

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

go! Platteland

SPRING 2024

The slow life is the good life

FLORA FROM THE KNERSVLAKTE

Makes magic with
roosterkoek &
koeksisters

Join us for a
wander through

Vosburg

Softening the grief

of losing a
beloved pet

PHOTO ESSAY

Windmills
of the Karoo

Soetmelksvlei

A bridge to the past

JAN MENTOOR

The broom-maker
of Malmesbury

Meet the rainbow of
Niekerkshoop...

FOOD

Errieda's
spring table
Baby veg takes
centre stage

Sourdough as medicine

Meet the bread evangelists
baking for health and happiness



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SPRING 2024

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PHOTOS GREG COX, SAMANTHA REINDERS, IAN DU TOIT, PETERVAN NOORD AND BABYLONSTOREN



Cover

PHOTO BABYLONSTOREN

MARTEN VAN STADEN, WHO IS FEATURED ON OUR COVER, WAS THE MILL AND DISTILLERY SUPERVISOR AT SOETMELKSVLEI UNTIL HIS PASSING IN JUNE. OUR SINCERE SYMPATHIES GO TO HIS FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES.



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EDITORS' LETTER



PHOTO IAN GOODES

By hand... and with love!

Every now and then, we have a first-time visitor to our house who sees the crockery we use and remarks, "How lovely! Where did you buy these?"

Then we laugh: "We made those plates ourselves, in pottery class."

"What? With your own hands?"

"Yes, of course, but most of them came out rather skew and crooked."

"But each piece is unique and... authentic? Man, you are artisans!"

Is there anything more clichéd than the terms "artisan" and "artisanal", words hijacked by canny marketers long before the Covid-19 pandemic and turned into meaningless buzzwords? (Just see how hard it is these days to get your hands on a knitted scarf that is not "artisanal" or "authentic". Or gin, bread, pizza, cheese, coffee, a quail egg...)

What the pandemic – amazingly enough, almost five years ago now – did bring about was turning numerous consumers of such handmade artisanal items into producers. Thousands who quit the concrete jungle for the platteland now bake their own sourdough bread. They have beehives and chickens,

grow their own vegetables, tackle DIY projects, knit, crochet and sew.

While working on this Spring issue of *Platteland*, we rediscovered what fun it is to work with your hands.

Marvel at the craftsmen and -women of Soetmelksvlei, a living history museum where you can experience life on a Boland farm in the year 1897, and where flour is freshly ground every day at the picturesque mill on our cover (page 24). And at the wondrous roosterkoek and koeksisters that Flora Linnert of Vanrhynsdorp bakes (page 58); the thatch brooms that Jan Mentoer of Malmesbury makes and sells (page 86); the authentic Swartland sourdough bread that Carien Hugo Waring bakes in Moorreesburg; and the sourdough bread that Janet Cruywagen, a former church minister, now teaches others to bake in Melville.

Keep in mind, however, that just because you made something by hand and with love, it does not automatically make you an artisan or craftsperson. You work with your hands... and that is good enough.

Happy reading!



The Summer 2024/25 issue will be distributed country-wide from **22 November 2024**. 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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go! Namibia

2024 TRAVEL GUIDE

Inside info

- Eat like a local in Windhoek
- Secret spots in Swakop

KAVANGO TO CHOBE

Camp on the banks of a wild river

NYAE NYAE PANS

Braai under a baobab
in the land of the San

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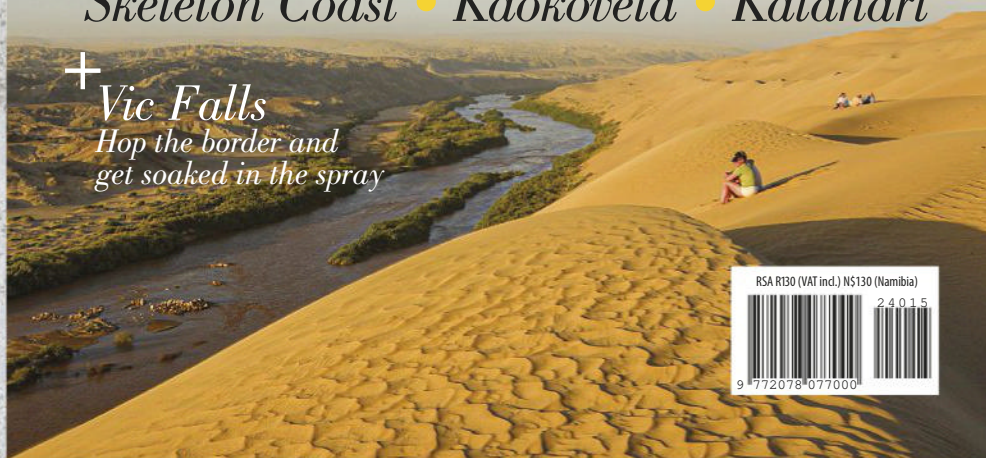
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Chitchat



winning
letter

We found our real home

I think this might be an unusual letter for *Platteland*. But it's inspired by the wonderful letters written by people who would probably be regarded as "typical" *Platteland* readers. So often the letters are from, or about towns we have visited, or

passed through. And many of them are now part of our new life.

We were born and raised in Johannesburg. Merrill's family were travellers – campers and caravaners. My family hardly did any travelling at all. Merrill and I, with our respective spouses, then spent,

coincidentally, 39 years abroad. For our own reasons we decided to come home; she in 2013 and I in 2015. Two years later, when we were 69, we were married, but our travelling had already begun.

We were then living in Joburg, and on our first road trip to Hout Bay (family connection) in 2016, we went via Kimberley. Our stopover was in Britstown and within half an hour of leaving the wonderful Transkaroo Country Lodge the next morning, the sheer beauty of the Karoo made us pull over to the side of the road to just gaze about us in wonder. And we haven't stopped gazing.

Over the next three years, we travelled this beautiful country extensively. Where possible, we avoided the N roads, stopped a lot, and spoke to the locals as much as possible. We also took note of the information from the wonderful books published by Julianne du Toit and Chris Marais. In 2019, the year we turned 71, we finally visited Prince Albert. We extended our four-day stay by another two days, and decided that we had found our paradise. We bought our new home,

Peter and Merrill Wilson from Prins Albert will receive an Ina Paarman gift pack worth R1 200 for her 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 recipe for Baltic potato salad 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.

returned to Joburg and sold our house there within six weeks, and the foot of the Swartberg has been our home ever since.

We continue to trawl our country, still avoiding the N roads where we can, and continue to explore all the little towns that we feel define our country. After a lifetime of living in city/suburbia, we have reached the point where the occasional trip to, say George, usually out of necessity, has us anxious to get home. Amazing to imagine that after our lives in Joburg, Sydney, Toronto,

San Francisco and London, we can't wait to get back to our platteland home with no robots and only a handful of shops.

We believe that we are now plattelanders, except for a bit of a shortage of Afrikaans to hand, and we get more pleasure out of our local magazines, like *Platteland*, now than we ever did from those international magazines that we thought were contributing to our cosmopolitan sophistication all those years ago.

Peter and Merrill Wilson
PRINCE ALBERT



Stop off in Richmond for a change

Over the years I often drove past Richmond, occasionally stopping there to fill up, and sometimes thought about the annual book festival held in this Northern Cape town.

It was only recently, however, after my mother moved there, that I got to know the place and its people. The town has numerous gems, like the renovated guest houses, the Vetmuis Plaaskombuis, the antiques shop, the second-hand bookshop, art galleries such as the Karoo Fine Art Gallery, and the horse museum – one of only two museums in the world dedicated to the saddle horse. The man who is responsible for keeping the museum going is Johan Tolken, the NG Church sexton. His wife, Wilna, is the matron at Huis Driefontein, where Tannie Tillie sits until late at night building jigsaw puzzles.

The book festival took a knock due to Covid-19 restrictions, and it's struggling to get going again, even though residents are still talking about how the town used to bustle with festival goers.

Early morning, rubbish bins are emptied into a trailer towed by a tractor, while Hendrik and his team at the municipal shed take stock of what's needed for the day's tasks. Tannie Marinette arrives at Vetmuis with freshly baked goodies to open up as BKB employees start queueing for coffee. Moksie drives past and waves. Soon after, the first GP-license-plate visitor stops for breakfast. The sun's

rays touch the church spire. The day is well underway. I like this town where people know your name and ask with compassion how things are going.

To paraphrase a line from a Coenie de Villiers' song: "Even if you just drive past here, something is left behind in you." Feel free to stop off in Richmond and experience the Karoo.

Stephan Hauman
BOSTON, BELLVILLE >



Home is where the heart is

It is with a heavy heart that my sister and I are packing up our things again. Even the Little Karoo is uncommonly sorrowful rather than scorching. It's quite fitting, as we would genuinely rather stay at home. The river is rising... and probably soon our tears will too.

Stellenbosch may once have been "platteland", but these days when the students roll into town – in Mini Coopers, Volkswagen Tiguan or their dad's new Hilux bakkie (all parked on the pavements around Dagbreek) – the place feels more like a city. This is when a terrible longing for the desolate plains settles like a lump in your throat and you wish your sister would turn her faithful old blue car, Snippie, around and head back east.

Here, I always miss the people of the Karoo, who are so attuned to one another and so dependent on nature. The people who understand that your neighbour is the only one who can come to your aid in a moment of need and is therefore your most cherished friend. At home, the community is all you have. They don't wear the current fashions and don't obsess over Burnt's latest activewear drop.

In the Karoo, it's the important things that matter. Quality time and freshly picked lavender flowers and arriving in time to relieve the neighbour sitting next to Oom Jan's hospital bed. It's drinking mugs of coffee in the bakkie while driving around the district on a Sunday afternoon, or up Koueveld Pass to see the snow, wearing winter coats and warm gloves. It's the privilege of braaiing on Little Saturday and being able to bask in the winter sun with your cat. Actually, it's just the slower pace of life and a focus on all these things.

Now, the recollections of seven weeks at home are just memories, and the townspeople hear our stories about the city from my mother. We drive past the bare oak trees in Victoria Street, and in the eyes of these two Stellenbosch students, it doesn't feel like spring at all.

Marthé Rossouw
LADISMITH



Why feed this hate?

Dear Johan van Zyl, my name is Mieke and I am a 28-year-old South African with an Afrikaans father and German mother, and grew up in Graaff-Reinet in the Eastern Cape. Our home has always been scattered with *Platteland* magazines, which I loved reading. I loved the articles of small South African towns, the recipes and celebration of culture.

However, I was absolutely disturbed and disappointed by the autumn issue of *Platteland* that included an article on Orania. As a young South African, I think it's appalling to have an article that celebrates a town that is founded on racist ideologies. I'm a proud Afrikaner and love the language and culture. I also understand the history, but this article doesn't do that; it doesn't build up the Afrikaans people; you're fuelling a deep hate that laced the Afrikaans people for so long and it's not constructive to building a South Africa or a global cultural awareness.

This article is racist and filled with far-right agendas. It is so harmful and not only reflects your own agenda and poor journalism but lack of tact and care. As your main audience is Afrikaans-speaking and the majority are White (sic) South Africans, this article just feeds hate and racist thinking and is not proactive or enlightening in any way.

I would be so ashamed to have my name tied to this. I know South Africa has many challenges but building an idealistic town based on racist ideas brings only more hate, discrimination and destruction. And more so celebrating the man who constructed Apartheid (sic). I am at a loss for words.

You aren't building up South Africa, you are feeding a hate that is so ingrained in our country, and from the looks of this article, in you.

If this is what *Platteland* stands for, then you've missed the point of what it means to live in the platteland. To be part of a community, to be part of South Africa.

Ulrike Mieke Marais-Campleman
BRIGHTON AND HOVE, UK

Letter received in English. – Eds

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News & diary

The trees are starting to bud, the days are getting longer and the mood is lighter. Celebrate spring with an open-garden experience or a wildflower show, treat your senses to the best cheese and wine in South Africa, or choose an activity from our action-packed diary.

COMPILED BY ANRI MATTHEE





ABOVE Margaret van Rooyen is one of the volunteers who helps to set up the show each year.

TOP The Ramskop Wildflower Garden is a wonderful place to see many different floral species in their natural habitat.

LEFT The annual wildflower show turns the NG Church in Clanwilliam into a pilgrimage site for flower enthusiasts.

The joy of wildflowers

After the veld has been awakened by the winter rains, volunteers venture into the Clanwilliam mountains to collect flowers. Many hands contribute to the impressive wildflower show held in the old NG Church building, known today as the "Flower Church".

It's thanks to this community effort that the Clanwilliam Wild Flower Show has become a favourite destination for flower enthusiasts and botanists over the decades.

The region is especially rich in species because four of the eight districts in the Cape Floral Kingdom converge here, and the easiest way to see more than 360 of these in one place is at the Flower Church.

"It has rained a lot and we're looking forward to a good flower

season," says Alicia Erasmus, who handles marketing for the show.

Boeta Genis designed the layout of this year's show, which will once again captivate visitors with the most beautiful wild flowers of the Cederberg. Apart from an appreciation of the flora, which truly comes into its own in the sacred exhibition area, the organisers also want to place the spotlight on the importance of nature conservation.

The first landscape exhibition was held in the old town hall in 1961 and later moved to the Flower Church. "This year marks the 52nd show in the church," says Alicia. "The theme is 'Nostalgia' and we are going to honour the exhibitions of yesteryear and pay homage to the people who started the flower show."

What's more, award-winning landscape designer, artist and botanist Leon Kluge will be present to open the show. It was under his leadership that South Africa won gold in May at the Chelsea Flower Show (see page 113).

When you're in the area, do also visit the Ramskop Wildflower Garden to admire the wide variety of flower species.

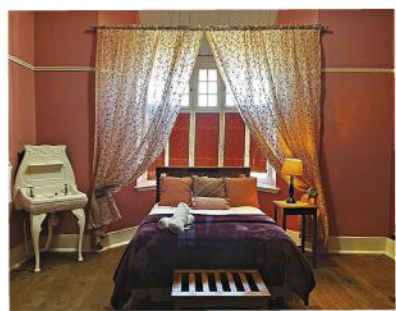
The Flower Church is open from 23 August to 3 September. Tickets are available at the door at R80 per person (R10 for children).

Contact 📧 bookings@clanwilliam.info
 🌐 clanwilliamwildflowershow.co.za
 📘 @ClanwilliamWildflowerShow
 📷 @clanwilliamflowershow
 ☎️ 027 482 2024 >



Rent a castle!

The newly restored historic Dunn's Castle outside Piketberg in the Swartland is the perfect destination for anyone who has ever wanted to spend the night or have a party in a Victorian castle.

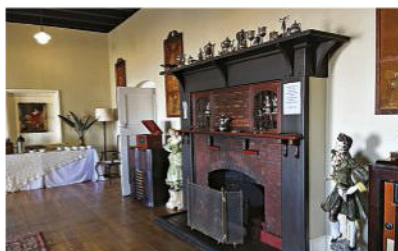


TOP The impressive stone castle at the foot of the Piketberg.

ABOVE One of the eight bedrooms.

Gems like the original French basin lend authenticity to the space.

LEFT The castle's dining room with its larger-than-life fireplace. Here, a long table can be prepared for you and your guests.



Aside from the Castle of Good Hope, which was completed in 1679, South Africa is hardly well known for its castles. Not like Italy, France, Ireland or Germany that boast 45 000, 40 000, 30 000 and 25 000 castles respectively.

But we do have a few (around 40), and the majestic 122-year-old Dunn's Castle at the foot of the Piketberg, next to the R399 to Velddrif, is one of them. The original owner, Englishman George Herbert Dunn, immigrated to South Africa due to a serious lung condition. Ten years later, he spared no expense in building his U-shaped dream house with a Norman tower and 14 rooms. Construction began in 1892 and was completed in 1902. Many important guests such as Cecil John Rhodes, Rudyard Kipling and Sir Herbert Baker frequently spent the night here. It has even been speculated that the castle was designed by Sir Herbert, who was a good friend of Dunn.

Dunn's Castle was built with stones from the area that were transported

to the site by ox-wagon, where they were cut and finished. The nails were imported from England, as was the cement (the beams in the cellar rest on 12 of these vats, filled with concrete). Oregon pine, teak and birch were mostly used for the interior woodwork. The floor is birchwood and the roof beams Norfolk pine, a characteristic of Sir Herbert's buildings. The roof tiles and hand basins are from France.

Cape Portland Cement bought the castle in 1922 as accommodation. It was occupied by a succession of general managers between 1927 and 1988, after which various owners managed the castle as a guesthouse.

The newly restored, fully equipped castle is now owned by Johan and Ancil Bester and offers eight Victorian-style bedrooms with room for up to 16 guests to sleep (not all the rooms are en suite but each has its own fireplace), along with reception, kitchen, swimming and braai facilities, as well as a wonderful view of the Swartland Valley. And at R6 500 per night for the entire castle (only R406 p.p.) you and your guests can give free rein to your imagination that you're true royalty.

Contact dunnscastle.co.za [f Dunn's Castle Guesthouse](https://www.facebook.com/dunnscastle_guesthouse) [@dunnscastle_guesthouse](https://www.instagram.com/dunnscastle_guesthouse) dunnscastle@mweb.co.za [022 913 2470](tel:0229132470)

KWV comes out tops

After almost a century of refinement, KWV has become synonymous with tradition and exceptional wines and spirits. The cellar won several top-10 awards at this year's Investec Trophy Wine Show, as well as the overall trophy for the most successful wine producer.

Of the 640 entries, only 19 wines were awarded trophies – and two of these were from KWV's The Mentors range. The 2022 The Mentors Chenin Blanc achieved an overall score of 98/100 and was announced as the best Chenin Blanc. Aromas of ripe mango, apricot and sweet peach, and a creamy palate with hints of zesty lime, make it ideal for pairing with vegetable dishes, rich fish or creamy chicken.

The other outstanding achiever

was the 2020 The Mentors Canvas. With a score of 97/100, it was declared the best red wine not made in the Bordeaux style. This complex red blend, with aromas of plum, cherry and raspberry, and flavours of cinnamon and blackberry, was aged in French oak barrels for 18 months, and is perfect for pairing with red meat, especially game.

The unwooded 2023 Cathedral Cellar Sauvignon Blanc also achieved a score of 97/100 as well as a gold award.

Contact kwv.co.za [f @kwvonline](https://www.facebook.com/kwvonline)

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trophywineshow.co.za (for more information about the prize winners and an online shop where the prize-winning wines can be bought) >



WIN! Two readers stand a chance to win a KWV gift box worth R528 each. Each box contains a bottle of The Mentors Canvas and a bottle of The Mentors Chenin Blanc. Go to platteland.net, click on "Win" and fill in the form with the key-words "Spring" and "KWV". The closing date is 22 November 2024.



ABOVE KWV winemakers Kobus van der Merwe and Izele van Blerk are proud of the cellar's awards.

ABOVE RIGHT Master of Wine Lisa Perrotti-Brown from the USA was one of the judges at The Trophy Wine Show.

RIGHT Mandla Patson Mathonsi, one of the local judges.

The gouda that lays the golden egg

Woolworths' 10-month aged gouda beat more than 1 000 other entries to be crowned South Africa's Dairy Product of the Year at the biggest and oldest national dairy championship in Africa, the Agri-Expo South African Dairy Championships.

This is the fourth time that this top cheese, which Lactalis South Africa makes specially for Woolworths, has been announced as Product of the Year.

"As the cheese ages, it develops notes of caramel, nuts and even a slight sharpness. By this stage the cheese has already broken down well, which means it melts in the mouth and has a slight crunch due to the cheese crystals," says Arnold Nieuwoudt, plant manager at Lactalis.

He adds that the cheese deserves a place of honour on any cheeseboard but is also delicious with pasta or in a steak sauce.

Contact  cheeses.co.za



Woolworths' aged gouda is South Africa's Dairy Product of the Year.



Babylonstoren's new book

The *Babylonstoren* coffee-table book is a visual feast, a true showcase of this working fruit, wine and guest farm near Franschhoek, as well as the many experts, artists, and craftspeople who keep it running smoothly.

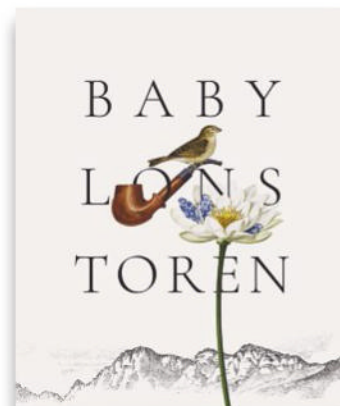
In chapters with titles such as "Soil," "Pruning," "Wild," "Taste," and "Learning", journalist Sophia van Taak explores the renowned historical garden, farm, luxurious guesthouse, spa, winery and farm-to-fork restaurants.

Its more than 250 pages present a comprehensive overview of the farm and make for a wonderful keepsake after a visit, or a lovely introduction for someone who has never been there.

Stories about the garden focus on

the soil, gardeners and main fruit cultivars, highlighting the region's vibrant food history and seasonal crops. At Babylonstoren, everything is dictated by the seasons and readers are introduced to the master pruner, soil expert and entomologist who work to maintain the delicate balance in the garden. Other stories feature the butcher, baker, and cheese and ice-cream maker who provide seasonal delights to the farm's shops and restaurants. There are also stories about the donkeys, Chianina cattle, water buffalo, chickens and insects, as well as the experts and volunteers who care for them.

Babylonstoren is priced at R790 and is available at the farm or online at  shop.babylonstoren.com.





ABOVE Hamley is one the puppies growing up in a loving foster home thanks to volunteer Stephni van Vuuren. **LEFT** The group sessions are great fun but form an important part of the training programme.

Become a guide-dog foster parent

The experienced instructors at the South African Guide Dogs Association train between 40 and 60 guide dogs, service dogs and autism support dogs each year, but few people are aware that animal lovers from the broader community can lend a hand and care for the next generation of four-legged friends.

At eight weeks old, potential support dogs are taken in by volunteer foster parents who raise and socialise them until they are ready for formal training.

Alida Pansegrouw, who has been involved with the foster-care programme for eight years, says that a healthy and trustworthy foundation is crucial for the puppies' future as working dogs. "Dogs that are self-assured, independent and well socialised adapt quickly. This means that our training department can immediately focus on the formal training," says Alida.

Volunteers attend weekly training sessions where good behaviour and following basic instructions are established with the puppies. They are also taken on regular group outings that expose them to new surroundings and teach them to remain calm and obedient among strangers, all in preparation for the important work they will do one day.

After 12 to 16 months, the dogs leave their foster homes to join the association's formal training programme that lasts from six to nine months.

Dog lovers over the age of 18 who have their own transport and a driver's license are ideal candidates for joining the foster-care programme. It's also of great importance that volunteers are patient, calm, physically fit and active enough to teach their dog good manners and raise them well.

"People who want to join the programme must be available during the week for training sessions with the dogs and be prepared for supervisors to teach them the association's methods," says Alida. It's therefore ideal for volunteers to live near to either the Gladys Evans Training Centre at the association's head office in Paulshof, Sandton, or near the Claremont office in Cape Town. "Sessions are also offered in Pretoria, and we handle these on a case-by-case basis."

Those who aren't able to commit long-term can still get involved by offering older dogs in the training programme a home at night or accommodating a "boarding-school child" over weekends!

Contact guidedog.org.za/puppy-raising-and-dog-fostering
alidap@guidedog.org.za >

Dahlias from Dinokeng

Floral designer Teneale Coetzee, who says spring is her favourite time in the garden, has been growing organic flowers at the Femme Pétale flower farm at Intundla Game Lodge & Bush Spa in Dinokeng for the past three years (we wrote about her two years ago in *Platteland* #36 in our article about the Hort Couture Flower Collective). Teneale always wanted to cultivate flowers without the use of chemicals, and was especially interested in working with colours and species not readily available at markets.

What is your advice for gardeners who want to start a flower garden?

Spring is a busy time in the garden. The warm season in South Africa is long enough for you to start in September and still have a magnificent flower garden in the summer. I fertilise my soil with compost extract to add the minerals and microbes essential for healthy plants.

If you want to start sowing seeds right away, consider zinnias, cosmos, dahlias, blue lace flowers (*Didiscus*), sunflowers, and genres such as *Agrostemma*, *Nicotiana*, *Phlox*, *Scabiosa* and *Rudbeckia*. We have a handbook for those who want to try sowing seeds for the first time and we're also selling dahlia cuttings this year, which is the easiest way to get dahlias to grow quickly.

What workshops do you offer on the farm?

We are planning various workshops and open days in spring and summer. Our most popular events are the "Bubbly, Brushes and Blooms" sessions with water-colour artist Jess Meyer, who also designed our seed packets. With a glass of bubbles in hand, we paint bright spring flowers and enjoy the peace of nature together. We also



TOP Teneale Coetzee established Femme Pétale flower farm in Dinokeng three years ago.

ABOVE Spring is a busy time on the flower farm.

RIGHT The flower-arranging and gardening workshops are extremely popular, and visitors attend open days to enjoy the floral beauty.



offer design and flower-arranging workshops and a special dahlia workshop where you can learn how to propagate dahlias.

What is the biggest lesson you've learnt as a flower farmer?

We can learn so much from Mother Nature, and the most important thing is that she is in control. A cold front has brought me back down to earth more than once. It's taught me patience and that we must work with the seasons. I killed so many seedlings in my first year! Fewer died in the second year, and now it's great to be able to say that I've got it right.

The most important lesson: The more you invest in your garden, the more you will be rewarded. A garden is food for the soul and good for your mental health. In my experience, there's no amount of anxiety that my garden can't bring under control.

For the next few months, Femme Pétale's flowers will be sold at a few markets in and around Pretoria. Book on the website for the workshops and open days.

Contact femmepetaleflowers.co.za
 Facebook: [@femmepetaleflowerfarm](https://www.facebook.com/femmepetaleflowerfarm)
 Instagram: [@femmepetaleflowerfarm](https://www.instagram.com/femmepetaleflowerfarm)
 Phone: 082 804 1547 (WhatsApp only)

Dates to diarise*

WESTERN CAPE

Namaqualand Flower Festival

VANRHYNSDORP

6–8 September

Namaqualand adorned in her spring best is the main attraction at this weekend getaway at Gifberg Holiday Farm, where festival-goers themselves determine the pace and atmosphere. The official programme is laid-back, with enough time for camping, swimming, dancing, star-gazing, yoga, and fun open-mic sessions.

Tickets R750 p.p. at Quicket.

Contact  namaqualandflowerfestival.co.za

 Namaqualand Flower Festival



Waterblommetjie Festival

WINDMEUL CELLAR & RHEBOKSKLOOF WINE ESTATE, PAARL

7 September

Enjoy this indigenous delicacy in all its forms, see who wins the famous potjiekos trophy this year, try a special waterblommetjie and wine tasting, or acquire fresh waterblommetjies for making your own bredie.

Entrance Free, but a donation to charity is welcome.

Contact  083 448 0810  waterblommetjiefes.com

 Waterblommetjiefes

 @waterblommetjiefes



COUNTRYWIDE

Garden Day

20 October

Invite your green-fingered and four-legged friends around for a party or picnic in your own garden to celebrate National Garden Day – and don't forget your flower crowns!

Contact  gardenday.co.za  hello@gardenday.co.za

 074 288 1487 (WhatsApp only)

Whisky Weekend

MCGREGOR

13–15 September

Explore the Scottish history of this charming Boland village and taste around 70 whiskies from around the world with the local whisky association. Book early for the master-class sessions!

Tickets  mcgregorwhiskyweekend.co.za

Contact  mcgregorwhiskyweekend.co.za

 McGregor

Whisky Weekend

 073 198 2969



Succulent festival

CALITZDORP

20–22 September

During this weekend festival, the local succulent club transforms the Calitzdorp Station into a market square with a display of impressive and rare indigenous succulents, many of them endemic to the Little Karoo. Growers from across the country will start selling

plants from 09:00 on Friday until 15:00 on Sunday. It's the perfect place to get inspiration.

Entrance Free, but there is a small tariff for the workshops and veld walk.

Contact  vetplant.co.za

 Calitzdorp Succulent Society  info@vetplant.co.za  084 612 3124

Montagu Herb Festival

MONTAGU

20–22 September

At this annual celebration of veld knowledge, the experts at the Montagu Museum will teach you the medicinal properties of the indigenous herbs in your garden.

Contact  Montagu Herb Festival  mherbfest@gmail.com

Darling Wildflower Festival

DARLING SPORT CLUB

20–22 September

Celebrate the secrets of the veld at this family festival, which offers a wildflower exhibition, tasty food and drinks, fun tractor rides, and a colourful market.

Tickets R80 p.p. (R60 for pensioners and students; free for under-12s) at Quicket.

Contact  darlingwildflowers.co.za  Darling Wildflower Society  068 151 5692

Melkbos Church Bazaar

NG CHURCH, MELKBOSSTRAND

20–28 September

A friendly spirit, traditional food and handmade products await at this old-fashioned church bazaar, which operates weekdays from 10:00 to 19:00 and Saturdays from 09:00 to 15:00 – perfect for early Christmas shopping.

Contact  Melkbos Feesmark  melkboskersmark@gmail.com  082 552 0301 (Juanita) >

Robertson Spring Festival

ROBERTSON

SHOWGROUND

24–28 September

South Africa's second-largest outdoor horse show will begin its 125th anniversary celebrations on Heritage Day. Boer goats are a new addition to the agricultural programme, and stalls, steak evenings and fun rides will provide entertainment. The gates are open daily between 08:00 and 22:00.

Tickets R50 p.p.d. (R30 for pensioners and children) at Webtickets. Special festival passes are available.

Contact Robertson Lenteskou admin@robertsonlenteskou.co.za 023 626 2512

Barrydale in Bloom

BARRYDALE

18–20 October

Admire the town's beautiful gardens, join a walk to see a new species of Erica in the mountains, discover how beekeeping can increase the yield of your fruit trees, take part in a competition for the most beautiful fairy-tale throne, or bid on artist Michelle Berry's painting *The*



Garden (pictured below left), all in aid of the local hospice.

Tickets Quicket

Contact barrydaleinbloom.com Barrydale in Bloom terrydevries22@gmail.com

GAUTENG

German Beer Festival

PREMIERMYN

HERVORMDE CHURCH, CULLINAN

7 September

Oompah music, lederhosen, eisbein and beer – it doesn't get more German than that! With a craft market, wine stall and a menu full of German delicacies, you can easily spend the whole day here. Tickets include all tasting sessions, and the gates are open from 09:00 to 17:00.

Tickets R140 p.p. at Quicket (or R160 at the gate).

Contact Cullinan Markets and Events dbooysen@mweb.co.za 082 926 4326

Garden Day celebration

RAYTON

26 October

The programme for this garden festival on the corner of R515 and North Street features various garden stalls for sharing tips on sprucing up your garden (between 09:30 and 13:00), a *Kokkedoor* chef will give a demonstration, and there will be a talk on landscape architecture.

Tickets R200 p.p. (meal included).

Contact hanlie.neethling@gmail.com 012 734 0130 or 082 682 1252

Open gardens by the dozen

Gardeners all over the country share their gardens with the public – the perfect way to find inspiration and enjoy the beauty of nature.

Hogsback

3–10 October &

7–10 November

(Thursdays to Sundays)

Tickets R150 p.p. (free for under-16s).

Contact Hogsback Open Gardens 082 934 3474

Barrydale and Smitsville

18–20 October

Tickets Quicket

Contact barrydaleinbloom.com Barrydale in Bloom terrydevries22@gmail.com

Bedford

25–27 October &

8–10 November

Contact Bedford

Garden Festival

bedfordgardenfestival@gmail.com

Helderberg Hospice

25–27 October

Contact Helderberg Hospice 076 062 5855

Tokara Rare Plant Fair, Stellenbosch

26 October

Tickets R50 per car.

Contact tokara.com @TokaraWine 021 808 5900

Grahamstown

2 November

Contact grahamstown.co.za/events Makana Tourism

Elgin

2–3 November &

9–10 November

Contact elginopengardens.co.za



Elgin Open Gardens 021 844 0154

Stellenberg Gardens, Kenilworth

From 7 November

Tickets R100 p.p. (R50 for children) at Webtickets.

Contact stellenberggardens.co.za Stellenberg Gardens 021 761 2948

Franschhoek

15–17 November

Contact franschhoek

opengardens.co.za

Franschhoek Open Gardens 083 231 5976

Benoni North

23–24 November

Contact Benoni North Open Gardens 071 608 6875

Ultimate Braai Master Live Festival MONTECASINO OUTDOOR EVENTS AREA 25–27 October

Top Braai Masters like Pete Goffe-Wood and Benny Masekwameng will demonstrate how to cook over coals, and you'll discover the latest outdoor and braai gear. September is, after all, braai month!

Tickets R150 p.p.p.d. (R80 for under-12s) at Quicket. There are also VIP or earlybird tickets.

Contact cookingoncoals.co.za/ubmlive2024
 083 788 0010

EASTERN CAPE

Medieval Fayre Banquet

NORM HUDLIN TRAILS, GQEBERHA

7 September

This pet-friendly family festival boasts a jam-packed programme: stalls, pony rides, a court jester, an evening banquet (for adults only) with sword fights and an authentic medieval joust... Start planning your medieval costume to get a discount on the entrance fee at the gate!

Tickets R50 p.p. for the day programme (free for under-6s); R220 p.p. for the day programme and evening banquet (no under-18s) at Quicket.

Contact Medieval Fayre Banquet
 MedievalGQ@gmail.com



EASTERN CAPE

MPO Dairy Fest GAMTOOS

21 & 22 September

This unique festival at the Ferry Hotel in Gamtoos celebrates the dairy industry, as well as the businesses and artists of Jeffreys Bay. Activities include demonstrations by security dogs and the chance to learn how to make cheese and yoghurt. You can already start licking your lips in anticipation of the milkart eating competition!

Tickets R160 p.p.p.d. (R90 for children aged 5–17) at Quicket. Special weekend passes are available.

Contact MPO Melkfees 064 934 3951

KWAZULU-NATAL

Durban Street Food Festival

DURBAN

6–8 September

Taste your way around the world with the variety of exotic flavours on offer at this festival at the Pavilion Shopping Centre. The programme includes a gin bar, beer garden, a food-truck arena and delicious snacks.

Tickets R100 p.p. at Quicket or the gate.

Contact Durban Street Food Festival
 064 809 2066 (Georgios)

Spring Leap Festival HOWICK

7 September

This spring wellness festival at the Old Mushroom Farm was offered for the first time last year, and includes demos and workshops focusing on dance and movement, meditation, journaling and foraging.

Tickets R300 p.p. at Quicket.

Contact theoldmushroomfarm.co.za The Old Mushroom Farm
 060 470 1218

NORTHERN CAPE

Kalahari Kuierfees UPINGTON

26–28 September

The Desert Palace Hotel plays host to this fun-filled family festival "without brakes". Expect stalls, food and fun rides as well as sport and music.

Contact kalaharikuierfees.co.za 054 332 1100

MPUMALANGA

Unwined Local Food & Wine Show

7 September

MBOMBELA GOLF CLUB 5 October

BOESIES RESTAURANT, SECUNDA

This show was created to bring producers and consumers together directly and to give local students from the hospitality industry a chance to gain practical experience. Come taste local wines, order food from specially selected stalls, and enjoy the festive atmosphere created by local musicians.

Tickets R250 p.p.

(Mbombela) or R150 p.p. (Secunda) at Quicket.

Contact info@un-wined.co.za un-wined.co.za @Unwined.yourlocalfoodandwineshow
 @unwinedwineshow
 082 789 4401



News about markets and bazaars

Tell us via email or on our Facebook page what's happening in your area between December 2024 and the end of February 2025. The deadline for inclusion is 8 October 2024. 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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Creative Air Bonsai featuring a *Tillandsia butzii* air plant suspended on a brass rod in a handmade teak frame R450
Evok evok.co.za



Happy Culture Kombucha, which is sugar-free and contains medically recognised probiotics, in the flavours Raspberry & Hibiscus, Pineapple & Lime, Ginger & Lemon and Blueberry & Basil (mixed box of 12 x 300 ml cans) R300
Happy Culture happyculture.co.za



Handmade ceramic serving plate R400 **Dipping bowls** R100 each
Kate Malan Creative [katemalancreative](https://katemalancreative.com)



Handmade soaps in the fragrances Lavender, Olive Oil, Pomegranate & Sage, Flower Power and Farmhouse R42 each
Body Balm with coconut oil, beeswax and lavender R110
Queen Bee Soap Co queenbeesapco.co.za

Let's go to town

As the weather was turning, we went browsing for spring fragrances and beautiful things in Bynesspoort, Cape Town, Elgin, George, Gqeberha, Hopefield, Johannesburg, Malmesbury, Montagu, Oudtshoorn, Prieska and Simondium.

BY MARIAN VAN WYK
PHOTOS GREG COX



Black Mountain Karoo Dry Gin, triple-distilled in a traditional Cape pot still and infused with citrus and Karoo botanicals (750 ml) R430
Grundheim grundheim.co.za



Multipurpose baskets R90–R140 each
PEP Home pepstores.com



Sunbird Superior Organic Infusion Rooibos in the flavours Vanilla, Spiced Orange, Pure, Chamomile, Buchu and Chai (gift pack of six boxes with 20 compostable teabags each) R360
Sunbird sunbirdrooibos.com



Non GM Citric Acid for use as a biodegradable dishwasher rinse aid (250 g) R55 **Oxygen Bleach** for laundry and household cleaning (2 kg) R224
Citrus-Infused Vinegar multipurpose household cleaner (500 ml) R66
The Apothecary buy.theapothecary.co.za



Pet-Pourri spray
quickly eliminates pet odours in
your home and car (472 ml) R350
Takealot [takealot.com](https://www.takealot.com)



Reusable Unpaper Towels
made of absorbent flannel to use instead of
paper towels (flatpack of eight) R290 **Hessian
Upsponge** filled with fabric offcuts for heavy-
duty dish scrubbing or cleaning R50
Greenie [greenie.co.za](https://www.greenie.co.za)



**Sunbird Superior Spiced Orange Rooibos
and Wildflower Orange Blossom Honey
gift box** R200
Sunbird [sunbirdrooibos.com](https://www.sunbirdrooibos.com)



Gourmet seasonings with ethically
sourced natural ingredients: Middle Eastern
(250 g) R110, South African (400 g) R150 and
Greek with oregano from Greece (400 g) R150
Terra Madre [terramadre.co.za](https://www.terramadre.co.za)



Wood Conditioner (200 ml) R216,
Wood Polish (125 ml) R178 and
Leather Polish (125 ml) R178 containing,
among others, beeswax and propolis
Simply Bee [simplybee.co.za](https://www.simplybee.co.za)



Man Candle made of soy wax and shea
butter and infused with oud and neroli
– it burns for about 50 hours and the melted
wax can be used on dry skin (220 ml) R350
Soy Lites [soylites.co.za](https://www.soylites.co.za)



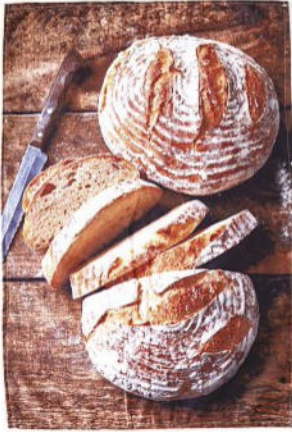
Strawberry Salad Splash (375 ml) R69,
Strawberry Syrup (330 ml) R47 and
Strawberry Jam (250 ml) R70
Red Berry Farm [redberryfarm.co.za](https://www.redberryfarm.co.za)



Natural eau de parfum
with botanical extracts and
15%–25% essential oils (15 ml) R395 each
Fijn Botanicals [fijnbotanicals.com](https://www.fijnbotanicals.com)



Handmade ceramic bells R590 each
Kate Malan Creative [katemalancreative](https://www.katemalancreative.com)



Bread cloth R150
Willie Strauss williestrauss.co.za



Retro-look ceramic vase
made of 50% recycled ceramics R400
H&M Home, Superbalist superbalist.com



Notebooks with growing paper covers
embedded with flower, herb or vegetable
seeds that you can plant after use
(140 cm x 20 cm) R140 each
Growing Paper growingpaper.co.za



Good to Glow Bath & Body Oil R280
Head to Toe Hand & Body Wash R230
I Can't Even Natural Perfume R440
Goodness Green Soap R75
Terapi terapi.co.za



Toiletry and cosmetics bags made of
cotton with a waterproof lining R175–R350
Binny Bags [binnybags](http://binnybags.com)



Cat IP65 Rugged power bank
is weatherproof, dustproof and shockproof
and has a 10 000mAh capacity R1 000
Takealot takealot.com



Pomegranate Balsamic Reduction
(150ml) R110
Ubali ubali.co.za info@ubali.co.za



Cotton bowl covers
are an alternative to cling wrap
(set of three for bowls up to 20 cm,
25 cm and 38 cm in diameter) R320
Greenie greenie.co.za



**Sought After Seedlings heirloom tomato
seeds** (about 30 seeds per packet) R34 each
Faithful to Nature faithful-to-nature.co.za

HIDDEN SECRET

Return to life in 1897





The old cellar, where wine was produced and matured in wooden vats, has been transformed into a Victorian-era exhibition room, featuring an oxwagon, a library of books dating back to before the turn of the 20th century, a display area and a life-size dollhouse for children to enjoy.

OPPOSITE The Cape Dutch homestead is spread over 3,3 ha. Front and centre is the farmhouse with its unique gable dating back to 1851, and to the left are the old sheds that now house the Ou Stal restaurant.

When you visit Soetmelksvlei museum farm on the slopes of the Simonsberg, you are transported back to the late 19th century, a time when life was much slower and simpler, but also more laborious – an era when everything was made by hand.

TEXT JOHAN VAN ZYL PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD AND BABYLONSTOREN



Whatever you do, do not flee to Soetmelksvlei on a day when you have totally

had it with your fast, comfortable, technologically advanced, consumer lifestyle. After spending seven blissful hours imagining that you are living in 1897 – the year that was used as the historical reference point for the restoration of the farm – you and most other visitors will disembark with heavy hearts from the safari vehicle that has returned you to the harsh realities of 2024.

But believe it or not, after having barely traversed the first bumpy farm road, a woman hauls out her mobile phone and starts quietly cursing the lack of reception: “Twelve missed calls!” She must immediately search for an old pin to send via WhatsApp to a lost courier who is

trying to find her house in the suburbs!

One wonders: Would it be a greater challenge for someone from the late 19th century to survive in the 21st century, or for someone from today to travel back to 1897 and live at a snail’s pace – without electricity, the internet, mobile phones, computers, cars, decent doctors, or a flush toilet in the house. In those days “ablutions” involved a chamber pot under the bed, a wash table with basin and pitcher, and an outhouse in the garden. All necessities were made by hand. Farms were remotely situated, and people had to be self-sufficient and resourceful if they wanted to survive. (This sounds a lot like *Platteland*, where we have always believed that the slow life is the best life.)

SOETMELKSVLEI has changed owners several times since it was granted to two Huguenots in 1694

as Bergen Henegouwen. In 1896, the farm came into the possession of the Koch family, who changed its name to Donkerhoek. The current owners renamed it Soetmelksvlei, a nod to the old Afrikaans radio soapie *Die Du Plooy van Soetmelksvlei*, and a reference to the Franschhoek Valley as the land of milk and honey. Wine, grain and meat were all produced on this 142-hectare piece of land until well into the 19th century. When the phylloxera epidemic destroyed the vineyards in the valley in the 1880s, the farmers decided to plant soft-fruit trees instead. Guests are reminded of this upon arrival, when they see the enormous glass-fibre peach designed by Josh Phillips of LEKA Design at the reception area, as well as the hand-laid peach-pip floor.

“The phylloxera crisis meant that farmers were required to put shoulder to the wheel to build a new soft-fruit industry from the ground >



LEFT A section of the farmyard as viewed from the chicken coop. Part of the main house is visible on the left, and to the right is the meat and dairy room, where workshops are held. In the middle distance is the Jonkershuis farm shop.

BELOW The dining room where the family and any visitors would have eaten and conducted their Bible studies. (The family Bible lies open on the little table to the right of the porcelain cabinet that displays period-specific pieces.) This room also houses a daybed that would give weary travellers the chance to take a nap before embarking on the half-day horse-carriage journey back to Cape Town.

OPPOSITE The new chicken coop with its traditional gable looks like it was built during the 19th century. This is where Soetmelksvlei's Naked Neck chickens, Peking ducks and a variety of other chickens lay their heads at night.



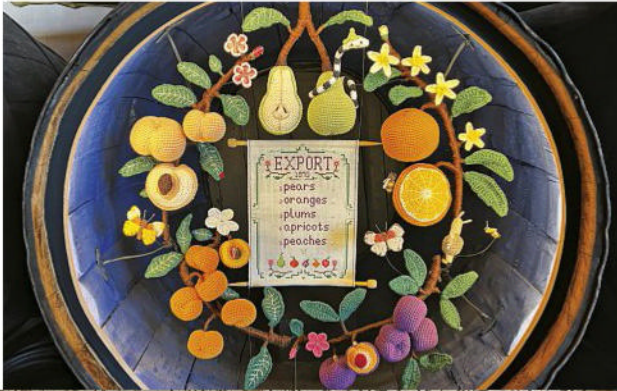
HIDDEN SECRET

RIGHT The oxwagon housed in the old cellar is surrounded by bookshelves heaving with literature dating back to the 19th century.

BELOW This detailed crocheted wreath is the work of Minette Vermaas and pays tribute to the history of the soft-fruit farming industry at Soetmelksvlei and its surrounds.

BOTTOM LEFT Elsa Vogts, Babylonstoren's museologist, was involved with the restoration project at Soetmelksvlei, and explains that this wallpaper was designed by the poet and textile designer William Morris in 1871 and could be ordered via post at the time.

BOTTOM RIGHT Soetmelksvlei celebrates the traditions of craftsmanship and artisanal endeavours, and visitors can attend workshops to learn, among other things, how to repair riempie chairs.





The main bedroom of the restored farmhouse honours everything hand made and the craftsmanship that went into creating each piece.

up, which started yielding results in 1897. This was the year when the Boland started flourishing again,” explains Babylonstoren museologist Elsa Vogts, who was closely involved in the Soetmelksvlei project. “It is also an overall reference to the ingenuity and inventions of the expanding agricultural industry in the Cape.” (The area would inevitably feel the impact of the tragedy of the Anglo-Boer War that started two years later.)

An ode to craftsmanship

Soetmelksvlei is a hybrid between a working farm (with animals, bee hives, grazing and citrus orchards), an interactive museum, and an ode to traditional crafts and trades that prevailed before far-reaching industrialisation became the norm.

Visitors are encouraged to experience for themselves how wonderful it is to work with their hands. The artisans at the farm

offer weekly workshops where you can learn old-fashioned skills such as woodworking, leatherwork and blacksmithing, or learn how to make butter and bake rusks.

A corner of the workshop building also houses a wagon-making exhibition, on loan from the Relihan family. It contains the original contents of the wagon workshop that Lefebre Relihan operated between 1885 and 1918 on Spes Bona farm, situated on the slopes of Kasteelberg near Riebeeck-Kasteel. Here, he and a team of artisans built wagons and carts and made tools at what is believed to have been the only complete cartwright’s workshop in South Africa.

Take a walk into the past

On the drive to Soetmelksvlei, the audio guide (delivered via ear-phones) informs visitors about everything they could possibly see along the route: from the crops and

noteworthy trees that grow between Babylonstoren and Soetmelksvlei, to the large Italian Chianina oxen and water buffalo that graze here. By September, audio guides should also be available for the farmhouse and old cellar to explain to visitors the context of what they are seeing. These guides will tell the (fictional) story of the Bosman family: the farmer, Wynand, his wife, Magriet, their 17-year-old son, Attie, and their six-year-old daughter, Katie.

Visitors are given a map at the Soetmelksvlei reception area to help them explore the 3,3 hectares on which the historical farmyard has been laid out. The buildings are arranged in a U-shape and no effort has been spared in restoring three of the oldest remaining buildings on the property to their former glory, true to how they would have appeared in the late 19th century: the impressive farmhouse with its unique gable dating to 1851; the old cellar with its yellowwood >



ceiling; and the old stable, now the restaurant, where the farmer kept his horses, ox-wagon and horse carts. The meat and dairy room, where workshops are held, served as accommodation in the 19th century, while the building that houses the Jonkershuis farm shop was added after the turn of the 20th century and originally served as a residence.

The architectural team from Open City Architects initially managed the research, development and design of the farmyard and buildings, but numerous archaeologists, heritage consultants and historians were involved in the process. Creative lead Etienne Hanekom worked with costume designer and stylist Sylvia van Heerden and her team, who ensured that the textural and fabric details authentically resembled those of the past. Antique furniture and other pieces were sourced from South African collectors, and new items were handmade according to the specifications of the period – from embroidery to crochet work. A fresh approach was taken with new additions to the farm (such as the reception building and bathrooms), but historical >



ABOVE On the day *Platteland* visited, apple tart, milk tart and malva pudding were on offer for tea or dessert at the Ou Stal restaurant. Traditional home-cooked meals are also served here. On the right, the harvest table is laden with fresh produce from the garden, together with roosteroek, a variety of cheeses, biltong and droëwors, nuts, and all manner of pickles, chutneys and jams.

TOP The farm kitchen is where you can enjoy a comforting drink and sample a piece of farm bread that's been baked in the wooden oven by Louise Johannes (pictured) and Jacqueline Matthews. The flour used is freshly milled every day at the farm's mill. On the left of the table is an old-fashioned glass flycatcher and apple peeler.



Meet the people

Adele Johnson

Head of Soetmelksvlei

When Soetmelksvlei's collies, Pippa and Tess, see the head of the farm approaching, they race to meet her, ready to jump into her arms for a kiss.

"Pippa and Tess are incredibly loyal," she says, "but the men of the kraal are always scolding them, as they don't want to leave the ducks and chickens alone. But next week they'll start attending puppy school!"

Sports-crazy Adele, a former Springbok basketball player, was born and raised in Paarl and says she is a "total animal lover" who had her own tortoise, guinea pig, dove and two dogs when she was five years old. "I adore puppy breath – it releases serotonin in my brain! And now I'm working on a farm where I am surrounded by animals every day – how lucky can a person be!"

After completing school and many Springbok basketball tours, Adele began to work as a waitress at Le Quartier Français in Franschhoek and later became the manager of Margot Janse's restaurant The Tasting Room. She was then approached to manage Babel restaurant at Babylonstoren.

But in 2014 she felt ready for a new adventure: She and her two dogs travelled to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania where she became the assistant manager of the Golden Tulip Hotel.

In 2017, she was lured back to Babylonstoren to become the food and beverages and functions manager for Babel. It was during this time that she married Cleve Dombas. Their son, Kai, is now five years old.

Adele says the intention at Soetmelksvlei is to offer guests a unique farm experience. "Everything tells a story that takes you back to a time long ago when things worked completely differently to the way they do today," she says. "I think people, particularly the farmers' wives, did a lot of physically hard work, in addition to cooking and making clothes, and didn't always have enough time during the day to finish everything. For example, when an animal was slaughtered, the entire beast had to be used and processed immediately. The fat was used to make soap and candles. And if the cow kicked over the milking pail, the farmer's wife had to make another plan."



ABOVE Adele Johnson, pictured here in the restaurant, with one of the beloved collies. "They're heading for puppy lessons soon," she says.

TOP Soetmelksvlei's workshop building houses, among others, a blacksmith and cabinet maker who restore and make furniture and implements.



Meet the people

Jamy Sampson

Chicken house

Jamy, a native of Paarl, is at her post in the beautiful chicken coop, and ready to explain why mostly Naked Neck chickens can be seen scratching around on Soetmelksvlei. "Back when the farm was still called Donkerhoek, they were kept as pets. Their lovely large eggs were used for baking cakes or they were slaughtered for the pot."

She says that Naked Necks are regarded as indigenous because they were brought to South Africa in the 17th century and have since become reasonably hardy to cope with our hot summers and cold winters, although they originally come from Malaysia.

In France, Naked Necks are used for commercial poultry production as they have 30% fewer feathers compared with other chickens. They eat less food to reach the same body mass as chickens that have feathers because they use less energy to produce their feathers.

Jamy says that in 2021 she took up a learnership at the Elsenburg Agricultural Training Institute where she worked mostly with cattle. But because she is so small, she realised that she couldn't manage large animals. "I find chickens incredibly funny, especially when they're scratching around or taking a sand bath to get rid of fleas and lice. But they are really easy animals because they know their routine and will walk home themselves in the afternoon."

details were also incorporated into their design.

The mill grinds slowly...

The beautiful water-powered mill – a replica of a 19th-century mill – is another of the recent additions at Soetmelksvlei, although it looks like it's been standing here for several hundred years. Farm mills were common in those days because buying flour in town required travelling long distances.

This mill is known as a Vitruvian overshot mill. "Overshot" refers to the water that falls from above into the buckets on the wheel, and "Vitruvian" refers to Roman engineer Vitruvius, who popularised the first vertical water wheel.

The mill was designed and

built with the help of expert Andy Selfe and his team, who were also involved with the restoration of Mostert's Mill in Cape Town. Andy and the architects visited several mills in the Cape, but the mill at La Cotte Farm outside Franschhoek and the one at Elim were closest in size and design to what would serve as inspiration for the one at Soetmelksvlei.

The animals are colleagues

In the 19th century, various animals would be found in a typical Boland farmyard, including cows, sheep and chickens, which are represented on the farm logo.

"All the animals at Soetmelksvlei are working animals, but they are also 'colleagues' who form an >



The farm's Ayrshire dairy cows, Blommetjie and Bella, are milked twice a day by hand, at 10.00 and 15.00, and visitors are welcome to watch these demonstrations. Here, one of Soetmelksvlei's animal handlers, Cheslin Kana, shows how the cream is separated from the milk using a traditional cream separator.

Soetmelksvlei's mill is a 19th-century replica. It was designed and built by Andy Selfe and his team. Flour is milled every day and used either in the farm kitchen or restaurant and is available to buy in 500 g and 1 kg packs at Jonkershuis farm shop.



Meet the people Benjy Pienaar

Miller

Benjy, who lives in Wellington, listens intently when he opens the sluice and the first water falls into the buckets of the farm's overshot mill. Every day, fresh wheat flour is ground here for the bakers on the farm as well as for visitors who can buy a voucher at the farm shop.

"This is not a modern system, so it is important to always pay attention, listen to whether the wheel has the correct rhythm, and ensure that there is sufficient wheat between the granite millstones, otherwise the flour will smell burnt," he says as the first white snowfall slowly sifts into a wooden bucket.

"The grains of wheat we use come from Lowerland near Prieska, because the local weather is too wet for wheat." (As an experiment in collaboration with Oakdale, the farm has now planted its own wheat in Riversdale.)

Benjy, who comes from Lambert's Bay and played rugby for the under-19 Boland team, says that, as a junior sommelier, he applied for a position as a waiter in May this year. But his love for wine and the wine industry clearly



shone through strongly and he was offered a position at the distillery and mill under the supervision of 27-year-old head miller Marten van Staden, who was tragically killed in a motorbike accident in June. "Marten gave me notes on how the mill operated and explained

that there are only a handful of people who still know how to do this. He also shared all his knowledge with me. I'm a very curious guy and started reading more, including the book *Grain by Grain: A Quest to Revive Ancient Wheat, Rural Jobs, and Healthy Food* by Bob Quinn and Liz Carlisle. Now I want to learn as much as possible and treat every visitor to Soetmelksvlei like a VIP."



Soetmelksvlei's organic wheat flour is milled fresh every day – its shorter shelf life means it's only available in the Jonkershuis farm shop. A 500 g package costs R60 and 1 kg costs R100.

integral part of the farm family,” says farm head Adele Johnson. At the kraal, built on the foundations of the original kraal dating from the 18th century, the two Ayrshire dairy cows, Bella and Blommetjie, are milked twice a day during milking demonstrations. Their milk and cream are used in the restaurant and in baking and butter-making workshops. The two Italian Chianina oxen, Astro and Ilios, belong to one of the largest and oldest cattle breeds in the world and have been trained to plough and pull the wagon that transports guests around the farmyard.

The other kraal residents include two miniature donkeys, Faf and Tjokkie, two Percheron horses from France, Simson and Delilah, and Welsh pony cross Blikkies, who was rescued as a carthorse in Macassar.

There is also a herd of Blackhead Persian sheep, chosen for their impressive history in South Africa. After a ram and three ewes survived a shipwreck along the Cape coast in 1869, the breed became the dominant one in South Africa.

On the other side of the farmyard stands the lovely chicken house with its traditional gable. It is home to 10 Naked Neck chickens, a few Boschveld chickens and five white Peking ducks that supply farm-fresh eggs for use in the kitchen, restaurant and workshops. They also manage the insect and snail populations around the farmyard.

The team is completed by collies Pippa and Tess, along with Gemmer, the young cat who keeps unwelcome rodents away.

This is a tight-knit community where humans and animals depend

on each other. And in an era where technology rules, Soetmelksvlei reminds us to slow down for a while, to take in the world through all our senses and make something with our hands, precisely the way it was done 127 years ago.

“I think that a 19th-century farm boy or girl would quickly adjust to and master the gadgets of the 20th and 21st centuries that are sometimes even incomprehensible to us!” laughs Elsa. “On the other hand, going back in time to 1897 successfully will depend on your mindset. If you are prepared to put your phone away and rely on effort, muscle power and patience, you might enjoy life.”

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Meet the people Medwin Dombas

Kraal

Medwin is Adele Johnson's brother-in-law. He has spent his life working with the “lost youth” in the Magnolia area of Paarl, where he runs his own basketball academy called Hoop Squad. As an excellent player and coach, he was involved in establishing the town's first basketball club in 1992, and in 1996 he achieved provincial colours in the sport.

“This is why I really enjoy it when school groups visit Soetmelksvlei, because although you are just showing them where milk and cream come from, you are also helping to establish their value system,” he says. “Passion is important at Soetmelksvlei and Babylonstoren, because if you enjoy what you do, it doesn't feel as if you are working.”

Soft-natured but quietly firm, Medwin says he is in his element among the farm animals. “Since starting to work here, I have experienced a feeling of déjà vu a few times and, of course, it's a bonus to work with people who are just as great.

“My background is in animal husbandry. Before joining Soetmelksvlei in October 2023, I took care of the lions at the Drakenstein Lion Park. It was also a great privilege to work with the clever chimpanzees after they were transferred there from the Tygerberg Zoo.

“Things are a little different at Soetmelksvlei because the farm animals become very tame, although they are working for us,” he says as we watch the two Chianina oxen, Astro and Ilios, who both weigh more than the entire Bok scrum that trounced the Scots in their first 2023 Rugby World Cup match, tuck into their oat hay.

“We cover their ears when we tell visitors how delicious Chianina meat and biltong tastes!”





TOPT LEFT The colossal Chianina oxen, Astro and Ilios, have been trained to plough, but they're also in charge of pulling the wagon that takes guests around Soetmelksvlei.

TOP RIGHT Delilah and her boyfriend, Simson, are French Percherons who do their fair share of ploughing on the farm, too.

LEFT Naked Neck chickens provide the farm with eggs. This breed of fowl was the first to be imported to the country and has a long history in the Cape.

RIGHT The farm's two excitable and energetic collies, Pippa and Tess, take a brief rest.

BOTTOM LEFT Soetmelksvlei has a small herd of Blackhead Persian sheep, chosen for their impressive history in South Africa.

BOTTOM RIGHT Gemmer recently joined the farmyard animal family, declaring himself chief of the rodent police, a job he seems to be taking very seriously.





Meet the people

Danie Grové

Historical artisan

Danie Grové, a former crop, cattle and sheep farmer, as well as joiner, has been responsible for all the wood and leather restoration work at Soetmelksvlei for the past six months. He uses only traditional hand tools, unless there really is no alternative, and he also sharpens his chisels himself by hand.

Danie says that his father, a Namibian farmer, also loved crafts and was always carving something, even while sitting quietly.

"He made real catapults that used ball bearings." Danie's own hands have mastered many things, including knitting, spool knitting and crocheting, "but I have a very loose hand when I crochet".

"If you are quick-tempered, this work calms you down. And as there is no electricity, there is usually not much noise, which gives you a chance to think. Long ago, I completed a joinery course and learnt how to make wagons and wagon wheels from Erik Holm of Hartbeespoort. There are only a handful of people who can still do this kind of work."

This is why he enjoys helping people who attend the Soetmelksvlei workshops to make lovely wooden stools by hand. "It's important to share these old, basic skills so that we can ensure their continuity."





ABOVE In the far corner of the workshop are the original contents of the wagon workshop that Lefebvre Relihan operated between 1885 and 1918 on a farm near Riebeeck-Kasteel.

Dan Devonshire

Blacksmith and toolmaker

"Excuse me, sometimes when it's just me with my anvil, I become completely lost in thought and don't realise I have visitors," laughs Dan, who is surrounded by hammers, tongs, chisels, axes and bottle openers, each one made by hand. Today, his main job is to make a hole in a hammerhead, which is likely to keep him busy until late afternoon.

He smiles: "It takes much longer to do something by hand, the old-fashioned way. But luckily, patience is my best character trait."

Dan and his wife, Roxanne, live in Wellington, but he grew up in Orkney and worked in a pharmacy in Ventersdorp before they moved to the Cape following the death of his father-in-law. It was here that he had the chance to explore his love for metalwork as an apprentice to artist and blacksmith Conrad Hicks. Last December, he was offered the opportunity to work at Soetmelksvlei, where he makes and restores everything from nails, chains and farm implements, to pans for the kitchen and ox-wagon yokes.

He points to a steel-and-wood wheelbarrow he made with Danie Cronjé. "This is Riaan Cruywagen," he laughs, a play on *kruuiwa*, the Afrikaans word for 'wheelbarrow'. We'll be making more of these for the farm and shop."



Visit the farm

Soetmelksvlei is open daily between September and March from 09:00 to 17:00 and in winter (April to August) from Thursdays to Sundays (09:00 to 16:00). The same hours apply to the Jonkershuis farm shop and the Ou Stal family restaurant, which is open for tea and lunch.

Departure times Safari vehicles depart from Babylonstoren every 30 minutes between 08:30 and 13:00 and return every hour on the hour from 11:00.

Bookings It is essential to buy tickets online or at the Babylonstoren ticket office. The number of visitors to Soetmelksvlei is limited and transport (from Babylonstoren and back) is provided.

Price Entrance costs R300 p.p. (if you have an annual Babylonstoren membership, the cost is R200 p.p.). The cost for children aged four to 17 is R100, and children three years of age or younger enter for free

(as long as they sit on an adult's lap on the drive between Babylonstoren and Soetmelksvlei).

Restaurant The Ou Stal restaurant serves hearty home-style food prepared over a fire: from soft pap and Chianina boerewors to bean, tomato and waterblommetjebredie. The daily harvest table offers a spread of fruit, roosterkoek, local cheese, droëwors and biltong, as well as pickles, chutneys and jams. **P**

After attending a course run by British food activist Vanessa Kimbell, former minister Janet Cruywagen firmly believes that sourdough bread isn't just healthy food; it's essential preventive nutrition.

Bake your own 'medicine'



When Pretoria-based Dutch Reformed minister Janet Cruywagen discovered that sourdough bread is a medicine that can create miracles for your gut microbiome as well as your physical and mental health, she bade the pulpit goodbye and began her own 'bread service' called Grace and Crumbs.

TEXT JOHAN VAN ZYL PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD AND PICTURE ME AND YOU



The Bible contains more than 350 references to bread, so it's not that much of a leap for a young minister from the Jacaranda City to exchange the pulpit for her own sourdough school and home bakery, which is what Janet Cruywagen did in 2021.

Over the past decade – since the publication of the Banting Bible *The Real Meal Revolution* (2013) by Professor Tim Noakes et al – bread has developed a reputation as the evil, belly-inducing king of carbs that raises our blood sugar levels, makes us obese, and sends us to an early grave.

But food activist Dr Vanessa Kimbell from Northamptonshire in England has since proved

scientifically that there is a huge difference between refined commercial bread baked with instant yeast versus fibre-rich fermented sourdough bread, which is nutritious and easy to digest. She calls sourdough bread “lifestyle medicine”, a holistic medical approach that uses evidence-based behavioural interventions, such as changes in diet and lifestyle, to prevent, treat and manage chronic disease.

Vanessa's research and doctorate degree led to her Baking as Lifestyle Medicine (BALM) framework, a system of baking, eating and sharing healthy sourdough bread as preventative healthcare, improving gut health, mental wellbeing and overall health. (Read the box “Bread as balm: 7 principles” on page 46.)

The Covid-19 turning point

During the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021, home-made sourdough bread (and much faster banana bread!) exploded suddenly when people had more time for old-fashioned and slower processes that can't be hurried, such as sourdough, which is made only with flour, water and salt. Baking was both a creative outlet and a form of therapy to counteract the uncertainty and stress of the pandemic.

Few people understand this more deeply than Janet Cruywagen. “Like the rest of the world, I also jumped onto the banana bread and sourdough bandwagon. I was especially scared of sourdough and had visions of a Tamagotchi that would die if it wasn't properly cared for. Then my sister-in-law, Babet Becker, gave me a sourdough starter



as a gift. I christened her Grace,” Janet remembers.

As the third minister of the Vallesig Dutch Reformed Church in Pretoria, Janet was responsible for serving the elderly, but as the virus increasingly claimed older members, she sometimes found herself holding between four and six funerals a week.

“Supporting dying people and their families day after day, living the trauma of the grieving process over and over again, eventually made me feel unbelievably depressed. It was during this time that I began experimenting with my starter and experienced for myself how therapeutic bread-baking can be. I woke up at 04:00 in the morning to start... working with your hands in that silence has an instantly calming effect. Sourdough

makes you work more slowly and attentively.”

In November 2019, Janet and her husband, Naudé, a computer engineer, and their son, Eduan, moved to a new house in Faerie Glen. On their second night there, the neighbours brought over a plate of cooked food and the next day Janet returned the favour with the first of many sourdough loaves.

“They asked me why I didn’t take orders and charge a fee for my bread. I then started a WhatsApp group and it slowly grew – I was baking up to 30 loaves a week, the most my fridge could manage.”

The culture of sourdough

In the meantime, Janet increasingly immersed herself in the sourdough culture and read many books, >

OPPOSITE Janet has been experimenting with various types of locally produced stoneground flour brands since 2020: Eureka, Millstone, Champagne Valley and Lowerland. For her own baking and home-based workshops, she only uses Gideon Milling’s stoneground flour. You can find it at most Checkers stores and selected Spars in the Western Cape and Gauteng. Find out more at gideonmilling.co.za.

BELOW Janet and her husband, Naudé, a computer engineer and avid base guitarist, with their son, Eduan, who inspired his mother’s mission to find the healthiest bread possible.



BELOW, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Janet's healthy and artfully adorned breads; the pizza oven in her yard was built by the team from Millstone, led by the late Johan Stapelberg; "Crumbs are often thrown away, but they can be used in a variety of ways," Janet explains in reference to the name of her business, Grace and Crumbs. (From September, she will be offering workshops at Crust and Crumb in Melville, Johannesburg.)

OPPOSITE Janet encourages creativity in baking and presentation, and workshop attendees are given free rein in the focaccia classes she's been running from her home.

including Dr Vanessa Kimbell's *The Sourdough School: The Ground-breaking Guide to Making Gut-friendly Bread*. At her Sourdough School in England, Vanessa researches how to improve the nutritional value and digestibility of sourdough bread, something that interests Janet because Euan refuses to eat anything other than cheese sandwiches, pizza and pasta. Last year a paediatric neurologist officially diagnosed him as neurodiverse and since last May he has attended primary school at the Wonderfully Made Center, where high-functioning learners with autism and Asperger's are given the chance to flourish.

"I was shocked when I read the long list of ingredients on the packaging of so-called sourdough bread that's baked on a large scale and sold in local supermarkets.

There is not supposed to be anything other than flour, water and salt in sourdough," says Janet.

She was therefore very keen to complete Vanessa's two-year online certificate course in Baking as Lifestyle Medicine to help her turn her family's, and specifically Euan's, food into something that would feed both body and brain. The terrible pound-rand exchange rate made the course unaffordable but she did attend one of Vanessa's free webinars during the lockdown. At the end of that session, Vanessa mentioned that bursaries were available to bakers who could not afford the course fee, so Janet sent an email that told her story.

"Vanessa actually replied and we had a video call the next day. For her, nutritious sourdough bread is a basic human right and, as our most affordable staple food, it >







LEFT Janet's favourite bread is a rolled-oat-and-honey boule – she brushes the crust with honey to finish it off. **ABOVE** Janet christened the 22-year-old sourdough starter she received from her sister-in-law Babet, Grace. She nourishes Grace with Gideon Milling flour.

should be accessible to everyone. She also believes that we should share our knowledge with others.”

Janet explained that she dreamt of her own sourdough school where she could offer hands-on workshops, as well as that she was involved with the charity organisation Echo Youth Development, where she empowers vulnerable young adults to lead healthier lives. She received a full bursary from Vanessa and in September she will travel to Sicily, along with 45 other sourdough bakers from around the world, for the graduation ceremony.

Janet says that Vanessa's personal journey to becoming an international sourdough activist began in southwestern France in the early '80s when she trained and worked as a baker for a long time. But in England, after taking a course of very strong antibiotics, Vanessa found that she suddenly couldn't eat the bread available there and she began to follow a gluten-free diet. A few years later she returned

to France where she discovered that she experienced no negative side effects when she ate the slow-fermented French bread she had grown up with.

In the early 2000s, very little information was available about sourdough or the impact of antibiotics on the microbiome but, as a trained baker, Vanessa had a strong suspicion that the fermentation process changed the structure of the bread.

She writes on her blog: “Bread is our most basic staple food. Once you understand that the microbes in the soil affect the levels of nourishment in the grain, you begin to connect to agri-economic systems. And as you realise that these same families of microbes in the starter damage the gluten, break down the anti-nutrients, predigest the sugars and make the bread easier to digest and more nutritious, you will rethink the way you bake. As you learn that the microbes in our guts manufacture the metabolites that our brains

need to function from the fibre in the grains we eat, then you will make the link and realise that we are symbiotic.

“The bread we eat is part of a system, and to be truly nourished, every part of the way we bake, eat and share bread needs to be in sync.”

This is how the Baking as Lifestyle Medicine (BALM) protocol slowly took shape during the sourdough classes that Vanessa has offered since 2002.

“When you bake according to BALM, you are actively synchronising the system. Avoiding ultra-processed bread, eating more fibre, connecting to the people in your community, and living a more Mediterranean lifestyle have a positive impact on both your physical and mental health and on the people you feed. Being a baker, you are actually disrupting the conventional food system where the majority of bread and baked goods damage our health, and the health of the planet.” >

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Janet in the room where her oven, mixer and stocks are kept and where, until recently, she gave her classes. The oven was given to her as a gift from a friend who closed her bakery.

Janet slices one of her loaves for Platteland to taste.

"Bread gathers people around a table," she says. "You eat it with your hands and you share it with others, and you always bake a loaf to give away. And I have discovered that you can add sourdough to so many things to make them healthier: pancake batter, pizza or pasta dough, pumpkin tart. I also make my own granola by mixing oats, seeds, nuts, a little honey and sourdough starter, then slowly bake it in the oven."

IN MARCH 2021, Janet decided to leave the ministry because, among other reasons, she had been approached by a restaurant and deli that wanted to convert its entire existing bread range to sourdough. Initially, Janet was only meant to take on a supervisory role, but staff challenges meant that soon she was mixing and shaping bread loaves on her own at 05:00 in the morning. By August 2021, she was completely burnt out and admitted to Denmar Mental Health Clinic.

"I left everything, and I didn't bake for eight months. Grace remained in the fridge. My family and I first had to regain our health," she says. During this time, she received a big gift from a friend who had closed her bakery: a deck oven in which she could bake 12 loaves, along with tins and bowls. She only had to buy an industrial mixer.

"When I was ready to face life again after Denmar, I rediscovered the value of bread therapy. I want to teach the right technique to people when they are young. I think I'm a naturally good teacher and the aim of my workshops, which I offer at my home, is to shift perceptions about bread and empower people to bake bread that relieves the health problems they and their loved ones experience. It's probably because I was once a minister that people readily share their stories... and everyone can just take a deep breath. So many people walk in feeling that they aren't creative or artistic, only to discover wonderful things about themselves. And, hopefully, they also discover that good bread is really good for them."

Bread as balm: 7 principles

Dr Vanessa Kimbell's Baking as Lifestyle Medicine (BALM) protocol is based on seven principles that are adapted to suit personal digestion, microbiome health and genes. Sourdough bread must also promote social equity, environmental awareness and a more balanced relationship between us and our food.

1 Lifestyle changes Vanessa regards sourdough bread as a form of activism. This includes symbiotic eating (ensuring that all your food includes both probiotic bacteria and the prebiotic fibre that is necessary to feed these bacteria and keep them happy), as well as the order in which we consume food during a meal (also known as "sequenced eating" or "food sequencing"), which can influence blood sugar levels and how our bodies digest and metabolise nutrients.

2 Increased fibre in every bread.

3 Increased diversity in every loaf by, among other things, using a variety of different types of stoneground wholegrain flour.

4 Fermentation – different bacteria, yeast and baking methods improve the nutritional value of bread.

5 Higher antioxidant levels – in the flour and through symbiotic eating.

6 Increased probiotics through symbiotic eating and adding living bacteria in the form of cheese, kefir, honey, vinegar, sauerkraut and miso.

7 Reduced refined sugar by choosing malt, maple syrup, honey or treacle. >



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Wildebeesthoek

NATURE RESERVE

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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

Sourdough vetkoek with dhal

As part of the Baking as Lifestyle Medicine course, Janet gave this classic South African staple food a healthier and more affordable twist. Her version contains no instant yeast and a lot more fibre, as well as less sugar and saturated fat to prevent elevated blood sugar levels. The dhal can be made ahead of time and stored in the fridge for a maximum of 3–4 days.

Serves **6–8**

Preparation time **2 days**

Cooking time **5 minutes**

YOU NEED

FOR THE VETKOEK

- 100 g wholegrain leaven (ensure that it is fed and active)
- 350 g stoneground white bread flour
- 100 g unsifted wholegrain flour
- 50 g wholegrain spelt flour

- 110 g water, plus an additional 10–20 g if needed
- 3 eggs plus 1 egg yolk
- 12 g salt
- 100 g butter, cubed
- 50 g honey
- sunflower oil for deep-frying

FOR THE DHAL

- 500 g red lentils, soaked in water for 30 minutes
- 1 can (400 g) brown lentils
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) olive oil
- 1½ teaspoons (7,5 ml) ground cumin
- 1½ teaspoons (7,5 ml) ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) ground turmeric
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) whole mustard seeds
- 2 curry leaves
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 4–5 garlic cloves, finely chopped

- 1 good piece (5–7 cm) fresh ginger, finely chopped
- 1 large ripe tomato, chopped
- 1–3 fresh chillies to taste
- 1 can (400 g) whole or chopped tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) sesame seeds, lightly toasted in a pan
- 1 cup (250 ml) thick Greek yoghurt or labneh (yoghurt cheese)
- ½ medium cucumber, chopped

THIS IS HOW

Day 1 (08:00) Use a stand mixer with a dough hook to slowly mix all the ingredients for the vetkoek (apart from the butter and honey) for 3–4 minutes until a dough forms. Increase the speed to medium and knead the dough for a further 4–5 minutes to further develop the gluten. Let the dough rest.

Day 1 (08:45) Add a few cubes of butter at a time and knead them in before adding more. Add the honey. Turn the mixer off once all the butter and honey is mixed in and the dough is shiny. Let the dough rest for another 5–10 minutes.

Day 1 (09:00) Perform a window test: Lightly wet your hands, pinch off a piece of dough and slowly stretch it between your fingers. If the gluten has developed sufficiently, it will form a “window” through which you will see the light. If the dough tears immediately, the gluten will need more time. Use the dough hook to knead it again for a few minutes, let the dough rest for another half hour, and do the window test again. Then place the dough in a bowl that has been lightly greased with oil, cover the bowl with a shower cap or a moist dishcloth and let it rise again at about 26°C.

Day 1 (09:30) Perform the first stretch-and-fold: Lift the dough up, fold it in half, turn the dough and fold it again.

Day 1 (10:00) Perform a second stretch-and-fold.

Day 1 (10:30) Place the dough in the fridge to slowly rise for the rest of the day and overnight.

Day 2 (11:00) Remove the dough from the fridge and allow it to reach room temperature.

Day 2 (12:00) Weigh the dough and



shape it into a ball. Sprinkle a thin layer of flour on one or two baking trays.

Day 2 (12:30) Use a dough scraper to cut the dough into pieces of approximately 120 g – you should eventually have 8–10 pieces. Shape each piece into a ball, arrange them on the baking trays and cover them once more to rise for 4–6 hours.

Day 2 (16:00) Start the dhal by soaking the red lentils for 30 minutes.

Day 2 (16:15) Heat 1 tablespoon (15 ml) olive oil in a saucepan, add the cumin, coriander, turmeric, mustard seed, curry leaves and cinnamon sticks and stir-fry everything over a low heat for a few minutes.

Day 2 (16:30) Add the chopped onion to the spices and continue frying over a low heat until the onion is soft and transparent.

Day 2 (16:45) Add the garlic and ginger and fry them for a few minutes before adding the fresh tomato and chilli. Fry this for a few minutes before adding the tinned tomato and red and brown lentils. Allow to simmer for a few minutes, add a cup of water and salt to taste, and let everything cook over a low heat for 45 minutes, stirring regularly. Add more water if it cooks dry. Toast the sesame seeds and mix them with the Greek yoghurt or labneh, salt to taste, and the chopped cucumber. Place in the fridge.

Day 2 (17:00) Check the progress of the dough while the dhal cooks. Heat the sunflower oil in a large saucepan or deep pan – it will be ready once it reaches 180 °C. Fry 2–3 vetkoek at a time for 2 minutes on each side until beautifully golden brown all over. Use a slotted spoon to remove them and allow to cool on a wire rack while you fry the rest.

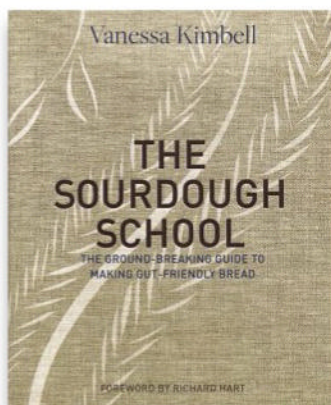
Serve the vetkoek immediately with the dhal and a glass of white wine, light beer or kombucha.

Store the remaining vetkoek in an airtight container and eat within two days. Heat them, preferably in an air-fryer or oven (or slice them in half and toast them) – don't use the microwave oven for heating.

Learn to bake with Janet

Since *Platteland's* last visit, Janet has been approached to present several practical courses at the Crust and Crumb Cooking School in Melville, Johannesburg. There are various options to choose from, including sourdough basics and sourdough bread, croissants, Portuguese pastéis de nata, gluten-free baking and more. Book online.

Contact crustandcrumb.co.za/courses admin@crustandcrumb.co.za



Find out more about bread as medicine

If you want to learn more about a sourdough starter and sourdough bread, or if you want to chat to Janet about Vanessa Kimbell's books or her course focusing on bread as lifestyle medicine, visit Janet's Grace and Crumbs website or write to her via email.

Kontak graceandcrumbs.co.za

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ENTREPRENEUR

Grown, ground and baked in the Swartland





The Swartland – comprising 70% white and 30% brown flour – is one of eight breads that Moorrees Artisan Bakery supplies to the Swartland towns within a 75 km radius of Moorreesburg.

OPPOSITE Carien Hugo Waring is about to place a Koringberg bread on its allotted shelf in the restaurant where the fresh breads are available for sale.

The Swartland is known for its rolling wheat fields, and the mill in Moorreesburg produces enough stoneground flour each week for Carien Hugo Waring from Moorrees Artisan Bakery to bake the place-specific sourdough bread that she sells in the town and its surrounds.

TEXT JOHAN VAN ZYL PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD

Until three years ago, Carien Hugo Waring didn't bake at all, believing bread was bad for you. But then she discovered sourdough bread and the wonders of its long fermentation process during which most of the gluten is broken down, making the bread healthier and easier to digest.

One thing Carien *did* have three years ago was a vision, one so clear that she wrote it down: "I want to live in a small platteland town one day, with a three-bedroom house for us, a smaller house for my parents, and a property big enough to keep animals. I want to live sustainably, and I want to change people's lives."

Here's how it became reality...

IT WAS MAY 2021. Carien, her husband, Craig, and their daughter,

Grace, were living in a townhouse in Durbanville. The phone rang. On the line was Altus de Villiers, her mother's brother (and Carien's godfather), who farms with pomegranates and waterblommetjies on the farm Klein Constantia near Moorreesburg. Altus was worried about his sister, Alsa, who had been diagnosed with dementia, and he had plans to fix up a cottage on the farm where Alsa and her husband, Danie, could come and live.

But he actually called to tell Carien about a smallholding for rent near their farm. There were two houses on the property, and he wanted to know whether Carien and Craig would be interested and perhaps even move to Moorreesburg. Another thing... he wanted them to have a look at a potential business project: the bakery at the Shoprite Baking Academy, where bakers were trained, had closed its doors the

previous month, and along with it, the Moorreesburger restaurant and craft-beer brewery on the premises.

Carien grew up in Albertinia and knew she would move back to the platteland one day. What surprised her was that Craig, the punk rocker engineer by her side, was immediately receptive to the idea.

Just a few months before her uncle's phone call, Carien had resigned from her position as brand ambassador for Anthonij Rupert Wines, which she'd held for seven years, with plans to focus on her Rapid Transformational Therapy (RTT) practice for the foreseeable future. After walking the Tankwa Camino eight years before to celebrate her 40th birthday, she came to the conclusion that she had to do something for more than just herself. That's why she completed the course in RTT with therapist and author Marisa Peer,



Carien is busy rolling the dough for her Renosterveld bread – the newest addition to the bakery's range – in a four-seed mixture. The photo in the middle shows the same loaf – a whopping 1,5 kg stunner – hot and fresh out of the oven. To the right, the more delicate fare is arranged, like carrot cake, pastéis de nata and chocolate brownies. They also make bagels, croissants, cupcakes, pizza bases, flatbread, dumplings and biscuits.



who had developed this therapeutic approach that combines elements of psychotherapy, hypnotherapy and cognitive behavioural techniques to address the root causes of emotional and behavioural issues.

Within a week of Altus's call, the couple drove to Moorreesburg to have a look at the smallholding and the business, and promptly signed a lease. They had just six weeks to set up a company, develop the Moorrees brand, hire and train staff, and design a new website before the official opening on 1 July. But their plans were scuppered when, two days before the grand opening, President Ramaphosa announced additional pandemic restrictions, so they were only allowed to sell takeaway food.

"We were somewhere between stupid and brave," Carien says, laughing, "because we had a full team of amazing staff who were all enthusiastic about getting started... and six days later, we all had Covid."

From instant yeast to Bertha

When Carien and Craig took over the well-equipped commercial bakery three years ago, they continued to use instant yeast in all their baking, but she was determined to change to sourdough as soon as possible. So she enlisted the help of Peet Steyn from Paternoster, her friend and sourdough mentor.

As a consultant for Moorrees, Peet trained up a baker for them, but after only a few months, the baker decided to return to his former job, and then Peet trained a replacement, but in the first week, just before they had to fulfil a large order, she let them know she wasn't coming in to work. Carien, who had never baked before, had to step in. Fortunately, Peet lent them a hand for two days.

"The most amazing thing happened when I first touched that dough," Carien says. "It just felt so right, almost as if I had baked >

ABOVE Craig Waring happily joined his wife in the bakery business and seems most content behind the bar counter. He is also responsible for purchasing.

TOP The bakery is located on the corner of Main and Royal streets in Moorreesburg (the entrance is in Royal Street).

LEFT From Tuesdays to Fridays, the team is on the go mixing and folding to ensure well-stocked shelves greet Moorrees's customers from Wednesdays to Saturdays.



Belina de Water, one of Carien's right-hand women, weighs out 1 kg of dough for each Koringberg loaf, which she then arranges on the baking trays before shaping and pinching each one – and then into the oven they go. On the right, we see the oven racks with the hot, beautifully baked breads.



hundreds of loaves in a previous life. Folding and shaping dough is really a form of meditation that you have to do with intention, otherwise you can end up with horrible loaves.”

In the meantime, she has trained three other women – Belina de Water, Louise Mentoor and Stephley Magerman – who now help her mix and shape the 300 to 400 loaves they bake weekly.

Their sourdough starter, which Carien named Bertha after her Sub B teacher (“a very strong woman”), was a gift from Peet. “We know that Bertha has been alive for between 30 and 40 years; she’s originally

from Israel but she now speaks many languages. A starter is really like a child or a dog with which you have an emotional connection. Because baking is hands-on work, the enzymes from your hands become part of the starter.”

From the Swartland, for the Swartland

Nowadays, people want to know where their food comes from. This is important for Carien too. “I asked right at the beginning: Where are we? What do we have here? What can we do with it? Everyone always drives past Moorreesburg, which is sort of in the middle of nowhere, but I realised that the town is only half an hour’s drive from at least eight other small towns where no one else bakes proper sourdough bread that has been fermented for a long time. And we live in wheat country!”

“A lot of the commercial sourdough bread that you buy in the shops is not real sourdough – you’ll get the shock of your life if you read the list of ingredients! Many

people still don’t know that real sourdough bread contains nothing more than stoneground flour, salt, water and sourdough starter. They don’t know the difference between our sourdough bread and the commercial kind, or why sourdough bread is good for you. But I’m always keen to set them straight!”

These days, Moorrees Artisan Bakery and Eatery’s sourdough range comprises much more than bread. There are also bagels, English muffins, biscuits, frozen biscuit dough for home baking, brioches, flatbreads, pizza bases, croissants and even dumplings. And they smoke all the meat on the restaurant menu themselves. It’s impressive to hear how they get their bread to the market: they have their “mules”, friends who live in Moorreesburg and work elsewhere who deliver the bread for them in exchange for bread or credits they can use at the restaurant.

Carien laughs and says it’s actually not quite so far-fetched that they now operate a bakery, restaurant, bar and wine shop.

Freeze and refresh

On Tuesdays, they only sell frozen sourdough bread at Moorrees, but it’s easy to refresh it, Carien says. Take the bread out of the freezer and heat your oven to 180 °C. Using a spray bottle, spray a little water on the bread and heat it in the oven for 15 minutes.



It's a great blessing to be able to work with people you like, and who've been with us from day one, Carien says. The Moorrees team, from left: Belina de Water, Kim Uys, Stefan Skippers, Louise Mentoer, Marchay Cleophas and Stephey Magerman, with Carien and her husband, Craig.

"Food is probably in my DNA, and certainly part of the language and culture I grew up with."

Her mother was a nurse and her father a cheesemaker before they ran a butchery and a shop in Albertinia that sold anything from shoes to sweets.

"My dad also had a herd of pigs and started making deli meats, which he would sell during the holiday season in Still Bay and Hartenbos and places like that. My brother, Jaco, who now lives in New Zealand, and I worked in the butchery from a young age, mainly during the holidays. The 12-seater dining table in our home was often full of people for lunch and dinner, and my mom would cook as if she was running a restaurant – and she often catered for weddings on her own."

After matric, Carien did an academic bridging year in Stellenbosch and worked at De Oude Werf, where she became infatuated with the cheesecake. Then she did a course in hospitality management at Damelin in George, and her >

Drop in at the Wheat Industry Museum

Moorreesburg, where the wheat is grown and ground, and the bread is baked, is also home to the Wheat Industry Museum, which focuses on the history of the industry in South Africa. It is one of only two wheat museums in the world. On display are all kinds of vintage tools – primitive grindstones, millstones and horse mills, scales, sieves, scythes and sickles – as well as tractors, machines for sowing, harvesting, threshing and cutting wheat, flour bags, knapsacks and bread pans.

The museum, at 134 Main Street, is open from Monday to Friday, 08:30 to 15:00.

Contact Wheat Industry Museum

kormuseum@wcaccess.co.za 022 100 1190





To the left, piles of sourdough pizza bases (yum), and in the photo on the right, Louise Mentoer readies the colanders in which the dough will rise, while Belina de Water checks the orders after preparing a batch of Swartland loaves

practical training at Fancourt. After that she worked at the Italian restaurant Casa Bella in Sandton, Johannesburg, and within six months she had earned enough money from tips to go overseas.

“My grandmother was married to a Scotsman, and I had the self-confidence at the age of 21 to write letters to a few hotels in Scotland. And that’s how I got a job as restaurant manager at Fort William, a place that seated 220 guests who’d arrive there by the tour-bus load.” Five years later, she managed a small hotel, before she

returned to South Africa and started working at the late Liz McGrath’s The Plettenberg. It was in this hotel’s wine cellar that Carien decided she wanted to investigate career opportunities in the wine industry.

New ventures

Carien and Craig’s lease recently came to an end and they were able to buy the premises. They would like to make some changes, as their budget allows, and in addition to her bread-baking workshops, Carien has several plans up her sleeve to help people indulge their creative spirit.

“I actually thrive on failure,” Carien says, “because I’ll try something for three to six months, and if it doesn’t work out, I’ll try something else without beating myself up about the failure.”

Not that there is much of that. From Tuesday to Saturday, they are mixing and folding and baking bread, and when you bite into one of their well-made place-specific loaves, you taste two things: love and pure Swartland.

• **Buy the bread** Moorrees’s sourdough breads – named Swartland, Familie, Kasteelberg, Koringberg and Renoster-veld, plus a few others that are baked to order – are for sale from the bakery from Wednesday to Saturday, and in the neighbouring towns and villages: Malmesbury (Cherry Lane Bistro & Deli), Riebeeck-Kasteel (Au Bouchon Rouge Brasserie), Hopefield (The Foodie Hub and the Hopefield Market), Stompneusbaai (El Torro Internazionale Delicatessen), Koringberg (Desert Rose Farm Stall), Piketberg (Piquet Collective) and Philadelphia (De Werf Farm Stall).

Join Carien for a baking class

Carien offers hands-on sourdough workshops at Moorrees on certain Saturdays. The dates until the end of the year are **14 September, 19 October, 9 November, 14 December and 21 December**. Everyone gets together at 09:30 for breakfast and coffee at the restaurant. From 11:00 until about 12:30, you learn basic practical skills to bake sourdough bread at home.

Wear non-slip shoes and bring an apron with you, as well as a cooler bag that’s big enough for a colander (so you can take your dough home to bake the next day). You’ll also get a starter kit with your own sourdough starter, enough stoneground flour to feed it once and a recipe. Any other extras, such as local stoneground flour in 5 kg and 12,5 kg bags, are for your own account. The workshop fee is R700 per person.

Bookings 📧 info@moorrees.co.za ☎️ 082 633 7321

Contact 🐞 moorrees.co.za

📘 Moorrees 📧 info@moorrees.co.za

☎️ 082 633 7321 📺

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Moorreesburg
& Koringberg



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Manna for the masses

Countless numbers of roosterkoek and koeksisters are baked in South Africa every day – whether it's to make ends meet or to fund a cause. But baker Flora Linnert from the Knersvlakte is truly in a league of her own.

TEXT JOHAN VAN ZYL PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD

You can call Flora Linnert of Aasvoël Street in Vanrhynsdorp's RDP suburb an old hand, but this has nothing to do with the fact that she

was born 66 years ago on a farm in the Koebee Valley near the border between the Western and Northern Cape.

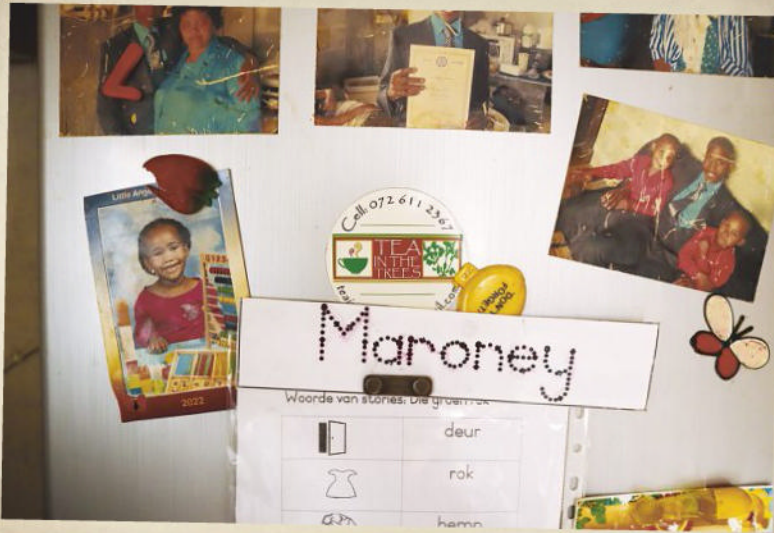
Whether Flora is mixing roosterkoek or koeksister dough, she doesn't measure out any of the ingredients.

"You really don't need to if you're doing it for about the thousandth time," she says, laughing. "No one taught me how to do it; I learnt by watching my mother as a young girl. I don't have a recipe; it's in my head. I do it by look and feel, but I saw in the *Cook with 7de Laan* recipe book that Matrone's koeksister recipe is very similar to mine, except she uses buttermilk. But buttermilk is way too expensive."

Roosterkoek, dripping with butter and apricot jam (Flora's favourite) or filled with a piece of succulent boerewors, and koeksisters are among the top sellers at almost every school or church bazaar, fundraiser, and arts-and-culture festival in the country. This dough duo has helped to raise funds for school tours and building school halls and tennis courts, has helped to put many children through university, or simply "kept households going by plugging budget holes", like for Flora, who gets on her bicycle three days a week to work as a domestic in town and only bakes to order. (She also bakes lamingtons and Hertzoggies.)

It's been called the "roosterkoek revolution", with Tannie Poppie van As from Laingsburg being one of the most recent examples of its popularity. Others say the roosterkoek renaissance is nothing new, that it started as part of the whole culture that developed around food cooked on an open fire. Some connoisseurs sing the praises of fancy smoky roosterkoek that is full of air holes, others flatten the dough just before they put it on the grid so it forms a large cavity in the middle.

Flora is clearly not of this school. She shakes her head, and even furrows her brows to express her disapproval: >



TOP Family photos, including Flora's granddaughter, Maroney, adorn the fridge.

ABOVE Flora's plump roosterkoek – she makes a batch of only 15 from 2,5 kg of flour – brown over the coals.

LEFT Koesie, the family cat, goes by the name Swartman, and he has precisely one white whisker on each side of his nose.

OPPOSITE Flora braais the roosterkoek at the front gate of her home in Aasvoël Street which gives her a perfect view of Maskamberg. "That mountain is my anchor. It's the first thing I see when I wake up and, I promise you, it looks different every day."



ABOVE Flora mixes koeksister dough in a plastic bowl. She first presses it down with her hands, then she rolls it flat and cuts it into strips and then into broad fingers. She makes two cuts in each of these, keeping the top intact, plaits the three “legs” and pinches the loose ends together. The oil must be hot enough so that the koeksister is browned on one side within a minute or two before she does the other side.

“No, no, no. I’m not looking for holes. I can’t let people pay R10 for a roosterkoek that’s full of air holes!”

She laughs and says roosterkoek with holes in it is the work of lazy people who don’t knead the dough properly before they cut it.

“My roosterkoek is big and soft, with an even texture. And one is a meal on its own – many people say they can’t finish it all. That’s perhaps what makes mine different, because here in Hopland and the Ou Blok there are about four other people who also sell roosterkoek. It’s probably like that in every town in the country. But the main thing is a roosterkoek *must* be cooked over a wood fire, because you have to smell and taste the smoke.”

Flora’s youngest son, Attie, who helped her bake roosterkoek at one stage, agrees to build and light the fire for her. He is busy making snackwiches using ordinary sliced bread to take to work, and is also packing plenty of koeksisters to share with his colleagues.

The roosterkoek dough – 2,5 kg white bread flour, instant yeast, salt, a little oil, a generous knob of butter and lukewarm water, which Flora

mixed and kneaded in a jiffy – has been set aside, covered with a tea towel, to prove.

“I made the syrup yesterday,” Flora says as she starts to mix the ingredients for the koeksister dough. She rubs the butter into the flour, like you’d do for scone dough.

She presses the dough into a flat rectangle, rolls it out and cuts it horizontally into strips and then into broad fingers. She makes two cuts in each of these, keeping the top intact, plaits the three “legs” and pinches the loose ends together. Quick as a flash. When the oil is

hot, she fries the plaits until they’re golden brown on the one side before she turns them, fries the other side, and then, while still sizzling hot, plunges them into the chilled syrup.

“There you have it: the koeksisters are done,” she says.

Outside at the fire, Flora spreads out a cloth and sprinkles it with flour. She punches down the roosterkoek dough and divides it into three thick sausages, which she presses flat and cuts into large rectangles. She coats the sides with flour too, so they won’t stick together while the dough proves for a second time.

Tips for making perfect koeksisters

- Koeksister dough needs a lot of butter, more than most recipes ask for, Flora says.
- Cream of tartar is an essential ingredient for the syrup as it helps to keep the koeksisters crisp.
- The syrup should be ice-cold when you plunge the koeksisters into it, straight from the hot oil.
- Koeksisters turn soft and crumbly when you keep them in the fridge for too long. Rather freeze them if you want to make sure they remain crisp and delicious, and take them out of the freezer half an hour before you eat them.





TOP Flora's kitchen is a compact space, but she always has more than one thing on the go. The photos on top show how she mixes and kneads the roosterkoek dough before pressing it into a long flat sausage and cutting each loaf. The photos above show her making the fire so she can cook all six sides of each roosterkoek over moderate coals.

A great year for wildflowers

Flora is one of Katrina and August Linnert's seven children, she tells us while we wait in the chilly winter air for the dough rectangles to prove. "I left school at 16 – my mom said I had to. I did quite well and didn't want to give it up. I thought of maybe becoming a nurse or a warden."

So Flora started to work at the Sea Harvest processing plant in Saldanha, sorting snoek and sardines. After nearly two years, she returned to the farm in the Koebe Valley where her father worked as a goatherd. She worked as a domestic worker in the Urionskraal district for a few months, and on 8 January 1979, she started working for the Basson family of the farm Uitvlug, where she was a domestic and carer for 21 years. In 1998 she moved to town, to Vanrhynsdorp, and erected a Wendy house in her mother's yard, before she received her own RDP house in 2007. This is where she lives now, sharing the house with Attie and his wife and her granddaughter, Maroney, and a lodger. Her eldest son, Lourens, and his family also live in Vanrhynsdorp.

She places the first roosterkoek on the grid. "For a while I made roosterkoek and cycled to town to sell them. The people at the old-age home don't have much money, so I sold them for R5, but they let it slip, and then everyone wanted me to give the roosterkoek away for nothing. A couple of times I made roosterkoek outside the butchery on a Saturday, and later outside the school during sporting events, but then they said I wasn't allowed to sell there if I didn't donate some of the money to the school.

"Now, I rather bake to order, and my regular customers support me. They tell me, 'Floor, if I can't have your roosterkoek or koeksisters, I'd rather not have any.' Perhaps I should bake roosterkoek next to the road again... during the wildflower season. We had a lot of rain; I think it's going to be a great year for flowers. My name is Flora, after all!"

Contact 📞 081 009 0247 📧

Tips for making perfect roosterkoek

- The coals should be hot, but not so hot that they blacken the outside of the roosterkoek while it's still raw inside. Place the roosterkoek on the braai grid and turn them by hand – if you burn your fingers, it's a sign that the coals are too hot.
- Before you turn a roosterkoek, it has to be puffed up on top and the underside should be nicely browned. Then braai it on the long sides, and lastly on the short sides. When it's cooked through, it feels light and gives a hollow thump when you tap it with your knuckles.



A photograph of a woman, Zelna Barends, wearing a red Chicago Bulls jersey, leaning over a young child in a classroom. The child is wearing yellow pants and patterned socks. The woman is looking down at the child, who is sitting on a blue plastic chair. The background shows a classroom setting with a green chalkboard and various items on shelves. The text "HIDDEN SECRET" is in the top left corner.

HIDDEN SECRET

Niekerkshoop's desert rose

The expression “bloom where you are planted” is perhaps the last one you’d use when referring to Niekerkshoop. Here, the earth gives you very little and life gives you even less. If you choose to flower in this place, it will be at your own risk. But Zelna Barends not only blooms here, she also provides shade for her whole community.

TEXT AND PHOTOS WILLEM VAN DER BERG





There's a stretch of sand, stone and umbrella thorn between Prieska and Griekwastad that few people in our country have ever seen. If you don't live here, there's no real reason for you to travel on the R386 between the two towns. Most of it is dirt road. And it's rough. The corrugated surface will rattle and loosen your – and your car's – joints. And around every corner, sharp splinters of the Asbesberge lie in wait for your tyres.

Roughly halfway on this 125 km tract, you'll find Niekerkshoop.

Bertie Coetzee, from the band Zinkplaat, is the only person who's ever tried to raise the profile of this town. The band's song "Elvis bly in Niekerkshoop" ("Elvis lives in Niekerkshoop") was a hit in 2005, despite the fact that most people

who enjoyed singing along had no idea where the town was located.

Bertie knows this place because he grew up on Lowerland farm about an hour's drive away and attended primary school in Niekerkshoop. "We would boast about our dirt-and-stone rugby field and were only too happy when someone knocked us down onto a patch of devil's thorn or moist horse manure."

According to the lyrics of the Zinkplaat song Bertie was singing back then, the town had already passed its expiry date.

EVEN FROM A DISTANCE, in the cool air-conditioned comfort of your car, it's possible to tell that the town is dying under the Northern Cape sun. Grey skeletons of pines and bluegums cling obstinately against the blue sky. Many have fallen over and are turning to dust. >

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE Niekerkshoop and its people are surrounded by a desolate, lonely landscape, a desert infiltrating the town's very existence. Buildings are in ruins and trees that once provided an oasis lie like skeletons on the dusty road. How long can this remote village and its community endure?





HIDDEN SECRET





Houses everywhere are weeping over the lack of hope and life here.

But one woman refuses to surrender to all the sadness. In Muisvoël Street, at the edge of the township, Zelna Barends stands out like a flowering desert rose. Her colourful play-and-learning centre, Zenisha's, is like a rainbow offering the only promise of hope.

"There are many days when it feels to me that no one knows that Niekerkshoop and its people even exist. We are isolated here between the asbestos and tiger's eye," explains Zelna with a smile that never seems to leave her face.

She knows precisely how rarely visitors, or indeed any mercies, come this way because she grew up in this part of the world. Her parents worked at the Koegas asbestos mine, about 60km west of the town. "My mother was a stonecutter and my father something just a little better. But they both died of asbestosis."

She left school after Standard 6 and a while later went to her sister in Pretoria. "You have few options if you don't have matric and I began working as a domestic helper. My daughter, Zenisha, was born in 2010 with Down syndrome. I knew nothing about the condition but made sure that I learnt as much as I could at the Down Syndrome Association of Pretoria." The more Zelna learnt about Down syndrome, the more she realised that she wanted to return to her own people because no one there understood or tried to help people like Zenisha.

"People living with disabilities become outcasts in societies like ours because there's no assistance for them, and there's a strange fear of the disabled. So, they just sit in their houses. I wanted to create a space for them to visit, a place where they could feel safe, where they would have a voice and know their lives had meaning." >

ABOVE You won't hear much from Gert Manna Olyn, but when you see the little windmills he makes, you'll understand why.

TOP Adults with disabilities gather at Zenisha's on Wednesdays. Here, they engage in conversation and crafts, which Zelna sells to provide them with a small income.

TOP LEFT Zenisha's Play and Learning Centre has a simple façade, but here in Niekerkshoop, it's a place full of hope and love.

OPPOSITE TOP The formidable trio of miracle workers. From left are Lena Runcie, Zelna Barends and Turien Roman.

OPPOSITE LEFT For the children of Niekerkshoop, the world is all dusty streets, umbrella thorn and scorching days. They know nothing else. That's why Zelna tries as much as possible to show them the world beyond the Asbesberge.



ABOVE Lena Runcie helps Carol-Ann, who is being raised by her grandmother, Maria Julies. “She is a strong child, but you need to work gently with her,” Maria explains.

TOP The main form of stimulation for the children comes through play. Rina Wiid, an occupational therapist from Prieska, visits the centre twice a month to help Zelna with other types of exercises for the children. Here, we see Marcel Julius and RJ Poolman playing.

ABOVE RIGHT Big smiles from Theodore as he cuddles mom Theodorsha Barend.

OPPOSITE Melinda Louw and Maria Roman sort through the material that has been donated to the centre – they are then used for crafts and handmade items.

ZELNA RETURNED to Niekerkshoop in 2017. But when she took Zenisha to the primary school in 2018, she realised that her work would be more difficult than she had anticipated. “I thought that in such a small school and community the people would accept my child more easily. But they refused to allow her to attend school. I even offered to be an assistant at the school to help children with similar problems, but it didn’t make any difference. The teachers were afraid of my eight-year-old daughter because they didn’t know how to work with her. Of course, they also didn’t want to admit any other children with mental or physical challenges. When I told the parents that I wanted to start a centre for these children, they didn’t believe me.”

With the help of the Department of Education, Zelna ensured that she received as much training as possible, and she also started

completing her high-school grades. Her former employers in Pretoria, Willem and Magdalena Roos, supported her dream and purchased the shipping container in which she started Zenisha’s Play and Learning Centre in February 2019.

The centre was set up at her home, where the container occupies a large part of her property, and the remaining open areas are used for play and work. There is also a kitchen where meals are prepared for all who come here.

“For a long time now, we haven’t only had a handful of children with disabilities coming to Zenisha’s. We also have adults who come on Wednesdays to practise their crafts and chat. This adds meaning to their lives. It helps them to feel like they are a part of something and are not alone. And then we have about 30 children coming here after school.”

Zelna is still smiling. She could very well have added that it’s the



“same school that did not want my daughter”. But she doesn’t, because she just wants to make Niekerkshoop a little more whole, and to help make sure that all its children do not become stone-cutters. So, she ensures that they can read properly, do school homework, eat, feel loved, and know that there is a wide-open world that lies beyond the Asbesberge.

“So many of the children don’t have a bed. Or have never eaten with a knife and fork. Some of them don’t know what a bath looks like. We try to show them that Niekerkshoop need only be their beginning. We try to give them the self-confidence they need to get away from here.”

Zelna takes the children on excursions to guesthouses so that they can add rooms to their dreams, visit kitchens where delicious meals are cooked, and look out of windows to the gardens beyond.

She sometimes takes them to Lowerland, the wonderful organic farm owned by ex Zinkplaat rocker Bertie and his wife, Alette, so that they can see how mealies and wheat become flour. And bake loaves to take home to houses where even bread is scarce.

A SHIPPING CONTAINER is not a large space when it needs to accommodate tables, books, toys and 10 children who are being kept busy. But Zelna has organised it very practically and beautifully, and each child has their own place where they can do and be what they want.

Two other miracles are at work here. Lena Runcie and Turien Roman

have been assisting Zelna for the past four years without earning a salary. “We do it for our children,” says Lena. “This isn’t a job that you do to make money. We give all we have so that the children can feel that they are living.”

They don’t only do this while they are assisting at the centre. Lena also adopted little Elrise, who is mentally handicapped, when her mother passed away two years ago.

“We have learned a lot from Zelna. And, at the moment, the three of us – Turien, Zelna and I – are busy with a course to become qualified early childhood development practitioners. This makes me very proud. While trying to make a difference to others, >

“We try to show children that Niekerkshoop need only be their beginning. We try to give them the self-confidence to get away from here.”



we are achieving something big for ourselves, too.”

Theodore Barend was born with an infection of the brain. Although he can’t converse with you, you have no doubt that he is a stylish guy.

“Oh, he loves dressing well. And his sneakers are his absolute favourite!” says his mother, Theodorsha.

She explains that Theo has undergone more than 30 surgeries. “It was very difficult in the beginning, and I couldn’t understand why all of this was happening to me and my child. But eventually you become used to it; this is your life. At one stage I said to myself: Girl, this isn’t about you. See how friendly your son is. If he can do it, so can you. He basically became my coping mechanism.”

Theo requires full-time care, which means that Theodorsha cannot work. But she is studying online to be a teacher.

“Young people are too quick to hand their children over to their mothers so that they can get on

with their lives. We can’t ignore our responsibilities like that. Zelna came here to teach us this and offer us help. She has become the mother of this community.”

Tannie Maria Julies agrees wholeheartedly with Theodorsha. “Zelna has shown me, as someone who is already a grown woman, how to be courageous. And she has shown me how to work with our children.”

Tannie Maria is a grandmother who is raising her daughter’s handicapped child.

“But, my sister, we are still privileged,” she says to Theodorsha. “Our children can laugh and cry and play. There are others who can’t even do this.”

How does Zelna stay positive while keeping the flame of Niekerkshoop’s last hope alive, even on those days when she has no more gas for cooking food in the centre’s kitchen?

“When I returned from Pretoria, Niekerkshoop almost drove me crazy. But the centre took my attention away from everything

ABOVE While not spacious, the container has been cleverly designed so that each little “workstation” provides enough room and stimulation for every child to play and be themselves.

OPPOSITE Precious little Royalty Malinga, Zelna’s granddaughter, has learnt about love and compassion from her granny. She plays with the disabled children, comforts them, and her sweet mischievous smile is infectious, spreading joy wherever she goes.

that bothered me and made me focus on *here*, where I can see that we are making a difference. And it keeps me busy; I can’t pay too much attention to other things. But Zenisha inspires me the most. She gives me courage. Because she started this whole project.” 

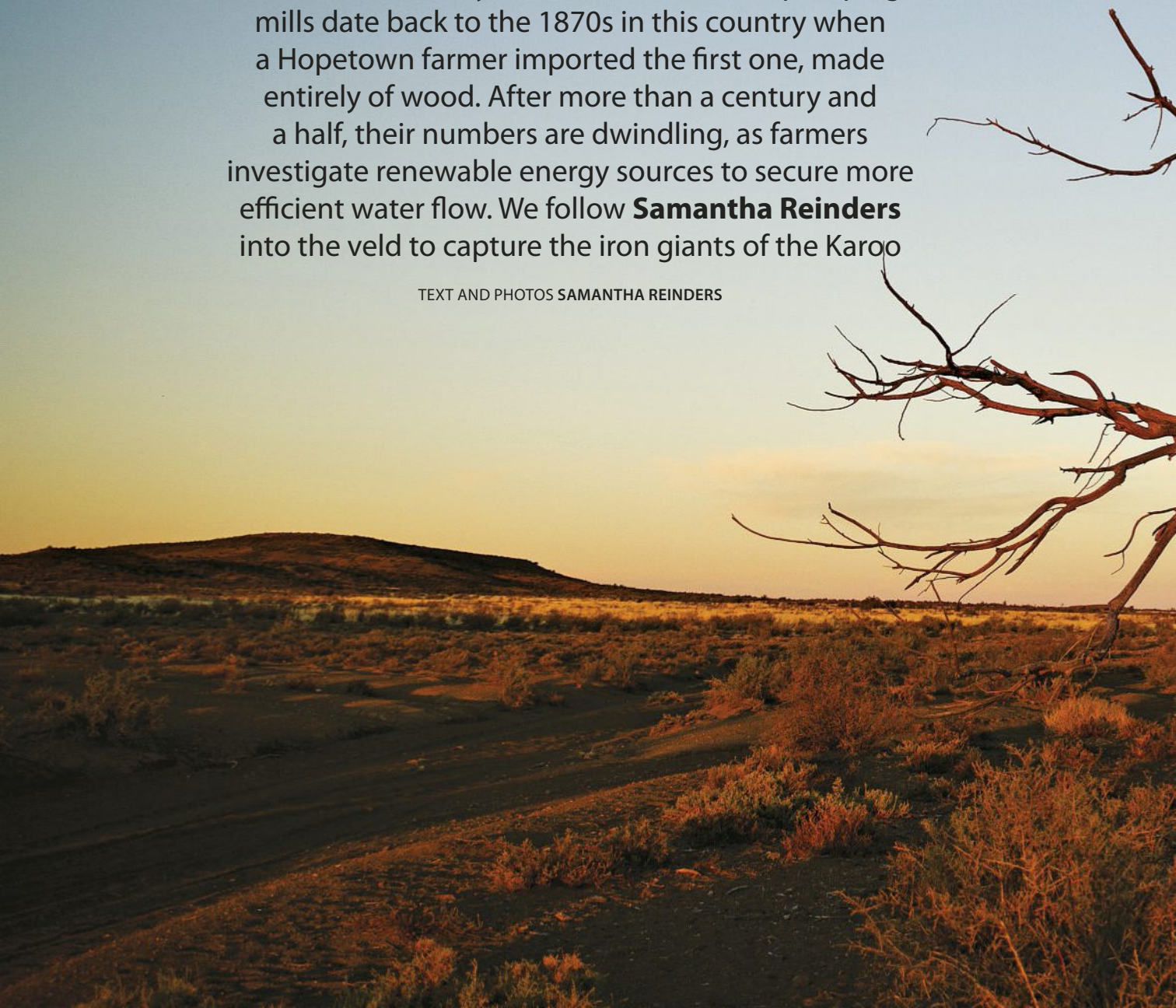
Contact  zenishascentre@gmail.com
 Zenishas Play and Learning Centre
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Winds of change

Windmills have become ubiquitous emblems of South Africa's dusty interiors. These water-pumping mills date back to the 1870s in this country when a Hopetown farmer imported the first one, made entirely of wood. After more than a century and a half, their numbers are dwindling, as farmers investigate renewable energy sources to secure more efficient water flow. We follow **Samantha Reinders** into the veld to capture the iron giants of the Karoo

TEXT AND PHOTOS SAMANTHA REINDERS







Scronk. Swieeee.
Scronk. Dwah.
Klank! Klank! Klank!
Klank! Shaaaaaar.
Kieeeeep. Shloop.
Woosh. Clonk.

If you ask a dozen people to explain the sound of a Karoo wind pump, you'll get a dozen different words describing the metallic rhythmic cough of the rusty steel structures that scatter the veld and blend into the Karoo's very own soundtrack.

If ever there was a true emblem of South Africa's dusty interior, it is the "water-pumping mill": windmill, wind pump or, of course, *windpomp*.

Life in the Karoo revolves around water – mostly the lack of it. With annual rainfalls often less than 250mm a year, it truly is a living desert and a difficult place to make a go of things. This all changed in 1854 when American Daniel Halladay patented the self-regulating wind pump. It took

20 years for the invention to make it to the Great Karoo. (In 1874 a Hopetown farmer named PJ du Toit was the first South African to import a windpump – a Halladay Standard, made entirely of wood.) Once here, the contraption earned its keep and, ultimately, permitted settlement in many areas that had previously relied on unpredictable water sources from springs or streams.

Fast forward to today and the Karoo is dotted with hundreds, if not thousands, of these metal giants that tap into the deep alluvial water supply. It is profoundly satisfying to watch them wheeling and whirring in the veld, the steady spin of the flashing blades driving the rods up and down, cylinders lifting a cupful of liquid at a time, over and over. Each cupful means one more *bossie* will pop out of the earth, one more sheep or goat will get a much-needed drink.

Of course, that is not where the

It comes on legs (previous spread, above and opposite)

Long before the Karoo had holiday homes and boutique farm stalls, the San were stewards of the land. For them rain was life. "It comes on legs" they are recorded as saying. The rain never lasted long, though. With the advent of the windmill, the rain "blessing" could be stored and dispersed later when needed for plant and animal and, therefore, human life to flourish.

story ends. With time comes change. Old broken wind pumps are being replaced by solar panels, their numbers fast dwindling as farmers look into renewable energy sources to obtain better and more efficient water flow.

So, before it's too late, find a windmill you can sit underneath. And just listen, you'll hear your own concerto. >







Standing guard

Cooling off in the Eastern Cape during the summer holidays is just one of a collection of memories of the Karoo's iron giants that steadfastly watch over human and animal endeavours.

Willowmore locals (opposite above)

Angora goats gather at their favourite water trough, courtesy of one of the windmills so ubiquitous to Willowmore.

Moving shadows (opposite below)

In a still Karoo landscape, the only thing that seems to move are the blades of trusty windmills. This old one near Sutherland keep chugging on... >

A Karoo trifecta

Compositions like this one don't come along often. But, as a photographer, when you spend the day in the Karoo and are gifted with light like this, a beautiful windmill *and* a rainbow, you just click. And click again! >



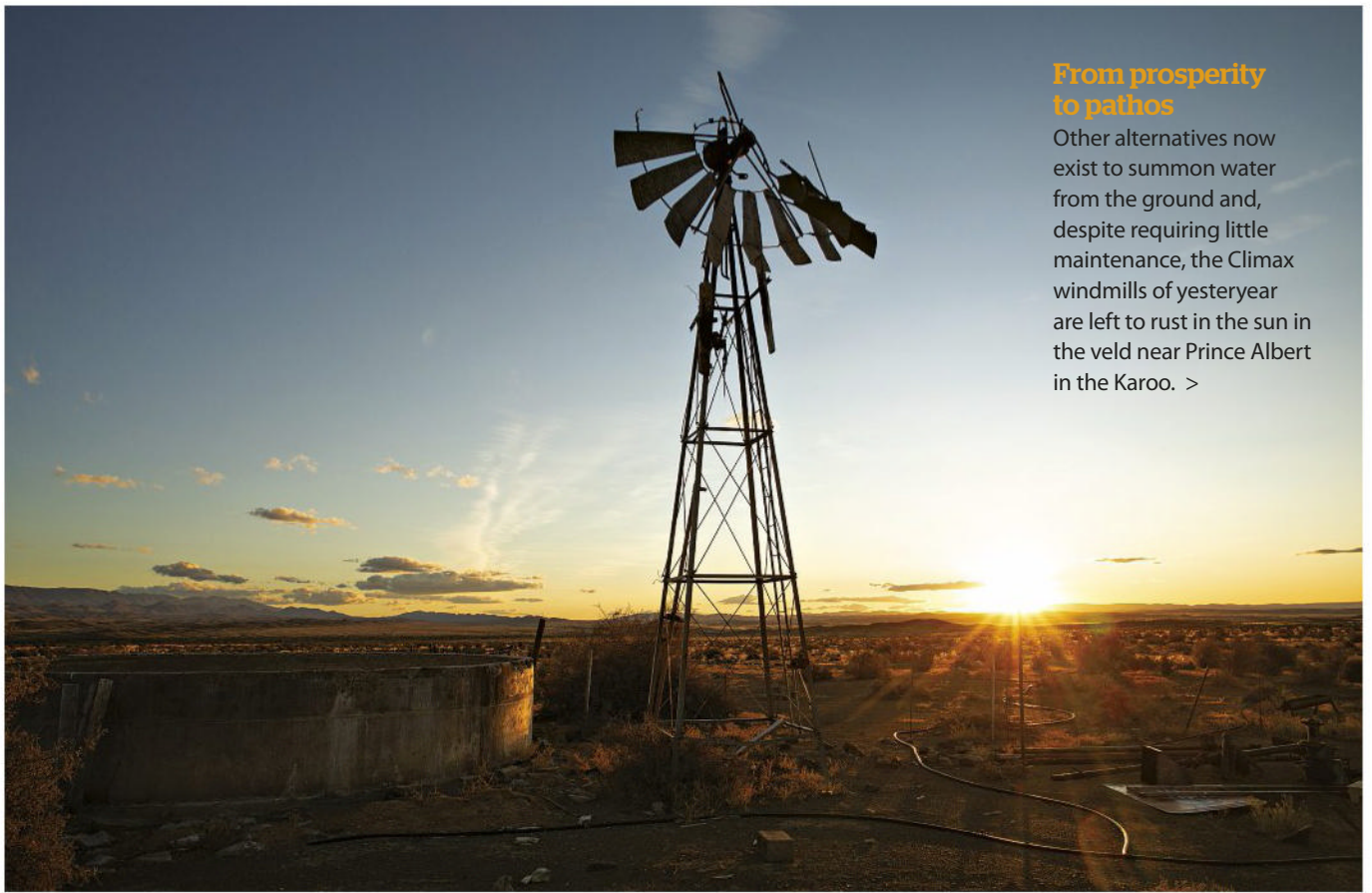




The end of an era

These two windmills, one just outside Philipstown in the Northern Cape (above), and the other (right), standing like a lonely sentinel on the side of the R355 between Calvinia and Ceres, no longer pump any water, but their skeletons remain as reminders of the past.





From prosperity to pathos

Other alternatives now exist to summon water from the ground and, despite requiring little maintenance, the Climax windmills of yesteryear are left to rust in the sun in the veld near Prince Albert in the Karoo. >







Take the plunge (above)

In the middle of summer, the best place to be, any time from 10:00 to 16:00, is submerged in the nearest farm dam, made possible by the nearest windmill.



Water as life (left)

For some, just a trickle of water; for others survival.

A visual narrative (opposite)

Halfway between Johannesburg and Cape Town, a scene of “blessings” to come. >

Stockpiling history (right)

Windmill blades pile up in barns and sheds across the country as they're replaced with other methods of pumping water.

I am not a tree (opposite)

In *Plains of Camdeboo*, Eve Palmer writes: "At first encounter the Karoo may seem arid, desolate and unforgiving, but to those who know it, it is a land of secret beauty and infinite variety." To the untrained eye, windmills all look the same, but each one is unique; this one taps the earth on a farm outside Strydenburg.

The stars of Sutherland (below)

A torch, an assistant with no fear of heights and who's crazy enough to brave the cold, a bottle of wine... You probably don't want to try this at home. For best results, add a long exposure. 









The man with the brooms

From jailbird to entrepreneur and believer...
This is Jan Mentoer, the broom maker of Malmesbury.

TEXT AND PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD

Every day, Jan Mentoer wakes up at his home in Wynruit Street in Malmesbury, prepares for the day, packs his stock, says goodbye to his wife of more than 30 years, and heads off to work.

This might sound like an ordinary suburban existence, but Jan's house is in Wesbank, a neighbourhood on

the outskirts of town, and his stock is a collection of exuberant thatch brooms, which he packs into a little home-made trailer. He then pushes the whole lot to his "place of work" almost 4 km away in the centre of Malmesbury, at the intersection of Ford and Voortrekker streets.

It's remarkable how he manages to manoeuvre everything while cars race past him, braking suddenly

before they reach the permanent traffic camera, and then speed off again. Even more remarkable is that Jan is, according to his ID, 73 years old, although a local newspaper reported that he was 54 in 2016 (which would make him 62 today).

JAN IS THE PICTURE of peace, and well known in the town. Just ask anyone about the "man with the >

TOP The little trailer Jan made himself contains everything he needs – mainly reeds and sticks – to make his brooms. With a few doll's heads thrown in for decoration, a fan and wheels that lock, it seems to have a personality all of its own.

OPPOSITE Jan seems unfazed by the world around him; he sets up at the same place every day to sell his brooms. He doesn't own a cellphone, prefers to not have too many friends, and says the radio is his favourite companion.

brooms” and they will immediately nod, usually with a smile that spreads across their faces.

He says he comes here every day, Monday to Friday and on Saturday until lunchtime. “But Sunday is church day.” His bread and butter comes from the people who stop to buy one, perhaps two, of his brooms, which cost R70 each.

Today, he is sitting in the morning sunshine as usual, his little trailer beside him, as he waits for customers to stop. He appears to be in a world of his own. There is a radio and two spare Bonus Power Max batteries on an upturned bucket in front of him, and a pile of old *Huisgenoot* magazines lies on the ground next to him.

“No, Meneer, I can’t read or write, and I didn’t go to school. People

drop these off for me. There are a lot of people here who care about me and support me by buying my brooms. Occasionally someone will even bring me a cup of coffee. I appreciate it so much.”

He is not at all bitter about his lack of education and keeps himself informed about world events; his radio is tuned to RSG all day and he listens to every news bulletin. “I’ve had a hard life, but I know that today I can do the same things with my hands that people who read and write can do.”

He’s had his share of trouble: “I sat here for more than 10 years, quietly listening to the radio and selling my brooms; then the traffic officers started to make things difficult for me. Luckily some of the people around here came out and told

them: ‘We buy our brooms here; the man isn’t doing anything. Leave him and his wireless alone.’”

On bad days he will sell just one broom – or none at all. “But it doesn’t bother me; I just come back the next day with my brooms. It’s a new day after all, and it could be better than yesterday.”

Jan remembers that his best day was when he made 100 brooms for the Moorreesburg co-operative.

JAN HAS BEEN married to Katriena for 30 years and they had five children, three of whom are still alive. “She is a lovely woman from the Upington area. All the people from there are tough as nails – you mustn’t step on their toes!” Jan laughs from deep in his belly.

“The two of us are pensioners



ABOVE The hill in the distance is where Jan goes to cut the reeds and sticks he needs for his brooms, which are beautifully made, neat and functional. He walks there with his trailer; it’s in the opposite direction to where he lives in Wesbank, so, if on a day, you don’t see him on the corner of Ford and Voortrekker, he’s probably out collecting materials. **LEFT** Jan’s stories are usually accompanied by huge belly laughs, especially if he’s talking about his wife who hails from Upington. “You don’t want to mess with those people,” he says.

now,” he says. “She makes delicious food and bakes lovely bread, but I don’t want to retire because then life is just about complaining and sickness!” He thinks for a moment. “My wife and children are the most important things to me; when you have too many friends, you’re asking for trouble.”

Jan originally comes from Moorreesburg. “I worked on a farm at Ebenhaezer, but have been in Malmesbury for 30 years. I first worked on three different farms and then I delivered bricks for a Muslim man from Kalbaskraal. After the business closed, I decided that I had to do something else. I knew how to make brooms.”

Jan says this interest comes from his father. “He would use rope to tie his brooms, but I use wire.”

He uses veld reeds, which he says are the best. Jan gestures towards the rise where Malmesbury’s prison is situated. “That’s where I cut my reeds.”

The reeds are pressed together before he binds them with wire, which is tightly knotted. “This is called the rigging. Then the handle – just a bluegum branch that I saw, sand and sharpen – is pushed between the reeds and fastened with another piece of wire, called the lock wire. And to make it extra sturdy, I add a third wire and hammer in a nail.”

He is proud of the brooms he makes, which are perfect for using in the garden. “My brooms don’t just fall apart. But you must work with them in the right way if you want them to last. You have to constantly

turn your broom around while you are sweeping.”

FEW PASSERS-BY will know that Jan lost his way early in life when he became enmeshed in gang life when he was 14. “I was a member of the 28s gang for a long time,” he says.

The tattoo on his nose gives it away. “Yes, I was given this stamp in jail. I was released from the Riebeeck West Prison in 1994 after serving nine years for murder and assault. But before that I was also in Victor Verster Prison in Paarl.” He sighs. “It was difficult to get myself out of it, but now my life is on the right path. I am married, I have my own house, I have no problems – not even a phone. I am glad that the Lord helped me.”

Jan found the narrow path. 



ABOVE LEFT Jan’s little radio is always tuned to RSG, somewhere between 101 and 104FM. You can check yourself. It’s all he listens to.

ABOVE RIGHT The little trailer has two handles, not unlike a wheelbarrow, which makes it easy for Jan to push it around. Over the years, the decorations have changed. Before the days of the doll heads, it was adorned with a Free State number plate.

LEFT The sturdy wire that is tightly knotted ensures that Jan’s brooms won’t fall apart. But you must use it properly he says. “Keep turning it around as you sweep.”



TAKE A STROLL

Oasis of the Karoo

Vosburg was the Northern Cape's finalist in this year's *Kwêla* Town of the Year competition. In the end, this picturesque town did not win the title – it went to Heidelberg, Gauteng – but our vote would go to Vosburg, every time.

TEXT AND PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD

Let the dust settle

In the early morning, shortly after the sun has risen in spectacular fashion (see the photo on page 99), bakkies start moving from the farms to the town, and before long a dust cloud settles over Vosburg with its windmills, colossal trees and impressive NG Church. (We see an opportunity for a dust-busting business of some sort here. – Eds.) >





Little wanders

This is the Karoo and everyone knows how quickly the mercury rises in the summer. Then a morning or evening stroll along the dirt roads or under the big trees is balm for the soul, for young and old. This photo was taken at the hotel on the corner of Market and Plein streets. The parking area to the left has been laid with stones for Die Ketel Coffee Shop/Tuisnywerheid's clients.

In the Upper Karoo, in the middle of the vast plains between Britstown and Carnarvon, you'll find Vosburg, a verdant town with an appeal few can resist.

As you pass by, the beautiful, inviting green haven calls to you, but you have to push on because you need to be at a certain destination by a certain time, so-and-so is waiting for you. Then you promise yourself – again – next time...

And then, finally, after many attempts, you get around to booking accommodation in Vosburg. You manage to leave Middelburg, Mpumalanga, before 6am and you keep going, only stopping when absolutely necessary along the N12 and the Karoo Highland route, passing neglected, sad-looking towns like Kimberley, Hopetown, Strydenburg and Britstown. And

then, at last, just before sunset, you take the turn-off to Vosburg.

Quiet, tidy, well maintained and tranquil. A town whose dirt roads are lined with trees and feature lovely Karoo cottages with inspired gardens. And then there's the astonishingly beautiful Gothic church building that opened its doors in 1910 and, most impressively, took less than a year to build. (It, like its organ, was declared a national monument.)

The Vos family played a crucial role in the founding of the town. Towards the end of the 19th century, PJA Vos, the great-grandfather of Jan Vos, who still farms here, identified a need for a church and a school. In 1895 the town was founded on one of the Vos farms, Prosesfontein, on the banks of the *spruit* of the same name. Two years later, the Vosburg settlement was granted municipal status.

The town has ample water – besides the *spruit*, there are numerous springs that nourish the trees.

How, you can't help but wonder on a late-afternoon stroll through the town, does Vosburg manage to have almost no sign of neglect – unlike so many other towns. You can tell that things are being fixed and beautified; and most people have gardens: front gardens, back gardens, vegetable gardens, stoep gardens, pavement gardens... There's even a wildflower garden boasting Karoo beauties such as aloes, vygies, blue tulips, restios and tumbleweed. The houses are painted in cheerful colours; stones are arranged to mark parking spaces; stoeps are furnished for proper stoep sitting; and the house numbers are a treat.

In the morning, as the sun rises above the eastern horizon, you become aware of a disturbance. It's bakkies coming into town >



The most beautiful

The brief given to Australian-born architect William Henry Ford and his team of builders was to make the NG church in the town *the* most beautiful in the country so that Vosburg would be known as “the town with the most beautiful church”. We believe they succeeded in their mission. On 27 November 1895, the congregation was established in Vosburg, its first minister was Jan Daniël Louw who served the community from 1898 to 1911. The church’s foundation stone was laid on 27 November 1909, and less than a year later, on 17 September 1910, the church opened its doors.

The “boere” mall

The co-op, along with the church, is the heartbeat of this town. Inside you can find just about everything you need and, nowadays, there’s also an Absa ATM and even Pudo lockers where packages can be delivered or collected. >



Down the garden path

In the Karoo, you'll always find houses with dust for gardens; there's nothing too strange about that. But the natural irrigation system in Vosburg means residents have a real chance to make some magic on their properties, as well as the pavements. In many yards, saltbush hedges have been planted, carefully tended and neatly pruned.

from the farms, stirring up a light cloud of dust. And in the evening, as the sun sets on the opposite horizon, it's the clear sky, dotted with various cloud formations interspersed with contrails left in the wake of aircraft, that captivates your attention.

The few people you spot in the streets – usually accompanied by a dog or four – greet you and stop to chat. They tell you that in Vosburg you don't hear alarms and sirens, only owls and the church bell.

There aren't many shops in town, but the Koöperasie (the agricultural co-op), Ricks Karoo Winkel, the Central Garage and Die Ketel Coffee Shop/Tuisnywerheid seem to meet everyone's needs. The co-op sells everything from hardware and fridges to clothes and shoes – no wonder they call it the "boere mall". (The co-op is also the only place where you can get petrol and diesel.)

The town has a clinic and a municipal building, and at Delta Primary School with its 300 pupils and seven teachers, they even have robotics as a subject, yet they haven't forgotten their riel-dance heritage.

And then there are the sheep. A variety of fragrant bossies grow in these parts that provide good forage for the merinos, among them shrubs from the Vaal Karoo, the Ganna Karoo and the Silver Karoo. That's what gives the mutton its distinctive flavour.

In fact, Vosburg's residents like to get together for a braai and a party at Mierfontein pan outside of town. *Skaapstertjies* (braaied sheep's tails) and all... They're a sociable bunch of people, they care about their town, they roll up their sleeves to get things done, and they never rest on their laurels.

We'll be back.





A dollhouse, perhaps?

This lovely Victorian gem is dwarfed by several huge pine trees that surround it. This stoep is clearly not for sitting around; a potter's kiln is testimony to that. (This was one of very few *untrimmed* saltbush hedges in the village that we saw!)

Stoep zen

Furnished with couches and stools, and decorated with ornaments and pot plants, the stoep is really just an extension of the house. And everything stays put. What better way to relax, G&T in hand, watching and greeting the passers-by?



Who lives here?

No courier or visitor is going to have any trouble finding this house and its creative owner. Who could possibly miss the address, cleverly made and craftily mounted on mattress springs above the gate? >



Beautiful and simple

In the olden days, people knew how to build homes in the Karoo to survive the heat here. The orientation is important as are the thick walls, having small and minimal windows, wooden shutters and a wide stoep. Vosburg homes boast quaint gables, are well looked after and maintained, and interesting plants abound in the gardens as well as on the pavements. >







Eat, sleep, chat and charm

On the whiteboard at the bar of the Karoo Country Inn, known by locals as the Vosburg Hotel, you'll see written in black koki: "NB: No insulting or humiliating comments will be tolerated in the bar. Pottie (owner) and Winnie (co-owner)." Winnie Potgieter is a busy woman, especially since Pottie broke his ankle quite badly and is practically stuck behind the bar counter. She welcomes guests, will eagerly make you a delicious cooked meal, and is ready the next morning with a breakfast second to none. And, in between all that, she'll happily chat to guests. Winnie is quite excited about the prospect of having a doctor in the town. Dr Sam Scheepers from Piketberg has bought a house here and is busy renovating it for his retirement. "Other than that... I do miss my grandchildren in Gauteng," she says.

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Bon voyage!

In a place like Vosburg, you just want to forget about technology. But the town lies on the flight route between Cape Town and Johannesburg and, inevitably, at dusk you'll see the aeroplanes passing, painting the clear sky with contrails that seem to weave into the pink and orange clouds, creating a glorious sight. It's an impressive intrusion that is followed by another distraction. At 18:48 you hear a plane right above you and quickly check the FlightRadar app on your phone. It's an Airbus A350 (registration number N519DN) from the American airline Delta Air Lines (Flight DL250). It's flying at 38 000 feet (11,6 km) and travelling at 444 knots (822 km/h) on route to Cape Town and will land in 37 minute's time, after having taken off from Johannesburg one hour and 11 minutes ago. (What a mouthful on one small screen!) Then it's probably heading over the Atlantic Ocean to Atlanta, Georgia. Sometimes technology is a wonderful thing.

Good morning, sunshine

Mother nature has dipped her brush in the pink pot this morning to create this sunrise. Another lovely, peaceful day dawns in Vosburg. 

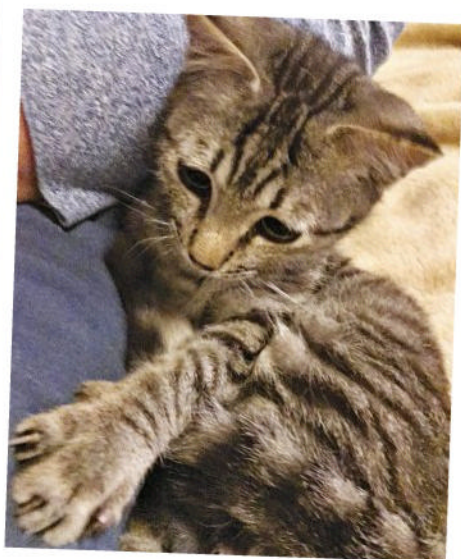


Goodbye, my *(best)* friend



It's common knowledge that our pets have positive benefits for our physical and mental health. In modern times, humans and animals have grown closer, and Covid-19 made us even more dependent on each other. But we also know that a dog or cat doesn't live as long as we do... there comes a time when we must say farewell. How do we process this loss?

TEXT AND PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD



The good life – Antonie enjoys a sunbath on a comfy bed of leaves. The photo opposite was taken the day after he arrived and even though he was badly neglected, we could see he was ready to play.





I am standing beneath three gigantic karee trees behind the house, watering the garden. This is our “forest” and special place, because it’s where we forget about the real world. It’s filled with plants – violets, clivias, ferns, orchids and moonflowers – together with old man’s beard and air plants. A choir of clicker frogs bursts forth here at night. And it’s a playground for the cats of the household.

Suddenly I notice a cheeky brown bird above me. The bright sunlight dances lightly through the branches. It flies closer, from branch to branch...

This is no stranger to our garden. It’s a Cape robin, part of a family of chicks hatched in the pot on the stoep that contains the wax plant – this despite the presence of the four cats.

These days, the little rascal also flies into the house. Straight through the open half of the stable door at

the back of the house and through the pantry door, which is kept ajar with a security chain. Sometimes we will spot a spatter of droppings under the chain, sometimes in the fruit bowl, and other times on the pestle where it rests in the mortar. He has even been caught tucking into the cats’ dry pellets.

Robin lands on a branch directly in front of me, at eye level, barely an arm’s length away.

“Yes?” I hear myself say. He tilts his head, as if expecting me to continue talking.

“Are you perhaps Antonie?” slips out of my mouth.

Startled, I turn around to see if anyone has heard me. Have I finally lost the plot?

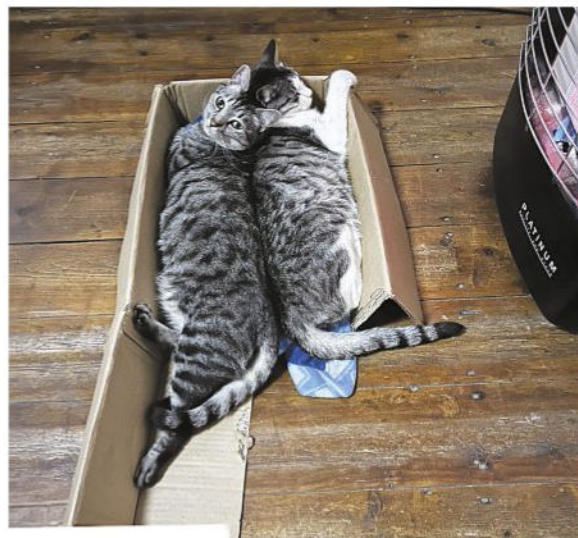
WE WERE A HAPPY family of two people and four cats. Karel, the only one of the four that we had chosen, and then the three newcomers all approved by Karel, who showed

little mercy to strange cats. First Antonie, severely neglected and abused, appeared out of the blue on the back stoep in mid-2017, followed a few months later by Doortjie, who was on the brink of death, full of worms, and very weak and terrified. And then, a year later, Klasie started visiting... and moved in.

Then, tragedy struck Die Wit Huis op Koringberg. On 25 September 2022, a quiet Sunday evening, Antonie, the precious, lively, curious, sociable court jester of the house, did not run to the front of the pack as usual when the gang was called in for the night. No one in this house sleeps outside.

After a brief search we found him in the street outside the house, under the bright streetlight, exactly where someone had offloaded him five years earlier – apparently because they had “grown tired” of him. Antonie’s body was still warm, but lifeless.

Barely three months later, Karel



FAR LEFT The grey brigade relaxing on the garden path. From the front are Antonie, Doortjie, Karel and Klasie. Antonie loved snuggling with everyone, including Doortjie (above) and the writer (left). **OPPOSITE** The cats love to play in the karee trees in the back garden. Like Doortjie (inset). It's right here where the little Robin came to chat.

withered before our eyes within a day. A visit to the vet brought damning news. He was severely diabetic, on the brink of a coma, and would not only need insulin injections twice a day for the rest of his life, but would also have to follow a strictly controlled diet. As we wondered if we wanted to put him through this, his condition deteriorated further, and a day later we held his paw in the vet's consulting room as he left us after almost 12 years.

We have had to say goodbye to many animals, and although the loss of each one was enormous, I did manage to find some solace. Yes, even about Karel's unexpected and premature death. But Antonie... I just couldn't come to terms with it. He was a house cat through and through, one who played in these karee trees every day. He didn't roam around, never fought... he never even caught anything. The only prey we are aware of was a cricket that

he once brought inside and, wearing an expression of slight revulsion, spat it out onto the kitchen floor. He made us laugh all the time, ran into the study several times a day to say hello, and took a nap with me every afternoon. He answered when I spoke to him and comforted me when I was sad. His favourite toy was a rubber ball that he dribbled around and tried to catch mid-air when it was thrown at him. And if I picked up the spray bottle when he was bullying his sister too badly, he immediately narrowed his eyes into slits and ran away. After a year-and-a-half, I was still crying about him. Dear Antonie, my sweet cat, my little furball, my darling one...

EXPERTS ARE UNANIMOUS that the loss of an animal is a traumatic experience and should be acknowledged as such. But people – and, yes, men in particular – find it hard to grieve.

The advice offered on the National Public Radio website in America is simple: "If you need to get a tattoo, do that. If you need to get a stuffed animal or a golden cat bowl, or create a shrine, whatever you need to do, be as weird as you need to be. Do that."

Ronell Lemmer, a psychologist from Brackenfell in Cape Town, says in her practice she finds that people are almost ashamed to acknowledge their own trauma around the loss of a pet. "It's as if they think they don't have the right to be sad because it's 'just an animal'. But this is changing due to greater awareness around animal rights, as well as the role that animals play in human mental health.

"I find that people often need permission to seek counselling when they are mourning the loss of an animal. And I often witness massive relief when a session focuses just on that loss and recognising it. Men still usually have the tendency to >

Soften your pain

Heleen says the first step is recognising that the death of your pet is a loss, so give yourself permission to go through a grieving process and express your emotions. "There is no right or wrong way; listen to your own needs."

- Cry as much as you need to.
- Talk to those who understand your pain and who knew your animal. Share your emotions and memories with them.
- Hold a funeral or scatter the ashes in a special place.
- Plant a tree in honour of the animal.
- Build a shrine.
- Burn a candle.
- Write a letter or tribute to your pet.
- Consult a psychologist. Seek specific trauma counselling after the loss of a pet, says Ronell. "Psychologists are much more aware of the seriousness of this loss and should treat it with the same gravity as the loss of a loved one." Veterinarian Dr Albertus Coetzee (see his advice on euthanasia on page 106) also recommends therapy. "It's time for our society to forget the stigma associated with trauma counselling."
- Consult an animal communicator (see page 108).
- Post photos of your animal on social media. Heleen says this usually evokes sympathy from others. Albertus agrees: "I always recommend that owners remember the good, enjoyable and funny moments. If Facebook helps to do this, then it is beneficial."
- There are a few support groups on Facebook. Search under "Pet loss support" or "Blue Cross pet bereavement".



Heleen Loubser is a psychologist and hypnotherapist from Durbanville. She has two small dogs, Leo and Phia, who work with her every day and offer significant therapeutic value to her clients.

be the 'strong' one in the family, and it's wonderful when they acknowledge their own feelings of loss and grief."

A visit to a psychologist is one way to handle loss, particularly because we don't have any organisations dedicated to helping people grieve their pets in South Africa. America has the Pet Compassion Careline, which offers support day and night, plus several other aid organisations such as Lap of Love, Everlife and the Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement. And in the UK, there's the Blue Cross, which has a highly successful Facebook group.

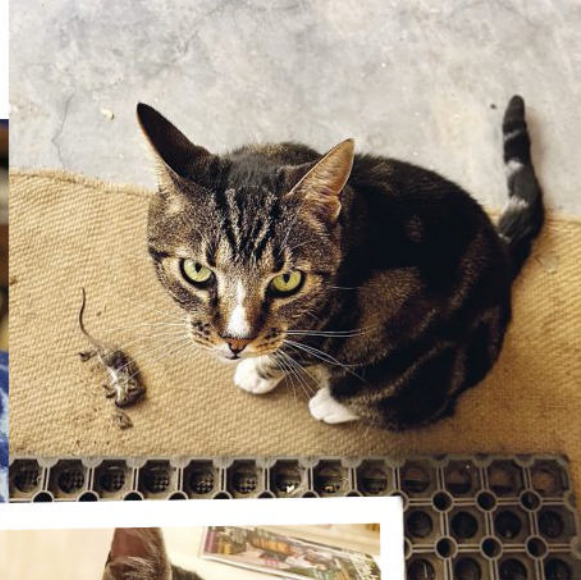
As with any trauma, the death of a pet is processed in phases: denial, anger, guilt, depression and eventually acceptance (or adaptation). These phases are not linear and each person experiences them differently.

Durbanville-based psychologist Heleen Loubser also believes that

this trauma is not sufficiently recognised. "The role a pet plays in people's lives does not get enough recognition. For example, dogs were previously mostly regarded as guard animals meant to protect us, while in modern society, where people increasingly experience social isolation, especially after Covid-19, we see how the role of pets is expanding more and more into social companionship. And as the role of a pet grows, so does the loss when they pass away. People feel that society may judge their reactions to this loss as an overreaction. But I think this perception is slowly changing."

Dr Albertus Coetzee of the West Acres Animal Hospital in Mbombela also observes in his practice how a stronger bond between humans and animals is developing, and he even once experienced someone taking their own life after the death of a pet. >





ABOVE Doortjie (front) with her two heroes, Karel and Antonie, who both left us too soon. First Antonie (right) and then Karel three months later.

RIGHT Karel (top) brings us a “present”. He and his brother, Klasie, made short work of the mouse population on our property, and probably half of Koringberg. On the other hand, Antonie (right) didn’t have much of a taste for hunting.

How can I help?

How can you assist someone who is mourning a pet? And, importantly, what should you say, and what should you *avoid* saying?

- Always be supportive. Ronell says that comforting words like these can be very helpful:
 - “Take your time.”
 - “I am here for you.”
 - “Everyone grieves differently.”
 - “Cry as much as you want to.”
 - “Tell me what you remember most about your pet.”
 - “What were your best times together?”

These are things you shouldn’t say:

- “Come on, it’s only an animal; pull yourself together.”
- “It’s time for you to move on.”
- “You’re crying too much and need to calm down.”
- “It’s time for a new animal.” Every animal has a unique place in people’s hearts, says Heleen, and you can’t simply replace one with another.

“Each person must decide for themselves when they feel ready. Sometimes another animal appears at exactly the right time...”

Heleen also shares this advice:

- Be prepared to listen. “Being supportive means acknowledging someone’s loss and emotions, and being prepared to listen. But respect the person’s needs. Some people need more space and time alone.”
- Encourage the person to share their stories and memories of their pet.
- Give physical support by offering hugs and a comforting touch.
- Follow up frequently and continue to offer your support.
- Show that you care in a practical way by, for example, giving them flowers or performing small tasks for them.



Ronell Lemmer is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Brackenfell, Cape Town. She has a special interest in the treatment of trauma. Her philosophy is “work with trauma is work of celebration”, because healing is indeed possible.

Euthanasia: How do you know that the time has come?

Euthanasia usually causes a tremendous struggle with one's conscience: Am I doing the right thing? Shouldn't we have given the animal another chance? Should I perhaps have sold my car to afford the surgery? **Dr Albertus Coetzee** has some advice.

In nature, older and weaker animals are rejected and become prey for predators. This may sound harsh but as a pet owner, you sometimes have to take the decision that you (the pack!) can no longer care for the animal in its best interests. Take note, *not* your own. For this reason, there are some guidelines to help you decide if it is the right time:

1 Is there pain? There are a number of pain-management protocols to help relieve an animal's pain. When all the options have been exhausted, the decision is close to being made.

2 Can the animal eat? It's essential for an animal to be able to eat and drink. When this is no longer possible, it's

exceptionally unfair to wait for too long before going ahead.

3 Is the animal's dignity affected?

This includes accidents in the house, or if they try to get outdoors to relieve themselves but are unsuccessful. If your pet used to faithfully meet you at the gate every day and was happy to see you but is no longer able to do this, this is also a loss of dignity.

4 Have you been thinking about euthanasia?

Over the years, I have seen in my practice that if a person has been considering euthanasia, it's already been on the cards for a while. We tend to postpone acknowledging this decision.



Dr Albertus Coetzee from the West Acres Animal Hospital in Mbombela has been a vet for 35 years. He spent the early part of his career working as a vet for the South African Police Service, where he had a lot of exposure to the way in which working dogs and their handlers form a tight-knit team. West Acres is a blended practice that treats dogs, cats, horses and game. The practice has a special interest in the unique bond that forms between humans and animals.



"The bond between people and animals has always been strong. In earlier years this was possibly because dogs, in particular, played a role as working animals, guard dogs or, to a lesser degree, as social companions. But the current trend is for dogs especially to influence lifestyles.

"Holidays are planned around visiting pet-friendly places, owners take their dogs for a daily walk or run. Some people spend hours on training. Should something happen to prevent the animal from, for example, go running with its owner, its pain and discomfort become a concern. If it then becomes necessary to say goodbye to the animal, this is an exceptionally painful process.

"The lockdown also meant people could spend more time with their animals, as did the work-from-home trend. The more time we spend together, the stronger the relationship becomes."

He says that it remains difficult for people to cry in front of others. "In our practice, we create a quiet space where people can say farewell, and we also give them the opportunity to leave the building via another door."

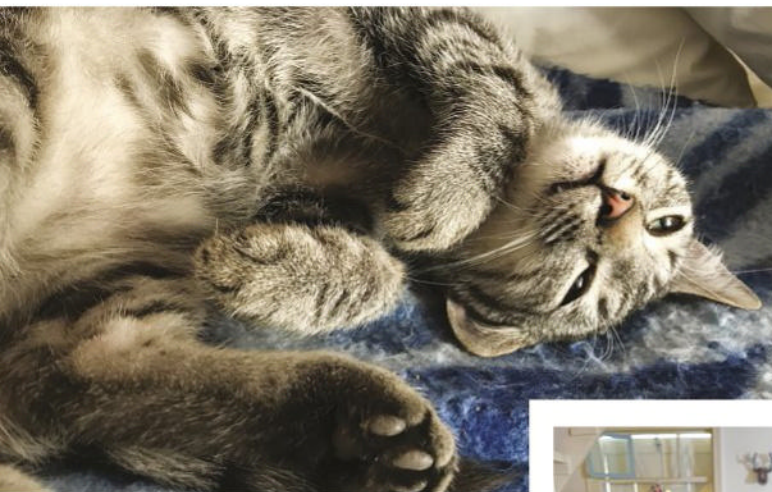
THE PANDEMIC definitely brought humans and animals closer together, says Heleen. "People became more dependent on their pets because there was less external social contact and they had more time to devote to their animals. The opposite is also true. Pets, particularly dogs, have started experiencing more separation anxiety related to their human family because they became accustomed to spending a lot more time together at home. These days we are also developing stronger bonds with our pets because they are live longer, thanks to good food, medical care and regular exercise. >

Help children

Albertus says it is of utmost importance for children to be part of the farewell process and to understand its reality. "They will be confronted with death repeatedly throughout their lives. It isn't right to hide it or keep children away from this kind of hurt. Unfortunately, one of the realities of pet ownership is that we outlive them (mostly)."

Ronell recommends that children create a "memory box".

"Decorate the box with photos or pictures and write letters to the pet that can be placed inside. I usually explain death to children using the example of a pupa that becomes a butterfly: 'The pupa is just the body that remains and the pet's soul is the butterfly that flies free.'"



ABOVE Antonie enjoyed an upside-down view of the world.

RIGHT Klasie is the hunter and hooligan in the family and spends little time in the house: This is a rare moment. On the right, he's checking things in the vegetable garden, with Doortjie keeping an eye on him from behind. **OPPOSITE** Doortjie in her favourite branch in the garden.



"The longer another living being spends in one's life, and the greater and more meaningful the role it plays, the greater the loss we experience," says Heleen. "Pets give unconditional love, which contributes to a strong bond between human and animal."

"Thanks to research and social media – and increased awareness of the role pets play in our lives – modern society is beginning to show a greater understanding of the pain caused by an animal passing away. But even more education is needed."

She says it's unfortunate that most employers do not view the death of a pet as a significant enough trauma to grant compassionate leave. Ronell agrees with this. "There isn't always understanding in workplaces for this process, but when people are able to give themselves permission to take a few days off to grieve, it helps a great deal. Of course, the grieving process doesn't just last for a few days, and you should give yourself enough time. Each person's process is unique."

I DIDN'T GET a tattoo or teddy bear, but my chat with the robin was the turning point that finally brought me peace, almost one-and-a-half years after Antonie's death. (I do admit that this is weird.) Yes, the sadness will always be there but these days, just as was the case with Karel and all the dogs and cats I have shared my life with, I think of him with a smile and no longer with tears.

I am thankful for the five years we were able to love each other.



A message from Antonie...

Upon the recommendation of Ronell Lemmer, we asked the animal communicator **Albè Albertyn** from Durbanville to reach out to Antonie. We sent her a photo of him and she sent us a reading. Here follows a shortened version.

Antonie greeted me with bright eyes and so much love. He felt deeply curious as I approached to meet him in a sea of love. There was no fear – only love and simplicity. His energy field was filled with the brightest golden light – it was almost blinding. He is whole and feels so loved. I let him know that you had sent me as a messenger to find out how he is currently experiencing life. His eyes brightened and he immediately began to purr like a little tractor and rolled onto his back. His first words were: "I didn't shake off my mantle too soon. I did what I had to do, and it was time to move on."

I had a clear sense that he had enjoyed his life to the fullest and had fulfilled his purpose. In the flesh, he was a mischievous, curious, simple little character who made you and your partner laugh a lot. He was incredibly agile, and climbing trees was his favourite pastime. That and playing. The garden was his sanctuary and the house his place of work. In the house he supported you on a spiritual level and tried to remind you, in his playful way, that one shouldn't only work, but also play. He never felt that hunting should be on his "to-do" list because he really didn't enjoy feeling living things shivering in his mouth. He expressed his hunting instinct by playing with balls in the house.

In his earthly form, he particularly supported you as a therapy cat. He always knew when you weren't feeling good. He was crazy about you talking to him. Every endearment made him feel so loved and he would choose to live a life with you and your partner again.

Antonie feels that you sometimes think far too much and must still work on just being present in quiet moments. He could always read the energy behind your words and thoughts, and when you felt out of sorts, he was simply

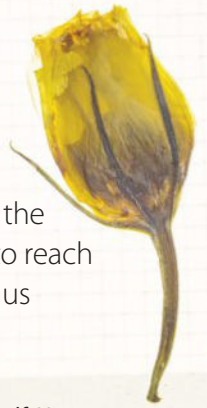
there as his loving, amusing self. He happily absorbed your emotional and physical stress.

He refers to a moment in your life when you experienced deep rejection as a child. Antonie could always sense that feeling of hurt, but he is grateful for this opportunity because he wants to tell you that you are perfect just as you are and that it's time to forgive yourself – forgive yourself for buying into the illusion that you are not good enough.

I asked him about his last day on earth. On a soul level, it was the right time for him to spread his wings, but on a personality level, he didn't see it coming. It was indeed "divine timing". He saw a bright light/figure on the other side of the road. It wasn't a streetlight. He felt he was being called – there was no doubt. He ran as fast as he could to reach the figure, and then he shot



Albè Albertyn's love for animals, plant medicine and meditation led her in the direction of animal communication. She communicates telepathically with animals all over the world that are ill, lost, have behavioural problems, or need to integrate into a new home, as well as with those that are in spiritual form.



out of his physical cocoon like a bullet. He felt no pain. It felt as if he was somersaulting from one dimension to another. The three-dimensional world felt heavy, but suddenly everything felt so light. He was surprised and excited.

Where he is now, he has never felt alone or that he doesn't belong. He was met by his biological mother and a dear woman with brown hair standing hand in hand with a man. They had both known you on earth. They were definitely a mother and father figure (possibly also a grandmother or grandfather). They welcomed Antonie like a child they hadn't seen in a long time. There was also a young soul – perhaps one that was never born on earth or a baby that did not live long. It was a soul related to you.

Antonie wants you to know that there is no such thing as “goodbye”. Life is eternal, and he is still with you. The name Johan came up. He refers to the fact that you both need to focus on communication and that you become stuck if you do not honestly share your feelings. He is trying to help both of you. He also wants you both to remember that you should never be without cats. You need their support – emotional and spiritual.

Antonie's message to you: “I know I left the earthly arena early, but I was ready to move on. We are eternally connected by a rose-gold ribbon in a sea of love. I am so happy where I am, because I can be here, there and everywhere. I found you during a time of rejection and all my earthly fears melted when you opened your hearts to me. I know you think I was a rescue case, but I was sent to you to heal your hearts. I wish for you a life of simplicity and pleasure. We are sent to earth to learn soul lessons, but also to enjoy ourselves. I achieved this easily. I know people struggle with this, because they are continually fighting with their thoughts, especially thoughts of the past.

“When you think of me, think of the good, wonderful moments we shared. Create wonderful stories that make you and everyone around you feel good. I know you love all that is beautiful in life. You are creative; use your creativity



to create light. Be a lighthouse for people, animals and plants. When you reach out to the world in this way, it will also help you to heal the deep hurts inside you. Shine your light!

“I know you think of me often. Know that it is I who plant those thoughts in your head. You will always find me in the garden or on your bed. Look for the light beams – the golden ribbons that peep through the leaves. I will always reach out to you in the form of light. Thank

you for your love. We will be soulmates forever. Oh yes, you must continue to move your body and to breathe more deeply. Your body must remain strong, for it is the important house that carries your spirit and soul through the world. Without a strong body, you cannot shine your light.”

Contact 📧 aalbertyn@icloud.com
📱 Deer Heart Connection
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Let's go into the garden

There's no reason to sit around this spring: Admire the industrious residents of the 16 hand-crafted hives in the "bee kraals" of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, learn to grow and cook with speciality vegetables, and plait a herb wreath for the table.

BY MAJA PALM



📍 KZN MIDLANDS

A kraal of bee castles!

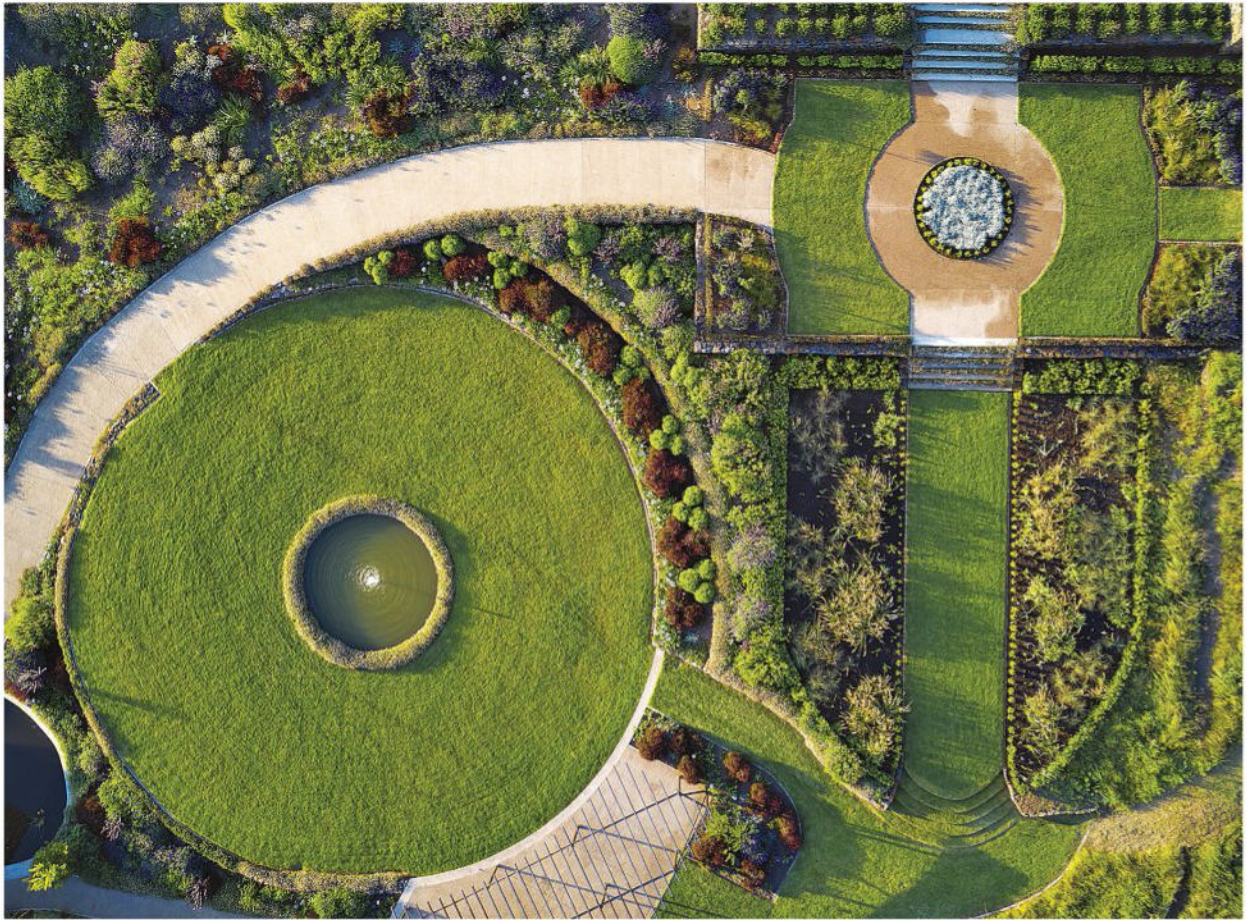
The garden at Brahman Hills in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands was announced as a Royal Horticultural Society Partner Garden last year, an honour that has been bestowed on only two South African gardens. And it now has a new addition: a "bee kraal" consisting of 16 massive hives.

Each unique hive resembles

a Zulu hut and has been handmade by local clay and bead artists. The circular *kraal* has a fountain in the centre and is surrounded by a water furrow. Visitors are able to reach the hives via a wooden pathway and can observe how hard the bees work to produce 200 litres of raw, organic honey a year, which is used in the

estate's Lake House restaurant. The large kitchen garden – where no pesticides are used – supplies the restaurant with seasonal, organic vegetables, herbs and salad ingredients.

Brahman Hills's formal pleasure garden is almost six hectares in size, and was designed by landscaper



Tim Steyn with the intention of giving day visitors, hotel guests and restaurant customers the opportunity to enjoy it.

Guests are welcomed to the farm by a new addition to the pleasure garden: a 4,5 m-high sculpture called “Hanneke”. Water flows into the Otter Dam from her extended arms, and her head bears a crown

of tree roots. Hanneke symbolises “grace and favour”, and the sculptor, Sandro Trapani, hopes that she will inspire visitors to think about our relationship with nature. More bronze sculptures by local artists greet visitors on the winding pathways, beside the fountains and pools, and in the 26 enclaves of the terraced garden.

The farm regularly offers delicious food and wine tastings and workshops – keep an eye on the Brahman Hills Instagram page.

Where? Exit 132 on the N3, Nottingham Road, about half an hour’s drive from Pietermaritzburg.

Contact brahmanhillsgardens.co.za
[@brahmanhills](https://www.instagram.com/brahmanhills) >



TOP Tim Steyn designed Brahman Hills’s pleasure garden to offer the perfect juxtaposition of a formal garden on various levels with informal and playful aspects like masses of flowers and grasses.

LEFT Sandro Trapani’s sculpture “Hanneke” stands 4,5 m high as a symbol of grace and favour.

OPPOSITE Each of the beehives has been handmade by local clay and bead artists to resemble huts in a *kraal*. The bees of Brahman Hills work hard to produce up to 200 ℓ of honey a year.



Authentic farm food

Have you ever tasted mokum carrots, striped German tomatoes or habañada peppers? Do you enjoy cooking with new and unique ingredients? Meuse Farm is a 1,2-hectare organic farm in the Hout Bay Valley that grows speciality vegetables and herbs.

"We grow food with flavour," says owner Iming Lin (pictured right). "It starts with healthy soil, but we also select varieties that have been bred for their good flavour, rather than for being suitable for shipping and needing to last a long time. And we only harvest our vegetables and herbs when they are at their very best."

Lin loves to experiment, and farms with a variety of heritage vegetables, indigenous Southern African crops and new varieties of vegetables.

For the past seven growing seasons, Meuse's dedication and commitment to the environment has earned its crops a place on menus at many top Cape restaurants, including the Chefs Warehouse group, Salsify at the Roundhouse in Camps Bay and FYN in Cape Town's CBD.

The good news is that Meuse also sells weekly vegetable boxes to the public and offers open days on the farm, as well as meals and workshops.

"Farming is a calling that requires skill, knowledge, dedication, patience and, most importantly, a sense of humour and humility," says Lin.

Veggie boxes

There are usually seven to eight different varieties of vegetables and herbs in the spring box and six to seven in the summer box. Choose between a collection for R275 or R150. The Meuse website home page offers a downloadable PDF listing the many vegetables and herbs available as well as their harvest times. Weekly boxes can be ordered online from Thursdays to Mondays at meuse-farm.myshopify.com and are delivered in the Cape Town area on Wednesdays. They can also be collected at the farm.

Open days and lunches

The farm offers four open days: spring (late September), early summer (late November), late summer (early January) and autumn (early March). Visitors can explore the farm and learn more about its produce and organic farming practices. Fresh vegetables, bread, baked goods and drinks are available to buy at various stalls, and a seasonal farm lunch is also available. Workshops and cooking demonstrations must be booked ahead of time.

Outstanding lunches and dinners showcasing Meuse's farm produce are prepared by a chef from a top Cape Town restaurant throughout the season. For specific dates and to stay informed

about events at Meuse, you can sign up for their newsletter, join the WhatsApp group (request access on the website's "Contact" page) or keep an eye on their Instagram account.

Contact meuse.com [meusefarm](https://www.instagram.com/meusefarm)



PHOTOS NAIMA MALEIKA



ABOVE The tomato varieties, as well as all the other vegetables, you'll find at organic Meuse Farm in Hout Bay are harvested at optimal ripeness – you'll notice it in the taste and colour.

SA gardens win top awards



ABOVE AND LEFT South Africa's winning fynbos exhibit at the Chelsea Flower Show with Leon Kluge, the man responsible for this landscaped artwork.

📍 CHELSEA, ENGLAND

A profusion of fynbos

South Africa's fynbos exhibit at the prestigious Chelsea Flower Show, described as "one of the most outstanding exhibits in the history of the show", won a gold medal and an additional two awards.

The team, led by landscape designer Leon Kluge, received the Best Exhibit in the Pavilion and Best New Design awards, a first for South Africa at this show. "These awards are like winning a gold medal at the Olympic Games," says Leon. This year's design was inspired by the floral abundance on the slopes of the

Cape mountains. Large clay panels, created by artist Tristan Woudberg, formed the backdrop of the display that celebrated one of the most biodiverse regions in the world.

"The clay sculptures represented mountain ranges," explains Tristan. "This enabled us to demarcate the various biomes of the Cape, each of which has, over time, played a role in the development of these unique flowers."

Approximately 22 000 cut flower stems – the most used to date – created the profusion of fynbos

for the exhibit, which included the popular hybrid protea 'Snow Leopard' and the blushing bride (*Serruria florida*), which were both on display at the show for the first time.

"Tourists visit South Africa to view fynbos in its natural habitat, just as they come to see the Big Five," says Leon. "Fynbos is so vulnerable. We don't always realise what we have until it's too late. The cut-flower industry creates so many employment opportunities in the platteland, and we must work together to protect this asset."

📍 SHANGHAI, CHINA

Tea in the weaver's nest

Nature's Sanctuary, a garden that represents a merging of South Africa and China, won a gold medal at the Suzhou International Flower Show just outside Shanghai in China.

Leon Kluge also designed this garden for South Africa, which won the prize for Best Design. The concept was of a deconstructed Bushveld weaver's nest transformed into a Chinese teahouse. >



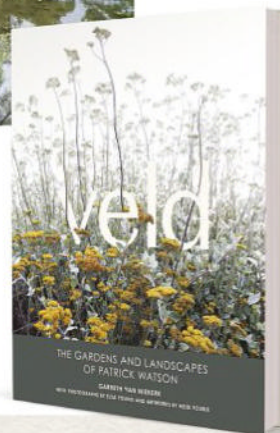
NEW BOOK

Veld gardens of Africa



Patrick Watson has created hundreds of gardens all over Africa, from huge landscapes such as those at Sun City and an entire island in the Indian Ocean, to the gardens of the Apartheid Museum and the Garden of Hope at St George's

Anglican Church in Parktown. But he is particularly well known for his pioneering work in landscape restoration and the use of indigenous species.



Garreth van Niekerk's new book, *Veld: The Gardens and Landscapes of Patrick Watson*, published by Penguin Random House, shares 23 of Patrick's favourite veld gardens with readers who are "passionate about design, plants, nature, and the art of how they all co-exist".

The book, photographed by Elsa Young and featuring artworks by Heidi Fourie, is divided into three sections: 23 of Patrick's veld gardens and landscapes; his inspirational professional and personal life; and lastly, plant lists from seven projects that represent different biomes and climatic regions, which will give you an idea of his planning process. Truly inspirational.

Price R650 at good bookstores or at [loot.co.za](https://www.loot.co.za)

NEW BOOK

Become a pruning expert

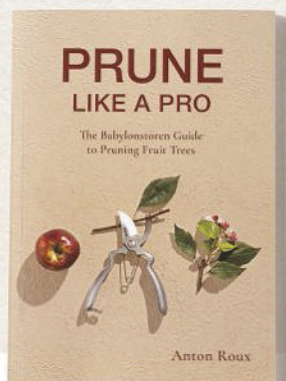
Winter may be pruning time but most gardeners are wary of using a pruning shears, as we wrote nine years ago in "Prune like a Pro", *Platteland* #7 (Winter 2015). Anton Roux, the fruit-tree expert and pruning master at Babylonstoren, shared his advice and two pruning mantras: **1** Good observation skills are your friend – over time, you will train your eye; and **2** You can't prune a tree if you don't understand how it bears fruit – you must know your tree.

Oom Anton's illustrated guide, *Prune Like a Pro: The Babylonstoren Guide to*

Pruning Fruit Trees, was published in June this year – an early present for his 85th birthday in November.

The book explores the most important aspects of pruning fruit trees, with clear, practical illustrations and directions, as well as information such as pruning methods, bearing habits, tree art, guidelines for trees of different ages, and pruning equipment and materials. It is an essential companion for anyone who wants to keep a fruit tree happy, whether it's a single apricot tree or an entire orchard.

The book



Why should you prune?



Fruit trees must be pruned to:

- determine the yield of the tree;
- determine the shape of the tree;
- ensure that sunlight reaches the centre;
- determine the size of the fruit; and
- encourage the development of shoots.

costs R340 and is available at Babylonstoren's Scented Room or online at shop.babylonstoren.com with free delivery countrywide.



DIY

Plait a herb wreath

This wreath is perfect for hanging in the kitchen, as you can pluck off herbs and spices as and when you need them. Keep this in mind for Christmas – either to make as gifts or to use on your own table, says **Maja Palm**. Using herbs from your garden and spice rack, it can be made in under half an hour.

YOU NEED

- rosemary springs
- thyme springs

- dried chillies
- star anise
- a round bowl
- rope
- ribbon

THIS IS HOW

First gather all your herbs and spices. Pick six to eight young rosemary sprigs that can bend easily, as well as a few sprigs of thyme. Shape your wreath: Use the bowl as a base in which you

shape the rosemary sprigs into a circle. Use the rope to tie the sprigs where they overlap. Now insert the thyme and chillies underneath the rope, all the way around the wreath. Lastly, tie the star anise around the wreath and attach a piece of ribbon at the top.

Tip Write one of your favourite recipes with these herbs and spices on a card and attach it to the wreath. 

Catfish from your garden...

Growing your own fruit, vegetables and herbs is a step in the right direction towards self-sufficiency. Imagine adding fish to that system, coupling aquaculture and hydroponics for food production. Martin Fick says it's not only rewarding, but it can also become a life philosophy.

TEXT AND PHOTOS MIA LOUW



Martin Fick and Ryan Stewart from Practical Aquaponics show off organic produce from their tunnels in Salem, Eastern Cape.

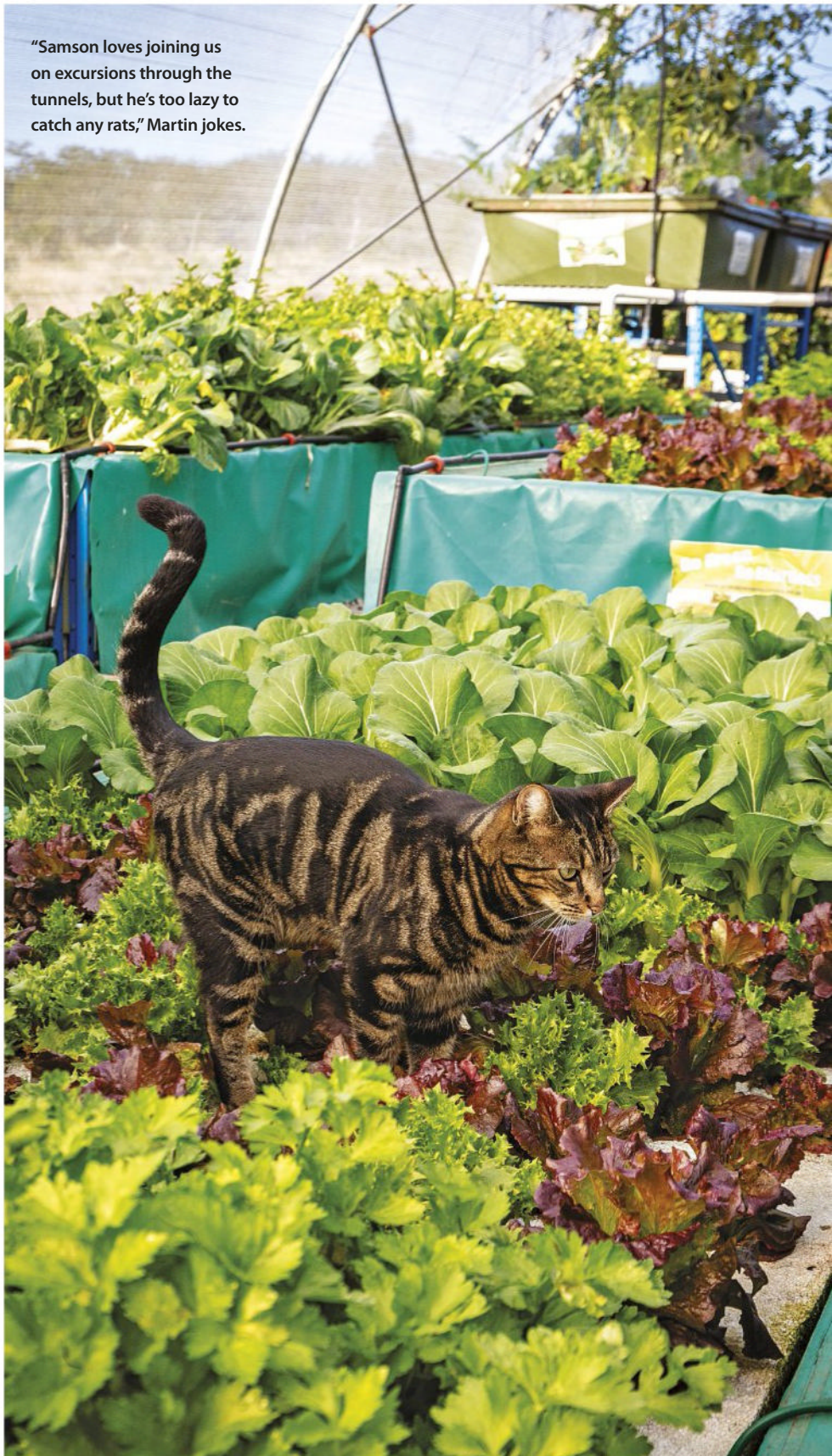
“Farming is all about biology,” says Martin Fick as he enters an aquaponics tunnel on his farm. “If you don’t understand the biology, farming is only going to cause you frustration. The more chemicals you spray and the more fertilisers you use, the less effective your farming is going to be. This is what’s driving the whole concept of regenerative farming, food production and sustainability: the importance of microbiology.”

Aquaponics, he explains, is a system of aquaculture in which the waste produced by farmed fish supplies the nutrients for plants grown hydroponically, which, in turn, purifies the water. It is evident that Martin is passionate about aquaponics and organic food production. His company, Practical Aquaponics, has not only been doing research in the field since 2006, it’s also been building systems for farmers and offering training courses and internships in Salem, a farming village 26km from Makhanda in the Eastern Cape.

“We have converted a garage on the farm into a training centre. Groups consist of a maximum of 14 people, and we’ve had trainees from all over the world. After starting off in the training centre, we progress to our systems to see the biology in action,” Martin says, glancing at the fresh produce in the tunnel: mint, basil, celery, lettuce, tomatoes, broccoli, granadillas, mulberries, mangoes, avos...



“Samson loves joining us on excursions through the tunnels, but he’s too lazy to catch any rats,” Martin jokes.





Martin inspects a massive cabbage growing in the smallest aquaponics unit on their farm. He used second-hand materials to build the structures and housing.

BEFORE HE STARTED Practical Aquaponics, Martin gained 25 years of experience in conventional crop farming and livestock management for export. Martin and his family moved from Zimbabwe to South Africa in 2002 and have been living in Salem ever since.

“Research into aquaponics started in the ’70s, but the first people recorded doing something similar were the Aztecs in central Mexico, between 1300 and 1521. They had what we call *chinampas* – or floating gardens – in their rivers. It’s also rumoured that the Hanging Gardens of Babylon were aquaponics gardens, so the technology was clearly understood in the past.”

Martin’s interest in aquaponics started around 2006, when he met Dutch professor Jan Ulfman from Wageningen University. This institution specialises in the fields of agriculture, food science and forestry. “He told me aquaponics will be the future of food production, because it’s sustainable, organic, offers high nutrient density and uses water sparingly.”

Martin had obviously heard of aquaponics before, but he never realised it could be used

for commercial farming. “We had experimented with it, but I always regarded aquaponics as a bit of a hippie-type thing. You know: a backyard set-up with guys growing weed or something,” he laughs.

Professor Ulfman informed him about successful commercial operations. “I joined him on a series of visits of aquaponics units in the Sub-Saharan region. We then assessed why some were failing. One of the big problems with aquaponics systems – as distinct from hydroponics – is that it’s biologically rich, which makes it difficult to manage. Hydroponics is simply the technique of growing plants using a water-based nutrient solution, rather than soil.

“That is the big advantage of hydroponics over aquaponics. It’s easier, but it’s also chemical dependent – you use fertiliser, chemical fungicides, herbicides and pesticides. Adding chemicals is the easy way out, but you’re also spending more money on those chemicals and your product is chemically charged. That’s not good for people’s health.

With hydroponics being easier, Martin says many farmers are

competing with the same chemically charged products, but with aquaponics you can create a niche for yourself with healthy organic produce, although you have to work a bit harder for it.

“When farmers aim to upscale in aquaponics, it’s easy to underestimate the biological complexity. The operations that we encountered in Africa revealed that people often built their systems too big, because they compare it with how easily one can upscale in hydroponics.

“The biology in aquaponics fouls up everything – it messes with the water, your flow, your pumps. It can be challenging trying to gain and keep control of a big commercial system where you have these biological risks. One of the first steps was to build small successful systems so we could get our hands on the reins of this dragon and fly it properly,” says Martin.

The biggest tunnel on the farm is 21 m x 10 m, although commercial systems that are being built today are four times this size. “We built our first systems, did experiments and were happy. After our first training courses, we were informed >

that we're building big fancy things that exclude the general population. So now we also build smaller units using second-hand materials."

Martin stresses that with organic production, one shouldn't expect blemish-free produce.

"The stuff we grow sometimes has a bite or two from a bug. We also do battle with rats, slugs and snails, but this broccoli coming up here is grown completely naturally – no pesticide, no chemicals, nothing! We have done studies on nutrient density, and aquaponics products are 10 times more nutritious than what is conventionally or hydroponically grown."

Ryan Stewart is a young intern from Zimbabwe who is doing a year-long internship on the farm at Practical Aquaponics. The idea is to get people to the point where they can step out into the industry and confidently run and manage the complexity of an aquaponics operation, Martin explains.

"I have always been interested in aquaponics," says Ryan, "and I wanted to see how it's done

properly – not just from a YouTube video. Now that I'm interning, it makes a lot more sense."

According to Martin, there are countless videos about aquaponics on YouTube. "There's a whole lot of stuff on there, but has it been physically proven? We don't sell aquaponics systems or any components to clients that we have not tried and tested, which means that they work in the long term."

THE SET-UP ON THE FARM is different from how it might look when you install a system in your own garden. This is a research and development facility, with differently sized units and sections that have been added over time.

"Oxygen is critical in aquaponics – biology requires it," explains Martin. "Our water goes from our fish tanks into a sump tank. From there it goes through an oxidising bioreactor that manages the amount of solids that come from the fish. That water is then pumped to our media grow beds with plants. These media beds

are tidal – they flood and drain like the beach. Biomimicry, a term for taking inspiration and solutions from nature and translating the principles to human engineering, is an extremely important component of our research.

"Microbiology is doing the heavy lifting here. The bacteria convert the ammonia from the fish waste into nitrites and nitrates, which are nutrients for plants. The more space you give the bacteria to live on, the better they perform."

The media beds are rectangular plastic containers with grey gravel inside. "So there is no soil in the system. Each little rock has a surface area – if you take all these particles with their nooks and crannies and you flatten out the surface, it is a much larger area than what meets the eye."

Oxygen only diffuses into water at the surface layer, so the larger the surface area, the more naturally you can infuse and diffuse oxygen into the system. The microbes or bacteria in the system need this oxygen to do their work.

How big and how much?

Martin says it's easy to aim too small with an aquaponics system, but because the input is hands-on, he believes in making the effort worthwhile by choosing a size that will produce enough for you and your family.

A basic system from Practical Aquaponics, which will produce enough for a family of three to four people, costs R34 000. You can also build your own system by using second-hand materials, and Martin is more than willing to give advice on this if you enrol for one of their courses. The smallest and most basic aquaponics system they sell costs R6 500 – perfect for single city dwellers wanting to grow some herbs on their apartment's balcony.



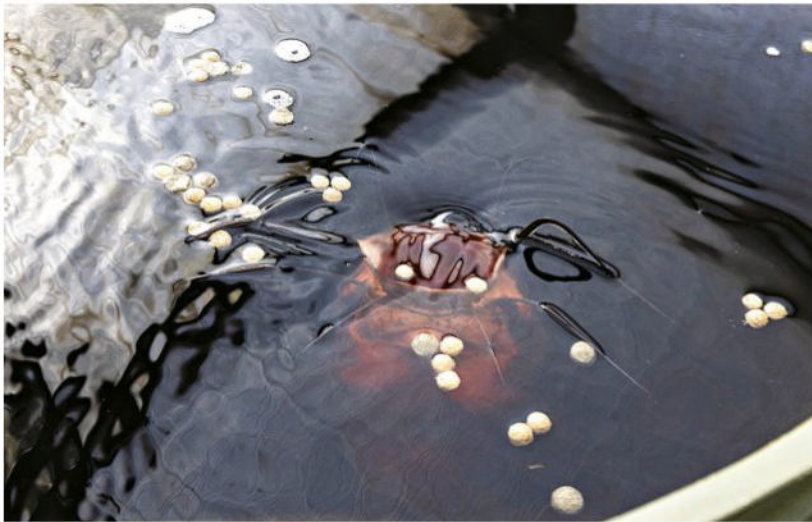
Practical Aquaponics' intern Ryan Stewart enjoys Samson's company while they're working in the aquaponics units.



"The tidal action in the media beds causes the water to drain, and leftover solids from the fish waste collect at the bottom and break down. It can get quite stinky down there, and the problem with anaerobic digestion is that it produces toxins such as hydrogen sulphide and methane – that rotten egg smell. We have oxygen blowing in here to break that down as well. From here, the water is usable for growing produce."

The primary function of the first media beds is biofiltration, but Martin still manages to grow some plants here, which is a bonus. "If we go back to our natural processes and biomimicry, this all represents a wetland. The water is flowing through here and the plants are performing a bio-rehabilitation of the water. When the water reaches the end of the beds, we pump it back to the fish – it's a recirculating system."

Another aspect that they are trying to mimic from Mother Nature is waterfalls, by using impressive technology which pumps nano-bubbles – ultra-fine bubbles – into >



Martin farms with tilapia (top) and catfish that are fed high-protein pellets (above).



the system, but this is mostly used and installed in their commercial-sized systems.

“When bubbles float in water they rise, but when you turn them into ultra-fine ones, they float further along in the water column and become a reserve of oxygen. As your oxygen is depleted further down the system, these bubbles pop and the oxygen becomes available. A waterfall also creates fine bubbles, and you will always find prolific growth on the edges of that water.”

To imitate natural ecosystems’ moving water, one obviously needs electricity, but Martin’s systems are designed to run on as little energy as possible.

“For a household system of 4 m x 8 m, you need about 120W – the equivalent of two light bulbs. We also design our systems to run on 24V DC, so that there’s no electrical risk – you can touch the electrical components and not get shocked.”

Unfortunately, not all crops thrive in aquaponics systems. Potatoes, carrots and garlic grow to a point, but the bulbs struggle to set without dry material like soil.

“If crops don’t like to float in the water on rafts, we place them in media bags and throw the nutrient rich water over them,” Martin explains while showing the fruit trees they grow in bags and buckets.

You have to choose specific fish too. The fish in their system – catfish and tilapia – are considered hardy species that are well suited to aquaponics. “We have catfish in this tank and tilapia in that one. It is a multi-species system, because that’s what we see in nature,” Martin adds as he lifts a Mozambique tilapia, *Oreochromis mossambicus* from the water. This is a popular option because it tastes like hake.

But it’s the catfish that come as a surprise to most people. The ones caught in dams are known to have a terrible muddy taste.

“The big issue is the algae that the fish eat. When catfish live in a dam, they are sifting through algae that



Fertili-tea

A bio-tea from their worm farm is added to the media grow beds. “We throw our kitchen scraps and other organic matter here. The worms break down the matter from a complex form into a more plant-available form. We never use the leachate in our aquaponics systems because it might have fungal spores; we pour that back over the farm. We rather use the vermicast or biomaterial – the stuff at the bottom that’s been broken down by the worms – and make a teabag from that. The plant material takes about 21 days to break down, so we have a rotating system of four bins – one bin for each week. This way the worms have adequate time to feed on, digest, and neutralise the fungal spores. By the fourth week, the vermicast smells and looks like clean soil.”

lies in mud. It taints the flavour of the fish and makes it taste like mud. Here they are in a clean water system, and we feed them high-protein pellets. The flavour of the fish is unbelievable!"

BACK AT MARTIN'S HOUSE, in the big farm-style kitchen, Ryan has filleted a catfish for lunch. It has a bright-pink colour, like salmon or tuna. He dips the fillets in milk, flour and egg, before frying it in a pan with butter.

Meanwhile, Martin finishes a batch of his chilli sauce consisting of celery, tomato, olive oil, garlic and chillies. "We smoke some of the ingredients before adding them,"

BELOW From left to right we have the raw catfish, the fish being prepared, Martin's chilli sauce and the fried catfish ready for lunch.

he says. "Would you like to try our smoked catfish?"

The fish is oily (as many are), but it tastes like smoked venison carpaccio. Martin has his own smokers on the farm, and part of Ryan's internship is to learn how to use them. Apparently their smoked catfish pairs well with eggs benedict, and at R350 per kilo, it sells for half the price of smoked salmon.

Now it's time to taste the fried version. "We managed to get 1,5 kg of meat from a fish that weighed 2 kg," Ryan says as he places a big salad on the table.

We all dig into the fresh produce that comes from the tunnel a few metres away. The fried catfish tastes like cod or tuna – delicious!

Martin loves to experiment with their products, and they sell the chilli sauce plus fresh produce from the tunnels at the Spar and Pick n Pay in Makhanda. There's

also a whole list of recipes on their website. This is how Martin's philosophy about aquaponics as a lifestyle comes together.

"Aquaponics provides multiple different crops growing at different stages. This becomes a sustainable way of living, because you can preserve things by making pesto and sauces, or smoking fish. I know I said upscaling aquaponics is difficult, but the flipside is going too small – it doesn't help if you're putting in all this effort for a very small yield."

"Aquaponics needs dedication and commitment. If you find yourself living in the countryside with time on your hands, what can be better than looking after a garden that rewards you with fresh fruit, vegetables *and* fish?"

Contact practicalaquaponics.co.za
 martin@practicalaquaponics.co.za
 083 278 4201



Martin picks a piece of mint for the gin and tonic they prepare with granadillas grown on the farm.

What to do about aphids?

Because Practical Aquaponics grows everything organically, they don't use any chemical sprays for pests like aphids. "We are trying a biological approach with Metarhizium, a fungus that identifies the aphid as a food source. These fungal spores land on the aphids and can identify if the aphids have been sucking the sap. If the aphid has absorbed chlorophyll, the fungus will anchor, send a root in and the aphid will stop feeding – the aphids become the host to the mushroom. Biology is doing our pest control!" 

Darling buds of

Spring

Spring has a playful quality that can easily catch you out in the twinkling of an eye.

As soon as you swap winter's large casserole dishes for salad bowls, the mercury plummets and it's time for Plan B. **Errieda and Ian du Toit** have the perfect solution for those in-between days: a menu wearing a floral dress with a cashmere jersey slung over the shoulders.

WORDS, RECIPES AND STYLING **ERRIEDA DU TOIT** PHOTOS **IAN DU TOIT**

THE DU TOITS' SPRING MENU

STARTER

Bourride with
baby vegetables
and rouille sauce

MAIN COURSE

Lamb-neck
navarin
with spring
vegetables

Fresh pasta
ribbons with
spring sauces

DESSERT

Cape brandy tart
(tipsy tart)

Snow pudding
with sweet basil
custard



PROF. F. BRACCIFORTI

DIZIONARIO
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ITALIANO-INGLESE

MIL
CASA EDI

Spring, wonderful spring. Every year, usually on a rainy day in late August, the blossoms of the climbing jasmine at our front gate announce themselves. First, a few clusters make their shy appearance before bursting into bloom and then, as the days pass, the ranunculus and the rest of the garden join in. The abundance of colour and aroma also finds its way onto our table, and food becomes lighter, revitalising the palate.

For home cooks, it presents an opportunity to channel our inner Paul Cézanne, using our wooden spoons as paintbrushes and our plates as palettes. The artist was prophetic when he said: "The day will come when a single carrot, freshly observed, will set off a revolution." Groundbreaking Spanish chef Ferran Adrià confirmed this, saying that, for him, there is no difference between a carrot and

crayfish; the one is as special as the other.

So, we visited a morning market for inspiration and found fennel bulbs, carrots, leeks, thin-skinned potatoes, radishes and turnips, all still wearing their baby shoes.

Our ode to the choir of young vegetables begins with a classic Provençal fish soup and continues with navarin, a light lamb-neck stew. Home-made pasta brings a little theatre to the table, and two puddings ensure a happy ending to our garden party.

We are so happy when spring arrives that my best linen tablecloth with the delicate crocheted trim and serviettes with embroidered flowers are ironed for the occasion. Nostalgic pink-and-white deep plates are unearthed and an informal arrangement of tiny spring vegetables adorns the table. And in our glasses, blush-pink wine reminds us to always remain in love with life.

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Bourride with baby vegetables and rouille sauce

Bourride is a simple Provençal soup-stew made without the rules that apply to bouillabaisse. This version remains true to the classic soup, which wouldn't be caught dead without slices of toasted baguette topped with rouille. A spoon of the sauce is also stirred through the soup to thicken it. My recipe contains the flavours of a Niçoise salad, and I've already lost count of everyone who should be credited: it's a combination of the recipe by my friend Colin Steyn, who first introduced me to bourride, a splash of Anthony Bourdain's soupe de poisson, Diana Henry's Niçoise vegetable stew, and my own Cape fish soup. It's a farewell soup, but it also symbolises the new beginnings of spring.

Serves 4

Preparation time **30 minutes**

Cooking time **40 minutes**

YOU NEED

- ¼ cup (60 ml) olive oil
- 12 unpeeled baby potatoes, halved
- 6 baby onions, peeled and quartered
- 4 young leeks, ends removed, thoroughly washed and sliced into rings
- 4 anchovy fillets (optional)
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) curry powder
- 2 plump garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 red chilli, seeds removed and finely chopped (or use 3 ml dried chilli flakes)
- 3 cups (750 ml) good vegetable or fish stock
- a good pinch of saffron threads (or use 1 teaspoon turmeric)
- 3 strips of orange peel
- 4 sprigs of fresh thyme
- 3–4 small fennel bulbs, cut in half down the middle
- 8 baby tomatoes (such as rosa), quartered
- 25 ml Pernod (optional)





- 600 g cooked seafood – from flaked crayfish tails to mussels, hake or even fish heads
- slices of toasted baguette to serve

FOR THE ROUILLE

- a little coarse salt
- 2-3 garlic cloves, roughly chopped
- 2 egg yolks
- 150 ml olive oil
- 2 teaspoons (10 ml) tomato paste
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) cayenne pepper
- lemon juice to taste
- finely grated zest of 1 orange

THIS IS HOW

Heat the oil in a pan and sauté the potato, onion and leeks for 15 minutes – shake the pan occasionally to prevent the vegetables from sticking to it. Add the anchovies, mash them until fine, then stir in the curry powder, garlic and chilli. Sauté everything together for a minute until the anchovies have dissolved. Add 2 cups (500 ml) of the stock with the saffron (or turmeric),

orange peel and thyme. Stir together, add the remaining cup (250 ml) of stock and season with salt and pepper. Allow it to simmer for 10 minutes or until the potatoes are soft but not breaking apart. Add the fennel and tomatoes and simmer for another 10 minutes. Add a splash of Pernod, to taste, followed by the cooked seafood. Stir until warmed through. Season to taste.

Make the rouille Use a mortar and pestle to crush the salt and garlic together, then transfer it to a mixing bowl. Mix in the egg yolks. Now the fun begins. While you continuously whisk the egg with a balloon whisk or electric handmixer, slowly add the oil – literally drop by drop – as well as a small amount of salt and pepper. The mixture will now thicken; don't add more oil until every drop has been thoroughly mixed in. Once all the oil has been added and the mixture is nice and thick, stir in the tomato paste, cayenne pepper, lemon juice, orange zest and salt and pepper to taste.

To serve Divide the soup into 4 soup bowls and place a slice or two of toasted baguette on top, with a generous spoonful of the rouille on each slice.

Tips and variations

- The word “rouille” is derived from the French word for “rust”; the colour that the combination of cayenne pepper and tomato paste lends to the sauce.
- For something more substantial on a chilly spring day, replace the toast with mini vetkoek filled with rouille.
- To make a vegetarian version, replace the fish with extra fennel, rosa tomatoes and potatoes.
- Pernod is an aniseed-flavoured aperitif that tastes delicious with the fennel – its use in this recipe is optional. >

Lamb-neck navarin with spring vegetables

Navarin is a delicate, rustic stew that celebrates the beauty of spring ingredients, a pleasurable coming together of lamb, sweet-as-a-baby vegetables, radishes and turnips (*navets*), and always white wine. Fresh herbs replace the heavier spices of winter stews. It is traditionally made during lambing season (particularly in French sheep-grazing regions like Normandy), when spring vegetables are still very young. Then it's called navarin printanier. Navarin is easy to make, and the intoxicating aromas of fresh vegetables and herbs (rather than spices) will coax warmer days out from their hiding places.

Serves **4–6 (generous portions)**

Preparation time **30 minutes**

Cooking time **2½ hours**

YOU NEED

- 2 lamb necks, halved down the length, and each half cut into 2 pieces
- olive oil or pork fat
- 2 onions, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 yellow carrots, diced
- 1 celery stem, finely chopped
- 2 ripe tomatoes, diced
- 1 bouquet garni (2 bay leaves tied with 5 parsley, 1 rosemary and 4 thyme sprigs)
- 6 peppercorns
- 1 cup (250 ml) dry white wine
- 6 young turnips, peeled and halved
- 6 radishes, washed, with part of the tops and tails retained
- 12 whole baby carrots, each with a piece of green stem
- 12 unpeeled baby potatoes
- 4–6 baby fennel bulbs, halved (optional)
- 1 cup (250 ml) frozen or fresh peas
- 200 ml broad beans
- a knob of soft butter

THIS IS HOW

Heat the oven to 160°C. Pat the meat dry and season thoroughly with salt.

Heat the oil in a large heat-resistant casserole dish and brown the pieces of lamb. Remove the meat. Sauté the onion, garlic, diced carrot and celery in the same dish. Stir in the tomato and fry everything together for about a minute.

Transfer the browned meat back to the dish and add the bouquet garni and peppercorns. Add the wine and enough cold water to cover the meat. Bring it to a gentle boil and remove the foam. Cover with the lid and bake the casserole for about 90 minutes. Then add all the prepared vegetables, apart from the peas, and continue to bake the navarin until the meat falls off the bone and the vegetables are soft when tested with a fork, about 40 minutes. Add the peas and broad beans and cook for 10 more minutes.

Remove the bouquet garni, season the stew with salt and pepper to taste, then stir in the soft butter.

Place the casserole dish on the table and serve the navarin in deep plates with tagliatelle or good bread.

Tips

- I like to use lamb neck, which the French call *collet* or *collier*. The gelatine in the neck gives depth and richness to an otherwise uncomplicated dish.
- A combination of lamb cuts – such as short rib, sliced shank or shoulder chops – will also work well. The meat just shouldn't be too fatty.



Fresh pasta ribbons with spring sauces

The Mediterranean theme continues with this homemade pasta, which is either served with a baby marrow sauce or a simple emulsion, which has a bright, lemony flavour that makes an excellent partner for the navarin. Perhaps you need to be persuaded to make the pasta yourself. This is pure food theatre involving preparation, rolling and cutting, leading up to the moment when you can display your handiwork – a curtain of tagliatelle ribbons hanging on the drying rack. You can make the pasta the day before or, even better, include your guests in an interactive dining experience. Do remember that fresh pasta takes just two minutes to cook, which means you only do this just before you are ready to serve. Although a pasta machine is useful, you don't need it for this recipe.

Serves 4

Preparation time **90 minutes**

(including resting time)

Cooking time **5 minutes**

YOU NEED

- 300 g flour (Italian 00 flour is best, but ordinary cake flour will do)
- 3 ml salt
- 3 eggs
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) olive oil

THIS IS HOW

Make the pasta Everything, including the rolling, is done by hand. Mix the flour and salt in a large mixing bowl or on a clean work surface. Break the eggs into a separate bowl and beat them lightly with a fork. Make a hollow in the flour and pour in the eggs and olive oil. Use your fingers to bring the mixture together. Add a little flour if it sticks to your fingers. Knead the dough for



8–10 minutes until it is no longer sticky. It should be smooth and elastic when you press it. If it feels dry when you start kneading, first attempt to knead it thoroughly. If it remains dry, then sprinkle a little water onto your fingers and knead the dough until it feels right. Shape it into a ball and let it rest in a cool place for 30 minutes.

Sprinkle flour onto a work surface. Use the palm of your hand to slightly flatten the ball of dough. Using a rolling pin, roll out the dough as thinly as possible (without pressing too hard). Keeping the shape in mind, roll it into a rectangle, as large as you can without tearing the dough.

Tip

You could cut the dough sheet into 2 pieces to make it easier to handle.

Place the dough sheet onto a dish-cloth and leave it to dry for 20 minutes. Cut the dough into ribbons, their width according to your preference.

Cook the pasta Fill a large saucepan with water and add enough salt. Bring it to a rolling boil before slowly lowering the pasta into the water, ensuring that it doesn't land in a ball with the ribbons sticking together. Stir it once and cook for 2–3 minutes. Once the pasta is ready, drain it carefully, reserving some of the pasta cooking water to add to your sauce. Serve the pasta with the baby marrow sauce or the fresh lemon, olive oil and Parmesan sauce (turn over for both recipes). >



Mediterranean baby marrow pasta sauce

Baby marrow's many aliases – courgette (French), zucchini (Italian) and baby marrow (English) – are an indication of the many virtues of this vegetable. One of these is how it gradually folds into itself over a low heat, concentrating the flavours until only the essence remains behind in the most captivating of sauces. You can make it even more luxurious with cheese, or tone it down with humble pangrattato – toasted breadcrumbs described by Italians as the poor man's Parmesan. The vegetable lovers at your table will be delighted with this sauce.



Serves 4

Preparation time **10 minutes**

Cooking time **40 minutes**

YOU NEED

- 750 g baby marrows, unpeeled, washed and ends removed
- 3 tablespoons (45 ml) olive oil
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- the finely grated zest of 1 lemon and the juice of ½ a lemon
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) crème fraîche (or use 80 ml full-cream milk)
- 400 g homemade tagliatelle (see recipe on previous page)
- toasted breadcrumbs (pangrattato) for sprinkling
- finely chopped parsley or torn basil leaves

FOR THE PANGRATTATO

- 200 g leftover farm bread, finely chopped in a food processor or grated into coarse crumbs
- olive oil for frying

THIS IS HOW

Slice the baby marrows into very thin rings – a mandoline works well for this. Place them in a saucepan with the olive oil. Add a good pinch of salt and cook the baby marrows for about 20 minutes over a low heat until the liquid starts to reduce and they become soft. Stir them from time to time to prevent sticking. Add the garlic and cook the mixture for another 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add some water if it starts to stick to the bottom of the saucepan.

Once the baby marrows have cooked down, season the mixture with salt and pepper. Stir in the lemon zest and add lemon juice to taste. Stir in the crème fraîche or milk plus a few glugs of good olive oil. Add just enough pasta water to loosen the sauce. Toss the baby marrow sauce through the drained pasta and sprinkle the toasted breadcrumbs and chopped herbs over. **Make the pangrattato** Heat a few splashes of olive oil in a pan over a moderate heat. Add the breadcrumbs to the hot oil and sauté them until golden brown and crisp. Drain the crumbs on paper towel and sprinkle salt flakes over.

Lemon, olive oil and Parmesan sauce

This combination of ingredients creates a surprising sauce that clings beautifully to each pasta ribbon. The secret to emulsifying the sauce well is to heat the bowl in which you plan to mix it, particularly if you're doing this on a cool spring day. The sauce will thicken even more once it's been stirred through the hot pasta.

Serves 4

Preparation time **10 minutes**

YOU NEED

- 5 tablespoons (75 ml) good extra-virgin olive oil
- the grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 100 g Parmesan or Grana Padano, finely grated (plus extra to sprinkle over)
- chopped fresh rocket and/or basil leaves

THIS IS HOW

Heat a large mixing bowl under a hot tap and dry it off. Add the olive oil, around half the lemon juice and all the zest. Using a balloon whisk, lightly whisk the mixture until it emulsifies. Whisk in the Parmesan and taste whether more lemon juice is needed, or possibly a little salt. This is a thick, grainy sauce. >



Pisum Sativum



Cape brandy tart (tipsy tart)

I've been dreaming of a real tart-and-tea garden party where everyone wears a hat. A traditional milk tart holds court on the tea table, surrounded by other tarts representing our baking heritage. I will have to act quickly though, as some of these treasures are already on the lost-or-forgotten list, like citron tart or green-fig-and-walnut tart. To save the noble Cape brandy tart, or tipsy tart, from the same fate, it is always on my spring menu to offer texture and dark contrast with the snow pudding, or as a sweet surprise later with coffee. I read recipes by legends such as the late Peter Veldsman, whose version is exuberant with ground ginger, nutmeg and cinnamon, while food historian Hetta van Deventer-Terblanche adds raisins. I, in turn, scent the mixture with lemon peel and add strips of peel to the syrup. The toffee flavour is thanks to the dates, and brandy lends its unique flavour, along with brown sugar, butter, ginger and nutmeg with a hint of orange. Despite the gleaming luxuriousness of the sauce, this brown tart does need colourful decoration in

the form of an edible flower such as sweet peas from my garden.

Makes **12 generous squares**

Preparation time **25 minutes**

Baking time **40 minutes**

YOU NEED

- 1 block (250 g) of pressed, pitted dates, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) bicarbonate of soda
- 1 cup (250 ml) boiling water
- 125 g soft butter (not melted)
- 1 cup (250 ml or 200 g) soft brown sugar
- 2 eggs, beaten until foamy
- 2 cups (500 ml or 240 g) cake flour
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) baking powder
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) salt
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) freshly grated nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) ground ginger
- zest of 2 oranges (optional)
- 1 cup (250 ml or 100 g) walnuts, chopped (or use pecans or almonds)

FOR THE BRANDY SAUCE

- 150 ml water
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml or 15 g) butter

- 1 cup (250 ml) brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) vanilla extract
- a few strips of orange peel
- a pinch of salt
- ½ cup (125 ml) brandy
- stiffly beaten cream, egg custard or ice cream to serve

THIS IS HOW

Heat the oven to 180°C with the oven rack in the centre. Grease a 25 cm-tart dish or pudding dish with butter, add a light dusting of flour and shake out the excess.

Place the chopped dates in a bowl, sprinkle with bicarbonate of soda and pour the boiling water over. Stir the mixture and set it aside.

Beat the butter in a mixing bowl and gradually add the sugar until the mixture is light and fluffy. Gradually beat in the egg – continue beating until the sugar has completely dissolved.

Sift the flour, baking powder, salt and spices into the egg mixture and mix everything thoroughly. Stir in the date mixture and orange zest, followed by the chopped nuts. Transfer the mixture to the greased dish and make a slight hollow in the middle. Bake the tart for 35–40 minutes until cooked. Prepare the sauce in the meantime.

Make the sauce Heat the water, butter, sugar, vanilla, orange peel and salt in a saucepan and let it simmer for about 5 minutes. Stir in the brandy and remove the mixture from the heat. Remove the orange peel.

Remove the tart from the oven and immediately pour the sauce over it slowly so that it is completely absorbed. If it dams up around the perimeter, use a skewer to make holes around the tart. Cut the tart into slices or blocks and serve it warm (or cold later) with whipped cream, egg custard or ice cream.

Tip

You are welcome to make the tart the day before – the brandy flavour will mellow and temper the sweetness. >



Snow pudding with sweet basil custard

"A charming spring pudding with a wintry name," my poetic mother, Inez Espost, wrote in her beautiful handwriting above this recipe for an old-fashioned dessert from the 19th century. Scoops of set snow pudding drift like clouds on the custard, which is subtly flavoured with basil for a modern twist. Sugared herb leaves round it off.

Serves **4–6**

Preparation time **30 minutes**

Cooking time **20 minutes**

Infusion time (for custard) **40 minutes**

Cooling time **30 minutes**

Setting time **3 hours**

YOU NEED

- 1½ cups (375 ml) water
- a good pinch of salt
- 190 ml sugar
- 3 tablespoons (45 ml) cornflour
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) cream of tartar
- juice and zest of ½ a lemon (or, according to my mother's recipe, use ½ a teaspoon of lemon essence)
- 3 egg whites

FOR THE BASIL CUSTARD

- 2 cups (500 ml) milk
- 85 ml sugar
- a good pinch of salt
- 1 cup (250 ml) basil leaves
- 3 egg yolks
- basil leaves (sugared, if you like) and sugared lemon peel for decorating

THIS IS HOW

Heat the water, salt and sugar to boiling point. Mix the cornflour with a little cold water and stir it into the boiling water. Add the cream of tartar and lemon juice and zest, and mix well. Beat the egg whites until nice and stiff and add these to the boiling mixture – whisk them in thoroughly. Place in a wet mould and allow to set in the fridge for about 3 hours. Serve cold.

Make the custard Heat the milk, sugar and salt to boiling point in a medium-sized saucepan, stirring continuously

to dissolve the sugar. Add the basil leaves and remove the mixture from the plate. Cover it and let it infuse for 40 minutes.

Pour the mixture through a sieve, pressing with a spoon to extract as much of the liquid and flavour as possible. Discard the leaves and return the milk mixture to the saucepan.

Lightly whisk the egg yolks in a bowl, then beat in some of the warm milk mixture. Pour the egg-milk mixture

back into the saucepan. Use a wooden spoon to continuously stir the custard as it slowly cooks to the point where it coats the back of a metal spoon. Pour the custard into a bowl and let it cool. Stir it occasionally to prevent a skin from forming.

Serve the custard in individual pudding bowls with a spoonful of snow pudding on top. Decorate each bowl with (sugared) basil leaves and/or pieces of sugared lemon peel. **P**





Salad season

Spruce up a traditional potato salad by trying this Baltic variety that includes carrots, peas and homemade mayonnaise for authentic flavour. Perfect for the spring table! From Ina Paarman's *My Favourite Recipes*.

Baltic salad

The mayonnaise is made in a food processor for convenience, but a hand-held blender works even better.

Serves **4–5**

Preparation time **15 minutes**

Cooking time **20 minutes**

YOU NEED

FOR THE MAYONNAISE

- 1 extra-large egg
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) white wine vinegar or lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) Ina Paarman's Lemon & Black Pepper Seasoning
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) hot English mustard powder
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) sugar
- 1 cup (250 ml) canola oil

FOR THE SALAD

- 3 medium potatoes, peeled
- Ina Paarman's Seasoned Sea Salt
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced (5 mm)
- 1 cup (250 ml) frozen petit pois peas
- viola flowers or chives, to garnish



THIS IS HOW

Make the mayonnaise Mix all the ingredients for the mayonnaise, except the oil, together in a food processor or in a bowl using a hand-held blender. Slowly add the oil while the machine is running. This mayonnaise will be very thick. Store in the refrigerator.

Prepare the salad Steam or boil the potatoes until just soft. Cut into 5 mm cubes and season with Seasoned Sea Salt. Steam the diced carrots until just soft, add the frozen peas and steam for another 5 minutes. Season with Seasoned Sea Salt. Toss all the vegetables together and leave to cool.

Assemble the salad Add $\pm \frac{3}{4}$ cup (160 ml) of mayonnaise to the cold vegetables and stir through.

Spoon into 6 cm bottomless mould rings and press down firmly. Refrigerate for a few hours. Place the salads on a serving plate and remove the rings. Garnish with violas or snipped chives.



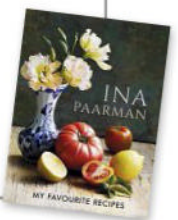
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moist. And a former school principal has perfected her knife-making hobby here, achieving master status.

Further on, at Droëvlakte, we wave at friendly strangers. They wave back. Over the next hill, like children, we see who can spot the ocean first. Indeed, the number plates here bear the letters CCC.

I still have the pansy shell I picked up one day at Preekstoel. And the curves of the road at Melkhoutfontein remind me of when, as a child, I realised I wouldn't be able to fit too comfortably in the rear compartment of the Volkswagen Beetle for much longer. In the interim, so many years have stepped courteously aside so that red-cheeked new ones can dance into existence.

The distant past and more recent times are plaited together like rich, syrupy koeksisters in our conversation. And we laugh a lot. Mostly at ourselves, as always. "Kraantjie, do you remember the day of the mussel soup?"

We were a group of broke students. One of us was there for beach services, one was employed for the holidays at the Bellevue Hotel, and a few others had arrived for the annual touch-rugby tournament. But first everyone harvested mussels together. We lugged them in anything and everything that could be carried, and spent all afternoon preparing the feast, salivating over the promise of the flavour adventure to come. Only when everyone sat down for dinner did we realise that the mussel shells were, in fact, empty. Many third-year theories flew around the table, but we could never precisely establish why so many mussels contained no flesh. Kraantjie's friend thought it was because she had carried some of the

mussels home in her underwear. "But we devoured that mussel sauce with bread as though it were food for a king," giggles Kraantjie.

At the gin distillery, we slow down for scurrying dassies. A grysbok beside the road stares tamely at us.

Holiday biscuits. Matchbox. Oom Jan Kallie's Boomwinkel. Palinggat. Candles and paraffin lamps.

Kraantjie remembers the first time she saw her history teacher wearing shorts. It was on the beach at Lappiesbaai. She says her life changed completely after that.

THE EXPERT ON PET BIRDS responds. She has just returned from her daily swim. She asks if Kraantjie could record a few of the sounds that Sam makes and forward them to her; Sam might experience performance anxiety tomorrow. Sam does not make a sound. Sam is not a talkative bird.

Stately milkwood trees. Rooikrans wood. The Stywe Lyne cafe. Spectacular water displays at the harbour wall during spring tide. Floating on our backs in the river mouth. Shanties beside palaces. The annual hike between Still Bay and Jongsfontein.

Ash-scattering ceremonies. The sea gives and the sea takes away.

When we arrive in Still Bay, we first take detours past familiar old landmarks and new developments. Smile once more at comical house names. Kraantjie says the beach houses that remain closed throughout the year make her sad. They remind her of an inflated jumping castle after a children's party. Abandoned.

Kraantjie says they would always spend the last day of the year with family beside the Goukou River. When you drive across the bridge that connects Still Bay East with

Still Bay West, you turn right and travel over many hills and take many turns before arriving at her uncle's smallholding on a gravel road. Everyone brings food and drink; it's a big feast.

"Apart from one year," Kraantjie explains, "when my aunt sent an early message with the vegetable hawker to our family in the caravan park, letting us know that we rather shouldn't come over. My uncle had experienced an incident while taking his traditional New Year's Eve swim across the river. Later that day, my father paid a visit to his brother alone. All that we could get out of him was that one should never underestimate how capricious nature could be. It was only after many years of assessing and piecing together little pieces of information and scratching our heads that the entire story came out. You see, for this swim, my uncle had removed all his clothes. He started out swimming freestyle but then remembered that river tortoises greedily bite anything that resembles bait. My uncle then turned over to attempt backstroke... only to see a black eagle plummeting towards him. Those birds are lightning-fast when chasing small rodents. No one would ever know which of the two had caused the most damage. But my uncle never went into the water again and he was also never himself again. He always sat with a blanket across his lap."

WE TAKE THE RISE to Bertie Barnard Primary. We first have to put in petrol. One would think that, with all the developments in and around Still Bay, there would be more than one petrol station. We stop to fill up. I tilt the rearview mirror so that I can see Sam. And what do I see! Sam's crest is upright with pride.

"Kraantjie, you can cancel the appointment with the professor. Turn around."

"My word!" says Kraantjie and starts to cry. "Hello Samantha."

Sam has laid an egg. 

"I tilt the rearview mirror so that I can see Sam. And what do I see! Sam's crest is upright with pride."



An afternoon to feed the soul

By **Elroy Africa** from Pretoria

– Eikenhof Dam, Elgin Valley –

It was a clear, beautiful sunny day in February when the hiking trails around Eikenhof Dam in the Elgin-Grabouw area mesmerized and enchanted me. My brother indulged me for about three hours as we spent the afternoon meandering along the magical paths – all clearly marked – above and around the dam.

The dam is about an hour's drive from Cape Town and forms part of the Kogelberg Biosphere, the first biosphere to be registered by UNESCO in South Africa. Among its many wonders, this biosphere hosts around 1880 plant species of which 77 are endemic. In a single afternoon I experienced the humble, fragile magic of fynbos, as well as wheatgrass, pine trees, hottentot-figs, yucca trees and eerie-looking tree stumps guarding the serene dam.

Hiking is never just about hiking. It's about connecting, losing yourself mentally and physically, pausing, contemplating the natural wonders, and having those inner conversations, called "self-talk". For me, it was also about trying to

capture and be nourished by what we often take for granted right on our doorsteps, just beyond the big city gates.

Looking back, I felt immensely happy – as I do now.

It was soul food! 

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