

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

go!

Platteland

AUTUMN 2025

The slow life is the good life

Something
is brewing in
Prieska...

Find zen in
Zastron

**LOSE YOURSELF IN
THE NORTHERN CAPE**
... and hope, love and
laughter will find you

Meet Plett's
**FOOD
GROWERS**

**Autumn
menus**
2 foodies
share their
**Middle-Eastern
favourites**

DASSIESFONTEIN
The 'N2 Mall'
turns 30

Pioneers of the
Free State

- **Time to make wine... in Philippolis!**
- **Turning a saving grace into a thriving herb business**



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Photo essay

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AUTUMN 2025

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PHOTOS GREG COX, WILLEM VAN DER BERG, LE-ANDRA SCHWAGLE, GAYE BOSHOFF AND SUPPLIED



Cover

 PHOTO
PETER VAN NOORD

 MODELS
HANNEKE AND KEVIN
BENTZ IN THE VINEYARD
THEY'VE PLANTED ON THEIR
BIODYNAMIC FARM JUST
OUTSIDE PHILIPPOLIS

EDITORS' LETTER



PHOTO IAN GOODES

The soul of the Free State

Every three months or so, we get itchy feet. Partly because we really enjoy taking long road trips accompanied by good music and *padkos*, but also (and, perhaps, mainly) because we really want to experience what other provinces, aside from the Western Cape where we live, have to offer.

We decided to head off to the Free State, a place we hadn't visited in quite some time. This, thanks to Marian van Wyk, compiler of our lovely Shopping pages, who told us about Janine Honiball, a farmer from Ventersburg, who's grown a flourishing herb business that supplies 5 tons of produce to Shoprite and Checkers in three provinces as well as Lesotho. (Those herbs are sorted into 20-40g bags...) Then, we found out that a former colleague, Hanneke du Toit, now Mrs Bentz, has started a brave new venture with her husband, Kevin, in Philippolis where they moved to a few years ago: they want to make wine. In the Free State!

So, we took to the road. The Free State was hot and dry; more arid than we'd ever seen it in the summer. Both entrepreneurs we spoke to could have

been hovering on the brink of despair, but their persistence and passion, so characteristic of South Africans, is simply astonishing. They're not planning on giving up anytime soon.

Philippolis, the town Hanneke and Kevin now call home, is beautiful. (Where does this couple find the time and energy to accomplish so much?) It also appears to be well run, so we nearly fell on our backs when we heard that the municipality is bankrupt and for all intents and purposes doesn't exist anymore. The town only receives water for a few hours every three days (everyone has water tanks, reservoirs and pumps on their properties), the farmers fix the potholes on the roads to neighbouring towns and the locals take their own refuse away.

But the most unbelievable thing of all? The people of Philippolis are not down and outers. There's no moaning or groaning or gnashing of teeth. Their new normal allows them, much like Hanneke and Kevin on our cover, to discover their own magic.

Johan & Peter



The Winter 2025 issue will be distributed country-wide from **23 May 2025**. Please let us know at helloplatteland@gmail.com if, by the end of the following week, you have not been able to find a copy.

go! Platteland

The slow life is the good life

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Situated on the R513 between Pretoria North and Hartbeespoortdam.

Come and visit The Honey Company for a unique honey experience.

At The Honey Company, we only sell pure raw South African honey sourced from our local beekeeper. Our shop offers a variety of products that includes pure raw honey, gifts, beeswax, propolis and facial products.

The macadamia orchid and fruit trees surround the restaurant where you can have breakfast and light lunches and offers a delightful experience with a menu that features honey-infused dishes. Our culinary team expertly incorporates the natural sweetness of honey into their creation.

Come and enjoy your food in a tranquil atmosphere with a variety of birds and game like sable, zebra, giraffes, waterbuck and much more. The Honey Company is ideal for small functions and birthday parties.

The Honey Company is adjacent to and within walking distance from Wildebeesthoek Nature Reserve where you can relax in a tranquil environment close to nature with two self-catering fully equipped wood houses, walking trails, various game and a birdwatcher's paradise.

The Honey Company the_honey_company www.thehoneycompany.co.za
orders@thehoneycompany.co.za restaurant@thehoneycompany.co.za

Wildebeesthoek NATURE RESERVE

Wildebeesthoek Nature Reserve is nestled against the majestic Magaliesberg Mountain Range.

Our two picturesque wood houses are fully equipped for self-catering purposes which will make you feel relaxed and at home in the bushveld.

The tranquil surroundings overlooking the mountain is a great escape from the hustle and bustle of the city life.

Wildebeesthoek Nature Reserve is situated in De Wildt only an hour's drive from Johannesburg and just outside Pretoria towards Hartbeespoortdam.

The reserve is a must for bird watchers as this is absolutely a bird-watching paradise with a bird hide, walking trails for guests only, as well as for those who like a bit of a challenge a trail up into the mountain with various game on the reserve to see while walking and watching. In the reserve are 164 indigenous trees, 135 species of birds, and various game, such as sable, waterbuck, kudu, impala, giraffe, blue wildebeest, zebra, blesbuck and springbuck.

At night, memories can be made while relaxing around a big campfire and listening to all the night sounds like jackal and night jars.

Within walking distance and adjacent properties is The Honey Company shop and restaurant for a unique honey experience where you can buy pure raw South African honey and have breakfast or lunch in a tranquil natural environment.



Wildebeesthoek Nature Reserve wildebeesthoeknature_reserve www.wildebeesthoek.co.za
bookings@wildebeesthoek.co.za

Chitchat



winning
letter

Fly with the gannets

Your article "Lambert's Bay: A diamond in the rough" in the Summer 2024/25 edition refers. Although I live in KZN I have, over the years, been a frequent visitor to Lambert's Bay. It's one

of my favourite places along our West Coast.

The town is renowned for its colony of Cape gannets on Bird Island, one of only a few breeding colonies found along the coast of

Southern Africa. Thousands of them breed, cheek by jowl, on this small island adjacent to the harbour. Overlooking them is a high bird-hide and watching these iconic seabirds is fascinating.

The incoming male bird, returning from a foraging trip that sometimes lasts for days, will circle the colony, identify its mate from among all the other birds and land next to her. So happy are they to be reunited that they intertwine their necks, twisting and turning and, despite the close presence of their neighbours, engage in this snogging activity until, I suppose, realising they have an audience, collapse on their nest in a show of marital bliss. The chick gets fed and the family is happy.

The departure of one of the pair whose turn it is to do the shopping is equally fascinating. The bird slowly strides through the congested nesting area, studiously avoiding any signs of aggression by making no eye contact with its neighbours and holding its long neck erect in a show of friendship, non-aggression and good neighbourliness.

The take-off runway is at the

Mike Coningham from Ballito will receive an Ina Paarman gift pack worth R1 200 for his winning letter. It contains a copy of Ina's new hardcover cookbook, *My Favourite Recipes*, a gift bag with her four new Curry Cook-In Sauces, and a small stainless-steel rack with eight of her spice mixes. Convenience is key when it comes to Ina Paarman's products, but not at the expense of taste, flavour and health. This extensive range is made in the traditional way from fresh seasonal ingredients – perfect for lending every meal a gourmet touch. Visit paarman.co.za for a variety of recipes and also try Ina's really easy recipe for biltong and fig salad with a blue cheese dressing 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. Go to platteland.net and click on "Contact" to write your letter, or send an email to helloplatteland@gmail.com. *Platteland* reserves the right to edit and shorten letters at our discretion.

edge of the colony and when our intrepid aviator receives the all clear from some unseen control tower, it waddles to the start of the runway, gathers itself, makes sure the path ahead is clear and commences its ungainly take-off. With wide wings flapping and webbed feet pounding the path, it appears awkward and cumbersome. Some distance down the runway, however, it reaches take-off speed, rises from the ground, lifting its two webbed feet and head and, after taking a final lap above the colony, turns towards the open sea, flying smoothly and gracefully towards the shopping centres of the cold Atlantic waters.

Once you've observed the colony for long enough, leave the bird-hide, walk back along the quay past the colourful fishing boats and sit at a table at Isabella's, overlooking the little harbour. A few beers slide down easily, the sun warms you and fires your imagination: stretch out your legs, fly with the gannets, dive with the gannets and return safely to Bird Island, the Cape gannet colony next to the little fishing harbour of Lambert's Bay.

Mike Coningham
BALLITO, KWAZULU-NATAL



The power of fire and water

It's amazing how you can suddenly feel when a lot of water is coming. Or smell, see and feel fire spreading and approaching. Evacuate! It's time to grab and run! But what do you take with you, and what do you leave behind? Who has a suitcase packed and ready to grab should a flood, fire, wind or other disaster threaten your everything?

What's more, today we're increasingly reading about tornados swirling debris everywhere, even here in the platteland. (*Marie is referring to the tornado that wreaked devastation in Welkom on 5 January. – Eds.*) What is certain is that nothing illustrates the insignificance of humans quite like the power and might of nature.

"These are worldly things," you could easily say, perhaps even light-heartedly. Yet, you may have spent a lifetime sweating and struggling to acquire these things. Your entire existence. And now you could suddenly lose everything. Certain items are

irreplaceable, even if you were to spend another lifetime sweating and struggling.

Isn't it strange how fire and water which, under normal circumstances, bring peace and relaxation, can also ignite such devastating anxiety? Nothing and no one is spared. Fire and water can literally strip you bare.

Isn't it wonderful, then, that people are able to literally rise from the mud and ash and start again? Certainly, this is not easy and comes with many howls, whys and longings.

Following a long drought, rain is often both a blessing and a challenge, leading to flash floods, soil erosion and loss of biodiversity. The potential consequences for platteland communities can be devastating. But how do we know the platteland? The concern, warmth and compassion of platteland residents have no limits. Please may it always be so.

Marie du Plooy
BLOEMFONTEIN >

Orania article: good and balanced

It was with absolute surprise and total shock that I read the letter in the Spring issue by one Ulrike Mieke Marais-Campleman, who was clearly projecting all kinds of malice after she read the article about Orania.

I see absolutely no connection between her letter and her strongly worded, unfounded accusations. Among other things, she vents that the article is "fuelling a deep hate" and that she thinks it is "racist" and "filled with far-right agendas", as well as being "appalling" and "harmful".

In my view, it is a good, balanced and interesting article about a peace-loving, hard-working Afrikaans-speaking community. Her last accusation is that *Platteland* has "missed the point of what it means to live in the platteland" – and this when the editors live in Koringberg and she in the UK!

Platteland is, and remains, my most-loved magazine.

Elzabe Durr
NEWLANDS, CAPE TOWN



My Prince Albert dream...

I have finished reading the Summer 2024-'25 issue of *Platteland*. Every word, every photo is stored deep in my memory, in case I get the chance to visit one of the lovely towns you wrote about.

My favourite is Prince Albert. My late husband and I once spent a day there and visited the most beautiful guesthouse. We just walked in, went through the kitchen to the backyard where we were greeted by guests who were enjoying their breakfast. We unabashedly wandered through the rooms to look around. An iron bed on the stoep had been made up with snow-white cotton sheets and a duvet... crisp and fresh. The swimming pool was surrounded by a wall where you could just sit and dangle your legs in the water.

I still dream of a Karoo swimming pool just like that. I still dream of a pure-white Karoo house with a long front and back stoep, and a large shady tree near the pool.

Perhaps my dream will come true, and I'll invite you to come visit. We'll eat Karoo-English food. I don't yet know what this will entail – I must still marry the two ideas. This English woman yearns for a little house in the Karoo.

Wishing you all things wonderful in 2025.

Gerolene Sterley
STRAND

Cover girl... 8 years later

Whenever we drive past Die Pampoenstalletjie between Worcester and Robertson, my daughter, Beth, and I recreate the cover image of *Platteland* #16 (Autumn 2016) that featured her and Hettie Viljoen, the owner of the farmstall.

This was the last one we took, just ahead of the new school year. Beth is now 13 years old and started high school in Fish Hoek this year. She enjoys water polo and modern dancing. I have a little playschool at our home and work for our church in the afternoons.

Lee Holgate
FISH HOEK





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News & diary

The days may be getting shorter and cooler, but this autumn's social calendar is definitely hotting up!

COMPILED BY ANRI MATTHEE



Holger Meier's love for the beer industry is clearly visible on his Beer Troopy vehicle.

Explore the land with a beer in hand

While clinking glasses and enjoying a refreshing sip of beer is a joy in itself, it's only part of the experience. The people we're sharing the moment with are just as important. This insight is what inspired Holger Meier, who has spent more than three decades in the beer industry, to unite enthusiastic beer drinkers

from all over the country with his Beer Passport: a road map and bucket-list combo featuring the most noteworthy craft breweries.

After lockdown, Holger decided to travel around South Africa in his trusty Land Cruiser, which is covered with brewery bumper stickers. And the number of people

who followed him on social media via his *Beer Troopy* blog simply grew and grew.

"I covered around 12 000 km in six weeks and visited 200 businesses," he says.

More than 5 000 people have joined the movement since he started printing the Beer Passport

in 2023. And now, for the first time, it's available digitally as an app on your smartphone.

"The pandemic hit micro-breweries the hardest because many bottle stores stopped stocking their beers," explains Holger. "Saving them was too big a task for one Beer Troopy; we needed an army. That's why the community was my key focus, and with their beer passports, members become like troops, working to promote micro-businesses in our small towns."

This bright-orange booklet means you'll quickly be spotted at the breweries, where you'll be welcomed with open arms. Each destination offers a passport stamp for a special prize and, usually, your first glass of beer will be on the house.

And if Holger isn't able to get to all the destinations himself, members

of the Beer Troopy family have offered to show the breweries how the stamp system works.

"We didn't expect this level of happiness among strangers who connect and share on social media. When a group of friends carrying their beer passports arrives at a brewery and spots another group, they all immediately become friends. And then other people want to know what the booklet is and what it means."

Cost An annual subscription to the Beer Troopy app costs R360. Visit the website to subscribe, download the app and follow Holger's blog.

Contact beertroopy.com
f Beer Troopy **@**beertroopy
e hello@beertroopy.com
t 082 465 3849

Local is Lekker!

Holger has expanded his passport concept to include a second project. The "Lekker Passport" – also available on the smartphone app – is intended to market entrepreneurs and hidden gems in small towns to visitors.

"When I visit a place for the first time, I want to buy and experience things that I won't find anywhere else. We want to use this passport to focus on these local heroes."

Thanks to recommendations from residents and his Beer Troopers, Holger is close to reaching his first goal of listing 1 000 destinations. Most of these are farm stalls or speciality shops but you will also find unique routes and noteworthy buildings. "A mountain pass may be far removed from a brewery or coffee shop, but these are all things that give people a reason to take a road trip." >

Win Three lucky readers will each win a printed Beer Passport to the value of R360. To enter, go to platteland.net, click on "English" then "Win", and fill in the form using the keywords "Beer" and "Autumn". The closing date is Friday 23 May 2025.



ABOVE Holger wants to encourage beer drinkers to travel with their Beer Passports and support small breweries.



ABOVE RIGHT Your first beer is complimentary when you have your passport stamped.

An armchair 'safari' for your doggo

Your best friend's playtime is now proudly South African thanks to Woolworths' exclusive range of soft dog toys. These stuffed animals were created by American brand P.L.A.Y. but the designs of indigenous wild animals and birds are proudly South African and only available at Woolies.

A spokesperson says: "The range was created by Woolies' internal pet team, who all have a deep love for animals. Our aim was to design unique toys that South Africans would recognise and resonate with and, at the same time, celebrate the beauty of our wildlife."

The available designs include a kudu, wild dog, hyena, hoopoe, Cape eagle-owl, warthog and African fish eagle. Woolies says the Knysna loerie, warthog and African penguin are among their top sellers. And cats can play along too, as the range also includes smaller catnip-filled sunbirds.

These cute toys are even suitable for dogs that enjoy a bit of rough and tumble – the reinforced stitching and double-layered fabric make each toy extra durable. If they end up buried in the mud, simply pop them in the washing machine and tumble-dryer.

Price Woolies' P.L.A.Y. dog toys cost between R100 and R200. A variety of designs can be found in store and online at woolworths.co.za.

ABOVE RIGHT *Platteland* ran our own test: Banjo, the cocker spaniel, immediately chose the Knysna loerie as his favourite!

RIGHT In the top row are iconic indigenous birds: the Cape eagle-owl, fish eagle and African penguin. In the bottom row are some animals to bring your dog's hunting instinct to the fore: a stuffed warthog, wild dog and kudu.



Introducing the A-Team of SA olive oil!

The liquid gold that we get from olives has been a pantry staple for thousands of years – so precious that the ancient Romans even used it as currency.

The purity of olive oil is still highly prized, and, locally, the SA Olive Association awards our extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) – the purest, highest grade of olive oil – gold, silver or bronze status every year. The top achievers are then assessed again in a blind tasting to select the very best in the country for the coveted Absa Top 10 Olive Oil Awards.

Last year's A-Team was announced at an awards ceremony at the Grande Roche Hotel in Paarl. In alphabetical order, the top 10 are:

- De Rustica Olive Estate: Estate Range Intense
- Kleinbergskloof: Family Reserve Medium
- Lapithos Olive Growers: Estate Mission Medium
- Mardouw: XXV Medium
- Morgenster Estate: Don Carlo Medium
- Oudewerfskloof Olive Farm: Coratina Medium
- "Ouma Se Huis" Boutique Olive Estate: Charisma 2 Delicate
- Rio Largo Olive Estate: Premium (White Label) Medium
- Tokara: Mission Delicate
- Terre Paisible: Extra Virgin Olive Oil Delicate

Extra virgin olive oil is natural and unrefined, and can only be processed by cold extraction at below 30°C. These cold-pressed olives contain vitamins, antioxidants and delicate flavours (which are destroyed at higher temperatures).

Producing a good-quality olive oil is no small feat, according to the CEO of SA Olive, Wendy Petersen. "The quality of our local extra virgin olive oils is constantly monitored and strictly controlled. We only award our 'Commitment to Compliance' seal to members when an oil has been tasted by a trained tasting panel and meets all the criteria. I encourage consumers to look for products that carry this green seal. It's an indication of quality, and only extra virgin olive oils bearing it may enter our awards."



These are the SA Olive Absa Top 10: the best extra virgin olive oils made in the country.



A freshly brewed book for your coffee table

Two decades of stories, photos and wisdom have been collected in a full-colour hardcover book from Terbodore Coffee Roasters. Called *Exploring Coffee*, it chronicles their journey from family business to national brand.

The team says, "The book has been in the pipeline for a while. When we visited Rwanda last year and celebrated our 20th birthday, we decided that the time was right to share the Terbodore story."

It's a coffee-table book that documents the challenges, big decisions and life lessons they've learnt. It also offers a new perspective on this iconic South African coffee brand, easily recognisable by the Great Dane on its packaging.

Apart from the striking illustrations by artist Amy de Vries, the entire book was created by the Terbodore team themselves. The story of the Macaskill family is closely intertwined with the story of their roastery, and their personalised approach to business is reflected in the Terbodore identity. They say that Terbodore is more than a coffee brand, it's a story of family, passion and tradition.

Where? *Exploring Coffee* is available on the Terbodore online store for R595.

Contact terbodore.com

contact@terbodore.com

Terbodore Coffee Roasters

@terbodorecoffee >

Wild, wilder... Winelands!

The first Wyn & Wildsfees to be held in the Cape Winelands is just around the corner. The idea behind this wine and wildlife festival, which has been almost a year in the planning, is to connect South Africans' unique love of nature with the dynamic local wine industry, and to celebrate our enthusiasm for both worlds in the great outdoors.

Festival director Marjoh Claassens says, "It's not only about hunting but also good wine, food and spending time together." The programme includes traditional games, tug-of-war, and slingshot and target shooting. The more adventurous can attempt archery or axe throwing.

When last year's first planned festival had to be cancelled due to bad weather, the organisers decided to hold it in September at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. It will take place there again this year, but they are finally bringing the action to the Cape – and on an even bigger scale.

Because the festival is also a networking opportunity for the big-game industry, there will be an arena for animal shows, as well

as stands for virtual safaris and booking hunting trips. Festival-goers can explore the latest outdoor and camping equipment, or participate in a trail run, mountain-bike race or treasure hunt. Children will be kept busy with animal rides, entertainment and a play area.

Marjoh says the festival menu is another big attraction. Game meat will of course play a big part in the potjiekos competition and spit braai, and food trucks will offer the perfect opportunity to sample high-quality meats from different regions. And don't forget the drinks: grab your glass and tasting tokens at the gate before sampling the wines and craft beverages on offer.

All the music and dancing – from gumboot dancing to drumming performances – is included in the ticket price and festival-goers will be entertained until late. And those diehards who don't want to leave can make use of the campsite. Around 2000 two-man dome tents will be erected and equipped with beds, linen, chairs and battery-operated lights – with ablution blocks and security close by.

Where? Sandringham Farm, Stellenbosch

When? Friday 4 April 12:00–20:00; Saturday 5 April 10:00–21:00; Sunday 6 April 10:00–16:00

Price Tickets cost R250 pppd (R200 for pensioners; R100 for children; free for children under 6). Weekend passes are available at a special rate. Visit the website to buy your tickets or book a spot at the campsite.

Contact diewynnenwildsfees.co.za

info@diewynnenwildsfees.co.za

f Die Wyn en Wildsfees

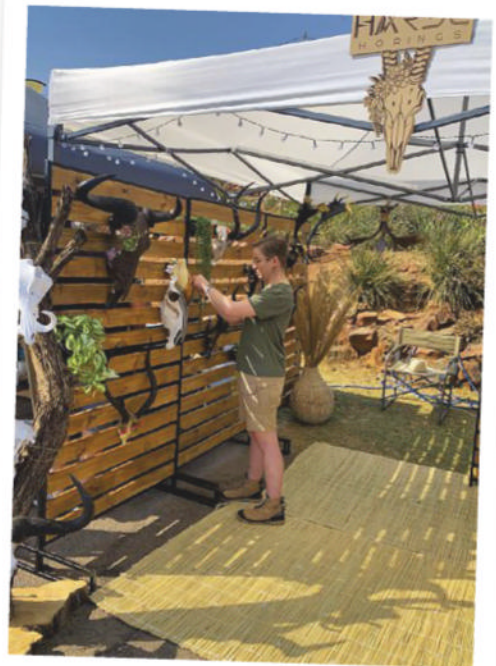
@diewynnenwildsfees

064 539 6452 (Marjoh)



ABOVE Biltong, sosaties, steak and potjiekos. Game meat in all its forms will be available to taste at Die Wyn & Wildsfees.

ABOVE RIGHT Even the crafts exhibited at the festival, such as these artworks made from skulls and horns, are game inspired.



Win 10 lucky readers stand a chance to win a double weekend pass to Die Wyn & Wildsfees, which will each give two people access to the festival over all three days. To enter, go to platteland.net, click on "English" and "Win", and fill in the form using the keywords "Winewild" and "Autumn". The closing date is Friday 28 March 2025.

Dates to diarise*

WESTERN CAPE

Fools & Fans

GREYTON

4–5 April

The eighth edition of this fun festival invites brewers and beer-drinkers from everywhere to gather in the heart of the Overberg. There will be plenty to drink: Friday will be devoted to home brewers who want to demonstrate their skills, and on Saturday, the best commercial brewers in the country will have their turn.

Tickets R200 pp for Friday and R280 for Saturday on Quicket. A weekend pass costs R420.

Contact foolsandfans.co.za

info@foolsandfans.co.za

[@FoolsAndFansBeerFest](https://www.facebook.com/FoolsAndFansBeerFest)



Cheese and Chilli Fest

FANCOURT, GEORGE

3 May

The great variety of cheeses, spices, spreads, sauces and chillies for tasting will delight your taste buds. For a hands-on experience, attend the cheese-making demonstration. And for brave culinary adventurers there's a chilli-eating competition.

Tickets R295 on Quicket.

Contact fancourt.co.za

hotel@fancourt.co.za

[@Fancourt.SA](https://www.facebook.com/Fancourt.SA)

[@fancourtsa](https://www.instagram.com/fancourtsa)



WESTERN CAPE

Spier Light Art festival

SPIER, STELLENBOSCH

21 March–21 April

This year 16 artworks will transform Spier into an open-air art gallery of light, space and colour. The exhibition will be open every day from 18:30 to 21:00. The sight of the exhibition coming to life as darkness falls is especially impressive – do make sure that you arrive early enough to watch it.

Entrance Free, but book at spier.co.za/events/spier-light-art-2025

Contact spier.co.za lightart@spier.co.za

[@spierwinefarm](https://www.facebook.com/spierwinefarm) [@spierwinefarm](https://www.instagram.com/spierwinefarm) 021 809 1100

Tulbagh Vintage & Vine Faire

TULBAGH

10 May

Celebrate Mother's Day weekend in Tulbagh and meet the local winemakers who make magic in the region's vineyards. The wine auction takes place again this year, and there will also be a vintage car exhibition as well as stalls displaying local products, such as top-class local olives.

Contact tulbaghtourism.co.za

info@tulbaghtourism.co.za

[Tulbagh](https://www.facebook.com/Tulbagh)

Vintage & Vine Faire

023 230 1375

Franschhoek Literary Festival

FRANSCHHOEK

16–18 May

If you've resolved to read more books this year, this festival is the best place to immerse yourself in the world of words. Come listen to talks by writers from South Africa and overseas and discover recommendations by other keen bookworms. The festival is also a fund-raising platform for the local school library project.

Contact flf.co.za

hello@flf.co.za

[Franschhoek Literary](https://www.facebook.com/FranschhoekLiterary)

Festival [@franlitfest](https://www.instagram.com/franlitfest)

GAUTENG

Muddy Puppy dog fun run

SUNDOWNERS, ALBERTON

2 March

All dog owners and their four-legged friends are welcome to enjoy quality time in nature and make new friends at the same time. The obstacle courses have been designed to get you moving, but you and Fido can choose to run, jog or walk. Mud and water along the 3 km route means that no one will be dry – or clean – at the end!

Tickets R220 pp on the day; R200 pp when you buy online on Quicket (R100 for children under 12; free for under sixes and dogs).

Contact muddypuppy.co.za

info@muddypuppy.co.za

[Muddy Puppy](https://www.facebook.com/MuddyPuppy)

[@oneplanmuddypuppy](https://www.instagram.com/oneplanmuddypuppy)

072 537 0122

Country Music and Craft Distillers Festival

PREMIERMYN HERVORMDE KERK, CULLINAN

5 April

Come and enjoy the great atmosphere at this festival, where local country stars will take to the stage while visitors sip beer, gin, brandy, rum and liqueurs from selected craft producers – all included in the ticket price. There will also be plenty of food and crafts to browse. Dust off your cowboy boots and join the fun!

Entrance R100 pp on Quicket; early-bird tickets are also available.

Contact [dbooyesen@](mailto:dbooyesen@mweb.co.za)

mweb.co.za

[@cullinaneventsco](https://www.facebook.com/cullinaneventsco)

082 926 4326 (Danie) >

Rand Show**JOHANNESBURG EXPO CENTRE, NASREC****17–21 April**

This year's show is a five-day extravaganza offering the best in entertainment, food and music. Adrenaline junkies, take note! The popular amusement park is now bigger than ever before. Come drift and spin with professional drivers, or elevate your heart rate with a flip in a helicopter or by jumping on a bungee trampoline.

Tickets Available on the website.

Contact randshow.co.za

info@randshow.co.za

@randshow

@rand_show_

011 494 2894

Hobby-X**KYALAMI GRAND PRIX CIRCUIT, JOHANNESBURG****1–4 May**

This flagship event for crafters, artists and creative spirits has been going for over 25 years. Last year's expo boasted more than 11 000 visitors and a world record for the largest display of rolled paper flowers. Whether you decorate cakes, paint or make wood carvings, there's plenty of opportunity to hone your skills at various workshops as well as mingle with other creative people.

Contact hobby-x.co.za

Hobby-X @hobbyxinsta

@HobbyXrsa

Protea Musiekfees**LAERSKOOL PROTEARIF, KRUGERSDORP****31 May**

Enjoy this inaugural music festival whose programme is already packed with well-known artists, and the stalls and food on offer also



promise to impress. Keep an eye on the Facebook page to see who will be performing.

Tickets From R200 pp on iTickets (R100 for children under 12; free for under sixes). Early-bird discounts are available.

Contact feesprotea@

gmail.com Protea Fees

082 876 5629

FREE STATE**VKB Bielie Mielie Fees SHOWGROUNDS, SAREL****CILLIERS STREET, REITZ 27 February–1 March**

This agricultural show and festival is known as the "the fest with the best", and the organisers promise something to suit everyone, including an amusement park for the little ones, a potjiekos competition, boeresport, quizzes, mountain-bike races and a golf day. And big names in the music business will supply the entertainment. Look out for Stronkie, the

**GAUTENG****Creative Native Vintage & Classic Motor Show****James Hall Museum of Transport, Johannesburg 1 March**

If you love vintage cars, this is the festival for you. Pack your own picnic basket or tuck into the fare available at the food stalls – and bring the whole family along to enjoy the outdoor music performances. Where else will you get the chance to catch a ride in an iconic red London bus from 1952?

Entrance Free, but places are limited – book on Quicket.

Contact feronicap@joburg.org.za James Hall Museum of Transport 011 435 9487

lucky mealie, who loves being photographed with happy festival-goers!

Tickets Available at the gate.

Contact bieliemielie.co.za

admin@bieliemielie.co.za

@bieliemielie

083 395 2640

EASTERN CAPE**MPO Melkfees****THE FERRY HOTEL, GAMTOOS****1–2 March**

Entrepreneurs, top artists and dairy-industry stakeholders of Jeffrey's Bay all gather at this festival, which the organisers promise will be a cracker after last year's event was cancelled due to an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. The milk-tart eating competition is always a highlight!

Tickets R120 pppd on Quicket (R90 for children). Weekend passes are also available.

Contact ec@mpo.co.za

@melkfees @mpo_

melkfees_ 064 934 3951

Great Kenton**Wine Festival****KENTON-ON-SEA****20–22 March**

A love of the ocean and an appreciation of fine blends meet at this charming wine festival. Your entrance ticket will let you explore the offerings of 30 cellars at three tasting venues around this town on the Sunshine Coast.

Tickets R350 pp on the website.

Contact greatwine weekends.com

Karoo Wine Club

karoowineclub@gmail.com

083 599 9302



Kunskoors Festival

JEFFREY'S BAY

1–3 May

This celebration of the visual and performing arts is made even more enjoyable by the unique coastal-town charm of Jeffrey's Bay. Browse through the programme and plan ahead so you can enjoy a little of everything: theatre, classical music, books, an art route, creative workshops and elegant open gardens.

Tickets Available on Webtickets.

Contact  kunskoors.co.za

 [soria@kunskoors.co.za](https://www.instagram.com/soria@kunskoors.co.za)

 [@kunskoors](https://www.facebook.com/@kunskoors)

 [@kunskoors](https://twitter.com/@kunskoors)

 082 684 4350

Stoep Tasting

GRAAFF REINET & NIEU BETHESDA

16–17 May and 22–24 May

A Karoo stoep is made for relaxation and socialising – especially with a glass of wine in hand. The popularity of this wine weekend means it will be held twice this year, with different tasting programmes.

Tickets R450 or R550 pp on the website.

Contact  greatwineweekends.com 

karoowineclub@gmail.com

 Karoo Wine Club

 083 599 9302



NORTH WEST

The Whisky & Spirits Classic

THE HUB, KLERKSDORP

1 March

A dozen world-class distilleries will share their new products, rare finds and timeless favourites at this premium event. Tickets include entrance to the main exhibit space but gourmands who want to walk the extra mile can also attend the masterclass. No under-21s are permitted.

Tickets R475 pp on Webtickets (R800 including the masterclass).

Contact  LiquidLuxe  071 451 5725

MPUMALANGA

Wakkerstroom Music Festival

WAKKERSTROOM

20–23 March

The 14th edition of this

classical music celebration proves that a passion project can go from strength to strength with the right support. One of the goals of the festival, where up-and-

coming and established artists share the stage, is to promote classical music and the fine arts in the local community.

Tickets Available on the website.

Contact  wmfestival.co.za

 info@wmfestival.co.za

 Wakkerstroom Music Festival  076 129 8180



KWAZULU-NATAL

Garden talk with Jane Griffiths

BLACKWOOD'S HOME OF GARDENING, HILTON

29 March

Gardening author Jane Griffiths will deliver a practical gardening talk titled "Grow green fingers", giving valuable insights into how to work with nature to establish a flourishing, sustainable garden.

Attendees are welcome to ask Jane questions after her 45-minute talk.

Tickets R200 pp on Quicket.

Contact  blackwoods.co.za

 hilton@blackwoods.co.za

 @Blackwoods.HoG

 @blackwoodsnursery

 033 880 0239 



News about markets and bazaars

To be included in the Autumn 2025 issue, tell us via email or on our Facebook page what's happening in your area between the last week of February and the first week of June 2025. The closing date is Friday 11 April 2025.  helloplatteland@gmail.com  @Platteland

*Closer to the time of an event, go online or contact the organisers to find out whether it is going ahead as planned.

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Ceramic cat food bowls R450 each
Baraka Gifts and Decor
barakashop.co.za



Handcrafted Nelly storage basket R530
My Basketshop my.basketshop
Itawuli 100% cotton bath sheet
(100 cm x 175 cm) R1 075
Mungo mungo.co.za



Garden Master plastic rake R38
Makro makro.co.za



Chaloner Arrabbiata sugar-free pasta sauce
(400 g) R95
Chaloner chaloner.co.za

Let's go to town

Just before the leaves started to turn colour, we went in search of autumn goodies in Durban, Elgin, Heidelberg (WC), Johannesburg, Krugersdorp, the KZN Midlands, Loxton, Middelpos, Polokwane, Pretoria, Robertson, Simondium, Stellenbosch and Wellington.

BY MARIAN VAN WYK
PHOTOS GREG COX



Handwoven Kiondo planter basket
about R390
Basketly basketly.co.za



Shweshwe cushion cover
with felt letters (50 cm x 50 cm) R550
Accessorise Your Lifestyle
accessoriseyourlifestyle



Forage and Feast Instant Chai Latte
With Rooibos (250 g) R75
Checkers checkers.co.za
Glass mug R40
Spar (Sea Point branch) spar.co.za



Yoda hip flask with a handcrafted leather sleeve R350
Baraka Gifts and Decor barakashop.co.za >



Indezi River Full Cream Yeast Free Kefir,
made of milk from free-range cows,
supports gut health (1 l) R63
PicknPay  pnp.co.za



Aromatherapy soy wax candles:
Balance votive candle (left) with neroli,
cedarwood and lemongrass (70 ml) R130
Harmony tumbler (right) with rose,
geranium and jasmine (220 ml) R350
Soylites  soylites.co.za



**Copper dark-roasted Arabica
coffee beans** (250 g) R120
**Nickel compostable
ground coffee pods** (10) R100
Boilers Coffee Co  boilerscoffeeco.com
 boilerscoffeeco@gmail.com



Linen-cotton-blend tea towel
(44 cm x 66 cm) R185
Jus Lié  juslie.co.za



**Kirchhoffs heirloom pea and
sweetpea seeds** from R142 per packet
Takealot  takealot.com



Organic garlic braid from the Karoo
(medium, 12–13 bulbs) R200
Marianne Scholtz  082 589 4476
 sakrivier@023.co.za
Linen table runner R485 per metre
Koöperasiestories
 kooperasiestories_simondium



**Karoo Hoogland
Aquarius Rosé 2024** R120 and
Capricorn Chardonnay 2023 R290
Karoo Hoogland Wines
 karoohoogland.co.za



Farm animal sweet biscuits R30 each
Ou Meul (Robertson branch)
 oumeul.co.za  023 004 0631



A room diffuser with a few drops of citrus
essential oil from a 10 ml dropper bottle
brings a refreshing scent to your home R75
Queen Bee Soap Co  queenbeesoapco.co.za



Gizzls Fishy Catnip, made using only natural ingredients and sustainable fish species, is rich in protein and omega fatty acids (60g) R105
Gizzls gizzls.co.za



Fynbos Herbal Tea, which has many health benefits, in the flavours (clockwise from top left) snow bush, mint pelargonium, rose pelargonium, silver bush and buchu (enough for 30 small pots of tea) R75 each
South African Fynbos
southafricanfynbos.com



Rugani Beetroot Boost 100% Vegetable Juice Blend is rich in vitamins, antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties (750 ml) R40
Faithful to Nature faithful-to-nature.co.za



Magnetic cellphone holder for keeping your phone handy on your car dashboard R260
Hooikraal Wine & Gift Market
hooikraalmarket.co.za



Grumpy Snacks Dry-Roasted Chickpeas coated in chocolate or flavoured with sea salt are healthy, gluten-free snack options (20 x 40 g packets) R375
Takealot takealot.com



Kalahari Braai coarse yellow maize meal in a cloth bag makes delicious *braaipap* R55
Die Skeerhok farm stall dieskeerhok.co.za



Soy body balms: Everyday Balm (125 ml) with a blend of rosehip and shea butter, infused with neroli, lavender and lemongrass R150; and Man Balm (100 ml) infused with oud and neroli, and with sandalwood and patchouli R140 each
Soylites soylites.co.za



Dried Greek wild oregano handpicked in the mountains of Greece (50g) R100
terramadre.co.za



Velskoene with a sheepskin lining R1 100
Klerakas klerakas.com

MY TOWN

Find Zen in Zastron

The natural beauty of Zastron, an agricultural town situated at the foot of the Aasvoëlberg in the Free State, as well as the sincerity and empathy of its residents, will captivate the hearts of even the most hardened city slicker.

TEXT HANCU AND MIA LOUW PHOTOS MIA LOUW

The grasslands at the foot of Aasvoëlberg provide the route for Zastron's weekly 5 km Parkrun, but serious hikers can explore the mountain slopes for something more challenging. The hill to the left is Kranskop, which lies south of Aasvoëlberg.



As you enter Zastron from the Van Stadensrus side, you're greeted by the town's welcome sign in Lucas Majozi Street.



“Hello! Would you like a quick cup of coffee?” booms Hennie Smit in the early morning twilight, his seven dogs gathering excitedly around him. It’s quarter past four and Hennie, armed with a walking stick and headlamp, is ready for his daily mountain walk with the three Great Danes and four rescue dogs.

“The temperature is pleasantly mild today, but the weather in Zastron can be very unpredictable,” he says as the morning sun slowly rises against the cliffs of the Aasvoëlberg, which extends 2207m above sea level and overlooks the town. “We even had snow in November – the third snowfall of the year.” The mountain was named

for the colony of Cape vultures that nest on its rocky ledges, while The Eye – a 9m-wide gap in the middle of the mountain – has become the town’s unofficial emblem.

Hennie and his wife, Anelmé, moved to Zastron in 2005 after living and working in Johannesburg for 15 years. “We grew tired of city life and the traffic, and started to think about doing something different, but we weren’t sure exactly what and where,” says Anelmé of their move. Although she grew up in Zastron, the town was initially not on her and Hennie’s radar, but they seized the opportunity with both hands when it presented itself.

“For all these years we’d been buying houses, fixing them up and selling them. While we were considering our next steps, we came to Zastron to visit my parents. There was a house on the market...

and here we are, 20 years later,” she laughs.

The Smits are not people who rest on their laurels, and business is in their blood. Since arriving in the town, Anelmé and Hennie have started, managed and then sold a variety of enterprises.

“One day, Hennie said: ‘There’s no restaurant in town. Don’t you want to open one?’ It seemed like a lovely challenge at the time, and so Nell’s was born. I sold it 10 years later.”

Apart from Nell’s, which remains an institution in the town, the Smits also opened and then sold a guesthouse. Hennie, a skilled handyman, currently owns and manages a hardware store.

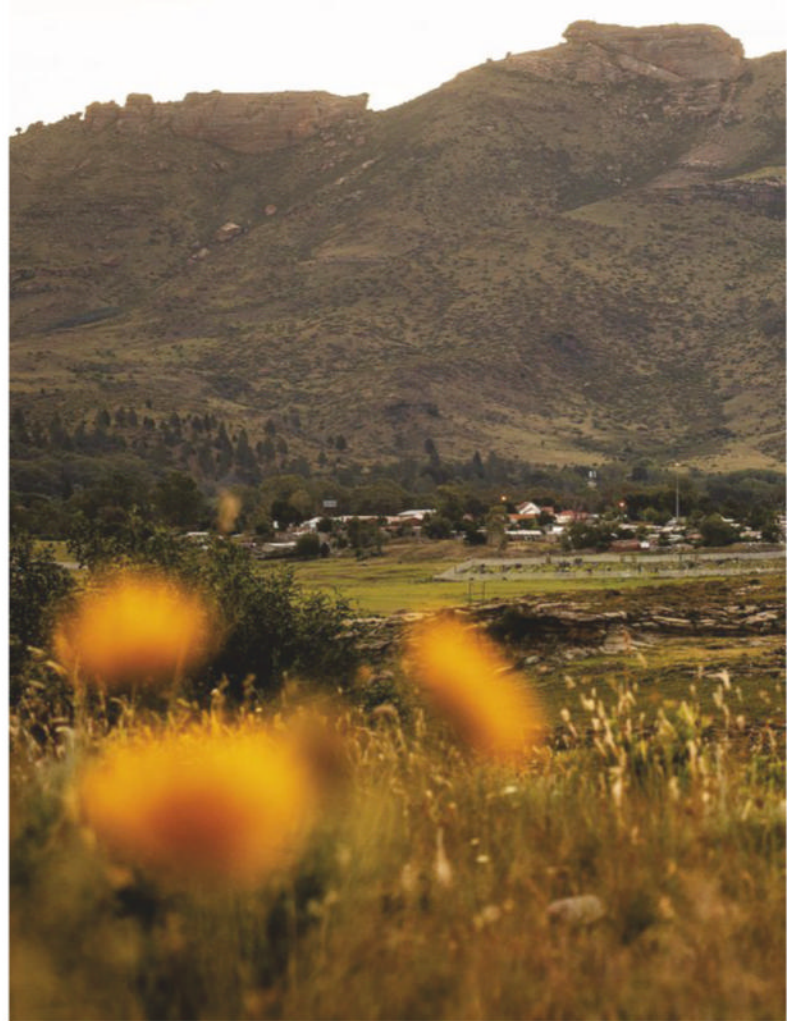
“I enjoy a level of freedom here that I haven’t experienced anywhere else,” he says as he gazes over the town from a koppie. This is his regular stop on his morning wander. >

Hennie Smit's early morning walk – a 4 km route he enjoys daily during the warmer months – takes him past Kloofdam behind the town. His seven dogs look forward to these excursions as much as he does.



Aasvoëlberg forms a heavenly backdrop for the houses of the town, some of which are around 100 years old.





“Don’t get me wrong, I love Joburg and city life, but we’re really lucky here because it’s relatively easy to start something small and systematically build it up,” he says of doing business in Zastron.

He is less enthusiastic about the local government. “The infrastructure is not what it should be, and things are falling apart,” he says, gesturing in the direction of the rundown municipal Kloof Dam Caravan Park, where gigantic willows and weeds are slowly engulfing the buildings and facilities. “This is the tragedy of what’s happening in the platteland.”

Despite these challenges, the Smits have achieved a lot by taking a pragmatic approach. “You’re responsible for basic services yourself, so you have to make a plan and carry on,” says Anelmé. Although Zastron is 176km from the closest city – Bloemfontein – there’s almost nothing that can’t be

delivered here. “It’s not as though we are cut off. Although I do prefer to support local businesses, I am able to buy anything that I can’t find locally online.”

Hennie and Anelmé are unanimous about one thing: The environment and the people make Zastron unique. “A lot of people think Clarens is beautiful, but it’s really beautiful here too. People just don’t know about it. I can walk out of my gate and into the mountain,” says Anelmé. “This is a place that offers a completely different lifestyle,” says Hennie while seven contented dogs lie on the stoep, cooling down after their excursion.

IT’S EIGHT O’CLOCK and already a scorcher, but fortunately the foyer of Ons Hotel offers a welcome refuge from the hot sun.

“Before we go any further, I want a photograph of you,” says owner

Magda du Plessis, who is ready with a handshake and a broad smile. “Now you’re also a part of our story; we’re all about the people here. After all, it’s the people who visit a hotel that make it what it is.”

Magda and her husband, Oubaas, live on a farm 13km outside the town where they farm with cattle and sheep. Her daughter, Patricia, and son-in-law, Peet, farm outside Rhodes in the Eastern Cape, and her son Kobus is a vegetable farmer outside Zastron.

“The platteland is in all their hearts. My youngest, Johann, is now in Grade 11 and he also wants to farm here,” she says proudly.

In 2021, Magda bought what was then called the Maluti Hotel with a dream of creating a retreat for the people of Zastron. “Johann and I were at the stop street on the corner and, on the spur of the moment, I said to him: ‘Come, let’s go find out if the hotel is for sale.’”



“The people of Zastron, especially those who have lived here for a long time, can be difficult. But they’re always there for you when you’re in a pinch.”

As with many other historical properties in the town, the 118-year-old hotel was neglected and run-down. The Covid-19 pandemic had also taken a toll on local tourism and the owners were eager to sell.

“Everyone said I was crazy, because my plan for the hotel was full of heart and little business sense.” Despite the many challenges she faced, Magda persevered and eventually gained the support of her family and the community.

“The people of Zastron, especially those who have lived here for a long time, can be difficult. But they’re always there for you when you’re in a pinch,” she acknowledges. “They came inside and offered to help: friends and townspeople. Everyone contributed in their own way.”

The floors were sanded, and the rooms refurbished and updated. In the process, they uncovered a historical treasure: the original wall of the Commercial Hotel, which

was erected in 1906, shortly after the devastation of the Anglo-Boer War.

“Some would argue that a hotel of this nature is not sustainable in the platteland, but for me it was about setting an example: a hotel can work – you just have to offer something different.”

This is precisely what Magda and her team do. Aside from the regular hotel facilities available, they also sell homemade products made by approximately 60 local suppliers in the country store at the hotel. A variety of craft classes are also offered on a regular basis.

“It’s about coming together and creating spaces where people can spend time together,” says Magda as she enters the hotel’s courtyard, a quiet, shady, green oasis away from the bustle of the town.

“Once a week, a group of older women gather in the garden to play Rummikub and then the young folk like to braai at the >



ABOVE Ons Hotel’s Magda du Plessis in front of the wall they discovered belonged to the original old Commercial Hotel structure built in 1906.

ABOVE LEFT Farmers here focus on cattle, sheep and grain. The silos, visible in the distance, are dwarfed by the mountains.

OPPOSITE Anelmé Smit spends quality time in her artfully decorated lounge with her rescue dog, Krummel.



MY TOWN

side of the hotel where the bar is situated," she explains. "I really feel like I was planted in Zastron – my heart has been here for the past 27 years. My husband has lived here for 50 years – his entire life. My children attended school here. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I just believe we must continue to tell people that there is hope in the platteland," she says, her eyes brimming with tears.

"WHEN I COME BACK from the sea and see old Aasvoëlberg, that's when I know I'm home," says 77-year-old Dorea van Rooyen, who can still remember what the town looked like before the roads were tarred.

The first plots were laid out in 1876 on Jan Hendrik de Winnaar's farm, Verliesfontein, at the foot of Aasvoëlberg, but the Free State Volksraad only officially recognised Zastron as a town in 1882. It was

named after Johanna Sibella Brand (née Zastron), the wife of President Jan Brand, the fourth president who presided over the Republic of the Orange Free State from 1864 to 1888.

"I was born and bred here, I met my husband at school here, and after spending a few years in Bloemfontein, we came back to settle down," says Dorea. "He wanted to return to the farm and I missed the town."

She has only good memories of growing up in Zastron. "All the roads were gravel. My family lived at the opposite end of town, and I remember when they tarred the main road. I was still little! Later they also tarred the road to the hospital and then we were in the pound seats because my family's home was on that street."

The natural beauty of the area lies close to Dorea's heart. "We spent much time in Aasvoëlberg when we were children. Holkrans is halfway

up and, right there, the sweetest water runs from the mountain and over the rocks," she says, pointing towards the mountain.

Dorea says that, apart from the fresh air and natural beauty, the people of Zastron are its greatest asset. "This was a healthy environment for raising children. We were one big community, and it's still like that today. And I always feel safe here. I'm very happy."

She wouldn't swap her house, situated in the middle of town on one of the last tarred roads, for anything. "And anyway, where would I go? Bloemfontein or Johannesburg, where I can taste the pollution in my mouth? I don't think so!"

Dorea's hands are never idle. To keep money coming in, she bakes and sells a variety of biscuits, rusks and koeksisters and also runs a small nursery on her front stoep. "It's good to keep busy, and I've always had a mind for business."



Dorea van Rooyen and her companion, Bones, enjoy some R&R on her stoep, which overflows with succulents she propagates herself.

But life in Zastron isn't all sunshine and roses. As is the case in many other platteland towns, the residents have to deal with inadequate service delivery. "The municipality is dismal but most of us make our own arrangements to manage the water and electricity shortages," she says. "Who would have thought? Over the years I've seen the roads tarred one by one. And, goodness me, one by one they're becoming gravel again. Isn't that funny?"

GROENHOEK FARM LIES about 14km east of Zastron. After a successful career as a professional rugby player in Italy, 33-year-old Adam Wessels and his wife, Bronwyn, a chartered accountant, moved here in October 2024. "The doctor advised me to manage my stress levels because the corporate lifestyle in sales and marketing that

I followed after my rugby career, was killing me," says the almost 2m-tall farm boy, who played for Rugby Calvisano, a club in Italy.

"We worked really hard and devoted almost all our time and energy to our jobs: late nights and early mornings were the order of the day. We were fully immersed in the rat race," says Bronwyn, the financial director of a large spice company.

"Adam suddenly fell seriously ill. After many tests by doctors and specialists, we still didn't have any answers. Eventually a cardiologist said that stress was the problem. One thing was clear: we couldn't continue the way we were," says Bronwyn, of the six months that it took for Adam to recuperate.

Adam's illness and the medical advice to scale down was why they eventually decided to swap suburban and corporate life – and a beautiful house in Northcliff – for the southern Free State. >

BELOW LEFT A herd of goats graze at the foot of Aasvoëlberg, a popular spot, it seems, as the weekly Parkrun kicks off here every Saturday.

BELOW RIGHT The Van Tonder family managed Vananco Wholesalers for 39 years, transforming it into a Spar six years ago.

BOTTOM RIGHT Cattle graze in a marshy area on route to the popular – and beautiful – Montagu Dam, east of the town.

BOTTOM LEFT Squares Furniture and Gifts in Reichenberg Street has been a fixture of Zastron since 1980.





In a nutshell

Distance from the big city?

Bloemfontein is 176 km away.

Average temperature

Summer (November to March) is hot and wet with an average daytime temperature of 30°C+, but 41 °C has been reported in January. Winter (June to August) is cold and dry with overnight temperatures sometimes falling to below freezing point.

Average rainfall

Annual rainfall ranges

from 450 mm to 500 mm, mostly in January and February.

Facilities Residents shop at Spar or Usave in the town; Die Oog Bakery in Mathey Street sells everything from fruit and vegetables to hardware; there are also two butcheries. Embekweni Hospital is the state facility in Zastron. The closest private hospitals are in Bloemfontein.

Nearest Woolies Bloemfontein (176 km).

Municipality Zastron, Rouxville and Smithfield fall under the Mohokare Local Municipality (part of the Xhariep District Municipality). Midway through 2023, Mohokare received a shocking 5% for basic service delivery and infrastructure development.

General information Visit the town's website for information about its history, as well as lists of all the businesses and activities in the area. zastron.co.za





Bronwyn and Adam Wessels moved to the old farmhouse at Groenhoek in October 2024, shortly after renovating their home in Northcliff, Johannesburg. Now the hard work starts all over again.

“I am still getting used to the fact that I can function and do my job here, far away from an office and the city.”

“I’d always wanted to farm, although Zastron was never really on our radar. I initially considered Kroonstad, because that’s where my father farmed and I grew up, or somewhere similar close to a city,” says Adam.

Adam and Bronwyn spotted Groenhoek for sale on the internet. The price and area were right, and after two visits to the town and farm, they moved, lock, stock and barrel, in October last year.

“I’ve been career-focused my whole life and am still getting used to the fact that I can function and do my job here, far away from an office and the city,” says Bronwyn, who was expecting their first child, a boy, in February.

Despite the adjustments that life in the platteland demands, the Wessels couple say that the people of Zastron and the surrounding farming community have made their move worthwhile so far.

“We had hardly arrived before people started to reach out to us. Before I’d even unpacked our boxes, our neighbour was here with a plate of food, offering to lend a hand. It’s completely different to life in the city,” says Bronwyn.

Adam says that a spirit of caring about others prevails here. Everyone is ready to support him as a young farmer: with advice, a tool, or an extra pair of hands. “It makes things easier, and it’s great to know that people are looking out for you.” >

Meet the people



Kathy Human

Owner: 36 on Boom B&B

Kathy Human is at her happiest on the stoep of her bed and breakfast with its view of the Aasvoëlberg. Watching the sun set behind the mountain will always be a special experience for her.

"Liesel from Quaggafontein is my younger sister. We played on the farms surrounding the town when we were children."

She has particularly good memories of the days they spent at Montagu Dam, 10km away. "When the sun sets over the water there, very few things can beat that view!"

One of the biggest changes that Kathy has experienced over the past few years, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, is the increasing number of young people who are moving to the town and surrounding area.

"I'm not just talking about people who grew up here and are returning; there are also newcomers, like the Wessels family at Groenhoek."

Kathy enjoys the outdoor lifestyle and talks enthusiastically about the wealth of walking trails that crisscross Aasvoëlberg. As one of the volunteers at the local Parkrun, she encourages her guests to take even a short stroll through the town and along the foot of the mountain. "You'll spot the Cape vultures soaring around The Eye early in the morning and late in the afternoon," says Kathy of the large gap at the top of Aasvoëlberg.

Tania van Tonder

Owner: Highlands Guest House

Tania has an eye for a bargain. "We enjoy buying houses at auctions, renovating them, then selling or renting them out. The cheapest house we bought in the town was for R5 000," she says from the stoep of her 102-year-old guesthouse.

Tania and her husband, Jacques, who farms with cattle, have lived just outside Zastron since 2003. "I've owned and managed several businesses, and in 2017 we bought the guesthouse."

The mother of three says that Zastron High School – or Zastron Combined School – plays a crucial role in the survival of the town. "The school is exceptional. We have good teachers and the classes are small enough to allow each child to receive the necessary attention."

Buses transport boarding-school children from as far as Ugie in the Eastern Cape – more than three hours' drive away – to and from the school on Mondays and Fridays. "This is thanks to the old students' association, which raised money to buy buses," she explains.

Tania says there's no better place to raise children. "I think that farm children are incredibly fortunate in comparison to city children. It's peaceful and quiet, and it's still safe enough for our children to just be children."



Meet the people

Ciska du Toit

Owner: Baruch Restaurant & Pub

There's barely room for a mouse at Baruch, where the walls are covered in the artworks of owner, Ciska du Toit, and her husband, Gus (with her in the photo).

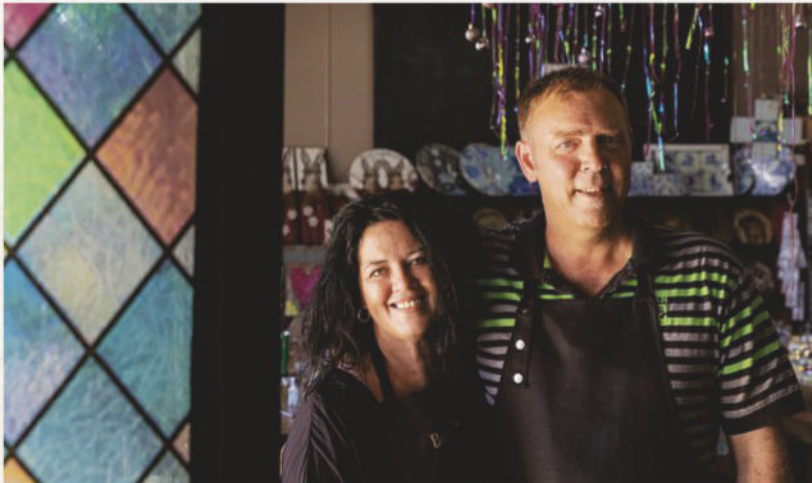
"All my work and artworks are prophetic; that's why I call it *Ware Woorde Kuns* (True Words Art)," she explains. Ciska's journey from Aliwal North to Zastron was a journey of faith; she was called here 14 years ago.

"We were ready to move and start something new, but exactly where remained a mystery. I sat with the Bible and prayed, then heard the Lord say to me: 'Sotho mountains, Sotho mountains'. I didn't even know that the mountains of Lesotho were visible from here. It was only when my husband and I found the words in the Bible about moving to the mountains that we knew we were coming to Zastron."

The past 14 years have not always been easy. "You can have the most beautiful place in town but if there's no foot traffic, you won't be doing any business," she says.

"I could have taken my art to a place like Bloemfontein or Pretoria, but my children grew up in safety here. Over the years, the Lord has softened my heart towards the platteland."

It is the challenges that make the lifestyle worthwhile. "You are forced to get involved. You have the chance to really make a difference."



Leon Scorrano

Owner: Zastron Butchery

Zastron Butchery, opposite Ons Hotel on Hoofd Street, is where Leon Scorrano has supplied meat to the locals for the past 46 years.

"I took over the business from my father when I was 20, after I'd completed my national service," says Leon from behind the shiny display counter housing a variety of fresh cuts of beef. "My great loves are my work here at the butchery and in the town," he explains.

Why has he lived in Zastron for all these years? "It's a friendly place – a quiet town with a lovely community that always stands together, regardless of the challenges and difficulties it faces."

Leon's advice to visitors is simple: "Come and find peace in Zastron."



Joyce Leifo

Security guard

Joyce and her daughter stand at the door of the Thleko hair salon. "I'm from Van Stadensrus, but moved here when I found a job," she says. Joyce began working as a security guard at Motheo TVET College in 2020.

"Zastron is much better. Van Stadensrus is a small place without any shops. Here, I at least have access to services like a hospital and banks," she explains.

Joyce's mother also lives in Zastron, which made her move easier. Life in the platteland also makes more sense to her than an urban existence. "In Bloemfontein I would spend almost all my money on transport to get to work, but things are close together and safe here – I can walk everywhere."



Dr Liesel Foster lives with her sons, William and Jack, and their dogs, Benji and Lilly, in the farmhouse on Quaggafontein, which was built in 1890.

“SURVIVING HERE means that you must learn to work with the people around you,” says Dr Liesel Foster, who has farmed at Quaggafontein, situated about 30km from Zastron, for more than two decades. After completing her undergraduate studies in agriculture, she returned to her family farm in 2003 to take over the reins from her father. Today she boasts a doctorate in agriculture, a Drakensberger stud, and serves on the board of the Drakensberger Breeders’ Society of South Africa, all while raising her

two teenage sons, Jack and William, and farming fulltime.

“My sons are now the sixth generation to grow up here; my sisters and I were the fifth, and two of us are still here,” she says of the hold that the area clearly has on its residents.

Liesel’s house, the original farmhouse on Quaggafontein, was built in 1890. “Everything used to build the house was transported from Grahamstown (now Makhanda) by ox-wagon,” she explains. Ever since, her family history has been >

What does property cost?

The properties on the western side of Zastron, closer to Aasvoëlberg, are the most beautiful. We liked these two bargains listed on Property24. Contact Rinette Swanepoel at RE/MAX for more info. 📞 083 630 1443



R3,2 million

This 251-hectare farm 20 km outside Zastron has a three-bedroom house and a two-bedroom guesthouse. The buildings are equipped with solar panels and solar geysers. The farm also has three boreholes and a swimming pool.



R950 000

This three-bedroom house in Committee Street has 3 bathrooms, a double garage and a large established garden with a borehole.

MY TOWN

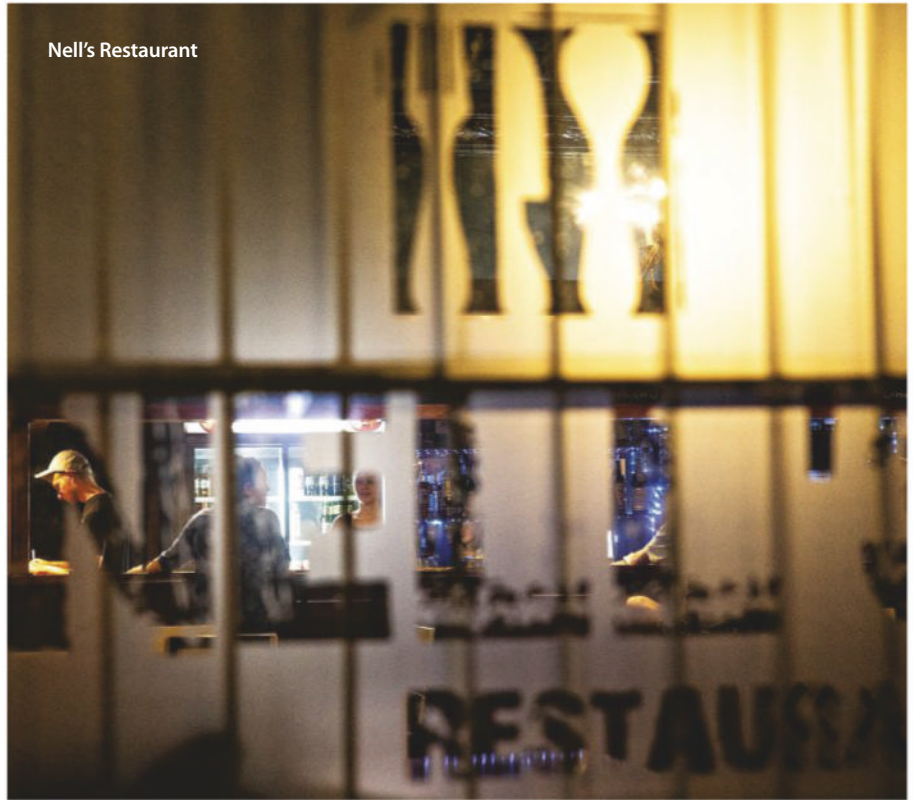
intertwined with that of Zastron's. "Tannie Dorea van Rooyen is a distant relative of mine."

Although she farms outside Zastron, almost on the banks of the Orange River, Liesel says that she wouldn't manage without the town, just as the town wouldn't survive without the farming community.

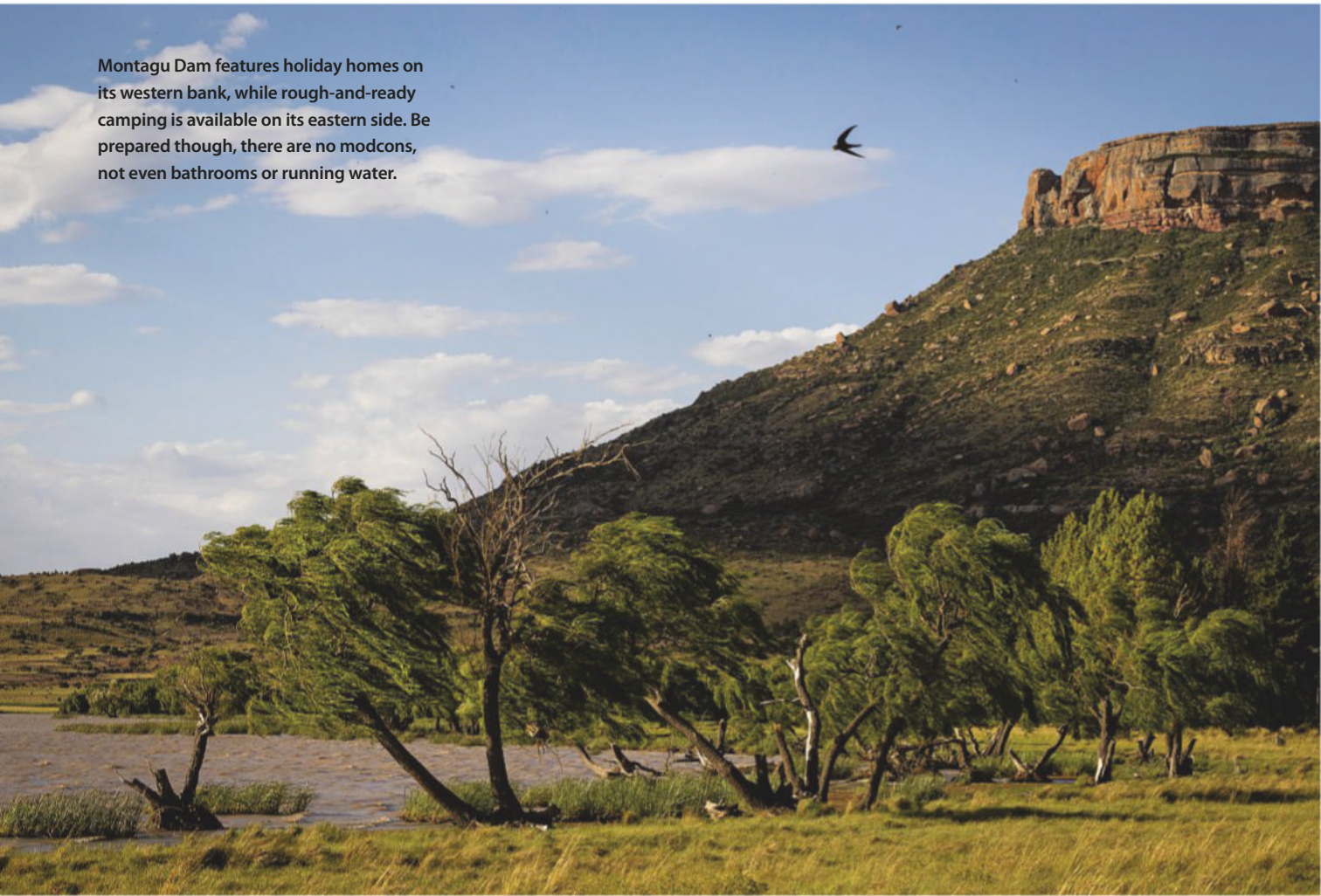
"I try to buy everything locally as far as possible, because people will buy from me in return. We support each other; that's just what we do here!"

With her long view of how things work here, Liesel acknowledges that the people of Zastron, especially those with deep roots in the area, are unique.

"You'll never encounter a more difficult bunch of people in one place. But if I'm facing a crisis, I can phone anyone at any time. They might be annoyed at first, but they'll still come lend a hand. And I would do the same for them."



Montagu Dam features holiday homes on its western bank, while rough-and-ready camping is available on its eastern side. Be prepared though, there are no modcons, not even bathrooms or running water.





Baruch Restaurant & Pub



Kotteljonsie



36 on Boom B&B

Eat, drink, have fun!

DO, WANDER, SHOP

Kotteljonsie

Leona Fouche describes her shop as an "all-in-one lifestyle centre". It's a gift and coffee shop that sells a little of everything, from children's toys, preserved fruits and stationery, to fragrances and homemade bath salts.

☎ 051 673 1369

Ons Kontreiwinkel

This shop sells produce made by around 60 local suppliers and includes everything from baked goods (such as ginger biscuits for R40) to needlework.

☎ 082 321 3236

MOM, I'M HUNGRY

Baruch Restaurant & Pub

This eatery and art shop is difficult to miss with its brightly coloured windows. Here, you'll find plates of affordable pub-style fare as well as handmade

artworks. Order a pizza (R100-R120 each) that owner Gus bakes himself in their wood-fired oven. ☎ 082 875 4954

Nell's Restaurant

In the evenings, there's a convivial atmosphere at this restaurant, where residents from diverse backgrounds gather to enjoy a drink or plate of food. The menu offers something for everyone, but you can't go wrong with the Hawaiian burger (R105) or loaded potato chips (R135). ☎ 078 944 7354

ACCOMMODATION

Ons Hotel

Find rest and relaxation at this historic hotel, which has been offering accommodation in the town for 118 years. The rooms feature coffee- and tea-making facilities and Wi-Fi, and the hotel restaurant serves meals.

📍 onshotel.co.za ☎ 064 009 3426

36 on Boom B&B

This guest house is situated right at the foot of Aasvoëlberg and offers comfortable self-catering accommodation and breakfast.

☎ 082 565 3436

Highlands Guest House

Here you will find 11 comfortable, neat en-suite rooms, and meals can be booked in advance. Drink your coffee on the massive front stoep while watching the sun rise.

📍 highlandszastron.co.za

☎ 063 379 7787

Die Dampondok

This unique one-bedroom cottage, featuring unusual architecture by David Magalanganqa, one of the workers at Groenhoek, is a good choice for a romantic weekend. It is located 13 km outside Zastron.

☎ 082 909 9558 📍

A TRUE FARM STORY



The quiver trees whisper to the people who've chosen to live in the most desolate and driest parts of our country. It's a language they depend on for survival.

Nowhere else

TV viewers have been deeply touched by the series *Nêrens, Noord-Kaap*, a farm story that tackles difficult and heartbreaking themes. Two questions have endured among the quiver trees that glow in the golden light of the late afternoon: "How did I get here?" and "Where do I want to go?" The people of the "real" Hantam Karoo keep their answers to these questions as simple as possible.

TEXT AND PHOTOS WILLEM VAN DER BERG





Lourens Adendorf from the farm Nêrens (Nowhere) in the Nieuwoudtville district of the Northern Cape passed away in early December, reportedly due to a blood clot while he was gazing at the Lange Jaap Lighthouse in the Netherlands. In the last episode of the second season of the popular kykNET series *Nêrens, Noord-Kaap*, he is buried on the farm and his will is read to his three sons. But their neighbour believes that it won't be long before the young men seek their fortune elsewhere.

"It just becomes too tough to try and get ahead in this part of the world," explains Josias van der Westhuizen from Klomp Boomen farm. And why wouldn't Josias know this? After all, he has spent 70 years in the Hantam and Bushmanland.

"One of my neighbours has two

sons, one of whom at least did come back to the farm – he is one of the few who has returned over the past 10 years. But I heard just the other day that those two fellows now both want to go to America. And another man nearby... man, he has a big piece of land. The drought really set him back to the point where he had to rent out the entire lot to a guy from Worcester. I have no idea what the hell that guy from Worcester wants to do with the land! But, okay, he's renting it out and now he works for someone in Bredasdorp. He has three children, three sons, and a wife who must all survive."

Josias's land borders on Gannabos, between Nieuwoudtville and Loeriesfontein, where the famous quiver tree forest is situated and where a large part of *Nêrens* was filmed. But he and his wife, Tertia, have never watched the series.

"The whole MultiChoice business didn't work so well for us. It was

often off and then we'd have to phone for someone to tell us which buttons to press to bring it back to life again," says Josias.

"And we're totally confused by the kind of English spoken by the people on the other end of the line," adds Tertia.

"I throw in a lot of Afrikaans swear words to stretch out my sentences a little more," Josias explains how he manages to express himself in English. Only when he must.

BUT THE REAL REASON why they no longer watch TV is the drought that ruined large areas of the Northern Cape between 2012 and 2022.

"You know, the drought took away all our extras and luxuries. A house in Lambert's Bay, a flat in Cape Town, and it drained every last savings account. Until, eventually, we were left with nothing but a mountain of feed debt," says Josias.



They know drought, but they also know how to stay positive. That is why they are still here, in this exposed part of the country. But this particular drought almost broke them. “We are older and slower, which made the drought feel so much longer,” says Tertia. “And you don’t want to have to start all over again at our age.”

For a moment it is silent around the large wooden table in the Klomp Boomen kitchen. Tertia and Josias don’t look at one another. It is difficult to carry your partner when the pain is apparent in both their eyes. And in a part of the world where every drop counts, the people have learnt to contain their tears.

“Anyhow, the other day a man came to help us load our phones and things onto a new satellite,” Josias starts telling another story. Because his stories are a way to fill life with humour. “The chap told me that the old satellite had run

out of time and had to come down otherwise too much stuff, space debris, is left in the sky. I asked him if he wouldn’t sell that old satellite to me. He asked me: ‘What does Oom want to do with it?’ I told him I wanted to load Tertia onto the satellite. I might as well add her sister and my neighbour’s wife too, because they make me so mad. I’ll launch them up there so that they can’t talk to me anymore.”

IN NÊRENS, NOORD-KAAP, the oldest son and his partner are struggling to have a child, a trauma that becomes an ever-growing desert between them. Tertia says that childlessness affects more farm families than people realise.

“We know of quite a few people in our area who couldn’t have children. But it remains one of those things that people don’t really talk about. When a farm that has been >

ABOVE There is something sacred about late afternoons on a Northern Cape farm. This is the time of day you look to the northwest for signs of rain, give thanks for your survival, and ask nicely for just a few drops.

OPPOSITE Tertia and Josias van der Westhuizen will tell you that everything they have received and everything they have lost has depended on the presence or absence of rain.







passed through several generations stops abruptly with you... yes, you probably do feel ashamed, as though it's your fault. Of all people, farmers should know that new life and birth are not guaranteed. But the thing is that on a farm, anything that doesn't reproduce is considered inferior. It's done away with..."

After they had their first child, Josias was cut open like a slaughtered sheep. The long scar extends the length of the entire front of his body.

"At first it was just a small lump. Like a pea on one of my balls. Cancer. Medical things weren't as advanced and refined as they are today. You couldn't get other treatment, radiation and that sort of thing. They just cut. The doctor removed all my lymph nodes. But I'm alive and I never saw that cancer again."

Chrismari remained their only child. She and her husband,

Franchwa Batt, also farm in the area and live on Uitspankolk, one of Josias's farms in Bushmanland. (Uitspankolk was in the news shortly before Christmas 2024; it is approximately 15 km from the epicentre of the earthquake that shook the region on 22 December 2024 and was felt as far as Cape Town.)

"They have two daughters. There's a whole lot of girl trouble here with us."

After Josias's birth, his mother had health issues which meant she couldn't fall pregnant again.

"These are just our little old stories," says Tertia.

"But it just shows you that life isn't in our hands. You don't make a child. You receive a child. It's a miracle for which you are grateful. If it doesn't happen, it's not your fault or your punishment."

Josias says the conversation has been too serious for too long. >

Quietly going about their business, like a heartbeat, Piet Smith (opposite below) and Hans Rye (above) not only carry the lucerne bales, metal poles and tired lambs on their shoulders, they also know the secrets and prayers of the farm. Piet says his life has been intertwined with "Oom Josias and Antie Têrs" and the seasons of the farm for many years. This, while spring, his girlfriend and most of his dreams are in Calvinia. "I go visit in my Nissan. This place won't let me go. But I can't stay there either. If you manage to get work here, it's best to hang onto it. Opportunities are drying up." His friend and colleague, Hans, agrees: "The towns are filling up with people who do nothing and only look for trouble. On the farm, it's peaceful."

OPPOSITE TOP Many lives depend on the small mercies of a farmyard.

“Old Paul Tollie... he’s 78 and got married the other day. He has a house in Lambert’s Bay and moved there to retire after he married. I drove there the other day to have a chat. I wanted to see what the woman looked like. They’ve been married for almost a year now. I looked at her and said to old Tollie: ‘But it doesn’t look like she’s expecting yet? What’s going on?’ He said he hasn’t lost hope. Ah, old brother Tollie! His legs are so skinny you can barely see them. It’s just hair. Wow, that guy is thin. And he has terribly woolly legs. His legs look like they belong to a rooikat.”

Sadness clings like a tick to many of the region’s funniest stories.

“That man has a lot of land, but

he has no children... So I asked him, wouldn’t his sister’s children be interested? He has four sisters. But he says, no, no, they have no interest in farming here. So, I just don’t know... We’re going to disappear from here. No young people are coming here anymore. On the other side of my Bushmanland farm, there are 100 000 hectares and not a single person to be found. No one thinks it’s worth doing anything there.”

IT IS TIME to drive to another farm to inoculate the sheep.

“It’s a necessary injection. We don’t usually interfere with our sheep too much. Our land is healthy and there are no pests. But anyway,

a neighbour let us know that his animals have sheep scab and I want to stop it from coming across to me.”

Josias uses pliers to pull his farm boots onto his feet.

“I go nowhere without pliers. Otherwise, I can’t get my shoes on.”

The veld on both sides of the road is filled with old stories, but the farmhouses are empty and cold.

“The two people from that farm worked in America for 15 years.

On a pheasant farm, of all things! In that cold. Anyway, they were eventually kicked out. They couldn’t get that red card or yellow card or whatever card it is. There was always some kind of setback. Now they’ve returned with the hope they can go back to America. >



ABOVE LEFT Josias is a big, sun-hardened man, but when Coco comes to sit with him, his voice becomes soft and gentle.

“Give Oupa a little kiss. Thank you, my darling, thank you, little Coco.”

RIGHT What’s a farmyard without a broad-chested rooster?

Tertia and Josias look for answers among
Klomp Boomen's quiver trees.





People think the Karoo smells of shrubs, but it's more likely the scent of sheep wool, kraal dust and blue sky.

TOP When your feet have grown old in the Hantam and Bushmanland, they're more at home on the ground... and more difficult to reach. So, pliers are an essential accessory.



Hans Rye secures an escapee that needs to be returned to the neighbour.



But they won't be allowed in again. The country will never accept such old person. They're around 70 now. And they're finished. The man had a hip replacement the other day and when he stood up, the opposite knee gave in. Now he's an even bigger mess. So their farm will also probably come to a standstill one of these days."

The sheep Josias is looking for are found walking at the foot of the Kubiskouberg between Loeriesfontein and Kliprand. Here on the southern side of the mountain is the Hantam, while the wide-open spaces of Bushmanland are found on the northern side. Farmers accompany their sheep as they move between the two areas to give them the best possible grazing.

"As a child, I loved sheep so much that I did that trek with them – the entire 126km. I had my seventh birthday along the way. These sheep should really be in Bushmanland

but things are looking bad there now. It's a sad business. At least the sheep will find a few green twigs to chew on here. They must just stay here."

Apart from the droughts, Josias says it has become a lot more difficult to farm profitably in the area.

"You know, when we were children, the man next to us had 3000 hectares and probably 400 or so ewes. And that man paid for three children's studies. Three. Truly, people accomplished a lot on their small farms. These days, you won't survive if you're too small. And if you're too big, your costs are too high and you also won't survive. It's a struggle; I don't know how we will get out of the situation we're in. Unless we can get more for our products. The gap between what someone pays for meat off the shelf compared to what we get will have to decrease."

In the past, Josias says he could easily pay off a farm. Now it's almost impossible.

"I'm telling you, we were able to pay off the land within eight years. Now you sit with the full 20 years and the Land Bank still hassles you because you're behind. The other thing is that our properties are decreasing in value because no one wants to buy them. That land over there was worth R1500 to R1800 per hectare. Try putting it on the market now for R1500... everyone who walks past you in town will laugh at you. They think you're completely crazy to expect so much. No, I'm also not buying anything anymore. Nothing. I've told Franchwa and ChrisMari, just continue with what you have now. Nothing more. Don't buy anything else."

Farming is a romantic business in stories, says Josias. When you see it on TV or on a photo or as you drive through the Karoo, it looks >



ABOVE Josias believes in his merinos as much as he does in the Lord. "Even if someone gave me another kind of sheep for free, I'd sue them!"

TOP Many farm kitchens hold treasures like these old-fashioned tins. "You can't believe the artwork," Tertia exclaims. In *Nêrens, Noord-Kaap*, these tins lend authenticity and are an important part of the story.

quite pleasant. But when your feet are in the kraal with the sheep, your head is filled with the drought, your plans depend on the Land Bank, the days are often long and gloomy.

"One of my greatest friends, old Klaas Kruger, flew for SAA for many years. After retiring, he lived in Hermanus for a while, then he sold up and bought a small farm near Montagu. He continued there for three, four years, but then he saw that farming isn't quite like it is when he comes here to visit me. We drink, we talk, we swear, and we row. No, he saw that farming wasn't at all like that. So, he sold his piece of land and now he lives in Franschhoek. He says it's much better that way."

If you've never been in a livestock crush with sheep, you wouldn't know that they're fluent in

Afrikaans. Josias, Piet Smith and Hans Rye have conversations with each member of the flock.

"Come tannie, come tannie, come closer."

"You're looking so good. Where are you still finding such good food?"

"Hey, old chap, stop with the attitude!"

"Show that groin for Oom Josias to inject."

"Sorry, sorry, we know it burns."

"Oh, you beauty, just look at the wool on you."

"That's it, that's it, off you go."

Thank you. Hang in there, the rain is coming. Go well!"

ON THE ROAD back to the house at Klomp Boomen, the seatbelt alarm beeps incessantly.

Occupied farmhouses in the Northern Cape are becoming islands in a sea of abandonment. Some of the scenes from *Nêrens, Noord-Kaap* were shot in the farmyards because people just don't live here permanently anymore.



"That thing says I must stop. I really don't like being shouted at. Or being told what to do. Do this! Fasten it! Put it on! No, no, no, then I do exactly the opposite. That's probably the one benefit of farming; you can do just about anything you want to."

Will he ever stop? Pack it in? Leave this place?

"Yes, definitely. On the day they come and box me, that's when I'll go to town. I'll lie there. Between the old women. That's when I'll leave, but otherwise..."

"Man, another thing, Tertia says that I'm the one who's wrong and I say Franchwa is the one who's wrong. You know, this farming business of mine means I must see everything. Franchwa doesn't enjoy that. He doesn't want me to always

see everything everywhere. I must. If I don't, I feel as if I'm blind."

The seatbelt alarm has screamed itself hoarse. It gives up.

"Anyhow, the TV story they made here, what does our veld look like in the story?"

It looks dry.

"Then it must be a true story. But the people are probably a worked-up bunch who make a lot of noise?"

No, definitely not. There's not much in the way of laughter.

"No, hell man, then it's a lie! We've learnt how to make a joke about everything and to laugh at everything. You must. Once you start crying here, you'll never stop. There's too little rain and money and people. But the people who are here remain so positive, no matter how difficult things are."

The blue sky is full of hope. The quiver trees are full of stars. The sheep are full of faith. And the people are full of jokes. Nowhere else. Only here. 

ChrisMari van der Westhuizen has twice treated Platteland readers to her stirring photographs: In the Spring 2018 issue (Platteland #20) we published her photo essay on farm life, and in Autumn 2020 (Platteland #26) she shared another about the crushing drought in the region.

Watch the show!

The first season of *Nêrens, Noord-Kaap* is currently on Showmax, while the second season is available on DStv Catch Up. Both feature English subtitles.



WE MADE THE MOVE

Magic, always, and everywhere...

In 2020, two creative city slickers, Hanneke and Kevin Bentz, swapped the City of Gold for Philippolis where they run two guesthouses and a tearoom and décor shop. Soon they will also be making natural wine from the grapes growing on their two-hectare biodynamic farm outside the town – and it's all just part of a much bigger story!

TEXT JOHAN VAN ZYL PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD

A man with a beard and a woman wearing a straw hat and a striped shirt are standing in a field of tall green plants, possibly corn. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The man is on the left, wearing a dark blue t-shirt and a red wristband. The woman is on the right, wearing a black and white striped shirt and a dark skirt. The background is a dense line of trees, and the lighting suggests it's late afternoon or early morning.

Believe it or not, there are young vines growing amid these rows of ground-cover plants, which function to enrich the soil and keep it moist, on Kevin and Hanneke Bentz's biodynamic farm in Waterkloof, 6 km outside Philippolis. When *Platteland* visited in December, the Free State was groaning under the weight of an insufferable heatwave, and desperate for rain.

WE MADE THE MOVE

Creative challenges have always been Hanneke and Kevin Bentz's bread and butter. You could say they form the golden thread that runs through everything that this couple takes on. This is even true of their move to Philippolis, the oldest settlement in the Free State, where "without any vision, let alone a house to live in", they have spent the past five years quietly discovering and honing a number of "hidden" talents.

Among other things, Hanneke designed magazines and book covers before she ended up working in the advertising and marketing industry in Johannesburg. Kevin still works as a television editor, mainly for British, Australian and American reality series such as *Survivor*, *Love Island*,

Deal or No Deal and *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*

"I jokingly call him the goose that lays the golden eggs. His work makes it possible for us to disappear down all sorts of rabbit holes without necessarily having a clue what the results will be," laughs Hanneke, who has completed a course in biodynamic farming and, more recently, has learnt to spin and dye wool. "Yes, I'm afraid the wool story is another one of those rabbit holes I've fallen into, but I'm crazy about it."

THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN turned their lives and lifestyle in the city upside down. Hanneke's mother, Magdaleen du Toit, had lived in Philippolis for a few years, which is how they had become acquainted with the town. In 2019, they snapped up two houses on the old

main road, Tobie Muller Street, for a song: Nagmaalhuis is a national monument that sleeps four and the larger Hoekhuis sleeps six. They decided to turn both properties into self-catering accommodation and the thriving old vine in the backyard of Hoekhuis inspired them to call this business The Dusty Vine.

That November, builders from Johannesburg began with the renovations and the month before the lockdown was announced, Hanneke resigned from her job and planned to regularly visit the town to keep an eye on the project. Kevin was on his way to Australia to cut *The Voice*. And then, every country in the world shut its borders. (Thanks to the lockdown, however, these days it's possible for him to accomplish 80% of his work from home.)

"We spent the first month of the lockdown in Victoria Bay, in

The backyard of the home that Hanneke and Kevin are renting in Philippolis. Most of the houses in the town have dams, rainwater-harvesting tanks and pumps, because water supply in the town is limited to only a few hours every third day.





Kevin is a sought-after editor in the television industry and was busy mixing episodes of the game show *Deal or No Deal* when *Platteland* visited.

a house that belonged to the parents of a friend. But I can't do my job without a large, powerful internet connection," says Kevin. Eventually, he had to book a hotel room at the City Lodge in George where he could work on his laptop. "Luckily there were no other guests there and everything worked out well with the Wi-Fi."

After the month in Victoria Bay, the couple moved to Philippolis where they had to rent accommodation – at one stage, Kevin was using almost all the town's available Wi-Fi capacity.

"In Johannesburg, the shops were just around the corner, so it always felt quite silly to grow our own herbs. But when we came to Philippolis, I realised that the wonderful thing about not being near a shop is that you are forced to be creative. We planted our own vegetables and herbs, and I remember that living more closely

to the earth gave me an incredible kick. Like the time we made minestrone from ingredients that was all grown within a 100m radius of our home.

"We learnt fermentation, we made mozzarella cheese, we baked sourdough bread and basically became a lot more involved in what we were eating. Maybe this is what we have found in the platteland: a massive sense of purpose. I don't think I could ever live in the city again," says Hanneke, who has also helped a local teacher, Cornel Smuts, establish a vegetable garden at Bergmanshoogte Primary School in the town.

IN SEPTEMBER 2020, Hanneke turned 40 and The Dusty Vine's recently renovated cottages received their first guests. In the interim they had also heard about two hectares of land for sale in the ghost town

of Waterkloof (which is currently undergoing a revival) about 6km south of Philippolis. They bought the property thinking they would build a house for themselves, but then Kevin watched the documentary *Blood into Wine* (2010) about two mysterious rock musicians who decided to make wine in the Arizona desert in the USA.

The environment reminded him of Philippolis... >





Hoekhuis (on the corner of Tobie Muller and Sem streets) was built in true Karoo style, and is one of two self-catering guest-houses that Hanneke and Kevin own and have been running under the name The Dusty Vine since September 2020. It sleeps six (in three bedrooms) and features two bathrooms and a well-equipped kitchen.

So why couldn't they also try making wine? "Kevin basically planted the seed and said, 'You figure it out.' I was hesitant at first, especially after I found out what it would cost to plant the vineyard. I thought it was just a stupid, expensive hobby – it's not for nothing that they say the only way to make a small fortune with a vineyard is to start with a big one. But once I realised that something like pumpkins wouldn't be that much more profitable in the long run, I agreed, and I also realised that I would have to learn how to do it."

Hanneke says she is allergic to "almost everything". Unlike food, where legislation requires additives

to be listed on the packaging, loopholes in the wine industry allow winemakers to add colourants, flavourants, acidifiers, preservatives and sugar without declaring it on the bottle. "All those things in the wine make me feel incredibly ill."

She wanted to make naturally fermented wine instead, without any artificial additives, which would be good for the soil and earth at the same time. Something like the biodynamic wine she had discovered through a sommelier friend in Norway in 2012.

"I also liked the clear, practical approach of biodynamic processes. It's more rigorous than regular organic farming and you are always

aware of what is taking place in all aspects of the process. We knew that the piece of land we bought had last been cultivated 80 years earlier, and that the air, soil and water in the area are very clean because Philippolis is mainly sheep country. We didn't face the problems they have in the Cape and other wine-producing areas where many farmers use insecticides and pesticides that can also end up on your plants, which means that a buffer zone is essential."

While conducting online research on how to work with this perfect blank canvas, Hanneke came across the biodynamic course offered by Helen van Zyl of Piket-Bo-Berg. >



TOP LEFT The vine in the shady backyard of Hoekhuis, which is more than 80 years old and still bearing fruit, was the inspiration behind the name The Dusty Vine.

TOP RIGHT One of the two bathrooms at Hoekhuis.

ABOVE Hanneke is responsible for the décor in both The Dusty Vine's guesthouses. On the left is the living area of Hoekhuis, and to the right its tastefully decorated and well-equipped kitchen.

LEFT The second of the guesthouses, Nagmaalhuis, is just a little further down Tobie Muller Street, and sleeps four in two en-suite bedrooms. The building is a national monument and was lovingly restored by the couple.

WE MADE THE MOVE



TOP Kevin and Hanneke pictured in the vineyard that is now two years old. They decided to grow continental varieties such as Alvarinho, Tempranillo, Carignan, Grenache Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon, originally opting for bush vines with a good drought tolerance and high water-use efficiency. However, the vines are being trained onto trellises and doing well.

ABOVE Hanneke shares her knowledge of biodynamic farming at Bergmanshoogte Primary School where she helped a local teacher, Cornel Smuts, establish a vegetable garden.

LEFT The fruits of labour visible in this developing bunch.

She and one of their workers, Hans Mohau, started the course in the middle of 2021. Many of the modules could be done online but they also attended practical workshops. Hanneke ordered heat-resistant varieties such as Alvarinho, Tempranillo, Carignan, Grenache Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon on Ramsey rootstock and initially used bush vines to decide which performed best in the worst of the summer heat, and now they are finally growing their vineyard. The soil is being conditioned with biodynamic preparations and a combination of more than 10 groundcovers, including chia, sorghum, wheat, oats, lentils, cowpeas, yarrow and valerian.

She has also discovered the highly experienced Koos Retief, who spent more than 30 years in commercial vineyard agriculture before retiring in Philippolis, and

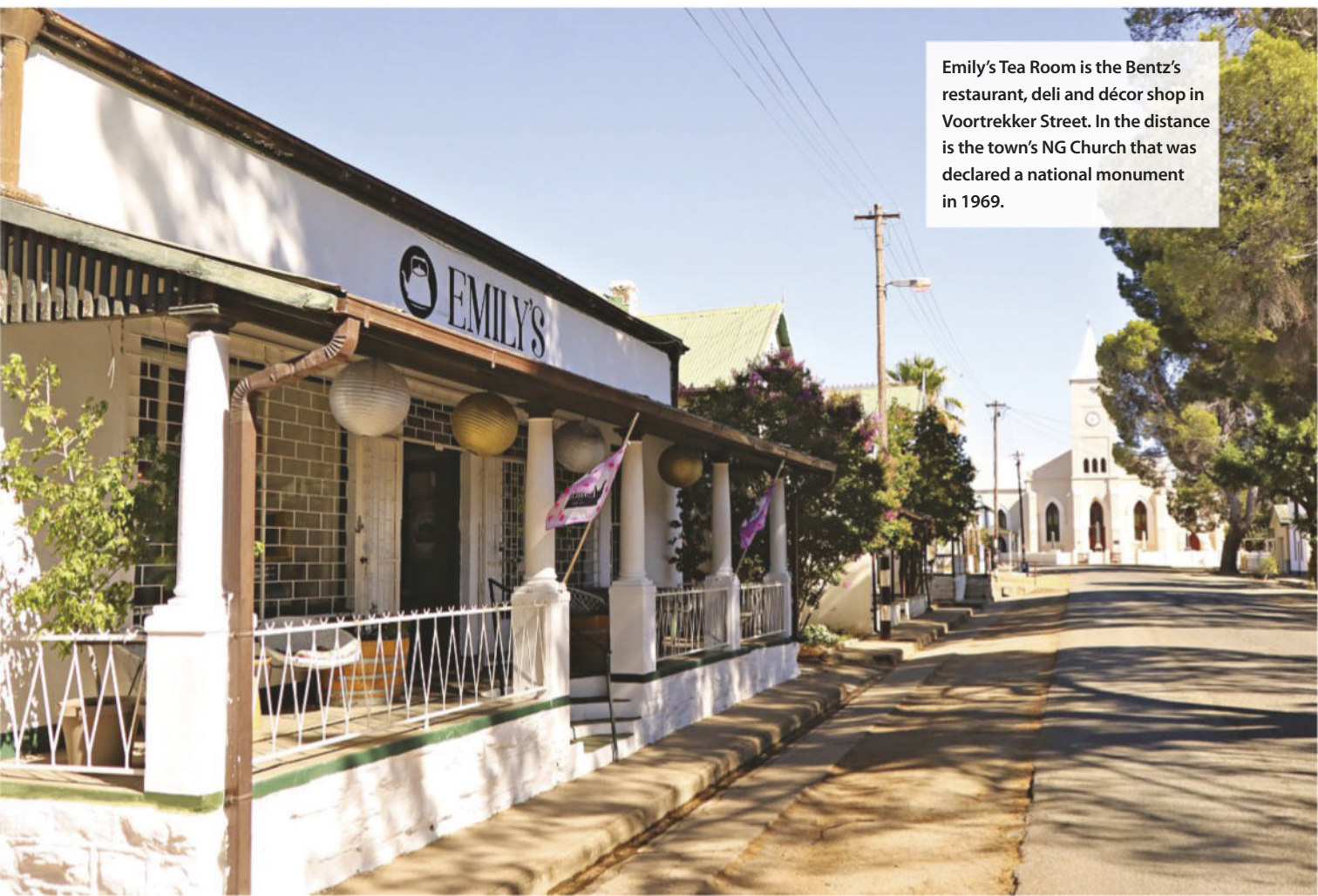
he is assisting them with advice and practical support.

WINE-MAKING is definitely not the end of their story. In 2022, the Bentz couple decided to purchase a magnificent tree-covered property in the Eastern Cape town of Hogsback, which had belonged to a Swiss botanist in the '70s. Although they are still focusing their energy on Philippolis, they escape to this much cooler part of the world when they want to recharge their batteries.

Hanneke has always been passionate about décor and beautiful things – for example, she chose all the furniture and incredible art for their two guesthouses herself. Back in 2012, she had handwoven rugs made at Mapusha Weavers as a “hobby”, and dreamed about owning her own décor shop one day.

Voortrekker Street in Philippolis had an old general dealership, later an antiques store, which had stood empty for a long time. Hanneke and two other residents were approached to start a coffee shop there, but the others pulled out and eventually she asked Carin Pienaar, a well-known figure in the town and now the manager of Emily's, if she wanted to open a coffee-deli-décor shop with her. It would also be ideal as a place where The Dusty Vine's guests could enjoy breakfast, lunch or tea and cake. Carin proposed the name of Emily's Tea Room because Philippolis was where British anti-war activist Emily Hobhouse opened her first spinning and weaving school in South Africa on 13 March 1905. This was where young women could learn to spin and dye wool, weave and make lace.

The shop opened its doors in August 2023. >



Emily's Tea Room is the Bentz's restaurant, deli and décor shop in Voortrekker Street. In the distance is the town's NG Church that was declared a national monument in 1969.

WE MADE THE MOVE

RIGHT The Dusty Vine and Emily's staff. Back, from left are Hanneke Bentz, Elina Thladi (whom everyone knows as "Vroutjie"), Hans Mohau, who attended the biodynamic farming course with Hanneke, and Schalk Hattingh. In the middle are Sylvia Jantjies, Lettie de Wee and manager Carin Pienaar, with Rebecca Mbulawa in front. Portia Rossouw wasn't available when the photo was taken.

BELOW Emily's sells all kinds of beautiful things that Hanneke takes pains to source from around the world or are produced under her label Sourcery. From left are ceramics, delightful stuffed deer and scarves.



Meanwhile, Hanneke also started Sourcery, a business that sources and produces beautiful objects from around the world. Indian rugs, Japanese and local pottery, quilts that Hanneke commissions locally, candleholders by Joburg designer Joe Paine (a friend of hers), candles, soap, glasses, baskets, cushions, scarves, Japanese art prints...

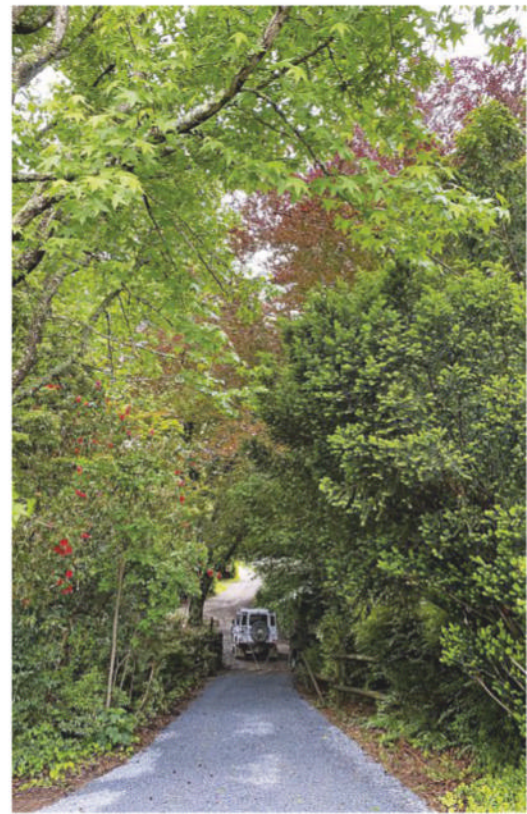
As this is also wool country, Hanneke wanted to know where to source wool, as well as how to wash and comb it and make batting

for décor items. She decided to attend the Winter Wool Festival in Middelburg in the Eastern Cape to educate herself about the local industry.

She then spotted a spinning wheel for sale on Facebook Marketplace and immediately bought it. The wheel was delivered to the neighbouring town of Colesberg the day before she was planning to leave for the festival, so she took it along with her, hoping that someone would show

her how to use it. And, so, she fell down yet another rabbit hole! Now she loves spinning wool and has started to experiment with natural dyes – anything from mushrooms to bluegum, birch and oak leaves as well as indigo – to dye the wool and then use it to make carpets and other products.

The Bentz's have realised there is plenty of space at the back of Emily's, which will be perfect for making their garagiste-style wine one day, as well as bottle and label it.



“The shop, which is open for breakfast and lunch, holds everything together, but the décor side remains my big love,” says Hanneke. “Oh, I just can’t help it. I always get these ideas and I say: Oh please, don’t let this be a thing. But next thing I know it has become, well, a thing.”

A few weeks after *Platteland’s* visit, she let us know that she’d be opening another décor shop soon, but this time in Hogsback.

A satellite branch of Emily’s?

“No, the name will be Sourcery. Sourcery – finding magic everywhere.”

Which is exactly what these two former city slickers have been doing together for almost 15 years. 

Emily’s Tea Room at 30 Voortrekker Street is open every day from 08:00 to 15:00 but closed on Sundays.

Contact  thedustyvine.co.za

 dustyvinebookings@gmail.com

 [sourceryshop](https://www.instagram.com/sourceryshop)  083 474 7124

ABOVE LEFT Hanneke is as happy as can be with her latest “rabbit hole”: the spinning wheel she uses to spin wool. **Below right** are samples that she coloured using natural dyes.

TOP RIGHT The driveway and gate to the entrance of the property in Hogsback that Hanneke and Kevin bought in 2022 and where they escape to as often as they can to recharge their batteries. Kevin’s old Land Rover Defender still has its Gauteng number plate, perhaps a reminder of the life they left behind.

ENTREPRENEURS

The 'N2 Mall' turns 30



Dassiesfontein farm stall, situated between Bot River and Caledon, as it looks today. It's been renovated and enlarged over the years, and the 4,8-hectares property on which the farm stall was built is no longer part of the Fick's original 850-hectares farm which they're renting out.

The famous Dassiesfontein farm stall on the N2 between Bot River and Caledon celebrated its 30th birthday in January, but four years before constructing their first building in 1995, Sassie and Alda Fick were “secretly” selling farm products from a trailer parked next to the highway.

TEXT JOHAN VAN ZYL PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD



When Sassie and Alda Fick got married in 1990, they were experiencing a tough time with the wheat, barley, oats, lucerne and Dohne merino on their farm, Dassiesfontein, “where the water fountain collapsed during the 1969 Tulbagh earthquake”.

“We received a total of R3000 as wedding gifts and when we returned home, we had to use all that money to pay the farm workers’ wages,” remembers Sassie.

But an idea for how to increase their income was already brewing at the back of his mind: He wanted to buy fresh produce from farmers to sell from a roadside trailer – plaited bunches of onions, watermelon

and sweet melon from Porterville, biltong, dried fruit... Alda would make preserves such as peach jam, beetroot and sousboontjies, and she would bake muffins and bread.

“I remember that on our first day of trading, which was in late 1990, we sold products worth R1000,” says Sassie. In the evenings, their trailer would be towed by tractor to their farmhouse 3km away, where they would load more products, and the next morning, the tractor would tow the trailer back to its position next to the highway.

“We eventually had three trailers,” remembers Alda, “but it definitely was not an easy road for us.”

“We had a lot of trouble from the authorities,” explains Sassie. “Once, our domestic worker, Francina August (Beukman), who also helped

man the trailers, was robbed and all the money stolen. And on another occasion, a strong wind blew one of the trailers over.”

“Then Sassie announced one day in 1994 that he was going to start building – of course without permission or plans,” says Alda. “I remember my mother saying: ‘That’s good, my child, you are still young, you still have the energy to start something new.’ That first building had no electricity or water, but it did have a wind charger and a record player. Unfortunately, we only had one record to play... Engelbert Humperdinck,” she laughs. “I really can’t remember how many years passed before we no longer saw a minus on our bank statement.”

Sassie, a man of few words, says:



Alda and Sassie Fick, Dassiesfontein’s owners, pictured here in the restaurant, which saw great festivities on 3 January when the farm stall celebrated its 30th birthday.

"I've always believed that it's better to start with little and then end with more."

Increasing numbers of passers-by stopped at Dassiesfontein, and many of them wanted coffee. As a result, the Ficks added the kitchen and restaurant in 1996, which soon became popular among local farmers. Some years later, the building underwent a third renovation to accommodate their fast-growing range of products. From then onwards, people started to call the farm stall, which has solar panels on the roof that generate 80% of its electricity, the "N2 Mall".

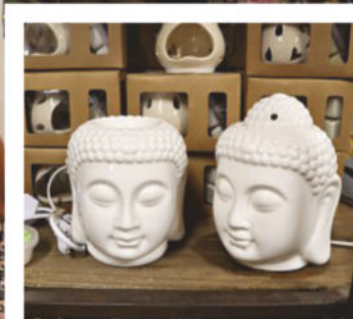
"We decided back then that we were going to make home-style food, *boerekos*, the kind of food we grew up with and understand. Right from the

beginning, the focus was on quality, and decent, large portions."

Their doors were open seven days a week, and on three days, they extended their hours into the evenings. They held steak nights, dances, and offal nights, and artists such as Valiant Swart and the Blues Broers performed here.

"Just to breathe some life into the place, you know," says Sassie, "because not much was happening in Bot River. One day a guy pulled up in a bakkie loaded with Dover wood stoves. I immediately bought the whole lot. Those stoves saved us and gave us quite a reputation. At one stage I had more than a hundred stoves in stock and we've sold masses of them over the years."

Alda says the farm stall was Sassie's idea from day one, and >



ABOVE It all started with this little wooden trailer that the Ficks parked on the side of the N2. They sold produce from the farms in the vicinity, as well as preserves, bread and muffins that Alda made at home.

LEFT It's easier to explain what Dassiesfontein *doesn't* sell. The farm stall has become quite famous over the years for its range of leather goods, which include handbags, purses and shoes.



ABOVE Dassiesfontein's manager, Andeline Jacobs, started working at the farm stall 29 years ago, initially as a dishwasher and packer, and then as a waitress. Today she's responsible for 80% of all purchasing and manages the staff.

INSET Sassie Fick built his first farm stall in 1995. There was no water or electricity, but it did have a wind charger and a record player. "We only had one record to play though," laughs Alda.

she just assisted him when she could. "We were two farm kids who knew nothing about money and doing business, and we didn't have any training."

"Yes," agrees Sassie, "in those days, we only banked the money when there was no more space in the cash register. We have already forgotten so much; 30 years is a long time and it's difficult to remember all the details!"

Alda admits, "Buying and selling definitely don't come naturally to me, but they do for Sassie; he was always in charge of the purchasing because I can only buy things that I find beautiful. I was involved with the farm stall for about 10 years but

always found it more enjoyable to be at home with our dogs! So I fired myself and put more of my energy into the Dohne merino farming, while Sassie focused on the farm stall. If I'd known while I was still at school that I would be a farmer one day, I would have gone to Elsenburg for training, because I've always felt so sorry for sheep out there in the wind, at the mercy of the elements. I've never been able to eat them. We've always bought our meat!"

In 2015, the Ficks decided to take a sabbatical year. They appointed Andeline Jacobs to manage the farm stall, stopped farming, and since then, have rented out the 850-hectare farm.



The lessons we have learnt

- **Money** "As a child, I grew up with the expression 'money is the root of all evil', but a while ago, I read that it's 'the love of money that is the root of all evil,'" says Sassie. "Money flows all the time, it's give and receive, and it's great to be able to create jobs for people and pay them."
- **Location** "This is one of the most important considerations for a farm stall and it definitely plays a part in our success."
- **Staff** "Our staff are friendly, they care about this place and they work well as a team. It's important to have a team with whom you can be creative *and* have fun."
- **Customers** "We have customers who have stopped here for 25 years. You must listen to your customers because without them, you are nothing."



IT IS 08:00 on Friday 3 January 2025. Although the farm stall only opens its doors at 08:30, it's already a hive of activity. Ribbons flutter on the gate for the ribbon-cutting ceremony that will take place later, Caledon FM is broadcasting from a caravan parked in front of the farm stall, an area on the stoep has been cleared to make space for the marimba band from Greyton, and a drone is standing by to film the festivities from the air.

Birthday cupcakes and sparkling wine for mimosas await visitors on a table at the entrance. Today, there will be a 30% discount off selected items and a variety of the Dassiesfontein suppliers have

been invited to set up stalls to give visitors a taste of their wares.

Like the rest of the staff – 32 people are employed full-time! – self-proclaimed smooth talker Andeline Jacobs is wearing her black Dassiesfontein T-shirt. She is waiting for Platteland on the stoep, where she is keeping a watchful eye on all the activity.

It soon becomes clear that Andeline is Dassiesfontein. She has worked here for 29 years.

"Don't you know it! I left school in Standard 4 and was 14 when they needed someone here to wash dishes. That was still in the old, first little kitchen. Then they asked me to come work as a casual because >

ABOVE Dassiesfontein developed a reputation for stocking a variety of stoves. Over the years, the farm stall has sold tons of them.

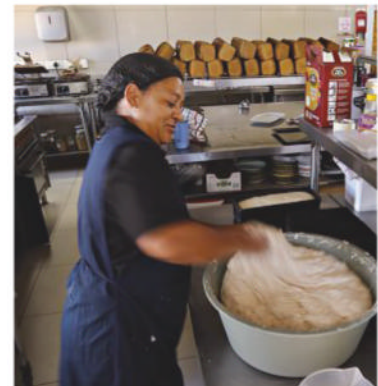
TOP LEFT Dassiesfontein as seen from the road to Villiersdorp.

ABOVE LEFT Simon and Isabel Nothnagel from Ulske meat products were one of the suppliers who were invited to set up a shop so that visitors could taste their wares at the 30th birthday celebrations. Ulske makes a variety of sausages and salami. We went mad for their pork sausage with lemon.

ENTREPRENEURS

RIGHT The restaurant was filled to the brim with visitors visiting on 3 January.

BELOW Kitchen manager Elsa Roux (left) says she loves her job. One of the best sellers is the bread (centre) that is baked daily on the premises using Bio-Wheat's stone-ground flour. Elgabian Adams (right), who hails from Bot River, has her hands full kneading dough. She makes 14 to 15 loaves from a 12,5 kg bag. Her secret? Firm kneading. "They say if your hand is lame, the bread will take forever to rise."



they needed a waitress. I'll never forget when someone ordered wine for the first time – a bottle of Graça – I had no clue how to open it!

"I also often came here to tidy and dust the shop. I enjoy making things look beautiful and always thought I'd be an interior decorator one day. And now so many interior decorators and film studios from Cape Town come knock on our door. I believe you should go after what you want in life and what you want to be, and it's a great privilege that the owners place so much trust in me. They tell people: You must talk to her, she's the boss."

Andeline is responsible for about 80% of all purchasing at Dassiesfontein because she knows the market and which ranges sell the fastest. Like some of Dassiesfontein's other suppliers, she also pays a monthly commission

because she runs her own men's clothing store in the farm stall.

The staff are her other big responsibility. "I'm not really a witch but I am at work 24 hours a day, like a real boss." She laughs and says she got herself into trouble during a television interview for saying that her work comes first, followed by her husband, Bradley, an electrician at Eskom, and her three children. "Afterwards I made the decision to put my family and health first."

IT IS DIFFICULT to explain to someone who has never pulled up at Dassiesfontein exactly how much they will find here. You could browse all day and continually spot something new. This farm stall is also a deli, a wine shop, a décor shop, an agricultural co-operative, a hardware store, a boutique,

a bakery, an art gallery and a general dealer. You will find Dover and Jewel wood stoves for sale, along with bellows, tinned abalone, rusks, fresh farm bread, toys, cards, hats, cushions and rugs, leather bags and shoes, perfume, skincare and bath products, pocket-knives, incense, limewash, kettles, cheese and meat, artificial flowers, jam, books, doorknobs, ribbons, braai accessories, sweets, fresh pastries...

Andeline laughs when asked if she can think of anything that isn't sold at Dassiesfontein. "Mmm, we don't really do groceries, but otherwise you'll find everything here aside from underwear!"

Dassiesfontein is open from 08:30 to 17:30, seven days a week.

Contact 📧 dassies@mweb.co.za
 📱 Dassiesfontein 📞 028 214 1475 📍

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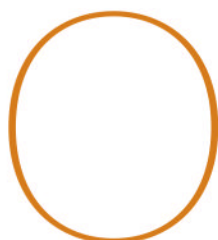


Following the rain and the sheep

For a long time, nomads and trekboers wandered large parts of our country, their direction and destination determined by the movement of the clouds. These days, fences, boundary walls and roads tell us where we may and may not go. But in the Karoo, Bushmanland and Namaqualand, people and animals still follow the rain.

TEXT AND PHOTOS WILLEM VAN DER BERG





ne would think that it would be constantly wet where our country's summer and winter rainfall

regions overlap. But this is exactly where it's the driest, almost as if the clouds become confused and don't quite know what to do.

This is why farmers here usually have land in both regions, which means they are free to move their animals to where it's more fertile. During summer in the Roggeveld, between Sutherland and Calvinia, farming occurs at the top of the mountains, while the sheep are usually moved down to the Tankwa in winter. Farmers in the south and west of Bushmanland, however, generally head for Namaqualand and the Knersvlakte and Hantam areas in winter.

These sheep migrations once took place on foot, and the herd, the farmer and his people would walk for days, camping along the trek route, until everything and everyone eventually ended up in the next rainy season. After three or four months, they would embark on the return journey...

BUT TIME IS scarce these days, and there are other alternatives. Most farmers use trucks to transport their sheep to better grazing, but here and there you do still come across those who believe in the tradition of the trek.

Lizri and CJ Badenhorst may be young, but they're crazy about the old trek routes. And because they know that this way of life is dying out, they invite people to join them to discover why the experience of walking alongside your sheep, sleeping under the Milky Way, >

Glamping for sheep

CJ will find out which farms have kraals along the trek route, and arrange with the farmer for the sheep to spend the night there. But if this isn't possible, members of the group will take turns to stay awake and watch over the animals. "They do learn that darkness means it's time to sleep. But they want to roam around when it's full moon," says CJ.

An eternal expanse (previous spread)

The trek from Gembokrivier farm in the Knersvlakte to Dikpens in Bushmanland takes walkers past the Sishen-Saldanha iron-ore trains, through the Krom River and Langberg, past date orchards, quiver trees and Pramkoppies hill. And for several kilometres the route traverses the bare black and red expanses of Blaauwpan.



What awaits today?

Lizri and CJ hold council at first light while JD Willemse (far right) and Dawid Rensburg (middle) wonder how many kilometres the sheep will make them walk today.

Not much to burn... (left)

Trees are scarce in this part of the world and even though CJ takes along a number of bags of wood, the fires they make are small and infrequent.



PHOTO ESSAY

and waking up before sunrise is so unique.

In November, I find them sheltering under the only *Prosopis* tree in the endless openness. The sun is no longer a problem; it is burning itself out. An unpleasant southwesterly wind blows dust into our eyes and produces gooseflesh on our arms. A group of friends and family have joined them for an evening braai. They are one week into their trek, which started on Gemsbokrivier farm, directly under Van Rhyns Pass. Tonight's rest stop is on Lospers farm, northwest of Loeriesfontein. The total distance they will cover is 184km, which can take between 10 and 14 days.

"The sheep set the pace," says CJ.

IT IS REALLY Lizri who taught CJ, who is originally from Wolmaransstad in the North West, about trekking and sheep.

These are things she grew up with in this part of the world. Her father, Daniël Kotze, comes from a family of trekboers. "They were born right there on the trek route, like lambs. And my grandpa delivered them," she says.

Lizri did well at school and was in a position to further her studies in any field. Just not journalism, her parents said when she considered it. Accounting, rather.

"But I wanted to farm. I was just afraid of what people would say, and my teachers really discouraged me."

So, she listened to her sheep, and came back to the farm. When CJ arrived one day to purchase sheep from her father and brother, she didn't pay much attention to the guy from the other side of the Vaal River who wanted to farm with Meatmaster sheep. But CJ hadn't only lost his heart to Lizri, he had also fallen in love with Bushmanland. After his first >

Eating on the move (right)

When the route takes them through veld, the sheep will graze as they walk, much as they would every day on the farm. "Sheep can easily walk between 12 km and 20 km daily while they graze, and this is exactly what we're doing on the trek," explains CJ.

Dust to dust (bottom right)

All life in Bushmanland receives the same mercy as the buck honeythorn and ash bush. Here, 36-year-old Pieter Paul Kotze and a young springbok ram lie in close proximity, both becoming one with the veld.

The sun will find you (below)

Humans and animals must rise early, before the Bushmanland sun emerges and discovers where you are. The sheep walk the majority of the day's route in the morning and rest during the worst of the afternoon heat.







sheep trek with the Kotzes, he knew that if he came here to farm, he would always feel as if he was on holiday. “There’s no other place with so much peace and freedom,” he says. Now he calls their business Op Vakansie Boerdery (On Holiday Farming). They sell a range of homemade farm products and have also begun inviting members of the public to join them on a holiday spent walking behind the sheep.

“CJ is the one who thought that trekking was so great that we should invite people along,” says Lizri. “For me, it’s just a part of our life here, nothing unusual. I’m worried that it will turn out to be too rough for people and they won’t enjoy it. But we’ve received a surprising level of interest.”

CJ says this is because it is such a unique experience. “One lady who walked with us this week cried when she had to say goodbye. She said she

had never felt so much a part of the surroundings, the dust, the veld, the sheep and the stars.”

Why don’t they just load the sheep onto a truck and complete the trek within a day?

“Transporting animals like that costs a lot of money. And when you have to do it a second time in a year, it really gets rough. But we also think it’s far more natural for the sheep to walk. They find it less stressful. When you transport pregnant ewes on a lorry, the stress can easily cause them to miscarry. Ewes also don’t reject their lambs on the trek route because they are with them all the time. And, ultimately, we also enjoy the experience. We like walking with our sheep and sleeping with them in the veld. When you’ve experienced it once, you’ll understand. If you don’t understand, well, then... um... I don’t know what’s wrong with you.”

Join the trek

The winter trek back to the Knersvlakte should take place in June/July 2025. But just as the sheep set the pace of the trek, so the rain determines the departure time. Keep an eye on the Op Vakansie Boerdery Facebook page for dates or send them a WhatsApp.

You don’t have to walk the entire route and it’s possible to join the trek for just a few days – a vehicle collects and drops off walkers in Loeriesfontein. Tents and camping mattresses are available for anyone who doesn’t have their own. Lunches and dinners are included but guests should take their own snacks. Water and a mobile shower are supplied for walkers to wash off most of the dust, but certain other needs will require a walk into the veld with a spade...

Price R10 000 pp

Contact Op Vakansie Boerdery

073 675 2078



Taking a breather

Lizri participated in her parents' sheep treks from an early age, and she is raising her children, Elana and André, to follow this old, nomadic tradition, just as she did. "My best memories are of the trek," she says. "Of course, it's not always pleasant. We've been soaked by rain on cold winter's nights. In summer, we bake in the sun. It's windy and dusty. But what we do not have is fear or worry about the world or that people are going to do something to us. This is the most liberated way to live. And the healthiest. It's only you, the veld, your sheep and God. What can harm you here?"

Human and beast lie low during the hot afternoon, when the only shade to be found is under the truck and trailer. The hardworking sheep dogs, Aero, Crash and Blits, also have a rest. >

Just like mom

Young Elana may only be five years old but she can already herd sheep on her own. She has certainly inherited her mother's love for animals.





Time for a drink? (left and below)

Sheep are desert animals and can last for a fairly long time without water, but the greatest challenge of the trek is finding enough water on the way. It can sometimes take two days to reach the next watering hole (in winter it's much easier). The troughs must be large enough to accommodate 700 sheep – and the dam or tank must be full. CJ therefore makes arrangements with specific farms where he knows this will work. And because water is basically a miracle in Bushmanland, he asks very nicely.

Wait up, guys (opposite below)

The trek is most frequently delayed by the young lambs that determine the pace. Fortunately, they can catch a lift on the truck and trailer when they show signs of exhaustion (their ears droop and their hooves start to drag). >



Time for an afternoon nap (right)

The days are long for a three-year-old. But little André does have his toys and a day bed on the back of the truck. And because they are mostly moving at walking speed, he can dream to his heart's content under the shade sail.

Harsh reality (below right)

Moving between rainfall regions doesn't mean there is always good veld. Sometimes you're going from a bare patch to a dry patch. Sometimes there's nothing to eat or even nibble on...

Shouldering the responsibility (below)

The same group of ewes remains at the front every day to set the pace. But the group at the back grows larger as the kilometres mount up. JD Willemse offers encouragement while carrying a tired lamb on his shoulders.

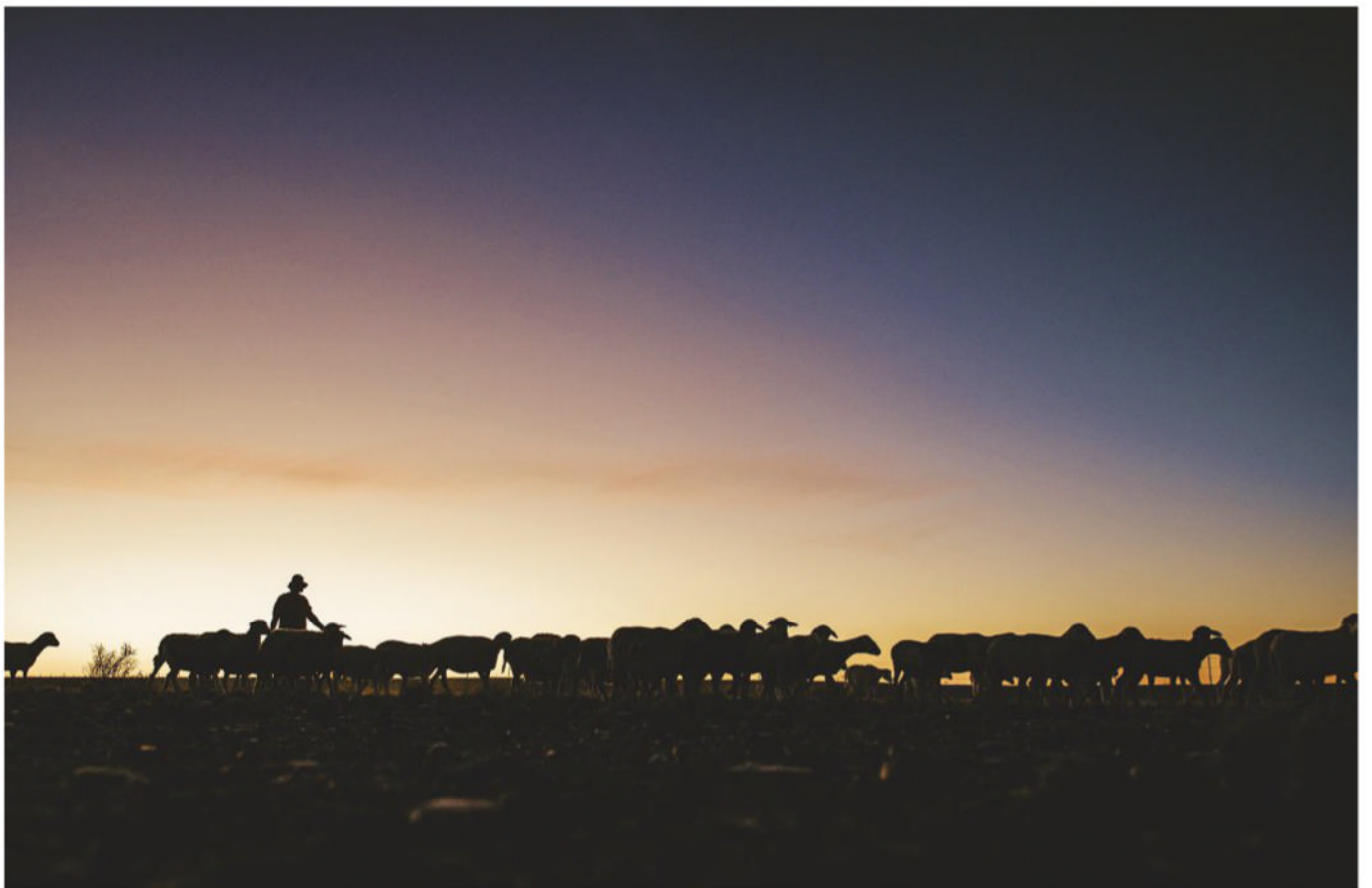


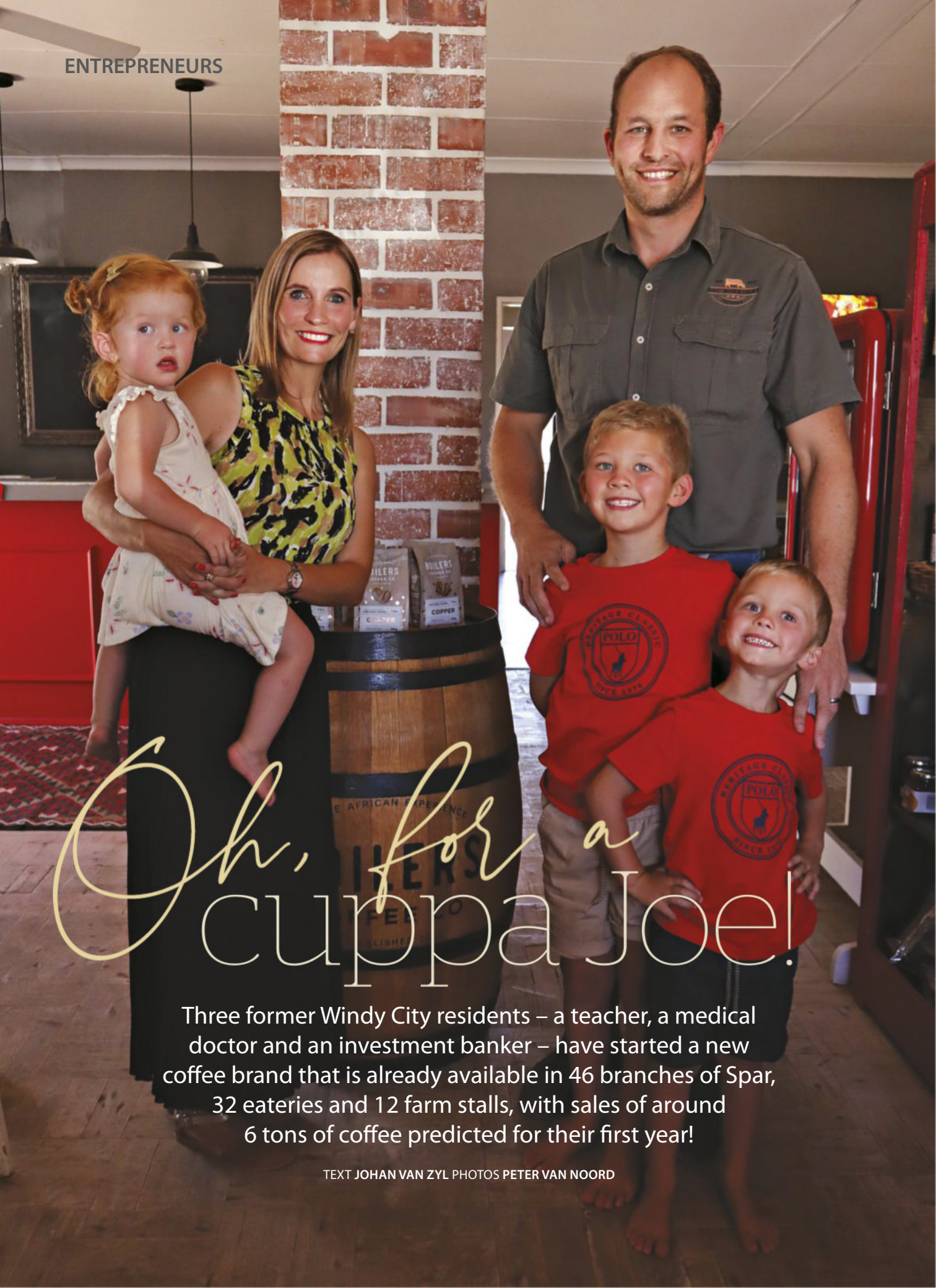
Oasis (top right)

Chrismari van der Westhuizen and Franchwa Batt's Uitspankolk is an oasis after two days of trekking through an arid landscape with nowhere to relieve one's thirst. But this is still Bushmanland, and aside from the dam and patches of green at the homestead, the rest is a mirage.

We made it! (right)

Dawid van Rensburg and the rear guard finally arrive at the kraal at dusk. 📍





Oh, for a cuppa Joe!

Three former Windy City residents – a teacher, a medical doctor and an investment banker – have started a new coffee brand that is already available in 46 branches of Spar, 32 eateries and 12 farm stalls, with sales of around 6 tons of coffee predicted for their first year!

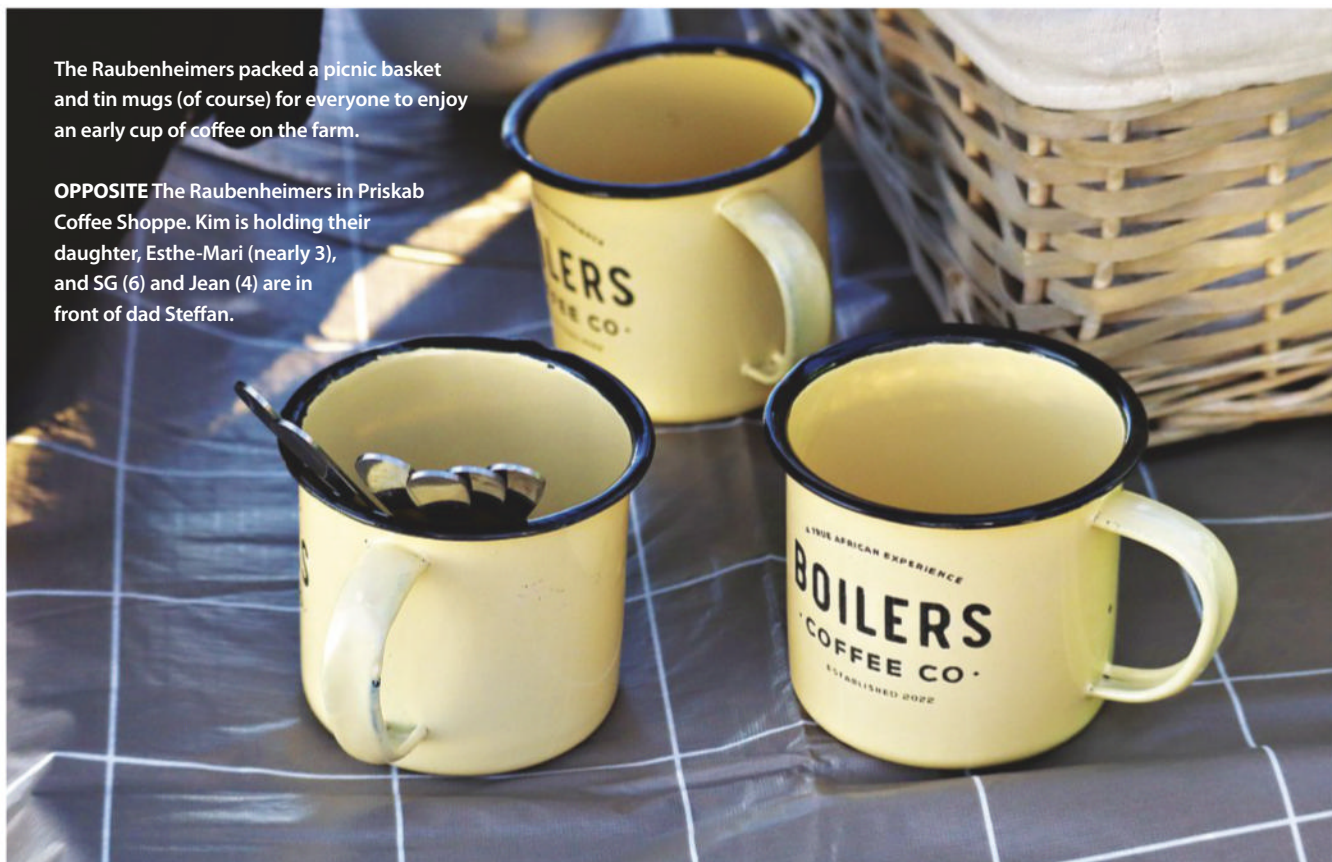
TEXT JOHAN VAN ZYL PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD

Prieska as seen from the foot of Prieska Koppie, which features a small, but handsome British stone fort built from raw tiger's eye stones.



The Raubenheimers packed a picnic basket and tin mugs (of course) for everyone to enjoy an early cup of coffee on the farm.

OPPOSITE The Raubenheimers in Priskab Coffee Shoppe. Kim is holding their daughter, Esthe-Mari (nearly 3), and SG (6) and Jean (4) are in front of dad Steffan.



In the years before Covid-19, when Gqeberha was still officially called Port Elizabeth, three coffeeholics – a teacher, her husband (a medical doctor) and brother (an investment banker) – took a seat around a kitchen table. For inspiration, they each had a mug of coffee at hand, because, as the packaging of their coffee reads: “All great ideas start around the kitchen table with a cup of coffee.” And Boilers Coffee Co proves it.

It's hard to believe that 30 years ago, a mug of good old Ricoffy was all it took to entice the South African middle-class out of bed in the mornings. In those years, before the global artisanal coffee culture as we now know it had spread to South Africa, any coffee shop or coffee snob who wanted to prove they were “a cut above the rest” would offer

their guests *moerkoffie* or Nescafé. Today, however, connoisseurs believe that instant coffee is as near as dammit to a swear word. Some of them will even use terms that were once exclusively used to describe wine to praise the brew they get from a barista: nose this and nose that, terroir, top notes of vanilla, bottom notes of toasted almond, hints of citrus and maritime air...

The three directors of Boilers Coffee Co – Kim and Steffan Raubenheimer and Kim's brother Stanley Dickason, who moved to London in February 2021 to work for Investec – are clearly not coffee snobs. In fact, they're dreaming of expanding the small Boilers product range to include instant coffee.

IN THE Priskab Coffee Shoppe in Prieska – where the Raubenheimers moved to in June 2021 with their

oldest child, SG (then 2½ years old) – Kim says that she, Steffan and her brother – “the whole family, really” – are crazy about coffee, and they wanted to do “something” with this shared love. At that stage Steffan had been specialising in cardiothoracic surgery for a year-and-a-half and, like many South African doctors, was considering seeking his fortune overseas.

“But then my father, who farms with cattle and game near the Nanaga Farm Stall in the Eastern Cape, phoned me to say that the new medical centre in Prieska was urgently looking for a doctor,” says Steffan, who had worked in intensive care units and emergency rooms before running his own practice for five years. “I thought the platteland would be a better place to raise children, and that I could also make more of difference here as a family doctor. I wasn't wrong.”





Kim says that she came up with the idea of starting a coffee drive-through while she was still teaching Grade 1 in Port Elizabeth and Port Alfred. “But there were three of us in the planned business, each with our own strengths and, of course, opinions. Actually, we all still have our own opinions!

“At one point we wondered if we should buy a coffee franchise, but after much consideration, we finally decided to start our own thing. When we came to Prieska, though, we realised that a coffee shop would be out of the question because the town already has one.” (The very coffee shop where *Platteland* met them for coffee and cake, and where Boilers Coffee Co coffee can be bought and ordered from the menu.)

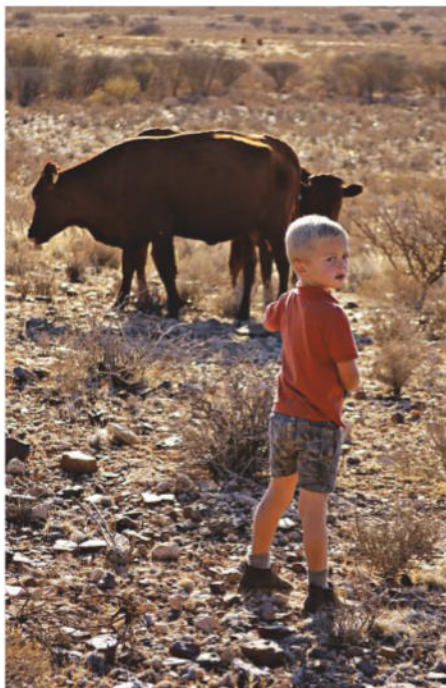
“Our plan was to create a proudly South African coffee that was unique to our country. We knew what we liked. We wanted to sell

great, ethically sourced coffee made from pure arabica beans at a reasonable price and without a bitter aftertaste,” Steffan sums it up. “We played with names for a while before eventually settling on Boilers.” (This refers to the boiler in an espresso machine.) Copper had been mined in the Prieska area until the '90s, which gave them the idea to use the periodic table to name their different varieties of coffee. Copper, a dark roast available as ground coffee or beans, was their first release, followed by medium-dark Nickel, which is supplied in 1 kg bags to coffee shops and is also used in their compostable coffee capsules. Next on the list is Mercury, a caffeine-free dark roast and, hopefully, the brand's own instant coffee will soon follow.

“Stanley and I work full-time,” says Steffan, “and we didn’t have a massive budget when we >

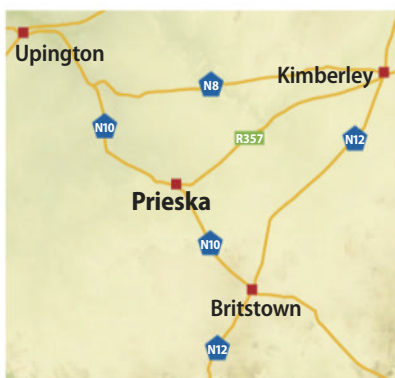
ABOVE Kim and Dr Steffan Raubenheimer pictured here in front of their home in Prieska. The couple started Boilers Coffee Co with Kim’s brother, Stanley Dickason, who works for Investec in London. *Platteland* wasn’t able to meet him as he was out of the country at the time of our visit.

OPPOSITE Prieska is situated on the banks of the Orange River. Thanks to donations from the local community, the town now boasts its own medical centre. Farmer Henry Coetzee was behind the drive to get the project going.



ABOVE The Raubenheimer children, SG, Jean and Esthe-Mari, enjoy spending time on the farm where Steffan pursues his hobby of farming with Bonsmara cattle, a breed he knows well from childhood. The children busy themselves building little stone sculptures, but have learnt to always be on the lookout for scorpions and snakes while exploring.

RIGHT The Boilers Coffee Co range consists of the dark-roast Copper, available as ground coffee or beans in 250 g packs, and the medium-dark roast Nickel, which is supplied in 1 kg bags to coffee shops and is also used in their compostable coffee capsules.



started, which is why we decided to rather approach a professional coffee roastery to roast the beans according to our taste and package them for us. We tasted and tasted, and also asked a few people for their opinions until we were happy.

“Even though we aren’t doing the roasting, packaging or distribution, it was still a big challenge to start a new brand out of nothing, something unique that could hold its own among the many other artisanal coffees available in the shops these days.”

Every director has their role to play: Stanley, the banker, manages the books and growing supplier list from London, Steffan enjoys people and talking and marketing, and Kim, who enjoys the creative side of things, was closely involved in the design of their packaging.

“We wanted to use local suppliers as far as possible, but were also committed to sourcing flat-bottomed packaging that would stand upright on a shelf. Then we discovered that this wasn’t something we could have printed >



Steffan has every second weekend off. This is when he heads off to land owned by friends a short distance from the town where he farms with cattle. When Platteland visited, he had to do a quick about-turn to get back into town to tend to a child who was in an accident and was subsequently airlifted to a hospital in Kimberley.

The business lessons we have learnt

- **Passion** “Everything is easier when you put your heart and passion into it and have complete faith in your product and yourself.”
- **Perseverance** “Launching a new brand is not all sunshine and roses. We were incredibly excited when Junior Groenewald from the Spar in Prieska became our first stockist. Then came the Douglas Spar and St Francis Bay, and the Kgalagadi Lifestyle Lodge where many tourists buy the coffee as a souvenir.”
- **Listen to your clients** “This is the easiest way to understand the needs of your market. For example, some people soon asked for coffee in a cheaper, larger packaging format, others wanted compostable capsules for the coffee machines, and now there are increasing numbers looking for caffeine-free coffee. These are things we hadn’t thought of when we started.”
- **No staff** “It’s a big relief not to employ any staff – we have professional suppliers who take care of the logistics, roasting, packaging and distribution. This saves us money because it’s more expensive to courier from a platteland town, particularly from Prieska, which is more than 200 km from Kimberley and Upington.”



Stay over in Prieska

In August 2024, the Raubenheimers turned a double garage on the other side of their property into a compact, tastefully-decorated two-bedroom self-catering cottage that can sleep four (in one king-size bed and a bunk bed). They named it Karoovlaktes and it has a kitchenette with a fridge-freezer, air-fryer, microwave, tea and coffee-making facilities and, of course, some good coffee from Boilers Coffee Co. It also offers air-conditioning, complimentary Wi-Fi, DStv and secure parking.

This is the ideal place for small families to overnight on their way to Namibia, or the Kgalagadi or Au-grabies Falls national parks.

Bookings 📍 [lekkeslaap.co.za](https://www.lekkeslaap.co.za) 📍 [airbnb.com](https://www.airbnb.com) 📍 [booking.com](https://www.booking.com)



The Raubenheimers converted the garage at their home into a self-catering guest house. Karoovlaktes has a private entrance and can sleep four people.



The only way to start the day when you have to get up at 05:00. A Boilers coffee brewed in a plunger – SG knows exactly how!



Liana Theron, the owner of Priskab Coffee Shoppe, with Steffan and Kim, standing at the shop's entranceway in front of a vat where Boilers coffee is proudly on display.



Priskab is a popular spot for both tourists and locals (the cake on offer certainly has something to do with this). The meringue-and-nougat cake is a favourite (on display in front) as is the Peppermint Crisp cake (right).

Stop for coffee

Local residents and travellers alike enjoy popping in at Liana Theron's coffee shop and restaurant, Priskab Coffee Shoppe, at 2 Loots Boulevard. Here, you will find good, affordable coffee, tasty food, decadent cakes and bakes, and the best local produce, such as pecans and pistachios from Senqu River, wines from Lowerland and coffee from Boilers Coffee Co.

Contact Priskab Coffee Shoppe

info@bokaro.co.za

071 892 9632



in South Africa, which meant that we had to have the first 2500 packets printed overseas," laughs Steffan.

SINCE WINTER 2021, the Raubenheimers have become true plattelanders who miss nothing apart from family in the Eastern Cape and overseas. They have integrated into the community, and Steffan has started farming with Bonsmara cattle, a breed he is familiar with from childhood, on 1400 hectares of land that belongs to friends about 6km outside the town.

"It's my hobby, and it's enjoyable to get out of town for a while, which

I do every second weekend when I'm off work," he says, as we take a 06:00 drive to the farm for rusks and a flask of their coffee. Apart from these weekend visits, he also visits the farm at least twice a week to ensure that his 40 cattle have sufficient food and water.

"The most wonderful thing about the platteland is the people," says Kim.

"Yes, they are down to earth. What you see is what you get. What you hear is the truth," says Steffan.

Since moving here, two more children, Jean and Esthe-Mari, have arrived. The two boys enjoy disappearing into the veld, where

they build all kinds of "monuments" from rocks that they find.

A message arrives on Steffan's phone: a child in town needs urgent medical attention. The mugs and rusks are quickly packed away.

"Jean and his sister only know Prieska," says Steffan before climbing into the bakkie. "In 2023, we all went to Bloemfontein to watch the Curry Cup final. When we arrived at the stadium and saw all the people, I could see that Jean was slightly bewildered. Then he asked: 'Daddy, when are we going back to Prieska?'"

Contact boilerscoffeeco.com

boilerscoffeeco@gmail.com

Aside from fresh herbs and spinach, Janine Honiball also grows potted herbs like parsley, basil, coriander and mint that are sold at Checkers and Shoprite under the Living Herbs label. She also supplies these on request as table décor and wedding favours.



The power of herbs

After a health scare in 2017, Janine Honiball started growing herbs and using them in her home cooking on the family farm outside Ventersburg. Now, this entrepreneur – one of only two herb farmers in the Free State – is supplying more than 5 tons of fresh herbs to Checkers and Shoprite annually.

TEXT JOHAN VAN ZYL PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD



There are three reasons why Janine Honiball christened her “hobby” La Vie – French for “the life” – in 2018. She had been compelled to exclude all colourants, flavourants and preservatives from her diet the year before, and the fresh herbs she began to cultivate as alternatives made a new life possible, firstly, and, secondly, sowed the seeds for her business. “Thirdly,” she smiles, “healthy, fresh herbs will bring almost any dish to life.”

La Vie has truly gone from strength to strength since Janine landed a contract in September 2020 to exclusively grow culinary herbs for Freshmark, the fruit-and-vegetable sourcing and distribution arm of Shoprite and Checkers. She

supplies them with basil, spring onions, salad onions (spring onions that are harvested early for use in salads), coriander, dill, mint, origanum, parsley, Italian parsley and rocket, as well as whole spinach leaves, baby spinach, cut spinach and celery. Potted herb plants – basil, coriander, parsley and mint – are also popular. These are sold under the Living Herbs label and Janine supplies them on request as table décor and favours at weddings.

IT IS SHORTLY before six in the morning, a week before Christmas, when Platteland arrives at the farm, located about 12 km south of Ventersburg on the N1. The La Vie staff are preparing to harvest spinach and herbs on the 1.5-hectare field they call “Canaan, the land of milk and honey” (to

distinguish it from the other smaller raised beds around the farm house). At 10:00, they will be forced to go into the two warehouses to escape the heat. Janine’s husband, Marius, who farms with mealies and Simbra cattle, arrives to greet us and says he’s waiting for two horse riders who are herding bulls from their other property. Later in the morning, they will move the best bulls in with the right groups of cows.

When asked if he and Janine farm completely independently of each other and whether he helps her at all, he grins. “Man, I struggle to help myself! Let’s just say I sometimes share advice about irrigation and that kind of thing. There are three boreholes around the house, two of which are used exclusively for the home. The rest of the water comes from the Allemanskraal Dam... but the herb business is hers.”



Apart from two men “who are responsible for the heavy manual labour in the beds”, women do all the harvesting, sorting, washing and packing work. Currently, eight women work here full-time but during peak season, or when the never-ending weeds need to be pulled, many extra workers join the team.

“There isn’t much available work in the area,” says Janine. “Most of the women were unemployed and their husbands work for Marius. I find it wonderful to be able to create work for these women and to also teach them farming skills.”

As Janine walks around bravely – she broke her baby toe five days prior – it soon becomes apparent that this elegant woman, always armed with a hat, is a perfectionist and born stylist. “Oh, no, no, no,” she quickly stops us. “You can’t take

photos here, there are just too many weeds.” And she immediately begins to pull out some of them.

The birth of the business

After receiving the news about her health, something Janine doesn’t want to discuss because it is traumatic and “highly personal”, she started to plant herbs in garden beds around the farmhouse in 2017.

“It was an experiment, but I wasn’t really intimidated because my father, Willem Slabbert, farmed with mealies at our farm outside Bothaville. I grew up in the fields and knew plants, just as I also came to know the stress and sadness of drought and the happiness and joy of rain.

“I read and did online research to master the finer details and preferences of certain herbs, >



BELOW On the day *Platteland* visited, Janine’s husband, Marius, was in the process of moving his best Simbra bulls in with the right groups of cows. Next to him is their youngest daughter, Niene, and behind them, Dene, and their eldest daughter, Daniel.

OPPOSITE At six sharp, the spinach harvest begins on the 1-ha field La Vie’s people refer to as “Canaan, the land of milk and honey”.





ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Lydia Gasmeni harvests some of the mildew-resistant basil that grows closer to the house where it enjoys shade for most of the day; fresh parsley ready for the warehouse where it will be sorted, weighed and packed; spring onions, freshly picked.

including their uses in the kitchen. For me, the herbs became part of a complete lifestyle change and a new way of cooking without using unhealthy artificial flavourants and soup powders full of MSG.

“I also decided that I wouldn’t use any poisons in my own garden – I don’t mind eating leaves with a few holes in them. In any case, many herbs help to keep pests and plagues at bay; I handle the rest organically with plants like marigolds.”

Janine says she instantly loved the smell and taste of fresh herbs in the family’s food, and noticed how easily the plants grew in the hot, dry climate of the Free State. “There was such an abundance of herbs in the garden that I soon started sharing them with my friends and took them to markets like the popular French Market in Bloemfontein. Many people at the markets asked me about what herbs worked well with specific foods. I compiled and printed a booklet on the subject and included a favourite

recipe of mine or my mother’s with each herb.”

Increasing interest at the markets inspired Janine’s decision in 2020 to contact various chain stores in the region. “Mercifully, Checkers responded, stating they needed a herb farmer in the Free State, so I used some of my savings to start farming on a larger scale.”

She gestures towards several mini tunnels of white shade-cloth a short distance from the house where she and Marius each have their own office. “After erecting the tunnels, we soon realised that the plants grew far better in the open. It was too damp inside and some of the plants, basil in particular, developed fungal diseases. But later I realised that I’d also used the wrong seed. It’s been going well since I began sowing mildew-resistant basil seeds.”

LA VIE HAS grown to such an extent over the past four years that today Janine focuses on the sowing and >



ABOVE After being washed, the spinach is spun, and then placed in front of a fan to dry thoroughly, before being packed.

TOP Florence Matjhaya, Rebecca Moseme, Lydia Gasmeni, Merriam Motemiseng, Miranda Mokoena and Rosalia Pheko with their baskets of with freshly picked herbs.

ABOVE LEFT Behind these raised beds where, among others, thyme is grown, the open doors of the warehouse are visible. The spinach is washed for the first time outside.

LEFT Packets of cut spinach ready for collection.





ABOVE Janine Honiball in her own herb garden next to the family's home.

OPPOSITE (TOP) Bennie Mafa and Tshokollo Maleho are the only two men who work for La Vie.

OPPOSITE (MIDDLE) Warehouse manager Juanita Ras, with Rebecca Moseme, Lydia Gasmeni en Rosalia Pheko pause for a photo in the early morning sun.

OPPOSITE (BOTTOM) Mint and thyme flourish in the raised beds situated near the warehouse.

planting programmes, as well as pest and plague control, while warehouse manager Juanita Ras manages the warehouses and staff.

"Before the season starts, I receive a growing programme from Checkers and sow and plant according to that," explains Janine. "Every Friday, we send a list of what we have available and orders are then placed for the following week. It's fortunate that our farm is situated right on the N1. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the Checkers refrigerated truck that travels from Centurion to Bloemfontein stops here at around 14:00 and loads up an average of 400 packets of spinach and 1700 packets of different herbs. Then it goes directly to the depot in Bloem to maintain the unbroken cold chain. I find it wonderful that herbs that are harvested here on the farm in the morning arrive at the depot in the afternoon and are available the next day at shops in the Free State, Northern Cape, North West and Lesotho. It doesn't get any fresher than that." >

Growing tips

Sunlight Most types of herbs need six to eight hours of direct sunlight each day. Morning sun is best in high summer, with shade in the afternoons.

Soil A surprising number of herbs do well in poor, stony soil with a pH of between 6 and 7, as long as it drains very well. Improve drainage by working in compost, organic matter and sand (or try raised beds if your soil is very clayey).

Water Many varieties are drought resistant and only require sufficient water to prevent them from dying or developing fungal diseases. More sensitive annuals such as basil and dill usually need a little more water.

Planting time Annual herbs in particular are sensitive to cold and frost – plant them in spring.

Pruning Regularly cut some of the herbs to encourage new growth.

Store them correctly Lengthen the shelf life of fresh herbs by rinsing them in salted water and drying them well. Line a container with a paper towel, place the herbs on top, seal and refrigerate.



Cook with herbs

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) is fantastic for pesto and also complements tomato dishes, especially when combined with cheese.

Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*) works well in salads and curries and as a garnish.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) is delicious in salad dressings as well as chicken, egg, fish and potato dishes.

Origanum (*Origanum vulgare*) is essential for pizza, pasta and other Italian dishes, and also works well with tomatoes, lamb, eggs and cheese.

Chives (*Allium tuberosum*) are delicious in scrambled egg and other egg dishes, and are also great with cream cheese, salads and in mayonnaise.

Celery (*Apium graveolens*) is used in soups, stews, salads, salad dressings and pickles.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*) is widely used as a garnish, as well as in marinades, dressings, soups, and cooked vegetable, egg, fish and chicken dishes.

Mint (*Mentha* spp.) is refreshing in drinks and herbal teas, and is lovely in fruit salad and some desserts.

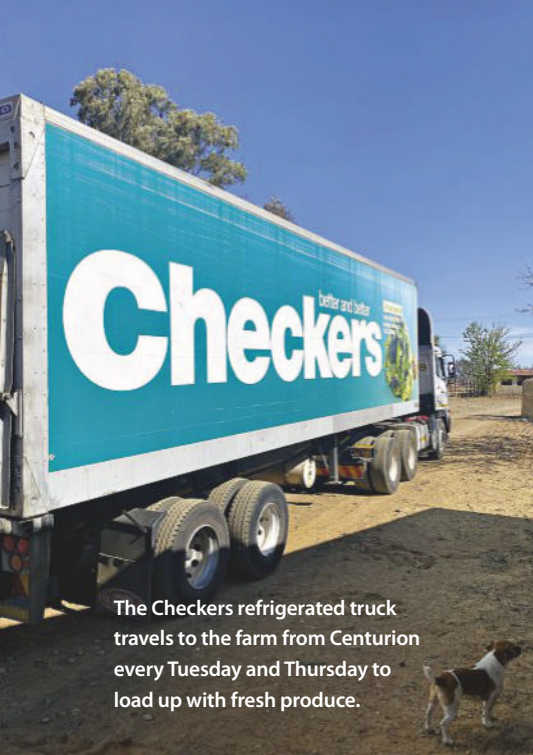
Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) is often used to flavour fish, strong curries, tzatziki and steamed asparagus.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is essential in soups and stews containing lamb and other meat, and works well with olive oil when used to top shepherd's pie or olive loaves.

Bay leaves (*Laurus nobilis*) are used in stews, soups, stocks and pickles. Together with thyme, rosemary, sage and parsley, bay leaves are one of the traditional herbs used in a bouquet garni.

Rocket (*Eruca sativa*) transforms any sandwich, burger, pizza or salad.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is wonderful with pork, as well as with butter over gnocchi.



The Checkers refrigerated truck travels to the farm from Centurion every Tuesday and Thursday to load up with fresh produce.



Grow your own superfood

Janine is a big proponent of micro-greens, healthy superfoods that are mostly used to garnish food but, in fact, contain all the nutritional properties of the adult plant. She offers interactive workshops on demand to show how easy it is to cultivate your own micro-greens.

This led to her selling her own micro-green kits online. The beginner set (R330, plus courier costs) includes the growing medium (coco peat and organic compost), a linen drawstring bag containing three packets of seeds (spinach, carrot and beetroot) and seed markers, a small garden fork, three sowing trays made from sugarcane fibre (bagasse) and a glass spritzer bottle to keep the soil moist. The special gift set (R520, plus courier costs) contains the same items, plus a denim apron (see page 93).

Recently, Janine also launched three home propagation kits (R100, plus courier costs) in which you can grow eight of your own basil, cherry tomato or spinach plants. The kit includes the seeds and eight peat pellets, which can be transplanted into your garden once the seedlings are big enough. Order your kit at lavieherbs.co.za.



ABOVE Janine recently launched a new home-propagation kit that offers eight spinach, cherry tomato or basil seeds. In the container on the left are the eight peat pellets as you'll receive them, and on the right, you can see what they'll look like once the seeds have been sown.

ABOVE LEFT Rosemary seedlings ready to be planted.

LEFT One of Janine's gift packs containing everything you need to grow your own micro-greens within two weeks.

The herbs are sorted and weighed in the two compact warehouses, where they are also packed into Freshmark packaging. Each packet is marked with an expiry date and supplier code so that it can be tracked. The order is then packed into crates in preparation for loading onto the truck.

In the high-care warehouse – for vegetables that consumers can use without washing them – cut spinach leaves are rinsed twice in Milton, then spun until they're as dry as possible in a regular washing machine (which is used exclusively for this purpose)! They are then dried under a fan before

being weighed and sealed inside the packets after a spray of nitrogen to extend their shelf life.

Challenges and lessons

One of the greatest challenges in the beginning was to strike a balance between supply and demand, particularly planting and sowing the right quantities to meet the demand. But, for the most part, she's mastered this now, says Janine.

"A farmer is, however, always at the mercy of the weather. In October 2024, we experienced a massive hailstorm that flattened everything... we weren't able to



supply anything for two weeks. This year it's the drought. Have you seen how the mealies are struggling? And there's a lot of frost in June and July, which is why those are our rest months."

Before we take the family photo the Honiballs' three cheerful daughters join us in the garden for tea and cheese scones. The eldest, Daniel, is completing her accounting clerkship at Claassen & Van Biljon Financial Services in Hoopstad, Dene is studying towards a BSc Degree in Genetics at the University of Pretoria, and the youngest, Niene (16), is in Grade 11 at Trio High School in Kroonstad.

Yes, it's great to arrive at the shops and know exactly where the packets of herbs come from, the three of them say. And, yes, they like the herbs their mom uses in her cooking, "apart from the rosemary that she throws into her stews".

"But you *have* to add it," says Janine. "Lamb can't do without it!"

When we say goodbye, she adds, "The greatest lesson that my herbs have taught me is how important one's health is, and that success is about hard work and grace. A lot of grace."

🖱 lavieherbs.co.za 📷 @la_vie_herbs
 📧 lavieherbs@gmail.com 📺

ABOVE The Honiball family relaxing in front of the exquisite star jasmine in their lush garden. Between Janine and Marius is their youngest daughter, Niene, who is in Grade 11 this year. Behind them are Dene, who is studying genetics, and Daniel, who is busy with an accounting clerkship in Hoopstad, holding little Puma, the sausage dog, in her arms.

GARDEN DIARY

Let's go into the garden

Book the Fynbos Trail in the Overberg and experience the region's indigenous autumnal display, admire the biodiversity of Vergelegen, sketch the essence of the season at the Dylan Lewis Sculpture Garden, and make your own Olla permaculture pot.

BY MAJA PALM



THE FYNBOS TRAIL

Meander through the Overberg's autumn showcase

"Swathes of pink Gansbaai heath, king proteas against sandstone koppies, flame-red Bredasdorp proteas and bulbs in bloom wherever you look," says Michelle Privett, co-founder of the Fynos Trail. "After a hot summer, hikers and nature have the chance to breathe again and the route can be enjoyed at its most colourful. The days are mild and wind-free."

The route covers 30km over three days in the Walker Bay Fynbos Conservancy in the Overberg, which is renowned for its biodiversity. Hikers will discover a variety of habitats and landscapes that differ dramatically, from coastal strandveld to mountain fynbos. The trail also takes walkers past limestone hills and through unexpected forests.

The route begins at the Grootbos Private Nature Reserve between Gansbaai and Stanford. You will

barely have started walking before finding yourself admiring masses of rare Gansbaai heath (*Erica irregularis*), covering the hills in soft, pink clouds. It only grows in a small area of the Walker Bay conservancy, a reminder of how truly unique South Africa's plantlife is.

Walk on and you will eventually be surrounded by the vibrant red flowers of the Bredasdorp protea (*Protea obtusifolia*). This endemic sugarbush only grows in the limestone hills of the south coast and is a goldmine for nectar lovers like the beautiful Cape sugarbird, which you will spot flitting among the flowers.

The trail becomes more mountainous and soon you'll have a view of the ocean. High on the cliffs, you will spot autumn flowers such as the red mimetes (*Mimetes cucullatus*) and the imposing king protea (*Protea cynaroides*).



PHOTO GROOTBOS FOUNDATION

Security cameras capture what we can't... a caracal walking through milkwood bushes on the trail.

"Its gigantic flowers stand proudly amid the rocky peaks, a highlight for many walkers," says Michelle.

Other favourites include seasonal bulbs that bloom in large, extravagant groupings in certain areas. The pale-pink painted ladies (*Gladiolus brevifolius*), purple *Gladiolus martleyi* and red-pink *Gladiolus meridionalis* are at their most beautiful in the autumn months.

It's possible to do the trail on your own but, according to Michelle, who has been operating it with her husband, Sean, for almost 13 years, it's well worth booking a guided hike in autumn. "The guides bring the entire landscape to life with their knowledge of the plants and animals."

Where? Walker Bay Fynbos Conservancy.

Distance 30 km over 3 days.

Options Premium walk (guided and catered), standard walk (self-guided and catered), budget walk (self-guided and uncatered).

Accommodation Comfortable cottages (with lovely views) tucked away in the heart of the fynbos.

Contact fynbostrail.co.za >



PHOTO SHAEN ADEY

ABOVE On day two of the Fynbos Trail, enjoy the natural refreshment only a waterfall can offer.

OPPOSITE As the trail progresses and the terrain becomes more mountainous, you'll come across beautiful red mimetes (*Mimetes cucullatus*) against the Swartkransberg.

WORKSHOP

Sketch autumn in the Dylan Lewis Sculpture Garden

Take a slow stroll through this garden just outside Stellenbosch with artist Diane Harper and be inspired by more than 60 sculptures amid the beauty of autumn. The walk is followed by a "Drawing from Nature" workshop in which Diane will help you to express your creativity through composition, line, rhythm and texture.

"The language of nature and how you make your mark are very personal," says Diane. "Everyone is encouraged to express their experience of the garden in their own way."

Natural materials such as clay, charcoal and tannin ink from the garden are available to use in your sketches. Diane says that art has



always been a way for her to better understand life and nature.

All skill levels are welcome.

Dates Visit the Dylan Lewis Sculpture Garden website, go to the "Menu" tab and choose "Events".

Price R890 pp (including drawing materials, coffee and cake, and entrance to the garden)

Contact dylanlewis.com

[@dylanlewissculpturegarden](https://www.instagram.com/dylanlewissculpturegarden)

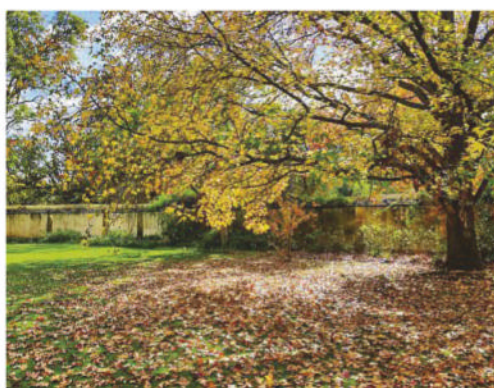
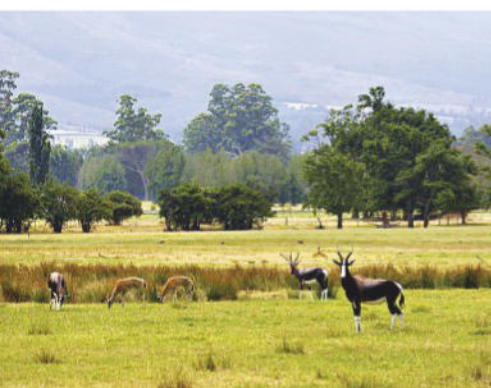
LEFT Artist Diane Harper sketches a scene from the Dylan Lewis Sculpture Garden.

BELOW You can take a walk through the garden with Diane, who is also a guide, and choose a spot that inspires you.





On the two-hour guided safari tour of Vergelegen, which has been declared a nature reserve, you'll see Nguni cattle and wildlife including bontebok, red hartebeest, eland and Rau quaggas.



🌿 BIODIVERSITY TOUR

Experience an explosion of species at Vergelegen

Twenty years ago, the largest private project to eradicate invasive plants was launched at Vergelegen wine estate outside Somerset West. The increase in biodiversity on the estate since then has been astonishing. Birds have multiplied from 57 recorded species to 159, of which 60 – including the blue crane – now also breed here. Plant species such as the *Lachenalia liliflora*, once thought to be extinct, have made

a comeback, along with 20 other species that appear on the Red Data List of critically endangered species.

The estate is 3 200-hectares in size, 2 200 of which have been declared a nature reserve that enjoys the same conservation status as the Kruger National Park.

When you book an environmental tour of this historical farm, you will be taken on a guided trip on an open safari vehicle to view

additional conservation successes, including Vergelegen's bee project. The two-hour drive through the fynbos offers the opportunity to view Nguni cattle, bontebok, red hartebees, black wildebees, eland and even the Rau quagga.

Price R750 pp (booking is essential).

Contact 🐾 vergelegen.co.za (click on the "Experiences" tab at the top)

📞 021 847 2111 >

PAPER ART

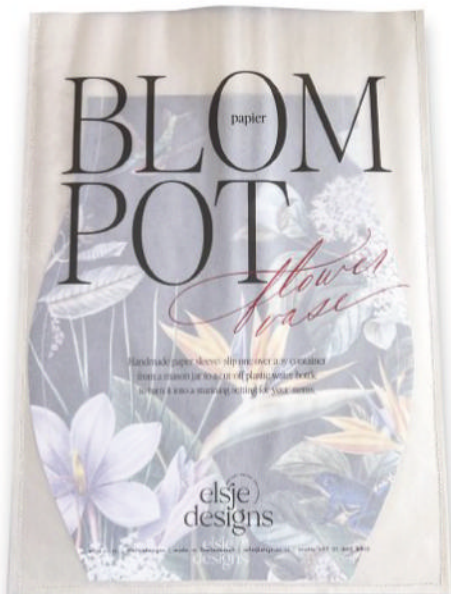
Pure floral delight

Few things brighten up a dull corner as effectively as a vase full of cheerful flowers. And a paper flower pot decorated with sketches of indigenous South African flowers will make it twice as beautiful.

Stellenbosch design studio Elsie Designs, known for gifts, stationery and paper décor inspired by South Africa's natural beauty, has launched a range of handmade paper flower pots. Each one is cut by hand out of 190g recycled paper and then assembled, ensuring that every pot is unique. The pots are slightly longer than a ruler (34 cm x 27 cm) and are perfect for displaying dried flowers.

Price R450

Contact elsje.co.za [@elsjedesigns](https://www.instagram.com/elsjedesigns)



ABOVE AND RIGHT Choose from a variety of designs featuring indigenous flowers from Elsie Designs' exquisite handmade paper vases.

DIY

A self-watering permaculture pot

Permaculture is a system that uses clever design to create environmentally friendly gardens. The simple Olla pot, which is an ancient method of irrigation, is reportedly 10 times more efficient than surface irrigation.

It takes just a few minutes to make your own Olla pot with affordable terracotta pots. Bury them strategically in your vegetable garden near the roots of the plants, and you will have a fast, cost-effective, waterwise irrigation system to keep your pot plants watered when you're on holiday.

YOU NEED

- 2 unglazed, porous terracotta pots of the same size
- 1 pot saucer
- 1 tube Sticks Like Sh*t glue

THIS IS HOW

Spread the glue over the top rim of one of the pots. Place the second clay pot upside down precisely on the glued rim of the first pot. Leave it to stand for a day to dry out properly before filling it with water. If it doesn't leak, your reservoir is ready to be "planted".

SOURCE: DISCOVERPERMACULTURE.COM



THIS IS HOW

- The two pots you glued together are your reservoir. Bury approximately 70% of the reservoir under the ground, close to the roots of the plants that you want to keep moist.
- Pour water into the hole at the top of the upside-down pot protruding above the surface of the soil. Place the saucer over the hole to prevent evaporation.
- Because the terracotta is porous, water will seep through it when the soil is dry. This will stop once the soil is saturated. When the soil dries out again, the roots will "draw" water from the reservoir.
- Remove the saucer occasionally to check if there is still water in the reservoir. When necessary, refill it and cover it with the saucer. **P**

FOOD GARDENS

Growing together



While South Africa – and the world – buckled under the strain of the Covid-19 pandemic, the community members of Kurland Village near Plettenberg Bay busied themselves transforming parcels of land into small, sustainable vegetable gardens to feed their families and supply the local soup kitchens. **Gaye Boshoff** returns to the area and marvels at the spirited transformation.

TEXT AND PHOTOS GAYE BOSHOFF



The Griqua Centre's lush food garden boasts a variety of healthy vegetables.

OPPOSITE A spitskop cabbage.

When you arrive at The Craggs, situated 20km from Plettenberg Bay, Peak Formosa,

the highest point of the Tsitsikamma Mountains, majestically comes into view. The area is home to polo fields, farms, wildlife sanctuaries and Kurland Village, aka Kurland rural township. (From here, the N2 winds down towards the coast, past a 600-year-old indigenous forest, to Nature's Valley.)

What is extraordinary about driving through Kurland Village are the small food gardens dotted everywhere – the residents have been busy! We – my partner, Pieter, and I – lived on a dairy farm in The Craggs after meeting 20 years ago, and most of his staff stayed in Kurland Village. We visited there often, celebrating weddings and, sadly, funerals too.

As time moved on, so did we. We heard stories about the mass migration to Kurland Village and of the decay that had settled on the township. With South Africa's shocking unemployment rate, these things are accepted as "normal". But then, when Covid-19 struck, we started hearing how rubbish dumps were being transformed into vegetable gardens. Seeing is believing!

Changing an impoverished environment clearly takes dedication. The residents have poured so much love and energy into their vegetable gardens and have maintained them beautifully – the joy and excitement of the community is real.

It really makes sense that they grow their own vegetables. They're situated a fair distance from Plettenberg Bay relative to the closer townships, whose residents prefer to catch a taxi into town to buy fresh produce.

There are 900 plots in Kurland Village of which 350 have been cultivated. Billy Pluim, Roland Damon, Julia Prema and Oom Links Roelf September have been the key garden-power initiators.

The "grow-your-own" influencer

Billy Pluim is well-known in the village and a longstanding "grow-your-own" influencer. His vegetable garden is impressive: from its compost heaps, mulched beds, and seedlings popping up everywhere to fully-formed, healthy cabbages. There is so much in his garden – and it's lovely to see.

Billy's childhood was all about growing vegetables, and he thanks his grandfather for making him the man he is today. Billy was taught that it's better to grow your own rather than go to a shop. And he has shared his knowledge and skills with his community to help them "grow their own" too. >

A snow-capped Peak Formosa watches from a distance over the vegetable gardens of Kurland Village.





“There is nothing more delicious than eating a peach from your neighbour’s tree. We must teach our children how to share.”

- Mary-Anne Mngomezulu, respected community member and founder of Native Roots Shelter for homeless people in Plettenberg Bay

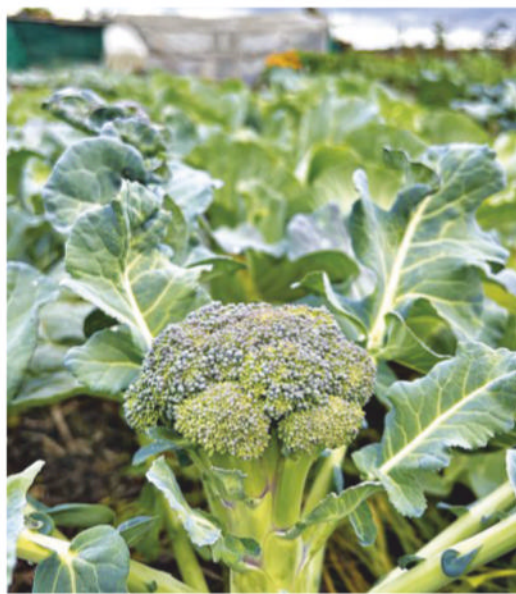


ABOVE LEFT Billy Plum’s wife, Lina, and Roland Damon tending Billy’s winter garden.

ABOVE Beetroot and carrots, all from Billy Plum’s garden.

LEFT A lovely healthy organic broccoli head beginning to form.

FAR LEFT A massive, healthy cabbage ready for harvesting.



Not without challenges...

Roland Damon has no space at his house for a vegetable garden, so he went searching for one, and found it beside the local school where he currently tends his garden. He is loving teaching the youth about growing their own food and is equally excited about the young volunteers who help him in his new garden.

Roland strives to provide food for his family, as well as support the local feeding schemes like the soup kitchens in the village. When Roland has excess seedlings, he sells them in Plett and uses the proceeds to buy more seeds.

Roland's biggest challenges include transporting compost and other soil amendments, water and irrigation, garden assistants (volunteers), organic defences against vegetable pests (snails especially), and purchasing seeds and seedlings, which are expensive.

Billy and Roland have been running the village's Vegetable Garden Club for years, sharing their knowledge. We were fortunate to visit their mutual friend Josef Mapondo, whose garden is a mixture of flowers, vegetables and herbs – too beautiful!



A church garden

Organic farmer and natural pharmacist Julia Prema may not live in Kurland Village, but she spends a lot of her time and energy helping the community. Shortly after Covid-19 hit, Julia established the non-profit project Eden Grow for the community members. This allowed them to gain access to resources and programmes they would have been unable to receive as individuals. The initiative also helped to connect various people and groups in the community.

The community garden at the Griqua Centre is a prime example of how Julia's initiatives are thriving in leaps and bounds. Julia identified

the large, empty piece of land as a potential site, set up a meeting and things began to roll.

Visiting the Griqua Centre – which is home to the Griqua Church, of which Oom Links Roelf September is the pastor – and community garden is a truly uplifting experience. There is also a bustling kitchen on the premises and a few ladies are busy making soap from the fynbos that grows in their gardens.

The vegetable garden is set up thoroughly, with rain tanks, irrigation, a shade house, a four-bin compost system, a tall fence, and a water pump that has been secured against theft. It is a dream come true for the Griqua community. >





OPPOSITE Roland Damon tending his garden next to the school.

LEFT From left are Oom Nicholas Sauls, Oom Links Roelf September, Sidney Slinger, Maria Slinger, Julia Prema and Oom Abraham de Waal, who all work actively at the Griqua Centre's garden.

BELOW Julia Prema discussing the centre's needs with Sydney Le Fleur, brother of the Griqua chief.



From empty site to veggie garden

After identifying a potential garden site within a township, how do you go about transforming it step by step?

- 1** Contact the ward councillor of the local municipality in order to establish an understanding of the dynamics and needs of the community.
- 2** The community members who own or take care of the land should be approached to find out if they are interested in developing the land, or becoming part of a long-term, sustainable economic project. Options and possibilities are usually discussed, and a decision made about how they would like to participate and proceed.
- 3** Step-by-step plans to achieve these visions are drawn up. Supportive bodies are contacted, training is provided and skills development is implemented. Communication is crucial for transparency.



From rubbish dump to tended garden

Another blow-your-mind garden was established on an old rubbish dumping site. It has been completely transformed into a phenomenal space with fertile soil and endless rows of vegetables. Freddy Davids tends this garden, which produces enough vegetables for him to feed his family *and* there's extra for the soup kitchens.

Plans for the future

There is also a scelerium micro-economic project on the go, filled with potential for future growth in the community. (Scelerium – kanna, channa or kougoed – is a succulent herb known for its traditional medicinal value.) Jessica Kamkam, the ward counsellor for Kurland Village, has been instrumental in obtaining support from the local Bitou Municipality, and the Department of Agriculture as well as The Table Mountain Fund have also come on board with their support.

Julia's latest exciting vision involves a garden site situated at the turn-off to Kurland Village at the old "Women on the Move" building, also home of the Ubuntu Women community group. Julia plans to convert the whole area around the building into a vegetable garden. This is a potentially wonderful collective space from where the community's artisans can both work and sell their garden produce

ABOVE Ando-Lee Davids prepping the dried lemongrass for soap-making at the Griqua Centre.

ABOVE RIGHT The soap-making microbusiness at the Griqua Centre.

RIGHT The soap makers at the Griqua Centre are (from left) Mariska Martin, Roseline Martin, Theresa May, Julia Prema, Angelique Roman and Ando-Lee Davids.





and other products. It could grow into a marketplace, nursery, skills-development centre or even house a restaurant that uses produce grown from its very own garden!

Vegetables are expensive. And these households are not only providing food for their own families; they are also giving back to their community through feeding schemes, bartering, the sale of vegetables and seedlings, creating their own microbusinesses, all the while teaching the youth and transforming derelict pieces of land into rich, fertile grounds for cultivation. A township tour is next on the list, something everyone is very excited about. Who would have thought that vegetable gardens could transform a township and set such a high standard of upliftment within a community? The future in our beautiful country grows brighter. 🌱

How can you help?

Phone Roland Damon on 📞 078 970 3149 or email Eden Grow on ✉️ edengrow123@gmail.com if you would like to contribute to a new garden site.



ABOVE LEFT Julia Prema and Freddy Davids at the old dumping site that has been transformed into a flourishing veggie patch.

FAR LEFT Josef Mapondo relaxes in his vegetable patch.

LEFT A beautiful, colourful mixed border surrounds Josef Mapondo's home.

EXOTIC FEAST

Foreign Affairs





Travelling involves more than exploring faraway and exotic places. It's also a treat for the palate. Lawyer and foodie **Stephen Benade** says that what truly uplifts him are those surprising dishes he encounters in foreign countries.

RECIPES **STEPHEN BENADE** STYLING **WASHINGTON MENDES FILHO**
PHOTOS **PETER VAN NOORD**

In all my interactions with lawyer colleagues, I always find there is something else, outside of working with the law, that lawyers aspire to do more of. These aspirations are usually to create something tangible. Law is stimulating, but the creative side of the mind can starve.

Travel and food have been my creative medicine for as long as I can remember. After 10 years of legal consulting based in South Africa, followed by 12 years of corporate life in the UK, the need to be creative could no longer be ignored. A solution decided upon was to relocate to Brazil, where my life partner was born, and start a restaurant in the city of Uberlândia in the mid-country state of Minas Gerais.

The restaurant's popularity was sudden and even unexpected, and it all became extremely demanding. I hadn't kept in mind that restaurants come with staff issues, supplier issues, licensing issues and patron issues.

In my case there was also the language barrier, and soon I found myself not creating anything. My kitchen was replicating the recipes I had developed, and I was virtually back in corporate life. I managed to endure three years of it.

These days, I am back in South Africa, in peaceful Koringberg,

practising defence law, cooking for friends, creating menus for whoever wants them, arranging long-table lunches, dinners and soirées, as well as travelling whenever I can.

How often do we hear of the longing for a dish made by our mother or grandmother and the frustration of not being able to replicate the exact taste, despite having been given the recipe written in the loved one's hand – the writing on a now-stained piece of paper with thin blue lines. I too suffer these bouts of nostalgia quite often. (As an aside, I have found that using white pepper instead of black pepper often gets me closer to the taste profile of old family recipes.)

Nostalgia works wonders when you need to revive a feeling of belonging. For me, a cottage pie topped with golden mashed potato textured with fork swivels, the scraped-out contents of a gem squash with a dollop of butter, or a mince curry with powdery potato chunks, ground me at once with their familiarity. But what truly lifts me are those surprising meals I've encountered for the first time in a foreign country, that now give rise to vivid memories, some of which I'd like to share with you.

Contact  [stephenbenade](#)
 [Stephen Benade](#)
 steve_benade@yahoo.co.uk

Harissa

Harissa hails mainly from Tunisia. I've never visited the country, but for quite some time I've been very intrigued by North African and Middle Eastern condiments and spicy sprinkles. You can enhance so many dishes if you have harissa on hand: Add it to a marinade for chicken or fish, use it to lend extra oomph to a tomato or vegetable soup, or mix it with yoghurt to put some fire into a dip or salad dressing.

Makes 1 x 350 ml jar

Preparation time 35 minutes

YOU NEED

- 5 tablespoons (75 ml) whole coriander seeds
- 5 tablespoons (75 ml) whole cumin seeds
- 22 peeled garlic cloves
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 20 red chillies, seeded and chopped
- 1 large red bell pepper, seeded and roughly chopped
- 100 ml good olive oil

THIS IS HOW

Lightly fry the coriander and cumin seeds in a dry pan until they become fragrant and start to crackle.

Grind the toasted spices to a powder and set aside for later. You can use a pestle and mortar, but it takes time and effort to get it to powder form. For me, a coffee grinder works best. (You can, of course, use 4 tablespoons each of powdered cumin and coriander but, dare I say, it will not be as fragrant.)

Place the remaining ingredients in a blender and blend to a rough paste.

In a shallow pan, cook the paste over low-to-medium heat until most of the liquid has evaporated – about 15 minutes – while stirring frequently to prevent burning.

Add the spice powder to the paste in the pan and stir through until well combined – the paste becomes thick (almost like jam) and the colour changes from dark red to brick. Allow the mixture to cool and spoon into a sterilized jar.

Pour a tablespoon of olive oil over the top of the paste before closing the jar. >





Tip This recipe fills a 350ml jar and will keep in the refrigerator for up to three months, provided you top it up with a little olive oil once you've scooped out what you need.

Harira

Harira is a thick chickpea and tomato-based soup that I encountered in Marrakech when I travelled in Morocco. It was Ramadan (I hadn't realised) and, because of this, finding a meal during the day was quite a challenge, so, the daily breaking of the fast was eagerly awaited. Harira is often served as the first evening meal to break the fast and it does a marvelous job to quell the hunger pangs. It has a distinct North African flavour and makes for quite a fragrant and exotic starter. Sometimes, harira contains lamb, which I found quite rich and heavy, but which satisfies in Morocco, when Ramadan falls within the colder months. I'm sharing the lighter, simpler yet filling vegetarian version, which I find works well even during warmer months.

Serves 6

Preparation time 20 minutes

Cooking time 60 minutes

YOU NEED

- 2 large onions, chopped relatively finely
- 4 celery stalks, chopped
- 4 medium-sized carrots, peeled and chopped into cubes
- 3 tablespoons (45 ml) good olive oil
- 5 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 red chilli, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) ground turmeric
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) black pepper
- 2 teaspoons (10 ml) ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) ground ginger
- 2 cans (400 g each) chopped tomatoes
- 1 can (410 g) chickpeas, rinsed
- 2 l vegetable stock
- 1 cup (250 ml) dry brown lentils, rinsed
- lemon wedges and chopped parsley to serve



THIS IS HOW

In a large pot, slowly fry the onions, celery and carrots for about 10 minutes in the olive oil. Cover but stir frequently. Add the garlic and chilli and stir through, then add all the spices and stir until the mixture forms a well-combined paste.

Add the canned tomatoes and chickpeas to the pot. Pour in the stock and lentils and simmer for 40–45 minutes until the lentils and carrots are soft.

Remove one cup of the soup and blend it in a food processor until fine.

Return this blended soup to the pot to thicken it. Should you, like me, prefer your soup as it was before the blending, skip this step.

Add salt to taste.

Serve with lemon wedges and chopped parsley, or chopped coriander if preferred.

Tip This recipe will provide six large portions. Remember to place a bowl of harissa on the table, should anyone wish to add more kick to the harira.

Moqueca [MO-KE-KAH]

This is one of the most delightful food discoveries I made during my time in Brazil. While different versions are prepared in other states of Brazil, I am most familiar with the version that originates from the vibrant state of Bahia in the northeast of the country. The simplicity of this fish stew and the ease of preparation justify a search for the best and freshest ingredients. This stew is often served at eateries on the beach, on white rice with a squeeze of lime. Lime is important, as the flavour is very different from lemon, but if it's unavailable, lemon works. It's also so much better if you like coriander but, if not, parsley will do. In Salvador, the capital of Bahia, this stew is made using red palm oil, called *dendê*, which is near impossible to find in our country, but I find that coconut oil makes for a good replacement.

Serves 6 (as main course)

Preparation time 30 minutes

Cooking time 30 minutes

YOU NEED

- 1,5 kg skinless firm white fish such as hake or yellowtail, cut into bite-sized cubes
- ¼ cup (60 ml) coconut oil
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 large red bell pepper, seeded and cut into half-rings
- 1 large yellow or orange bell pepper, seeded and cut into half-rings
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) dried chilli flakes
- 1 can (400 g) chopped tomatoes
- juice of 1 lime (or use the juice of one small lemon)
- 1 can (400 ml) coconut milk
- 1 cup (250 ml) fish stock
- 18 uncooked shelled prawns (optional)

THIS IS HOW

Sprinkle a little salt over the cubed fish and allow to stand. In a large pot, heat the coconut oil and lightly fry the onion until translucent.

Add the garlic and stir through until fragrant. Add the bell peppers and stir until soft.

Then add the chilli flakes and stir through. Pour the tomatoes into the pot and stir until the tomato liquid starts to reduce. This should not take longer than 5 minutes. Add the lime (or lemon) juice and stir well.

Pour in the coconut milk together with the fish stock and stir until

everything is well combined and the sauce is simmering slowly. Add the fish and prawns. Ensure all the cubes are submerged in the sauce.

Place the lid onto the pot for about three minutes and then remove the lid. Simmer for about another three minutes until the fish is cooked, but not overdone. Add salt to taste and serve the stew on white rice with lime wedges on the side. >



Mujadara

[MOO-JAH-DAH-RAH]

This has been my favourite rice dish since I was introduced to it many years ago during my travels in the Middle East. Aside from its remarkable taste, it's an extremely versatile dish. With a dollop of thick yoghurt and some fresh herbs, one has a very tasty and presentable vegetarian dish. I make fish, chicken or lamb kebabs and serve these directly from the grill onto a large spoonful of mujadara. Frankly, meat or aubergine served directly from the grill on mujadara is a treat. History states that the dish originates from Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq and areas of Syria, Turkey, and Iran), but no one country can claim this dish for themselves, since it's also frequently served in Jordan, Lebanon and Israel.

Serves 6 as a side dish

Preparation time 15 minutes

Cooking time 60 minutes

YOU NEED

- 1 cup (250 ml) basmati rice, rinsed
- 1 cup (250 ml) brown lentils, rinsed
- ¾ cup (175 ml) olive oil
- 5 onions, peeled and chopped finely into half circles
- 2 teaspoons (10 ml) salt
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 teaspoons (10 ml) ground cumin

THIS IS HOW

Boil the rice until flaky and soft, but don't overcook it. Allow to cool to room temperature.

Boil the lentils until soft but not so much that they lose their shape. Allow to cool to room temperature. I find that if you add salt to the water when boiling lentils or beans, they tend to stay hard and won't soften fully. Rather add salt at the end of the boil.

Pour the oil into a large pan and begin caramelizing the onions. Sprinkle the salt over the onions and allow them to become completely soft and

dark caramel in colour. This can take 35–40 minutes.

Just before the onions are fully caramelized, add the garlic and cumin and stir through until fragrant. Let the onion and oil mixture cool slightly.

Combine the rice, lentils and onions in the oil and stir through carefully to prevent the rice and lentils from breaking down to a paste. Taste and add salt if needed.

Serve this lovely rice dish with the moqueca (recipe on the previous page) or harissa and yogurt chicken kebabs (recipe below).

Tip I have served this rice dish topped with grilled haloumi cheese, or slices of charred aubergine as a vegetarian main. A large dollop of yoghurt on top with a sprinkling of za'atar round off this dish well.

Harissa and yoghurt chicken kebabs

A kebab elevates a braai from the ordinary to the extraordinary. I get a thrill from eating from a skewer and this kebab recipe makes the perfect topping for mujadara. There is some preparation involved, since the chicken is best marinated overnight, but after that, everything is very easy. A version of these kebabs is very popular in Greece, and it was my lunch every day for two weeks when I was on holiday on the small island of Paxos.

Serves 6

Preparation time 20 minutes plus overnight to marinate

Cooking time 10 minutes

YOU NEED

- 2 cups (500 ml) plain full-fat yoghurt
- ½ cup (125 ml) harissa
- juice of 2 lemons
- 6 skinless deboned chicken breasts, cut into equally sized cubes of about 4 cm
- 12–14 bamboo or steel skewers (soak bamboo skewers in water for 30 minutes before using)
- 20 dried apricots, cut in half (optional)
- chopped herbs for serving (I use thyme, parsley and mint)

THIS IS HOW

Place the yoghurt, harissa, lemon juice and chicken cubes in a strong plastic

bag and knead until the marinade is well combined with the chicken. (You can also do this in a bowl.)

Let the mixture stand in the fridge overnight. Thread the chicken cubes onto the skewers. Spread the cubes across 12–14 skewers. Leave a little space between each chicken cube to allow the grilling heat to reach the centre. (If using dried apricots, thread the apricot halves in between the chicken cubes.) Grill or braai the skewers until done, turning frequently to ensure that all sides are grilled. (Watch the apricots as they burn easily.)

Serve the kebabs on mujadara and top with a dollop of plain yoghurt and chopped herbs. >





Pudim

Another delight I brought back from my time in Brazil is *pudim*, although I was already familiar with the dessert. In the 1980s, I frequently experienced the joy of a Flanby dropping perfectly from its little plastic container, spilling its sweet caramel onto the plate. Flanbys are still available, but this fairly easy recipe makes a large custard caramel dessert. The French claim it as theirs, but this light, creamy and refreshing version is frequently served in Brazil and is simply called *pudim* (“pudding”). Using a cake ring tin makes for a more show-stopping presentation, but you can also use a deep round or square cake tin (however, do not use a springform tin, as the caramel will leak).

Serves 6–8

Preparation time 10 minutes

Cooking time 40 minutes

Cooling time 2½ hours

YOU NEED

- 1 cup (250 ml) sugar
- ½ cup (125 ml) cold water
- 6 eggs
- 2 x 385 g cans condensed milk
- milk – enough to fill two condensed milk cans
- 2-3 ℓ boiling water

THIS IS HOW

Make the caramel Place the sugar in a dry pan over low-to-medium heat and stir occasionally with a silicone spatula until all the sugar has melted and the syrup turns an amber colour.

Pour small amounts of the cold water into the syrup – take care, as the mixture will bubble quite violently but by stirring, it will calm down, at which point you add more water and continue stirring until you’ve poured half a cup in total.

When the syrup reaches a clear dark amber colour – beware not to burn the syrup since this can happen very quickly – remove the syrup from the heat and carefully pour it into the cake tin.

With the spatula, spread the syrup onto the inside surfaces of the tin until completely covered. This will ensure that the dessert drops out of the tin perfectly in shape.

Make the custard In a blender, combine 6 eggs, two tins of condensed milk and the same quantity of milk – I use the empty cans to measure the milk. Blend well.

Pour the egg mixture into the prepared tin through a sieve to prevent bubbles. Cover the top of the tin with foil. Crimp the edge of the foil tightly to the rim of the tin to seal it off well.

Place the tin in a deep pan or a wide pot and pour boiling water around the tin into the pan or pot allowing the

water to reach halfway up the side of the tin. Let the water simmer for 40 minutes on the stove, over low-to-medium heat. Should the water run dry, add more boiling water.

Carefully remove the tin from the pot or pan and remove the foil. The contents of the tin may appear to wobble, but leave the tin to reach room temperature (around 1 hour) before placing it in the fridge for 1½ hours.

Remove the set custard from the refrigerator and place the serving plate over the tin. Carefully turn the plate with the tin over to allow the contents to fall free from the tin. I enjoy this dessert served chilled, so if you’re not serving it immediately, return it to the fridge until you’re ready. **P**



AUTUMN TABLE

The heartbeat of the home

As the weather cools, there's no better way to warm the heart than by gathering around a lovingly set table to break bread – and enjoy other delectable dishes – with friends and family. We've compiled an autumn menu with recipes from Elmarie Berry's new cookbook, *The Table: The Heartbeat of the Home*, to add spice and conviviality to your next occasion.

TEXT, RECIPES AND STYLING **ELMARIE BERRY** PHOTOS **LE-ANDRA SCHWAGELE**





MENU

*Choose from the dishes below to
create a variety-filled table.*

Sweet potato with grilled
pears & ginger labneh

Roasted carrots with herb
dressing

Mushrooms with rice,
olives, chilli, basil, feta
& harissa

Lebanese shredded lamb
with rosmarino pasta

Cinnamon-butter
star-shaped brioche

Cucumber, mint, lemon
& melon salad

Italian potato salad

DESSERT

Gingerbread tiramisu

Sweet potato with grilled pears & ginger labneh

My grandmother always made this dish using prunes, but I love it with grilled pears. An unlikely, but mouth-watering, combination.

Serves 4

Preparation time 20 minutes

Cooking time 25 minutes

YOU NEED

- 4 sweet potatoes
- 7 tablespoons (105 ml) extra virgin olive oil
- coarse sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 pears, sliced
- 12 spring onions, sliced lengthways and finely chopped
- 1 fresh red chilli, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) balsamic glaze

FOR THE GINGER LABNEH

- 2 cups labneh (see recipe below)
- 200 g preserved ginger in syrup

THIS IS HOW

Preheat the oven to 220°C. Wash the sweet potatoes, cut them in half lengthways, then cut each half into three long wedges. Rub with 3 tablespoons (45 ml) olive oil, 2 teaspoons (10 ml) salt and a little pepper.

Lay the wedges skin side down on a baking tray and roast until soft but not mushy, about 25 minutes. Remove and allow to cool.

Heat 2 tablespoons (30 ml) olive oil in a pan, add the sliced pears and grill them until caramelized. Arrange the sweet potatoes and pears on a serving plate. Heat the remaining oil in a medium-sized saucepan and add the spring onions and chilli. Fry over medium heat for 4–5 minutes, stirring often so the chilli doesn't stick, then slowly pour the mixture over the sweet potatoes. Mix the labneh and preserved ginger together and spoon over the sweet potatoes and pears. Drizzle over the balsamic glaze.

Serve at room temperature.

MAKE YOUR OWN LABNEH

Labneh is a thick, creamy Middle Eastern strained yoghurt, known for its rich and tangy flavour. It's often used as a versatile ingredient in both savoury and sweet dishes or enjoyed on its own as a spread or dip. My friend Iné taught me how to make labneh from amasi and I make this weekly for my family as a substitute for cream cheese.

Makes 2 cups (500 ml)

Preparation time 5 minutes plus 12–48 hours of straining time

YOU NEED

- 1 kg full-fat plain yoghurt or 2 ℓ amasi
- ¾ teaspoon (3,75 ml) fine Himalayan salt

THIS IS HOW

Place the yoghurt or amasi in a medium-sized bowl, add the salt and mix well to combine. Line a colander with a piece of muslin or cheesecloth large enough to hang over the sides and place the colander over a bowl.

Transfer the yoghurt to the centre of the cheesecloth and fold in the overhang so that the yoghurt is completely covered. Place a heavy weight over the cheesecloth (a few cans or jars will do) and transfer the bowl to the refrigerator. Let the yoghurt drain for at least 12 hours and up to 48 hours.

After draining, discard the collected water. The remaining yoghurt should have lost at least half its volume and be very smooth and creamy, like cream cheese. Labneh keeps in the refrigerator in an airtight jar or container, sealed with a thin layer of olive oil on top, for up to five days. >



Roasted carrots with herb dressing

This herb dressing is perfect over salads, especially baby carrots. It's so simple to make and can be kept in the fridge for up to two weeks.

Serves 4–6

Preparation time 15 minutes

Cooking time 12–14 minutes

YOU NEED

- 800 g long baby carrots or regular carrots, peeled and stems trimmed to leave just a centimetre or two (see photo)
- 2 teaspoons (10 ml) cumin seeds
- 2 teaspoons (10 ml) honey
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) extra virgin olive oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon (3,75 ml) salt

FOR THE HERB DRESSING

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (60 ml) vinegar
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) sugar or xylitol
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 cup (250 ml) mixed fresh soft herbs, such as mint, parsley and coriander
- pinch of salt
- 1 cup (250 ml) extra virgin olive oil
- ground black pepper, for garnish

THIS IS HOW

Make the dressing Place all the ingredients in a blender and blend until combined.

Preheat the oven to 200°C. If using regular carrots, cut them into batons measuring 10 cm x 1,5 cm.

In a large bowl, mix the cumin seeds, honey, oil and salt. Add the carrots, toss well, then spread them out on a large baking tray lined with baking paper. You don't want to overcrowd the carrots, so use two trays if necessary.

Roast for 12–14 minutes, until the carrots are beginning to brown but still retain a little crunch. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool.

Serve the carrots at room temperature with the herb dressing, and garnish with black pepper.



Mushrooms with rice, olives, chilli, basil, feta & harissa

Prepared and served in the same pan, this delicious vegetarian dish is perfect as a main or side. Mushrooms will never taste this good cooked any other way.

Serves 4

Preparation time 20 minutes

Cooking time 55 minutes

YOU NEED

- 1 red onion, finely sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, finely sliced
- extra virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) cumin seeds
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) dried chilli flakes
- 1 cup (250 ml) uncooked brown rice
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) salt
- 3 ½ cups (830 ml) vegetable stock
- 4 large brown mushrooms
- sea salt
- 2 teaspoons (10 ml) harissa paste (see recipe to make your own on page 114)
- 12 olives, pitted and chopped
- 200 g ripe cherry tomatoes, halved
- 100 g feta, crumbled
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) balsamic vinegar

TO SERVE

- zest of 1 lemon
- handful of fresh basil leaves, chopped
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) plain yoghurt

THIS IS HOW

Preheat the oven to 200 °C. Place the onion and garlic in a large, shallow ovenproof casserole dish over medium-high heat, add 1 tablespoon of oil, the cumin seeds, chilli flakes and a splash of water. Cook for 5 minutes, or until softened, stirring regularly.

Stir in the rice, add the salt and stock and bring to the boil, then cover and simmer for 10 minutes.

Lightly score a criss-cross pattern into the stem side of each mushroom and sprinkle with a pinch of sea salt. Loosen the harissa with a drop of



water and spread it over each scored mushroom. Lay the mushrooms on the rice, harissa side up. Mix the olives, tomatoes and feta together and drizzle with balsamic vinegar. Top the mushrooms with the mixture and sprinkle some of it around them.

Bake covered for 30 minutes, or until the rice is cooked, the liquid has been absorbed and the mushrooms are soft. Take the lid off and bake uncovered for 10 minutes until the feta is golden.

To serve, spoon over the lemon zest, chopped basil and yoghurt. >

Lebanese shredded lamb with rosmarino pasta

This is your go-to dish for large family gatherings. It's delicious, bold and easy to make, and your family will come back for seconds. Tip from my mom: Add a ground coriander rub to the lamb and cook it overnight for the most tender meat.

Serves 6

Preparation time 20 minutes

Cooking time 4 hours 15 minutes

YOU NEED

- 2 kg leg of lamb
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) ground coriander
- 2 onions, sliced into rings

- ½ cup (125 ml) water
- 1 can (410 g) chopped tomatoes
- 1 cup (250 ml) white wine
- 3 cups (750 ml) boiling water
- 500 g rosmarino (rice-shaped) pasta

FOR THE TOPPING

- 2 rounds of feta
- zest and juice of 1 lemon
- pomegranate seeds
- fresh mint, chopped

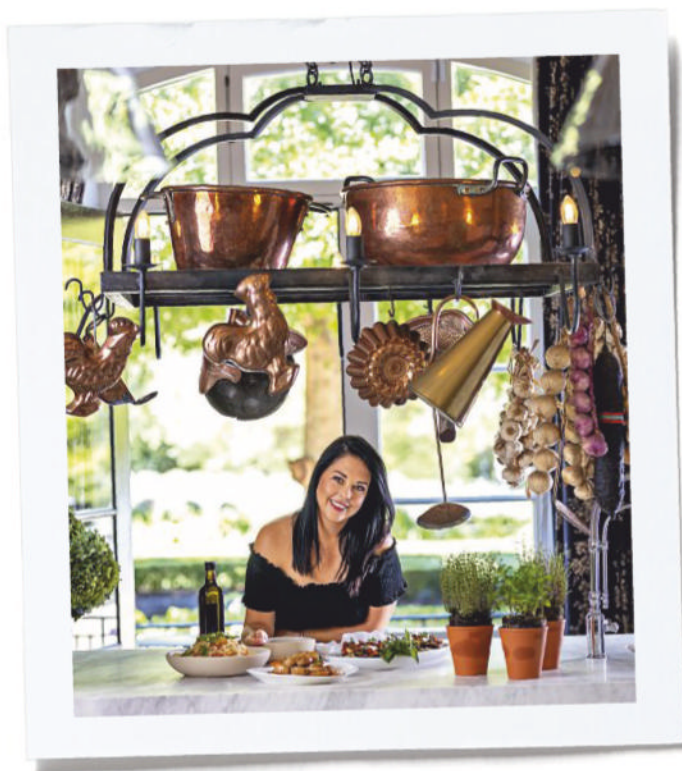
THIS IS HOW

Preheat the oven to 150°C. Rub the leg of lamb with ground coriander and season with salt and pepper. Spread the chopped onions over the bottom of an ovenproof dish. Add

the lamb and the ½ cup (125 ml) of water. Put on the lid or cover with foil and bake for 3–4 hours until tender. Take the lamb out and shred the meat. (For overnight cooking, roast the lamb at 220°C for 15 minutes, turn down the temperature to 130–140°C and leave it there for 8 hours.)

Mash the onions with a potato masher inside the dish, add the tomatoes, wine and the boiling water. Add the rosmarino and simmer on the stovetop for 8–10 minutes until al dente. Stir in the shredded meat and cook for another 5 minutes.

Sprinkle with the feta, lemon zest and juice, pomegranate seeds and mint. Season to taste. >



Nice to meet you!

Elmarie Berry is a chef, recipe developer, food blogger, stylist and photographer from Somerset West in the Western Cape. Her first cookbook, *Kosbaar*, was published in 2022, followed by *The Table: The Heartbeat of the Home* late in 2024. In the introduction of the latter, she writes: “I was so privileged to grow up in my grandmother’s kitchen, learning from both her and my mother, who, to this day, loves to bake and cook wholesome, traditional South African food. I love combining recipes from both my mom and granny’s kitchens – South African food with a Lebanese influence. Every Sunday, from when I was a little girl, my Lebanese grandmother would set her 16-seater table for lunch. She used her most beautiful tablecloth and her best silver. For the next two hours, around her table, we were royalty. This is why, for me, it all starts with the table. Planning and setting your table are the beginning of the experience you are about to give your guests. It is an act of love; a way to create a space for everyone to share parts of their lives and hearts around the table. Whether you serve egg on toast, a salad or Sunday roast, it is a meal to share together around the table. The table is the heartbeat of your home.”

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Cinnamon-butter star-shaped brioche

This delicious masterpiece is perfect for special celebrations.

Serves 8

Preparation time 25 minutes plus
1½ hours for rising

Baking time 30–35 minutes

YOU NEED

- 4½ cups (1 125 ml) cake wheat flour, plus extra for dusting
- 2 teaspoons (10 ml) salt
- 2 teaspoons (10 ml) sugar
- 1½ sachets (15 g) instant dry yeast
- 1½ cups (375 ml) lukewarm milk
- 50 g butter, melted
- 2 eggs
- icing sugar, for dusting

FOR THE CINNAMON-BUTTER FILLING

- 1 cup raw nuts, chopped
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) ground cinnamon or chai spice mix
- pinch of salt
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) fresh thyme leaves
- 100 g butter, softened

FOR THE EGG WASH

- 1 egg, whisked
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) milk

THIS IS HOW

Make the dough Place the flour, salt, sugar and yeast in a large mixing bowl. Stir to combine. Mix in the milk, butter and eggs. Knead the dough for about 7 minutes until it forms a ball. Set aside in a greased bowl covered with a clean tea towel to proof for an hour. Meanwhile, combine all the ingredients for the cinnamon-butter filling.

Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured surface. Divide into four equal pieces, then shape each into a ball, cover and leave to rest for 5 minutes.

Line a baking tray with baking paper and lightly dust it with flour.

Roll each piece of dough into a 25 cm-diameter disc. Place the first disc on a baking tray lined with baking paper. Top with a third of the cinnamon-butter mixture and spread it over the surface. Add a second dough disc, smoothing it down gently, and repeat the process with a third of the cinnamon butter. Add the third dough disc and spread over the remaining cinnamon butter. Finally, add the fourth dough disc.

Combine the egg and milk to make an egg wash and brush a thin layer around the edge of the dough disc.

Place an 8 cm glass in the middle of the stacked dough discs. Press lightly to form an imprint. Using a sharp knife, cut through all the layers of dough to create 16 pie-shaped pieces, working from the glass imprint outwards. (I find it easiest to start with 4 cuts, then halve each one, and then halve again, so there are 16 dough strips radiating from the glass imprint.)

Take two adjacent strips of dough and twist them away from each other twice, then pinch the ends together into a point. Repeat with the remaining pairs of dough strips until you have an 8-point star. Pinch the points together again if needed. Lightly cover the bread with plastic wrap and leave it to rise until puffy, approximately 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Brush the surface of the star bread with egg wash and bake for 30–35 minutes, until golden brown and cooked through. Dust with icing sugar. >



Cucumber, mint, lemon & melon salad

This salad reminds me of my Middle Eastern roots with its fresh cucumber, mint and lemon, and is a firm favourite on the table in our home.

Serves 4–6

Preparation time 20 minutes

YOU NEED

- 1 green melon
- 1 shallot, halved lengthways and finely sliced (40 g)
- 1½ fresh green chillies, finely sliced into strips (deseed for less heat)
- 1 large cucumber, peeled and halved lengthways
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) salt
- 60 g lamb's lettuce
- handful of fresh dill, roughly chopped
- handful of fresh basil, picked
- handful of fresh mint, picked
- edible flowers, for garnish

FOR THE MINT & ZA'ATAR DRESSING

- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) lemon juice
- 4½ tablespoons (67,5 ml) olive oil
- 1¼ teaspoons (6,25 ml) dried mint
- 1½ teaspoons (6,25 ml) za'atar

THIS IS HOW

Make the dressing Whisk all the ingredients in a small jug. Set aside.

Use a melon baller to scoop out the flesh from the melon. Add the melon, shallot and chillies to a bowl. Scoop out the watery centre of the cucumber, then cut the cucumber at an angle into 5 mm-thick slices. Add to the bowl together with the salt. Mix well, then add the lamb's lettuce and herbs. Toss gently, garnish with edible flowers, and serve immediately.

Italian potato salad

This is not your ordinary potato salad. It is light and fresh and deserves a place on your table.

Serves 6–8

Preparation time 20 minutes

Cooking time 30 minutes

YOU NEED

- 1,5 kg baby potatoes
- 1 red onion, finely sliced
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) finely grated lemon rind
- ½ cup (125 ml) lemon juice
- ⅓ cup (80 ml) extra virgin olive oil
- 4 fresh red chillies, deseeded and finely shredded
- ⅓ cup (80 ml) baby capers, rinsed
- 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- ⅓ cup (80 ml) fresh parsley, chopped
- ⅓ cup (80 ml) fresh dill, chopped
- 100 g fresh rocket

THIS IS HOW

Place the potatoes in a large saucepan of salted cold water over a high heat. Bring to the boil and cook for 20 minutes or until the potatoes are tender. Drain, then set aside to cool. Slice the potatoes in half, or into thirds if larger.

Meanwhile, place the onion, lemon rind and juice into a glass bowl to pickle, and set aside.

Heat the oil in a pan over a medium heat. Add the chillies and capers and cook for 6 minutes or until crisp. Add the garlic and cook for 3 minutes.

When ready to serve, place the potatoes, parsley, dill, rocket and pickled onion in a large serving dish. Season to taste. Add the chilli-caper mixture and the pan juices to the salad and drizzle with the onion pickling liquid. Gently toss to combine. >



Gingerbread tiramisu

Tiramisu is already a star, but the gingerbread spice mix will add a touch of festiveness to any occasion.

Serves 6

Preparation time 30 minutes plus
4 hours of overnight chilling time

YOU NEED

- 1 cup (250 ml) whipping cream
- 1 cup (250 ml) mascarpone, softened
- ¼ cup (60 ml) sugar
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) vanilla extract
- 1½ cups (375 ml) cooled espresso or very strong coffee
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) coffee liqueur (I use Kahlua)
- 24-28 ladyfinger (Boudoir) biscuits
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) cocoa powder

FOR THE GINGERBREAD SPICE MIX

- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) ground cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) ground ginger
- 1½ tablespoons (22,5 ml) ground allspice
- 1½ teaspoons (7,5 ml) ground cloves
- 1½ teaspoons (7,5 ml) ground nutmeg
- pinch of ground black pepper

THIS IS HOW

Mix all the ingredients for the spice mix together in a small bowl and set aside.

Beat the whipping cream until medium-stiff peaks form. Set aside. Mix the mascarpone, sugar and vanilla until combined. Using a spatula, fold in the whipped cream, scraping the bottom and sides of the bowl. Then use an electric mixer to beat the mixture until smooth.

Combine the coffee, 4 tablespoons (60 ml) of the gingerbread spice mix and the liqueur in a shallow plate and lightly dip each ladyfinger into the coffee-liqueur mixture. Do not soak the biscuits or they will become soggy.

Line the base of a square baking dish with a layer of biscuits. Spread half of the cream mixture over the biscuits. Repeat with another layer of dipped biscuits and cream mixture. Chill for a minimum of 4 hours or overnight.

Mix the rest of the spice mix with the cocoa powder and dust the tiramisu with the mixture before serving. 

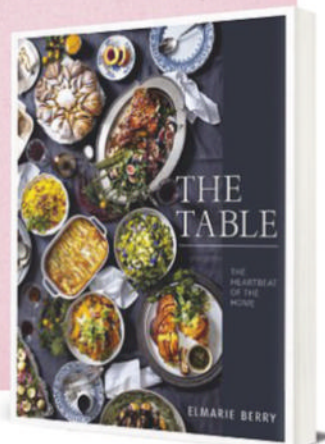


Buy the book

With a focus on easy yet flavourful recipes, Elmarie Berry's *The Table: The Heartbeat of the Home* is your go-to guide to effortless entertaining. From casual gatherings to special celebrations, each recipe is designed to impress without the fuss, ensuring that every meal becomes a cherished memory.

Join her on this culinary journey that blends the vibrant flavours of South Africa with the rich heritage of Middle Eastern cuisine, guided by the cherished recipes of Elmarie's Lebanese granny. In this cookbook, tradition meets innovation as generations collide around the dining table, creating unforgettable moments with every dish. The book is published by Penguin Random House and costs about R400.

 penguinrandomhouse.co.za





Savoury & sweet

Combine two South African stalwarts – biltong and figs – to create this delicious, creamy salad, a sure winner for autumn braais or lazy, long lunches with friends and family. From Ina Paarman's *My Favourite Recipes*.



PHOTO MICKY HOYLE

Biltong and fig salad with blue cheese dressing

Serves 4–5

Preparation time 5 minutes

YOU NEED

- 2 x 30 g punnets rocket leaves
- 6 fresh or preserved whole green figs, cut into quarters
- 200 g very finely sliced (paper thin) semi-dry beef biltong
- 125 g wedge creamy blue cheese
- Ina Paarman's Creamy Blue Cheese Dressing

THIS IS HOW

Line a large salad platter or 4–5 medium-sized plates with rocket leaves. Dot fig wedges here and there on the leaves. Scatter the finely sliced biltong over the salad. Crumble over the blue cheese.

Shake the dressing well and drizzle over the salad just before serving.

VARIATIONS

Replace the biltong with crispy bacon pieces, or use Ina Paarman's Sun-dried Tomatoes in a Garlic and Herb Vinaigrette for a vegetarian option.

If you don't like blue cheese, replace with feta, and dress the salad with Ina Paarman's Creamy Herb Dressing.



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My Favourite Recipes boasts more than 100 of Ina's choice recipes developed over a 50-year career. Available from certain branches of Exclusive Books or at takealot.com.



Longing for the sound of silence

It's something that is becoming increasingly scarce in modern society, even in the tiniest of towns. Bring back the silence, pleads **Peter van Noord**.

ILLUSTRATION DIEK GROBLER



Prieska looks like a pleasant place. Quiet, as befits a Northern Cape town. Lovelier and neater than one would expect. The roads are mostly intact, many houses boast a fresh coat of paint, and the litter in the streets hasn't yet reached the levels found in so many other towns. Naartjie trees have been planted on a median between two roads, there for everyone's use...

Clearly, the people who live here care about their town.

It's also so much greener than you would expect, probably because one forgets that the mighty Orange flows – wide and stately – past the town. On the road from Britstown, in particular, endless stretches of

nothingness unfold before you, making you forget all about the existence of green. One straight 27km section is followed by a gentle 3° to the left. Another 18km, 1° to the right, then another 22km... that's how it goes for the entire 130km. And it's dry on both sides, right up to the horizon. Flat, arid, drab and dusty. Seemingly lifeless. Even the *Prosopis* trees that have taken over the Northern Cape appear to be losing the battle.

TOMORROW WE TRAVEL the long road to the Free State and the fuel-gauge needle is dangerously close to the reserve light. We must fill up now. We turn into the TotalEnergies petrol station on Prieska's main road. Turn off the bakkie and look up, directly at a notice that prohibits

clients from using alcohol or drugs. "Any form of smoking" is also strictly forbidden. Quite a classy place this, I think in the silence.

Then, suddenly, I become aware of a tremor that increases in intensity until it seems to emanate from my seat. It vibrates through my entire body, almost as if it wants to take control of my senses. It becomes stronger, harder, more urgent – and insistent – until, eventually, it feels as if the aliens have arrived to take us away. Oomph-oomph-oomphhhh, it pulsates, just a few metres away from the driver's window. I hear some rude lyrics through the vibrations.

A Toyota Corolla has stopped on the other side of the pump. Tenth generation, the one that made its appearance around 2006. A single

occupant, the driver, sits low and leans against the door pillar. All the windows have been rolled down. A party without people or place. I don't even have to hold my phone outside the bakkie window to allow Shazam to tell me who is making such a racket. Within seconds, the app shows "Move Bitch (feat. Ludacris, Mystikal & I-20)" by a group with the very apt name of Disturbing tha Peace...

IS THERE STILL a place to be found where silence is sacred? Over the past 20 years, we've even witnessed the precious quiet gradually slip through our fingers in the tiny Swartland town where we live. Here, where only a handful of spaza shops, a decent hotel, a clinic and a fertiliser factory are found. And, of course, an unfortunate liquor store where quarts of beer and cheap "rooiroppie" wine are the top sellers.

I remember the night in April 2006 when we slept in what is now the Wit Huis op Koringberg for the first time. In the empty old house, equipped with only a mattress and a few bathroom essentials, I lay staring at the high ceiling, feeling amazed at the sheer silence that was broken only by a group of eagle owls repeatedly calling "hoo-hoooo". And the church clock chimed every hour, updating us on how deep into the night we found ourselves. The greatest commotion was caused by a midnight train as it went sailing past, causing the entire house to vibrate.

As the years have passed, as suburban refugees have gradually moved in and sliced up plots, and as facebrick houses have appeared with unwanted (and truly unnecessary) coils of barbed wire marking their territory, the precious silence has receded.

Each person has brought along their own particular brand of noise: naturally there's the thump-thump-thumping music of the *onderdorp* liquor-store visitors; the carousing of party-goers in the *bodorp*; the roaring

"There's always a bored, yappy little dog to be heard, always a child who makes one wonder if it has Tourette's or is on the spectrum, or is simply throwing a tantrum."

motorcycle brigade showing off in front of the drunkards on the main road. (And, of course, the drunkards make their own contribution. From 9 on a Saturday morning, they let loose with the kind of language that makes your head spin...)

Then there are the guesthouse residents who bring their dirt bikes and quad bikes and make a racket on Saturday or Sunday afternoons. There are the parents who spoil their children with a 50cc... Today I understand why my father used to call these ungodly abominations "pesky little gnats". There are the truck drivers who make liberal use of their exhaust brakes (nevermind that this is illegal in any town), the reversing delivery drivers who couldn't care less about the "beep-beep-beep" of their vehicle's warning system. The noise factor increases noticeably just before Christmas. This is when the end-of-year bonuses have purchased dropped suspensions and free-flow exhausts that create endless fun when combined with the aforementioned *rooiroppie* wine. Street races, fantastic doughnuts, stopping and hitting the accelerator until the poor car screams to high heaven. Oh, and let us not forget the cheap boom boxes that distort so beautifully...

Of course, there are the poor sods who can only dream of receiving a Christmas bonus. The holes in their exhausts grow ever larger, and they make their own special contribution to murdering the peace and quiet.

There's always a bored, yappy little dog to be heard, always a child who makes one wonder if it has Tourette's or is on the spectrum, or is simply throwing a tantrum that makes you wish you could

seal its mouth shut with duct tape. There are the speed freaks and those who believe that a wave or nod isn't enough; it's essential to also honk your hooter.

Nevermind the house alarms that are triggered without getting an armed response, or any kind of response at all. There's the ping of WhatsApp groups where morose people complain about peacocks making a noise and messing on their stoep, moan about the sour milk they bought at the local shop or scold "the children from Hopland" who dare to wander the streets at night to admire the Christmas tree at the entrance to the town.

And last, but certainly not least: there are the idlers. Those guys in their lorries or Hiluxes who quickly pull over outside the shop and waste valuable fuel while they talk on their phones, creating unwanted, and always ill-timed, "white" noise.

Ironically enough, it was the noisy folk who united to ensure that the church clock, of all things, was silenced. Because, would you believe it, that reassuring sound every hour was keeping them awake.

On a positive note: Leaf blowers haven't yet reached our town... and the owls have never left. When the rowdy people have run out of steam late at night, silence descends over the town. And then you hear it: "Hoo-hoo", followed by "hoo-hoo-hooooo" from another direction.

HOW ARE WE going to restore and preserve the silence? We urgently need help. Who remembers Zibi, the ostrich who reminded us on every street corner to throw our litter in a bin? Maybe we need a Zibi to remind us about that old saying: Silence is golden. 🦋



Over the rainbows...

By **Martin Kellett** from Stanford

- Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Overberg -

A dramatic silhouette is framed by a double rainbow in this picture from the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley in the Overberg. It was only later that I realised just how much this image captured the spirit of something I had been unconsciously seeking for a long time.

For years, I've been visiting this amazing country for work and business, and I've been captivated by a "somethingness" that I couldn't quite describe or explain. It was a combination of landscapes, light, skies, people, smells, sights and sounds. But it was more than that; the somethingness was about citizens, about community, about ruralness, honest toil and a seeking of a fulfilling way of being.

Yet it was even more. It was a richness of personal spirit, a creative and finer way of living.

I had no idea it had a name until I saw this magazine on

a shelf: "Platteland". Even with my elementary Afrikaans I knew that this name captured the concept completely. A better place to be, and a place to be better. 

Show us the places of your heart

Martin wins an Elana's gift pack to the value of R1 000. This Robertson company preserves food just the way your grandmother used to. The most delicious green figs, peach halves and lip-smacking quinces; salads such as curried peaches, slaphakskeentjies (sweet mustard onion salad) and even waterblommetjies; olives; peach, fig and other jams and marmalades; cordials and balsamic reductions; and melt-in-your-mouth fudge. They despatch their products all over the country but if you want their thin pizza bases, you'll have to visit the shop in Robertson.  elanas.co.za

Send a photograph of a place that lies close to your heart (a minimum of 1 MB) and a description of 200 words to  helloplatteland@gmail.com, and you could stand a chance of winning a gift pack from Elana's.



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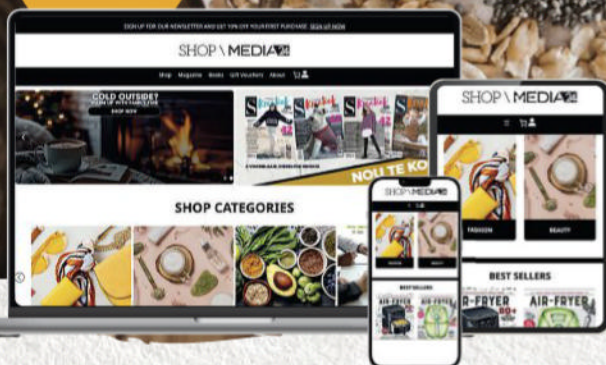
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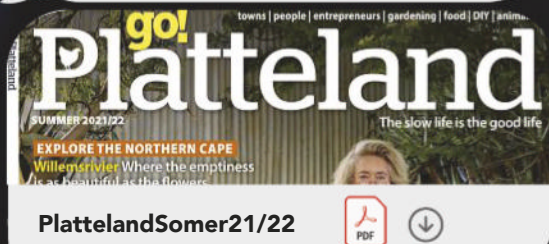
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