towns | people | entrepreneurs | gardening | food | DIY | animals

go! Platteland

SPRING 2022

The slow life is the good life

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

9 flower farmers join forces

+ Make a flower crown for GARDEN DAY

Vanderkloof
A dam fine place in the Northern Cape

Freewheeling in Velddrif

PHOTO ESSAY

Face to face with the Tankwa and its people

BRAAI DAY
8 recipes for a sizzling celebration

DIY
Beat the load-shedding blues with Zigi's power box

Is a food garden worth it?

Plant or buy?

Community gardens
Hope & growth in Bathurst

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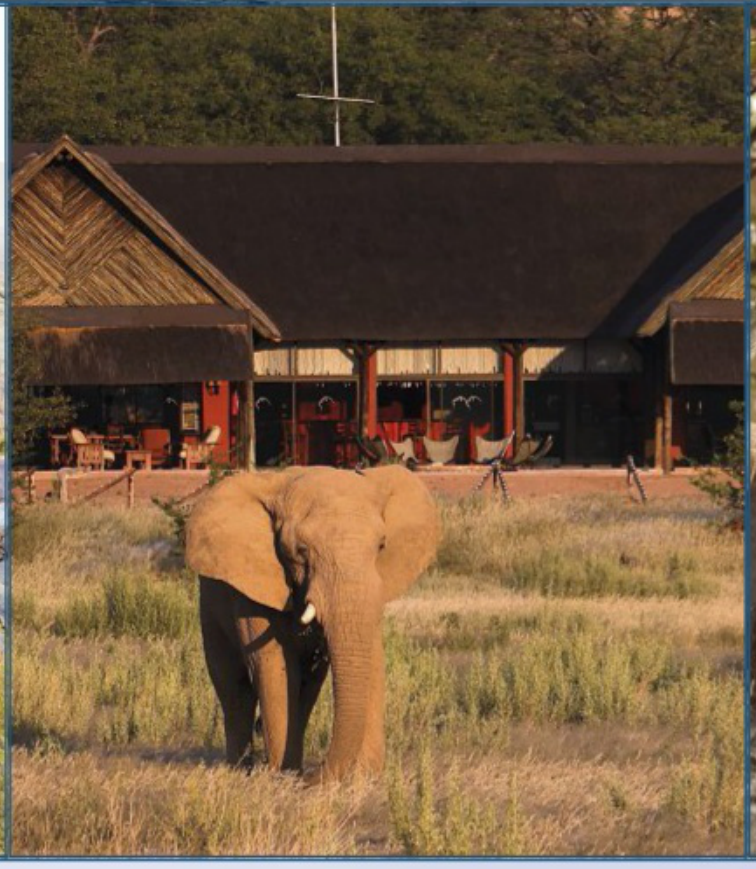

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SPRING 2022

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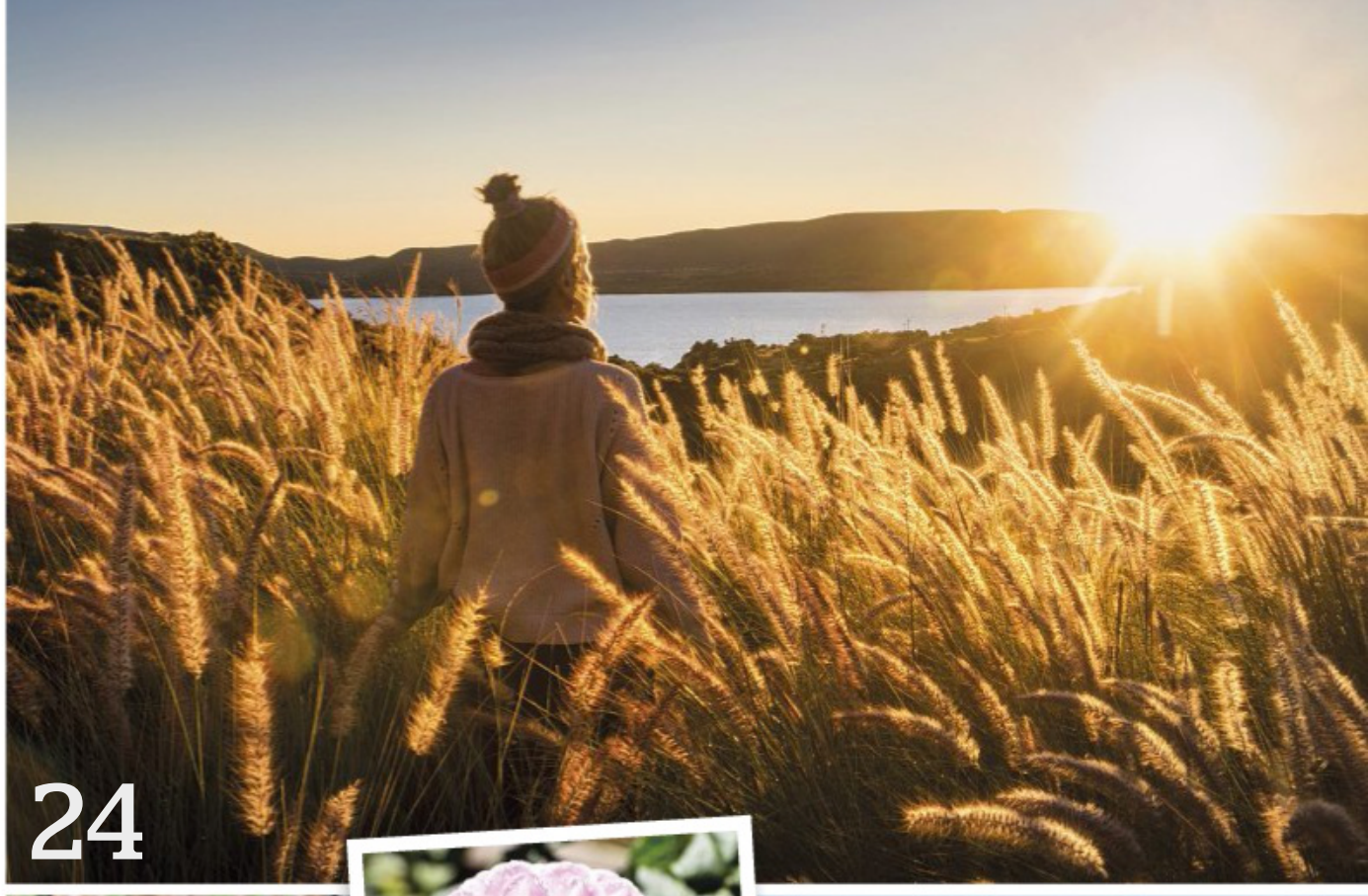

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Cover

PHOTO **MIA LOUW**

PLACE & MODEL **AT FORT GOVERNOR'S ESTATE IN THE EASTERN CAPE, MOZZIE THE AUSTRALIAN SHEPHERD PLAYS MODEL FOR FLORAL DESIGNER JO VAN ZYL OF LILY ROSE SA**

PHOTOS GREG COX, MIA LOUW, ELZE POLS, ADRIAAN OOSTHUIZEN & DONNA LEWIS

PHOTO ANRI MATTHEE

There's (still) strength in unity

With accommodation for the night booked in Williston, we left Bloemfontein around lunchtime on 23 June.

We were keen to try a different route for a change, and the GPS presented us with three options. Naturally, we did not choose the longest route via Kimberley. The sensible choice, seeing as we had 650 km to cover before dark, was the fastest route: the R48 to Luckhoff and Koffiefontein, with a turn-off onto the R705 to Jacobsdal, then joining the N12 to Hopetown.

This turned out to be one of the most nerve-racking "road" trips we've ever experienced. The oncoming traffic, mostly trucks, seemed like deadly missiles aimed straight at us as they drove in our lane up until the last possible moment before impact before swerving into their lane… to make the most of the remaining patches of tar.

Shortly after our return home, Mia Louw's article about Vanderkloof (page 24) landed in our inbox. Mia quotes Liza Bredenkamp, the owner of Sandgat, a caravan park and resort on the banks of the Orange River, saying that the roads leading to Vanderkloof are their biggest challenge. "The potholes in the road from Bloemfontein to Koffiefontein and Luckhoff put moon craters to shame. Guests often prefer to drive the extra 157 km via Kimberley, Hopetown and Orania.

"But," she adds, "the peace and quiet make the detour worthwhile."

The newspapers are filled with accounts of the disgraceful state of affairs on a daily basis, yet we also read of ordinary citizens rolling up their sleeves to fix and maintain what they can.

A month later, this message was reiterated when Dr Braam Hanekom, director of the Centre for Public Witness, visited the community hall in Koringberg to talk about its project #100DorpeDialoog, and the need to repair social cohesion and heal our broken society first, because so many of the problems we see around us are symptoms of the disconnect among us.

Take a look at nearly every South African town that still consists of "two towns". Have we forgotten all about "Unity is strength"?

Johan & Peter

The Summer 2022/23 issue will be distributed countrywide from **28 November 2022**. Email us at **helloplatteland@gmail.com** if by the end of that week you have not been able to find a copy.

go! Platteland
The slow life is the good life

EDITORS JOHAN VAN ZYL & PETER VAN NOORD
helloplatteland@gmail.com
ART DIRECTOR SEAN ROBERTSON
COPY EDITORS CHRISTINE DE VILLIERS & KAY-ANN VAN ROOYEN
JOURNALIST ANRI MATTHEE
PROOFREADER BARBARA MALAISÉ
SOCIAL MEDIA VILIEN COETZEE

MEDIA24 CORPORATE
CEO: MEDIA24 ISHMET DAVIDSON
GM: MEDIA24 LIFESTYLE AND NEWS MINETTE FERREIRA

PUBLISHING TEAM: MEDIA24 LIFESTYLE
GENERAL MANAGER NERISA COETZEE
CFO JAMEELAH CONWAY
DIVISIONAL OPERATIONS MANAGER EDWINA LYNERS
CIRCULATION MANAGER ARMAND KASSELMAN
armand.kasselman@onthedot.co.za

HEAD OF COMMERCIAL SPONSORSHIP NIKKI RUTTIMANN
nikki.ruttimann@media24.com
ADVERTISING
DANIE NELL 082 859 0542 | danie.nell@media24.com
SHARLENE SMITH 083 853 1604 | sharlene.smith@media24.com

MEDIA24 DIVERSE REVENUE
GROWTH MANAGER LISE VAN BREDA
lise.coetsee@media24.com
HEAD OF DIVERSE PROJECTS FRANCOIS MALAN
francois.malan@media24.com

CREATE STUDIO
CREATIVE DIRECTOR MICHAEL DE BEER
COMMERCIAL MANAGING EDITOR GERDA ENGELBRECHT
MARKETING MANAGER ANDILE NKOSI andile.nkosi@media24.com

REPRODUCTION DEWALD SPIES
ONLINE SHOP YUMNA TOFEY yumna.tofey@media24.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS, RENEWALS AND ENQUIRIES
PRINT MAGAZINE
Tel 087 353 1300 WhatsApp 087 353 1333 Email subs@media24.com
International queries +27 21 065 0033
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Chitchat

I'd flirt with a blue gum any day...

Winning letter

As I edged towards the till in a hurry and glanced at the magazine shelves out of habit, the words "Blue gums" caught my eye. And that brought me to a standstill because, you see, I have a love affair with trees, especially the red flowering gum (*Corymbia ficifolia*), but I shamelessly flirt with all kinds of trees.

This was the first time I bought your magazine. As I read Dave Pepler's article about eucalyptus trees, I could hear his calm voice in my mind. He highlighted all the features of these trees that I've always championed. And it gave me such satisfaction, because here someone was laying out the facts. Now, word might spread that blue gums are not in fact the monstrous water guzzlers they're alleged to be. Against all odds, these trees have survived wherever a farmer planted them a long time ago between a rock and a hard spot.

I'm usually wary of going into any kind of forest, owing to the murder of Jacoba "Bubbles" Schroeder years ago in a blue-gum plantation – news that the grown-ups didn't discuss in front of the children. But then we lived on a farm and the neighbours' daughter wanted eucalyptus branches for an arrangement from a tree that stood in the middle of a stand of blue gums.

Of course I was afraid, but we had picking to do, and the huge, straight-trunked trees enchanted me. This is where I first became acquainted with blue gums: in the middle of the bushveld, surrounded by thorn trees.

Even when I stoke my little wood stove with a log of blue gum, I silently hope it had died of "natural causes".

Many years ago, we bought a piece of land on which there was nothing but grass and rocks – not even shrubs. Everybody who cleared their gardens gave us whatever saplings had germinated in their soil, and we planted all of them. The blue gums were the winners. Not even the Highveld frost could kill them.

Years later, a herd of sheep standing in the shade of the trees make for a lovely scene. I feel so sorry for Karoo sheep when I see them in a field without blue gums standing with their heads down in one another's shade.

Later, I got to know the row of blue gums, bent by the wind, near Melkbosstrand, and more recently the red flowering gums of Durbanville. Old trees,

Rita Annandale from Durbanville will receive an Ina Paarman gift pack to the value of more than R1 200 for her winning letter. It contains a selection of products, including a stainless steel rack with 14 spice mixes and a complete set of Ina Paarman's recipe booklets. Convenience is key when it comes to Ina Paarman's products, but not at the expense of taste, flavour and health. This extensive range of products is made in the traditional way from fresh seasonal ingredients – perfect for lending every meal a gourmet touch. Visit paarman.co.za for more information and a wide variety of recipes – and do try Ina's recipe for vegetable kebabs on page 135.

WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Write to us and tell us about your move to the platteland or your dreams of doing so, the characters in your town, the things you love… or the things that bug you. Visit **platteland.net** and click on "English" and then "Contact" to write your letter, or send an email to **helloplatteland@gmail.com**, or post it to *Platteland* Letters, PO Box 526, Moorreesburg 7310. Include your name and surname and, importantly, the town where you live. *Platteland* reserves the right to edit and shorten letters at our discretion.

magnificent trees.

My current obsession with blue gums can also be ascribed to the fact that a blue gum plays a part in a book I've just finished writing.

I am so glad that Dave Pepler feels the same way I do about these trees.

I want my ashes to be placed in the ground one day with a sapling of a red flowering gum.

Rita Annandale
DURBANVILLE

Plant; don't cut down!

Dave Pepler's article about blue gums (*Platteland* Winter 2022) refers. I've been saying for years that we should leave gum trees as food for bees. Years ago, there used to be a huge stand of magnificent blue gums in Cecilia Forest, adjacent to Kirstenbosch, with many beehives dotted around among the trees.

Walking in the area in recent years, I've noticed that the trees are gone, and with it the lovely cool shade and food for bees provided by these noble trees.

Because of global warming, we should be replanting eucalyptus and pine trees, since they are quick-growing and able to help absorb some of the excess carbon in our atmosphere.

It should be a national priority to replant trees, not cut them down. Other countries are starting to do that.

Rachel Perl
CLAREMONT, CAPE TOWN

Over to our Facebook friends

Michelle Rene
I was very surprised to see eucalyptus beginning to enjoy popularity among florists and gardeners in Europe and the UK, where I've seen young trees for sale at garden centres Thank you for focusing attention on the facts, but I fear the popularity of the tree extends only as far as its attractive young leaves are concerned and not for the enormity and challenging features of a mature tree, completely unsuited to all but a few large gardens. Time will tell what the response will be once these trees reach maturity in urban gardens in the UK especially.

Johann Conrad Brits
Lindani removed all their blue-gum trees and experienced a significant improvement in the water table. I am really not impressed with your discretion, *Platteland*. No consideration for the environment, and even less for our water sources (yes, also part of the environment)!

Jan C Greyling
First determine the utility value before you start chopping down trees.

Annelien Pienaar
Bees always come first! Trees should remain.

Huldah Eloff van Wyk
What is a farm without blue gums? The Karoo, for example, has few indigenous trees, and the blue gums have been providing shade for humans and animals for years. Leave them alone.

Ena Bester Posthumus
I talked to a farmer who chopped down and dug up all blue gums near his fields, pastures and buildings. He did his research before he started removing them. Blue gums use up to 80 ℓ water per day!

Lorna Barnard
Blue gums!? Nothing, nothing else grows underneath our attractive blue gums.

Sunette du Plessis
Australia, a very dry continent, has hundreds of eucalypt species. So I wonder, do these trees cause the dry conditions? Or are they just well adapted to the dry climate?

Maureen Brady
I agree with Dave wholeheartedly. Many of those blue gums in the platteland are more than a hundred years old. And not all eucalyptus species are invasive.

Robbie Crouch
Cut them down. Alien invaders. Blue gums poison the soil beneath their crown so that no other plant can utilise the soil. They also use about three times as much water as indigenous trees of comparable size.

Johan Truter
Would deprive the country of shade… Ludicrous.

Agatha Ikking
The wood is among the most beautiful there is.

Vivia Seidl Sundu Erichsen
Blue gums were commonly planted along roads to control surface water runoff.

Maritha Steyn
We live at Penhill Country Estate between Kuils River and Strand. We are surrounded on three sides by a blue gum plantation. The street on which we live is a dual carriageway with a spectacular row of blue gums in the centre. >

Call of the Wilge River Valley

The Winter 2022 issue of *Platteland* included an article about the Wilge River Valley and its people. In December 2021, my husband and I each bought a Honda all-terrain motorbike, with a 125 cc and 150 cc engine, respectively, with which to explore platteland roads now that retirement is around the corner.

It goes without saying that *Platteland* has become our departure point (literally!) whenever we do research for a new adventure. That's how we both came to load our bikes onto the trailer and drive straight to the Van Wyngaarden family's Berg en Rivier Country Retreat in the pretty green Wilge River Valley, which we used as our base for exploring the area. After a friendly welcome from Johan, we were invited to leave our trailer there for the day, free of charge, and to join them for a cup of coffee afterwards.

Our journey of discovery started on a tarred stretch of road covering about 45 km to Witbank and back. Next, we rode a westerly circular route to Verena, where we satisfied nagging hunger pangs with NikNaks we bought for next to nothing at a small shop. Here, we enquired about the roads in the vicinity before steering our motorbikes in the direction of Meulstroom's dirt road to get back to Berg en Rivier safely. On this day we covered about 120 km.

The Wilge River Valley is a beautiful area and deserves to be included in a magazine such as *Platteland*.

Jeanne Prinsloo
PRETORIA

Once again, you get it right

I receive my Facebook notification that *Platteland* is on its way to the shops, so a beeline is made on my to-do list to pick up my copy.

I do not even glance at the articles; I get home, get my cup of coffee and take the time to start at the beginning with the editors' note and then I know all is right with the world for the next two days.

I am not fortunate enough to live in one of these *dorpies* I get to read about, but my husband and I love nothing better than "road-tripping". Coffee in a flask, good music and hitting the road. No *padstal* is passed without a quick see, and a dirt road is never an inconvenience (some of them are better than our tarred roads).

Our love for the history of the towns and the people is all we need for a good weekend (a good bottle of wine also helps).

With reference to my first sentence, it is about the timing and the content of this publication. The number of times I wonder whether we should be packing up and emigrating, the frantic pace of what we call life – "survival" seems to be more apt currently – and then I read the editors' letter about "WhatsUp" groups and the giggling starts because I then know I am not alone wondering what is going on.

You have the ability to transport me for 48 hours to these towns with their people and their stories, and I have to admit, only in South Africa do we find the characters that make us so uniquely South African. Yes, I see the trend emerging of the real fears of everyday citizens: service delivery, water, infrastructure, price increases, but I also see the resilience of who we are. The saying "*'n boer maak 'n plan*" comes to mind.

I am so grateful not only for the articles but also the way each and every article is written. It is beautiful, and it is not often when language and grammar capture the true essence (whether it is the written word or a gorgeous photo) and then conveyed to paper.

I love the fact it is only published quarterly – it is something to look forward to, and there is no need to fill it with nonsensical advertising material that outweighs the content due to having to do monthly publications. I love the recipes; many have been used in our "Dinner on the Move" evenings with friends.

So this is just a message of thanks for managing to keep going through Covid-19 and keeping the positivity going. Each and every issue stays in the bookshelf until it is time for another road-tripping adventure and we get to plan a journey somewhere new and different.

Rochelle Jordaan
RANDBURG >

The Genadendal attraction

I was enthralled by the article "Genadendal: barefoot on hallowed ground" by Anri Matthee in the Winter 2022 issue. My wife, Sue, and I have been privileged to visit this village in the Overberg, which "is steeped in the slower pace of an earlier era", as Anri writes on page 51. We cycled most of the route from the nearby N2 highway.

Interestingly, well-known writers made their home in the Overberg, and the neighbouring town Greyton became a popular weekend retreat. Afrikaans poet PJ Philander lived and taught in Genadendal. Whether their creations were in words or colourful pictures, in this countryside where the mood can change from sunlit wheatfields to stormy mountain backgrounds in seconds, artists certainly had many reasons to be inspired!

The 19th-century explorer Christian Latrobe was so moved that he wrote he could hardly believe a town such as Genadendal existed. As Anri notes,"in a village that depends so heavily on its history, it is important to find a balance between the past and progress". Nevertheless, the community somehow managed to thrive and there was an influx of residents when slavery was abolished at the Cape in the 1930s.

Of further interest, Anri notes that "up until 1924, everyone in Genadendal were members of the Moravian Church", and that "there was a split and a splinter group broke way – thus Genadendal was no longer a true mission station". With so much engaging historical significance, it comes as no surprise that, through the centuries, the relatively isolated town of Genadendal has attracted celebrities from afar to experience its unique character and charms!

Not far away, the Baviaans River flows strongly through a ravine in the mountains into the valley, passing the stately blue cranes and sheep in the wheatfields to meet up with another strong-flowing river, the Sonderend, where a young Moravian Missionary, Georg Schmidt, arrived in 1737 from Germany to convert the locals to the Christian faith. This was the first ever preaching of the Christian message in this region. In fact, by 1738, Schmidt had gathered a small flock of about 30 pupils and he taught them to read the Bible in Dutch. Not only did he teach religion, but he also introduced them to productivity – and they learnt how to grow crops such as barley, vegetables, nuts and fruit. Schmidt, also through his administrations, managed to have a threshing floor built, as well as an oven for baking bread!

Martin Briggs
FERNGLEN, PORT ELIZABETH

Land that bears my father's footprints as a child

Today, you hit me right between the eyes – with both laughter and tears. Today would have been the birthday of my father, Sybrand Jacobus (Koot) Niemann, who would have turned 93 years old.

He was born at Bultfontein in the Free State, and his father and grandfather had been from Winburg. But my father moved to Vorstershoop in the Kalahari with his parents when he was a toddler.

The Winter 2022 issue of *Platteland* made my heart miss a beat, because there I saw the names Piet Plessis, Bray, Tosca and Vorstershoop on the cover. I paged to the article straightaway and started reading greedily, engrossed by the simplicity that was such an integral part of my father's childhood.

He used to tell us how remote it was. The winters were icy – and they did not have shoes. On their way to school, to warm their bare feet, they would hop from one fresh cowpat to the next.

gereserveer vir dorpstigting.

Foto 55 Laaste bewoners van Piet Plessis (in wit kalkkliphuisie by die dorpswater) voor dorpstigting: David Jacobus Niemann en Meraai (Burger), hulle jongste seun Koot en dogter Esther.

I don't know how old he was when they had to move back to the Free State, or how long they were there before they moved to Pretoria to live with one of his older brothers in Doornrandjies. A family folly had led to them moving to the Kalahari to manage someone's farm, but when they arrived, there was no farm.

Just this morning I was saying to my husband we should take a trip there one day to get a sense of the places that bear my father's footprints as a child.

Herewith a photo of my father as a young boy with his sister and parents. It comes from a book about that region, but sadly I do not know the title of the book or who wrote it. Everyone has passed away already.

Thank you for the excellent articles in *Platteland* about remote *dorpies* that are home to ordinary people – the salt of the earth.

Ria (Niemann) Pieterse
VEREENIGING

A comfort in dark times

It has taken me almost a year to write this email of thanks. In May 2021 I found myself in an unthinkable situation: my 17-year-old daughter had taken an overdose of pills and we had to get her into care at a psychiatric facility in George.

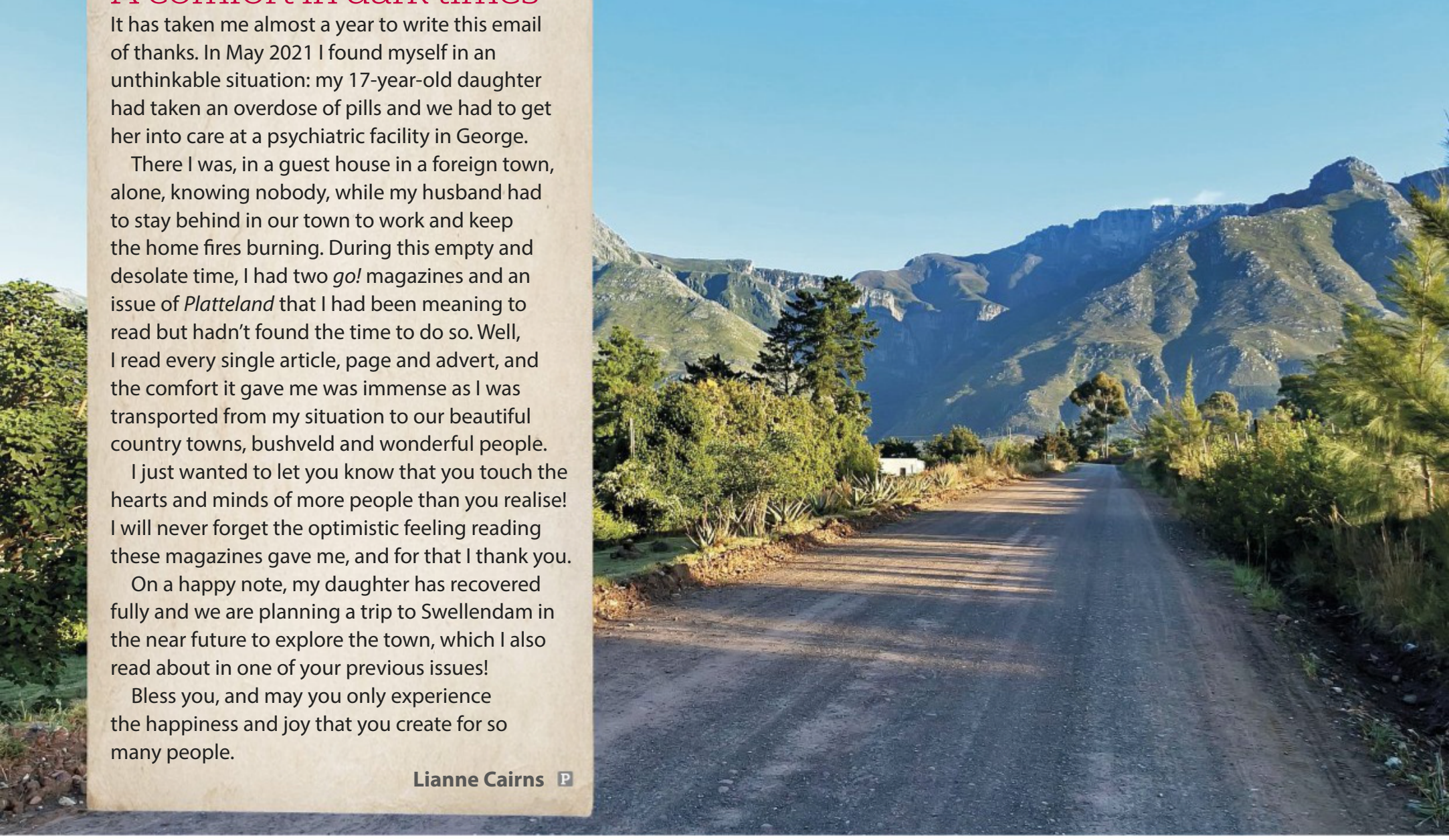
There I was, in a guest house in a foreign town, alone, knowing nobody, while my husband had to stay behind in our town to work and keep the home fires burning. During this empty and desolate time, I had two *go!* magazines and an issue of *Platteland* that I had been meaning to read but hadn't found the time to do so. Well, I read every single article, page and advert, and the comfort it gave me was immense as I was transported from my situation to our beautiful country towns, bushveld and wonderful people.

I just wanted to let you know that you touch the hearts and minds of more people than you realise! I will never forget the optimistic feeling reading these magazines gave me, and for that I thank you.

On a happy note, my daughter has recovered fully and we are planning a trip to Swellendam in the near future to explore the town, which I also read about in one of your previous issues!

Bless you, and may you only experience the happiness and joy that you create for so many people.

Lianne Cairns P



News & diary

There's a bounty of activities on offer to celebrate the arrival of spring, including adrenaline-rush adventures, festivals, markets and courses.

COMPILED BY **ANRI MATTHEE**

History of the soil

We guess most of our readers are familiar with the brand Livingseeds. This impressive heirloom vegetable seed farm outdoes itself every season. The 2022–'23 seed catalogue, introduced in June, showcases the largest variety of seeds yet: more than 1 200 unique varieties, of which more than 200 are brand-new.

"We cultivate more than a thousand varieties on the farm," says Sean Freeman, who owns and runs the business with his wife, Nicola. "We're unique in the world because our closest seed competitor cultivates only about 400 varieties."

When Livingseeds opened the first online shop for heirloom seeds in South Africa in 2009, it offered about 34 varieties. This year, it sells 214 kinds of tomatoes alone.

Sean singles out the bicolour and striped tomatoes, like the Berkeley Tie Dye Green Tomato. "The colours make them stand out, and the taste is really something else!"

What are heirloom seeds?

The terms “heirloom” and “heritage seed” refer to open-pollinated seeds or plants that have been handed down from generation to generation – generally a variety that is no longer available in the commercial seed trade and that has been preserved and kept true in a particular region, according to Organicseed.com. Unlike the vegetables we buy at large supermarkets, vegetables grown from heirloom seeds will have the same features as the original plant harvest after harvest.

“Heirloom seed is our connection with the past, but it’s also our connection with the future,” Sean says. “It enables us to honour our ancestors and where we come from.”

It’s also a reliable way of ensuring successful vegetable harvests.

“Heirloom seeds are open-pollinated varieties. That makes it possible to share the seed with family, friends and neighbours, thereby promoting food security.”

In our society, the use of heirloom seed is an important connection to other cultures. The varieties available from Livingseeds come from countries around the world and offer a much wider variety than the vegetables sold at local supermarkets.

Livingseeds often procures from gardeners rare seeds that were on the brink of extinction. By cultivating them on the farm and making them available to customers, Livingseeds helps to preserve these varieties.

Spring on the farm

“We cultivate vegetables on the farm, but it’s not for consumption,” Sean says. “We grow veggies only for the seed. We allow them to become overripe on the plant, because that’s when you get the highest quality seed.”

Spring starts early at Livingseeds. The team starts planting at the beginning of July: first, various kinds of chilli peppers (superhot, hot and mild), tomatoes and brinjals; then, until mid- to late August, vegetables that are easier to grow, such as cucumber, watermelon and pumpkin.

Sean’s advice

“The best advice I can offer novice gardeners is to start small,” Sean says. “People tend to think gardening with vegetables is easy, and sure, that may be the case in the first few months – until the weather warms up and pests and weeds start invading the garden!

“Spend half an hour a day in your garden. The best fertiliser for your vegetable patch is your footprint.”

As you learn more and become familiar with plants, you can introduce more varieties.

“Start small and expand every year as you gain more knowledge. I’ve been gardening for most of my life, and I still learn something new every week.”

Join the Livingseeds Facebook page and subscribe to their newsletter to keep abreast of developments in the world of heirloom seeds. And if you’re in the area, the farm at Henley-on-Klip in Gauteng is well worth a visit. You’ll pick up numerous gardening tips, so take a pen and a notepad with you.

Contact livingseeds.co.za
016 100 0824 or 082 819 0641 (WhatsApp only) living_seeds
Livingseeds

Also read our article on kitchen gardens on page 116. >

Celebrate spring – a time of rebirth

It's hard work, planting, pruning, fertilising, watering and weeding in your garden throughout the year. So, on National Garden Day, take time off to enjoy the fruits of your labour or to share the beauty of it with others. It doesn't matter whether yours consists of a few potted geraniums on your balcony or it's the neighbourhood's prize-winning garden – celebrate it on 9 October. The organisers of this movement suggest enjoying an early-morning cup of rooibos tea and rusks in your garden, hosting a picnic where you exchange plants and cuttings with friends, or organising an evening get-together under a tree decorated with lights.

Contact gardenday.co.za

Tokara's liquid gold

A salad of freshly picked lettuce leaves and herbs really only needs one thing: an exceptional olive oil. And there's none better than the Tokara Premium Extra Virgin Olive Oil, a blend of mainly Coratina and Frantoio olive oils. It recently won gold at the first Amsterdam International Olive Oil Competition, hosted by the Stichting Olijfolie Nederland. As part of the recognition for winning this prestigious award, the Tokara Premium will be exhibited at several Dutch trade fairs this year. This oil was also a gold winner at the 2021 SA Olive Awards.

Contact tokara.com winelounge@tokara.com
021 808 5900 tokarawine Tokara Wines

Win Three readers will each win a bottle of Tokara Estate Premium Extra Virgin Olive Oil valued at R135. Go to platteland.net, click on "English" and "Win", and enter the keyword phrase "Spring Tokara". The closing date is 30 November 2022.

Venture into the great outdoors with Mama's food

Imagine going backpacking and eating flavourful, wholesome dishes such as mushroom barley risotto, Moroccan butternut tagine and Central African peanut stew instead of instant noodles or tuna out of a tin.

Pack your choice of dehydrated single-portion meals from Mama Alles and enjoy these dishes in the middle of nowhere. They are healthful and full of flavour, not to mention lightweight – just the thing for your next outdoor adventure.

Here's more from Mama Alles founder Catherine Cartwright:

How did Mama Alles come about?
I started in late 2021 in my kitchen in Cape Town. I enjoy overnight hikes, but the thought of processed food such as instant noodles and long-life cheese spread on biscuits was just so off-putting. Before we went on a week-long hike in the Fish River Canyon, a friend of mine dehydrated healthy meals in her oven. It was delicious, and the food had more than enough nutrients to sustain us – without any of the stomach cramps you tend to get from traditional hiking food! It took me two years to start the business, but that was the inspiration behind it.

How did you choose the name?
I attended a wedding where the MC referred to nature as "Mama Alles" (Mother of Everything). It makes you nostalgic for the food parcel your mom used to pack before you set off on an adventure, but it's also a reminder to care for the environment. We want to encourage people to go out and enjoy nature.

Tell us more about the meals.
To us, it's about enjoying beautiful food in beautiful places. Our meals are made with local ingredients and contain everything you need to sustain you on your trip.

The focus seems to be on local organic ingredients…
We want to support small-scale local farmers and suppliers, thereby boosting the local food network. We are also environmentally conscious. Although South Africa protects wildlife habitats and establishes national parks, most people are buying cheap, industrially grown vegetables. It just doesn't make sense. And we keep our prices competitive – good food doesn't have to cost more.

What's the greatest misconception about hiking food?
That it's expensive. There are commercial brands that freeze-dry their foods, and that doubles the cost. Our products are dehydrated, have a shelf-life of one year, and cost half as much. If you add up the costs of all the components of one of our hiking foods, a delicious, healthy meal costs you R72. All you need to add is boiling water.

Contact mamaalles.com 072 601 1013
mama_alles Mama Alles >

PHOTOS JEANEME KUHN, NARDUS BOSMAN AND SUPPLIED

Pawsome accessories!

Benji + Moon's new range of leather dog collars – with matching leads – have a trim in red, yellow, turquoise, pink, forest green or aubergine purple.

Pet accessory brand Benji + Moon offers a wide variety of quality products for pets. Its latest range, Season 22, includes black leather collars and leads for both dogs and cats, and each item is finished in contrasting stitching in one of six colours. The cat collars are fitted with a security snap buckle that will open should the collar catch on something. The range is available in several sizes, but for a limited time only.

All Benji + Moon products are made by hand, which means the retailer creates opportunities for skilled local craftspeople and artists. Also, 5% of the sale of each product is donated to CLAW, a community animal welfare organisation. Your money helps cover vet expenses for disadvantaged pet owners, and gives abandoned and stray cats and dogs a second chance by helping the organisation to care for and rehome these animals.

A date with destiny

Benji + Moon regularly hosts Date-a-Dog events where prospective pet owners can meet dogs rescued by CLAW. If the first date goes well, you can start the process to adopt your new furry friend. Benji + Moon has helped 105 dogs (and nine cats) find a new home so far. The 17th Date-a-Dog event takes place on 24 and 25 September from 09:00 to 15:00. Why not pop in? You might just meet your new best buddy.

Where? Linden Market in Johannesburg
Contact benjiand moon.co.za
info@benjiandmoon.co.za
benjiandmoon Benji Moon

Dates to diarise

WESTERN CAPE

Nampo Cape 2022

BREDASDORP
14–17 September

This well-known agricultural expo, a collaboration between Grain SA and Bredasdorp Park, is not to be missed! It's not only a marketplace and information hub but also a networking opportunity and a gathering place for everyone who takes an interest in agriculture.

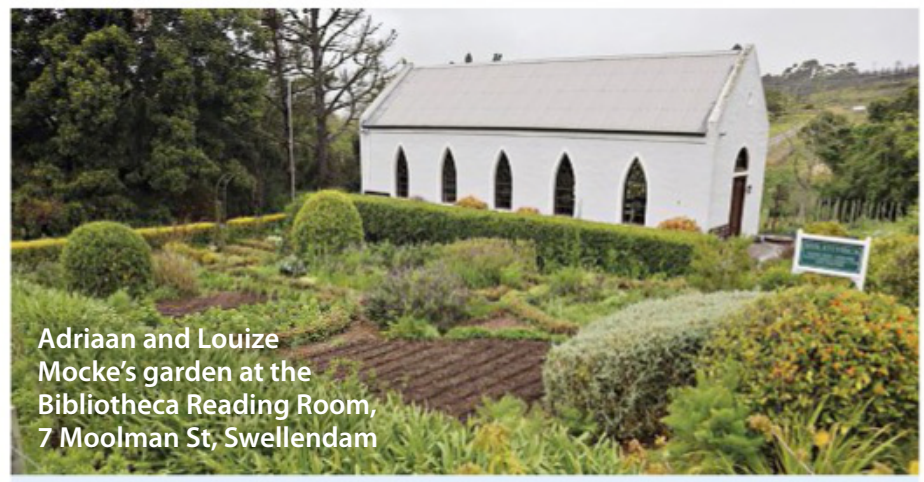
Tickets R80 per adult and R40 per learner from TicketPro
Contact expo.org.za
admin@expo.org.za
028 050 1385 or 072 905 5111

Succulent Festival

CALITZDORP
16–18 September

The Calitzdorp Succulent Society's annual festival is the perfect excuse for a trip to the Little Karoo. See endemic succulents in their natural habitat and a wide range of other species, and get tips on maintaining your own succulent garden. Species that you're unlikely to find at your local nursery will be for sale.

Entry Free
Contact vetplant.co.za
info@vetplant.co.za
Calitzdorp Succulent Society



Adriaan and Louize Mocke's garden at the Bibliotheca Reading Room, 7 Moolman St, Swellendam

WESTERN CAPE

Swellendam Garden Expo

SWELLENDAM
4–6 November

The local green-fingered brigade is pulling out all the stops for the town's very first garden expo. Eighteen gardens in and around the town will be open to the public, plus there will be a gardener's market where visitors will be able to enjoy refreshments and listen to talks about topics such as aromatherapy, garden design and cooking with herbs. There will be a competition for children and school groups to build the best-looking scarecrow. The largest portion of the expo's income will be donated to local branches of the SPCA.

Entry R200 per person for the two days; R120 per person for one day tickets to the talks are priced between R30 to R80, with some only requesting a donation
Contact swellendamgardenexpo@gmail.com
083 560 1998 swellendam_garden_expo
Swellendam Garden Expo

Muse Festival

GREAT BRAK RIVER
23–24 September

This festival celebrates the fine arts in all its forms. It features exhibitions and talks on textiles, pottery, wedding dresses, model ships, wood sculpture, bonsai, drone photography, epoxy resin art and more. And don't miss the book discussions, including three local writers' insights into poetry, as well as a memoir writer who decided to walk the Portuguese Camino at the age of 60.

Contact 082 738 8011 (Laurinda) or 082 331 1434 (Annlerie)

Herb Festival

MONTAGU
23–25 September

This celebration of heritage is hosted at the Montagu Museum in Long Street. The programme includes hikes, workshops,

demonstrations and cooking events, and several experts will share their knowledge of the medicinal value of herbs. This is the ideal opportunity to learn more about the area and discover indigenous traditions and history.
Contact mherbfest@gmail.com 082 411 0562
Herb Festival

Whale Festival
HERMANUS
30 September – 2 October
Don't miss the chance to attend the country's only eco-marine festival, held every year to celebrate the return of the southern right whales to their breeding grounds off the coast of Southern Africa. This year the Whale Festival celebrates its 30th anniversary. There'll be food stalls and an antique car show, as well as live music, sevens rugby, a treasure hunt and an interactive marine exhibition.
Contact hermanuswhalefestival.co.za festival@hermanuswhalefestival.co.za
066 478 0081
Hermanus Whale Festival

Wine and Sweet Potato Festival
NAPIER
1 October
The small Overberg town of Napier is jam-packed with a variety of restaurants, which join in this celebration of spring by being open all day. The characteristic snoek and sweet potato stalls are always a hit too. This year's programme includes live music, markets, outdoor events, art exhibitions and the popular scarecrow fun run.
Contact napierwinepatatfees.co.za napierpatatfees@gmail.com 082 596 5681
napierwinepatatfees

EASTERN CAPE

Loerie Nartjiefees
LOERIE
8 October
After a two-year pandemic-induced absence, what's known as "the Eastern Cape's best family festival" returns. Visitors can look forward to entertainment by top local artists, a variety of stalls and, of course, the ever-popular naartjie-eating contest.
Tickets R150 per adult and R90 per learner; babies and toddlers free of charge
Contact ngkerkloerie@lantic.net loerienartjiefees
Nartjiefees

Permaculture Design Course
EAST LONDON
10–22 October
This course will equip you with the necessary theoretical knowledge and practical skills to design, implement and maintain natural systems in your garden and home. Well-known Australian permaculture researcher and consultant Geoff Lawton will visit South Africa for the first time to present several shorter courses over 12 days.
Contact Permaculture Institute for Southern Africa
info@pisa.africa
permaculture_institute
Permaculture Institute for Southern Africa

WESTERN CAPE

Melkbos Festival Market
MELKBOSSTRAND
30 September – 8 October
This festival market, an annual event on the Melkbos calendar, is held at the Dutch Reformed church in 11th Avenue. The stalls offer everything from delicious home-made goodies and braai tools to children's toys, decor items, jewellery and stationery. In between shopping your heart out, take a breather with a cup of coffee and a pancake or authentic bazaar pudding.
Contact 082 552 0301 (Juanita) Melkbos Feesmark

Hogsback Spring Festival
HOGSBACK
20 October – 13 November (Thursdays to Sundays)
Visit Hogsback for its fabulous open gardens that celebrate spring in all its glory. Turn to Garden Diary on page 110 for more details.

Bedford Country Gardens
BEDFORD
21–23 October & 4–6 November
With 16 years' experience, the people of Bedford are old hands at organising a garden festival. The event offers visitors the opportunity to admire beautiful gardens in and around town, and to exchange gardening tips, buy plants, enjoy fresh food and drinks, and gain inspiration.
Contact bedfordgardenfestival@gmail.com
Bedford Garden Festival

NORTHERN CAPE

Namaqualand Flower Festival
VANRHYNSDORP
2–4 September
The Namaqualand Flower Festival, now in its 15th year, invites nature lovers to drink in the quiet beauty of Namaqualand in full bloom. Gifberg Holiday Farm – a "five-billion-star hotel" – offers camping facilities aplenty. Spend the weekend under the stars while enjoying dancing, music, swimming, stargazing, jogging, outdoor yoga and >

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED, MONTAGU ASHTON TOURISM, JUANITA VAN ZYL, JORDAN MILTON PHOTOGRAPHY & WIZARD HARRY

more. The #Namfest slogan is, after all, "Bring your vibe and flavour to the flowers!"
Tickets R500 per person from Quicket
Contact experiences@nodanger.org 082 409 8212
namaqualandflowerfestival
Namaqua Flower Fest

Kalahari Kuierfees

UPINGTON
29 September – 1 October
After a two-year hibernation, Graatjie, the festival's mascot meerkat, is back with a bumper festival. The organisers are giving their all this year. Visitors can look forward to entertainment, children's activities, a variety of stalls and an excellent sports programme.
Contact kalaharikuierfees.co.za kalahari1@kuierfees.co.za Kalahari Kuierfees

Bull Run

VANWYKSVLEI
6–8 October
Action, adrenaline and dust – none of these will be in short supply at the annual South African Bull Run. Those who aren't up to getting behind the steering wheel can still look forward to an enjoyable weekend at the campsite and watching the action from the sidelines. This year's ticket price also includes a music concert on the Friday.
Tickets R1 500 per person for spectators, from Quicket
Contact gerrie@dustmedia.co.za Weg Ry & Sleep Bull Run

KWAZULU-NATAL

Hilton Arts Festival

HILTON
23–25 September
Now in its 30th year, the Hilton Arts Festival once more delivers three days packed with theatre, music and art. There's a crowdfunding campaign on BackaBuddy, Hope For Hilton Festival, to raise funds to help ensure the festival's future.
Contact hiltonfestival.co.za
admin@hiltonfestival.co.za
082 469 7222
hiltonartsfest
Hilton Arts Festival

Winterton Street Festival

WINTERTON
5 November
The day on which the town's main street is closed to vehicles from 08:00 to 17:00 is back in full swing. Enjoy the KZN outdoors with live music, stalls, delicious food, art, children's entertainment, vintage cars and Harley-Davidsons.
Entry Free
Contact 084 567 8802

KWAZULU-NATAL

Street Food Festival

DURBAN
23–25 September
Visit the Pavilion Shopping Centre in Westville for a three-day celebration of food, music, wine and community. Durban is a cultural melting pot, and this event will showcase all the colour and flavour of both international and uniquely South African culinary offerings.
Tickets R80 per person from Quicket
Contact durbanstreetfoodfestival@gmail.com
064 809 2066 (Georgios) durbanstreetfoodfestival
DurbanStreetfood Festival

FREE STATE

Nampo Alfa

BOTHAVILLE
29 September – 1 October
This agricultural expo, featuring livestock and everything outdoors, returns to Nampo Park. Hunters and marksmen can safely test new firearms on the premises, and 4x4 enthusiasts will get the chance to test-drive the latest vehicle models on a special track.
Contact imele@agriconnect.co.za 082 562 2188
Nampo Alfa

Aardklop

30 September – 2 October (Potchefstroom); 30 September – 9 October (Pretoria); 6–9 October (Linden)
This year, the iconic Afrikaans arts festival takes place in the form of three pop-up festivals in different locations, thereby bringing the arts to a wider audience. As always, the programme is jam-packed with music, theatre and arts. Check out the website for the festival programme and get your tickets now!
Contact aardklop.co.za
navrae@aardklop.co.za
087 527 0023
aardklopkunstefees Aardklop

NEWS ON MARKETS AND EVENTS

Let us know via email or on our Facebook page of events happening in your area between 1 December 2022 and 28 February 2023. The deadline for inclusion in the Summer 2022/23 issue is 14 October 2023.
helloplatteland@gmail.com Platteland

FAIRLADY *Smart Women*

WELCOME TO
7 STEPS TO YOUR START-UP

7 Steps to Your Start-Up is the online business course you need! Designed specifically for FAIRLADY SmartWomen by successful entrepreneurs Dawn Nathan-Jones and Lesley Waterkeyn, it's a high-impact online programme created for start-ups and small businesses. As entrepreneurs themselves, they know exactly what you need to get you where you want to go. Using the colours of the rainbow, 7 Steps to Your Start-Up cleverly combines proven business strategies with a practical process that gives you a clear blueprint for taking your good idea and transforming it into a good business. 7 Steps uses both video and workbooks so you can absorb the excellent content in the optimal way for you.

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Getty/Gallo Images

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Hand-painted ceramic plates
by Eve Art (28 cm in diameter) **R395 each**
Lucky Fitsch lucky_fitsch 083 775 7344
Eve Art eveartstudio.co.za

Darling Sweet gift box
with 10 x 30 g toffee bars
in different flavours **R169**
Darling Sweet evitaseperron.com/shop

Ancho metal watering can R390
Holt holt.co.za

LMC Lemon, Chamomile and Lavender Rooibos and **LMC Pure Rooibos**
(20 teabags each) **R47 each**
Carmien Citrus Chai Rooibos Gin
with 43% alcohol (500 ml) **R390**
Lize Mouton Collection
lizemoutoncollection.com

Let's go to town

We went shopping for original, organic and handmade items in Citrusdal, Darling, Durbanville, Koringberg, Lakeside, Paarl, Pretoria, Prieska, Randburg, Somerset West, Vredendal, Wellington and Woodstock.

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

Bread Emporium Sourdough Bread Making Kit with a sourdough starter, a proving basket, a scoring tool, a dough scraper, a dough divider, a basket brush and a recipe **R1 100**
Baard & Co. baardandco.com baardandco

Original Baard Blend 100% Arabica coffee beans (250 g–1 kg) R110–R350
Ceramic cups by Therle Chaston **R290 each**
Baard & Co. baardandco.com baardandco

Jug with floral motif **R595**
Lucky Fitsch lucky_fitsch 083 775 7344

Handmade cat doorstopper R180
New England Design newed.co.za >

PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF GOING TO PRESS, BUT SUBJECT TO CHANGE. PRICES OF ONLINE MERCHANDISE MAY VARY DEPENDING ON DELIVERY CHARGES

Fleur de Sel Sea Salt (100 g) R49
Extra Virgin Cold Extracted Olive Oil (250 ml) R100
Black Olives (345 g) R79
Oak Matured Balsamic Vinegar (250 ml) R89
Namaqua Olives ↖ namaolives.co.za

Pak choi heirloom seed that has not been genetically modified R30
Six Degrees East ↖ 6degreeseast.co.za

Swartland Kitchen Ginger Biscuits, **Soet Koekies** and **Vla Koekies** (200 g each) R48 each
Evita se Perron ↖ evitaseperron.com/shop

Cotton scatter cushion covers with Pink Pot design (60 cm x 60 cm) and with Cactus Pots on a Table Cloth design (60 cm x 38 cm) **R600 each**, both painted by Pippa Lea Pennington
Oona.G ↖ oonagenterprises.com

Tannie Evita Bezuidenhout Orange & Rosemary Cordial and **Lemon & Ginger Cordial** (500 ml) R80 each
Evita se Perron ↖ evitaseperron.com/shop
Carafe R270 and **tumbler** R30
Mr Price Home ↖ mrphome.com

Die Verlore Bokooi 2020 (blend of Merlot, Petit Verdot, Shiraz, Tannat and Cabernet Sauvignon)
Die Wonderdraai 2021 (blend of Colombard, Chenin Blanc and Viognier)
R150 per bottle
Lowerland ↖ lowerland.co.za

Personalised Bark Box with selected dog treats, pet shampoo, a pet toy, and a feeding bowl with your pet's name on it **from R300**
Salt Events ↖ saltandco.co.za

Respana six-piece garden tool set R270
Holt ↖ holt.co.za

Safari Days collection with bergamot, sage, patchouli and cedarwood, clockwise from left, **Luxury Lotion** (200 ml) R215, **Room & Linen Fragrance** (100 ml) R295, **Liquid Soap** (200 ml) R215 and **Natural Hand Cream** (75 ml) R95
Cape Island ↖ capeisland.co.za

Hydration bottles made of 18/8 stainless steel with double-wall vacuum insulation that keep liquids cold for up to 24 hours or hot for up to 12 hours (500 ml) **R599 each**
Le Creuset lecreuset.co.za

Skin Creamery sample set
with seven vegan-friendly mini skin-care products and a hemp purse **R230**
Hemp face cloth (27 cm x 51 cm) and a bag **R180**
Three reusable cleansing pads made of hemp and cotton (8 cm in diameter) and a pouch **R110**
Skin Creamery skincreamery.co.za

Biltong Infused Salt Flakes and **Beetroot and Fig Infused Salt Flakes** (80 g each) **R65 each**
Funky Ouma funky-ouma.co.za

Dish-washing brush R100
Scrub brush R40
Dustpan and brush set R190
Holt holt.co.za

Sourdough bread made of stone-ground flour, clockwise from left, Bunny with purple sweet potato (550 g) **R120**, Thandi with activated charcoal (1,1 kg) **R150** and Lady in White (1,1 kg) **R150**
Baard & Co. baardandco.com baardandco
Utility towel (55 cm x 80 cm) **R320**
Mungo mungo.co.za

Grey Karoo gourd R750 and **green nesting bowls** from R260 each made of hand-felted karakul wool
Chic Fusion chicfusion.co.za

Bytjie Salf natural skin-care products, clockwise from bottom left, **Go Go Mosquito** (125 ml) **R147**, **Eczema Balm** (125 ml) **R220**, **Handmade Soaps** R65 each and **Skin Repair Balm** R84
Bytjie Salf bytjie.com

Beard oil R252
Baard & Co. baardandco.com baardandco

Multipurpose Increda-Peg pegs
for hanging the laundry, organising computer cables, supporting plants and more
(120 pegs and drawstring bag) **R255**
Increda-Peg incredapeg.co.za

Protea Street is the only public access road into Vanderkloof. As you wind your way through the koppies, you're always aware of the dam as sections of water sparkle in the distance.

Get away from it all in Vanderkloof

Lying among koppies on the shore of South Africa's second-largest dam is Vanderkloof, an oasis in the Upper Karoo. There seems to be consensus that you won't find a town anywhere else in the country as peaceful and safe as this one.

TEXT AND PHOTOS **MIA LOUW**

As you approach the Vanderkloof Dam from the north – from Bloemfontein via Koffiefontein and Luckhoff – the road forks about 1,6 km before the dam wall. Keep right and you will cross the Orange River via a bridge that offers a view of the dam wall downstream. Bear left and you will travel over the highest dam wall in the country and cross the provincial border between the Free State and the Northern Cape.

The Vanderkloof Dam overflowed from early summer last year until late autumn this year – the sight of such a large mass of water in this dry landscape catches you completely by surprise. It's an oasis in the Upper Karoo landscape characterised by mountains that shield you from the outside world.

There's a large circle at the entrance to the town decorated with a flower formed with stones that are painted red and yellow. Bennie Liebenberg started the project shortly after his wife, Thirza, died of cancer in 2017. It was her idea to have a daisy or sunflower in the centre of the circle. "She had a vision that the desert would bloom again. Things will once again go well for our people – the town and the country," Bennie says. The vegetation in this normally arid landscape is indeed blooming, particularly since 827 mm fell here during the recent rainy season – from October 2021 to the end of June this year. (In December alone, they measured 193 mm of rain!)

Bennie plans to transform the 96 m^2 flower into a sundial and market it as a tourist attraction. "It will be the biggest sundial in the country – Hankey in the Eastern Cape currently has the largest one," he says.

Bennie has been living in Vanderkloof since 2014 and, like many other residents, earns his bread and butter from tourism. He owns and >

ABOVE On the way to Vanderkloof you can drive over the dam wall. It is 765 m long and 107 m high – it's the highest dam wall in the country.
OPPOSITE, TOP The traffic circle at the entrance to the town features a giant flower that Bennie Liebenberg and his team formed with stones.
OPPOSITE, BELOW Bennie has installed solar panels and wind turbines at his home and at his Hemel op Aarde self-catering chalets.

OPPOSITE Liza Bredenkamp, the owner of Sandgat, says the caravan park is regularly fully booked and bursting at the seams. They recently added another camping section, called Rivierpark.
LEFT An African fish-eagle sits on a perch, looking for fish to catch. Smallmouth and large-mouth yellowfish, carp, barbel and mudfish also attract anglers to the water.
BELOW Construction on the arch dam wall in the Orange River started in 1971, and the work was completed in 1977. The reservoir is a popular recreational area.

manages seven self-catering chalets at Hemel op Aarde, high against the koppies with views over the dam.

The town was a popular holiday destination in the 1990s, until the Vanderkloof Holiday Resort went to ruin as a result of municipal mis-management. Fortunately there are several similar attractions nearby, such as Sandgat, a camping and recreation resort on the banks of the Orange River.

"The roads that lead here are our greatest challenge," says Liza Bredenkamp, the owner of Sandgat. "The potholes in the road from Bloem-fontein to Koffiefontein and Luckhoff put moon craters to shame. Guests often prefer to drive the extra 157 km via Kimberley, Hopetown and Orania."

But the peace and quiet make the detour worthwhile. The locals cannot stop talking about how safe the town is. Many ascribe it to the low population density in the Northern Cape.

"THE TOWN SPRANG UP in the 1970s when the dam was built and the workers needed accommodation," Bennie says.

He mentions the fact that author Deon Meyer set his 2016 novel *Fever* in Vanderkloof: a utopian settlement named Amanzi is founded in a post-apocalyptic South Africa after more than 90% of the population has succumbed to a virus. >

In reality, Vanderkloof is not exactly a utopia. Residents become hot under the collar when they discuss the shortcomings of the Renosterberg Local Municipality. Because it owes Eskom almost R100 million, at the time of *Platteland*'s visit the town was experiencing additional planned power outages on top of regular load shedding as Eskom throttled back the power as "punishment". Vanderkloof is also burdened with poor service delivery, which has an impact on the water and sanitation infrastructure, and unpaid municipal wages.

"The municipality should have applied for a larger power facility at some stage, but that never happened," says Abrie Coetzee, chief artisan at the Department of Water and Sanitation. "Eskom has said that it cannot switch off the power completely because some residents are paying whereas others aren't. Now we have a limited amount of power. Also, no one consulted Eskom before expansion was undertaken… The water treatment plant, for example, was upgraded between 2008 and 2011, and there are now more than enough large pumps but not enough power to run them."

Abrie says there are no staff available to work at night, because the municipality is not paying its workers. "To ensure that water is not wasted, it is turned off at night and not pumped into the reservoir. If there's no water in the pipes, there's no water pressure."

The dam, built between 1971 and 1977, has a surface area of 133,43 km^2 and a capacity of about 3 200 million cubic metres.

"When the dam was completed, Water Affairs had to move on to the next project. A delegation from the local farming community then went to parliament to ask whether the houses that were meant to be dismantled and moved couldn't be left behind for future development. Vanderkloof is one of the youngest towns in South Africa – I think it was registered in 1988."

Abrie is enthusiastic about showing off the inner workings of the dam, how the sluices and the pump station operate, and how Eskom generates electricity at the hydroelectric power >

Abrie Coetzee, chief artisan at the Department of Water and Sanitation, at the Vanderkloof Dam, which was still overflowing in May. "In December alone we had 193 mm of rain!" he says.

Meet the people

Frikkie van Zyl, Minnie van Zyl and Marnus Bredenkamp

Stoney Rapids Lodge

"I've always said I couldn't live in a place that's flat; I need water and mountains," says Marnus Bredenkamp. In 2016, he took over the Stoney Rapids Lodge on the Bredenkamp family farm after completing his training as a chef in the Western Cape. His aunt, Liza Bredenkamp, owns Sandgat, the caravan park next to the hunting lodge.

Apart from the game in two hunting camps, they also farm with maize, lucerne and wheat. Marnus and Frikkie have been friends since they were young boys. Frikkie rents accommodation on the farm and his mother, Minnie, helps with the catering at the lodge.

Stoney Rapids has a large variety of exotic game, including mountain sheep and lechwe, as well as a wealth of animals that occur here naturally. They have seen bat-eared foxes, silver-backed foxes and black-backed jackals in the area. "We sometimes even spot leopard tracks. Servals, African wildcats, Cape genets and the small black-footed cat all occur here – but they are very rare," Marnus says.

The lodge hosts a market day every second month, with stalls spread out under the pecan trees along the river. "It's a nice way to attract people, and with every market we grow by two or three stalls. We now have about 30," Frikkie says.

Minnie says spring and autumn are the most beautiful times of the year in Vanderkloof. In winter, she says, the temperature can easily drop to -7°C.

Karen Compion and Anna Cook

Slobs 'n Snobs

Walk into Slobs 'n Snobs and you'll see stray cats prowling among the clothing and books. Owner Karen Compion and her friend Anna Cook leave food out for the cats and watch them while they sit outside crocheting. Karen and Anna both moved here with their husbands last year. In December, Karen opened the shop, where she sells preserves, handmade soaps, gifts, clothes (for humans and dogs), jewellery, toys and coffee, milkshakes and jaffles.

"We try to offer something the cafés don't sell," she says. "There isn't a lot of foot traffic in town, so you can't bake a cake… You'll have to eat it all by yourself! But we do sell biscuits."

Because the town library is closed owing to a municipal strike, Karen and Anna decided to start a book exchange at the shop. They are well supported by the residents and are making friends in the process. Locals often pop in so that Karen and Anna can help them with their knitting or crocheting, or simply for a coffee.

Although there are lots of politics in small towns like Vanderkloof, especially where the churches are concerned, Karen says, they love living here. "There's always something to laugh about."

Willem Masala and Johannes Mrabe

Security guards at Water Affairs

A man rides a bicycle across the dam wall. In the middle, right on the border between the Free State and Northern Cape, he waves with one hand. This is Willem Masala, a security guard who watches over the dam wall and Water Affairs offices. He and Johannes Mrabe live 22 km away in Petrusville, where Johannes was born. Willem originally comes from Athlone in the Western Cape and moved here for work. His wife and children live in Bloemfontein.

"All Johannesburgers like this place," Willem says. "They like the fresh air, the freedom and the friendly people. The crime rate is also very low. You can walk everywhere and even sleep outside in summer, but the Northern Cape winters are very cold."

The dam has been overflowing for six months. "This is the first time in many years that the area has been this green," Johannes says. "It used to be the grey-brown colour of Karoo bushes, but we've had good rains. It's amazing."

Meet the people

Louise de Klerk

Artist

"We've lived in Vanderkloof for five years," Louise says, referring to herself and her son, Guillaume. They moved here to the Northern Cape from Parys after an armed robbery prompted them to look for a safer place to live.

"It's very peaceful here. Visitors often wonder whether we have any dogs in town because you almost never hear dogs bark. We do, it's just that there are so few strangers to bark at."

Louise is a fine artist who works primarily in oil. Her paintings have been exhibited at and sold through several art galleries in South Africa for the past 30 years. She also undertakes commissions and couriers her paintings to buyers.

There aren't many job opportunities in Vanderkloof, she says. So if you want to settle here, it's good to have a job you can do from home, like painting. "You have to keep yourself busy."

Mervin Tieties and Vernon Kammies

General workers

Mervin and Vernon were working at the traffic circle at the entrance to town, painting stones that form the flower at its centre, when we chatted to them.

"I was born in Keurtjiekloof at house number 30," Mervin says, "and I've lived here for 41 years." His father worked on the team that built the dam wall in the 1970s. The dam is the town's greatest resource, he says. "If you don't have work, you come down to the water to catch yellowfish, sandfish, carp or barbel to eat."

Vernon, also born and bred here, describes Vanderkloof as a great place to retire to. "It's safe; you can leave your house unlocked when you go for a walk. There aren't many naughty people here."

Chantelle and Liza Bredenkamp

Sandgat Caravan Park and Resort

"When you say the word 'Sandgat' in Bloemfontein, everyone knows what you're talking about," says Liza Bredenkamp, who has lived here for 30 years. "The feedback from campers is positive, for which I'm grateful, because it's not luxurious. When people phone to say they want to get married here, I tell them to first come and have a look at the place, because it's rustic."

Sandgat has been in business for 14 years, but it's only in the past seven years that it's been bursting at the seams. "There used to be nothing here except paths among the reeds. We used to come down to the river to swim. We called it the '*sandgat*' because there's a sand bank that's exposed when the river is low."

Liza often organises music performances at Sandgat, and the entertainment hall is available for events. "I always wanted to run an entertainment space. On the day we built it, my mother said I was making more work for myself! She was right: the hall keeps us busy!"

A fish-eagle calls from the opposite side of the river as Liza's daughter, Chantelle, sits on a camping stool in the sun and takes care of some admin. She studied beauty therapy in Stellenbosch and then spent four years working on ships and private yachts. She returned home last year to help her mom with the business.

Sandgat has 50 stands and 22 caravans for hire. Recently, the Bredenkamps opened the new Rivierpark, with 34 stands, self-catering accommodation and a swimming pool overlooking the river.

station. At a discharge of 400 m³ per second, the water can produce 240 MW with two generators. “This is one of our most beautiful dams, something to be proud of. Gariep was our first large dam, and many international engineers were involved there, but this one was designed and built exclusively by South Africans.”

When Abrie arrived in Vanderkloof, there was a tiny primary school in town, “where you’ll find the municipal offices today”, but it closed in 1992. A school bus used to pick up the kids on the dam wall to transport them to school in Koffiefontein, but these days a bus transports learners to Orania, 48 km away, which is also one of the nearest towns with a doctor and bigger shops.

THERE IS ACTUALLY a school closer to Vanderkloof – 3,3 km up into the koppies, in the suburb of Keurtjiekloof. Chantelle Coetzee is the school principal. She regards the distance to other schools as a challenge for the future. She’d think twice before one day enrolling her own children at Keurtjiekloof, she says, because not only will they be the principal’s children but they’ll also stand out as the only white learners in the school. “Orania is the nearest option, but I’m not keen on the idea. Jacobsdal is the other option, which is 130 km away. Or De Aar, 123 km away. These are good schools, but how do you send a Grade 1 child to a hostel?”

Chantelle and her husband, Rulov, moved to Vanderkloof in 2018 from Florida, Gauteng. “My parents-in-law had a holiday house here for many years, which is where we would spend school holidays.” Rulov’s parents have lived here permanently for five years, and they plan to retire soon. Rulov made the move initially so he could help out with the family business, >

ABOVE Keurtjiekloof is situated in a beautiful setting against the koppies overlooking the Vanderkloof Dam, but this neighbourhood has its challenges, like poverty in the community and an unsightly rubbish dump.
TOP Juanita Jacobs and Chantelle Coetzee, teacher and principal respectively at Keurtjiekloof Primary School, say smaller classes at this school with its 123 learners allow them to give the kids individual attention.

Oppiedek Braai Restaurant.

Chantelle first taught at a school in Luckhoff and later transferred to Keurtjiekloof, where she was appointed as principal in 2020.

"A great advantage of living here is the peace and the low crime rate, especially for people like me who come from Johannesburg," Chantelle says. "I can go for a late-afternoon walk with the dogs on my own."

Juanita Jacobs is a teacher at Keurtjiekloof. She was born and grew up here, but completed high school in Petrusville and De Aar. She studied teaching and then worked at a crèche, among other places, before starting to teach at Keurtjiekloof in 2020.

"It's a huge responsibility to be a Grade R teacher, because I am the one who lays the foundation," she says. "When a child comes from a disadvantaged background, you have to take him from the street to the school desk. You need a holistic approach: you have to teach him everything."

In a poor community where alcohol and drug abuse is a major problem, teachers cannot focus on the curriculum alone. "You're a teacher, mother, father, grandmother, grand-

Robert Nicol has been coming to Vanderkloof since 2009 for the excellent fly-fishing.
TOP When you approach the Vanderkloof Dam from the north, keep right at the fork about 1,6 km before the dam wall and the road will take you over a bridge across the Orange River.

father, doctor and police officer," Chantelle says. It's also hard for children to have dreams beyond the boundaries of Keurtjiekloof.

AS YOU DRIVE DOWN from Keurtjiekloof to the dam, you see the contours of the water surface among the koppies. You can take a boat nearly 100 km up in the direction of Gariep, says Robert Nicol. But he warns that it's easy to get lost if you don't know the dam and the tributaries.

"I have been coming here since 2009 for the fantastic fly-fishing experience."

Largemouth and smallmouth yellowfish, carp, barbel and mudfish attract anglers from all over.

"I realised there weren't many guest houses geared to anglers or a large group of holidaymakers."

Robert now owns the self-catering House on Suikerbossie. He says when you look up from the outside shower on a dark night, the stars are as bright as lights.

Robert first got to know the town when he worked in the wine industry and once spent a hunting weekend in the Karoo with a client. They wanted to watch a rugby match between South Africa and New Zealand, and Vanderkloof was the nearest town with a TV.

The property market is looking good, Robert says: city dwellers have been snapping up houses and vacant land over the past five years. "I often see new faces. People are renovating their homes and looking after the town. Small towns struggle with municipalities that collapse faster than they do in the cities, but because the town is small, it's easier for residents to have a handle on problems, for example, by repairing potholes themselves and fulfilling other functions with the help of the ratepayers' association."

Every second month, Robert commutes to his other home in Centurion for a week or so, but he admits he finds it harder and harder to travel over the dam wall. "I always wanted a house in the Karoo – then I bought this place. "Ten to one I'll retire here. The more time I spend in Vanderkloof, the more I want to stay." P

Visitor information

Shop and play

Karoo Kontrei Winkel
One of the three cafés on the main street, Karoo Kontrei Winkel stands out thanks to its facade decorated with reflective mosaic tiles – it's known as the "mirror shop". Do try one of the venison pies (R24).

Adventure Kayaking
Do a kayaking trip on either the Orange River or the Vanderkloof Dam with Adventure Kayaking, which offers one-day, three-day and four-day trips. Overnight options are either camping on the river bank or sleeping at a lodge.
adventurekayaking.co.za
083 625 3094

Eat out

Ribbok Restaurant
Join the locals at this eatery in Disa Street in the CBD, where the menu offers good bar-style food. How does R95 for a 200 g rump steak, eggs and chips sound?
053 664 0025 Ribbok Restaurant en Kroeg

Oppiedek Braai Restaurant
There's a great atmosphere at Oppiedek over weekends, when you can listen to live music while tucking into the braaied food the restaurants specialises in. The pizzas are popular too.
078 947 7895 Oppiedek Braai Restaurant, Vanderkloof -Noord-Kaap

Oppiedek Braai Restaurant

Route 48 Roadhouse
This roadhouse is 17 km from Vanderkloof on the right-hand side of the R48 as you enter Petrusville. Order a burger, a pizza or a toasted sandwich with chips – it's the perfect *padkos* when you're heading for Colesberg.
route48.co.za 053 880 0113

Stay over

CasaMere Guest House
This lovely guest house offers dinner, but the rooms are also equipped with a small fridge and microwave oven.
076 314 4134 CasaMere

Waterfront Guest House
You won't find another guest house this well situated! It's in Kalossie Street, a stone's throw from the water's edge, and offers luxurious self-catering accommodation and breakfast.
083 300 7208
Waterfront Guest House

Waterfront Guest House

Hemel op Aarde Chalets
There are six double-storey chalets and one wooden cabin for short- or long-term rental. Enjoy your coffee on the second-floor stoep as you watch the sun rise. 064 824 6977
Hemel op Aarde Chalets

House on Suikerbossie
This self-catering home sleeps eight – convenient for a group of anglers. It has a small swimming pool, an outdoor shower and a braai area.
082 909 9558 Flyfishvanderkloof

Freshly picked 'Diana's Memory', 'Cornel Bronze' and 'Polar Ice' dahlias in a bucket on Nzwi Dyirakumunda's smallholding between Meyerton and Three Rivers in Gauteng.

Sisters *of the* soil

Two years ago, nine small-scale flower farmers across the country found one other on Instagram and created a support network called Hort Couture Flower Collective. Who would have thought a flourishing new venture would sprout and bloom from the hardship of the hard lockdown?

TEXT AND PHOTOS **MIA LOUW**

Jo van Zyl with dahlias and zinnias from her garden at Fort Governor's Estate in the Eastern Cape. She delivers bouquets to Makhanda on her commute to and from school to drop off and fetch her daughters Lily and Rose.

ABOVE The ducks Plobby and Snow, also known as "pest control", are always nearby.

LEFT Jo's daughters, Lily and Rose, help catch chafer beetles in the garden. The pesky bugs are partial to flower petals.

BELOW Lily picks a rainbow for herself while merrily singing, "Red and yellow and pink and green. Purple and orange and blue. I can sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow too."

Flower farmers seem to agree that what we see on their polished social media feeds are a far cry from what goes on while they have their hands in the soil.

"I'm only wearing a nice dress for you and the photographs," Teneale Coetzee from Femme Pétale Flower Farm says. "A white dress isn't practical. I usually look like I've been driven over about five times!"

Flower farming isn't all moonlight and roses. It takes hard work and patience – as well as loads of research and support in the budding stages. And that's how Hort Couture Flower Collective came about.

Nine aspiring flower farmers dabbled in growing their own blooms in 2019 and 2020 when the hard lockdown afforded them the chance to follow their dreams. They all soon realised that time and individual research are good starting points but for their ventures to flourish they would have to reach out to others for advice.

"Flower farming is a notoriously closed and secretive industry," says Jo van Zyl of Lily Rose in the Eastern Cape. Established flower farmers aren't always keen to share their knowledge, possibly for the fear of competition.

Through hours of research and scrolling on Instagram, Jo found a kindred spirit: Nzwi Dyirakumunda from Akanaka Blooms in Gauteng.

"We were chatting on Instagram about how difficult it was to grow cut flowers and to tap into the South African market. Nzwi introduced me to the clan on a WhatsApp group called You Grow Girl. I have never felt more bonded to a random group of women in my life!"

The biggest factor linking the women in the collective is that they all wanted to grow dahlias, and the most cost-effective way for them to grow the colour varieties they wanted was to import the tubers from the Netherlands. >

OPPOSITE Kids, animals and flowers galore! Plobby and Snow join the gang in the kitchen; Nimsy the tame African wildcat strolls through the carnations, zinnias, cosmos and dahlias; and Mozzie the Australian shepherd plays model for one of Jo's flower crown creations.

BELOW The entertainment area at Stoneyvale Cottages on the Eastern Cape game farm Fort Governor's Estate has a pool, bar, boma and dining room. Spending 'a summer weekend in the bush' can be a very comfortable affair.

Not only do they club together to do so, but they also buy seeds together and share knowledge and advice in the group.

"If you want a specific dahlia variety, you have to order tubers – the thickened underground plant stems," Jo says. "With seeds, you don't know which variety you're growing. We club together to order the tubers, because there is a minimum quantity that they'll ship. It works out cheaper for all of us."

She strolls past her dashing dahlias as her two little girls, Lily (4) and Rose (7), list some fabulous names: 'Pink Pearl', 'Wizard of Oz', 'Salmon Runner', "Souvenir d'Eté" (French for 'Memory of Summer'), 'Rebecca's World' and 'Cornel'. While imitating an Italian accent, Lily shouts out the name of the last variety in the row: 'Genova' ball dahlia.

"What's that dark-red one, girls? Remember, it has a cool rock-star name… 'Rip City'," Jo reminds her two blossom boffins.

Growing up in central London, Jo never imagined she'd be raising her daughters on a game farm in the Eastern Cape. Fort Governor's Estate, which lies 30 km from Makhanda, has been her home for the past seven years.

Jo and her husband, Sean, met in London 20 years ago. "My life was there and his was here. He grew up in Graaff-Reinet," Jo says. Sean divided his time between the two countries for a while, and while he was in the Eastern Cape he managed lodges on game reserves like Shamwari and Amakhala. He joined Jo in England for another year while she was studying landscape and garden design at Inchbald School of Design in London. "But it was like caging a lion," she says. "I was at a crossroads where I was either going to set up my own landscape design company in England or move to South Africa."

Jo doesn't regret her choice one bit. She has since helped Sean manage lodges in the Eastern Cape, and was in charge of landscaping for the M-Net TV series *The Wild*, which was filmed on a game farm near Heidelberg in Gauteng. She also set up her own landscape design company in Joburg.

"But it's the Eastern Cape that feels like home to me. We are close to town and the schools in Makhanda are >

great. This here is living the dream," she exclaims while cutting a soft peach dahlia, called 'Café au Lait'.

Their two Australian shepherds Fin and Mozzie keep watch while Jo tends to her garden. In the pond nearby the ducks Plobby and Snow, also known as "pest control", are splashing merrily, while Nimsy the tame African wildcat strolls among the pink, salmon, white and cream dahlias.

IN A FLOWER BED set slightly apart from the rest, two of Jo's own creations are flaunting their unique colours in the autumn light. "Last year I tried to breed my own dahlia varieties with zero knowledge," she says. She collected about 30 seeds from two flowerheads. Each individual seed produces something entirely different. Dahlias are octoploids, which means they have eight sets of chromosomes. This wider range of genetic possibilities is the source of their diversity.

"This flower bed has all the random seedlings that came from my experiment. You can get technical and cross-pollinate, but there are no guaranteed results. I was lucky to get two varieties that I'm keeping and growing."

The women of the collective helped her name her new dahlias: 'Raspberry Ripple' and 'Smokey Jo'. "It takes time to build up stock," Jo says. "I'm not sure how they are going to perform when producing more tubers, but we want to keep these as Hort Couture exclusives."

Besides the dahlias, she also grows a bunch of other flowers, herbs, shrubs and grasses to use in her beautiful bouquets. Cotton, panicum, penny gum, lemon and cinnamon basil, mint, carnations, roses, poor man's orchid, cosmos, zinnias, anemones and ranunculus, to name a few.

"We have green flowers," Lily offers, referring to the 'Queen Lime Blush' zinnias growing in front of the house.

"Can we do the wiggle test?" Rose shouts, leading the way. The "wiggle test" involves shaking the zinnias gently to check whether they're ready. "They shouldn't wiggle, otherwise they will wilt when you cut them," Rose explains.

Jo cuts flower after flower as the girls point to the ones they fancy. Rose's bunch is toned down, with a creamy 'Café au Lait' dahlia, a yellow zinnia, and light-blond 'Vanilla Ice' miniature sunflowers to round it off. Lily's bouquet is a rainbow of colours.

As we head back to the house, the girls sing a song by Peggy Lee: "Red and yellow and pink and green. Purple and orange and blue. I can sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow too…"

It's not all rainbows and butterflies, though, and this is where Hort Couture Flower Collective comes in with support. The women do most of the work on their own, with a bit of help from one or two family members, friends or employees. They constantly face challenges like pests, diseases and harsh climates.

"The soil genius in the group informed us about this biofungicide, Trichoderma. It is a fungus that out-competes and suppresses bad fungi," Jo says. "Dahlias are particularly disease-prone, so many of us also make our own organic sprays against powdery mildew, which appears on

OPPOSITE Rose and Jo look at the flowering *Helianthus debilis* 'Vanilla Ice' – or beach sunflowers.

Stoneyvale, one of four lodges on Fort Governor's Estate, comprises five cottages, each with a fully equipped kitchen, dining area, wood-burning fireplace, and lounge opening onto a deck.

the leaves. A mix of bicarb and milk works well."

Something they all struggled with was pricing their flowers – figuring out how much people would be willing to pay for them. "You have to decide whether you want to sell bouquets locally, or focus on wholesale, which will determine what you plant." Flowers for a wedding don't have to last as long as flowers for a bouquet, for example.

The women have to plan around these different markets. "This whole way of growing is called 'slow flowers', like the slow food movement," Jo says. "It takes more time and planning."

The Hort Couture Flower Collective is trying to promote the idea of buying flowers grown locally rather than flowers flown in, and its members believe their chances of success are much better when they work together.

"'Individual dreams but collective goals' is our mantra."

ON A SMALLHOLDING between Meyerton and Three Rivers, Nzwi Dyirakumunda tends to her >

Meet the members of Hort Couture Flower Collective

Visit this local flower-farming community's Instagram page:
hortcoutureflowercollective

EASTERN CAPE

• Lily Rose South Africa
Owner: Jo van Zyl
jojo_vz
lilyrosesouthafrica
jo@fortgovernors.com
071 199 2040

GAUTENG

• Wildly Sown
Owner: Lisa Barrett
wildly_sown
hello@wildlysown.com
083 288 5519

• Femme Pétale Flower Farm
Owner: Teneale Coetzee
femmepetaleflowerfarm
info@femmepetale flowers.co.za
082 804 1547

• Akanaka Blooms
Owner: Nzwi Dyirakumunda
akanakabloomtheflowеracre
nldandadzi@gmail.com
071 854 7712

WESTERN CAPE

• Spinlea Farm
Owner: Karen Quayle
spinleafarm
spinleafarm@gmail.com
082 922 8422

• Jamestown Flower Farm
Owner: Wendy Attwell
jamestownflowerfarm
jamestownflowerfarm@ gmail.com
082 894 6405

• Flourish Urban Flower Farm
Owners: Susie Harris-Leblond and Tarryn Martin
flourish_urbanflowerfarm
tarryn@biodiversity africa.com
071 332 3994; 072 387 9695

ZIMBABWE

• Flo Maphosa
flo.maphosa
flomaphosa@gmail.com
+263 77 245 2208

USA

• Floret Flower Farm
Floret Flower Farm in Washington's Skagit Valley is not a member of the collective, but the owner, Erin Benzakein, has been a huge inspiration and help to Hort Couture. The women in the collective describe Erin as overwhelmingly generous with her knowledge, and the whole idea to become "farmer florists" stemmed from her business. The focus of Floret Flower Farm is to sell directly from the farmer to the consumer.
floretflowers.com

Nzwi Dyirakumunda is happy among her dahlias, sunflowers and cosmos – only a year after starting her flower business.

LEFT Nzwi picks dahlias at Akanaka Blooms before going off to her other job: she not only grows flowers but is also an advocate and a CCMA commissioner.

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT Celosia 'Flamingo Feather; packets of Akanaka Blooms flower seeds; and the dahlia cultivars 'Maroon Fox' and 'Polar Ice'.

flowers at Akanaka Blooms. She lives in Edenvale, 66 km away, and currently juggles three jobs: "I grow flowers, I am an advocate, and I am a commissioner at the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration," she says, holding a bucket of sunflowers.

Nzwi only started planting flowers in November 2021, which is hard to believe when you see the 2 ha property, a radiant tapestry of dahlias, carnations, snapdragons, sunflowers, cosmos, chocolate lace, celosia, zinnias, amaranthus, scabiosa, craspedia, lisianthus, foxgloves, love-in-a-mist, phlox, ranunculus, mint and rosemary.

"This is my first season," Nzwi says. "People say you shouldn't applaud yourself, but I think I did fairly well."

She toyed with the idea of growing something for a while, so she started with flowers and artichokes in her garden. "In 2019 I came across a flower company in America, Floret Flowers, and bookmarked their website. When lockdown came, I had more time on my hands. I bought books, did research and thought, well, flowers it is."

Nzwi and her husband, Tinashe, initially planned on renting a property, but after a few hiccups to secure a plot, they changed their minds.

"We shopped around to see what made sense financially. You don't want to invest too much, just in case the business doesn't work. Property in this area is more affordable." (They paid R330 000 for 2 ha, to be exact, but they had to sink a borehole for water and hound Eskom for an electrical connection.)

Nzwi is dressed to the nines in a long floral dress today, her bright pink toenails peeking from wedge heels. "I can look all glamorous while doing this, but ultimately it is hard work. I had to cut my flowers in the rain on Sunday." >

Hort Couture Flower Collective had a stroke of luck with a dahlia consignment. The shipment of tubers was scheduled to arrive this year, but due to a cancellation from New Zealand they received their order last year.

"We have been supporting each other in multiple ways. I've got this pest here; how do I deal with it? What is your spacing for dahlias? What can I charge for these flowers? All the little things that make an operation come together."

Help with physical labour is also important. Nzwi relies on an assistant, who lives on the smallholding with his wife. And Tinashe helped her to bring Akanaka Blooms to fruition.

"Tinashe is an architect who's turned into a farmer," she says. "We are both from Zimbabwe and we grew up on smallholdings. He came to South Africa in 2005, and I arrived in 2009."

They have two children, Muku (10) and Matipa (7). Muku has cerebral palsy – he has cognitive impairments and cannot communicate.

"That is also why I am growing flowers. I would like to work with young adults who have special needs. I would like to offer them job opportunities, a purpose and fulfilment, because they are marginalised in society."

Nzwi describes Muku's journey as painful. "We take it one day at a time, and there is no better place to realise that than here, among the flowers."

Akanaka Blooms is part of her personal healing, as a mother and someone who has also experienced trauma as a child. "I talk about it openly: I was raped as an eight-year-old. I don't think I ever really healed from that pain. For me, this space acts as a lot of things in one."

In autumn this year the lovely flowers you're seeing on these pages had run their course, and on 21 April Akanaka Blooms hosted its last pick-your-own Saturday for the season. This is a weekly event from spring to autumn. The best time to see the dahlias is in December and January. It costs only R150 to fill a bucket with beautiful blooms to take home.

Nzwi also supplies flowers to two artisanal grocers in the city – The Landing Village Grocer in Edenvale and Farm Table in Linden – as well as several small florists and the The Jill Manson Floral Design School.

The biggest comfort for Nzwi was the collective's confirmation that cut-flower farming is worth her time and effort. "I haven't always received support from friends and extended family. They don't know the industry; they think I should just practise law and make a living."

When Nzwi was in hospital for three weeks in October last year, just before she started planting her blooms, her friends from Hort Couture often checked in to see how she was feeling. "This community we built here is so much more than just flowers."

A 40 KM DRIVE FROM PRETORIA, Teneale Coetzee is chasing her mom's ducks out of the garden. "They are cute, but they're also little *bliksems*! >

Nzwi cuts *Helianthus annuus* 'Soraya', or common sunflowers, on the 2 ha smallholding where she runs her flower business Akanaka Blooms, 66 km from her home in Edenvale.

Teneale Coetzee of Femme Pétale Flower Farm among her dahlias. The coral-pink cultivar in the basket is 'Salmon Runner'.

They eat the bugs, but lately they've been pecking the leaves off my dahlias and zinnias. I even found one going for a flowerhead the other day!"

Teneale grew up in Pretoria, and her family have owned Intundla Game Lodge in Hammanskraal for the past 24 years. Initially they camped on the farm over weekends, but her father always dreamt of building and running his own lodge.

The commute from Teneale's home to her flowers at Femme Pétale takes 30 to 40 minutes. "I've wanted to grow flowers since 2018, but it only became a reality when we went into lockdown during 2020," she says.

Teneale has been a flower designer for the past eight years. The idea of growing her own came about when she was designing a chandelier for the 2019 Johannesburg International Flower Show. "The flowers I wanted to use for my design weren't available. It wasn't the first time I had this problem, and it certainly wouldn't be the last."

She received a shove in the right direction again later that year when she visited The Flower Cartel in Wellington. "I met the co-owner, Louise Steenkamp, and walked around on the farm. I realised that this was all I wanted: to grow my own and to have all the flowers my heart desires!"

Teneale did an online course hosted by Floret Flower Farm in the US and she bought loads of seeds from The Flower Cartel.

"You can study something theoretically, but you don't really learn much until you get your hands dirty. With my first attempt I killed all of my seeds," Teneale says. She thought her dream was dead, but luckily she learnt where things had gone awry.

"Initially my seedlings were happy: they were in a humid area and they were getting fish water from my uncle's tilapia tanks – the nitrogen is great for flowers – but we didn't realise that this pine tree was going to cast so much shade. We moved them, but then it was too hot. They were over-watered and died."

Although Teneale has the hang of things now, the process still entails testing everything, especially when your aim is to run an organic operation. She uses fish emulsion as a fertiliser and sprays her flowers with her own compost tea, which has helped with the powdery mildew on the leaves of the dahlias.

"I had mildew problems in January because it was too humid, but look how beautiful the new leaves are after I sprayed them with my tea. That just shows you how nature bounces back if you give the plants a chance to use their own resources. If you add chemicals, you have to keep on adding more and more."

Teneale also doesn't use foam or wires in her flower arrangements. She grows her own loofahs, which she uses when making wearable flower designs like headbands.

Femme Pétale Flower Farm grows anemones, dahlias, ranunculus, zinnias, phlox, roses, atriplex, bachelor's buttons, chocolate lace, candy tufts, cosmos, scabiosa and strawflowers, to name a few. Teneale also dries and dyes flowers and grasses for the business.

"Phlox is my favourite flower, because you can use it as a filler or a statement piece. When it comes to design and colour, you have many options."

Teneale says whites, creams and pinks are currently popular for weddings, so you can't go wrong with 'Salmon Runner' or 'Pink Pearl' dahlias.

Teneale wants to step away from designing for weddings to focus more on brand alignment, like designing for perfume launches. "Other than that, I just want people to experience the joy of flowers. We're going to host pick-your-own festivals in spring, and I'm offering workshops to teach people how to garden."

She jokes about needing a trust fund to be able to become a full-time flower farmer. This is her first season, and before she's even made a decent profit, she has had to buy seeds, tubers and equipment for the next season. "But the support from the collective has been a huge help," she says. "It's all about sharing knowledge and having compassion for one another's work."

This farming journey has made Teneale realise that flowers inspire gratitude, and that gratitude can be a seed for joy. And the women from Hort Couture Flower Collective are packaging and selling their seeds of joy to the public.

"Seeds are exciting!" Teneale exclaims. "You need patience to wait, watch and take care of this flower coming up through the ground. It is the most beautiful process, and we want it to be a shared experience." P

ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Femme Pétale has an online shop where you can buy seeds, dried flowers, prints of botanical illustrations, and floral-print T-shirts and raincoats, among others. Teneale tends to anemone and ranunculus seedlings in her tiny greenhouse. Things you'll find in the Femme Pétale garden: 'Pink Pearl' dahlias and chameleons.

Kameel...

Where is that, exactly?

There are many small towns and villages in South Africa that you've probably never visited but their names will ring a bell. Then there's a hamlet like Kameel, with 49 silos and 27 residents…

TEXT AND PHOTOS **WILLEM VAN DER BERG**

Exactly 805 miles from Cape Town and many thousands of miles from Cairo, Kameel was once a railway station on Cecil John Rhodes' unfinished Cape-to-Cairo railway line.

OPPOSITE The people of Kameel are justifiably proud of their gorgeous sunsets.

You might need a magnifying glass if you want to find Kameel on a map. It's not a place mentioned in casual conversation; in fact, chances of hearing someone talking about their visit to Kameel are close to zero.

Kameel is a tiny hamlet in North West, so small that Delareyville and Stella, the two towns on either side of it, appear positively bustling. And Vryburg is a metropolis by comparison.

It's a matter of debate whether Kameel actually has streets. A tarred stretch of roadway branches off from the R377 and weaves past Kameel Rust and Vrede B&B and Camping, and 21 silos. Just past Wilrick Supermarket it makes a snappy turn to the left and runs past another 28 silos, five houses and the primary school. Then the tarmac – and everything else that qualifies Kameel as a human settlement – ends at the NWK co-op.

Early in the morning, the voices of 42 children can be heard in the "main street" as they sing the national anthem, standing outside the school building. The English lyrics are a little unclear. School principal Leonie Brand gives a slightly abashed laugh. "Oh, our farm kids struggle with English, and it doesn't help that the teachers are all from farms in the area too."

Leonie, too, grew up on a farm in the Delareyville district, never imagining she'd one day live on another North West farm and work as a teacher.

"After high school I couldn't wait to move to the city. I said the last thing I would do would be to marry a farmer, and I never wanted to live in the Delareyville area again."

She started out studying law at the former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, but eventually realised this was not her field of interest.

"I felt really bad about giving up my studies and told my parents I'd work at the Spar in Delareyville. >

ABOVE There aren't many places where silos outnumber the residents.

OPPOSITE Kameel Primary School is the alma mater of former Springbok rugby player Basie van Wyk, who played flank in the Fifties. Learners from small schools in the area – Kameel, Tosca, Wildehondepan, Piet Plessis and Bray – play together as the Molopo team to compete in sports.

LAERSKOOL
KAMEEL
1976

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My mother said, no, rather study teaching, so that's what I did. And I really enjoyed it, especially psychology, which was one of my subjects."

Pierre Brand was also a student at the university at the time. One evening, shortly after he'd prayed for a wife, he got an SMS from Leonie asking for a lift to Delareyville.

After he'd finished his studies he returned to Delareyville to farm… and he and Leonie got married.

"So, none of my plans worked out, and today I'm so happy about that," she says. "It's a privilege to be able to raise our children on a farm, and it's such a pleasure to work at the school in Kameel. Everything is exactly as it should be."

The school was established in 1934. A few years ago, to raise funds for the school, they started a cross-country rally. "One of our former learners, Victor Fincham, takes part in rallies. He's the founder of the Kameel Motor Klub, which organises an annual championship here. The profit from the entry fees is donated to the school, and we provide catering and camping spots. Most of the visitors camp on the school rugby field. It's a big thing – there's a lot of noise, and it makes a significant contribution to the school's finances."

Someone rings a large copper bell and the 42 barefoot children burst from the classrooms for first break. Oh, wait, two girls are wearing shoes after all, but, just like their friends, they waste no time digging their hands into the soil. The others play soccer before switching to rugby. Boys and girls play together, each one as grubby as the next when break ends.

"Bye, Oom! Thanks for the photos!"

You have to wonder if big schools in the city with all the opportunities they offer are truly better than Kameel Primary. >

OPPOSITE The children of Kameel are used to wide-open spaces and running barefoot in the veld. It's a challenge to keep them sitting still at their school desks. Breaks are often stretched a few minutes longer.

BELOW After two remarkably wet summers, the cattle – like this Afrikaner bull with his shiny coat – are in excellent condition.

If you want to book accommodation in Kameel, it will have to be at Patrick Finchan (left) and Hercules Fourie's Kameel Rust and Vrede. These two men take good care of their guests, and a dinner prepared by Hercules is a memorable affair.

"*JEEZ*, MY HANDS get clammy when I have to drive out of Kameel," says Patrick Fincham. The idea of going to Gauteng gives him the shivers. He only just manages to remember what the road signs mean. And he no longer exceeds 100 km/h.

"That's him driving fast," adds Hercules Fourie.

The two men started to offer accommodation in Kameel in 2013. Some people were taken aback, Patrick says. "My sister said we were crazy. Everyone asked who we thought would want to spend the night here. We weren't too sure either, and for an entire year we didn't get a single booking. And then we had our first visitor on 7 April 2014. *Jinne*, we ran around. Were so excited that I can't recall wether we asked for payment!"

Kameel Rust and Vrede gradually expanded from a single room to a variety of accommodation options. Today, there are caravans, wooden chalets and a camping area. Many visitors spend the night on the way to Botswana or the Kgalagadi, and business has picked up to such an extent that it has allowed Patrick and Hercules to resign from their jobs in Delareyville.

"We both worked at the mill and met among the flour and dust," says Hercules, who used to be a traffic official in Germiston and then worked in Christiana and Bloemfontein.

Patrick's entire life story is bound to Kameel. The train station in the hamlet owes its existence to Patrick's great-grandfather's saltworks at the pans in the area. Grandpa Victor Baden Fincham founded the school too, and the Fincham family still owns the Kameelbult, the farm on which the settlement of Kameel developed.

Patrick attended primary school here and returned after six years in the Air Force to open Wilrick Supermarket, a general dealer, bottle store and post office in one – these days it's called "the Kameel mall".

"When your life is so intertwined with a place, it's hard to feel at home >

This is a part of our country that has remained somewhat wild. Small settlements have not developed much, and none have become weekend destinations popular with the in crowd. The shops still sell only basic necessities. The roads tend to be neglected, and the beer lorrie might get stuck in mud… as *Platteland* did on the way to Kameel.

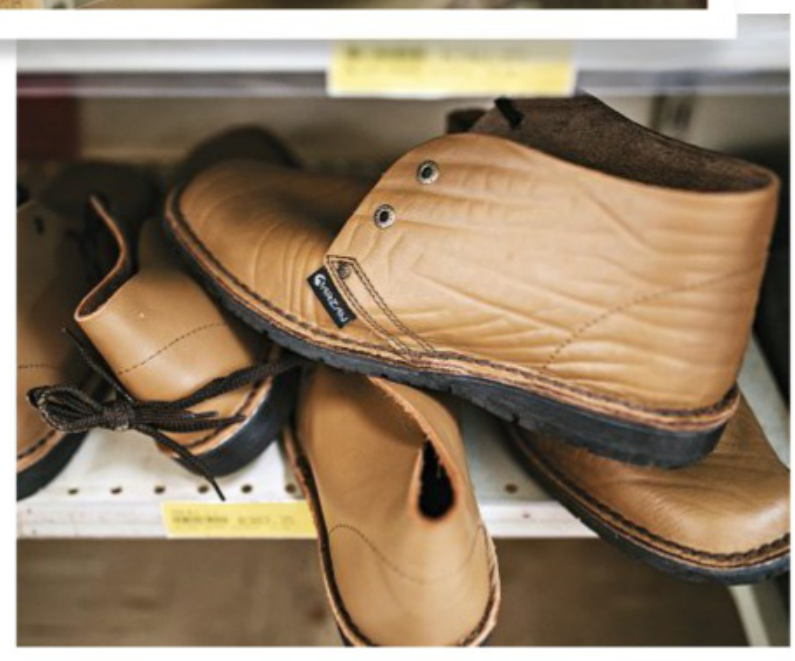
anywhere else," he says, sitting in their dining room, which is furnished with pieces from the former train station and post office.

"No use bothering with big dreams in Kameel. This railway line formed part of Cecil John Rhodes' plan to connect the Cape with Cairo. The Rovos Rail is the only train that stops here now. Once a year a group of international bird hunters arrive to shoot guineafowl – when they get off the train, you'd think they were hunting elephants."

The huge silos that tower above Kameel are increasingly becoming white elephants. They were once full of maize, but these days game and cattle roam where crops used to be cultivated.

"It's becoming too dry," says Patrick. "It's not worth the risk to plant crops. Three years ago it was so dry the ants had to bend down to reach the grass."

More recently, the region had the wettest summer in a long time. The veld is green; the cattle gleam like burnished clay. Dirt roads guarantee muddy



TOP Hanno and Carine du Plessis keep the NWK co-op's shelves stocked and the customers happy.

ABOVE AND RIGHT The co-op stock everything from a bobbejaan wire strainer to wellies and vellies – the real deal, made for working with cattle and putting up fences.

adventures that take four times longer than usual. The few bakkies parked in front of the NWK co-op are all the same colour: North West Reddish Brown.

Inside the co-op, the smells of chicken feed, livestock medication, galvanised wire, vellies, diesel, soap, fertiliser and a hundred other things blend into a specific scent. You have to be patient to get a chance to talk to the manager, Hanno du Plessis, and his wife, Carine. People don't just come here to shop; they chat around the counter while the dot matrix printer churns out receipts.

"It's great to be part of a community where we all know one another," Hanno says. "People don't ask how you're doing – they already know. Instead, they say, '*Jinne*, I heard you dented your bakkie.' Or, 'I saw you weren't home – where have you been gallivanting?'"

"Of course, this isn't ideal when you have urgent work to take care of and someone wants to tell you about the day's hunt. Or when you simply want to have a relaxed Friday night at home but the braai invitations start coming in. There's nowhere to hide!"

Reports that the antiparasitic drug ivermectin could treat Covid-19 symptoms resulted in people rushing to co-ops to get their hands on the veterinary version, Hannes says. "They'd phone and say they want to buy all our stock; we should please set it aside; they're on their way. I had to lie and say we'd run out, because otherwise we wouldn't have had anything to sell to the farmers."

He admits he took a few mouthfuls himself. "It's oily stuff. Feels better for the joints than for anything else."

If you have the chance, fill up your diesel vehicle at a co-op. It's always cheaper than at regular filling stations. And the attendants are as chatty as Ragontse Ditira, who's up for discussing everything from the weather to politics.

"Did you grow up in Kameel?"

"No, somewhere nearby."

"Where?"

"I could explain, but you wouldn't understand."

That's a good answer. And probably the best one to the question of where exactly Kameel is. P

Stay over in Kameel

Kameel Rust and Vrede B&B and Camping

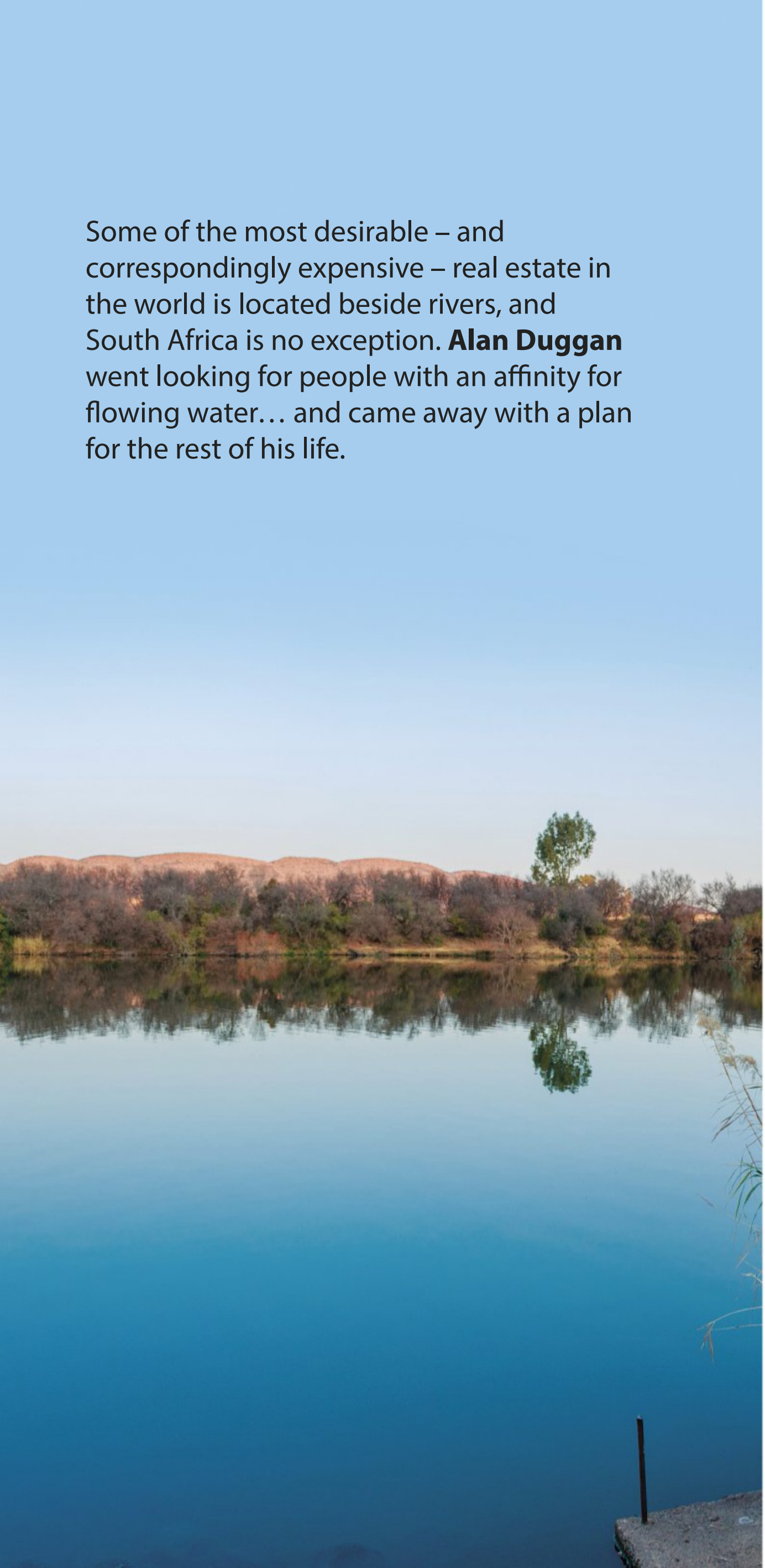
Apart from the Kameel mall, Patrick Fincham and Hercules Fourie also offer spacious en-suite guest rooms with coffee-making facilities and a bar fridge each, as well as wooden chalets, self-catering caravans and camp sites with power points. Wonderful for people who'd like to do absolutely nothing, except perhaps gaze at the stars and admire the sunsets.

kameelrustandvrede.co.za
pjfincham@gmail.com
076 548 8035 (Patrick) or
063 749 1248 (Hercules)

Dirty bakkies and horse riders are the main modes of transport in Kameel.

A river runs *through it*

Some of the most desirable – and correspondingly expensive – real estate in the world is located beside rivers, and South Africa is no exception. **Alan Duggan** went looking for people with an affinity for flowing water… and came away with a plan for the rest of his life.



Thirty years ago, Robert Redford directed a film adaptation of a semi-autobiographical novel by author Norman Maclean about a river, fly-fishing and complicated family dynamics. Audiences around the world were captivated by the characters, mesmerised by the river's ever-changing moods and moved to tears by the narrator's final words: "Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs. I am haunted by waters."

We humans are fascinated by oceans, rivers, lakes and other bodies of water. You might think it's because our very distant ancestors emerged from the sea hundreds of millions of years ago, or because the trillions of cells in our bodies are composed mainly of two hydrogen atoms linked in a single chemical bond to an oxygen atom. You know, water molecules.

Personally, I find these conjectures something of a stretch. But when someone tells me that living beside a river is "good for the soul", I absolutely get it, which is slightly weird because I don't believe in souls or the afterlife (or the Kardashians, for that matter). >

A clear blue sky is reflected in the languidly flowing waters of the Vaal River. Far from the clamour of civilisation, with no other humans in sight, this kind of soul-soothing getaway is hard to beat. Even science says so.

It's a house, it's a boat, it's the perfect escape. Moored on the Vaal Rover in southern Gauteng, the Van Zyl family's Privé Class houseboat delivers every luxury imaginable, including a gas braai on the deck. Obviously.

Best of all worlds

Take the case of the Van Zyl family, who enjoy an idyllic waterside lifestyle far from the cacophony and myriad stresses of the city. Pierre and Annalien van Zyl divide their time between a waterfront home at the Vaal Marina and a houseboat moored at the Emerald Resort & Casino on the Vaal River in southern Gauteng.

They never cease to marvel at the passing show: the occasional antelope on the river bank, the flurries of water as a boat passes, even a modest-sized tornado. It's all part of nature's ever-changing show, and they love it.

Pierre is project manager for a large tyre company. His diverse roles – including overseeing the construction of a 7 000 m² shipping container warehouse in Meyerton – have introduced him to the concept of light steel frame construction, and the installation of generators and solar power systems.

Says Pierre, "I have a passion for nature and watersports, and an active lifestyle, so mountain bikes, canoes, yachts, motorcycles and boats have always been part of my activity list."

This became readily apparent during our interviews. One message from Pierre read, "Sorry I missed your call. I was fetching a boat." Another chat was cut short when he texted, "Can I call you back in 5 minutes? I'm rowing a dinghy."

His "biggest joy", Pierre says, was the discovery that their daughter, Anzel, had a matching passion for outdoor pursuits, and that effectively laid out a road map for what was to come next. "We used to live in Meyerton, where we found that gardening and maintenance demanded too much of our time and attention, so we would book long weekends at a club at Vaal Marina to enjoy some fishing and jet-skiing.

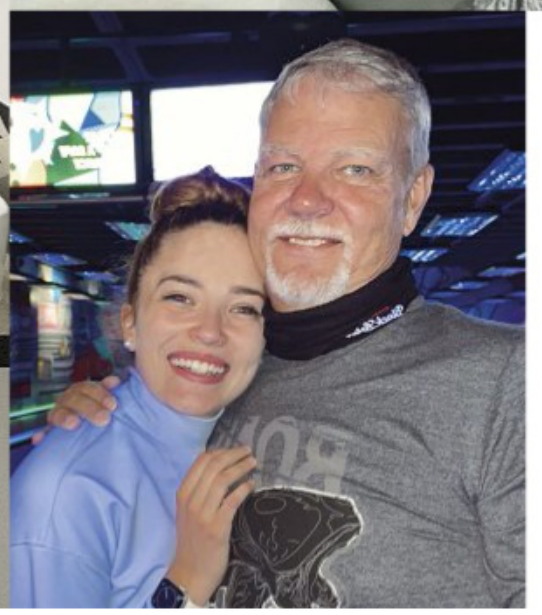
"In 2010, we bought a holiday house there, and six years later, we bought a waterfront stand with the intention of building a permanent home. We moved in two years later."

But, as Pierre and his family discovered, life has a habit of tossing you curveballs, not all of them bad news. In their case, it was the realisation that the matric year had ended and opportunity was knocking in the form of the need for student accommodation – for Anzel as well as for students at North-West University's Vaal Triangle Campus, just a few kilometres from their home.

Pierre hit the internet and soon came upon an advertisement for a very desirable houseboat.

"Something clicked, and after a very long negotiation with the company Shelter Marine, we agreed on a joint project to build a houseboat. Anzel was put in charge as project manager, effectively taking control over the construction of her own home."

Anzel had a budget and a business plan, and understood that she could make all the important decisions, Pierre says. The project called for her to live aboard from Monday morning to Friday morning, then turn over the houseboat to paying guests over weekends and holidays. In between bookings, the



Hot showers on demand, a fully equipped kitchen, masses of living space, two air-conditioned bedrooms with mesmerising views of the river… This houseboat has it all.

LEFT Pierre and his daughter, Anzel, who project-managed the houseboat's construction.

family would use the houseboat.

Living on the water is an unbeatable experience, Pierre says. "You're not just close to nature, but actually part of it. You're aware of the fish swimming around you, the motion of the water as a boat passes by, the skittish *bokkie* that you pass during your morning exercise routine. You can feel nature talking to you.

"Then there's the sunrise and the sunset, and hearing, feeling and smelling the rain. We've experienced torrential rains that swelled the river, a drought and falling water levels, even a time when Mother Nature delivered a tornado."

And in case you were wondering, they wouldn't change it for the world.

Contact info@liquidlounge.co.za
016 982 3411

Luxury without compromise

The Van Zyl family's houseboat is a Privé Class design, and it's rather special. It comes with two large air-conditioned bedrooms, one of them with a bathroom en suite. A second bathroom is accessed from the living room, which has an open-plan design and a fully equipped kitchen at one end.

Pierre describes the power, water and sewerage systems as "marvels of engineering". Shore power is supplemented by a generator; three pontoons with large air compartments keep it all afloat and accommodate the houseboat's water and sewage tanks (a shore-based freshwater feed tops up an 800-litre tank in one pontoon, from where it's pumped to taps and showers); a 500-litre sewage holding tank in another pontoon feeds into a 2 000-litre holding tank; two inverter air conditioners keep the temperature down during hot summer days; there's a gas braai on the covered patio with windshields for privacy and shelter… You get the picture.

If you absolutely have to move the 14 000 kg houseboat, Pierre says, you could start up a pair of powerful outboard motors, although this would need to be done by a certified commercial skipper.

"All the construction materials were picked for minimal maintenance and maximum lifespan. For instance, the Chromadek roof and gutters have a 20-year lifespan, the house frame is made from zinc-alum [an alloy of zinc and aluminium], which has a 20-year lifespan at the coast, and the design allows for optimum airflow to ensure a comfortable temperature."

The main floor is constructed of 15 mm marine plywood encased in fibreglass. Underneath it is a maze of pumps, pipes, float level switches (these control the ballast, fresh water, and pumping of sewage between the tanks and the shore) and other equipment that keeps everything on the houseboat working.

Pierre pays tribute to Shelter Marine's Chase van der Merwe as the "consummate professional" who helped to make it all happen. >

Of rocks and sweet water

Petrus Jansen, who grew up in Pretoria, lives on an idyllic riverside farm in Montagu in the Western Cape, with his wife, Liana, and children, Anno and Lilja. Their Kogman & Keisie Organic Farm is a little gem.

"People who're not familiar with the area often assume the farm took its name from us, so my husband is Kogman and I'm Keisie!" Liana says. She has no problem with it, because "keisie" means "shiny or sweet water" in a Khoekhoe tongue. "My husband's name means 'rock' (Petrus is a Latin name derived from the Greek for 'rock'), so it's quite apt."

The farm's name actually comes from Kogmans Kloof (also spelled Cogmans Kloof, originally Cochoqua, after a Khoekhoe group) and the Keisie, one of two rivers that meet in Montagu and periodically cause havoc in the town.

Regular flooding has forced them to come to terms with the unpredictability of nature, Liana says. They originally planned to create biodiversity corridors coming down from the mountain that would allow free movement of creatures large and small, but quickly learnt that nature does things its own way. This became especially apparent when the trees they had planted were swept away by floodwaters, leaving only acacias to grow in their place.

Not that they fear or resent the river. In fact, they are profoundly grateful for its presence in their lives. As Liana says, "On moonlit nights, it's nice to hear the river and know that it's there."

Petrus was never a fan of city life. "I'm of the opinion that cities are not the ideal landscape for human beings. We *do* adapt to be able to live in cities, but I believe that, psychologically and emotionally, they are overstimulating to an extent that many people go into a protective or survival mode, blocking out as much as possible.

"I had a dream to move to the countryside, so I came down to the Western Cape and saw many small towns before arriving in Montagu. It stood out as the ideal small town in terms of the balance between the infrastructure, the scenic beauty, the architecture and the community.

"All the farms I looked at had a river or stream, but then I found a small place in town bordering a nature reserve and the Keisie River, which as far as I know has never dried up." The property also had a borehole, access to *leiwater* and a connection to the municipal water supply. In short, it was perfect.

Over the years, Petrus and Liana have learnt a great deal about rivers – their unpredictable moods, their power and their life-giving properties. As Petrus tells it, "Rivers never forget where they run, and sometimes people make the mistake of trying to alter their course. Floodlines can change when humans interfere, as we've discovered. At times, the small Keisie River becomes like the mighty Nile."

There are other challenges. "We have a problem with reeds. The runoff of fertiliser from neighbouring farms contains so many nutrients that reeds are given an unfair advantage over indigenous plants. They regrow quickly after you cut them back; so far, there appears to be no sustainable solution."

"Sustainability" is a recurring mantra for this farming couple. Petrus believes fervently in the organic-only method: "You shouldn't use poisons… it's almost like poisoning your own food. I went organic from the very beginning, and that was 14 years ago. You feel a strong connection with nature, with wildlife and all the elements that matter. You become a custodian of the land, and that's a privilege."

Not that it's all plain sailing. "It can be tough when things don't go well, for instance, if there's a flood or a fire, or when baboons come raiding your fruit and vegetables."

Petrus and Liana are strongly focused on permaculture, exploring every possible strategy in pursuit of sustainable and regenerative farming. They believe in the cycles that make their

RIGHT Liana and Petrus Jansen, and their children, Lilja, 3, and Anno, 8, of Kogman & Keisie Organic Farm.

farm work – harvesting seeds, planting them, eating the fruit, then planting seeds again. "Animals eat the excess, the manure enriches the soil, healthy plants grow… That's how nature works, and that's what we care about.

"We grow grapes, lemons, limes, nuts, olives, pomegranates… a bit of everything. I love growing heirloom vegetables, especially tomatoes and broad beans. We also have chickens, ducks, geese and sheep."

Why does Montagu work for them? "In this town," Petrus says, "you are part of a community. Everyone knows who you are, and if you have a child at school, everyone knows who the parents are.

"Then there's the lower crime rate, less noise pollution, and clean air. People are generally happier and less stressed than city people. They wave to each other in the street, and mostly drive at a reasonable speed."

Contact info@kogmanandkeisie.co.za
083 767 6943

Leaving it all behind you

In the far eastern corner of North West, Cathy Dwyer lives in a spacious open-plan house at Lindequesdrif, halfway between Vanderbijlpark and Parys, on the banks of the Vaal River.

"Entering my property feels like a full-body exhale… you leave all your shit behind. The river views, the wildlife, the scenery, the sunrises and sunsets… It's all amazing," Cathy says.

"I grew up in Durban, but I moved here because I wanted something quieter. I love birds and wildlife. Sitting beside the river, it's beautiful and peaceful. There are all sorts of water-fowl, paradise flycatchers, honey-guides, and even eagle-owls nesting in the trees.

"It's a popular fishing area, and where I live there's a clear divide between the riverside properties and the nearby farms… Quite a weird mix of incomes and types, but interesting.

"I'm not a squeamish person, but there are lots of snakes around and they sometimes come into the house. Rinkhals and puff adders are common, so you need to have a snake-catcher on speed dial, and there are friendly neighbours to help out if needed. There are also lots of spiders and other creepy-crawlies. Big leguaans, too."

Quite a few people in the community have lost dogs to snakebites, Cathy says. "You have to understand that it's not the city. You need to adjust and accommodate rather than try to recreate city living in nature. Get rid of preconceived ideas, and if you're not prepared to do that, you need to think twice about relocating to the riverside.

"It's a beautiful place to bond and connect with people, and a privilege to be able to offer a place like this to friends and family. You see them arrive on a Friday afternoon, still feeling harassed and rushed. Then they sit by the river, perhaps with a glass of wine, and you can see their stress and tension melting away."

Cathy and a former partner >

LEFT Set against a rugged mountain backdrop, Kogman & Keisie Organic Farm lies on the edge of Montagu. Fires, floods and marauding baboons are only a few of the challenges faced by the Jansen family over the years. They've not only survived but also thrived, respecting the land and growing multiple crops according to strict organic principles.

ABOVE Sheep, chickens, ducks and geese roam freely on the farm, much to the delight of visitors.

RIGHT Cathy Dwyer's Vaal River idyll at Lindequesdrif offers an ever-changing vista of water, sky trees and wildlife in abundance, including many species of waterfowl and occasionally alarming visits by leguaans, snakes and creepy-crawlies.

BELOW Cathy with her rescue dog Tiger ("a gentle giant") and Staffordshire terrier Joey, both now deceased.

bought the property about 18 years ago. The house had a spacious open-plan design and six bedrooms, but, as Cathy recalls, there were some odd features. "For instance, there were no doors to any of the rooms, not even the bathrooms, and '70s-style fluffy salmon-pink carpets were everywhere. We installed doors and wooden floors, and made other changes to suit us, including structured terraces leading down to the river."

About eight years ago, Cathy began to think about creating a second income stream. She started a vegetable garden under shade netting and grew vegetables for a number of years.

She is also a trained yoga teacher, so she decided to turn a part of her property into a yoga retreat. She built a spacious thatched-roof yoga studio next to the river and converted some rooms into guest suites to accommodate paying guests, generating some useful income and making her a bunch of cool new friends. She provides visitors to her "wellness space" with a variety of vegetarian and vegan dishes.

"It's worth mentioning that running this kind of place is not for the faint-hearted. There's the borehole pump to maintain and repair when something goes wrong, a booster pump that must keep working if you want to have a shower, a lot of lawn that needs mowing, and a garden to maintain."

Then there's the occasional flood. "My bottom terrace floods at least a couple of times every summer, and I've experienced two major floods since I've been here. Water has come up as high as my yoga studio but, fortunately, my house is located quite high up. A friend down the road was less fortunate and had to spend two or three weeks on the second floor of his house when the lower level was flooded.

"You're very much on your own when things go wrong. My biggest fear is that there will be a drought and my borehole will dry up, but that hasn't happened yet."

Contact tinyurl.com/2p9ujzy3

Forget the world and uncork the Chardonnay

During the worst days of the Covid-19 lockdown, Luke Adam and his father scoured the Northern Cape for a farm with easy access to water, and preferably lots of it. Within a remarkably short time, they managed to secure a riverside gem at the convergence of the Orange River and Oorlogspruit, about 25 km north of Colesberg.

Tzamenkomst River Lodge has since become a popular meeting place for travellers from all over the country. People come here to cycle, paddle, ride horses, try their hand at fly-fishing or do very little other than gaze at the gently flowing river, sip a nicely chilled Chardonnay and think Deep Thoughts.

Luke lives in a converted office in a large block of stables known as the King Barn, built by a former owner of the property, legendary golfer Gary Player. By all accounts, the provenance of his home is a bonus.

During the day, Luke is usually hard at work maintaining irrigation and other equipment, tending to the pecan

ABOVE His day's work done, Luke Adam hauls out his fishing tackle and spends a few satisfying hours fishing off the river bank at Tzamenkomst, a guest farm north of Colesberg.

LEFT Visitors can do some kayaking and horse riding, have a go at fly-fishing or simply sit back and gaze at the gently flowing river.

orchards and otherwise taking care of the many chores associated with a 140 ha working farm. "During our short time here, we've laid two very long pipelines and centre pivots for irrigation; built four new lodges, a boma and a lapa; and converted an old bird hide on the Oorlogspruit tributary into a honeymoon suite."

But when the working day is over the magic begins. "After a long day of farming, as the sun sets over the river, I'm reminded of why we bought the farm. It's a peaceful escape from everything."

Sometimes, Luke and his friends will board an inflatable boat and head up the river to fish, talk and generally unwind. On one memorable occasion, they hauled out the kayaks, paddled to another riverside lodge for drinks, then paddled home… a 27 km round trip!

Challenges? There have been a few, concedes Luke. "In the nearly two years that we've lived here, the Gariep Dam filled to 120%, then 115%, and the river came up quite high, fortunately without causing much damage. Recently, the Oorlogspruit tributary flooded our honeymoon suite."

Any scary moments?

"Yes! My little Jack Russell named Jacques was bitten on the neck by a Cape cobra. I didn't see it happen, but I knew something was wrong and took him to the vet. By the time we arrived, he was paralysed. The vet gave him a 5% chance of pulling through, but luckily he was okay.

"Describing how I feel about this iconic river is quite difficult because I feel so much," Luke says. Watching the setting sun gleam on the gently flowing water gives me a feeling of peace and gratitude.

"Without the river, we wouldn't have much of a farm or such a popular guest house. Tzamenkomst means 'congregation', and that perfectly describes a place where our family and others can come together and share this beautiful piece of Africa."

To book your stay, call Lee-Anne on 072 596 0017 or email bookings@tzamenskomst.com

Its good for the soul

Even if you don't believe in the existence of the soul, there's a fair bit of evidence to support the claim that living beside a river has benefits for the psyche, defined by one dictionary as "the human soul, mind or spirit".

Some of my earliest and happiest memories are associated with flowing water, starting with a rubber duck in the bath and evolving over the years into a harmless obsession with rivers. When I was a child, the highlight of our family's annual pilgrimage from Kimberley to Cape Town was a picnic stop beside the Hex River, where my brother and I would paddle in the cola-coloured water and I would dream of living in a little waterside shack and never having to go to school again. (*In the picture above, Alan – right – is playing in a bathtub with his cousin Hercule du Preez, who succumbed to Covid-19 last year. – Eds.*)

Although that dream didn't materialise, I was on the right track. Studies have shown that people living near water enjoy significant health benefits, including a lower risk of obesity and a reduced likelihood of premature death. There are also reports of an improvement in mental health and wellbeing. Not exactly the sort of peer-reviewed material that would make it into scholarly journals, but it's good enough for me. After many hours of searching online, I've found a spot beside a sleepy river that appears to have it all, including birds and fish begging to be caught.

In preparation for the coming zombie apocalypse, I'll stock our riverside getaway with 10 cases of baked beans, the last six jars of Peck's Anchovette in the known universe, and some air freshener. When my wife comes home, we need to talk.

The Velddrif hustle

Boats, bazaars and bokkoms

Fishing is one of Velddrif's main industries. The fishing harbour in Laaiplek, on the west side of town at the mouth of the Berg River, caters to both commercial and subsistence fishers.

OPPOSITE Rob and Maria Kirsten and their daughters, Kiara (18) and Savanha (12).

Since Rob and Maria Kirsten picked unassuming Velddrif on the West Coast as their new home 17 years ago, they've built their own house and established a number of successful businesses.

TEXT **CARLA REDELINGHUYS** PHOTOS **ELZE POLS**

Bokkom Avenue is lined with quirky shops and restaurants. The owner of the River Studio is artist Marina Cluni, who paints landscapes, portraits… and boats, of course. Ek & Djy Vissery next door is a hotchpotch of bric-a-brac. And their food is good, if somewhat limited.

When you've driven across the narrow Carinus Bridge spanning the Berg River, that's when you know you've arrived in Velddrif. And you'll soon understand why: the confusing stop-street-slash-faux-circle situation where nobody really knows what they're supposed to do or which way to go aptly reflects the contrasting nature of this West Coast town.

This is a place where you'll still find kids participating in *volkspele* at a popular hotel on a Saturday afternoon, but it's also where a local dentist has orange dreadlocks and looks like he'd be more at home at AfrikaBurn than with a dentist's drill in his hand.

And it is home to Rob and Maria Kirsten, who, at first glance, are the antithesis of what you'd expect a couple living in a small West Coast town to look like. Seeing Rob for the first time, you'd be forgiven if your thoughts immediately turned to Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones – Keith in a bandana with sunflowers, a tie-dyed vest and barely-there swimming briefs. But whereas the legendary rock 'n' roll guitarist would probably be swigging a bottle of Jack Daniels at 4in the afternoon, Rob is sipping on a Black Label and listening to David Gray when, on a Friday afternoon, I walk into the rustic braai area adjacent to the couple's house. He has an infectious smile, and a face lined by life, laughter and the sun.

"I grew up in Melkbos, in 5th Avenue, with my dad. I've always loved that town. But it's sad – he had to move away because the rates and taxes became unaffordable; at that stage, my sister and I couldn't help out. So we sold the house," he says in response to my complaint that the journey to Velddrif from Melkbos had been slow-going because of heavy traffic.

As a relatively new resident of Melkbos, I commiserate about the rates and taxes, complain about the week-enders who take our parking spaces and flock to the beaches, forcing locals to find relief from the heat under their sprinklers if they're not lucky enough to have a pool. And how it seems as if there's a new wave of well-heeled incomers, and older locals moving out.

"It's interesting what you're saying. Quite a few young people have moved to Velddrif. And for the most part, it's a welcoming town. You still have the older, more conservative generation, and now you have city folk who want to raise their kids in a more wholesome environment. But it's often difficult for those who fall in the middle to fit in.

"At first we were met with, I guess, suspicion – when we moved here. It was a different place then. It's a small town and people talk. But Maria, being who she is, soon won everyone over, and now you won't find anyone >

who won't do anything for her. I'm away for about six months of the year working offshore, so she needs support – and she has that in the community."

As if she heard us speaking about her, Maria hurries in, her long, wavy hair framing the face of a woman you can immediately see is a take-no-nonsense, formidable force. She carries herself with a fiery grace that screams independence. She is a woman who for half of the year has to keep a household with two teenage daughters in check and keep several businesses afloat on her own, so you can understand her tough demeanour.

"I'm so sorry I'm late. I had a boat trip that went on a bit longer than usual. If you'll just excuse me, I have to chat to Rob about a few logistics for tomorrow."

It's the annual church bazaar on Saturday, a big event on the town's calendar, and the Kirstens are in charge of the laser tag.

"Is everything ready for tomorrow, Rob? I have a sunrise cruise and I can't help set up."

Rob answers in the affirmative, but you can see mild scepticism on his wife's face.

I ask about the laser tag.

"It's more of a side-line project," Maria explains. "It's something we started because we had the space for the huge tent and we found that there was interest from visitors who wanted to keep their kids busy for an hour or two. We also have large groups who book and that makes it worthwhile to keep it going.

"But our main source of income is from the boat cruises, which we started at the beginning of 2021. It was still in the middle of the Covid-19 panic, so it was slow-going at first, but we've steadily progressed to where we do three cruises a day over weekends. We do sunrise, midday and sunset cruises. Each take between 1 and 2 hours. Those are long days – for the first trip we leave at 05:45, and because we have to stop to disembark and embark and refuel, I sometimes get home late in the afternoon. It does get tiring. But we're not doing too badly."

So, what kept them afloat in the six years between when they moved to Velddrif in 2005 to the present?

"Rob's been working steadily as first assistant on dive-support vessels, and that's obviously helped tremendously. But it also means he's away from home a lot. And I'm not one to sit still and do nothing, so I used what I had at my disposal and I hustled. I sold fruit and veg from my garden, I made and sold jam, and now on our plot I have nine bee hives and I sell the honey – Home Grown @BovenRivier – mostly at the nursery in town." >

A trip on the *KnotXtreme* is always a fun experience. Rob, who really knows his stuff, entrances passengers with his knowledge of the local wildlife.

Maria does one of her sunrise cruises, which depart at 06:45. Just a word of caution: While many choose to ignore the rule, swimming in the Berg River is not allowed. The local municipality has imposed stricter measures after a recent spate of drownings.

ONE CAN'T HELP but sense some underlying tension because of Rob's biannual absence from home. Has he considered taking fewer jobs?

"Many times. But someone has to pay for all of this."

And "all of this" really is something – an oasis in a stark, dry landscape.

Why Velddrif? (No disrespect to Velddrif, of course.)

"I was all about money," Rob says."I did commercial offshore diving for many years, and it helped me live the life I thought I wanted to live. I bought a huge house in Melkbos – the town I grew up in – with everything you could think of: the flashy cars, the big-screen TVs… I was that guy. (It's difficult to imagine that the man sitting in front of me was ever anything other than a laid-back free spirit.)

"Then I met Maria. She was wild and free, and nothing like I was."

"When Rob and I met 20 years ago, I was working at Doodles in Parklands and living in a flat…"

"You were living in a flat with a bunch of people I didn't like…"

"Rob, who's telling the story?"

"Maria, I think we should get the 'talking stick' out again."

(The "talking stick" is pretty self-explanatory and perhaps a good idea in many homes.)

Rob picks up the story: "After a few weeks, I asked her to move in with me… She kindly declined, but then she became pregnant with our first daughter, Kiara." So circumstances dictated the outcome, and Maria moved her belongings to her new abode.

Maria makes no bones about the fact that she was less than enthusiastic about living in Melkbos. "I didn't fit in. Rob was a local; I was not. I was very much an outcast."

One evening, when Maria picked Rob up from the airport after one of his diving jobs, she didn't take the turn-off to Melkbos but kept driving along the R27. Understandably confused, Rob asked her what was going on.

"We're living in Velddrif now."

In his absence, she had packed what she could into her little Corsa, asked a local wood supplier if he would transport the rest of their belongings, and that's how she moved their life up the West Coast.

That was 15 years ago.

AT FIRST THEY LIVED in an old house just outside town, but they knew they wanted a place they could make their own. The urgency for this ramped up after a particularly brutal assault on Maria when she was home alone with their young daughter, Kiara, while Rob was away on a diving job. When Rob returned, the search began in earnest.

"All the plots I was looking at were either too expensive or not right. Then one day I was driving along this dirt road a few kilometres outside of town. I saw a plot with a lone barn and a small tree next to it. >

As someone who spends most of his life on, in and around water, Rob is in his element on a boat.

Maria is not only at the helm of the *Knot Xtreme* most of the time, but whenever Rob is away working on dive-support vessels, she also runs their businesses and household on her own.

ABOVE The Kirstens' warm, inviting home is a reflection of their personalities and their interests.

RIGHT The pool was one of the first things the Kirstens built on their property. In a place where the temperature has been known to reach 47°C, you can understand why.

It immediately stood out to me because it was the only plot with a tree on it. I phoned the estate agent, but she told me that there was another interested party. That night, I told Maria about the property but said that someone else had already put in an offer on it. Turns out that someone was Maria!"

Serendipitous. Today, that tree stands 20 m tall, and the lone barn isn't so lone anymore. Little by little, the couple added to the 5 ha property: first the main house and the swimming pool, then the lapa with its pizza oven, then the braai pit. It's been a labour of love that's taken eight years to get the place to where it is now – with a bit of imagination, you could be in the south of France – except it's 40°C and you have views of dry vegetation and bare patches of earth.

Rob and Maria built everything themselves. They handpicked every rock in the stone pillars around the house, each piece of furniture inside has a story to tell, and knick-knacks collected over the years tell the story of a family who love nothing more than spending time in their unpretentious home. It's a place where strangers are made to feel like friends. You can see the Kirstens' personalities reflected in every nook and cranny. Because that is who they are: warm, hospitable, easy-going.

Later that evening, sitting in the lapa, Rob chats a bit about the bazaar the next day. As a lover of small-town fêtes, I know that these events are often attended by, shall we say, the older generation who are not always as accepting of "others". I subtly raise this with Rob.

"*Ag*, no man. They all know me by now. I am who I am. But I *can* tell you a story. A few years ago, Kiara was in a private school in a town a few kilometres from Velddrif. She came to me one day and said that there was a daddy–daughter *potjiekos* competition and asked whether I would be interested in taking part. I'm a *boerseun* – you wouldn't say it by looking at me, but I played first-team rugby all through high school – so I obviously said yes. Some of her friends' dads couldn't make it so I said they should all come with us. >

The Kirstens have slowly added on to their property since they bought it, and it now seems perfect, but Rob says there is always something more to be done.

"I loaded my potjie, wood, carrots, potatoes, meat, a fold-out table, and a few peelers into my Isuzu bakkie and off we went. When we arrived, I first thought we might be at the wrong place. There was one table with a chocolate fountain. A chocolate fountain! Others had brought in caterers. But I said, to hell with it, this is a *potjiekos* competition. So, I folded out the table, got the girls to peel the veg, and I made my fire and started my potjie. There was little interaction between us and the other parents. And when it came time for the judges to sample the goods, so to speak, they didn't even come round to me. They ignored us completely. I made a decision then and there that if we weren't good enough for these people, they weren't good enough for us. I told the girls to pack up everything, we loaded it in the bakkie, and left. I told Kiara that I was extremely sorry if I had embarrassed her, and she gave me a hug and said, "You didn't."

The couple moved Kiara and their younger daughter, Savanha, to a school in Hopefield the following week.

The couple's best friends with their kids and dogs in tow appear as though out of nowhere and it's hugs all round, even for me. The occasion? It's a proper West Coast snoek braai (snoek caught by Rob himself, of course). While the men are preparing the evening's meal, Maria talks about some of their projects and the log cabins at the bottom end of the property.

"Rob is never done. Whenever he's home, he adds something new. We recently added the cabins with bunk beds that each sleep eight, and we rent it out to large groups. There are communal bathrooms and a kitchen."

She seems to have a lot on her plate.

"Actually, I've also recently bought the plot two stands down from us. I'm renting it out to a man and his daughter who are farming with snails."

Snails?

"Yes, for escargots and for snail cream. They're testing it out at the moment to see if it's viable, but it looks like it might be, and then I'm seriously considering buying into the business."

Rob walks over with the first of what will be an array of dishes. He gives Maria a big kiss on the cheek.

"*Sy's 'n moeilike vrou*, but dammit if I don't love her."

A formidable couple, indeed.

Contact Knot Xtreme Bergriver Boat Cruise knotxtreme@gmail.com
083 439 1030

ABOVE RIGHT A feast of rock lobster – legally sourced, of course.

Rob and Maria built their house on the West Coast themselves.

ABOVE Rob prepares the coals for a snoek braai on a Saturday night.

TOP Kiara takes a snooze in the sun on a hot Velddrif afternoon in a hammock on the stoep.

Bokkom Republic

Upon entering town, turn right and drive along Voortrekker Road, and you'll soon see a sign for Bokkom Avenue, Velddrif's first ever street and now also the "restaurant/coffee shop hub" of the town, overlooking the Berg River. No trip to Velddrif is complete without a stop here. Have a rustic breakfast or a toasted sarmie outside on the jetty at Ek & Djy Vissery, then have a look at the quirky decor inside – it really is something to behold. If you fancy something slightly healthier, go next door to Avoo Health Café, which, as the name implies, caters for the more waistline-conscious among us. They also sell rusks and other lekker goodies for the trip back home. And for a plate of authentic West Coast seafood, you can't go wrong with Gilda's. Should you wish to buy a painting or a fridge magnet as a keepsake, stop in at River Studio.

Birders are in for a treat: greater and lesser flamingos, spoonbills, pelicans and pied kingfishers are abundant, and the elusive black swan has been known to make an appearance.

Rob and Maria offer river cruises on their boat *Knot Xtreme* – it's a great way to see birds.

As for where the street got its name, it is the epicentre of the town's bokkom industry. Bokkoms, to the uninitiated, are essentially fish biltong – delicious (to some), but it has a particular taste and a smell that lingers on the breath and fingers no matter how hard you try to rid yourself of it. So be warned.

The recipe for making bokkoms has not changed over generations: After mullets are washed thoroughly, they're packed in crates and salted – heavily. Then they're tied in bunches and hung in the sun to dry for between two and three weeks.

The bokkom trade is huge in Velddrif, and many people make their living off this authentic West Coast snack. It might not be your thing, but, hey, you only live once. And there are always breath mints and soap. P

Postcards from the Tankwa

The R355 between Ceres and Calvinia is the longest stretch of gravel road between two towns in South Africa. And if you find yourself on this route, you're in the Tankwa Karoo. From the road, the surrounding plains seem lifeless and dull, but when you stop your car, sit quietly and breathe in the atmosphere, you realise there might just be much waiting to be discovered here.

TEXT AND PHOTOS **ADRIAAN OOSTHUIZEN**

Rock solid

I met Jakob van Wyk by the side of the road in the Hammelhoek area. I saw something of the Roggeveld Mountains in the creases on his face, almost as though the mountains' mere presence left their mark on Jakob. To me, his weathered jacket and pipe, along with the goats in the background, depict steadfastness in a remarkable way. >

Counting sheep

I'd photographed Oom Kershof of Garsfontein on his farm before, so I wanted to stop by to give him a print. At his home near the R355 they told me he was out counting sheep. We went looking for him, and after a while I saw his bakkie parked in the road. We got out and found Oom Kershof alongside André, one of the farm workers' children, and Blesman the border collie. I asked them to sit still for a moment and took this picture. Oom Kershof has since passed away.

Where does the Tankwa begin and end? This question elicits a wide variety of responses, depending on whom you ask. Sure, there are geographical boundaries on maps, as well as different plant biomes and geological features. But my personal feeling is that the Tankwa starts as soon as you pass the longest avenue of fig trees that I know of, and the sky and the plains open up in front of you as you drive through Karoopoort.

That's where the Tankwa starts.

The gigantic basin is bordered in the west by the Cederberg and in the east by the Roggeveld Mountains. The Swartruggens hills lie to the south, and the Hantam Mountains to the north. The Tankwa Karoo is part of the Great Karoo, but its enclosure by these mountains creates the impression of a separate entity. Locals refer to the centre of the basin as the Tankwa, and this is also where the Tankwa Karoo National Park is situated. They call the southern part the Ceres Karoo.

My mission, however, wasn't to study the area's geography, but to explore the places and meet the people of this remote environment. I fancy myself a type of modern-day explorer, using my camera to share my discoveries and observations. After all, it's any explorer's duty to document what they find. I also wanted to add meaning to the moment in time in which I found myself. As soon as I met some of the people of the Tankwa Karoo, it was clear they all share a certain pride in their heritage.

My fascination with seeking to mirror the landscape in the faces of its people, and to convey something of that pride, set a subconscious process in motion. It was a process that touched me so deeply that I could only discern the meaning once I'd finished my project.

The only thing I was aware of during the five years of driving there and back to complete this project was a search for beauty. That was my only motivation. I sought to capture the essence of the Tankwa Karoo within the confines of my abilities and my reach, to eventually enclose it in the covers of a book for others to enjoy too. The result was the book *Briewe uit die Tankwa*, which I completed with the help of writer Leti Kleyn. I believe her words and the stories of Dawid Slinger are the only suitable travelling companions to the images in the book.

I inherited my love of the region – both my parents are originally from the Karoo. It's in my blood, as it were, which is why I return time after time without ever tiring of the landscape.

With every visit, I gained a deeper awareness of the place and its people. I started welcoming the silence, which is so intense that you can hear the blood rushing in your veins. I was able to immerse myself in the environment, become a part of it.

Leti was my travelling companion, and I was able to revisit several of the people I'd photographed years before. Even though I encountered change and loss, the beauty was all I saw. Just like a horse wearing blinders, I simply couldn't see anything that wasn't pretty.

Briewe uit die Tankwa (Protea, 2016) is available from takealot.com for R380

Silent sentinel in the night

The noble windmill bearing the brand name Climax on the vane is synonymous with the Karoo. This one is at Klein-Hangklip, next to the R356 on the way to Sutherland. I often passed it on the way to Bizansgat. This picture was my second attempt. The time to take a photograph like this is limited, as there's only once chance per night to do it. Once the night gets too dark, the window of opportunity has closed. This technique allows you to highlight the objects that interest you –in this case it is quite obvious. >

Footprints of the past

Along the Middelpos road, just before the turn-off to the Tankwa Karoo National Park at Onder-Wadrif, lies a deserted farm that SANParks has bought to incorporate into the park. To me, this abandoned washing line with its wooden crosses on either end symbolises the sale of the land. The long line used to bear lots of clean laundry, but now there's nothing. It's an image that reflects the depopulation of the Tankwa.

Daughter of the soil

I met Willamina Botes on the farm Brakfontein, just beyond Elandsvlei in the direction of Die Mond. She and her mother and a handful of other people were busy planting crops when I arrived. I tried to photograph everyone who wanted to be photographed. I was occupied with beauty.

All along the wire

When you cross the Doring River in the Biedouw Valley and ascend the rocky pass to the top, you arrive at Die Bos. But before you get there, there's a turn-off to your right that the map indicates as Poortje. The road makes a circle before winding down to Elandsvlei. I met Jacky and his horse on that road, along with Kerneels and his greyhound. They were checking wire fences.

Time to pause

I spotted Tannie Anna Pieterse on Oom Kershof's farm, Garsfontein. She was simply standing in the doorway of the cookhouse, gazing out at the landscape. In her face I found what I'd been searching for: a mirror of the landscape. >

Where once was endless ocean

It was a late afternoon in midwinter and I was rushing to find something I knew existed. We were hunting the light and when we found it, we watched as it waned. I drove as fast as I could on a bad road because I knew there wasn't much time. When I stopped the car, I could see the flowers already starting to close against the cold. But the light was perfect, and I had exactly a minute to take this picture.

The stand of Jan Jacobs and Anna Strots on an open plain.

The Middelpos road crosses a ridge in the landscape just before the Tankwa Karoo National Park. The ridge runs from the direction of Oudebaaskraal all the way to Waatlemoenfontein. After even a little rain, grass grows on the ridge and in the dry river beds, making the landscape come alive.

Oudebaaskraal Dam fills up after good rains. Originally built for irrigation, it has fallen into disuse. The body of water in this harsh countryside is the embodiment of the circle of life, in my view. It's a surreal beauty. Sometimes life can be abundant.

Tankwa all-terrain vehicle

I met Jan Dini on Brakfontein. The rider's wide smile and the horse's proud stature resulted in one of the most imposing portraits I've ever taken.

Smooches from Snoepie

Wally Lange is the brother of Hein, and together they own the Tankwa Farm Stall. I went to see where Wally lives and I was about to take a picture of him when his dog Snoepie jumped up onto the dam wall and started covering him in kisses. It was a beautiful moment. >

Time and distance

This was the first picture I took in the Tankwa, and it inspired the entire project. I was photographing rain over the foothills of the Cederberg when I turned around to see the last light of the day setting the few rocks and bushes in the foreground aglow. I made this picture and then it was gone.

Tannie Lizzie and her *suikerklont*

This is Oom Mannetjies Esau and Tannie Lizzie Claaste. I had to ask them nicely to pose for the picture – in fact, I pleaded. It's easily one of my favourite pictures of the Tankwa's people. When Tannie Lizzie smiled at Oom Mannetjies, it created this special moment. She calls him her *suikerklont* (lump of sugar).

Salt of the earth

Venture far enough into the Tankwa, and you'll get to a sign on the R355 that reads "Die Mond". If you take that turn-off and drive on for quite a distance, you'll eventually reach Die Mond at the Doring River. It's an oasis in the arid landscape. This is where Linda and Hannes Hough's farm lies.

Karoo cowboy

I met Marthinus Abrahams at Onder-Wadrif. To me, his hat makes him look like a cowboy. >

Raising the next generation

I was deeply impressed by the passion for education evident in the two teachers at Elandsvlei Primary School, Monya Prinsloo and Nicolette van der Merwe. The school's slogan inspired me to take a picture of them with all 25 of the learners. After all, how often does one get the chance to capture an entire school's staff and learners in one picture?

Peas in a pod

Brothers Selwyn and Edward Klaaste are both learners at Elandsvlei. Children are completely without pretence and often make for wonderful portraits full of surprises.

Kissed by the light

The beauty of the early-morning light on the grass at Brakfontein attracted my photographic eye like a magnet.

Trio of travellers

I met Petrus Kalmeyer and his two donkeys, Brander and Swartland, on the farm Bizansgat. I visited the farm a few times, because it was one of the places where we could stay over. Petrus is very proud of his donkeys and his cart; he says he's travelled far and wide with them. P

Big heart, helping hand

As if Tori Stowe didn't have enough on her plate as an artist, illustrator and surface designer, in 2020, this avid gardener from Bathurst also started GROW Nolukhanyo. This inspiring community project enables donors and volunteers to establish and maintain food gardens at homes, crèches, schools and a clinic.

TEXT AND PHOTOS **MIA LOUW**

Even in autumn some of the vegetable gardens in Nolukhanyo are lush with leafy greens like spinach.

"Hi! Yoh! Tomorrow is going to be a busy day." A message from Tori Stowe. "We're joining American veteran volunteers while they fix the fence at a crèche in Nolukhanyo. The Rotary Club of Port Alfred is meeting me at my art gallery to donate garden equipment for the clinic, and we are also visiting private gardens in the township. Then, homeward for coffee!"

This is a normal day for Tori. Sometimes she also drives 40 km from Bathurst to Makhanda, where her son Noah (13) goes to school, all while juggling a huge vegetable garden, 64 chickens, four dogs and her real job.

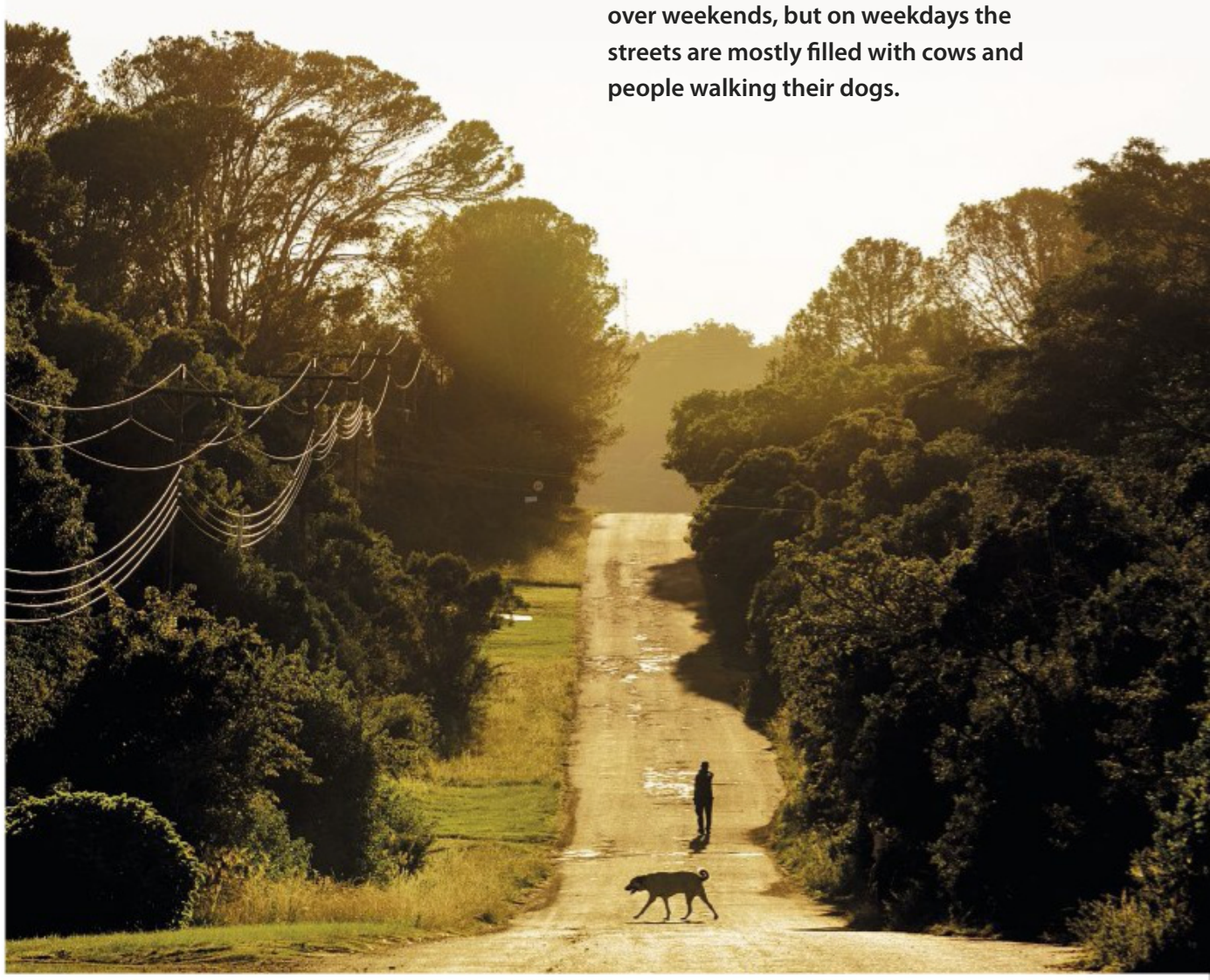
"I'm a full-time freelance artist, which means I don't only have to *do* my job but I also have to make it up first!"

If she's not designing for Woolworths and other homeware stockists, she is illustrating children's books and producing ceramics, sketches and fabrics with her team at Stowe & So at The Corner Gallery in Bathurst.

Her talents and time management are impressive, but Tori constantly shifts the focus from herself and her art to a project called GROW Nolukhanyo, which she started during the hard lockdown in 2020. Locals and organisations support gardens at 70 homes, crèches, schools and the clinic in Nolukhanyo township by providing seeds, seedlings, fruit trees, gardening tools, water tanks and fencing.

"GROW Nolukhanyo is mostly funded by friends and family, and growing food is really cheap," Tori says. She acts as a facilitator between donors, volunteers and the community to either establish new gardens or to help maintain existing ones.

Tori has always been focused on helping others, and through trial and error figured out what works best. She dedicated a year to help set up the Stowe & So staff with their own businesses by helping with marketing, logos, the purchase of equipment or stock, and organising training. >



The R67 from Makhanda brings car traffic through the village of Bathurst, especially over weekends, but on weekdays the streets are mostly filled with cows and people walking their dogs.

Lello takes a nap next to one of Tori's work stations, which is covered in artwork for a children's book that she is illustrating.

Tori enters her gorgeous garden from the chicken coop. “I plant at least 10 new things every day,” she says.

Many people, organisations and businesses have become involved in GROW Nolukhanyo since Tori started the project in 2020. JoJo has installed water tanks at crèches, like the Seven Days Church and Crèche above. Ten private gardens in the village (top and right) also received JoJo tanks. Tori encourages gardeners in Nolukhanyo to follow permaculture practices, where you always have something to harvest. "We focus on composting, mulching and worm farms," she says. The traditional method is to clear the garden and start again, but this is more sustainable."

"Our art and craft gallery was the outlet for the products. I didn't see how it could go wrong, but it did! The ideas of screen-printing, soap making, pottery and a nursery all fell flat the moment I stopped assisting. Entrepreneurs are a rare breed, hence the popularity of jobs. I realised that I superimposed my ideas on others. I decided rather to look for people already doing things, and help them with that."

With this new approach, Tori started visiting Nolukhanyo often and soon noticed all the vegetable gardens in the township. "And the seed was planted! I rushed home and started with 50 fruit trees. It was winter and they all died, but the idea grew within me."

TORI STROLLS THROUGH THE GARDEN on their smallholding, a short drive from Bathurst's centre. "After Noah gets on the bus to school in the morning, I spend 2 hours gardening. I plant at least 10 new things every day."

Tori follows a process of elimination and continues to grow what works well in their area. She keeps a diary and notes what thrives at certain times of the year. Citrus trees seem to struggle, but figs, olives, almonds, peaches and guavas do well.

She shows us her potting shed, where she propagates plants for herself and for the township gardens. Staples for Nolukhanyo include maize, pumpkins, squashes and beans in summer, and potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions, spinach, cabbage, beetroot and lettuce for when autumn comes around.

Tori leads the way to their bucolic creeper-covered home – "a renovator's dream", as she puts it. Her husband, Craig, is in the kitchen making coffee. They met while studying at Rhodes University in Makhanda.

"I grew up in Grahamstown," she says. "I went to Diocesan School for Girls and then Rhodes, where I studied fine art, alcohol and boys. After that I moved to Durban for a boy. I hated city life; after a year I moved back >

BELOW Chandra Tremayne from VETPAW and Recycle for Veterans lends a hand in the garden at Siphucule Crèche in Nolukhanyo.

Help from abroad

Chandra Tremayne, who represents the companies VETPAW and Recycle for Veterans, recently visited South Africa for the first time. "We are building a big programme out here to have more continuous volunteers, including military veterans from the United States. VETPAW has been in South Africa for eight years and protects wildlife on the Buffalo Kloof Conservancy nearby. It has been assisting with rhino poaching and has been training to work in other areas of conservation.

"This is Recycle for Veterans' first trip, to meet the community and to figure out how to build the programme. Some of the things we are looking at are how to get recycling centres up and running, and collecting plastic and turning it into art. This also helps veterans to transition out of the military and back into civilian life."

to the Eastern Cape with that boy," she says, glancing at Craig, all grown up now.

Tori and Craig lived in Port Alfred for 10 years, where they ran an advertising agency. The coastal town's property market was booming, and at the peak of the business, they employed 10 staff members. "It was a successful little ad company, but it was also draining, especially for an artist. Having to take your vision and do five options for a client is challenging."

They opened the art gallery in Bathurst as a side hustle. "I found it to be loads more fun, so we switched to this full time in 2004. Who needs money anyway, right?" Tori jokes.

She says an art gallery based in Bathurst is impractical because of dwindling customer numbers, the distance from suppliers, and the fact that they have to adjust their prices to a different economy in the rural Eastern Cape.

"Our roads and municipalities are rubbish, and basic services to keep things going are difficult. It can be draining running a business here, but it is also inspiring. Challenges make you more creative."

Tori and Craig run the gallery and the art and craft production, and they supply 16 shops around the country. As a designer, Tori's biggest client is Woolworths – she has done surface design for its homeware department for the past six years. She also illustrates children's books and is currently busy with her 11th one. On the kitchen table lie sheets of paper with blue and red beans painted as characters. "This is for a teacher in Hong Kong. It is for a children's book about racist beings, but I've turned them into racist beans," she laughs.

People are rarely the focus in Tori's art – she prefers plants and animals, with dog portrait commissions keeping her extremely busy. "I haven't really championed a cause with my work yet, so this year everything is themed around sustainability, climate change and good deeds. That's what I'm passionate about."

THE GOOD DEEDS in Nolukhanyo picked up steam in 2020, when locals immediately started gathering food for the less fortunate as the hard lockdown hit. "We still live in a very divided community. There is Bathurst, predominantly white and wealthy, and Nolukhanyo, predominantly black and poor," Tori says.

"I realised quickly that the pandemic was making little difference to many people's way of life. They didn't have a job or an income before, and once the Covid-19 food parcels were gone, they were exactly where they started."

While distributing food parcels, Tori mapped the village to identify families in need and those who were already growing food. With GROW Nolukhanyo, she shifted her focus to gardens and continued to collect funds to >

The Corner Gallery at the main intersection in Bathurst stocks Stowe & So's ceramics, tablecloths and art prints by Tori, as well as art and crafts from other local creatives.

ABOVE Nosicelo Mbendeni has been screen-printing with Tori for eight years, but their working relationship stretches back 13 years.
TOP LEFT Members of team Stowe & So discuss new designs.
TOP RIGHT Gladys Dayile tends to customers and makes soft toys for the shop. She has known and worked with Tori since 2002.
ABOVE RIGHT Tori describes her reLEAF series as a simple design of a bird in a bush. "The label encourages the customers to leave their lawns and hedges untrimmed to house the millions of animals that live there," she says.
RIGHT Stowe and So's dog designs are popular with customers, and dog-portrait commissions keep Tori extremely busy.

Priscilla Silevana, the project manager at Phumelela Special Needs Care Centre, shows off their garden and new JoJo tank.

establish and maintain these spaces.

They do rounds about twice a month, providing seeds, seedlings, fertiliser, netting or fencing, and gates made from pallets donated by Buco. The seedlings come from two local growers, so these small businesses are also given a source of income.

"As I explore Nolukhanyo, I meet more people involved in the community. Vuyo Sontsonga is a health-care worker at the clinic and runs a soccer club for boys. He informs me about special-needs cases, then I run drives for the families. The ladies at the Methodist Church in Port Alfred knit the most adorable clothes, gloves, beanies and blankets for crèches."

Many organisations and businesses have jumped on board, like The Bathurst Community Trust and Rhodes University. JoJo has installed water tanks for schools, crèches and the 10 best private gardens in the village. Friends and family also donate money, and Tori has hosted an online auction of animal drawings that raised R9 000 to spay and neuter strays.

THIS DYNAMO IS ALWAYS on the go. This morning she's meeting up with Veterans Empowered to Protect African Wildlife (VETPAW) at Siphucule Crèche. This group of US veterans who protect and train park rangers to combat poaching in Africa are planting a line of granadillas all along the fence they have fixed.

"They have also raised funds for uniforms at Vuyo's soccer club and organised electricity at the Phumelela Special Needs Care Centre," Tori elaborates on the way to Phumelela, where 28 children are being taught life skills. She points out the private gardens along the way.

"We are encouraging people to follow permaculture practices, where you always have something to harvest, even if it's only a handful of leaves. We focus on composting, mulching and worm farms. The traditional method is to clear the garden and start again, but this is more sustainable."

At Phumelela, Tori points out all the work that has been done recently, including burglar bars for safety, a wheelchair ramp and a growing box for potatoes. The project manager, Priscilla Silevana, introduces us to a group of children busy with bead-work. "Now that they have electricity, sewing is next on the agenda," Tori says.

On the one side of the property is a vegetable garden, and on the other side a fruit forest designed by a perma-culture expert. They created keyhole gardens – round beds, each with a compost pile in the centre – and established plant guilds, a beneficial grouping of plants that support one another in their functions.

"You usually have a fruit tree at the back, like this mulberry; then flowers that pollinate; plants like comfrey with big leaves that die and make compost; and nitrogen fixers like legumes. If ideas like these were repeated across the country, it could help alleviate hunger."

Tori believes it's far simpler to help others than people may think. "If someone like me with few resources can do this, what would happen if we all did it?"

LEFT Tori gives Priscilla, the project manager at Phumelela Special Needs Care Centre, plants from her garden.
BELOW A group of children at Phumelela, busy with beadwork.
BOTTOM Participants in the Community Work Programme, a government initiative aimed at tackling unemployment, work in the garden at Nolukhanyo Clinic.

Over the past two years she has learnt that kindness can gain incredible momentum. "It's just like that Spike Milligan poem, but replace the word 'smiling' with 'kindness'," Tori says as we part ways, with Milligan echoing her mantra:

Smiling is infectious,
you catch it like the flu,
When someone smiled at me today,
I started smiling too.
I passed around the corner
and someone saw my grin.
When he smiled I realised
I'd passed it on to him.
I thought about that smile,
then I realised its worth.
A single smile, just like mine
could travel round the earth.
So, if you feel a smile begin,
Don't leave it undetected.
Let's start an epidemic quick,
and get the world infected! P

CONTACT

Tori Stowe 072 297 3060 info@stoweandso.com
Stowe & So at The Corner Gallery 079 615 2380 admin@stoweandso.co.za
stoweandso.co.za
GROW Nolukhanyo GROW Nolukhanyo

Power to the people

Load shedding has become a common nuisance for South Africans. Fortunately nothing keeps you from making things easier for yourself when Eskom leaves us in the dark. We show you how to build your own compact power box.

TEXT **ZIGI EKRON**
PHOTOS **PETER VAN NOORD**

It feels like yesterday that Eskom first asked South Africans "nicely" to use less electricity, as its network was under immense pressure – but this was back in 2007. The nation "would not listen", and we were introduced to something that would change our lives drastically and for which we didn't even have a name before: load shedding. And the situation has worsened since.

Fortunately, today you can empower your household against load shedding with rechargeable lamps, battery back-up systems, generators, solar panels and built-in batteries and power inverters. Naturally, the prices vary: from about R100 for a rechargeable LED bulb to more than R200 000 for a system that will have you feeling like a cabinet minister who lives in an estate where they never experience load shedding.

Platteland will be looking at the various options, but the focus of this article is a compact power box you can build yourself from parts that are relatively affordable and easy to find, and that can keep a small home office running when it's your turn for load shedding: the Wi-Fi router, a laptop or two, and possibly a cellphone or a Fitbit in need of charging. You can also go to sleep with the assurance that this box will keep your home alarm on. You could even watch Netflix.

Here are your step-by-step instructions to build a power box.

You need

MATERIALS

- a plastic ammunition box with a high lid (R300 at Outdoor Warehouse)
- a 1 000 W inverter (Takealot sells the Gamistar we used for about R1 350. The advantage of this model is that it is equipped with the type of three-point sockets that are standard in South Africa. A lot of the others on the market have European or US sockets, which necessitate an extra fitting.)
- 2 kitchen cupboard air filters (most hardware shops stock them in various colours – we bought ours at Gelmar for R2 each)
- 8 screws of 4 x 4,6 mm
- a multi-plug wall socket (R50–R200 – we chose one with sockets for 1 three-point plug, 1 two-point plug and 2 USB power points)
- a wall socket box into which the multi-plug wall socket fits – the type that is usually built into the wall (± R20)
- a three-point power plug (± R30)
- electric cable, about 65 cm long (R20)
- a smart charger for a 12 V battery with a minimum power output of 3,5 A (we found this Bosch C3 charger on Takealot for R880)
- double-sided tape
- a 100 Ah deep-cycle battery (R2 500–R11 000 – Battery Centre branches countrywide sell a First National battery for R2 550; see our advice on batteries on p 104)
- a battery meter (we bought a Lumeno battery meter at Outdoor Warehouse for R300)
- ± 30 cm-long 1,5 mm red-and-black twin flex power cable
- 2 contact rings (10 mm)
- 2 contact-breaker points (4 mm)

TOOLS

- a Phillips screwdriver
- a try square
- a small slotted screwdriver
- a drill
- a 64 mm hole saw
- a 29 mm hole saw
- a fret saw
- a sharp knife (or use a carpet knife)
- sandpaper
- a pair of long-nose pliers

This is how

A Unscrew the base plate of the inverter and use it to mark the four holes on the outside of the ammunition box where the inverter needs to be screwed to the inside. (Place the edge of the base plate against the reinforced corner of the box.) 1 Drill the corresponding holes. 2

Tip **Use a drill bit somewhat larger than the shaft of the screw – that way you will have some room to align the holes in the side of the box with the holes of the inverter.**

B Mark on the panel the vertical centre between the holes you have just drilled. 3 On that line, drill a pilot hole 55 mm from the top inside edge of the panel, followed by another pilot hole 80 mm below the first one. 4 >

C Use the 64 mm hole saw on these pilot holes and cut two holes from the panel. Sand the edges until smooth and remove any extra plastic fragments. **5**

D Place the filters over the two holes and drill holes so that you can screw them down using the small screws. **6**

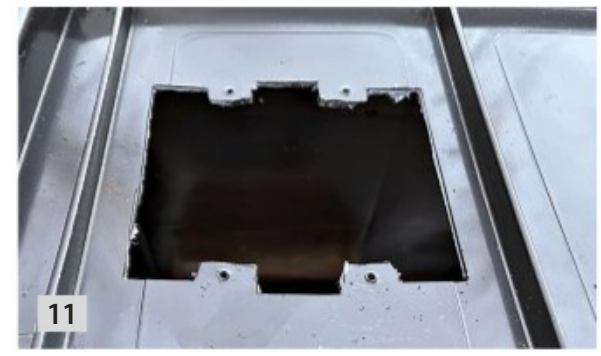
Tip **Initially we tried to glue the filters to the box using PVC glue, but it did not adhere well enough.**

E Screw the two battery wires that came with the inverter into place – the red wire on the red pole, and black on black. **7**

Screw the inverter to the inside of the box with the power sockets closest to the corner. **8**

F Unscrew the front plate of the wall socket box and use it as a stencil to mark the four screw holes and its inside on the outside of the ammunition box (opposite the inverter). **9**

G Again, use a hole saw to cut a hole as big as possible inside the lines you have just marked. Then use a fret saw and a sharp knife or carpet knife to remove the remainder of the plastic. **10**



The hole does not need to be perfectly neat, as nobody will see it, but it must be large enough to accommodate the backside of the wall plug. However, try to keep as close to the original shape as possible. **11**

H Strip one end of the electric cable and screw the three wires to their corresponding terminals on the back of the wall socket (green and yellow = earth; blue = neutral; brown or red = the live wire). **12**

I Make a hole in the underside of the wall socket box and insert the loose end of the electric cable through the hole in the side of the ammunition box first and then through the hole in the wall socket box. **13**

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J Remove the cover plate of the wall socket and screw it through the corresponding holes in the side of the ammunition box to the wall socket box. 14

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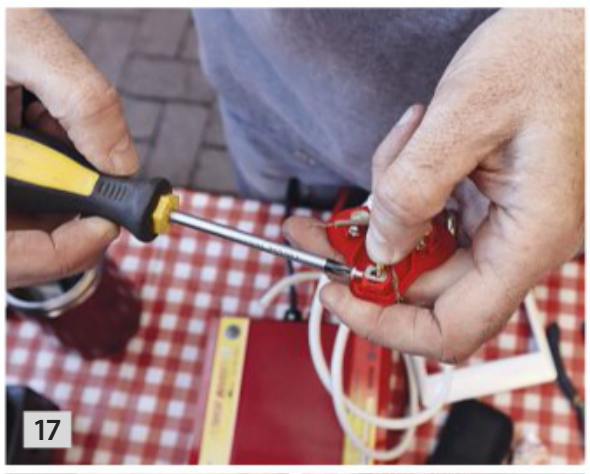
Clip the cover plate back in place. 15 and 16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K Attach the power plug to the loose end of the electric cable and plug it into the inverter. 17 18 and 19

Tip **Here's an easy way to remember where each wire goes: BLue = Left and BRown = Right**

L The Bosch C3 smart charger comes with a plastic plate that clips onto it, so that you can mount the charger to a wall – stick this plate to the bottom of the ammunition box using double-sided tape and clip the charger in place.

M Using the 29 mm hole saw, drill a hole in the panel next to the wall socket so you can mount the battery meter. 20 The hole should be about 5 mm from the inner edge of the panel 21 (to leave space for the lip at the front of the meter) – with enough space inside the box for the battery to fit alongside it.

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Screw the battery meter in place using the plastic ring that came with it. 22

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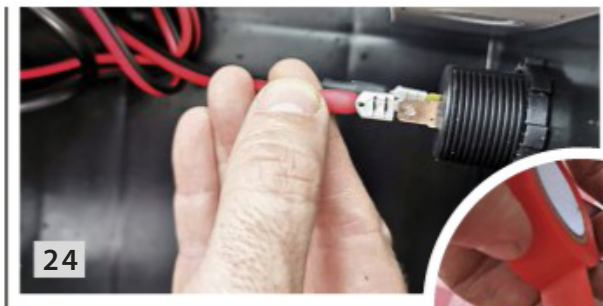
N Strip both sides of the red-and-black twin flex power cable, and use long-nose pliers or a crimping tool to pinch the two contact rings to one side and the two contact-breaker points to the other side. 23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Tip **You can use red and black insulation tape to mark the points. Connect the two contact-breaker points in place. The red wire is connected to the point marked "+" (top) and black to the point marked "–" (bottom).** 24

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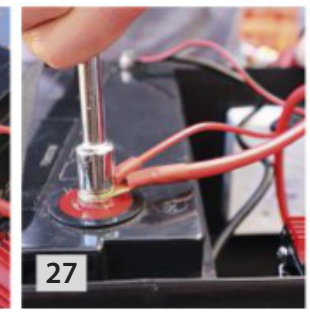
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O All that remains is to position the battery and connect the wires of the charger, meter and inverter to the poles – red on red and black on black. 25 26 and 27 Depending on the battery you bought, you might need to replace the contact rings of the inverter and charger with larger ones. Attach them the same way you did with the battery meter.

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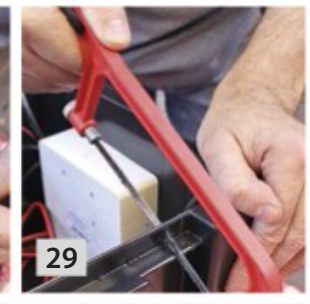
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P Make a small groove in the upper lip of the ammunition box through which the power cable of the charger can fit when the lid of the box is closed. 28 29 30 and 31 >

THIS IS HOW IT WORKS

The smart charger charges the battery and keeps it constantly charged, even if the power box is unused for weeks or months – unlike a normal car battery, which runs down over time. Whenever Eskom plunges you into darkness again, you simply open the box and switch on the inverter. You can then plug in appliances like a smart TV and the router for your internet and fibre connection, and charge a laptop or two, and even plug in an energy-saving LED bulb.

Note Although it is technically possible, this box is not meant to be used as a UPS (uninterrupted power supply). When you have plugged your charger into the wall and made sure it is on the correct setting (see the manual), you can leave it with peace of mind to keep your battery charged and going. But rather leave the inverter switched off until you need it.

THE BATTERIES

There are various types of batteries available in a range of sizes, and smart alecs can make your head spin with information on what to do and what not to do with batteries. Don't throw caution to the wind, but it really is not as complicated as it seems.

• Deep-cycle batteries

The first thing people will tell you around the braai fire is that you need a deep-cycle battery. True indeed. Deep-cycle batteries are specially made to provide an even stream of power over a long period. In this respect they differ from regular car batteries, which are designed to provide a lot of power for a short time.

• Size

The capacity of a battery is measured in amp-hours, denoted as "Ah". This is an indication of how many amperes (amps) the relevant battery can deliver per hour before it is completely flat. A battery of 100 Ah can thus give you 100 amperes for one hour, 50 amperes for two hours, and so on. The more amperes you draw from the battery, the faster it will run down.

Think of the battery as a bucket of water into the bottom of which you drill holes. The more holes there are (and the larger the holes are), the faster your bucket will empty.

For the purpose of a power box such as this one we propose you use a battery that gives at least 100 Ah.

• Three types

You may also hear people talk about lead acid, "AGM", "gel" and lithium batteries. You can just about write a thesis to discuss the difference between these, but suffice it to say the names indicate the various inner workings and chemical processes of the respective batteries. But in the end all these batteries fulfil the same purpose.

The different workings and processes mean the life span of the types of batteries vary. Using the example of the bucket again, the lead acid battery is probably the grey plastic bucket you can buy at the Chinese shop on the main street; an AGM battery is an enamel bucket; a "gel" battery a sturdy bucket of galvanised steel; and a lithium battery is a stainless steel bucket.

Note Lithium batteries are much lighter than other batteries, but also way more expensive, costing up to five times as much as a lead acid battery. You also need a special lithium-battery charger, which is not cheap either. However, just as a 5-litre plastic bucket cannot contain more water than a 5-litre stainless steel bucket, a 100 Ah lithium battery won't give you light for any longer in a blackout than a 100 Ah lead acid battery.

THE INVERTER

Everybody ought to know that each piece of electric or electronic equipment draws a certain amount of power, measured in watt (W).

Most household appliances come with a label that gives you an indication of their maximum wattage – a kettle, clothes iron or hairdryer, for example, uses a lot more watts than other appliances. The size of your inverter (with the battery) will determine which and how many of these appliances you can use at the same time. So, if you have a 1 000 W inverter, the total amount of the power usage of all the appliances you plug in should not exceed 1 000 W.

AN EASY CALCULATION

There is still some maths to do. As the power usage of appliances is indicated mostly in watt and not in ampere-hours, it makes sense to determine the power supply of your power box in watt-hours (Wh). Fortunately, there is an easy calculation for this: multiply the circuit tension of the battery (volt, or V) with the amount of amp-hours (Ah). In the case of the 12 V battery of 100 Ah we used for our power box, the capacity is 1 200 Wh (V x Ah = Wh).

Now you divide the capacity by the watt total of the appliances you plug in. Say your laptop uses 100 W power, your Wi-Fi router 15 W, your smart TV about 150 W and an energy-saving LED bulb 7 W; the calculation is: 1 200 ÷ (100 + 15 + 150 + 7) = 4,4.

This means everything can work for 4 hours and 24 minutes before the battery runs down (and you start hearing the inverter warning you).

Rather try not to deplete the battery. The smart people say one should try not to use more than 50% of the power of a lead acid battery. That prevents damage that could shorten its life span.

THE BATTERY METER

The LEDs on the meter we built into the power box shine in three colours (like a traffic light), and in the centre is a reading of the charge of the battery.

When the battery is charging (or is fully charged) the green lights are lit up and the screen shows a reading of between 13,8 V and 14,6 V. As the battery loses power, the green lights will fade and the yellow ones will shine. In the yellow zone the reading should be between 12,2 V and 13,6 V. This is still a normal level, and the battery would be safe to use. But when the yellow lights go out and only the red ones remain, it is an indication that the charge of the battery has dropped below the 50% level. Then it is time to recharge.

What are the other options?

Depending on your needs and budget there are a few easy solutions to keep on the lights and electric appliances.

Uninterrupted power supply (UPS)

For many people the greatest need during load shedding is to keep the Wi-Fi and internet connection running. For this purpose quite a number of small backup systems are available that vary in shape and size, but some of the best ones are not much bigger than your Wi-Fi router and look more or less the same too, but without the antennas.

Their capacity is mostly given in milli-ampere-hour (mAh). To determine for how long a UPS such as this one will supply power, use the same calculation we used on the opposite page. To simplify it: a unit of 8 800 mAh can easily see you through 4½ hours of load shedding. But this UPS is, however, not meant to power much more than a router and your fibre connection.

Our choice *Gizzu 8 800 mAh UPS at Takealot – R1 400*

Camping power box

Over the past few years, the camping market has been suppling consumers with their own mini power stations to take along on camping trips – in trailers and caravans and tents as well. Most of these look like a small suitcase with a lot of buttons and lights. They are not meant to supply uninterrupted power, and most have a small lithium battery, which is just enough to charge a few cellphones, a digital camera and a laptop or two before the power box itself has to be recharged. The advantage of such a box is that it is compact, light and easy to carry.

Prices vary from R3 000 to R30 000, depending on the capacity of the unit.

Our choice *Jackery 1000 at Outdoor Warehouse – R20 000*

Ready-made UPS

Similar to camping power boxes, there are also several ready-made UPSs available. Most of them look more or less like a higher-grade welding machine on wheels, and work on exactly the same principle as the power box we built. It basically consists of a battery, a charger, an inverter and an outlet plug. The quality and price vary, depending on the type of battery and the size of the inverter. A battery of 100 Ah and a 1 000 W inverter are a reasonable standard option.

You can expect to pay from R8 000 for a setup like this. **Our choice** *Mecer at Waltons – R8 500*

Rechargeable LED bulb

Most hardware shops and large stores such as Game and Makro sell rechargeable LED bulbs. You screw the bulb into a normal light socket, and it charges while the electricity is on, and uses this stored-up power to give you light during load shedding.

Various brands are available, but the principle is exactly the same. Instead of a glass tube with gas and a fuse, this bulb has a light-emitting diode (LED), most of which have a wattage of between 5 W and 9 W. With the LED, each bulb also has a tiny rechargeable battery. As soon as there is no power, the light draws power from the battery and stays on – albeit not as bright as usual. Depending on the brand and the power of the battery, these bulbs can emit light for 2–5 hours.

You can still switch the light on and off at the switch as usual. It is important to remember that the light has to be switched on while there is power from Eskom to allow the battery to recharge.

Our choice *Forest Lighting LED emergency bulb at Makro – R100* >

Generator

Petrol- or diesel-driven generators are as old as Methuselah, and as with all the other options, they vary in size and price. By a rough standard, even smallish generators supply more power than an average UPS or power box. Rand to kilowatt, initially they are a cheaper investment than any of the other options, but there are other factors to consider. The most obvious one is that you need to fill the tank often (now at about R25 per litre for petrol). Although such a generator is not as thirsty as your Fortuner, it can cost you quite a lot in the long term. *And* then there is the noise. Although the salespeople maintain that some models are nearly noiseless, you will always hear them. Lastly, there is always the issue of emissions: do you really want to contribute actively to air pollution?

Prices vary from R7 000 to R30 000 depending on the model. **Our choice:** *Ryobi at Makro for R7 000.*

Built-in inverter-and-battery system with solar power

If you aren't in the mood for any of the other options and don't have qualms about spending your children's inheritance, you can invest in a built-in inverter-and-battery system that is connected directly to the wiring in your house. In principle, such a system works exactly the same as our power box, but on a much larger scale – from about 3,5 kW to 8,8 kW. The price once again shall be determined by the capacity and the purpose it's used for. Dwayne Schrader of Ecolec Solar & Electrical Solutions says an entry-level system can cost between R50 000 and R55 000. With such a setup, the backup batteries charge with regular Eskom power and switch over automatically when the power goes out.

A colleague, Jaco Marais from Brackenfell, says the system for his home cost about R60 000, and during load shedding he can use nearly all his electric appliances. "We have a gas stove, but during load shedding we have used the electric oven and tumble dryer together with the Wi-Fi, two TVs and an Xbox," he says. "By the end of that load shedding shift, the battery level was not even on half. The system is connected in such a way that it switches over without you noticing it. Often in the evenings we only realise there's load shedding when we look out of the windows and see that our neighbours' homes are dark."

Dwayne says there is a lot of room to expand such a system with solar panels and extra batteries – provided you use the correct components from the start.

"If you want to be totally independent of Eskom, I advise using at least four batteries. Then you should also take into account the cost of the solar panels and installation. Then the cost is closer to R270 000."

He also warns that certain municipalities are laying down the law when it comes to the type of equipment they allow on their power network. Therefore it is wise to consult your town council beforehand for the necessary guidelines and make sure you get a reliable contractor to do the installation for you. P

PHOTO **JACO MARAIS**

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C_GD_03/2022

In October, when the apple trees are in bloom, beehives are moved to the orchards so the bees can pollinate the trees.

Spring is in the air

There are numerous good reasons to come out of hibernation, like celebrating Garden Day by strolling through other's people's gardens for inspiration, or picking fresh berries, or learning new skills…

BY **MAJA PALM**

WESTERN CAPE Elgin Valley | **7 September** | **Spring Gardening Workshop**

Fresh hacks for green fingers

Have you ever walked through a blossoming apple orchard, the scent of honey heavy in the air? "Every season is special here," says Catherine Boome, whose husband Selborne is the third generation of Boome men to farm with deciduous fruit on Cheverells Farm in the Elgin Valley. "In spring, everything awakens – the trees are in bloom and we bring in 60 beehives for pollination.

"Here and there, the flowering plants in the garden also start to show some colour; it's a welcome reward for winter's hard gardening tasks. The slightly warmer weather also brings hope for a bountiful harvest in summer."

Catherine, who's a registered dietician, has transformed a former packing shed on the farm into the Country Café, which offers a seasonal menu. "It's lovely being able to share the privilege of farm life with others. We hope to inspire visitors to live life at a slower pace and closer to nature and, where possible, to grow their own vegetables."

That's why they offer seasonal gardening workshops on the farm from time to time. Horticulturist Talitha Cherry runs the Spring Workshop on 7 September. (Read our short interview with her on the right.) Participants will learn more about sowing and propagating to ensure a summer harvest, and the best ways to protect your harvest from pests and diseases.

Where? Cheverells Farm, Elgin Valley
Cost R550 per person, including the workshop and complimentary cuttings, as well as coffee and rusks on arrival, scones at teatime and lunch at the Country Café.
Contact cheverellsfarm.com
@cheverellsfarm 060 861 1044

Spring workshops are presented in the glass greenhouse and the garden, and lunch is enjoyed at Country Café in a 60-year old renovated apple-packing shed.

Catherine Boome, the co-owner of Cheverells Farm in Elgin, enjoys sharing aspects of the farm lifestyle with visitors.

A time of growth

Spring is a time of intense activity in both your decorative garden and veggie patch, says horticulturist and apple farmer **Talitha Cherry**, who presents workshops and manages a nursery on Cheverells Farm.

What's on the programme at the Spring Workshop? Tell us about the topics you'll be discussing.
Spring is a time of growth. That's when you need to be sowing and making cuttings for summer crops, but it's also when snails and insects increase in number. So we'll be talking mainly about how you can ensure you – and not the bugs – get the most out of your summer harvest.

Typically, a workshop starts at 9:00, with coffee at the Country Café in the old apple shed. We make introductions and chat about a few basic gardening principles. There are usually about six to 12 people at a workshop.

After coffee, we head to the garden, where activities include making cuttings to take home. Afterwards, we enjoy a healthy lunch together.

What are the most important gardening tasks in spring, including in the veggie garden?
Plant, plant and replant! If you have a bare patch, weeds will grow, so preempt that by planting something.

Spring is the best time to remove bulb plants such as agapanthus, day lilies and wild garlic, separate the new bulbs and replant them in smaller clusters. It's also a good time to make cuttings of herbaceous plants such as sage, lavender, plectranthus and geraniums. Bulbs such as gladioli, amaryllis and dahlias are ready for planting too, and it's a good time to plant summer crops.

Cover garden paths with a thick layer of surface material to limit weed growth, and check that your sprinkler system is in good working order before the heat of summer arrives.

What kind of vegetables can be planted in spring?
Sow seeds and plant seedlings of lettuce, brinjal, tomatoes, chillies and spinach. Plant pumpkin, baby marrow, gem squash, butternut and cucumber further apart in the spaces where they'll be growing this season. Runner and bush beans will thrive. It's also a good time to sow marigolds to deter insects in summer. Buy a six-pack of herb seedlings such as thyme, mint, origanum and rosemary to give them a chance to grow a little bigger before transplanting them in late spring.

What's your motivation for presenting these gardening workshops?
I enjoy sharing my knowledge and experience. And I think all of us crave a bit of nature, healthy food and the reward of a good harvest. During the Covid-19 pandemic, nurseries were among the few businesses that showed growth. More people now want to be involved in producing the food they eat.

Tell us about the nursery in the glass greenhouse on the farm.
It gets cold and wet in this area. The glass greenhouse makes it possible to plant tropical species such as hoya and all kinds of succulents. We don't currently sell any of the plants – we give them away at the workshops. The café also uses a lot of the herbs and vegetables that we cultivate. >

RIGHT Talitha Cherry, her mother, Corrie de Bruyn, and her daughter, Kirsten, in an apple orchard on Cheverells Farm.

EASTERN CAPE: Hogsback | **20 October – 14 November** | **Spring Celebration Open Gardens**

Stroll through 11 beautiful gardens in Hogsback

During the Hogsback Open Gardens Spring Celebration in October and November, 11 private gardens will be open to the public for four consecutive weekends. "Hogsback is known for its azaleas, rhododendrons and roses that bloom in spring," says Sarah Currie of Hogsback Garden Club. "Because they don't all bloom at the same time, our open gardens can run for a whole month. The azaleas are at their prettiest from mid- to late-October, and then the rhododendrons take over. The roses awaken in stages until they're in full bloom by mid-November.

"Because a month is quite a long time, the private gardens are only open to the public from Thursday to Sunday. It gives both the gardens and the gardeners a bit of a break."

The two special weekends are Azalea Splendour (21–23 October) and Magical Roses & Rhodis (11–13 November), when there will be gardening talks, a night food market, stalls and more.

Keen gardeners may need to plan their budget, because there are magnificent azaleas for sale at Mistlea Nursery, shrubs and plants at Applegarth Nursery, flowering plants and shrubs at Woodside, and roses at Mons Garden.

"Mons Garden is a very special nursery laid out in the shape of a rose," Sarah says. "Here, the rhododendrons with their large pom-pom-like blooms flower at the same time as the roses with their variety of colours and scents."

Cost R120 per person (entry to all 11 gardens) at quicket.co.za.
Contact Hogsback Garden Club
hogsbackgardenclub@gmail.com
076 334 4856 (Sarah Currie)

WESTERN CAPE: Cape Point | **15 & 19 October and 12 November** | **Flower Workshop**

Explore the edible landscape

"There are the most wonderful foods, flavours and medicine in nature – we just need to learn how to spot them," says Roushanna Gray, the founder of Veld & Sea. She describes herself as a passionate "veld and sea culinary artist, foodie and forager".

Veld & Sea's foraging workshops are seasonal, because every season offers a unique opportunity to experience a different taste adventure. Spring is when Roushanna offers her popular flower workshops, which "celebrate everything related to flowers, from tasting, picking, creating and learning, to drinking and eating".

The workshop, held at Good Hope Gardens Nursery over the road from Cape Point Nature Reserve, starts with a demonstration of techniques to make a flower crown. After learning about edible flowers in the garden, everyone gets the opportunity to pick their own and to make dishes containing flowers and botanical-infused drinks in the lovely Veld and Sea Glasshouse.

Time 10:00–14:00
What to bring A bunch of any type of flowers (either from your garden or store-bought), and comfortable walking shoes for the foraging excursion
Cost R800 per person, which includes the flower crown, flower arrangements, beverages, lunch, printed notes and recipes
Contact veldandsea.com @veldandsea

It's quite a challenge to find the seven strawberry stations in this maze formed by brush cherry hedges on Redberry Farm.

WESTERN CAPE: George | **Year-round**

Climb to the top of a giant strawberry

Even though strawberries are summer fruit, Redberry Farm at the foot of the Outeniqua Mountains lets you pick your own strawberries throughout the year.

They recently built a 14,5 m-tall strawberry structure on the farm with a spiral staircase inside. As you ascend the stairs, there are six signs along the way with information about the 22-year-old farm. At the top, you exit the strawberry and walk out onto a deck, from where you can enjoy panoramic views of the farm, strawberry fields and mountains.

There's also a huge maze on the farm with hedges grown from more than 30 000 brush cherry shrubs (*Syzygium paniculatum*). The goal is not to find your way out of the maze but to locate all seven strawberry stations inside it. Best wear your walking shoes, and set aside enough time, as you will navigate more than 10 km of footpaths and a 25 m underground tunnel.

Climb the spiral staircase inside the giant strawberry on Redberry Farm and enjoy the view from the top.

Visit Redberry Farm from 09:00 to 16:00 Monday to Saturday. It is closed on Sundays, Good Friday and Christmas Day.

• **Jog or walk** A trail-running event on 10 September 2022 offers visitors the opportunity to run or walk either a 5 km or a 9 km route through Redberry's strawberry and golden kiwi fields. Enjoy scones served with the farm's own strawberry jam and cream afterwards. The 9 km race starts at 8:00 and the 5 km at 08:15.

Cost R50 (9 km) and R30 (5 km). Tickets to visit the giant strawberry (R50) and hedge maze (R40) are sold at the farm stall.
Contact info@redberryfarm.co.za
redberryfarm.co.za 044 870 7123

Lunar planting
a 3-month guide

Gaye Boshoff offers advice on when and what to plant in the vegetable garden in September, October and November to help gardeners create a healthy growing cycle.

Understanding the basics

Moon phases

As the moon's gravitational pull causes tides to rise and fall, it also affects moisture in the soil. Therefore it is said that seeds will absorb more water during the full moon and the new moon, when more moisture is pulled to the surface. This causes seeds to swell, resulting in improved germination and better-established plants. The moon also impacts plant growth through geotropism, which is how plants grow in response to gravity. Roots grow downward in the direction of the gravitational pull, and stems grow in the opposite direction.

• **New moon to first quarter (waxing) – semi-fertile** This is the ideal time to plant crops that produce their seeds outside the fruit. It is most suited to sowing or transplanting leafy annuals of which we eat the leaves, as well as the flowers and the stalks in certain instances.

• **First quarter to full moon (waxing) – fertile** The success rate of seed germination increases a few days before a full moon. This phase is most suited to fruiting annuals of which we value or eat the fruit or seed-bearing part of the plant.

• **Full moon to last quarter (waning) – semi-fertile** As the moon wanes, it is beneficial to those root, tuber and bulb vegetables and herbs that rely on a strong root system, things that grow underground, plants that are decorative and fruiting perennials.

• **Last quarter to new moon (waning) – semi-barren** As the moonlight decreases night by night, plants are encouraged to grow roots, tubers and bulbs. This is not the best time to sow seed.

1 Pick your climate zone

Climate zones are the general weather conditions averaged over a series of years in a particular place. These include the average temperature, air pressure, humidity, rainfall, sunshine, cloud and wind directions throughout the year.
Winter rainfall Western Cape
Summer tropical Mpumalanga; KwaZulu-Natal Lowveld and Coast
Summer temperate Gauteng; Limpopo; Free State Highveld; KwaZulu-Natal Midlands Eastern Cape; Little Karoo
Dry continental Western Free State; Northern Cape; North West

2 What to plant

(**S** Sow | **T** Transplant | **P** Plant)

WINTER RAINFALL
Western Cape

September

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **S**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Swiss chard **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Celery **ST**; Rhubarb **T**; Brinjal **ST**; Cucumber **S**; Marrow **S**; Okra **S**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Jerusalem artichoke **P**; Parsnip **S**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Turnip **ST**; Potato **P**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

October

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Swiss chard **T**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Artichoke **T**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Celery **ST**; Brinjal **ST**; Cucumber **S**; Marrow **S**; Okra **ST**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **S**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Parsnip **S**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Turnip **ST**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

November

Amaranth **ST**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Kale **ST**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Artichoke **ST**; Cabbage **S**; Cauliflower **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Brinjal **S**; Cucumber **S**; Marrow **S**; Okra **T**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **T**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **T**; Tomatoes **T**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Turmeric **P**; Turnip **ST**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

SUMMER TEMPERATE
Gauteng, Limpopo & Free State Highveld

September

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **S**; Cabbage **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Spinach **ST**; Swiss chard **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Celery **ST**; Rhubarb **T**; Brinjal **ST**; Cucumber **S**; Marrow **S**; Okra **S**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Maize **S**; Peas **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Jerusalem artichoke **P**; Parsnip **S**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Turnip **ST**; Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

October

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Spinach **ST**; Swiss chard **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Artichoke **T**; Cabbage **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Brinjal **ST**; Cucumber **S**; Marrow **S**; Okra **ST**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Jerusalem artichoke **P**; Parsnip **S**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Turnip **T**; Potato **P**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

November

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Kale **ST**; Lettuce **T**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Spinach **S**; Swiss chard **T**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Artichoke **ST**; Cabbage **ST**; Cauliflower **S**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Brinjal **T**; Cucumber **S**; Marrow **S**; Okra **T**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **T**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **T**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Jerusalem artichoke **P**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

VEGETABLE & HERB SYMBOLS

LEAF vegetables or HERBS The edible leaves of plants.

FLOWER vegetables The edible flowers of certain vegetables.

STEM vegetables The edible stalks of plants when the stalk is the main part of the vegetable.

FRUIT vegetables These are fleshy and contain seeds.

SEED vegetables The edible seeds grow in pods, some of which are also eaten (legumes).

ROOT vegetables Usually a long or round taproot.

TUBER vegetables They grow underground on the root of a plant.

BULB vegetables Consist of layers and usually grow just below the surface of the ground and produce a fleshy, leafy shoot.

SUMMER TEMPERATE
KwaZulu-Natal Midlands

September

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **S**; Cabbage **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Spinach **ST**; Swiss chard **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Celery **T**; Rhubarb **T**; Brinjal **ST**; Cucumber **S**; Marrow **S**; Okra **S**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Jerusalem artichoke **P**; Parsnip **S**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Turnip **ST**; Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

October

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Spinach **ST**; Swiss chard **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Artichoke **T**; Cabbage **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Brinjal **ST**; Cucumber **S**; Marrow **S**; Okra **ST**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; >

PHOTOS **GAYE BOSHOFF AND SHUTTERSTOCK**

Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Turnip **T**; Potato **P**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

November
Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **T**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Spinach **S**; Swiss chard **T**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Artichoke **ST**; Cabbage **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Cucumber **S**; Brinjal **T**; Marrow **S**; Okra **T**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **T**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Turmeric **P**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **T**

SUMMER TEMPERATE
Eastern Cape & Little Karoo

September
Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **S**; Cabbage **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Spinach **ST**; Swiss chard **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Celery **ST**; Rhubarb **T**; Cucumber **S**; Brinjal **ST**; Marrow **S**; Okra **S**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; Maize **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Jerusalem artichoke **P**; Parsnip **S**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Turnip **T**; Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

October
Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Spinach **T**; Swiss chard **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Artichoke **T**; Cabbage **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Rhubarb **T**; Cucumber **S**; Brinjal **ST**; Marrow **S**; Okra **ST**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Parsnip **S**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Potato **P**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

November
Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **T**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano T; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Swiss chard **T**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **T**; Artichoke **ST**; Cabbage **ST**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Cucumber **S**; Brinjal **T**; Marrow **S**; Okra **T**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **T**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **T**; Tomatoes **T**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

SUMMER TROPICAL
Mpumalanga

September
Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Swiss chard **T**;

3 When to plant

Follow the guide below to time your planting according to the phases of the moon, and look out for the next instalment in *Platteland* #37, on sale from 28 November 2022.

New moon (Sat, 27 Aug, at 10:17) to first quarter (Sat, 3 Sep, at 20:08)

First quarter (Sat, 3 Sep, at 20:08) to full moon (Sat, 10 Sep, at 11:59)

Full moon (Sat, 10 Sep, at 11:59) to last quarter (Sat, 17 Sep, at 23:52)

Last quarter (Sat, 17 Sep, at 23:52) to new moon (Sun, 25 Sep, at 23:55)

New moon (Sun, 25 Sep, at 23:55) to first quarter (Mon, 3 Oct, at 02:14)

First quarter (Mon, 3 Oct, at 02:14) to full moon (Sun, 9 Oct, at 22:55)

Full moon (Sun, 9 Oct, at 22:55) to last quarter (Mon, 17 Oct, at 19:15)

Last quarter (Mon, 17 Oct, at 19:15) to new moon (Tue, 25 Oct, at 12:49)

New moon (Tue, 25 Oct, at 12:49) to first quarter (Tue, 1 Nov, at 08:37)

First quarter (Tue, 1 Nov, at 08:37) to full moon (Tue, 8 Nov, at 13:02)

Full moon (Tue, 8 Nov, at 13:02) to last quarter (Wed, 16 Nov, at 15:27)

Last quarter (Wed, 16 Nov, at 15:27) to new moon (Thu, 24 Nov, at 00:57)

New moon (Thu, 24 Nov, at 00:57) to first quarter (Wed, 30 Nov, at 16:37)

First quarter (Wed, 30 Nov, at 16:37) to full moon (Thu, 8 Dec, at 06:08)

Thyme **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Celery **T**; Cucumber **S**; Brinjal **ST**; Okra **S**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **T**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Jerusalem artichoke **P**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

October

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **ST**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Artichoke **T**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Brinjal **T**; Okra **ST**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Jerusalem artichoke **P**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

November

Amaranth **S**; Basil **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **T**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Artichoke **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Okra **T**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **T**; Tomatillo **T**; Tomatoes **T**; Maize **S**; Jerusalem artichoke **P**; Radish **S**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **T**

SUMMER TROPICAL

KwaZulu-Natal Lowveld & Coast

September

Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Swiss chard **T**; Thyme **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Celery **T** Cucumber **S**; Brinjal **ST**; Okra **S**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **T**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

October

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Artichoke **T**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Brinjal **T**; Okra **ST**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

November

Amaranth **S**; Basil **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **T**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Artichoke **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Okra **T**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **T**; Tomatillo **T**; Tomatoes **T**; Maize **S**; Radish **S**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **T**

DRY CONTINENTAL

Western Free State, Northern Cape & North West

September

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **S**; Coriander **S**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Spinach **ST**; Swiss chard **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **ST**; Asparagus **ST**; Celery **ST**; Rhubarb **T**; Brinjal **ST**; Cucumber **S**; Marrow **S**; Okra **S**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Jerusalem artichoke **P**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Turnip **ST**; Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

October

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Coriander **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Lettuce **ST**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Spinach **ST**; Swiss chard **ST**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Artichoke **T**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Cucumber **S**; Brinjal **ST**; Marrow **S**; Okra **ST**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **ST**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **ST**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Radish **S**; Turmeric **P**; Turnip **T**; Potato **P**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

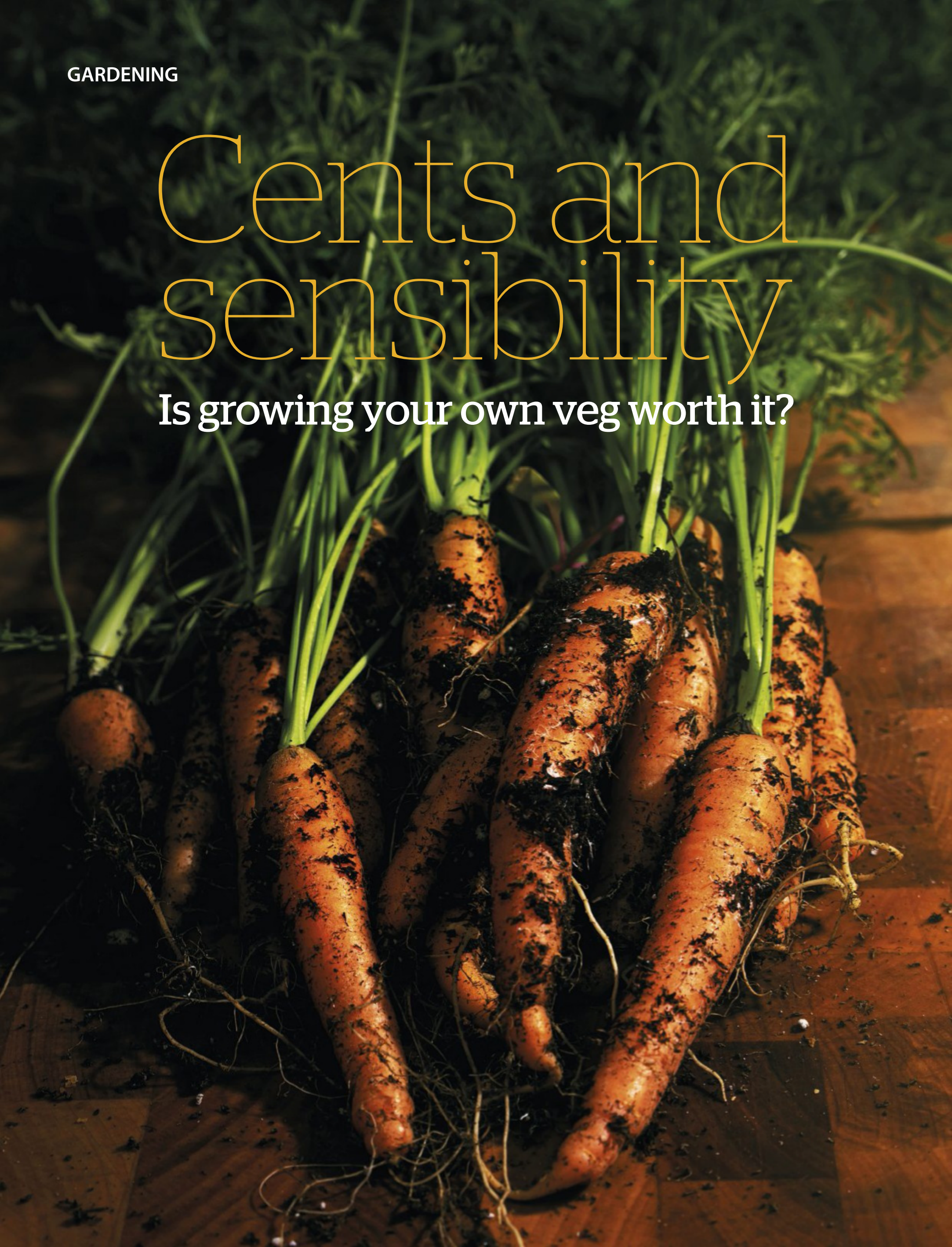
November

Amaranth **S**; Asian greens **S**; Basil **ST**; Dill **S**; Fennel **S**; Kale **ST**; Lettuce **T**; Marjoram **T**; Mint **T**; Oregano **T**; Parsley **T**; Rocket **S**; Rosemary **T**; Sage **ST**; Spinach **S**; Swiss chard **T**; Thyme **ST**; Watercress **ST**; Artichoke **ST**; Cabbage **S**; Cauliflower **S**; Echinacea **S**; Sunflower **S**; Asparagus **ST**; Cucumber **S**; Brinjal **T**; Marrow **S**; Okra **T**; Peppers (hot chillies & sweet peppers) **T**; Pumpkin **S**; Squash **S**; Tomatillo **ST**; Tomatoes **ST**; French beans **S**; Lima beans **S**; Maize **S**; Runner beans **S**; Beetroot **T**; Carrots **S**; Ginger **P**; Horseradish **P**; Turmeric **P**; Sweet Potato **P**; Chives **ST**; Spring onion **ST**

Visit honeymoonfarm.co.za to order a digital or printed full Moonbloom planting calendar. The printed version of the 2023 calendar will be on sale from November.

Cents and sensibility

Is growing your own veg worth it?



In this fast-paced world where we expect everything to be convenient and cheap, a kitchen garden is a beautiful but unattainable dream for most people. With the economy in its current state, one might justifiably wonder: isn't it more affordable simply to buy your vegetables at a grocery store?

TEXT **JOHAN VAN ZYL**

Theoretically, you can grow vegetables anywhere there's sunlight. As long as you have that, the smallest surface will do, from a window-sill or balcony to a few pots at the back door. In fact, the smaller you start, the less overwhelming the project will feel and the smaller the loss in case of a failed crop.

Since we published our (Afrikaans) book about starting a vegetable garden, we've heard from several readers who've thrown in the towel after one disastrous season, often because they were a little too ambitious at the start. We also felt like giving up in the first year or two, but through trial and error you learn what won't grow in your garden or tends to fall victim to pests. And we made our peace with the fact that the only plants that grow in Koringberg in midsummer are herbs.

The other question that often comes up in readers' letters (most likely after a failed harvest) is whether growing your own vegetables is really cheaper than buying them at a grocery store.

In our experience, first-time vegetable gardeners are often astonished at how much time, dedication and patience – rather than money – a food garden demands. Still, number crunchers often want to know whether, "realistically speaking and in terms of time and money", a food garden offers a positive return on investment. The answer to the question is a confident yes, although the "return on investment" won't necessarily make sense on an Excel spreadsheet.

Why grow your own vegetables?

Before talking about rands and cents, lets look at all the non-financial benefits of gardening. That way, you can decide for yourself how much each benefit is worth to you – "realistically speaking and in terms of time and money".

Hobby, exercise, meditation

Several studies have confirmed that gardening is not only good physical exercise but also a relaxing hobby and a form of mindfulness meditation that reduces blood pressure and stress levels. Moreover, research has shown that people who grow their own food eat more fresh produce than those who buy it at a grocery store.

By now, we all know that good nutrition is one of the best and most affordable ways to prevent and alleviate chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, obesity, several types of cancer, autoimmune conditions and digestive issues. Generally, those

who grow their own vegetables are healthier and happier, in part thanks to *Mycobacterium vaccae*, a microbe that occurs naturally in soil. Once it enters the human body, this bacterium acts like a natural antidepressant by increasing the excretion of the feel-good hormone serotonin.

Besides, seeing tiny seeds develop into vibrant plants that reward you with nutritious food is an educational, satisfying process and an achievement to be proud of.

Fresher, healthier, tastier

Unless you're buying your vegetables fresh and directly from an organic farmer, a neighbour or a farmer's market, shop-bought veggies simply cannot compete with the sun-ripened tomatoes from your garden when it comes to freshness, taste, flavour and nutritional value.

Taste and flavour aren't the only criteria. Several studies have shown that organic vegetables contain up to 50% more vitamins, minerals, nutrients and antioxidants, which they absorb from the soil and deliver in a format that ensures optimal digestion to those who eat it. Nutritious food is directly related to healthy, balanced soil that contains enough minerals, micro-organisms and organic material.

Knowing exactly what you're eating

A vegetable garden puts you in complete control of how you cultivate the vegetables, fruit and herbs that end up on your plate: how and where they're grown, what type of seed and fertiliser you use, and how you control pests and fungal diseases. Exactly the opposite is true for store-bought vegetables, unless you're willing to pay extra for organically certified produce.

Good for the planet

Without plants to produce the oxygen we breathe, humans and animals won't last long. If you grow a variety of vegetables organically, practise crop rotation and make your own compost, you'll be offsetting your

Begin Jou Eie Groentetuin **by Johan van Zyl and Peter van Noord, the editors of *Platteland*, is a comprehensive guide to starting a vegetable garden. It costs R300, which includes delivery to your door. If you'd like to buy a copy, email an enquiry to helloplatteland@gmail.com and we'll send you the details.**

carbon footprint, helping to promote and protect biodiversity, and avoiding environmental pollution with pesticides. What's more, your crops don't need to be transported anywhere, which cuts down on greenhouse gas emissions.

But is it cheaper?

As any farmer would tell you, there are significant risks to cultivating food crops. Anyone whose "rustic dream" of a self-sustaining, bountiful vegetable garden has been ruined by a pest, drought, poor soil quality or extreme weather conditions will know that this exercise can be as eye-watering an expense as a fast-growing child who needs new clothes and shoes every six months.

Although fruit and vegetables are VAT-exempt in South Africa, the prices of all consumer products are increasing. Additionally, most South Africans tend to buy the cheapest fruit and veg, which usually aren't at their freshest or most nutritious. Relatively few consumers can afford always to buy the pricier organic options out of principle.

It's hard to say whether it is truly cheaper to grow any kind of vegetable yourself. It would depend on what you grow, how much space you have available for it, the size of your eventual harvest, and to what degree you manage to process the produce you cannot immediately eat.

Just as important is the list of expenses. This will vary depending on individual vegetable gardens. If, for example, you live in an area where the climate or soil present several challenges, you'll probably be spending more money on things like compost, fertiliser, water, and frost protection or shade netting.

The basic expenses you need to take into account when you calculate the total cost of home-grown produce include the costs of:

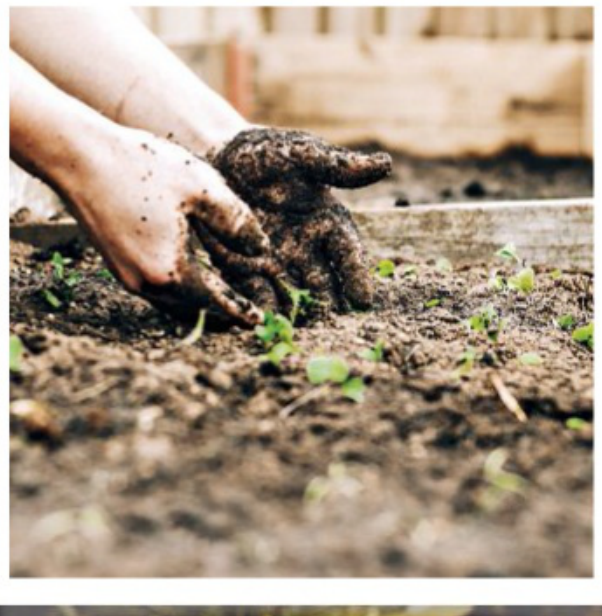
- the seed, seedlings or mature plants
- enriching the soil (topsoil, compost, fertiliser, worms)
- irrigating the plants
- protecting your plants and harvest (hedges or fences, frost protection, shade netting)
- gardening tools (spades, pitchforks, gloves)
- what you reckon your own time is worth

Once you have a better idea of all the benefits and expenses, you can make a rough calculation. For example: In July, 1 kg organic heirloom tomatoes cost R43 at a well-known supermarket chain. A packet of heirloom seed for a similar variety cost R28 from Livingseeds. A packet will yield roughly 50 plants, each producing 4 kg–12 kg tomatoes. Assuming you only harvest tomatoes from 20 plants, you can still end up with anything from 80 kg–240 kg

tomatoes – which would cost you a whopping R3 440–R10 320 at the supermarket. Even considering all your other expenses, there's no doubt you'll be saving money this way.

How to save

While you can save a lot of money every year by growing your own fresh produce, the following tips will *really* help make it worth your while.



1 Start small

Don't start off trying to compete with the likes of Babylonstoren, even if you have the space for it. Although it's great to be able to share your bounty with friends, family and neighbours, the bigger the garden, the more money, time and effort it requires. If you start small, you require less material, time, energy and money, and you stand to lose much less should disaster strike.

Start with four or five of your favourite vegetables and see how it goes. After a miserable growth season or two, many gardeners decide to focus only on those crops that are easy to cultivate, such as lettuce, cherry tomatoes and carrots, alongside herbs like rosemary, mint, thyme, parsley, sage and oregano. There's nothing wrong with that approach. There's no law dictating that you must plant onions, pumpkins or artichokes, which occupy large tracts of land for long periods.

What's more affordable to grow yourself?

Your return on investment will depend on the monetary value of the vegetables you grow. Of course, the plant's growth pattern, the season, your location and factors beyond your control – such as flooding, drought, diseases and pests – also affect this calculation.

Over time, we've learned that plants that yield a crop for an entire season (such as tomatoes and peppers, as opposed to, for example, radishes, where one seed yields a single radish) are cheaper to cultivate yourself than buying them at a grocery store.

Another important factor is how long you need to wait before you can harvest a crop. Radishes, for instance, are ready to eat within three weeks after planting, whereas you have to wait up to four months for Brussels sprouts.

If you can manage to grow the following successfully, chances are you'll be beating the supermarket on price:

- Herbs, especially basil, parsley and coriander
- Lettuce, Asian greens and rocket
- Peppers and chillies
- Tomatoes and cherry tomatoes (these can be tricky to grow, however)
- Cucumbers
- Gem squashes, baby marrows and patty pans

2 Cultivate only what you like to eat
Unless you're planning on selling your produce, there's no point in planting fruit and vegetables your family members refuse to eat.

3 See it as a long-term project
Because all healthy gardens start with good soil, the cost can quickly escalate, especially if your soil is poor, which means you must buy truckloads of topsoil, compost, cattle manure, organic fertiliser or other enriching products. You might have to build more beds, rent or buy tools, take into account the water bill… Don't throw in the towel after a year and a failed harvest or two.

4 Grow the "expensive" products yourself
Lettuce and herbs are a lot cheaper to grow than to buy. Plus, the products you buy are usually very expensive or way too much for the recipe you want to try, or they tend to spoil quickly.

5 Seed versus seedlings
A packet of seed is often cheaper than a bag of the same veggies at the shop, and you can cultivate a lot of fresh produce from a single packet. If you're using heirloom seed, you can harvest your own seed to use again the following year and to share with other gardeners. Seed offers much better value for money than seedlings, and if you don't need a whole packet you can always exchange seed with your neighbours.

6 Make your own compost
It's cheap, easy and more eco-friendly than buying compost – and you'll save a fortune. Plus it's good physical exercise.

7 Preserve the bounty
Another way of saving money is to preserve, freeze or dry surplus vegetables. Then, in winter, you'll still be eating organically without having to buy exorbitantly priced imported vegetables.

Four handy top-10 lists

The 10 vegetables with the highest yield rate

Which vegetables are the "most cost-effective" when it comes to their total yield per square metre, the average supermarket price per kilogram, and how soon after planting you can harvest the crop? We were unable to find South African statistics, but this list from the American National Garden Bureau offers a fair idea of the most bountiful harvests:

1 Vine tomatoes
2 Spring onions
3 Lettuce
4 Turnips
5 Baby marrows
6 Onions
7 Shelling peas
8 Runner beans and bush beans
9 Beetroot
10 Herbs

The 10 vegetables at the bottom of the organisation's yield list are pumpkin, squash, melon, celery, Brussels sprouts, brinjals, cauliflower, okra and leeks.

The 10 easiest-to-grow vegetables

1 Lettuce
2 Radishes
3 Green beans
4 Beetroot
5 Cherry tomatoes
6 Baby marrows
7 Cucumbers
8 Carrots
9 Spinach, Swiss chard and kale
10 Peas

The 10 vegetables suited to pots

1 Lettuce and rocket
2 Pak choi
3 Peppers and chillies
4 Spinach and Swiss chard
5 Bush beans
6 Brinjals
7 Cherry tomatoes
8 Garlic
9 Radishes
10 Herbs

The 10 hardest-to-grow vegetables

These vegetables have (a) very specific requirements in terms of climate and soil; (b) take up a lot of space; (c) have a long growing season, which makes them more susceptible to pests and diseases; or (d) it's more cost-effective to buy them.

1 Asparagus
2 Cauliflower
3 Celery
4 Artichokes
5 Cabbage
6 Parsnips
7 Onions
8 Pumpkin
9 Watermelon
10 Melon

spinach

SOURCE National Garden Bureau
ngb.org

PHOTOS **SHUTTERSTOCK AND UNSPLASH**

Let's braai!

Celebrate Heritage Day on 24 September with this braai menu, which *Platteland* put together from **Martelize Brink**'s recently published second cookbook, *Oor die Kole*.

RECIPES **MARTELIZE BRINK** PHOTOS **DONNA LEWIS**
STYLING **MARGIE BURGER** FOOD ASSISTANT **GILIONELLE KABA**

Menu

- STARTER -

Ash bread and
sheep's tails
– or –
Skinless sausage

- MAIN DISH -

Smoked brisket, served
on angel buns
– or/and –
Lamb steaks with
three sauces

Braai salad

Pearled wheat salad

- DESERT -

Pastel de nata

Ash bread and sheep's tails

The humble sheep's tail eaten with ash bread is food fit for a king. While filming a documentary about this Khoekhoen baking method, I watched wide-eyed as my hostess placed dough directly on sand on which a fire had been made, and then covered it with river sand and placed more coals on top. Half an hour later she dug out a pair of beautiful loaves and used a stone to scrape off the sand. The deep flavour was unique and the whole ritual was almost spiritual. But you don't need to source river sand in order to bake your own ash bread. You simply need a few coals that have lost most of their heat. Make your dough 24 hours in advance, let it prove, and refrigerate it overnight. Take the dough out of the fridge 2 hours before you want to bake the bread so it can reach room temperature.

Makes **6 rolls**
Preparation time **10 minutes (plus cooking time for the sheep's tails and proving time for the ash bread)**
Cooking time **20–30 minutes**

YOU NEED

FOR THE SHEEP'S TAILS

- **2 sheep's tails per person – they are very rich; 2 per person is usually enough as a starter (but I have seen a large man devour 4)**

FOR THE ASH BREAD

- **2 cups (500 ml) white bread wheat flour or cake wheat flour**
- **½ sachet (5 g) instant yeast**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) sugar**
- **½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) salt**
- **1 cup (250 ml) lukewarm water**
- **butter and makataan (wild watermelon) preserve or jam, to serve**

THIS IS HOW

Cook the sheep's tails Place the sheep's tails in a saucepan, cover with water and cook for 1½ hours. Carefully remove the tails from the saucepan, season them with salt and freshly ground black pepper, and braai them over moderately high heat for about 20 minutes or until they're browned nicely and the fat has rendered. Serve them with the ash bread.

Make the ash bread Combine all the dry ingredients, then mix in the water until the dough comes together. Knead the dough for at least 10 minutes to develop the gluten, then let it rest for about 1 hour or until doubled in volume. If you're in a hurry, let it rise in sunlight. But remember, the longer (and more slowly) the bread takes to prove, the more the texture and flavour will develop.

After 1 hour you can either place a whole loaf in the coals or make individual rolls by dividing the dough into 6 balls and lightly shaping each one into a roll that's 2 cm–3 cm thick.

Let the fire burn until the flames are gone and only coals and a layer of ash remain. The coals should still be hot but not glowing. Place the dough on top of the ashy coals and lightly cover it with more coals. Bake the bread for 20–30 minutes, depending on how much heat is left in your coals. You will immediately see it rise. If necessary, turn over the bread (or rolls) after 10 minutes. Bake until it makes a hollow sound when you tap it with a spoon. If there are any burnt spots, use a grater to remove them. Serve the bread with butter, wild watermelon preserve or jam, and the hot sheep's tails.

Skinless sausages

Mince shaped into a sausage is found in countless versions all over the world, for example as Turkish koftas or Serbian ćevapi. Not everyone has a sausage stuffer at home, or access to casings – this is an easy way to enjoy homemade sausage cooked over the coals. Experiment with your choice of spices and mince combinations.

Serves **6–8**
Preparation time **10 minutes plus refrigeration time**
Cooking time **6–10 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **500 g beef mince**
- **250 g pork mince**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) whole coriander seeds**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) salt (or to taste)**
- **4 cloves, freshly ground (or use ½ tsp ground cloves)**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) Worcester sauce**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) brown vinegar**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) dried thyme**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) nutmeg**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) black pepper**
- **¾ teaspoon (3,75 ml) bicarbonate of soda for binding**
- **6–8 bread rolls or roosterkoek, to serve**
- **1 cup (250 ml) crème fraiche, to serve**
- **1 small red onion, sliced thinly, to serve**

THIS IS HOW

Combine all the ingredients for the sausage mixture (don't overmix it!) and leave it to rest in the fridge for about 2 hours. Divide the mixture into 6–8 balls and shape them into "sausages", each about 10 cm long. You can shape them around skewers. Refrigerate the sausages for a further 30 minutes. Braai the sausages over moderately hot coals and serve them in bread rolls or roosterkoek with a spoonful of crème fraiche and a few onion slices on top.

Pleased to meet you!

Martelize Brink is a radio and TV presenter and producer who has been making a name for herself on the SABC's Afrikaans radio station RSG since 2004. Born and bred in Paarl, she published her first cookbook, *Martelize Kook! Jy Is Genooi*, in 2017, and last year she combined food and genealogy in her first television series for VIA. Martelize loves to cook and is at her happiest sharing food and good red wine with friends. In her free time she often makes appearances as a motivational speaker and master of ceremonies. Find out more on her website: martelizebrink.co.za

Smoked brisket

Once this brisket, which you smoke and cook in your kettle braai, has rested sufficiently, you'll find it's one of the tastiest meat cuts you've ever tasted. But be warned: you will have to practise this braai method – it's not something you'd serve guests on your first attempt. It's important to become acquainted with the meat and your equipment first. (See "Kettle braai: cooker and smoker" opposite.)

Also note that you'll need to invite many guests to make the most of the meat. It's sometimes jazzed up with a sweet spice mix, but I prefer using only salt and pepper, as the smoked meat has a distinctive, indescribable flavour.

Serves **12–15**
Preparation time **10 minutes plus resting time**
Cooking time **8–10 hours plus resting time**

YOU NEED

- **3,5 kg–4,5 kg whole brisket, filleted**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) salt**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) freshly ground black pepper**

FOR THE BRAAI SAUCE

- **1 cup (250 ml) tomato sauce**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) chilli sauce**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) dark brown sugar**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) Worcester sauce**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) apple cider vinegar**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) dried chilli flakes**

THIS IS HOW

Cut off all the hard pieces of fat on the brisket, but retain at least 5 mm of fat on the topside. Sprinkle the salt and pepper over the meat, thoroughly rub it in, then place the meat in the fridge for 1–2 days – or even longer if you have time, because this does wonders for the texture and juiciness.

Remove the brisket from the fridge 1 hour before you want to cook it so that it reaches room temperature.

Prepare your kettle braai for the indirect cooking method. Arrange 20–30 unlit briquettes in pairs so that they snake around one side of the kettle braai.

Place a dish on the bottom grill of the kettle braai and pour in water until the dish is almost full. The brisket will be placed on the top grill above the dish of water. The dish fulfils a dual purpose: it catches the fat and moisture that drips off the meat (making cleaning the kettle braai afterwards much easier); and it maintains a moist environment so that the brisket doesn't dry out too much.

Place about 10 lit briquettes on one side of the "snake" so that several of them come into contact with the unlit briquettes. All the briquettes will burn slowly but surely, creating even heat. Place your choice of wood (a small log or shavings) partly over the lit briquettes and partly over the unlit briquettes.

Place the brisket, fat side down, opposite the briquettes for indirect cooking. The thickest part of the meat should face the briquettes. (A dual thermometer, which you can leave in the meat and the kettle braai, would be very useful here.)

Cover the kettle braai and smoke the brisket for about 4 hours at 110°C–120°C. Try to keep the temperature constant.

Meanwhile, make the braai sauce (this recipe makes about 1½ cups) Place all the ingredients in a pan and simmer for several minutes. Taste the sauce and adjust the acid and salt to your taste.

Once the brisket has reached an internal temperature of 60°C after about 4 hours, remove it from the kettle braai and wrap it, first in damp baking paper and then in foil.

Make sure that it's sealed tightly so that no steam escapes.

It takes a very long time to raise the internal temperature of the brisket from 60°C to 90°C, but it will happen. Place new unlit briquettes in the kettle braai if necessary to ensure that you have heat for the next 4 hours.

Return the wrapped brisket to the kettle braai with the thickest side facing the heat, cover the kettle braai and continue cooking the meat at 110°C–120°C for 4-6 hours, or until the brisket reaches an internal temperature of 90°C.

Once the brisket has reached 90°C, place it in a well-sealed cool box and let it rest for 2 hours or, if there is time, up to 4 hours. This is one of the most important steps in the process, because it gives the meat a chance to reabsorb all the juices.

Once it has rested, slice the brisket against the grain and serve it any way you like. As shown in our photo, we served it with angel buns, coleslaw and the braai sauce.

Kettle braai: Cooker and smoker

Martelize uses her kettle braai to smoke food or to cook it slowly – anything from meat to fresh pasta. Many South Africans own a kettle braai, and if you use her method you won't have to go to the expense of buying a smoker.

Double indirect heat or the snake method The first method is to arrange coals on opposite sides in the kettle braai, with a piece of meat or a loaf of bread in the centre. The snake method involves stacking two rows of unlit briquettes in a semi-circle on one side of the kettle braai, and placing a few lit briquettes at one end of the snake; they'll slowly ignite the next briquette in line and provide even heat over many hours.
Smoky flavour To create a smoky flavour, Martelize places a small wooden log on top of the lit and unlit briquettes. But you could also scatter wood shavings over the briquettes.
Constant temperature When it comes to smoking and cooking meat, the biggest challenge is to maintain a constant temperature inside the kettle braai and to lift the lid as little as possible.
A thermometer is useful. It's easy to drill a hole and affix a portable thermometer to the braai, but it's best to use a dual thermometer that can measure both the temperature inside the kettle braai and inside the meat. This means far less work, as you won't have to check every 20 minutes that the temperature is remaining constant, or open the kettle braai to test the temperature of the meat.

The minute the temperature rises or drops, use the air vents to adjust it. If the kettle braai gets too hot, close the vents. Once the temperature starts to stabilise, gradually open the vents. If the temperature starts to drop, the vents should be fully opened. This is how you get to know your kettle braai. >

Angel buns

These buns are feather-light and only lack wings. They're like a cross between a scone and traditional white bread made with yeast. The result is a soft bun, as rich as a scone but as soft as bread. Double the recipe if you want to serve the buns with the smoked brisket for a large group of people.

Makes **5 buns**
Preparation time **10–15 minutes plus rising time**
Cooking time **10 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **1 sachet (10 g) instant yeast**
- **3 tablespoons (45 ml) warm water**
- **3 tablespoons (45 ml) sugar**
- **2 cups (500 ml) white bread wheat flour, plus extra**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) baking powder**
- **½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) bicarbonate of soda**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) salt**
- **50 g cold butter, cubed**
- **50 g cold margarine**
- **1 cup (250 ml) buttermilk (see 'Tip" for how to make your own)**

THIS IS HOW

Mix the yeast, warm water and 1 teaspoon (5 ml) of the sugar, and set aside. Combine the flour, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda, salt, the rest of the sugar, and the butter and margarine in the bowl of a food processor. Pulse about 5 times or until the mixture has a sandy texture. You should still be able to see pieces of butter.

Add the instant yeast mixture and the buttermilk to the bowl and mix, but don't overwork the dough. Shape it into a ball and place it on a surface dusted with flour. Fold the dough over and over, press it together and flatten it until it is about 3 cm thick.

Put some flour in a bowl. Take a 10 cm round cookie cutter and dip it into the flour, then cut out rounds of dough without twisting the cutter. Press together the scraps and roll out the dough again to cut out more rounds.

Grease a flat-bottomed cast-iron pot (25 cm in diameter) with butter. Place the dough rounds in it and allow to prove for 40 minutes to 1 hour. To make individual buns that don't touch one another, you will probably need 2 pots. The buns can also be baked on a baking tray in the oven.

Bake the buns over a high heat with hot coals covering the lid of the pot (200°C) for 10 minutes or until light brown on top.

TIP Make your own buttermilk by stirring 2 tablespoons (30 ml) vinegar or lemon juice through 1 cup (250 ml) milk and letting it stand for several minutes.

Lamb steaks with three sauces

Ask your butcher for lamb rump cut to a thickness of 2 cm–2,5 cm (this is an art!). I prefer serving these steaks with salsa verde, a classic "green" herb sauce full of flavour, as an accompaniment, but tzatziki and bagna càuda are just as delicious.

Serves **4**
Preparation time **15+ minutes**
Cooking time **10–15 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **4 x 150 g pieces of lamb rump**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) whole coriander seeds, toasted and ground**

FOR THE SALSA VERDE

- **1 large handful each of parsley, coriander and mint leaves**
- **3 garlic cloves**
- **4 anchovy fillets (preserved in oil)**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) capers**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) Dijon mustard**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) red wine vinegar**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) olive oil, plus extra**
- **8 cocktail gherkins**
- **⅓ cup (80 ml) mayonnaise (optional)**

FOR THE TZATZIKI

- **1 cup (250 ml) cucumber, grated coarsely or diced**
- **2 cups (500 ml) plain yoghurt**
- **¼ teaspoon (1,25 ml) salt**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) mayonnaise (optional)**
- **1 large garlic clove, grated finely**
- **4 medium sweet-and-sour gherkins, chopped finely**

FOR THE BAGNA CÀUDA

- **⅓ cup (80 ml) olive oil**
- **12 anchovy fillets (preserved in oil)**
- **5 garlic cloves, grated finely**
- **⅓ cup (80 ml) butter**
- **1 cup (250 ml) cream**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) white pepper**

THIS IS HOW

Season the lamb with ground coriander, salt and freshly ground black pepper. Braai the lamb steaks over moderately hot coals for 5–7 minutes on a side, until lightly browned on the outside but still pink inside. If the coals are very hot, watch the meat closely and turn frequently. Serve the lamb with one of the sauces.

Make the salsa verde (makes 1½ cups)
Salsa verde, which is usually made with a mortar and pestle, has a coarse texture. For this recipe, I've turned it into a runny, thick sauce. Place all the ingredients except the mayonnaise and seasoning in the bowl of a food processor and pulse until fine. Add extra olive oil if necessary to create a sauce. Stir the mayonnaise through and season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

Make the tzatziki (makes 3¼ cups)
Press the water out of the cucumber and mix it with the rest of the ingredients. Keep the sauce in the fridge until you are ready to serve it. This versatile sauce will also work well on a cheese board, with meatballs, pitas and crudités.

Make the bagna càuda (makes 1⅓ cups)
This sauce is traditionally served with crunchy fresh vegetables, but it is equally delicious with meat, chicken or fish. The garlic is fried slowly, which means the taste and aftertaste are not strong. Place the olive oil, anchovies and garlic in a pan and fry over a very low heat until the anchovies have completely melted. The garlic shouldn't turn brown, so stir it frequently. Add the butter, cream and white pepper, and allow to simmer for 3–5 minutes. Serve immediately. >

Braai salad with bacon vinaigrette

Yes, you can braai lettuce, and thanks to this recipe it will never be a dull side dish again.

Serves **6–8**
Preparation time **10 minutes**
Cooking time **10 minutes**

YOU NEED

- 4 heads of cos (romaine) lettuce, halved lengthwise
- ¼ cup (60 ml) olive oil
- grated Parmesan cheese, for sprinkling on top

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE

- juice of ½ lemon
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) white wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) honey
- ¼ cup (60 ml) olive oil
- 1 heaped teaspoon (7 ml) Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) whole mustard seeds
- 60 g diced bacon, fried until crispy

THIS IS HOW

Coat the halved lettuce heads all over with olive oil and braai them over moderately hot coals – you want the leaves to scorch in places. As soon as you've removed them from the coals, drizzle vinaigrette over and sprinkle Parmesan on top.

Make the vinaigrette Combine all the ingredients, add freshly ground black pepper to taste, and beat everything together for 1 minute.

Pearled wheat salad

This is one of my favourite dishes from childhood. It tastes even better the second day, so make it a day ahead.

Serves **8**
Preparation time **30 minutes plus cooking time for the pearled wheat**

YOU NEED

FOR THE SALAD

- **3 cups (750 ml) pearled whole wheat, cooled**
- **10 soft dried apricots, preferably Turkish style (see 'Tip'), or dried peaches**
- **1 large red onion, chopped finely**
- **1 large handful of parsley, chopped finely**
- **1 celery stalk, chopped finely**
- **1 red sweet pepper, diced**
- **100 g pecan nuts, toasted**

FOR THE SALAD DRESSING

- **¼ cup (60 ml) Worcester sauce**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) sunflower oil**
- **1 teaspoon (5 ml) curry powder or garam masala**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) Dijon mustard**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) honey**
- **3 curry leaves, fried in a little oil until crispy (this is my secret ingredient)**

THIS IS HOW

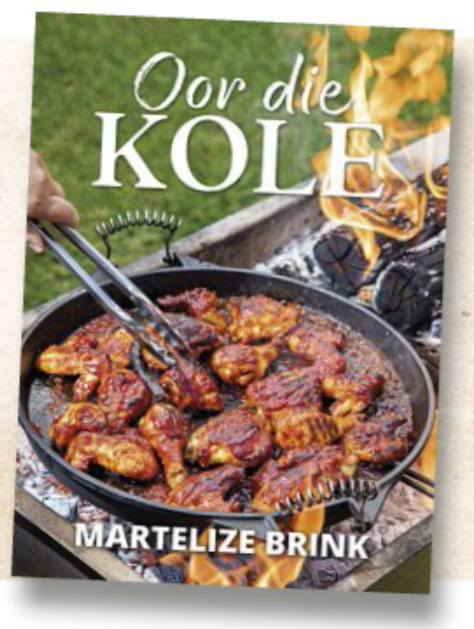
Make the salad Combine all the salad ingredients in a bowl.

Make the salad dressing Mix all the ingredients in a jug, and season with freshly ground black pepper. Pour over the salad and toss to coat. Allowing the salad to "marinate" for a while makes it even tastier.

TIP Turkish-style apricots are sweeter than regular dried apricots. If you're using the latter, add 1 tablespoon (15 ml) apricot jam to the dressing. >

Buy the book

Oor die Kole is Martelize's second Afrikaans cookbook. It's a collection of recipes for all kinds of meat, fish, seafood, vegetables, breads and desserts that are cooked, baked, smoked, braaied and simmered over the coals. The recipes, both traditional and exotic, will inspire anyone who loves to light a fire. *Oor die Kole* is published by Human & Rousseau and sold at bookshops for R420.
nb.co.za 021 406 3033



Win We're giving away two copies of *Oor die Kole*. Go to platteland.net, click on "Win" and fill out the form using the keywords "Spring" and "Kole". The closing date for entries is 25 November 2022.

Pastel de nata

Pastel de nata (the singular term for pastéis de nata) is a Portuguese version of a milk tart with dark-brown caramelisation on top. A cast-iron pot over the coals is just the thing to make this delicacy.

Serves **8**
Preparation time **30 minutes**
Cooking time **15–20 minutes**

YOU NEED

FOR THE SYRUP
- **1½ cups (375 ml) sugar**
- **½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) ground cinnamon or 1 large cinnamon stick**
- **4 cardamom seeds**
- **grated zest of 2 lemons**
- **½ cup (125 ml) water**

FOR THE CUSTARD FILLING
- **1½ cups (375 ml) full-cream milk**
- **¼ cup (60 ml) cake wheat flour**
- **½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) salt**
- **6 extra-large egg yolks**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) vanilla essence**
- **1 cup (250 ml) cream**

FOR THE CRUST
- **butter, for greasing**
- **1 x 400 g packet puff pastry**

THIS IS HOW

Make the syrup Place the sugar, cinnamon, cardamom, lemon zest and water in a pot and simmer until all the sugar has dissolved. Simmer – but do not stir – for another 5 minutes.

Make the custard filling Beat the milk, flour and salt in a pan and let it simmer until the mixture starts to thicken. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool.

Beat the egg yolks and vanilla essence together. Stir the egg mixture into the milk-and-flour mixture, along with three-quarters of the syrup mixture. (Retain the rest of the syrup to pour over the cooked tart.) Add the cream and stir through.

Make the crust Grease a flat-bottomed cast-iron pan with a diameter of 25 cm with butter and line it with puff pastry. Lightly roll out the pastry and cut it so that the edge of the crust will reaches 4 cm–5 cm high inside the pot. Lightly press the pastry into the base of the pot and against the sides. Use a knife to remove the excess pastry.

Pour the filling through a sieve into the crust – it should fill the crust to a height of about 2 cm but no more, as the filling will rise.

Cover the pot with the lid and place it over moderate coals. Place hot coals and a few small burning logs on top. Pastel de nata is know for its dark-brown spots of caramelisation on top, which happens during the baking process. Bake the tart for 15 minutes, then check whether it has reached the desired colour. If not, continue baking it for a few minutes, covered with the lid and a few burning logs.

Once the tart is done, pour over the remaining syrup. You can slice the tart inside the pot and serve it directly, or allow it to cool slightly before attempting to slide it out of the pot. Make sure the edges come away from the sides of the pot easily. Use a spatula to lift the tart from the bottom, and tilt the pot as you slide the tart out. Serve with ice cream. P

Spring on a stick

Expand your braai repertoire by serving a side dish of flavourful spring-vegetable kebabs cooked to perfection over the coals.

PHOTO **MICKY HOYLE**

Vegetable kebabs

This is a delicious way to cook vegetables over the coals. It's best to steam the firmer vegetables first. They should always be well seasoned – basting the kebabs with salad dressing does wonders to enhance the flavours.

Serves **6**
Preparation time **20 minutes**
Cooking time **15–20 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **12 baby onions or shallots, peeled and halved**
- **2 mielies, each sliced into 4 wheels**
- **3 baby marrows, sliced into portions**
- **6 Roma tomatoes, quartered or halved lengthwise**
- **12 whole button mushrooms**
- **½ pineapple, sliced into rings and quartered**
- **olive oil**
- **Ina Paarman's Vegetable Spice**
- **Ina Paarman's Greek Dressing**

THIS IS HOW

Steam the baby onions or shallots in the microwave for 3 minutes on high. Add the mielie wheels and microwave for another 3 minutes.

Toss together the cooked and raw vegetables with a generous splash of olive oil and season really well with Vegetable Spice.

Thread the vegetables onto kebab sticks. Cook over medium coals, turning and basting them often with Greek Dressing, until cooked through and lightly charred. P

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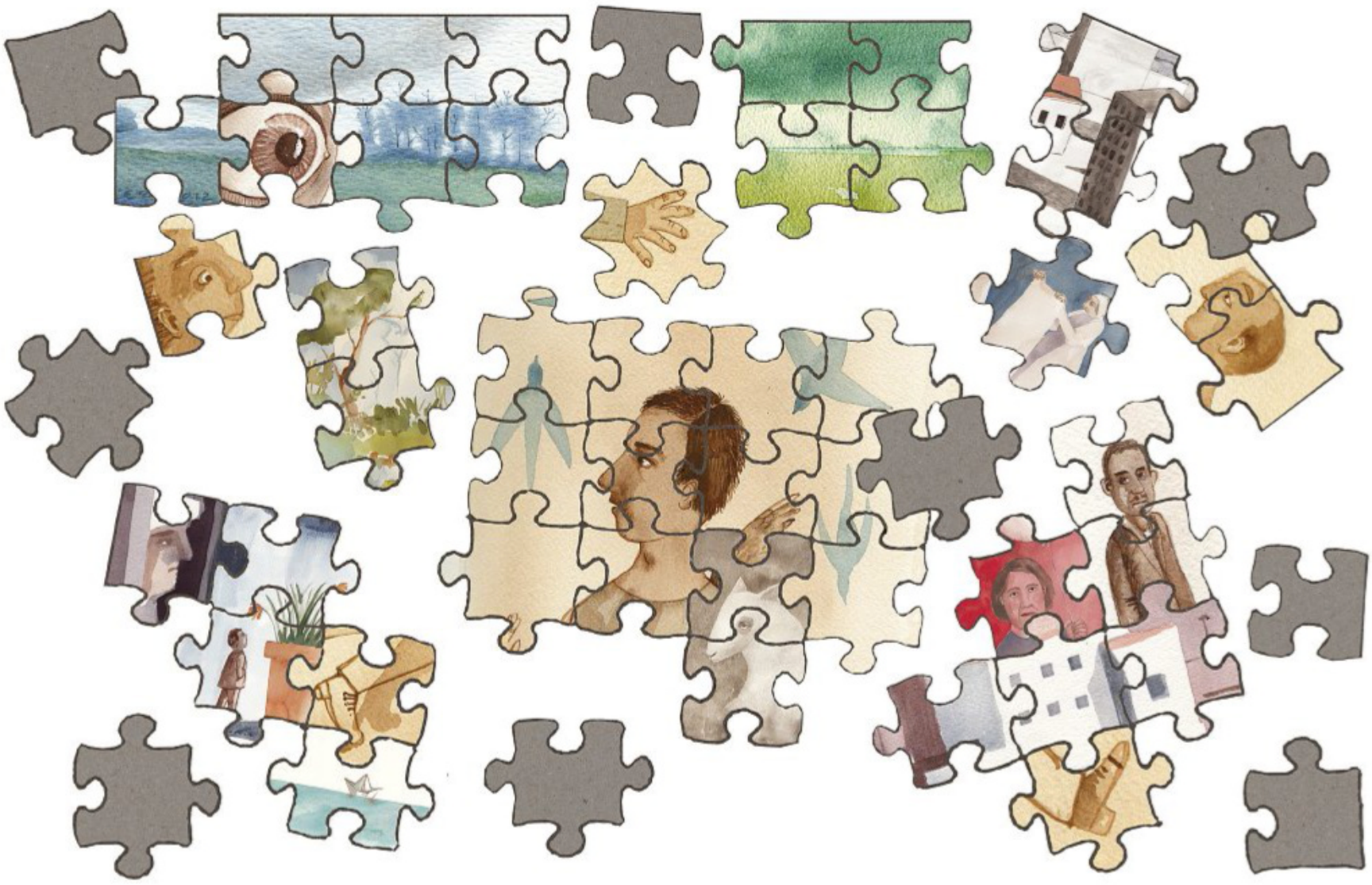

A puzzle of nostalgia

Ride a fat bike through the town where you grew up – an abiding landmark in your life – and behold the picture that reveals itself.

BY **RYNO EKSTEEN** ILLUSTRATION **DIEK GROBLER**

You don't easily forget the place where you first tasted condensed milk from the tin.

I recently rode a fat bike around the Southern Cape town where I'd grown up, and I was pleasantly surprised by how lovely everything still was. The infrastructure is being well maintained. I'm proud of where I come from.

Santie wrote in my matric autograph book: "May all your problems be small ones."

IT'S EASY TO GET TRIPPED UP when you retrace the steps of your youth. "Name, surname, animal, town" may thus be altered to protect some parties from embarrassment, unhappiness or feelings of hurt. Also to protect the man himself, who keeps looking over his shoulder as he rides his bike.

Nostalgia and memory games are like a large jigsaw puzzle full of wheat-fields and mountains and blue sky. Many puzzle pieces are similar, or appear the same from a distance.

Those were the days before barcodes and air bags in vehicles.

The village is not much bigger than a postage stamp, yet the locals speak of their *city* hall. It remains a beautiful building. It's where grand events like wedding receptions were held. Concerts were held in the school hall and bazaars in the church hall.

The neighbouring town had a drive-in, and in between the trailers that preceded the feature film home-made adverts for dried fruit, sheep for slaughter and air compressors would flash across the big screen. Just written on ruled paper and cellotaped to a noticeboard. Everything doesn't always have to be perfect and dolled up. As long as the heart of a message is in the right place. I watched my first movie at the drive-in: *e'Lollipop*.

As a teenager I handed in many a roll of film at the pharmacy and would go back two weeks later with great anticipation to enquire whether the photos had arrived yet. Many things had to be brought in or ordered from elsewhere. Usually a few photos were out of focus, but I was relieved that no one commented on the swimmers I'd sneakily photographed down at the river.

At the public library, I gaped at the paintings of the Old Masters. With your mother's permission, you could borrow these prints for up to three months and hang them on a wall at home. And the opera music on LP… New worlds opened up for me at the library.

Those were also the days of cassette tapes and seven singles. The radio was my companion through ups and downs. And books, of course. *What Every Boy Should Know* (and has been suspecting for a long time). And so on.

YOU KNOW, maybe Swaan van Schalkwyk's mop of hair didn't really catch alight while they were practising for the Christmas carol service. Perhaps the rays of sunlight streaming through the balcony windows were the cause of all the drama and pandemonium. Reflections can be deceptive. But it looked like fire to Tannie Rita, who accompanied the choir on the organ. She was feeling nervous, as this was the last rehearsal before the big night, and the first time with all the decor and stage props, which Kotie had taken extra trouble with that year. The lighting and flowers and ambience had to be perfect. Kotie thought it would be fantastic if the choir sang "Silent Night" lit only by candles burning in floor candelabras, with the rest of the church in pitch darkness.

Tannie Rita was the first to notice the "flames" and she threw her water glass straight at Swaan. Neither the glass nor the water hit him, but on the night of the performance, another choir member who had stood much closer to the organ sang with her head wrapped in a bandage.

I never exerted myself playing sport. Those balls fly terribly fast at you, and then you're still expected to do something with it as a sort of response. No, I'd rather spectate than participate. Particularly tennis. And join in the singing on the pavilion on athletics day.

I CYCLED OUT OF TOWN beyond the showgrounds and the cemetery. Places with beautiful views. The dirt road where the timorous woman once lived is now tarred. Every morning when I pushed the rolled-up newspaper through the wire mesh on her garden gate, she would be watching from behind lace curtains. My mother said the woman liked her own company; nothing's wrong with that.

I once asked my mother why all people couldn't be friendly and pleasant. She laughed and explained that life consists of weights and counterweights; if everything was weighted to one side, earth would be out of balance. It takes all types and sorts to bring about equilibrium in life.

When I'd arrive at the shy woman's neighbour, the one with the big dogs, I'd throw the newspaper in its plastic bag in a wide arc so it would land on the front stoep. Sometimes the homeowner would come outside and catch it.

Bokbaai vygies and many roses and fruit trees were silent witnesses to my early-morning task. Back home, there would still be enough time to see to my pigeons and wish each one a lovely day. Vera, Stoffel and Amper.

Oh, did I love to experiment! Ordered exotic bulbs from Stodels. Not at all suited to the clay soil and dry climate. Fortunately, parsley never disappointed.

My paper-route money meant that, for a few weeks in a row, I could buy extra magazines containing iron-on photos of famous people. You could use a hot iron to transfer the face of your favourite actor or singer onto fabric. I was excited to see what my heroes would look like on pillows and T-shirts. But many attempts delivered dubious results: Lucy from *Dallas* came out fuzzy; Sylvester Stallone's face was completely rumpled; and John Travolta was a blur because I'd lifted the picture halfway to check the result.

THIS IS ALSO THE PLACE where, as a boy, I learnt to drive a car. It took three attempts to pass my learner's licence. I floundered every time I got questions about traffic lights – there were only stop signs in our village. And on the occasions when we'd go to bigger towns as a family, my father must have pretended he knew what he was doing. My dad was a friendly man who had a habit of doffing his hat to strangers. With the benefit of hindsight, I now know that Pa's polite greetings probably got us out of many traffic jams.

We had no idea what lasagne was. We only knew macaroni-and-cheese.

It was also the place of wire toy cars and goose-down pillows. And a man from the plots who was enthusiastic about dowsing. His dowsing rod would invariably react in certain parts of town.

To walk barefoot and use a pocket knife to scrape devil's-thorns out of your soles. Discovering a cisticola nest with tiny eggs as the mother bird hopped from one bush to the next in an attempt to mislead me – or perhaps she instinctively knew I would not harm her or her future brood. I just wanted to have a look.

"It took three attempts to pass my learner's licence. I floundered every time I got questions about traffic lights – there were only stop signs in our village."

THE MAN LOOKING OVER HIS SHOULDER knew, that Sunday evening, that someone at the telephone exchange was listening in when he poured out his heart to his best friend. He remembers vicious lashes and poisonous tongues. Fortunately he knew every pop song from that era and would hum "I will survive" in the mornings on his way to school. "

It was the place of letters written by hand. It was the time of ordering one-week-old chicks advertised in *Landbouweekblad*. And a sheep dog from Colesberg. In the middle of the night, the stationmaster phoned to say the puppy had arrived on the milk train. My father and I left immediately to fetch Cole. When he saw me, he peed and then licked my face. We were inseparable.

Up to Sub A, I mostly knew only about playing. The first day of school was terrifying. I slowly got to know the other children and the teachers.

Today, I'm deeply grateful for that education. The place where you learn to read and write will forever be remembered as a landmark of life. P

Soul food

Anyone can benefit from settling down on a rock and opening their eyes, ears and heart to the beauty of nature around them, says Emile Shreve from Barrydale in the Little Karoo.

– Barrydale, Western Cape –

Owning a property grows more pleasurable as one becomes more familiar with it. Mine has its own peaceful view. Most late afternoons you'd find me on "my" rock, with a cushion, admiring ever-changing cloud formations. My cats would follow, settling nearby, no doubt developing their own feline philosophies.

We would hear and see, high in a casuarina tree, a guttural pair of herons, at first nesting, then later feeding their clamorous young. We are not the only observers of this new life: inquisitive and loudly disclaiming, a pair of Egyptian geese plus a guinea fowl or two would stop to inspect the nest. Twice we marvelled at a magnificent peacock as, in full plumage, it floated up to investigate. If only one could tap into *their* thoughts!

As we've quietly sat there, pale scorpions, prehistoric-looking dung beetles, a bright-red locust and suspicious lizards have all darted by, making the cats twitch. Varied and melodious birdsong is abundant, joyful, but I can never spot anything but doves around us; those hidden musicians remain a mystery. Nearby, sheep bleat, each one in his own peculiar voice.

In the past I've always felt guilty to sit and do nothing, but now I realise I'm not wasting time – I'm feeding my soul. P

PHOTO EMILE SHREVE

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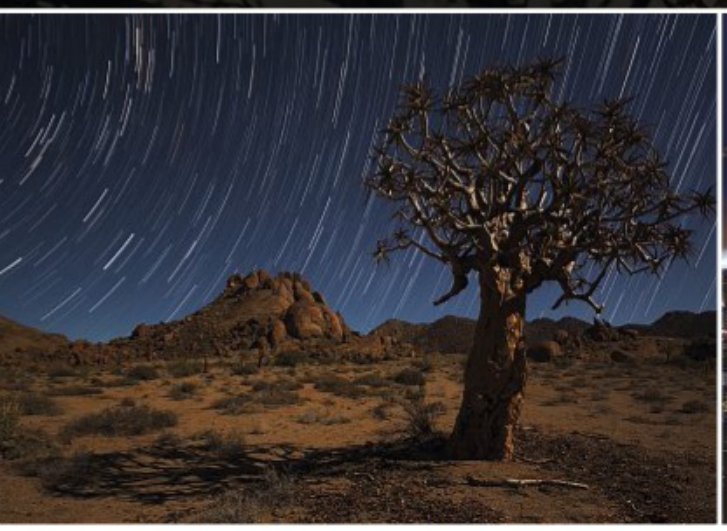

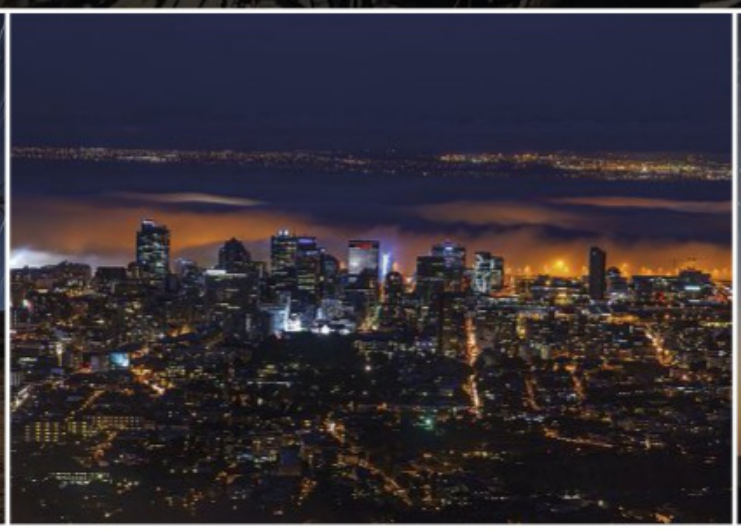

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