beetroots that are similar in size and do not discard the leaves – they can be used as a substitute for salad leaves and spinach. Also leave part of the stalk and root attached when you boil or roast beetroot, as this helps to prevent it from "bleeding".

The most popular cooking methods for beetroot are boiling and oven-roasting. Keep in mind it's easier to remove the skins while the beetroots are still warm.

Juicing raw beetroot is another favourite way of enjoying this gem. Simply blend fresh beetroot with an orange, a carrot, an apple and some fresh ginger. It doesn't get much easier, tastier or healthier than that! >

SOUP BOWL AND BLACK PLATE WOOLWORTHS; SINCERE THANKS TO **STEVE BOTHA OF MAGIC HERBS**

Oven-roasted beetroot soup

Serves **4**
Preparation time **15–20 minutes**
Cooking time **About 1 hour and 15 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **50 ml olive oil**
- **1 red sweet pepper, halved and seeded**
- **1 yellow sweet pepper, halved and seeded**
- **6 Italian plum tomatoes, halved**
- **2 onions of average size, peeled and quartered**
- **2 whole unpeeled garlic cloves**
- **2 Granny Smith apples, cored and quartered**
- **500 g beetroots, washed and halved**
- **juice and zest of 1 lemon**
- **350 ml homemade or good quality shop-bought chicken stock**
- **100 ml Bulgarian yoghurt (or cream)**
- **100 g roasted cherry tomatoes, to garnish (optional)**
- **freshly baked bread, to serve**

THIS IS HOW

Heat the oven to 200°C. Grease a large oven dish with oil. Arrange the peppers (skin side up), tomato, onion, garlic, apple and beetroot in the dish, drizzle olive oil over and season to taste with salt and freshly milled black pepper. Cover the dish with tinfoil.

Roast the vegetables for about 30 minutes, shaking the dish several times during the cooking process. Remove the tinfoil, reduce the temperature to 160°C and continue roasting the vegetables for another 30–40 minutes. The skin of the peppers should be blackened and the tomatoes should be half their original size.

Transfer the pepper halves to a plastic bag, seal it and allow to sweat for several minutes to enable you to remove the skins easily.

Remove the beetroot skins while still warm and place the beetroot in a food processor along with the other roasted vegetables and peppers – you could also use a stick blender. Pulse until smooth, then pour the mixture into a medium-sized saucepan. Add the lemon juice and zest to the vegetable pulp, stir in the chicken stock and season to taste with salt and freshly milled black pepper.

Heat the soup to boiling point and allow it to simmer for a few minutes. Remove the saucepan from the heat, stir in the yoghurt or cream and serve the soup with the roasted cherry tomatoes and bread.

Beetroot and corn fritters

Work carefully, because raw beetroot is more difficult to grate than when it has been cooked. Alternatively, chop it in a food processor.

Makes **20 fritters (serves 4–6)**
Preparation time **10–15 minutes**
Cooking time **10–15 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **2 (about 150 g) raw beetroots, peeled and grated**
- **2 (about 150 g) raw carrots, peeled and grated**
- **1 cooked ear of corn, kernels sliced from the cob**
- **2 spring onions, finely chopped**
- **1 small red onion, finely chopped (optional)**
- **2 teaspoons (10 ml) finely chopped fresh dill**
- **4 teaspoons (20 ml) chopped fresh coriander leaves**
- **½ cup (70 g) self-raising flour**
- **1 knife point of baking powder**
- **½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) salt**
- **3 extra-large eggs, beaten**
- **100 g feta, crumbled**
- **oil for shallow-frying**
- **tzatziki and green micro herbs of your choice, to serve (optional)**

THIS IS HOW

Combine the beetroot, carrot, corn kernels, spring onion, red onion, dill and coriander.

In a separate bowl, sift the flour, baking powder and salt together and mix with the vegetables. Stir in the egg and feta, then season the batter to taste with salt and freshly milled black pepper.

Heat the oil and fry spoonfuls of the batter in the hot oil. Fry the fritters until golden brown and drain them on paper towel. Garnish the fritters with micro herbs and serve with tzatziki. >

Savoury cheesecake with home-smoked chicken and beetroot

Smoke the chicken yourself in a flat-bottomed cast-iron pot for this starter.

Serves **6–8**
Preparation time **20–30 minutes**
Cooking and baking time **1½ hours**

YOU NEED

FOR THE CRUST

- **140 g Provita biscuits**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) melted butter**
- **100 ml (40 g) finely grated Parmesan cheese**

FOR THE FILLING

- **6 chicken thighs**
- **300 g raw beetroot (about 4), peeled and diced**
- **a bunch of spring onions, washed and thinly sliced**
- **1 cup (230 g) cream cheese**
- **1 cup (250 ml) mascarpone**
- **6 extra-large eggs, beaten**
- **200 g feta, crumbled**
- **100 g blue cheese or Gorgonzola, crumbled**

TO GARNISH

- **pea shoots and Parmesan shavings**

THIS IS HOW

Heat the oven to 180°C. Place the biscuits, butter and Parmesan in a food processor and pulse to form crumbs. Use your fingertips to press the crumbs over the bottom and up the side of a 22 cm springform tin and place it in the fridge.

Smoke the chicken You will need a flat-bottomed cast-iron pot and wood shavings, as well as a small round wire rack and a round enamel plate that fit inside the pot.

Season the chicken to taste with salt and freshly milled black pepper. Spread out about ½ cup of wood shavings in the base of the pot, place the wire rack on top of the shavings, and the enamel plate on top of it. Place the chicken on the plate and drizzle a little olive oil over it. Cover the pot with tinfoil, put the lid on and place on the stove over high heat to smoke the chicken for about 15 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium and smoke the chicken for a further 10 minutes. If the chicken is still not cooked, transfer it to a dish and roast it in a hot oven until cooked through.

Make the filling Peel and cube the beetroot. Remove the skin and bones from the chicken and slice it into small pieces. Arrange the beetroot cubes, chicken pieces and spring onion in the tart crust.

Beat the cream cheese, mascarpone and eggs to form a smooth mixture. Stir in the feta and blue cheese and season to taste with salt and freshly milled black pepper. Pour over the ingredients in the crust.

Bake the cheesecake for about 1 hour or until cooked, then let it rest at room temperature for at least 2 hours before you transfer it to a serving dish. Garnish the cheesecake with pea shoots and Parmesan shavings, and slice to serve.

Pork fillet slices with wholegrain mustard and beetroot purée

I developed this recipe for a wedding menu 12 years ago, and since then I have often made it when cooking for friends. If you are up for a bigger challenge, replace the pork fillets with a whole pork neck: butterfly the neck and arrange the ingredients on top, roll up the meat and tie it with kitchen string. Roast it for about 2 hours or until tender and cooked through.

Serves **4–6**
Preparation time **30 minutes**
Cooking time **1½ hours**

YOU NEED

FOR THE BEETROOT PURÉE

- **4–6 (about 300 g) baby beetroots, washed**
- **1 onion, peeled and coarsely chopped**
- **1 carrot, peeled and coarsely chopped**
- **1 celery stem, coarsely chopped**
- **2 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) olive oil**

FOR THE PORK FILLET

- **1 kg whole pork fillet, cut into 2 cm-thick slices**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) olive oil**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) wholegrain mustard**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) honey**
- **100 g pecorino cheese, grated**
- **2 cups (500 ml) finely chopped beetroot leaves and stems (or use spinach)**
- **1 can (330 ml) beer**
- **100 ml cream**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) butter**
- **50 ml whisky**
- **mashed potato, to serve**
- **beetroot micro leaves, to garnish (optional)**

THIS IS HOW

Heat the oven to 200°C and begin with the beetroot purée: arrange the beetroot, onion, carrot, celery and garlic in an oven dish. Drizzle the olive oil over and season to taste with salt and freshly milled black pepper. Cover the dish with tinfoil and roast the vegetables for about 50 minutes or until they are cooked and start to caramelise.

Remove the beetroot skins while they are still warm. Place all the purée ingredients in a food processor and pulse until smooth, then press the mixture through a sieve. Set the purée aside.

Prepare the meat Season the pork fillet slices with salt and freshly milled black pepper.

Grease a large oven dish with a little of the oil and arrange the pork fillets in it. Coat each slice of meat with some mustard, drizzle a little honey over, place a spoonful of pecorino on the honey and finish off with beetroot leaves. Drizzle the remaining oil over the meat and pour over the beer.

Roast the meat for about 10 minutes at 200°C, reduce the temperature to 160°C and continue roasting it for another 30–40 minutes or until tender and cooked. Remove the meat from the dish and set it aside, keeping it warm.

Add the cream, butter and whiskey to the pan juices and stir thoroughly. Add the puréed beetroot and heat the mixture to boiling point. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary.

Serve the pork fillets with mashed potato and beetroot purée, garnished with beetroot micro leaves. >

PIRES
W. WOOD
VERDUGAL

Beetroot roulade

This cross between a soufflé and a Swiss roll is made with a white sauce into which eggs are stirred.

Serves **4–6**
Preparation time **20 minutes**
Baking time **20–25 minutes**

YOU NEED

FOR THE FILLING

- **100 ml soft cream cheese**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) finely chopped fresh parsley**
- **100 ml finely chopped fresh beetroot leaves (or use spinach)**
- **juice and zest of 1 lemon**
- **fresh coriander leaves, to garnish**

FOR THE ROULADE

- **100 g (100 ml) butter**
- **½ cup (65 g) cake wheat flour**
- **½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) salt**
- **2 cups (500 ml) milk**
- **4 extra-large eggs, separated**
- **⅔ cup (160 ml) cooked, puréed beetroot**

THIS IS HOW

Heat the oven to 180°C. Line a baking tray with baking paper and spray it with non-stick cooking spray or grease it with oil.
Make the filling Mix all the ingredients together until well combined and set aside.
Make the roulade Heat the butter in a medium-sized saucepan and stir in the flour. Add salt and stir for 1 minute. Slowly add the milk and beat the mixture continuously to form a smooth mixture. Season to taste and leave to cool.

Stir the egg yolks into the cooled white sauce. Whisk the egg whites until stiff and fold into the white sauce. Stir the puréed beetroot into the white sauce, pour the batter into the prepared baking tray and bake it for 15–20 minutes or until cooked.

In the meantime, cover a large cooling rack with a large, clean tea towel. Leave the roulade in the baking tray for about 5 minutes, then turn it out onto the tea towel on the cooling rack. Remove the baking paper and use the ends of the tea towel to roll up the roulade tightly. Take care not to roll the tea towel into the roulade – only use it to support the roulade and prevent your hands from burning. Let the roulade rest for several minutes, then unroll it. Spread the filling over the surface and roll it up again.

Slice the roulade and garnish with coriander leaves.

Beetroot marmalade cake

Serve this starter with a bitter salad – use leaves like rocket and mustard lettuce.

Serves **4–6**
Preparation time **20–30 minutes**
Baking time **30–40 minutes**

YOU NEED

FOR THE BEETROOT MARMALADE

- **2 cups (350 g) peeled, cubed beetroot**
- **1 cup (210 g) sugar**
- **juice and zest of 1 lemon**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) marmalade**
- **juice and zest of 1 orange**
- **4 teaspoons (20 ml) finely grated fresh ginger**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) butter**

FOR THE CAKE

- **⅓ cup (80 ml) soft butter**
- **200 ml (170 g) sugar**
- **2 extra-large eggs**
- **1¾ cup (230 g) cake wheat flour**
- **2 teaspoons (10 ml) baking powder**
- **½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) salt**
- **½ cup (125 ml) milk**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) icing sugar**
- **1 cup (250 ml) vanilla-flavoured yoghurt**

THIS IS HOW

Heat the oven to 180°C. Grease a 20 cm springform pan, line the base with baking paper and spray it with non-stick cooking spray.
Make the marmalade Place all the ingredients in a saucepan and heat the mixture to boiling point. Reduce the temperature and let it simmer for about 30 minutes or until thick. Remove the saucepan from the heat and set aside.
Make the cake Cream the butter and sugar for about 10 minutes. Beat the eggs until light and fluffy, and stir little by little into the butter mixture.

Sift the flour, baking powder and salt together and stir it into the butter mixture, alternating with the milk – end with the flour mixture.

Transfer the batter to the prepared tin, pour the beetroot marmalade on top and lightly stir it into the batter. Bake for about 25 minutes or until cooked through. Allow the cake to cool in the pan for a few minutes before you turn it out onto a wire rack to cool completely. Dust icing sugar over the top and serve the cake with yoghurt. >

Beetroot pickle

Always make sure there's a jar of this sweet-sour beetroot pickle in your fridge – it's delicious served on the side with a regular meat or venison burger.

Serves **4–6**
Preparation time **10–15 minutes**
Cooking time **15–20 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **¼ cup (60 ml) olive oil**
- **1 kg red onions, peeled and sliced**
- **3 whole garlic cloves, peeled and coarsely chopped**
- **1 red chilli, sliced into long strips**
- **1 red sweet pepper, sliced into thin strips**
- **1 kg beetroot, peeled and grated or sliced**
- **150 ml white-wine vinegar**
- **250 g soft brown sugar**
- **2 bay or lemon leaves**
- **peel of 1 lemon**

THIS IS HOW

Heat the oil in a saucepan and fry the onion, garlic, chilli and sweet pepper for a few minutes over a low heat.

Stir in the beetroot, vinegar and brown sugar. Season the mixture to taste with salt and freshly milled black pepper, and heat it to boiling point. Reduce the temperature and allow it simmer for about 10 minutes.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and transfer the pickle to sterilised jars. Insert the bay leaves and some lemon peel. Leave to cool, seal the jars tightly and store them in the fridge.

Preserved beetroot

Makes **1 large or 2 smaller jars**
Preparation time **10–15 minutes**
Cooking time **30–40 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **1 kg baby beetroot, with roots and part of the stalks intact**
- **2 cups (500 ml) good-quality vinegar**
- **1 cup (210 g) white sugar**
- **1 star anise pod**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) whole peppercorns**

THIS IS HOW

Boil the baby beetroot until just starting to soften. Let them cool slightly before removing the peel, roots and stalks. Decide whether you want to keep them whole, halve them, slice them thinly or grate them.

Transfer the cooked beetroot to a sterilised jar.

In the meantime, heat the vinegar, sugar, star anise and peppercorns to boiling point. Reduce the temperature and let it simmer for 5 minutes. Pour the liquid over the beetroot and leave to cool before you seal the bottles.

Beetroot and chocolate cupcakes

These days most red velvet cupcakes get their hue from food colouring. Why not try this recipe using beetroot? I came across it on the website My San Francisco Kitchen (mysanfranciscokitchen.com) and have adapted it considerably.

Makes **12–15 cupcakes**
Preparation time **15–20 minutes**
Baking time **15-20 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **350 g cooked, peeled beetroot**
- **⅔ cup (160 ml) buttermilk**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) vanilla essence**
- **1 cup (210 g) white sugar**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) oil**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) butter**
- **2 extra-large eggs, beaten**
- **2 cups (260 g) cake wheat flour**
- **33 g cocoa powder**
- **2 teaspoons (10 ml) baking powder**
- **½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) salt**
- **1 large Bar-One chocolate bar, sliced into chunks**

ICING

- **1 cup (230 g) cream cheese**
- **⅓ cup (80 ml) soft butter**
- **2 cups (260 g) icing sugar, sifted**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) golden syrup**
- **extra cocoa powder, to sift over**

THIS IS HOW

Heat the oven to 180°C and line the cups of muffin pans with 12–15 cupcake liners.

Blend the cooked beetroot, buttermilk and vanilla essence in a food processor.

Using an electric mixer, cream the sugar, oil and butter until light and fluffy. Add the eggs and beat the mixture again thoroughly.

Sift the flour, cocoa, baking powder and salt together. Place the butter mixture, flour mixture and 2 cups of the beetroot mixture in a bowl and stir until just combined.

Divide the batter between the cupcake liners, press a chunk of chocolate bar into each one and bake the cupcakes for 15 minutes or until cooked through.

Make the icing Beat the cream cheese and butter. Add the icing sugar little by little, continuing to beat the mixture slowly, then stir in the syrup. Chill the icing for several hours before you ice the cupcakes.

Melt any remaining chocolate and drizzle it over each iced cupcake before dusting it with cocoa powder.

Quick beetroot recipes

BEETROOT CRISPS Use a grater or mandolin to slice raw beetroot very thinly. Heat cooking oil and fry the beetroot slices in it until cooked and crisp. Drain the crisps on kitchen paper and serve them on burgers or as part of a cheese board.

BEETROOT JUICE Juice fresh beetroot and carrot with fresh ginger, apple and orange. Store the juice in the fridge.

BEETROOT MAYONNAISE Stir some cooked beetroot purée and a spoonful or two of Dijon mustard into tangy bought or homemade mayonnaise.

BEETROOT SALAD Combine sliced raw beetroot, shredded red cabbage, peach or plum slices, split fresh figs, thinly sliced red onion and chopped pecan nuts, and bring it to life with a balsamic-vinegar salad dressing.

BEETROOT SAGO PUDDING Cook raw sago in a mixture of apple juice and water until done. Stir in a purée of cooked beetroot and coconut milk, and serve with cinnamon sugar.

INSTANT BORSCHT Blend a carton of Werda grated beetroot (or a packet of Ina Paarman's roasted beetroot) with 2 cups (500 ml) buttermilk. Season the borscht to taste with salt and freshly milled black pepper, and garnish with finely chopped parsley.

PLATTELAND DINNER CLUB

DING.

ela botter, 2 eiers, 2 le-
desert lepels maizena,
te melk, bietjie klapper.
, geel van eiers en
. Kook 1½ pint mel
na en mel aan. Roer die
maizena en meel en sodra
aat kook. Haal af van vuur
ers in Gooi uit in gesmeerde
Laat ligbruin word in ma-

ERSEN, Bellville Suid.

JELLIE.

Davis' jellie. 2 koppies melk,
suiker, geursel na smaak. Sit
en suiker in bak en roer tot
Smelt nou die jellie in 'n bietjie
koel, voeg dan die melk by en
Sit in 'n vorm opsy om styf te

Mev. DAVIS.

MERINGUE.

art tin with good short pastry (or
ry) and bake in hot oven. Before
owned remove from oven and fill
shed fruit (stewed or canned). Pile
gus made with beaten white 1 egg,
sugar. Return to oven and brown.
ade with yolk of egg. Served either

Miss. M. LUNDGREN, Klipdam.

46

s. J. J. F. BRUWER, Grikwastad.

47

a Baai is bekend vir hul gasvryheid en Chris se vis-

Strooi vis mildelik met sout en laat vir 60 minute.
Neem 'n no.3 driebeen ysterpot en smoor
en seldery in lae op die rys. Spoel die vis
en pak dit op die rys. Voeg res van besta
by. Bedek en laat stadig prut totdat die rys
uitswel, ongeveer 1½ uur.

Skrop perlemoen skoon en sny dit in papier
skyfies. Kneus perlemoenskyfies met 'n
hamer. Verhit botter en braai gekapte ui
deurskynend. Voeg perlemoenskyfies by en
tot goudbruin. Voeg witwyn, water en bruinry
en prut tot rys amper gaar is. Voeg sout, gro
peper en net na smaak by.

ASYN

1 eier

Seekospotjie

15 ml kookolie
2 uie, in skywe gesny
2 knoffelhuisies, gekneus
200 g snoek, in blokkies gesny

Verhit kookolie in 'n potjie en braai uie en knoffel liggies totdat uie deurskynend is. Voeg snoek, koningklip, aartappels en mossels in lae by. Geur met sout en peper. Sprinkel suurle-

MOCHA C

1 Cup milk
1 Teaspoon

Mix coco
the remainder
milk well befor
produces an att

TRINIDAD CI

1 Glass iced milk
2 Teaspoons drink

Sprinkle drinki
top with a blob

SHERRY COB

Medium sherry
Sugar
Crushed ice

Cherries (maraschino)
Pineapple cubes

Half fill a cocktail glass with crushed ice. Add sherry to fill the glass two thirds. Add ½ teaspoon sugar. Place ¼ orange slice, 1 pineapple cube and a cherry on a cocktail stick and place in the glass.

OLD-FASHIONED ORANGE SYRUP

Juice of 12 oranges
Rind of 6 oranges
3 pts Boiling water
2¼ lbs Sugar
1 oz Epsom salts
1 oz Tartaric acid
2 ozs Citric acid

Put all the ingredients into a basin. Pour on the boiling water and stir until dissolved. Bottle.

To make lemon syrup, use juice of 6 lemons and rind of 3, instead of orange.

119

n over t top
m and castor sugar. Use tall glasses and pro hort

1 Orange (sliced)
2 Tablespoons sugar
½ Lemon (sliced)

bottle of red wine into a punch bowl and add le and
sugar and brandy. Just before serving, in tall gla , add
ater and stir well.

LL

erry
Ginger ale
Mint
Ice cubes

1 Piece cinnamon
¾ Vanilla bean
1½ Cups brandy
2 Cups strong black coffee

ients, excepting the coffee, in a chafing dish and he t. Put
e into a soup ladle and scoop up a little of the brandy
nd slowly lower the ladle into the mixture in the chafing
offee and using the ladle, carefully mix the coffee and the
all coffee cups as soon as the flame has died down.

118

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ONDS

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Sauce:
1 cup bro
1 rounded

127 A.

OLD MALAY RECIPE FOR BREDIE. (Mary Kotzé)

2 lb Flank or thick rib of mutton.
6 - 8 Ripe tomatoes, or 1 cabbage or cauliflower, or 8 potatoes, or 2 vegetable marrows, or 1 lb. Spring beans, or 2 C cubed pumpkin or 1 1/2 C dried beans soaked overnight, or 1 lb. water uintjies, or 3 quinces, peeled and sliced.
Salt and pepper
2 T Fat — Small piece red chilli
2 Onions — 1 T sugar if tomatoes are used

Chop the onions finely. Melt fat in broad shallow saucepan. The old-fashioned stewing pot with tight fitting lid is best for making bredie. Add onions and brown lightly. Cube the meat and add to the onions. Stir well until all pieces are thoroughly seared and browned. Remove skins from tomatoes. Chop into small pieces and add to meat. Add the skin of the red chilli finely chopped. Cover and simmer on low plate for about 2 1/2 to 3 hours. An hour before serving add sugar, salt and pepper.

No water is required if tomatoes are used. A little boiling water is added to the meat if a bredie of any other vegetable is desired. The meat is simmered in the same way but the vegetables are not added until 1/2 hour before serving, except in the case of dried beans, which should be par boiled, drained and added to the bredie at the beginning. The vegetables should be cut up into small pieces, added to the meat and allowed to cook gently. More boiling water may be added, a little at a time if the bredie becomes too dry, but it should never be allowed to become watery.

CURRIED BEAN BREDIE. (Mary Kotzé)

Use the same recipe as above for dried bean bredie. When the beans are to be added, add also 2 T curry powder mixed to a paste with 1/4 C water, 2 T vinegar or lemon juice and 1 T Add 1 cup chopped sour apples or apricots, dried or fresh and 1/2 C seeded raisins. If the dried fruit is used, wash the and soak for a few hours beforehand.

Serve the "boontjie-kerrie" with rice and chutney.

HOUSEHOLD HINTS.

Tea and Coffee Stains.

The water in which potatoes have been boiled makes an excel solution for removing tea or coffee stains. Soak the stain parts in the potato water for 1/2 hour or so, and then wash in the normal way.

Brass that is rubbed once a week with a piece of flannel mo with sewing machine oil is not likely to tarnish.

Scorch Marks.

Damp with water and rub on borax, place in the sun. When disappear, wash area with cold water.

'n Prikkelpoot 1920

Fill in your name and address below. Affix a 1d. Postage Stamp on the other side of this card and a CROXLEY JOTTER will be posted FREE.

Vul u naam en adres onder in. Plak 1d. Posseel aan die ander-kant van hierdie kaart en 'n CROXLEY KLADBOEKIE sal KOSTELOOS aan u gestuur word.

Cookies/Bis

PEANUT BUTTER CO

(Ideal for school lun

1 cup margarine	1 cup
1 cup soft brown sugar	1 cup
2 eggs	2½ cu
1 tsp. bicarbonate of soda	1 tsp.
½ tsp. salt	1 tsp.

Cream margarine, peanut butter and su eggs and vanilla essence. Add sifted dry in balls. Place one inch apart on cookie shee fork. Bake at 375°F for about 10 minutes

CHOCOLATE COCONUT MA

Melt 5oz. dark chocolate in the top o until smooth and allow to cool. Beat 2 eg gradually beat in ½ cup of castor sugar. ½ tsp. mixed spice and 1 tsp. vanilla es until mixture is very stiff. Add cooled c fold in 7oz. coconut. Drop teaspoonfuls greased baking tray and bake at 325°F Remove carefully with a spatula and pla

GINGER BISCUIT

8oz. oats	6oz. su
8oz. PREMIER flour	6oz. go
4oz. Blossom margarine	salt
1 tsp. cinnamon	1 egg
1 tsp. ginger	1½ tsp.
½ tsp. mixed spice	

Mix dry ingredients together. Melt marg let cool a little before adding dry ingredien about the size of a walnut, flatten and put biscuit. Bake at 350°F for about 10 minut

ROMANY CREAM

339g (12oz.) Blossom margarine or butter	3 cups
1 egg — 6oz. Sugar	2½ cups
1½ tsp. baking powder	3 desse
	½ cup

Cream butter, sugar and egg well. Add the flour, baking powder and salt. Add alternately with the cocoa which has been water. Mix well. Drop tsps. of the dough and bake in a 350°F oven. When cool melted chocolate or soft chocolate icing.

Sharing is caring

It was a veritable trip down memory lane as *Platteland*'s editors compiled an autumn menu from Errieda du Toit's *Share: A Century of South African Community Recipes*, a collection of beloved recipes that epitomise collaboration and the joy of sharing good food.

RECIPE ADAPTATIONS **ERRIEDA DU TOIT** STYLING **HANNES KOEGELENBERG** PHOTOS **IAN DU TOIT**

Menu

STARTER

Asparagus quiche

PALATE CLEANSER

Geranium leaf sorbet

MAIN COURSE

Leg of lamb in pastry

Parmesan roast potatoes

Pumpkin fritters with muscadel sauce

Minty cucumber salad

DESSERT

Blitztorte (Strawberries in the clouds)

Asparagus quiche

No collection of retro dishes is complete without this chic tart featured in *Cooking with the Housewives' League* (1989) and *Winterberg Winners & More*. Nowadays, quiche is used as a general term for all kinds of savoury tarts. Here, the classic quiche Lorraine gets a little taste of my mom's asparagus tart. The fuss-free wholewheat cheese crust doesn't need to be baked blind.

Makes **1 quiche (22 cm)**
Preparation time **10 minutes**
Cooking and baking time **1 hour, plus 20 minutes' cooling time**

YOU NEED

FOR THE CRUST
- **60 g wholewheat flour**
- **60 g cake wheat flour**
- **100 g finely grated Cheddar cheese**
- **100 g coarsely grated butter**

FOR THE FILLING
- **400 g fresh young green asparagus shoots, ends snapped off (see "Variation")**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) butter**
- **3–4 leeks, halved, washed and sliced**
- **2–3 rashers streaky bacon, finely chopped**
- **4 eggs**
- **2 cups (500 ml) cream or milk**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) prepared mustard**
- **1 cup (250 ml) grated Cheddar cheese**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) salt**
- **black pepper, freshly ground, to taste**

THIS IS HOW

Make the crust Using your fingertips, rub the crust ingredients together. Spray a springform quiche pan 22 cm in diameter with non-stick cooking spray. Press the dough evenly into the base and sides of the pan. Refrigerate.

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Make the filling Blanch the asparagus in boiling water for 3 minutes. Rinse in cold water, drain and set aside. Heat the butter in a frying pan and fry the leeks until tender and just starting to brown. Remove from the pan and set aside. Fry the bacon in the same pan until crispy. Drain on paper towel.

In a large bowl, beat the eggs, cream or milk, and the mustard together. Stir in the fried leeks and bacon, as well as the cheese, salt and some black pepper. Carefully pour the mixture into the chilled crust. Arrange the blanched asparagus on top and lightly push them into the egg mixture.

Place the pan on a baking sheet (this makes it easier to take it out of the oven) and bake for 45–50 minutes; the quiche should be puffed up and lightly browned on top, and set in the centre (shake the pan lightly to check). Remove from the oven and leave to cool for at least 20 minutes before slicing and serving.

VARIATION

If you're yearning for a more nostalgic savoury asparagus tart, replace the fresh asparagus with a 400 g tin of asparagus salad cuts. Drain them very well and spread evenly over the base before carefully pouring in the egg mixture.

Geranium leaf sorbet

Rosemary Nel's recipe was published in the East London Rotary Club's *Rotary Recipes*.

Serves **4**
Preparation time **About 40 minutes**
Freezing time **About 2 hours**

YOU NEED

- **12 fragrant green geranium leaves (rose, lemon, apple or nutmeg geranium)**
- **300 ml water**
- **75 g castor sugar**
- **juice of 1 large lemon**
- **1 egg white**
- **geranium leaves and flowers for garnishing**

THIS IS HOW

Wash the geranium leaves and shake them dry. Heat the water, add the castor sugar and stir until dissolved. Add the geranium leaves and bring to the boil. Remove from the heat and leave to steep for 20 minutes. Taste the syrup and, if the flavour isn't strong enough, boil the leaves again, remove from the heat and steep for a further 10 minutes with the lid on.

Pour the syrup through a sieve into a sturdy 1-litre container, add the lemon juice and leave to cool. Place in the freezer until semi-frozen (45–60 minutes).

Whisk the egg white until stiff and fold into the syrup. Freeze until firm (about 1 hour).

Serve in glasses, decorating each one with a geranium leaf and flower if you wish.

tip Place a few fragrant geranium leaves in the base of a cake pan when you bake a cake.

Leg of lamb in pastry

Community recipe books usually focus on quick, easy and economical meat dishes. For special occasions and Sunday lunches, the "Do you remember?" recipes come out. Sometimes nostalgic food gets a new look, like this leg of lamb wrapped in a lattice of pastry.

Serves **8–10**
Preparation time **About 30 minutes**
Cooking time **About 4 hours**

YOU NEED

FOR THE LAMB

- **1 deboned leg of lamb (2 kg–2,5 kg)**
- **1 garlic clove, finely chopped**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) Worcestershire sauce**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) brown sugar**
- **2 whole cloves**
- **fresh or dried thyme to taste**
- **2 onions, sliced into rings**
- **1½ cups (375 ml) meat stock**

FOR THE PASTRY

- **2 rolls (200 g each) puff pastry, thawed**
- **whole cloves**
- **1 egg yolk**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) milk**

THIS IS HOW

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Place the leg of lamb in an oven roasting pan, season with salt and freshly ground black pepper, and add the remaining ingredients. Cover with heavy-duty tinfoil and roast for 2–3 hours. Remove the tinfoil and roast for a further 30 minutes.

Drain the meat on a wire rack set over a plate to catch the juices, and leave to cool. Retain the juices for making gravy.

Increase the oven temperature to 200°C.

On a floured work surface, roll out one pastry roll until a little thinner. Carefully fold the pastry over the cooked leg of lamb, brushing the edges with water to seal the pastry. Place the wrapped meat, with the join at the bottom, in a greased roasting pan.

Roll out the other pastry roll, cut into long strips and weave a lattice effect over the wrapped meat. Brush the strips with water to attach.

Press a clove into each crossing of the lattice. Beat the egg yolk and milk together with a fork and brush over the pastry. Bake for 40–60 minutes or until golden brown. Thicken the meat juices and serve separately.

Parmesan roast potatoes

Mariëtte van der Westhuizen's recipe appears in *Resepte van die Suidpunt van Afrika*, published by Bredasdorp Primary School in 1997.

Serves **8–10**
Preparation time **10–15 minutes**
Cooking time **1 hour and 30 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **24 medium potatoes, unpeeled**
- **40 g Parmesan cheese, grated**
- **50 ml finely chopped parsley**
- **100 ml oil**

THIS IS HOW

Place the potatoes in a large saucepan and cover with water. Boil until just tender. Drain the potatoes, leave to cool and pull off the skins.

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Scrape the potatoes with a fork, and place them one at a time in a plastic bag with the cheese and parsley. Shake to coat them, and then place them in a roasting pan. Sprinkle with oil and salt. Roast for 60 minutes or longer, turning regularly. Arrange around the leg of lamb.

Pumpkin fritters with muscadel sauce

Hannerie Visser, a fellow cookbook enthusiast, chose this recipe out of *Bak & Brou van Toeka tot Nou*, published by the NG congregation in Klawer. She says the page featuring this recipe is the scruffiest in the book, proof of the many times her mother made the dish.

Serves **6–8**
Preparation time **5 minutes**
Cooking time **20–30 minutes**

YOU NEED

FOR THE FRITTERS

- **2 cups (500 ml) cooked, mashed pumpkin**
- **1½ cups (375 ml) cake flour**
- **3 tablespoons (45 ml) baking powder**
- **2 eggs**
- **1½ teaspoons (7,5 ml) salt**
- **oil, for frying**

FOR THE SAUCE

- **200 g sugar**
- **1 cup (250 ml) water**
- **2 teaspoons (10 ml) ground cinnamon**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) cornflour**
- **2 cups (500 ml) muscadel, reduced to 250 ml (leave to cool)**

THIS IS HOW

Make the fritters Combine the pumpkin, flour, baking powder, eggs and salt and mix to incorporate. Heat the oil in a frying pan, drop spoonfuls of the batter into the hot oil and fry until golden brown.

Make the sauce Combine the sugar, water and cinnamon, and boil over moderate heat until the sugar has dissolved and it becomes syrupy; leave to cool for 2 minutes.

Mix the cornflour with the cooled muscadel, pour it into the cinnamon syrup and simmer until thickened.

Pour the hot sauce over the cooked fritters.

Minty cucumber salad

This refreshing cucumber salad appears in *Smaaklike Geregte* (published in Swellendam, but undated) among all the familiar moulded salads and pasta salads of the era. With fresh flavours of crushed mint, fennel, yoghurt and olive oil, it was well ahead of its time.

Serves **8–10**
Preparation time **15 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **4 cucumbers, peeled (not English cucumbers)**
- **½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) salt**
- **1 clove garlic, finely chopped**
- **2½ teaspoons (12,5 ml) wine vinegar**
- **1 cup (250 ml) yoghurt**
- **pinch of dried fennel, caraway or onion seed**
- **4 teaspoons (20 ml) olive oil or salad oil**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) finely chopped fresh mint**

THIS IS HOW

Slice the cucumbers thinly and place in a bowl. Sprinkle over the salt, garlic and vinegar and leave to stand for 10 minutes. Drain and reserve the liquid.

Place the yoghurt and fennel, caraway or onion seeds in a separate bowl and add the reserved cucumber liquid. Stir until well combined and then add the cucumber slices. Mix lightly until the cucumber slices are evenly covered with the yoghurt dressing. Drizzle with the oil and garnish with mint.

Serve immediately.

Blitztorte (Strawberries in the clouds)

The name of this easy cake with a sponge base and meringue topping differs from book to book – blitz cake, blitzkuchen, blitz torte, even lightning cake. It is traditionally filled with confectioner's custard, or crème pâtissière. And if decorated with fresh strawberries and whipped cream, you can call it "Strawberries in the clouds".

Makes **1 double-layer cake (22 cm)**
Preparation time **About 30 minutes**
Baking time **30 minutes**
Cooling time **45 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **25 g butter**
- **250 g sugar**
- **3 eggs, separated**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) vanilla essence**
- **3 tablespoons (45 ml) milk**
- **120 g cake flour**
- **1 ml salt**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) baking powder**
- **½ cup (125 ml) flaked almonds or chopped walnuts**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) castor sugar**
- **½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) ground cinnamon**
- **confectioner's custard (see recipe below) or whipped cream for filling and topping**
- **a punnet of strawberries, sliced**

THIS IS HOW

Preheat the oven to 180°C and grease two 22 cm cake pans.

Cream together the butter and 100 g of the sugar. Beat the egg yolks, vanilla and milk. Sift together the flour, salt and baking powder.

Alternately mix the egg-yolk mixture and flour mixture into the butter-and-sugar mixture. Divide the batter among the prepared cake pans – it will form a thin layer.

Whisk the egg whites until frothy, then add the remaining sugar a spoonful at a time, beating well after each addition. Whisk until the meringue is shiny and smooth and forms soft peaks. Spread the meringue over the cake batter in the pans. Sprinkle the nuts on top. Mix the castor sugar and cinnamon, and sprinkle on top.

Bake for 30 minutes or until lightly browned. Place on cooling racks and allow to cool in the pans for 15 minutes. Loosen the sides with a knife and carefully remove from the pans. Place on cooling racks until completely cooled.

Just before serving, place one of the cake layers, meringue side up, on a cake plate. Spread the whipped cream or confectioner's custard over and top with strawberries, and repeat with the second layer.

Confectioner's custard (Crème pâtissière)

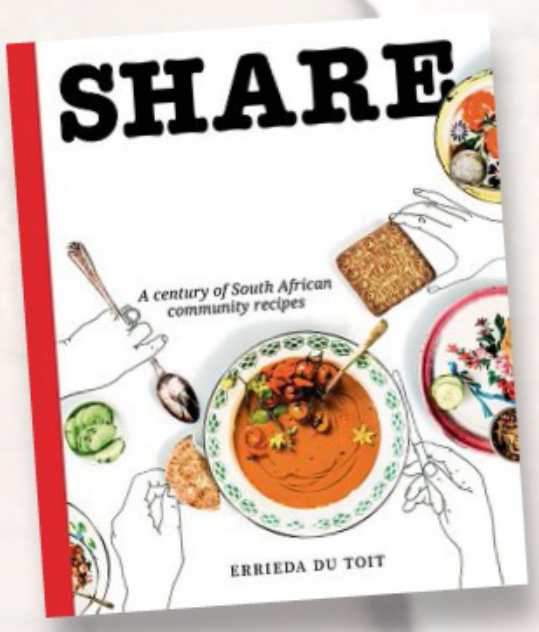
YOU NEED

- **285 ml milk**
- **2 egg yolks**
- **30 g sugar**
- **40 ml cornflour**
- **2,5 ml vanilla essence**

THIS IS HOW

Heat the milk in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Beat the egg yolks, sugar and cornflour in a mixing bowl. Bring the milk to the boil again and pour it over the egg mixture. Return the mixture to the saucepan and stir over moderate heat until it starts boiling again. Simmer for 1 minute or until the custard thickens. Stir in the vanilla essence.

Cover the custard with cling wrap and leave to cool.



Get the book

Share: A Century of South African Community Recipes by Errieda du Toit is a quirky hardcover collection of recipes as generous, gracious and welcoming as the home cooks who shared them. To put together this South African first, Errieda, widely regarded as the champion of local home cooking, pored over more than 150 of those dog-eared, food-stained recipe booklets often compiled by women's groups to raise funds for church or other charitable causes. From the keepers (recipes known for their longevity), the never-fails (epic winners that never let you down) and communal food for come-on-overs to retro classics and those defining dishes and bakes treasured as heritage food, you can count on easy, tasty, fool-proof results. It is published by Struik Lifestyle and costs R360 at bookshops countrywide.

Win We are giving away two copies of *Share: A Century of South African Community Recipes*. Email your name, address and phone number to helloplatteland@gmail.com with the words "Autumn Share" in the subject line. The closing date is 29 May 2020.

Janice Vos (with four-year-old Azul) and her husband, Marnus (at centre, with Skyler, who's nearly two years old), from Boschkop are regulars at the market. On the right is their friend Jandré Moolman from Olympus with Lex (also nearly two). All three weimaraners were rescues from the SPCA.

Good times

At the Cowhouse, a gourmet food and craft market held every Saturday and Sunday in Hazeldean Valley, on the eastern outskirts of Pretoria, you're in for a good time *and* good deals.

WORDS **JOHAN VAN ZYL** PHOTOS **PETER VAN NOORD**

Many Gauteng families subjected to the daily grind in the concrete jungle, in the suburbs or in peak traffic want to get out of the city on weekends to relieve their cabin fever. If the budget doesn't allow for a weekend escape far from civilisation, there are the options to go cycling, running, horse riding, socialising or shopping. And if they are smart, live near Pretoria and want to do *all* of those things, they head straight for Hazeldean Valley near Silver Lakes, where you can try it all.

The Cowhouse Market is held in an old milking shed at Hazeldean Valley every Saturday and Sunday from 09:00 to 16:00, and every last Saturday of the month until 22:00. Adults, children and dogs are welcome, and everyone can bring their bicycles – and if you don't have a bike, you can hire one to enjoy the trails in the area.

Platteland might have been there on a quiet Sunday, but even after church, when business definitely picked up, it never seemed too crowded or hectic.

Wandering among stands selling an extensive range of food, treats and drinks, some handiwork, antiques, books and second-hand goods, you'll notice that most visitors come here to relax and catch up, tuck into something tasty and enjoy good live music. And the youngsters tire themselves out on the jumping castle, jungle gym or pony rides.

The next day was Monday, but at this market you wouldn't have guessed it – no one seemed in a hurry to get home.

• The market is held on the former Hazeldean Ayrshire farm, on the corner of Ridge Road and Oukraal Boulevard. Visit the website and the Facebook page for directions.

cowhouse.co.za Cowhouse Market
info@cowhouse.co.za 067 186 8767

At the tables outside, with the stage on the one side and the kids' playground on the other, there's a lively, festive atmosphere every Saturday and Sunday.

Laura Memory from Centurion and Wessel Gildenhuys from Pretoria worked at the Hazeldean Brewing Company stall. This craft beer is brewed on the farm where the market is held. The flagship Hazeldean beer, the Vienna Lager, and Premium Pale Pilsner are the top sellers.
hazeldeanbrewing.co.za

Making music on the day *Platteland* visited the market was singer–songwriter, guitarist and guitar teacher Peter Toussaint (right), a solo artist and session musician who plays in a number of bands. With him on the stage was bass guitarist Franco Jamneck. 073 307 5683
ptoussa@gmail.com

Zelmarie Hattingh was on duty at Assie se Pannekoekstalletjie, which sells not only pancakes but also boerewors rolls, hotdogs and corn dogs (a Vienna sausage on a stick coated in a maize-meal batter and deep-fried). That's what Megan Jansen (9) from Waverley ordered. It was her first visit to the market. 082 453 0096 >

It may look quiet at the Wyntreinstasie, but on the day *Platteland* visited the Cowhouse Market, Nelson Santos (left) from Boksburg sold litres and litres of slushies made with red wine, white wine and litchi-flavoured white wine, with an alcohol content of about 5%. On the right is Dawid van Dyk from Delmas, father-in-law of the owner of the Wyntreinstasie stall, CJ Leach. 071 481 0263

At the Caribbean Cocktails stall, the Naughty Coconut (Malibu liqueur, coconut water and flesh, and granadilla pulp) is the top seller. So Vincent Siziba and Sam Phiri (right), originally from Mozambique and now living in Eastgate, have gotten adept at cracking open coconuts with a long knife. "Don't worry – look, we still have all our fingers!" said Vincent. siziba.vincent@yahoo.com

ABOVE Two years ago, Miki Stewart from Hazeldean started Craft Kitchen, testing the market waters to see if her fancy sandwiches would sell. These days, she has Mexican fare like nachos, jalapeño poppers and quesadillas on her menu. Miki's food is served in paper or recycled material – polystyrene is banned! 061 125 8997

ABOVE André Marx from Die Wilgers started buying and stockpiling antiques 40 years ago. Since his retirement in 2015 he has been selling pieces at the Cowhouse Market every weekend. His plan is to move to the United States, where his children live, and thanks to brisk business at the market he has not had to use any of his retirement funds.

Davin Warwick, who used to live in Hermanus and Mossel Bay, decided 12 years ago "to follow the money north"; these days, he and his daughter Jami sell biltong that he makes under the label Plaaskardoes. "It's the best biltong at the market. Come back later today to check – there won't be any left." And he was right!
082 239 0553

A friend from Buenos Aires reminded chef Francois Delport that the Argentinians love their *asado* as much as South Africans love their braai, although the flavours differ. So he established The Belly King in 2019 and began to sell tortillas stuffed with rump steak or pork belly… There wasn't a crumb left at the end of the day!
079 715 4622 info@gourmetchef.co.za

Karin Meyerowitz from Potchefstroom has been making and selling beef, chicken and spinach-and-feta croquettes since the first Cowhouse Market – either frozen or piping hot. They're as good as any you'll find in the Netherlands. Karin says she, her brother and brother-in-law use a secret recipe of her father's, who was a baker. 073 364 6420
karinmeyerowitz@gmail.com

ABOVE Karel Gerber jokingly refers to himself as a "*maplotter* from Donkerhoek" who has sold two properties to the government for low-cost housing. When he sells the last one (on which he lives), they'll hit the road: moving to where his son lives in Mozambique, or to where his sister lives in Spain, or to a lekker platteland town. Karel has had a stall at the Cowhouse Market for the past three years, right near the entrance, where he sells antiques and restored furniture, as well as tables that he makes himself. He call his enterprise Karel's Goods. In the foreground is a bench designed by architect Herbert Baker, about which Karel was very excited. Karel's GOODS 072 651 3554

ABOVE Muzi Mabuza (left) from Sunnyside has his own company, Muzi 1 Café Events, that offers barista services at social events. He and Given Mahlangu (right) from Mamelodi manned the Bourbon Bean coffee stall – and proved they know how to make a potent cappuccino!
muzi1cafe.co.za Muzi 1 cafe >

What's a market without a good supply of freshly picked fruit and vegetables? Pieter Snyders from Mooiplaats, about 5 km from Hazeldean Farm, grows the spinach, tomatoes and baby marrows he sells. He buys other produce from farmers in the area, and sometimes he shops at the big local fresh-produce market to supplement his supplies. 071 224 1825

Chony Boswell from Lyttelton likes hunting and fishing, and she has been in charge of the African Survival stall since the first Cowhouse Market. She sells imported knives and hand-made Paul Smyth knives. africansurvival.co.za
African Survival with Chony's this and that corner

Ryan McCreanot (left) from Brits and his parents are regular market-goers, but this time he invited his friend Ivan van der Westhuizen from Pretoria along. The two were enjoyed their ice creams, which they bought at the Candyland stall (photo right).

Juan Rossouw (16) from East Lynne helped his aunt Janine van Wyk at the Candyland stall, where his cousin Zandré Hattingh (13, left) dropped in regularly to keep him company. On the menu at Candyland there was soft-serve ice cream, milkshakes in a variety of flavours (the Bar-One flavour is sinfully good) and all kinds of sweets, reminiscent of the pick-and-mix counters from the old days. 060 561 1667

Andre Bouwer from Centurion, who was in the Special Forces for 23 years and in the Navy for 15 years, has been making items under the label Helie-Andre Leather Products for 39 years. Since his retirement three years ago this hobby keeps him busy full time. This you can clearly see in the variety of items he sells at his stall: wallets, handbags, carry bags, wine bags, pool-cue cases, coasters, belts, knife sheaths, pipe stands, guitar straps, chess sets, fly swatters… 082 052 9582

It was the first time in more than six years of visiting markets that *Platteland* saw a pool table at one. And we have to admit we discovered for the first time that Tyger Valley is not only a mall in Cape Town's Northern Suburbs but also a Pretoria neighbourhood. This is where electrician Steve Kruger (above) lives. Steve says he comes to the market every Sunday – first for a mountain bike ride and then for his weekly game of pool.

Jan Boneschans from Bronkhorstbaai sells ribs, rib burgers, chicken wings, eggs Benedict, waffles and s'mores. With him is Adrian Hattingh from East Lynne.

If you like hot chilli sauces, you have to try the ones Lilo Weideman from Faerie Glen makes at home. His top seller, however, is the peanut brittle he buys in bulk and packages to sell. At his stall you can also buy olives from Hartswater in the Northern Cape, and honey and honey fudge made by Henri van Vuuren in Nelspruit. P

Hitting the right note...

In platteland towns, the local music school's gala evening is a highlight on the social calendar – as long as you have sufficient liquid and edible sustenance at hand, as **Julio Agrella** learnt the hard way.

ILLUSTRATION **DIEK GROBLER**

The platteland doesn't have the kind of attractions that keep born urbanites happy.

Our neighbour had married a city girl – they'd met as students at university and fallen in love. And, since love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, she was determined to adapt to life on the platteland. All was indeed fine… until their second child entered school. That's when she got restless and remembered she'd once dreamt of a singing career.

Lucretia is our town's music teacher. Thirty years ago she was an *inkommer* herself, but after her husband's untimely death she had to earn a living, so she started to teach piano, the guitar and singing to children, mainly.

The neighbour's wife became one of Lucretia's few adult students.

ONE FRIDAY AFTERNOON, our neighbour and his wife knocked on our door. They invited us to join them as their guests at the music school's annual gala concert. The event would be held in the primary school hall and guests had to take their own food and beverages. But we weren't to worry about that – we were their guests and *they* would provide everything.

Come Friday evening, the curtains in the hall were tightly shut to keep the stage a surprise. Plastic chairs were arranged around tables covered with hessian tablecloths, and the walls were draped in metres and metres of chiffon-like fabric: bright pink and mauve and powder blue and lime green. A *lot* of chiffon-like fabric.

The party had already started. Cool boxes containing ice and brandy and Coke occupied the spaces among the tables, and the tables themselves were laden with Tupperware containers full of chicken drumsticks, cold cuts, sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs, along with paper plates, plastic glasses and rolls of paper towel.

The neighbour's wife hadn't forgotten how things were done in the city. On our table there was a cutting board featuring one freshly baked loaf and a few pretty small bowls containing butter and pesto. Porcelain plates, dainty fabric serviettes, thin-stemmed glasses and two bottles of red wine… for eight people, because both his and her parents had also been invited to the event.

Almost shyly, she handed out the programme for the evening. Her name appeared next to item 37, and the song was "Diamonds are Forever" by Shirley Bassey. It was the fourth-last performance of the evening. I made a quick calculation: If each performance was 3 minutes long and it took 1 minute to change artists, and taking into account the speeches listed on the programme, we would be sitting there for at least 3 hours. Eight adults, one loaf of bread, two bottles of wine… Suddenly I was very keen to introduce myself to the guests at the nearest table.

THE PROGRAMME was as broad as it was long – it covered everything from

"I Walk With Thee" and "Amazing Grace" to the "Drinking Song" from *The Student Prince*, as well as Kurt Darren's "Loslappie" and "Kaptein Span die Seile". There was an American rap song or three and a couple of Xhosa numbers, and before Shirley Bassey we were to take a detour via Russia to Heidi in Switzerland, with a few classical compositions in-between.

At quarter past eight – only 15 minutes (half a glass of wine and two bites of warm bread spread with butter and a little pesto) late – Lucretia, diva, principal and only staff member of the music school, took to the stage wearing a full black skirt and a black chiffon blouse. She struggled to keep her balance on her high heels.

"*Goeienaand, vriende*. Good evening, friends!" she trumpeted across the hall. She said every phrase in Afrikaans and followed it immediately with the English translation. I don't know why, because for most people in our town English doesn't exactly roll off the tongue.

Within minutes the commotion returned to the level at which it had been before she'd started her speech. And the people were partying. But not at our table, because there was still a quarter of the first bottle of wine left, and officially the night had not yet begun.

In the meantime, the diva addressed the chaos. She pressed a button on the microphone and it whistled like an ambulance rushing to hospital. Immediate silence. "*En daarom, dames en here*; and therefore, ladies and gentlemen; *welkom by die 15de galakonsert van Lucretia se Musiek-skool*; welcome at the 15th gala concert of Lucretia's School of Music."

The curtains were drawn and the first singer appeared. More chiffon. The girl of about 14 or 15 nodded at Lucretia and looked somewhat helplessly into the darkness of the hall. She cleared her throat, smiled shyly and started to sing. Someone had forgotten to cue the backing track. Her voice floated faintly over the tables. She stopped. Blushed. Appeared to be on the verge of tears. The backing track started to play. She joined in three words too late, but caught up fast. The audience clapped and whistled. The night was officially under way.

Most students sang and played the piano or the guitar. Some of them clearly had talent; many others should have rather hidden their light under a bushel. And yet, one couldn't help but admire the chutzpah and dedication.

After every fifth number, Lucretia would ascend the stage to say something like: "Big names started out here. Some of them will be here this evening and might even help to secure a recording contract or two. And now, give a warm round of applause for…" Then she'd return to her seat, a proud mother hen clucking over her chicks.

"It's going so well tonight," Lucretia said, "that my skirt's elastic band has snapped."

THE NOISE LEVEL INCREASED as the evening progressed. As every artist stepped onto the stage, their table of supporters would shout, "Silence!"

Lucretia was an equal-opportunities music teacher: The white boys sang Zulu songs; a black girl tried her hand at "Loslappie"; a few boys did American rap; a piano-and-guitar-playing trio experienced "Amazing Grace".

Some of Lucretia's students displayed exceptional talent. Others displayed exceptional determination despite a complete lack of talent.

The fourth time Lucretia ascended the stage, she was clutching her skirt in one hand. "It's going so well tonight," she said, "that my skirt's elastic band has snapped."

There was much eating and drinking and laughing and chatting at all the other tables, but at our table everyone watched the proceedings in silence. Our food was finished, our wine was finished, and we still had 15 songs to go before our singer would make her debut.

Next it was the turn of a teenager belonging to the table next to ours. "Quiet! Quiet!" they shouted, "Shhhhh!"

And the child could sing! She hit a flat note here and there, but another year with Lucretia would sort that out. Her father was so proud of his daughter's achievement that he leant over to me and asked: "Can I pour you a drink, my larney? I see your table has been thirsty for a while." I gratefully accepted his offer, but tasted right away that they had run out of mixer. My wife and the rest of the table shook their heads – nothing for them, thank you. I was grateful my wife had declined the drink, because I could feel it going right to my head.

At last it was the turn of the neighbour's wife. She removed her small diamond engagement ring and her wedding band, and handed them to her husband. As she waited for her backing track to start, she put a big glass rock of a ring, probably bought at the R5 store, on her finger.

And she *could* sing. Her voice filled the hall, raised goose bumps and compelled everyone to fall silent. When the final notes faded away, we all jumped to our feet and gave her a standing ovation. The rest of the hall joined in.

It was after midnight when my wife and I drive home. "It was worth it," said my wife. I nodded. The neighbour's wife sure had a voice.

FIVE MONTHS after Lucretia's gala evening, we heard that the neighbour's wife wanted a divorce. She yearned for the city and her singing career… Dreams tend to have a price that cannot be measured in rands and cents. She moved back to the city, and a few years later moved to the US.

Our neighbour remarried. Lovely woman without any artistic or creative aspirations. She loves raising children.

And his former wife now sings on big cruise liners sailing between Florida and the Bahamas. Every night she's Shirley Bassey or Joan Armatrading or Amy Winehouse. She's wearing a genuine rock of a diamond on her ring finger. Some nights the audience falls completely silent when she sings, other nights she brings them to their feet. Sometimes the talking and eating continue as if she doesn't exist. Even though there is a real diamond on her finger, sparkling in the spotlight that is shining on her. P

Higher ground

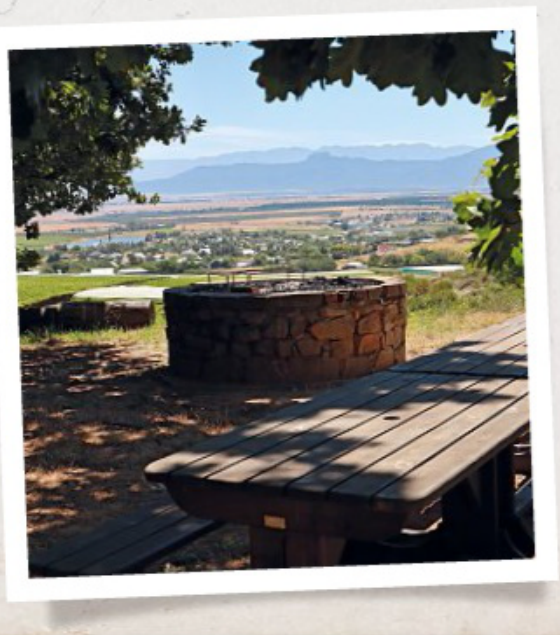
Springbok flanker Pieter-Steph du Toit has the world at his feet, especially after his performance at the Rugby World Cup in Japan*. But his heart will always belong to the Swartland.

Kloovenburg, Riebeek Valley, Swartland

Kloovenburg, where my parents, Pieter and Annalene, farm – producing wine and olive products, among others – is my special place, even though I live in the Boland now with my wife and our son. Kloovenburg is where I grew up, where my three brothers and I stomped grapes, where we played, carefree, in the veld.

My dad's two grandfathers, Oupa du Toit and Oupa de Kock, bought the land in 1956, and the next year Oupa Piet "Spiere" du Toit started to farm on Kloovenburg. And when my dad was 9 or 10 years old, he told the owner of the neighbouring farm, De Hof, that if he ever wanted to sell his farm, he should let him know! Without my dad's knowledge, the man later approached my grandfather and indeed sold the farm to our family.

My grandfather, a keen hiker, built a lovely concrete dam and braai area on De Hof, high up on Kasteelberg near two old oak trees. The view across the valley is incredible: You see vineyards, then the town of Riebeek-Kasteel, beyond that wheat fields and, in the far distance, the Groot Winterhoek Mountains under a blue-blue sky.



This is where my grandfather and his friends would come to braai and swim after a hike up the ravine. Today, we still come here to throw some chops or chicken on the braai. And this is where you'll find us when we just want to relax or enjoy some quiet time.

I would like to return to the farm one day and get involved in the business, especially since nature is close to my heart. Earth is under threat in so many ways. It's our duty to conserve the environment for future generations. P

*** Pieter-Steph was named the Player of the Tournament at the Rugby World Cup in Japan, *and* he was awarded the title of World Rugby Player of the Year for 2019.**

PHOTOS **PETER VAN NOORD**

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