

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

go! Platteland

AUTUMN 2026

The slow life is the good life

KOMATIPOORT

Meet the hearty folk of this bustling border town

Prince Albert gives its young residents **REAL HOPE**

Meet the Richtersveld's **SUCCULENT CRUSADER**

Cricket fever hits **Springfontein!**

Our **50th** edition!

BARDOLINO

A Lowveld retreat for creatives

Renette from Rooitamatie prepares an autumn feast in **Rosendal**

Klaarstroom

Where donkey carts travel faster than time



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BOESMANLAND

3 farmers' wives trump the drought with handmade creations

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AUTUMN 2026

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PHOTOS GREG COX, MIA LOUW, WILLEM VAN DER BERG AND LOVE DAHLIAS



Cover

PHOTO
WILLEM VAN DER BERG

MODEL
RENETTE VOSLOO

PHOTO TAKEN AT
ROOITAMATIE IN ROSENDAL



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PHOTO IAN GOODES

Coffee, good company and beautiful stories

Fifty issues. This is one of those birthdays you can't ignore even if you wanted to – you're still so young and spirited at heart even though you do sometimes feel a little stiff in the mornings...

In a way, this issue is exactly that: a small milestone beside a corrugated gravel road that confirms, "We're still here!"

When *Platteland* started at the end of 2013, we had no big dreams of world domination or glamour and glory. We simply wanted to tell the stories of platteland towns and their determined, innovative residents. Accomplishing this for the 50th time feels like it deserves a celebration. And we're not only referring to all the wonderful stories we have published, but also to you, our readers, who still want to buy a magazine in a world where an "expensive" paper product is increasingly being relegated to the sidelines. Reading a magazine has become an act of rebellion that says, "Technology can wait, I just feel like sitting for a while."

Yes, the world of magazines is under pressure worldwide, and, yes, we do sometimes wonder how much longer the road ahead will be. At the same time, the length of the road becomes less important when coffee, good company and beautiful stories worth telling are found along the way.

Two of our favourite Karoo towns happen to lie barely 60km apart: tourist favourite Prince Albert (see page 88) and its much quieter neighbour, Klaarstroom (page 52), and they both prove that the platteland has a place for everyone. This is true whether you want to witness the transformative power of ideas come to life for a community, as is happening in Prince Albert, or want to feel as if time is standing still, which is very much the case in Klaarstroom. We truly find it impossible to choose between the two!

Enjoy this issue, and thank you for your support. Next stop: 100!

Johan & Peter



The Winter 2026 issue will be distributed countrywide from **22 May 2026**. 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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Chitchat

winning
letter

Litter: Ask what *you* can do

While sitting in my doctor's waiting room the other day, I picked up a copy of *Platteland* (#47, Winter 2025). The first article that caught my eye was the Editors' letter about littering.

Litter is dependent on what people do with and about it. It's so easy to toss a sweet wrapper or a *stompie* out the car window, but it takes conscious thought to find a bin, or take it home with you.

Mom was always there to pick up after us when we were children – toys, clothes, dirty dishes – and this mentality of "someone else will pick up after me" often follows us into adulthood. After pointing out a refuse bin not two metres away from someone who was littering, I was told, "People are employed to pick up trash."

It's actually the other way around: they are employed because people litter!

It wasn't until our

children went to school that my wife and I knuckled down and decided to "do our bit". Until then, I suppose, we were just like everybody else – we just didn't think about it. The school had a recycling drop-off centre and the classes had competitions each week to see who could bring in the most plastic, metal, glass, paper, cardboard, etc. It worked! With the funds received from the companies who collected the recyclables each month, computers, white boards and other items could be bought and installed.

Fast-forward 40 years and here we are, still religiously recycling everything we can and shaking our heads at our neighbours who don't.

Aside from the usual solid waste we generate (plastic, glass, metal and paper/cardboard), and our kitchen waste that goes into a compost bin, we still use a black refuse bag for each week's collection, but could probably use a supermarket bag.

Each refuse collection day,

I see our neighbours' bins overflowing with cardboard and plastic items and, when the bins are emptied into the municipal refuse truck, I hear the clatter and crash of bottles and cans. Many people are too bone lazy to collect their recycling and drive it to a municipal dump or take it to collection sites at a local school or shopping centre.

Rwanda's capital, Kigali, is famous for being one of Africa's cleanest cities. It's virtually litter-free, due to strict laws banning plastic bags (since 2008), and heavy fines imposed for littering, coupled with a strong culture of collective responsibility, notably the monthly mandatory community clean-up known as *Umuganda*, where everyone, including leaders, participates in keeping the city spotless.

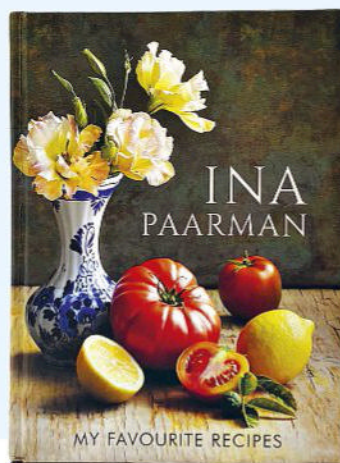
"Ask not what your country/municipality/community can do for you (picking up your litter), but what you can do for your country/municipality/community."

John Rayner

DIEP RIVER, CAPE TOWN



John Rayner from Diep River will receive an Ina Paarman gift pack worth R1 200 for his winning letter. It contains a signed copy of Ina's hardcover cookbook, *My Favourite Recipes*, as well as her four curry cook-In sauces, five new Flavour Bombs (see page 16) and a small stainless-steel rack with four 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 some online shopping. Also try Ina's recipe for curried eggs 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.

The man behind Zibi

What a pity Hester Kritzinger ("I'm the Zibi Tannie", Chitchat, *Platteland* #49, Summer 2025/26) didn't mention Dov Fedler, the late iconic cartoonist who drew the cartoon figure of Zibi.

He was a brilliant cartoonist and for many years was the cartoonist for *The Star* newspaper.

Angela Lurie

Dov Fedler drew for more than 50 years of his life. After being in the trade since 1961, he joined The Star as their cartoonist in the early 1970s, and his work was published in this newspaper and others across the country – The Pretoria News, The Mercury (in KZN), The Cape Times and Diamond Fields Advertiser (in Kimberley) – until his retirement in 2017.

Dov has covered the careers of hundreds of politicians, athletes and celebrities from Albert Hertzog through to Jacob Zuma. And yes, also Zibi.

This legendary litter-busting ostrich was created in 1979 to inspire a nation to "Zappit in the Zibi Bin". People who remember the Keep South Africa Beautiful campaign in the 1980s recall nostalgically how Zibi induced life-long anti-littering habits.

In 2010, Zibi was brought out of



ABOVE Dov Fedler had a career of more than fifty years drawing and painting.

LEFT Dov (right) with his son-in-law, David Batzofin, who wrote a moving piece about Dov on his website, travelandthings.co.za.

retirement by the City of Cape Town, which calculated that it costs 10 times as much to collect litter off the ground than it does to collect it from bins. Around 10 000 single "Zibi Bins" were installed around the city, and they embarked on an extensive campaign to get people to use them. In addition to these bins, thousands of dual-purpose bins – with one side catering for recycling – were installed at fan parks, fan walks and other high-pedestrian traffic areas during the Soccer World Cup.

When asked how he felt about the relaunch of his iconic creation, Dov said, "After trying to revive Zibi on

numerous occasions, I thought that he was finally buried in the sand. It's gratifying to see him pop up again!"

Dov was married to Dr Dorrine Cumes and they had three daughters, Carolyn, Joanne and Laura. Joanne is a well-known writer who has sold more than 600 000 books in Germany alone.

According to his son-in-law, David Batzofin, who is married to Carolyn, Dov died on Saturday 11 January 2025 at 22:48 in the Golden Acres retirement village in Glenhazel, Johannesburg, 10 days before his 85th birthday. – Eds.



Greenies unite!

I read the story of Hester Kritzinger and her Zibi Club in your latest issue with great interest! I live in Somerset West and can really relate to her "fingers itching" to do something similar in this area. As a "Greeny" at heart, I'd like to connect with her to see what we could possibly achieve together. Let's see where this will lead us to...

Keep up with your wonderful magazine!

**Lisa Balz
SOMERSET WEST**

Wonderful, we're looking forward to what you come up with. Do keep us posted! – Eds. >

50, not out!

I just put down the Summer issue (#49), after another cover-to-cover read. It's hard to believe we are waiting for issue #50 to arrive on the shelves! You guys must be extremely proud of what you have achieved with *Platteland* and the thousands of people who have marvelled at the content, and, who like me, planned extensive trips into the furthest and often most forgotten places and towns in our country. I hope to be around when #100 is published!

PS Does anyone perhaps have an extra copy of Winter 2015 (#7), the only one missing from my collection? I will pay a premium for it! Please send an email to borrageirorronnie@gmail.com.

Ronnie Borrageiro
HOEDSPRUIT, LIMPOPO

Subscription glitches & fixes

My mom, Laura Collings, loves *Platteland* magazine – she's so obsessed that our whole family goes on high alert to find the latest copy in store.

I was trying to organise a one-year subscription for her as a Christmas gift, but I got as far as filling in a basic form, and no further. How can I have the magazine delivered to her?

Caroline Collings
RYNFELD, BENONI

We apologise for the glitch on our landing page – the problem was fixed after we received your letter. Readers should keep in mind there are many ways to subscribe – please see the details with our special offer (40% discount) on page 20. Or drop us a mail at helloplatteland@gmail.com and we will ask the subscriptions department to contact you. Laura's Autumn issue is on its way – thank you for your kind support! – Eds.



All roads lead to Bloukrans...

Best wishes to all of you for 2026, and many thanks for the beautiful magazine you produce every quarter!

We originally weren't going to take a holiday in December 2025 but as the season approached, my husband and I found ourselves yearning for isolation and dead quiet – and especially some cellphone-free time.

We wanted to book accommodation in the Eastern Free State but were quickly informed that the place we had our eye on was no longer available. We resumed our search and came across a fantastic spot, but, as we would need to drive on a dirt road to reach our destination, we asked the host, Franci Vosloo, which of our vehicles would be most suitable for the 12 km farm road. She recommended that we use the *Plaasjapie* (a 2013 Mini Countryman), but the little car's fuel consumption was hopelessly too high for the 1 188 km journey from Pretoria to Laingsburg. So my husband asked his father if we could borrow his far more suitable sports utility vehicle, which is not only lighter on fuel but also has significantly more packing space. Perfect for an 11-day remote self-catering holiday.

My father-in-law is always willing to help and when we went to fetch the car, my husband gave him a gift pack that

included the Summer 2025-'26 edition of *Platteland*. We also bought ourselves a copy to read on holiday. Note that this treat was only for the holiday, *not* before. So we sat on the stoep of Sinkhuis at the Bloukrans Klein-Bewarea guest farm and read the magazine, which contained an article about the very same Bloukrans Klein-Bewarea. We not only recognised our accommodation but also Franci. We had such a good laugh about this "coincidence"!

Wow, what an experience! No TV, cellphones, wifi, noise. We had a fantastic, much-needed 11 days in the Moordenaars Karoo and would recommend it to everyone. The Karoo, especially Bloukrans Klein-Bewarea, is most definitely a destination rather than a place you drive through. Each cottage is a work of art and Franci is a wonderful host! And, yes, we're not sure that the *Plaasjapie* would have handled the beautiful 12 km farm road.

Thank you very much to dad Christo for the use of your car, and many thanks to Franci for a truly unforgettable experience.

The photograph shows my husband, Marinus, reading *Platteland* on the stoep of Sinkhuis.

Christina Lourens
ELARDUSPARK, PRETORIA

The day Dad unmasked the “villains”

There comes a time in life when your childhood memories suddenly feel like golden treasures. You unearth them from the depths of your consciousness, dust them off and share them with your children, although you notice how they sigh internally when you start with: “When I was young...”

I love talking about the days when we’d play toktokkie as if we were part of a covert spying operation. No one could ring doorbells and duck behind conifers quite like we could.

I have an especially clear memory of the night the Oom with the short temper whipped out his revolver. I’ll never know if it was loaded or not, but I remember that I ran like I’d never run before in my life – my feet only touched the ground again after two blocks. After that night, not a single milk bottle was moved, not a single pot plant vanished.

The town knew: the rascals had been unmasked.

Today, my children are growing up in a world of alarms, cameras, fences, and neighbourhood watches with more WhatsApp groups than we have family group chats. And yet, the urge to ring a doorbell and run away is still there.

So, on an ordinary Thursday, they decided to continue the tradition. Just a bit of fun. A small adrenaline rush. An innocent game.

They were barely back home – red in the face, short of breath, eyes as large as saucers – when there was a knock on our front door. Not an ordinary knock; a serious, I-must-talk-to-the-owner knock.

The sort that immediately makes your stomach churn.

I looked at the boys. They were like two buck caught in the headlights. Guilty. Innocent. At the same time. A combination only children get right.

Daddy opened the door. The complainant stood at the entrance: pale, dramatic and clearly convinced that he has just uncovered a crime syndicate in the town.

“There were two boys,” he declared earnestly, “on red bikes. They raced off... looked like a gang...”

Before he could continue, two heads appeared slowly around the corner. Not out of bravery, but out of necessity.

They had to confess. But, then, something changed. Daddy wore that expression.

The one that meant he was about to spin a yarn. He spoke calmly, almost like

a detective in a TV series. He

asked questions, raised his brows, gestured dramatically.

Suddenly the stranger burst out laughing. “Oh, I see,” he exclaimed. “They’re only children!”

The boys stood there, surprised at first, and then I heard it: a stifled giggle. One that turned into an exuberant laugh, bubbling like a shaken soda.

When the door finally closed, they turned to their father and said, half-admiringly, half-relieved: “Daddy, your one-man show was brilliant!”

And so it was that Daddy not only unmasked the “villains”, he also saved them from possible trouble in the future.

**Lynette Strydom
QQEERHA**



Hugo, phone the (tourism) police!

We were privileged in December 2025 to experience Route 62, but in my view there’s no one who can lie quite like a guesthouse owner on this route.

From Barrydale, we drove through Ladismith, Oudtshoorn, Jansenville and eventually Kareedouw. We stood in front of a guesthouse and phoned the number on the sign.

“No, we’re full.” But the gates were closed and the curtains drawn.

“But, ma’am, we just need a single room, please.”

Then the story changed: “We reopen after 12 January.”

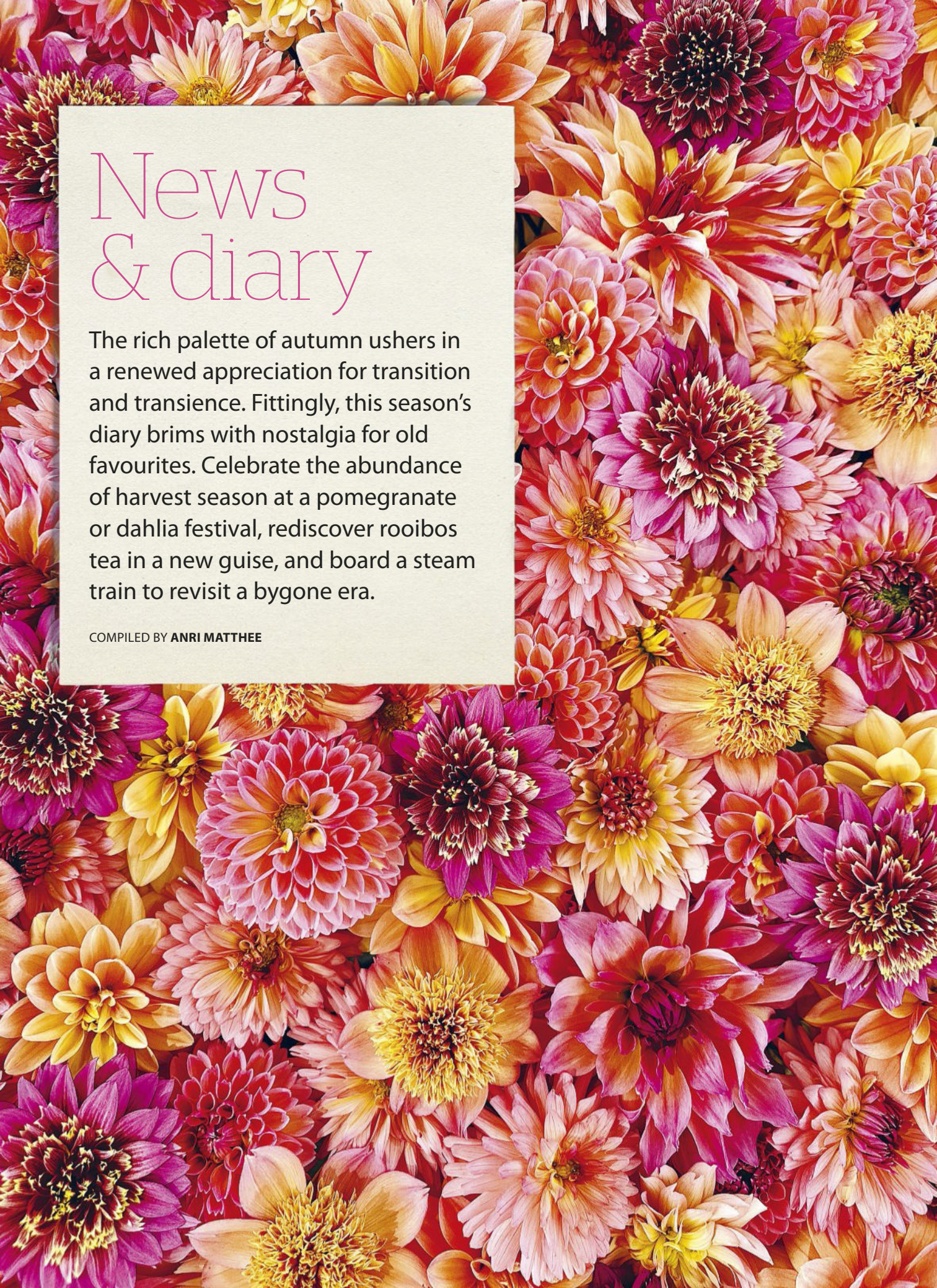
Now we know she’s lying through her teeth.

What’s the story with this so-called tourism offering? Is it a case of rich Daddy spoiling Mommy with linen and furniture shopping sprees? Typical capitalists. During the holidays, she wants to go to Hermanus or Plett so that she doesn’t miss out on any gossip.

Why not recruit students to do some practical work in December?

I think the tourism police should be called in to revoke the licences of guesthouses that lie so shamelessly.

**Gerard Smal
MOTENG, BUTHA-BUTHE,
LESOTHO**



News & diary

The rich palette of autumn ushers in a renewed appreciation for transition and transience. Fittingly, this season's diary brims with nostalgia for old favourites. Celebrate the abundance of harvest season at a pomegranate or dahlia festival, rediscover rooibos tea in a new guise, and board a steam train to revisit a bygone era.

COMPILED BY **ANRI MATTHEE**



A dahlia for your darling

"I used to work in the wedding industry and actually started farming with flowers to get away from people. But one day last year, while I was standing in a field of blooms, I realised that this was something that needed to be shared."

Then and there, Mareli Visser of Love Dahlias decided to open her little piece of heaven, situated outside Douglas, to visitors, and this year she will hold the first Love Dahlias Festival. "Dahlias in full bloom aren't just beautiful; they are an overwhelming and joyful sight. It's the kind of beauty that makes you stop in your tracks."

Because Douglas is so remote and dahlias don't handle long-distance travel well, most of Mareli's cut flowers didn't make it beyond the farm gate. So she made a plan: invite the people to the flowers!

Mareli also sees the festival as an opportunity for visitors, other flower farmers, and creative souls to learn together and find inspiration. Besides a tour of the seasonal floral splendour, the festival programme includes various workshops,

demonstrations and Mareli's own dahlia masterclass. Each day concludes with a long-table dahlia dinner, where a well-known chef will cook according to the theme of the evening using seasonal local ingredients.

Date The Love Dahlias Festival takes place from 18–21 March in Douglas in the Northern Cape. The full festival programme and ticket sales are available on the Love Dahlias website.

Contact [lovedahlias.com](https://www.lovedahlias.com)

sales@lovedahlias.com

[Love Dahlias](#) [@lovedahliasrsa](#)

082 552 6020 (Mareli) >

WIN Two lucky readers stand a chance to win a Love Dahlias Festival package, including a ticket to one workshop and entrance to the dahlia dinners on all three evenings. Visit [platteland.net](https://www.platteland.net), click on "Win" and fill in the form using the keywords "Dahlia" and "Autumn". The closing date is 11 March 2026.

ABOVE The sheer variety makes dahlias one of Mareli's favourite flowers. "There are so many different shapes and variations, from the large dinner plates to the miniature pompon balls."

ABOVE LEFT Flower farmer Mareli Visser invites you to four days of festivities at her dahlia farm in Douglas.



Full steam ahead!

"People usually say you can't fix something with a hammer, but with a steam train, you can achieve *a lot* with a 20-pound hammer!"

Rick Botha from the Ceres Rail Company should know. He's spent the past few months observing their two old-fashioned steam locomotives undergoing a transformation. The locomotives, which were withdrawn from service in the middle of 2025 for an extensive refurbishment, are usually used for the company's passenger rides, including the popular day trips between Cape Town and the Elgin Railway Market.

But once the work is complete and they return to the tracks, both locomotives will be fit to run for the next 30 years. One should be operational by March and the other shortly afterwards.

These two Class 19D steam locomotives were imported in 1949 for use on the national railways. "Before Ceres Rail bought them, they had stood in Voorbaai for 12 years, just

deteriorating. Fortunately, a team of tradesmen who'd previously worked on the Outeniqua Choo Tjoe were able to get the locomotives back into working condition," says Rick. "Technicians are very scarce in South Africa, but we have a really good team, and also train people who are interested."

Ceres Rail began freight transport in 2013, which is really the company's core focus. Diesel locomotives are used for this. In 2015, the restored steam locomotives ran their first passenger trips on the Ceres-Wolseley line but two years later the trips were moved to Cape Town, where interest was greater.

"Seeing the world through the window of a train is something special. You notice things you can't see from the road. The steady rhythm of the train, chatting with the people around you... it's an escape from reality!"

Ceres Rail also started an Overberg route last year, which runs between Bot River and Elgin. "It's a shorter but

very popular trip. We will definitely run it again in 2026 as soon as our two locomotives are back." Bookings are also open until the end of March for a special six-day tour between Cape Town and Mossel Bay in May. And trips to Darling, Simon's Town and Matjiesfontein are in the pipeline.

"Our dream isn't necessarily to cover as many destinations as possible, but to expose as many people as we can to the peace you experience on a train," says Rick. "There are so many new ideas and people are starting to get involved in the revival of the railways in South Africa. It's an honour for us to be a part of that."

Bookings Tickets for all train trips can be booked on the Ceres Rail Company website. Follow their social media for information on special trips that will be announced during the year.

Contact ceresrail.co.za [f](https://www.facebook.com/ceresrail) Ceres Rail Company info@ceresrail.co.za [ig](https://www.instagram.com/ceresrailcompany) @ceresrailcompany [079 401 9353](tel:0794019353)

PHOTO CERES RAIL COMPANY

Chug-chug through the countryside. The world looks different from a railway carriage, says Rick Botha.





LEFT The masterminds behind Rooibru: distiller Hamish Gebers and student friends Christian Hall and Kelvin Swanepoel.

BELOW Many months of experiments and tasting sessions helped fine-tune Rooibru to a market-ready product.

Not your granny's iced tea

Late-night conversations between student friends have always been fertile ground for great ideas, and one such exchange provided the inspiration for Rooibru, an alcoholic beverage with a distinctive South African twist.

Christian Hall remembers the discussion he had with Kelvin Swanepoel in 2024: "Unlike many late-night ideas, this one luckily didn't fade with the daylight."

A few weeks later, the two friends were knee-deep in developing their new brainchild: rooibos iced tea with a splash of alcohol. Once Hamish Gebers joined the team as distiller, three months of intensive tasting sessions followed. "It was hands-on and a welcome break for these Stellies students, who now suddenly had a valid excuse to drink in the middle of the week," says Christian.

Rooibru was inspired by the growing success of "hard iced tea" in the USA. "We felt there was a clear gap for a uniquely South African version of this trend. So, we focused on keeping the ingredients as local and as natural as possible, with the aim of offering a refreshing

alternative to other chemical-heavy spritzers and overly artificial seltzers. Rooibos is the ideal base: it's caffeine-free and widely known for its antioxidant properties."

Apart from the classic rooibos, Rooibru recently launched two flavoured versions: lemon and peach. "We wanted flavours that felt familiar, approachable and refreshing while still allowing the rooibos to remain the hero."

The team is constantly working behind the scenes to refine the product and expand their offering. Keep an eye on their social media to find out when the new elderberry flavour will be available.

All three Rooibru flavours are available online in packs of 6, 12 or 24 cans. Kegs are also available for festivals, weddings and private functions in the Winelands and Cape Town. Their website lists restaurants and liquor stores that stock Rooibru. Click on the "Rooibru Radar" tab on the website.

Contact [rooibru.com](https://www.rooibru.com)

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

☎ 064 650 7585 (Christian)



From the streets of Stellenbosch

"We're big believers in keeping things simple. Most of the time, our favourite way to enjoy Rooibru is straight out of the can," says Christian. "But if we're feeling a bit fancy, we'll pour it over ice with a slice of lemon and a few mint leaves – easy, refreshing and perfect for a warm afternoon."

Rooibru is also a fantastic base ingredient for cocktails. "Our favourite is our take on a Long Island Iced Tea, which we've dubbed the Dorp Street Iced Tea, named after many formative evenings in Stellenbosch. Here's how to make it: Mix one shot each of vodka, gin, light rum and Triple Sec over ice and top up with the classic rooibos Rooibru iced tea. It goes down very well – proceed with caution!" >

WIN Two lucky readers stand a chance to win a case of Rooibru peach or lemon to the value of R550 each. Go to [platteland.net](https://www.platteland.net), click on "Win" and fill in the form using the keywords "Rooibru" and "Autumn". The closing date is 21 May 2026.





The pomegranate festival is held at the peak of harvest season, when the fruit are hanging heavy from the trees. But don't be fooled, warns Kobus: The reddest pomegranate is not necessarily the sweetest...

Autumn's sweet red delight

"The most beautiful quality of a pomegranate is revealed when you break it open and see those deep-red arils on pure-white flesh," says Kobus van Zyl from Ubali Pomegranate Farm, located between Pretoria and Cullinan. It is around this seasonal pleasure that he and Louis Swanepoel have created their annual Pomegranate Festival. Louis, a former landscape architect, has farmed here since 2011, first with dairy goats and now with pomegranates and prickly pears, which are perfectly suited to the sandy soil. He was joined six years ago by Kobus, who has a background in corporate marketing.

"Cultivating pomegranate trees for the agricultural industry forms the largest part of our business," says Kobus. "We are the biggest supplier of the 'Wonderful' cultivar in the north of the country."

He says that it was no longer worth their while to transport the fruit to market. "We decided to open the farm to the public, allowing people to enjoy the beauty for themselves."

Visitors can buy the farm-fresh whole fruit, arils and juice, as well as a variety of pantry products that Louis and Kobus make themselves: pomegranate jelly, syrup, balsamic vinegar, reduction

and molasses. Seasonal treats such as pomegranate cheesecake and drinks are also available, and there is an art and ceramics exhibition featuring pomegranate-inspired works.

"We held our first Pomegranate Festival in March 2017 and it has grown every year. We have since built the shop and venue, and then a big greenhouse where we serve the food and drinks. The juicing factory is the most recent addition."

This year's festival will take place over the weekends of 20–22 and 27–29 March, coinciding with the peak of harvest season, an exceptionally busy period on the farm.



ABOVE Apart from the lovely ripe fruit, pomegranate pantry products and artworks are for sale.

ABOVE LEFT Louis Swanepoel and Kobus van Zyl from Ubali.

ABOVE FAR LEFT They sell fresh fruit, bottled products and even art works in the farm shop.



Heaps of pomegranates – hand-pick your own, or buy pre-packed fruit, arils or juice from the farm shop.

Peel it like this

Part of the joy of the harvest season is breaking open a fresh pomegranate yourself, and Kobus has discovered an easy method: “Start by cutting off the crown. The white segments that taper towards the bottom will now be visible. Cut downward along the segments without cutting into the seeds. Do this all the way around the fruit, lightly tap it with a spoon and break open the segments as you would with an orange. Inside are the most beautiful red seeds packed with healthy goodness.” >



PHOTOS UBALI POMEGRANATE AND PRICKLY PEAR FARM

“Long before harvest time, we have to keep a close eye on the trees for all kinds of diseases. The sweetness of the pomegranates is measured with a refractometer to determine when the fruit is ready. Then it’s picked by hand because the fruit bruises easily.”

Ubali also hosts the annual Prickly Pear Festival in January and holds open days on the first weekend of the month for the remainder of the year. “Visitors can walk the hiking trail through our forest camp, stay overnight in our accommodation, or simply relax in our large garden. Louis and I are avid gardeners,” says Kobus.

“Ubali has become a destination. People enjoy the tranquillity of the farm and it’s a comfortable distance from Pretoria and Johannesburg.”

Price Entrance to the Pomegranate Festival is free. Access to the walking trail costs R40 pp (R20 for under-12s), payable on the day.

Where? Ubali is situated in the Serengeti Conservancy in the Bynesspoort and Kameelfontein area between Pretoria and Cullinan.

Contact 📧 info@ubali.co.za
📍 ubali.co.za 📷 @ubali_farm 📺 Ubali Farm 📞 082 920 2038 (Kobus)

Reading gives you wings

The people of Koringberg in the Swartland now have access to a public library for the first time. The opening of the community library is thanks to a partnership between the local non-governmental organisation Ek n Jy and the volunteer organisation Adventures for Love.

"Two years ago, when we realised that the primary school library wasn't open to the whole community, we came up with the idea of creating a place where young and old could have access to books," says Cecilia Mackay, a director of Ek n Jy. Volunteers had already begun collecting, sorting and safely storing books until a suitable venue could be found.

"This space has been created to feed the imagination, encourage reading and strengthen ties within our community. We hope it becomes a place where old and young will gather."

As there is no government funding, the library relies completely on the time and dedication of volunteers. Cecilia says it would make a big difference if more residents could offer just a few hours of their time every week.

"People who are already using the library service are so happy that they no longer have to travel to Moorreesburg to get books. We also want to start a children's reading group where volunteers come in twice a week to read aloud to the little ones and show them how to borrow books themselves."

There are already about 5 000 books from which to choose. "Many of the children's books are in English but this is an Afrikaans-speaking community, so we need more Afrikaans reading material for teens and adults, but especially for children."

Where? The Koringberg community library has been installed in a container at the POP Centre in Koringberg and is open from Mondays to Fridays from 10:00–16:00.

Contact eknjy.co.za socialite@socialdma.co.za [f Ek N Jy Koringberg](https://www.facebook.com/EkNjyKoringberg)
[@eknjycommunity](https://www.instagram.com/eknjycommunity) [083 226 6099](tel:0832266099) (Cecilia)



ABOVE Cecilia Mackay and Elizabeth "Rosie" de Klerk from Ek n Jy.

LEFT Bookworms both young and old now have a meeting place in Koringberg following the opening of a community library. The library already has 5 000 books but donations, particularly of Afrikaans reading material, are always welcome

PHOTOS EK N JY



Throw a flavour bomb or five!

Here at *Platteland*, we had a great time experimenting with the latest product range from the Ina Paarman test kitchen over the festive season. Flavour Bombs are sachets of liquid seasoning that you simply mix with a tablespoon of oil, then use to coat 150–200 g of meat, fish, prawns or vegetables before cooking them in a pan, oven, air-fryer or over coals. Flavour Bombs, available in Spicy Cajun, Zesty Lemon, Portuguese Peri-Peri, Steakhouse Pepper and Spanish Tomato flavours, are sold in supermarkets in cardboard cylinders containing four sachets and an information leaflet with basic suggestions. Extra recipes and videos are available on the website.

Price Approximately R40 per cylinder of 4 sachets.

Contact paarman.co.za



Dates to diarise*

WESTERN CAPE

Spier Light Art festival

**SPIER WINE FARM,
STELLENBOSCH**

6 March–6 April

More than 13 000 people enjoyed last year's outdoor festival of art, light and colour. This year, the eighth festival will see 21 experimental installations light up the night and stir the senses. Free tours will depart from the information desk at 19:30 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.

Entrance Free, but places are limited, so book in advance on the website.

Contact spierlightart.co.za

hello@spier.co.za

[f](https://www.facebook.com/SpierWineFarm) Spier Wine Farm

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

☎ 021 809 1100

SANPO Gala

BRAMBLE HILL, GEORGE

14 March

The South African National Pigeon Organisation's annual gala and awards ceremony is the highlight of the racing season. It's also a networking event for breeders and anyone interested in the sport.

Tickets R400 pp (R200 for under-12s) at iTickets.

Contact sanpo.co.za

sanpo.pigeonsa@gmail.com

☎ 083 969 6092 (Rona)

Serenade in the Forest

**KING EDWARD VII/
DIEPWALLE BIG TREE,
KNYSNA**

15 March

An enchanting combination of world-class musical talent and the natural beauty of the Knysna Forest, all in aid of the local honorary rangers. Tickets include light snacks.



PHOTO WINELANDS COFFEE FESTIVAL

WESTERN CAPE

Winelands Coffee Festival

MISTICO EQUESTRIAN CENTRE, PAARL

28–29 March

After a successful debut last year, this coffee festival returns with an expanded offering: more exhibitors, demonstrations and workshops for coffee roasters, baristas and enthusiasts. Browse for a new coffee machine, the latest equipment and contraptions, or simply enjoy tasting great coffee, wine and beer.

Tickets R130 pppd (R230 for a weekend pass) at iTickets.

Contact coffeefestival.co.za/winelands

hello@tcfc.co.za [f](https://www.facebook.com/WinelandsCoffeeFestival) Winelands Coffee Festival

[@winelandscoffeefestival](https://www.instagram.com/winelandscoffeefestival) ☎ 082 303 9131

Note Ticket holders must park at the Loerie Park Stadium and from there catch the free shuttle.

Tickets R650 pp at Quicket.

Contact sanparks-volunteers.org [f](https://www.facebook.com/knysna) knysna.

chair@honoraryrangers.org

[f](https://www.facebook.com/SANParksHonoraryRangers) SANParks Honorary Rangers ☎ 079 473 9705

KKNK

OUDTSHOORN

28 March–4 April

This is a milestone year for this much-loved arts festival

in Oudtshoorn as KKNK turns 30! And it certainly promises to be a big party. Find the festival programme on the website – it's an exciting, action-packed line-up.

Tickets Available at Webtickets.

Contact kknk.co.za

info@kunste.org.za

[f](https://www.facebook.com/KKNK) KKNK [@kknkfees](https://www.instagram.com/kknkfees)

☎ 044 203 8600

Fools & Fans

GREYTON

10–11 April

Craft brewers, home brewers and beer enthusiasts from across the country gather in the heart of the Overberg, with plenty of music, food and good company on the menu. This year there will be a festival cellphone app, making logistics easier and offering the chance to vote for your favourite brewers and stalls.

Tickets R210 pp for Friday; R300 pp for Saturday; R440 for a weekend pass – available on the website.

Contact foolsandfans.co.za

info@foolsandfans.co.za

☎ 078 802 0006 [f](https://www.facebook.com/FoolsandFansBeerFestival) Fools

& Fans Beer Festival

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

Agulhas Wine Triangle Harvest Festival

**LOMOND WINE ESTATE,
GANSBAAI**

25 April

Celebrate a successful harvest season with 13 of Africa's southernmost cool-climate wine producers at this annual festival. Tickets include tastings of 30 to 50 wines, and bottles will be available for purchase. The programme also features food stalls, music and interactive workshops.

Tickets R300 p.p. (tasting glass included); R250 for early birds, available at Quicket. >



PHOTO AGULHAS WINE TRIANGLE

Contact  agulhaswine-triangle.co.za  info@agulhaswinetriangle.co.za
 Agulhas Wine Triangle
 @agulhaswinetriangle
 082 658 3883

Franschhoek Literary Festival

**VARIOUS VENUES
15–17 May**

Interviews with authors, pop-up bookshops and interesting conversations with fellow bookworms... What more could you want from a reading and literary getaway in charming Franschhoek? Book accommodation early and make a weekend of it. The festival also raises funds for the local school library project.

Contact  flf.co.za
 hello@flf.co.za
 Franschhoek Literary Festival  @franlitfest

GAUTENG Country Legends and Craft Distillers Festival

**MAKERS VILLAGE,
CULLINAN
28 March**
 South Africa's music icons and the charm of Cullinan will transport you to the wonderful world of country music. You'll also taste the best beers, gins, whiskies and brandies by local distillers and brewers. The whole family is welcome.

Entrance R170 pp (free for children) at Quicket.

Contact  info@cullinan-events.co.za
 Cullinan Events Co
 082 926 4326 (Danie)

Rand Show

**JOHANNESBURG EXPO
CENTRE, NASREC
2–6 April**



PHOTO HOBBY-X

GAUTENG

Hobby-X

**KYALAMI GRAND PRIX CIRCUIT, JOHANNESBURG
30 April–3 May**

Whatever your chosen medium, give your creativity wings with all the skill, expertise, materials and tools your heart and hands desire. In addition to the wide range of practical workshops, there are also dedicated DIY zones for honing your craft and exchanging tips with fellow makers and artists. Open every day from 9:00 to 17:00.

Tickets R180 pp (parking included); R99 for early birds, available from Howler.

Contact  hobby-x.co.za  marlene.bosch@za.messefrankfurt.com
 Hobby-X  @hobbyxinsta  084 622 3931

Enjoy the best in entertainment, shopping and family fun during this five-day extravaganza. Held for the first time in 1894, the Rand Show is South Africa's longest-running continuous consumer expo. The bridal and matric farewell expo are new on this year's programme, and competitions and fashion shows are also on the line-up.
Tickets Book on the website.
Contact  randshow.co.za
 info@randshow.co.za 

@rand_show_  Rand Show  011 494 2894

FREE STATE

**VKB Bieliemieliefees
SHOWGROUNDS, SAREL
CILLIERS STREET, REITZ
26–28 February**

The organisers of this festival have a simple philosophy: the more, the merrier! That's why the Bieliemielie festival focuses on forging new friendships, cherishing old ones and showcasing typical Free



PHOTO VKB BIELIEMIELIEFEES

State hospitality. It's part agricultural show, part community get-together and part sports day – bring your friends, family and a healthy appetite!

Tickets Available at the VKB shops in Reitz and Bethlehem (and at the gate).
Contact bieliemielie.co.za
admin@bieliemielie.co.za
 VKB Bieliemieliefes
 083 395 2640

EASTERN CAPE

Gin & Bubbly BRIDGE STREET BISTRO & SMOKEHOUSE, GQEBERHA

7 March

Longing for aromatic botanical spirits or refreshing bubbles? There's a drink to suit every preference and personality at this lively tasting event. Selected bottles of gin and sparkling wine will be on sale. Dress according to the tropical theme and relax under the thorn trees, glass in hand.

Tickets R275 pp at Quicket.

Contact bridgestreet.co.za management@bridgestreet.co.za [Bridge Street Bistro & Smokehouse](https://www.facebook.com/Bridge-Street-Bistro-&-Smokehouse)
[@bridgestreet_pe](https://www.instagram.com/bridgestreet_pe)
 041 581 0361

The Great Kenton Wine Festival

**KENTON-ON-SEA
19–21 March**

Do you love wine and the sea? Do you want to buy top-class wines or learn more about wine-tasting? Then come to this long-weekend wine festival and spend the afternoons (14:00 to 17:00) sampling wines from 35 cellars at three tasting locations.

Tickets R450 pp (tasting glass included) at Quicket.



PHOTO CHARLENE WRIGHT

EASTERN CAPE

Stoep Tasting

GRAAFF REINET & NIEU BETHESDA

21–23 May and 28–30 May

It's difficult to believe that only 45 tickets were sold for the first Stoep Tasting in 2014. Today, the wine festival attracts connoisseurs from across the country who clink glasses on the stoeps of these two Karoo towns. Each exhibitor is chosen by hand, ensuring an offering of the highest standard.

Tickets R660 pp or R830 (glass included) on the website

Contact greatwineweekends.com karoowineclub@gmail.com [Karoo Wine Club](https://www.facebook.com/Karoo-Wine-Club)
 083 599 9302

Contact greatwineweekends.com karoowineclub@gmail.com
[Karoo Wine Club](https://www.facebook.com/Karoo-Wine-Club)
 083 599 9302

Kunskoors JEFFREYS BAY

1–3 May

Art is for everyone, which is why the organisers bring top-class music, literature, theatre and visual arts to the community of Jeffreys Bay. The festival also serves as a platform for local artists, offering them more

exposure. Various workshops are also on offer.

Tickets Book at Quicket – type “Kunskoors” into the search bar.

Contact kunskoors.co.za
soria@kunskoors.co.za
[@kunskoors](https://www.facebook.com/Kunskoors)
 082 684 4350

MPUMALANGA

Wakkerstroom Music Festival WAKKERSTROOM 20–22 March

Classical music in the heart

of the platteland – and this year the festival celebrates its 15th anniversary. The organisers involve the townspeople through their marimba project, which develops musical skills in schoolchildren. This project is supported by the festival proceeds.

Tickets Sales start

a month before the start of the festival – keep an eye on the website.

Contact wmfestival.co.za

info@wmfestival.co.za

[Wakkerstroom Music Festival](https://www.facebook.com/Wakkerstroom-Music-Festival)
 076 129 8180

KWAZULU-NATAL

Great East Coast Chilli Fest

**NORTHWOOD
CRUSADERS SPORTS
CLUB, DURBAN**

28 March

This is the perfect destination for culinary daredevils who want to put their taste buds to the ultimate test. Beyond the variety of flavourful, spicy and hot food on offer, festival-goers can also challenge each other in the chilli-eating competition or compete for the title of the tastiest chilli sauce. There's even a showdown to see who can eat the hottest bunny chow!

Tickets R65 pp, available at Quicket.

Contact thegreatestcoastchillifest.co.za
hello@thegreatestcoastchillifest.co.za
[The Great East Coast Chilli Festival](https://www.facebook.com/The-Great-East-Coast-Chilli-Festival)
 084 505 0113 (Nick)



News on markets and bazaars

Let us know via email, or on our Facebook page, what's happening in your area in June, July and August 2026. The closing date is Monday 13 April. helloplatteland@gmail.com [@Platteland](https://www.facebook.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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L-Gin Lush craft gin is made by three friends using locally grown juniper berries and Granny Smith apples and infused with lemon peel, coriander, angelica root and fresh ginger (750 ml) R400
L-Gin l-gin.net



Handmade felted wool trivets
(17 cm in diameter; 1 cm thick) R360 each
Sourcery sourceryshop



Bugolobi Blend dark-roasted Arabica coffee beans with a soft acidity (250 g) R100
Vegan hot chocolate with a rich, creamy chocolate taste (250 g) R65
Stainless-steel non-spill suction cup R280
Brother's Coffee Roastery
brotherscoffee.co.za



Karoo Tuin body products
Clockwise from left, Luxury Room Mist, Body Butter, Gardener's Balm and Gardener's Scrub with rose geranium, neroli, petitgrain and cedarwood fragrance From R115 each
Windmill Junction windmilljunction.co.za

Let's go to town

Get into the spirit of autumn with these beautifully made finds from Alice, Barrydale, Cape Town, Cradock, Darling, Elgin, George, Graaff-Reinet, Great Brak River, Harkerville, Hoekwil, Paarl and the West Coast.

BY MARIAN VAN WYK
PHOTOS GREG COX



Coffee mugs R25–R30 each
Pep Home pepstores.com



Azizi women's lace-up leather shoes
with a wider fit at the toes R1 850
Bummel bummel.co.za



Mohair-wool blend blankets
in the colours (from the top) Hantam Karoo, Fever Tree and Olienhout
(130 cm x 180 cm) R1 999 each
Karoo Farm Box karoofarmbox.co.za



Kefir promotes digestion thanks to live probiotic cultures (500 ml) about R36
Milkwood Dairy Products
milkwoodfarm.co.za >



Cheese straws and biscuits made with mature Cheddar and butter (120 g) R58
Kaashaas kaashaasrsa@gmail.com



Black garlic – fermented garlic cloves with a sweet, balsamic-like melassic flavour, and no pungent aroma (50 g) R90
Ouma Swesie se Spens
oumaswesiesespens.co.za



Hand-poured candles in terracotta jars in the fragrances Cederberg, Tamboerskloof and Karoo Garden R455 (medium), R265 (small), R295 (cylinder)
Rekindle Candle Co. rekindlecandleco.co.za



Pikkii Kitty sticky tape dispenser made of eco-friendly bamboo R350
Big Blue bigblue.co.za



Eco-friendly laundry detergent sheets in Fragrance-Free, Forest Breeze and Orchard Breeze – gentle on sensitive skin (80 sheets per pack for 80 laundry loads) R329
Erthhaus erthhaus.co.za



Bosveld Braai Kruit braai spice blend (130 g) R60
Vonkproppe eco-friendly fire starters (8 per pack) R40
Brandy (200 ml) R60
Buffelsfontein buffelstoor.co.za



Salted, pure and chocolate-flavoured peanut butter made from locally sourced, dry-roasted peanuts with no added oils or artificial ingredients (250 g) R40 each
Buttanut buttanut.co.za



Botani Blush Natural Tallow Deodorant made of beef tallow, coconut oil, arrowroot, kaolin clay, potato starch and essential oils (55 ml) R170
Cypress Hill cypresshill.co.za



Tallow Balm body and skin products: Wound Ointment, Skin Moisturiser, Insect Repellent, Kaalgat Unscented Body Balm and Solar Kiss Sun Blemish Repair (100 ml each; Body Balm 200 ml) R170–R300 each
Cypress Hill cypresshill.co.za



Die RSM beard oil R195 and **moustache wax** R175 – both containing beeswax and coconut oil – and **wooden beard comb** R85
Buffelsfontein buffelstoor.co.za



Beard oil with various essential oils:
Laventelhaan, Krygkommissaris, Doringkosie, Ou Suur-Pierre, Neutkraker and Grootwildjagter R175 each
Buffelsfontein buffelstoor.co.za



Honey Mead Vinegar – made with raw honey and kept unfiltered to retain the benefits of fermentation (250 ml) R100
Indicator Mead Glühwein – sweet, mulled mead infused with citrus and various spices (375 ml) R100
Cape Town Meadery
capetownmeadery.com



Heirloom purple-top turnip seed
about R50
Free From Nature [082 882 8688](tel:0828828688)



Japanese Noda Horo steel kettle
with an enamel finish and a long, narrow gooseneck spout for precise pouring (2 l)
R1 400 Sourcing [sourceryshop](https://www.sourceryshop.co.za)



Die Braai Blaai – made of heavy-duty, pliable cardboard paper – prevents braai juices from dripping on the floor or on your braai (pack of 6 disposable sheets) R79
Die Braai Blaai diebraaiblaai.com



Gluten-free, vegan fruit-and-nut rusks
without added sugar (250g)
From R75
Buttanut buttanut.co.za



Glass vase R40
Pep Home pepstores.com



Oak paddle board (19 cm in diameter) R330
Windmill Junction windmilljunction.co.za

MY TOWN

KOMATIPOORT

Gateway to Kruger

(and Mozambique)

At the confluence of the Komati and Crocodile rivers in Mpumalanga, you'll find the border town of Komatipoort. This place of extremes and contradictions is home to an established farming community, and provides a gateway to Africa's east coast and several of the country's most well-known and iconic private game lodges and golf courses.

TEXT HANCU LOUW PHOTOS MIA LOUW

Tranquil views of the Komati River and the foothills of the Lebombo Mountains. The river is one of only two places in the country where you can catch tigerfish, and visitors travel from far and wide to cast their lines here. But, beware, of what else lurks beneath... plenty of crocodiles. It's also not uncommon to see a hippo or two in the water.



Have we accidentally driven into Mozambique without showing our passports, we wonder as we try to weave our way along the main road of Komatipoort, where all the vehicles have Mozambican number plates.

On pavements, throngs of people – old and young, rich and poor – haggle with traders selling everything from stockings to solar panels. Informal vendors hawk fresh produce, clothing and curios beneath plastic awnings, and car boots overflow with all manner of groceries. You don't hear a word of English or Afrikaans being spoken.

Then there is an abrupt change of scenery: the Babel-like confusion of the town centre gives way to large, leafy properties, and people walking and cycling everywhere.

"Goodness, you've really caught us on a day when everything is going wrong," says Elmarie Cronje, owner of Stoep Cafe Restaurant and Guesthouse, which, for the past 20 years has been a gathering place for residents as well as visitors. She leads us to a table under a large Natal mahogany. Although it's just a few days before the festive season is due to kick off properly, there is neither electricity nor water in the town. "It's been like this for almost a week now," says Elmarie, who grew up on a farm 20km from town and started farming on family land with her late husband, AJ, in 1988.

"I started the business because I wanted to have somewhere to go when I came to town, often to wait for my children while they played sport. People who live on farms are often quite lonely, and the shop was my antidote to that," she says of her decision to open her business in

2005. "This was the railway doctor's house and consulting room," she explains, pointing out the distinctive architecture seen throughout the town: rectangular red-brick buildings with wide verandas.

When Sandra Dudley takes our coffee order, she tells us, "I'll never forget turning to my colleague the first time I came here and asking, 'Who on earth would want to come live in Komatipoort?'"

Her career in retail, including for the Spar Group, brought Sandra here. "Part of my job involved opening Spar stores," she explains.

Without her being aware of it, Komatipoort's subtle charm began to tug at her heartstrings, and she joined Elmarie as the chef and manager of Stoep Cafe in 2015.

"I'd grown tired of my corporate career and was looking for a place where I could express my love of cooking and connecting with





people,” she says. “We’re privileged to welcome a mix of local and international visitors to the restaurant. It keeps us on our toes and makes the work rewarding. The town itself quickly gets under your skin... there’s a calmness here, yet it’s far from dead. And despite the challenges around service delivery, residents always make a plan and push through. There’s a sense of community you don’t find in Johannesburg’s suburbs. Believe me, I lived there,” says Sandra.

Elmarie attributes this support and can-do attitude among residents to the healthy, established farming community. “There is life here in the platteland. Many young families are settling on farms or opening businesses in the town.” Her two sons and son-in-law farm outside the town, while her daughter and daughter-in-law are both pharmacists in Komatipoort.

“Look! That’s the paradise

flycatcher,” Elmarie suddenly exclaims, pointing out a brightly coloured bird with long tail feathers as it flits in the branches. “This is what people long for: the peacefulness of watching birds in your own front garden, a place where you can escape. That’s what this area offers; you just have to drive a little bit beyond the town entrance to find it.”

ALTHOUGH PEOPLE AND GOODS had been moving along the Komati and Crocodile rivers for centuries, the town was officially founded in 1874 when the Oosterlijn railway line between Delagoa Bay (now Maputo Bay) and Pretoria was built. But for decades, malaria, wild animals and tensions between the indigenous tribes living in the district made the surrounding area a melting pot of opportunists, adventurers and rogues. >

ABOVE Sandra Dudley (left) and Elmarie Cronjé from Stoep Cafe Restaurant and Guesthouse, a special place where residents have been gathering and travellers visiting for two decades.

OPPOSITE Large trees, pedestrians and cyclists are a familiar sight in Rissik Street, the main drag that runs through the town, connecting to the R571 on either side.





ABOVE Trainspotters will see an average of seven trains a day coming and going over the railway bridge that crosses the Komati River between South Africa and Mozambique. The Lebombo Mountains and border are about 6 km away.

OPPOSITE A typical scene in Komatipoort: people on bicycles going about their daily business. Despite the ongoing hustle and bustle of formal and informal traders at the top of town, an easy calm characterises the streets of the town's quieter suburbs.

The establishment of the Kruger National Park and arrival of the first tourists in the 1920s slowly transformed Komatipoort from a refreshment station into an agricultural and tourism town. The name is a composite of the Swazi word “Komati”, roughly translated as “river of cows” (referring to hippos), and the Afrikaans reference to the confluence of the Komati and Crocodile rivers, which forms a natural gateway through the Lebombo Mountains – the border with Mozambique.

Late in the afternoon, we hear a thunderstorm rumbling in the distance. The mercury is still at 38°C when we take the turnoff toward the Botha family's farmhouse 10 km outside town. “We would regularly ride our bicycles into town,” Cobus Botha recalls of his childhood years on their farm. “The world was very different back then. The

border was closed due to the war in Mozambique, which meant the main road to Nelspruit was dead quiet,” he says of the N4, where, nowadays, up to 3000 trucks pass through the Lebombo border post daily.

But here on the thick grass under the large wild mango tree growing in Cobus and his wife Fernice's garden, it's hard to picture the chaos of the Lebombo border post, just 15 km northeast of the farm.

As a native of the area, Cobus has many stories to tell about how the town has changed.

“Komatipoort was a tiny place. Apart from farming and the railways, not much was happening back then. On weekends, we played tennis in town and on the way home we'd swim in the pools where the Komati River flows over the low-water bridge,” he remembers, adding that the chance of encountering a crocodile in the river wasn't enough of a reason to not cool off. >







Today, Cobus is the production manager of a family farming business that includes thousands of hectares of sugarcane, bananas and citrus, that stretches to the Mozambique border and 65 km further south to Swaziland.

“Ours is some of the most beautiful land in the country. You could plant a twig here and it will grow – you don’t even have to water it. Agriculture, specifically sugarcane production, is the biggest economic activity of the region and plays a key role in the survival of the town,” explains Cobus, who is also the chairperson of the local agricultural association.

“There is a well-established Afrikaans farming community here because there are so many family farms in the area. Many of us grew up here or came from elsewhere in the Lowveld, which creates many points of connection between residents. This really makes you feel at home when you go into town to do business.”

According to Fernice, it is precisely the combination of community and access to all the services the town offers that makes Komatipoort the perfect place for a family.

“The town has expanded quite a bit. There are two fairly large shopping centres and the Spar has almost everything you need. There’s also a Woolworths Food in Malelane, 45 km away, which means I rarely have to go to Nelspruit,” she says.

But progress is a double-edged sword. “Look, on Sundays the town is beautiful because the streets are quiet and clean, but the business centre looks rough the rest of the time,” admits Cobus. “On days when the town is busy and you struggle to find parking, you sometimes wish that the thousands of people who move across the border between South Africa and Mozambique every day would just go away.”

To overcome this challenge, Cobus and most other residents have adopted a pragmatic approach to formal and informal trade. >

ABOVE The average annual rainfall of between 600 mm and 700 mm means the low-water bridge of the Komati River is regularly under water, especially during the rainy season from September to March.

OPPOSITE Cobus and Fernice Botha with their dogs. From left is Sasha the Spaniel, Lola the Yorkie, Mily the Australian cattle dog, and Bella the wolfhound. The Bothas like nothing more than spending a summer’s day enjoying the coolness provided by the giant wild mango tree in the garden on their farm, situated a short distance from town.



ABOVE When one considers that the trucks queuing at the Mozambican border can form lines as long as 10 km, it becomes apparent there's a great deal of trade between that country and ours. It's no wonder the wait to cross the border can sometimes be as long as four days.

TOP Impala graze on the banks of the Crocodile River, which forms the boundary between the town and the Kruger Park.

ABOVE RIGHT Gys van der Merwe, the principal of Komatipoort Akademie. Although he and his family are loving their new life in Komatipoort, he still finds the blistering summer heat a huge challenge. The mercury can rise as high as 48°C.

"When the borders were closed during the Covid-19 lockdown, we realised how much we needed the foreigners. Without them, business comes to a standstill. Ultimately, you have to understand that Komatipoort is a border town, with everything that entails. What sets it apart is how wild it still feels.

"We live among the animals... we regularly see servals, jackals, mongooses, bushbuck and duikers from our front stoep. It's a privilege I would exchange for little else.

"The kingfishers have discovered that there are fish in the little dam behind our house. Some days, if I have time, I just sit here under the tree and watch and listen to the birds. We live in a paradise! My children can ride around on their bikes, just like I did so many years ago. There are fewer and fewer places in the country where it's still possible to do that."

"WHEN I HEARD I'd got the position in Komatipoort, my first thought was: Oh dear, why Komati, because you know, it's sweltering here!" laughs Gys van der Merwe in his air-conditioned office.

He and his family moved from Barberton in 2024 after he was appointed principal of the Komatipoort Akademie. This single-medium school, with approximately 300 primary-school and 190 high-school pupils, will celebrate its 80th anniversary in 2026 and is a bastion of Afrikaans education in the Onderberg region.

It wasn't just the sky-high summer temperatures that intimidated Gys initially (the high 40s are nothing unusual!). "It was also a shock to see that the school is right in the busiest part of the main street, sandwiched between the foreigners' stalls and the delivery trucks." >

Meet the people

Hannes Hamman

Owner of Tambarina Restaurant and Guesthouse

"The 'Republic of the Kruger National Park' will always be here, as will the border with Mozambique, which means there's really no chance that things won't continue to thrive," says Hannes. As we talk, mangoes fall from the branches above us every few minutes.

Dressed in his vellies, khaki shorts and shirt, Hannes looks more like a game ranger than a restaurant owner. "I've always worked in the hospitality industry, and Komatipoort gave me the opportunity to satisfy my career aspirations as well as my love for Kruger at the same time," he says. He is an honorary game ranger who has lived in the town with his family since 2012 when he and his wife, Annalize, bought Tambarina Restaurant, a local institution since the mid-'90s. They had decided this was where they wanted to build a business and a life. "We were attracted by the easy access to everything, and that's what keeps us here."

Tambarina serves the freshest of seafood and offers visitors a taste of Mozambique without the need to cross the Lebombo border. The guesthouse behind the restaurant has four comfortable rooms and Hannes also offers tours to the game reserve.

"There's a sense of freedom that hasn't changed over the years. My children attended school here and enjoyed a healthy childhood in the fresh air, just as the children growing up here still do today." Apart from the healthy environment, Hannes says there's no shortage of work and business opportunities. "It's so much more than just a border post, but not many people realise that."



Richard Williams (right) with Nick Bold, manager of Riverhill Lodge.



Richard Williams

Owner of Riverhill Lodge

"Once you've tasted the water here, you'll never leave," jokes Richard on the wooden deck of the Riverhill Lodge bar, which offers views of the Komati River, the town and the Kruger National Park.

It was business that brought Richard here more than 30 years ago. "We bought a farm on Mananga Road in the direction of the Eswatini border," he says.

His involvement with Riverhill Lodge on the banks of the Komati, about 2 km from the town, began with the Covid-19 pandemic. "We used to come here regularly to visit and fish. When the pandemic hit us, the previous owner of the lodge wanted to sell. Tourism and agriculture are the area's two economic drivers, and that's why it made sense to diversify.

"Everything is five minutes away, except when the river is in flood, as it is now: the town, the doctor, my children's school, our friends, the golf course and the game reserve. As long as you can get used to the hustle and bustle of the town centre, Komatipoort is a wonderful place to live."

Nick Bold, who manages the lodge, moved here from Cape Town a year ago and says that although he misses the sea, the rural tranquillity of Komatipoort is a welcome relief from the hustle and bustle of the city. >

Meet the people



Karin Steynberg and Rudi Stoltz

Owners of the Marula Padstal

"I live here because the climate suits me perfectly!" says Rudi on the stoep of the Marula Padstal, about 5 km from the Crocodile Bridge Gate of the game reserve. This is where he and his sister, Karin, decided, in 2018, to transform a dilapidated building alongside the R571 into a farmstall and coffee shop.

"My dad actually started the whole farmstall story. He was looking for something to do after retiring and decided he'd try to catch the tourists travelling to and from the reserve," Karin explains. "He sold droëwors, biltong and ginger beer straight out of his car boot."

The informal little shop quickly attracted plenty of customers. "My dad did so well that we realised there was a business opportunity we needed to seize," says Rudi, who previously worked in the meat industry and has lived in Komatipoort for many years.

Today, the farmstall sells an impressive collection of art, plants, baked treats, preserves and handicrafts. "What we don't make ourselves, we source from local artists and bakers, and that's part of our success. People from as far as the Cape stop here, specially to buy Tannie Kotie's homemade ginger beer, or to enjoy Rudi's pap and kaiings," Karin says.

For her, Komatipoort is not just a place to do business, but also a safe haven. "In the 1990s we fled from Tete in the northwest of Mozambique when the fighting between Renamo and Frelimo was at its worst. Rudi was already living in town, and we decided to settle here, because although Komatipoort isn't Mozambique, it almost feels like it."

Dyllan du Preez

Fishing guide at Riverhill Lodge

Dyllan, who moved to Komatipoort in 2024 to work as a fishing guide at Riverhill Lodge, is at his happiest beside the shimmering waters of the Komati River.

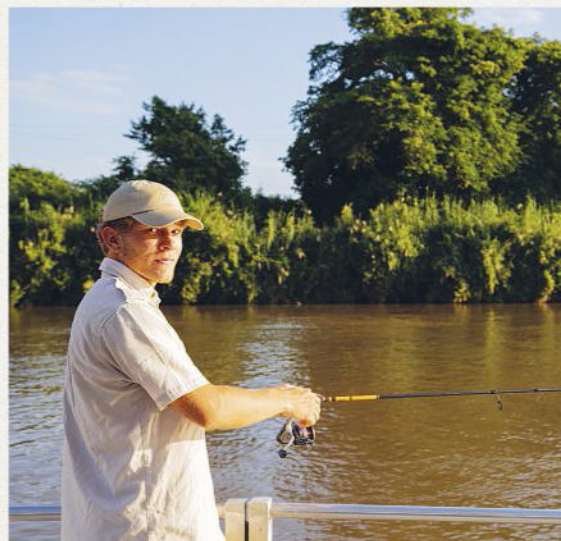
"Second to the game reserve, tiger fishing is the town's biggest tourist attraction," he explains from behind the helm of a pontoon boat, which he uses to take both beginners and seasoned anglers on excursions on the Komati River.

"The Komati is one of only two places in the country where you can catch tigerfish, and the fish here put up a much harder fight than those in the Jozini Dam near Pongola in KZN," explains this sea angler, who is a native of the KwaZulu-Natal coast.

It is indeed the size and strength of the tigerfish that attract sport anglers from as far afield as Canada and Spain to the Komati. But there's more than just large tigerfish hiding in these waters.

"I see a crocodile almost every day, so, as much as my guests might want to swim, they are better off staying on the boat," he says, gesturing towards the rugged riverbank where large fig and monkey-thorn trees cast shadows over the water.

For Dyllan, Komatipoort offers everything a young man needs to carve out his path in life. "There are plenty of opportunities here, and the shops have everything you need. There's a lively atmosphere in town, and when I need a break, I go fishing and enjoy the quiet of the riverbank."



Natasha Broodryk

Manager of Kambaku Golf Club

Natasha is happiest behind the wheel of her golf cart or on the sixth hole at the Kambaku Golf Club. "If there was ever an example of someone born and bred in Komatipoort, it's me," she says during a tour of the course, which offers views of the Kruger National Park.

Unlike many other young people who grew up in the platteland, Natasha says she has no plans to leave. "I have a community and support network here. Besides, this is my office," she says, gesturing towards the established indigenous trees, the lush green grass and the 360-degree views uninterrupted by skyscrapers or billboards.

For her, an ordinary week includes an encounter (or two) with an elephant or hippo grazing on one of the fairways. "We've had quite a few players who unexpectedly run into a herd of buffalo on the course, or anxiously ask us to remove an animal from the greens," she laughs.

"The most beautiful part of the day is when the sun rises right over the confluence. Even though I see it so often, it will always be special to me."

Natasha on the deck of the club house at Kambaku-Golf Club with Dr Theo Stronkhorst, the captain of the club.



Nicolette Grace

Komatipoort resident

Late in the afternoon, a young woman in a bright pink dress strolling through the streets of Komatipoort catches our eye. Nicolette moved to Komatipoort from Limpopo three years ago with her husband, Matthew.

"I met Matthew, a game ranger, at a lodge in the north of the country and fell pregnant at a young age. You know what they say about khaki fever?" she laughs.

Today they own and run a five-star lodge in Marloth Park, about 25 km from Komatipoort. "We're dog lovers, but you're not allowed to keep pets in Marloth. That's why we live here, where my fur babies are welcome."

As a relative "newcomer", Nicolette says the town and its people treat her well. "I can safely walk into town on my own, and my little boy and his friends ride their bikes around the neighbourhood without me worrying about their safety."

Jansen Engelbrecht

Owner of Die/The Bakery

You notice the smell of freshly baked bread long before you see Jansen or his shop, situated right in the heart of the town. "When Covid-19 turned things in Komatipoort upside down, I saw an opportunity," Jansen says from behind the till.

This is the only bakery in town, and Jansen says business is good. "I used to farm, but the decision to move into town and start the business was the right one." With an almost inexhaustible market in the form of hundreds of foreigners who buy around 3 000 loaves from him daily, Jansen says he's here to stay. "The business is going well and I can make a steady living. What more could one want from life?"

But his daughter, Moné, says she can't wait to leave the town and its busy main street behind. "I'm only here for the holidays to chill a bit and help my dad in the shop," she says.

Moné, who went to school in Komatipoort and is studying education at the University of Pretoria, is surprised to hear that visitors enjoy her hometown. "No, really, it's too small. It was nice to grow up here but I don't want to stay."

Contact Die/The Bakery 072 409 8725 diebakery2023@gmail.com >



In a nutshell

Distance from the big city?

Komatipoort is situated 93 km northwest of Maputo and 120 km east of Mbombela (Nelspruit).

Average temperature

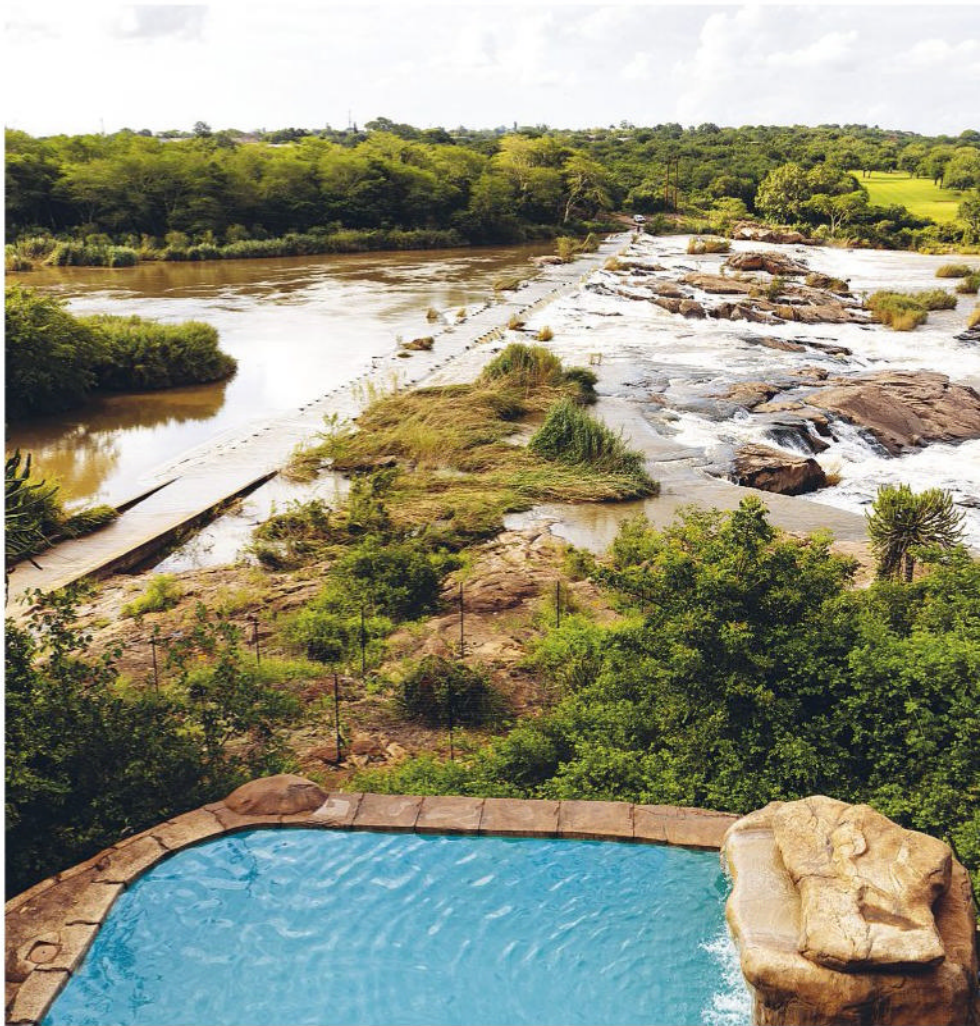
The town is known among Lowveld residents as the hottest place in Mpumalanga. In summer, the mercury can easily rise to 48°C, accompanied by high humidity and rainfall. Average summer temperatures range between 25°C and 35°C. Winter is pleasantly mild, with average temperatures between 15°C and 24°C.

Average rainfall The subtropical climate brings summer rainfall, which usually occurs between September and March. The annual average ranges from 600 mm to 700 mm.

Facilities With more than eight butcheries, a big Spar and Shoprite, as well as a Builders, there's very little you won't find in Komatipoort. The town has a state clinic and general practitioner but the nearest private hospitals are in Nelspruit.

Nearest Woolies Malelane (45 km)

Municipality Along with Malelane, Marloth Park and Hectorspruit among others, Komatipoort is part of the Nkomazi Local Municipality, which forms part of the larger Ehlanzeni District Municipality. The municipality faces several challenges: problems with financial mismanagement, corruption, poor planning and lack of capacity impact basic services such as water, sanitation and infrastructure.



But Komatipoort and its people quickly won the Van der Merwes' hearts. "Since we moved here, my children have flourished. I attribute that entirely to the community. In a place like this, no one is anonymous; we notice each other and live close to one another," he says. "My little boy burned his hand the other day. It was after working hours, but within minutes our family doctor was here. It's a privilege to be able to live like that, where you feel that the people around you truly care about your wellbeing, even if you're a relative newcomer. People will cross the street to shake your hand and ask how you're doing."

Over weekends, the Van der Merwes go fishing or mountain-

biking on the nearby farms, or enjoy braais with friends. "The area offers so much adventure and natural beauty; you just have to know where to look. And if you get tired of the town, the Crocodile Bridge Gate to the game reserve is only 8 km away."

Although the heat is still an almost daily torment for Gys, he and his family are here to stay. "Even if I have to move mountains to continue living here, I will, because there is a future for me and for my children in Komatipoort."

DESPITE A LIGHT morning drizzle, it remains unbearably hot – enough reason to take shelter in the cool of the restaurant and clubhouse at the Kambaku Golf Club. >



What does property cost?

The most sought-after properties are those on the northern side of Komatipoort, closer to the river. We chose two properties being marketed by **Jan Engelbrecht** from **Fine & Country Lowveld Kruger South**. 📞 082 784 5682



R4,25 million

This three-bedroomed home features a large stoep, lapa and swimming pool and is situated in a quiet, leafy neighbourhood that borders the Komati River and game reserve. The price includes an undeveloped erf, which brings the total size of the erf to 2974 m².



R12 million

This 2,2-hectare smallholding on the banks of the Komati River is about 3 km from town and features a four-bedroomed house and a second two-bedroomed cottage. It has a solar power system, as well as a borehole, swimming pool and a braai area with a view of the river.

ABOVE The leafy suburbs and their surrounds, especially on the northeast side of the town that borders on the Crocodile River and Kruger National Park, will give you the impression you're entering a subtropical forest.

OPPOSITE The bar at Riverhill Lodge, located a short distance from town, boasts an exceptional view of the Komati River and Kambaku Golf Club.

MY TOWN

The large wooden deck, with its unobstructed view over the confluence of the Crocodile and Komati rivers, makes it immediately clear why Kambaku is considered South Africa's leading nine-hole golf course.

"There's a leopard that regularly comes to drink on the opposite side of the river in the game reserve," says Dr Theo Stronkhorst, pointing to a rocky outcrop on the northern bank of the Crocodile River. "Elephants are an almost daily sight along the border fence, and, of course, there's always a crocodile or two basking on the riverbank."

It's because of the elephants that the golf course got its name. "Kambaku, which means 'big bull elephant' in Shangaan, was the name of a well-known enormous bull with giant tusks, each weighing around 63 kg, that lived near the confluence in the 1980s," says Theo.

Unlike most of the other golf courses in the country, Kambaku exists thanks to the local farming community. "The farmers got together and decided there should be a golf course for the townspeople, because they were tired of driving for 45 km every weekend to play a round on the course at Malelane."

The golf club was established in 1997. A shortage of money and available land didn't deter the founding committee, and within two years a contract had been signed for the piece of land where Kambaku golf course is now situated.

"It was a community project in every respect. Money was collected from all quarters, and the farmers themselves prepared the land for the fairways, greens and holes that you see today," says Theo, who has been the club captain for the past year and enjoys at least two rounds on the course each week.

But it's not just the picture-perfect golf course that has kept Theo in town for the past 26 years. "I came here because there were opportunities for me. My brother already had a consulting room in town, and the rural atmosphere here, right in the bush, appealed to me as a young man."

He still feels the same way today. "I have never once regretted my decision; on the contrary, I can hardly imagine a better place to live. Besides the very good school, where my children can still attend classes in Afrikaans, I am able to take an early-morning drive through the game reserve and enjoy nine holes of golf by lunchtime. In the afternoons, I sit on my front stoep and watch elephants grazing just a few metres away on the riverbank. What more can I say? It's an absolutely phenomenally special town!"

The ninth hole of the Kambaku Golf Club has uninterrupted views of the Crocodile River and Kruger National Park. You're bound to see an elephant, buffalo or crocodile during your round of golf.





Marula Padstal

Eat, drink, be merry!

WANDER & SHOP

Marula Padstal

Rudi Stoltz and his sister, Karin Steynberg, sell a wide variety of local products, from grass mats to indigenous plants. You can also order a takeaway or sit down and enjoy Rudi's best-selling pap and kailings. Remember to buy a bottle of Tannie Kotie van Aswegen's homemade ginger beer! [f](#) Marula Padstal ☎ 064 615 9626

Komati Vintage Furniture & Windpomp Station

Pop in to explore the antiques and restored wooden furniture, as well as other finds such as vinyl records and crockery. [f](#) Komati Vintage Furniture & Wind Pomp Station ☎ 082 464 6551

MOM, I'M HUNGRY!

Stoep Cafe Restaurant

Stoep Cafe's menu includes anything from breakfast and hamburgers to

vegetarian and vegan options. Try the Stoepburger (R120) or French toast with bacon and caramelised banana (R90). [📍 stoepcageuesthouse.co.za](#) ☎ 067 316 6081

Tambarina Restaurant

There's a sociable atmosphere almost every evening at Tambarina, where locals and visitors gather for a TipoTinto Rum & Raspberry or a plate of fresh seafood. Portuguese dishes are the order of the day. Try the Seafood Combo

for six (R430) or the Mozambican king prawns (R290). ☎ 082 325 5720 [📍 tambarina-eat-stay-safari.co.za](#)

ACCOMMODATION

Stoep Cafe Guesthouse

Enjoy respite in one of five self-catering units in the heart of the town. (Meals are available at Stoep Cafe Restaurant, just a stone's throw from your room.) Another five self-catering units are available at Stoep at Steenbok, located on a quiet plot with a view of the Komati River. ☎ 083 457 3909 [📍 stoepcageuesthouse.co.za](#)

Tambarina Guesthouse

Four neat, spacious en-suite rooms await behind the Tambarina Restaurant. Drink your coffee on the guesthouse stoep under the shade of the lush mango trees. ☎ 082 325 5720 [📍 tambarina-eat-stay-safari.co.za](#)



Handmade miracles from Bushmanland

On every farm in Bushmanland, you'll find a courageous woman putting her hands to work to counteract the effects of the drought that's ravaged the region, to relieve debt and reduce despondency. From baking, knitting and spinning wool to making sheepskin slippers, and tallow soap and skincare products, they're helping to keep their households going, providing hope and dignity in the process.

TEXT AND PHOTOS WILLEM VAN DER BERG



The farm Uitval, some 30 km northeast of Kliprand, where Jasper and Comien Smith farm with sheep. Comien helps to keep the family's pot boiling by baking game pies and making the loveliest hand-spun wool.



Bushmanland is dry most of the time. The people who live here know and accept this. They've learnt how to live modestly when times are tough.

They understand that money is set aside for animal feed first and things like holidays are not a priority.

But the drought that gripped the Northern Cape – and especially the remote Bushmanland region – between 2012 and 2022 was something even the oldest and toughest residents of Bushmanland had never experienced before.

On a white-hot spring day in 2021, André Nel from Makkiesplaas, situated between Kakamas and Loeriesfontein, said: "This drought is breaking us. It's taking everything; our farms are barren. I haven't prayed for rain for a long time. If the Lord doesn't know by now that it's dry, I don't know if I want him as my Lord. Now I'm praying for the wisdom and strength to make it through this thing."

It isn't easy to come up with fresh ideas when you're facing the eighth or 10th year of a drought. Your head feels as dull and dusty as the veld around you. And yet, from the bare plains and empty feed sacks of Bushmanland, bright ideas were born and nurtured. Some even said the recent drought brought with it the aroma of freshly baked rusks...

Boesmanland Manna

The business that André Nel's daughter, Marietjie, started during the drought is a case in point. She began making sheepskin slippers that are so popular it's difficult to keep up with the demand. She and her husband, Stan Miller, farm about 90km west of Makkiesplaas.

"At our wedding in March 2011, our guests were frightened by the locusts. That was the last time we saw lush veld until it rained again properly in 2023," says Marietjie.

Her slipper-making started in 2021, for quite sentimental reasons, actually.

"My two sisters and I grew up watching our parents making slippers. This is what they did every evening for 16 years. My mom, Annamarie, saved her slipper money in an ice-cream container in

the cupboard for holidays. She died on 7 November 2008. She drove to Kakamas to fetch my sister and some other children from the hostel. On her way back, blinded by a cloud of dust from a truck, she drove into a lorry. My father never made another slipper after that."

André gave the equipment to Marietjie, hoping she would make use of it one day.

"I felt nervous about starting. A sheepskin costs R700 and you can only make one pair of adult slippers from it. But when I close my eyes, I can see precisely how my mother and father used to make them."

"One of the first pairs I made was for my neighbour. She showed them off on social media and suddenly I was getting enquiries. I was actually overwhelmed by the interest and stressed terribly about all the orders >



Because a single sheepskin is so expensive and only a single pair of adult slippers can be made from one, Marietjie Miller makes most of her profits from the extra items she's able to fashion from the leftovers.



LEFT The equipment Marietjie uses once belonged to her parents, and the shapes she uses for the outline of the slippers were made from vinyl tiles from the kitchen of the farm where she grew up.

BELOW Marietjie also makes these cute slip-ons. Visit [Boesmanland Manna's Facebook page](#) to see examples of all her products.

BOTTOM The Millers (from left): George, Stan, Marietjie holding their *laatlammetjie* Jakobus, Anmari and Andréa.



that were coming in. It's not as if there's a whole team making them. It's only me!"

Marietjie struggled to find the yarn needed to stitch the slippers together, but, ironically, the drought provided the solution: the cords from all the feed bags.

"I took a chance at first and was surprised by how strong they were. Now we collect cords by the bagful. They're perfect, we just have to wash them first. They make the slippers authentically Bushmanland.

In the meantime, 2023 and 2025 were good rainfall years and most of Bushmanland was covered in shimmering waves of bushman grass. But feed debt doesn't wash away. Sheep don't grow back. A drought can drag you far and deep into an abyss and leave you there.

"On every farm in the area, you'll find women who are making something. One of my neighbours does printing on clothing and

a variety of other products. Another woman bakes. And another makes boerseep. I think we've all experienced the deep relief that a little extra income can bring. We'll probably never be able to stop."

Just the other day, someone contacted her to ask if she could repair a pair of slippers that her parents had made.

"I thought there wouldn't be much left of them, but all they needed were new soles. It was incredible! How old would they have been? It seems to me that when you sell someone a pair of sheepskin slippers, you won't be doing business with them again for a very long time."

Marietjie says she is taking as long as she can to fix them.

"It's so special to hold them in my hands. I can feel my mom sitting here next to me while I'm working on them."

Contact  Boesmanland Manna
📞 083 364 5911

Every now and then Marietjie gets her hands on coloured sheepskin, which adds some visual variety to her stock. Let her know if you fancy "Blue Bull Blue" or "Cheetah Orange" slippers.





Dawie and Lizelle Burden in their kitchen at Platbakkies. This is where they've spent plenty of time praying, as well as hatching drought-survival plans.

Platbakkies Tallow Treats

Lizelle and Dawie Burden both grew up in the wide open plains of Bushmanland: Dawie on Platbakkies, 40km northwest of Kliprand, and Lizelle on the farm Velskoen, closer to Springbok. People from the area are like quiver trees. You can plant them elsewhere and they will survive, but their feet *must* come into contact with Bushmanland if they are to prosper and thrive.

Lizelle had a tough time after she enrolled to study at Stellenbosch. "The initiation in the residence didn't help and I just wanted to go back to the farm. One afternoon I was told that someone was at the front door with a parcel for me from my mom. And there stood the head boy of Springbok High School when I was in Standard 6! Dawie didn't know who I was but I recognised him. A part of Bushmanland was standing right in front of me. I almost burst into tears. And he came again the next day."

They married after completing their studies and Dawie spent a number of years working as an industrial engineer before they moved to the farm at Platbakkies.

"My father-in-law always said that this is the border between the summer and winter rainfall areas. If you're lucky, you'll get a bit of both, but mostly you get nothing," Lizelle says.

She and Dawie also had to make plans during the drought, and Platbakkies became a guest farm in 2018. Visitors can choose between staying in a house, an apartment, rooms or at the campsite. "For long periods during the drought, the guests were our only source of income. I don't know whether one can still farm in Bushmanland without an alternative source of income," she says.

That's why she started another business making tallow products. "We've always enjoyed living

healthily, and I like doing research to find ways of doing things in a more natural way. I started reading up about tallow and thought that if other people can make money from it, surely we can too. I mean, we farm with fat-tailed sheep and always throw the fat away!"

Lizelle first tested her products herself and then sent them to her daughters in the Cape to try.

"It wasn't long before all their friends began using our tallow products. Dawie used to suffer badly from eczema but it's gone now. You don't really hear about people being allergic to sheep fat. Tallow is the closest thing that matches our own skin oils. The fat around sheep's organs is rich in vitamins A, D, E and K and other minerals. Our skin is our largest organ and yet we don't think about what we're putting on it."

The sheep grazing on Bushmanland veld aren't injected with >



1



2



4



3



5

1 The raw fat is ground and then slowly heated in salted water until it melts. It mustn't cook as this will destroy all the essential vitamins and minerals. **2** The melted fat floats to the top of the water, leaving behind any impurities that have separated out. After the fat has solidified, it's scooped out of the water and heated in salted water a second time until it's pure white and practically odourless. **3** This is a block of pure fat that Lizelle can use to make various products. Her son-in-law, Doccie Shields, gave her the interesting apron... **4** For creams and body butters, the raw fat is softened with a beater and essential oils are added. **5** Lizelle uses a piping bag to fill her tins.

medicines and drugs, and their fat is free of chemical substances.

“This is one of the most important things people need to remember: make sure you know exactly where your tallow comes from. Not all fat is equally clean and healthy,” Lizelle warns.

She only uses the fat from their own sheep, purifying it several times in warm salt water until it is as white as a three-thorn flower.

“I only add essential oils, mainly for fragrance, but the oils also have therapeutic properties.”

Platbakkies Tallow Treats opened its online shop in 2025 and Lizelle's daughters, Kari and Malindi, ensure that the products are shipped all over the country.

“We had high expectations when we opened the online shop but the sales are going slower than expected. Aside from making people aware of your products, they also need to be convinced about using

tallow. It's interesting that people talk so much about the state of the earth and say they want to help, but then they still choose products that are full of chemicals and packed in plastic.”

However, Dawie says the value of Lizelle's tallow business can't only be measured in sales.

“An additional income takes a lot of pressure off the farming operation, but in our case the business also makes it possible for us to farm with Afrikaner sheep. They're hardy animals and far better adapted to our arid environment than other breeds. But few farmers keep Afrikaners because they're fat-tailed sheep and you're paid less for their meat. Lizelle's business means that we and our entire farming operation are now better able to withstand droughts.”

Contact tallowtreats.co.za
f Platbakkies Tallow Treats
i @platbakkies_tallowtreats
☎ 078 561 7166 >

Lizelle makes a wide variety of tallow products, from everyday soap and soaps you can use for washing dishes and clothing to shampoos and all kinds of creams that offer sun-protection and anti-ageing benefits and ward of insects.





When Comien Smith sits at her spinning wheel, the wool is all that exists. And for a time, thoughts of drought and loss subside.



Esmrah Wool

In Bushmanland, your neighbours often live on farms up to 50km away. It takes an hour to reach Lizelle's neighbour, whose beautiful balls of hand-spun wool are sold at Platbakkies. Comien Smith and her husband, Jasper, farm at Uitval, 30km northeast of Kliprand.

"When we arrived on the farm in the early 1980s, there were plenty of people all around us," Comien says. "Nowadays, you can drive for miles and miles without seeing a soul. If I had arrived here now as a young person, I would have died from loneliness."

Droughts have certainly thinned out the farming community, says Jasper. "Especially this last one. If you were lucky, you kept half your sheep. Not everyone could carry on. The drought created a lot of fear. We were afraid to buy sheep again, to start something, or to try anything new. When there is grazing, you immediately worry it won't last."

That's why the contributions made by the courageous women of Bushmanland are more important than many people realise. They not only kept households going, they also provided courage and dignity.

"I just bought the groceries for the house," says Comien humbly of her contribution.

But when she isn't around, Jasper tells a different story. "During a time of drought, you're in debt and so anxious you actually stop living. You try look after the animals that are left. That's why so many of us were dependent on the wonderful >



ABOVE LEFT Many of the farms around Uitval, where Comien and Jasper Smith live, are being abandoned due to the devastating drought. It appears this exodus won't end anytime soon.

LEFT If she could, Comien would spend all her time knitting. But their isolated location means that finding people to help with the wool work would be a challenge.

donations people sent us. But it makes you feel sad when you're not be able to give something back.

"The money the women brought in made it possible to say, rather give that donation to someone who needs it more. Then you at least feel like you matter again. About two years ago, Comien and I were able to go to the Netherlands. She paid for everything with her pie money. We would never have been able to go if it weren't for her."

Comien's game pies have become so popular she can hardly keep up, but during the drought she had to start doing something to keep herself going after the family suffered a great tragedy.

On 12 August 2015, the couple's son was involved in a freak accident during which he was electrocuted and died. He was a mechanical engineer at a company near Vredendal, and on that day he was helping to move a large piece of equipment when it came into contact with overhead power lines.

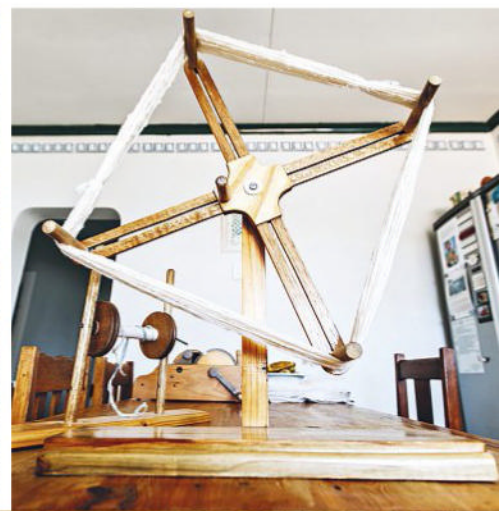
"The grieving process is terribly difficult," says Comien. "One day you feel okay, the next day it knocks you to the ground. The counsellor said I should find something to distract me, and someone suggested spinning. Jasper bought me a spinning wheel and it's become my escape and my therapy. When I sit in front of that wheel, I'm

somewhere else. The only thing that exists is the wool in my hands and the wheel that sings and sings..."

She gets most of her raw wool from her brother, Braham, who farms with Merinos near Bitterfontein. Every now and then someone from the area gives her a fleece. Comien does all the washing, carding, dyeing and spinning of the wool herself.

"It's hard work, but it's very rewarding. You start with a bundle of dirty wool, and you end up with wool you can use. And soon you have a beanie or scarf you've made with your own hands. It's wonderful. What I'd really like to do the most is knitting; I just don't have the people right now to help me. That's why I don't want to advertise too much; the process takes a long time. In the meantime, my pies generate the most income. My problem is that I have too many plans and too little time."

"Many of us were dependent on donations. But it makes you feel sad when you're not be able to give something back."



ABOVE (from left) Before spinning begins, the wool must be washed, carded and dyed. It can take a few days to produce enough thread for one decent-sized ball of wool.

RIGHT Contact Comien to find out which farm stalls stock her wool or when she's next planning to attend a market.





Their late son, Harmse, was also like that. And to commemorate his life, she named her business after him. Esmrah (pronounced “es-me-rah”), an anadrome of his name.

“He would have been very proud,” says Comien. “From when he was a little boy, he explored and experimented. The good and the bad.”

“He was a lot like Comien,” says Jasper. “Always busy making plans, building new things. Fast-paced people. I’m slow. I just want to be peaceful, among my animals.”

By late afternoon, Comien is sitting behind her spinning wheel in the day’s last rays of sunlight. The living room glows like a Bushmanland sky. From her hands, tufts of wool twist and become golden yarn. Soon Jasper will join her and help card the wool while they talk and watch a programme on TV.

Contact ☎ 073 169 2610

IN THE KITCHEN at Platbakkies, Dawie carries in freshly rendered sheep fat, which Lizelle will transform into the whitest cream and soap. The sheep are really looking beautiful now, he says. And the fat smells just like the veld. What a blessing, says Lizelle, “for us and for everyone who will receive a little piece of Platbakkies.”

Marietjie and Stan’s farmhouse also glows with light deep into the night. And in the dark hours, the most beautiful sheepskin slippers come into existence.

Little miracles. Miracles that keep Bushmanland and its people alive. 



Jasper and Comien enjoy the remains of a Bushmanland day with Dora, their boerboel.

ABOVE LEFT Esmrah’s label features a dancing sheep holding a ball of wool in one hand and a pie in the other – the two essential side businesses that have enabled the Smiths to carry on farming.



KLAARSTROOM

A sepia photo frozen in time

A donkey cart clip-clopping through the only street in Klaarstroom makes you feel as if you've wandered into an old sepia photograph. The only visible change in this Karoo town over the past century seems to be the fresh consignments of silence devotees who arrive here in search of salvation.

TEXT JOHAN VAN ZYL PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD



The sun settles behind the Swartberg... Klaarstroom is situated at the northern entrance of Meiringspoort. This photo was taken from the hill behind the Klaarstroom Farm Stall that does business from the Goods Shed on Frans Steenkamp's farm. To the bottom left, a small section of the labyrinth is visible.

When you hear a platteland town described as “a place where time stands still”,

it's impossible not to roll your eyes involuntarily, precisely because you understand how accurately this cliché hits the nail on the head. In a world completely obsessed with speed, Klarstroom remains one of those Karoo hamlets where watches feel more decorative than functional, and where the art of not rushing has been perfected.

Few people understand this as well as veteran filmmaker and cinematographer Koos Roets (83), who decided 56 years ago that this was where he wanted to live. (It did, however, take him another 40 years before he finally bade farewell to his life in Johannesburg in 2009 and

came to live here permanently!).

Over tea and biscuits in the striking Karoo garden behind his house – the handiwork of his life partner, Eunice Visser, award-winning author of the book *Die Kaapse slawe 1652-1838: 'n Kultuurhistoriese perspektief* (*The Cape slaves 1652-1838: A cultural-historical perspective*), Koos says he became acquainted with Klarstroom and De Rust after working as a cameraman on Jans Rautenbach's movie *Pappalap* (1971) at the end of 1969.

Over the years, he returned many times, camera in hand, to this area on either side of Meiringspoort. *Kootjie Emmer* (1977), based on André P. Brink's satirical novel of the same name about an undertaker and night soil man on Witgatworteldraai, was filmed entirely in Klarstroom, as were parts of Katinka Heyns's film *Paljas*

(1998), as well as the whole of *Faan se trein* (2013) and *Hoener met die rooi skoene* (2017).

“All that has really changed since I came here for the first time is that the trees have grown, two houses have been added, and the main road has been tarred,” says Koos, a sworn Landrover man with a passion for classic cars and airplanes. “Otherwise, everything is still the same. Wait, no, I think Klarstroom looks a lot better now, because new residents have spruced up the handful of typical Victorian Karoo-style houses beautifully.

“When we shot *Kootjie Emmer*, the town was already quite rundown and starting to die. The house we live in now, which was used as Kootjie's house in the film, was on the market for R600 – I wish I had bought it then already!” he laughs as he reaches for another biscuit.

A view of Klarstroom taken from the vantage point of the 11.9m concrete wall of the enormous dam that Graaff-Reinet sheep farmer Bob Murray built on the Witrivier in 1950. An incredible 88 000 bags of cement were used in its construction, says Frans Steenkamp of the dam that lies on his property. The dam is a stone's throw away from the site of the very first wool-washing works, which was built in 1874.



Eunice explains that for *Faan se trein*, Koos managed to turn the clock back even further and transform Klaarstroom into a period film set: the main street, which had been tarred since the filming of *Kootjie*, was again covered with dirt; the unsightly security fence around the police station was removed with permission (and later put back); the boundary wall of The Good Shepherd Anglican Church next door was rebuilt; and the homes of many residents were used as sets for interior and exterior scenes.

Now, when you amble down the only street in the historic part of the village and Johannes Daniels comes clopping past on his donkey cart, it feels as if you've wandered into a sepia photograph in which time has either come to a complete standstill or is inching forward very slowly, like the rusted blades

of an ancient windmill. The only thing that has truly changed over the past century, residents will tell you, is the fresh consignments of silence devotees who come here seeking peace. And along with this information, you also receive a friendly tip: "Unless it's an emergency, you don't bother people in Klaarstroom between 14:00 and 16:00. That's siesta time..."

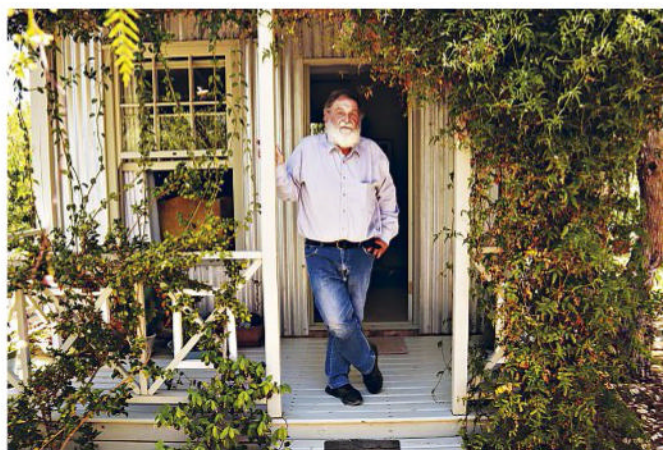
THE STORY of Klaarstroom – about 60km east of Prince Albert, 95 km northwest of Unionsdale, 96 km from Willowmore and 23 km from De Rust – can be traced back to 1763, when the first large loan farm in the area, De Claar Stroom, was granted. The old Dutch name refers to the abundance of "clear water" in the vicinity of the Swartberg, which was also why the first >

Watch Klaarstroom!

Koos Roets's films *Kootjie Emmer* and *Faan se trein* were both filmed in and around Klaarstroom. Both are available to watch for free on YouTube and give a good idea of what the town has looked like over the years:

- *Kootjie Emmer* [youtube.com/watch?v=6wpece44eal](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wpece44eal)
- *Faan se trein* [youtube.com/watch?v=Uyd8x4LLj0g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uyd8x4LLj0g)

Filmmaker Koos Roets and his life partner, writer Eunice Visser, on the back stoep of their home (below), which was used as Kootjie's house in the movie *Kootjie Emmer*. The bottom photo shows Koos outside the studio in their beautiful back garden where he can work in silence. (Even in the main street of Klaarstroom, one can find silence. - Eds)





We bumped into Johannes Daniels, who's been living in Klaarstroom for the past 21 years, and his faithful donkeys: Shirley (7), the lighter one, and her brother, Klonkie (15). They're clopping down the main street on their way to deliver a load of braai wood. The local children who came along for the ride are (from left) Heinrich Darries, Jayden du Plessis, Jonathan Jacobus, Tiano Gurrha and Stalin Beukes.



wool-washing works in South Africa was established here in 1874. The graves of its last owner, Adolph Gustav Bernhardt, and his first and second wives, can be found next to the Anglican church.

"You must remember, before Meiringspoort was officially established on 3 March 1858, the poor wool farmers of the Great Karoo had to haul their ox wagons around the Swartberg... and those wagons could only do 20, maybe 25, miles per day," says businessman Frans Steenkamp, who bought De Claar Stroom farm in 2008.

"Long story... we emigrated to Australia where I had a kangaroo abattoir in Cobar, about 700km from Sydney, but that's real outback territory. My wife had had enough after six months. So I said to her go and look for a place in the Karoo, near a town, because I don't really want to farm, I just want to live on a farm. So she told me she'd found this one – it's right in the town, or rather, it is the town."

Frans still owns the farm, which covers around 4000 hectares, but since 2023, he has lived in De Rust with his wife, Salomie, where they manage a retirement home in the main street. Although the Steenkamps no longer live in Klaarstroom, they played a massive role in the rejuvenation of the town by restoring the hotel to its former glory in 2015 and building the Goods Shed, where the Klaarstroom Farm Stall trades, in 2019.

"I was a very bad lucerne farmer. I like farm life. After all, I come from a small place in the Northern Cape, Niekerskshoop, better known as Niekerskshoopeloes these days. But not a damn can I farm. That's why I'm leasing out the farm now. Please excuse my language... I'm a Christian and a humanist but I don't go to church and I do swear. A lot."

Before you can blink, Frans is telling the most incredible story of how he fell into the ostrich byproducts industry. It's a tale with



“In 1860, thirty plots were demarcated for a town they wanted to call Pietersburg. Luckily that name was quickly forgotten and the place became known locally as Klaarstroom.”



far too many twists and amusing anecdotes to repeat here.

“Years ago, they only used the ostrich legs for meat and some of the skin for fancy shoes and handbags. The rest of the carcass was just a damn nuisance that ended up in the landfills, so the guys were only too happy when I offered to pay them something *and* take it away.”

And that is how Frans discovered that literally everything else can be used in dog food and treats: the fat, bones, tendons, organs, feet... and so the company Ostripet and brands such as DogGro and Pets Choice, managed today by Frans and Salomie’s children, were born. The products are exported globally and are available locally.

“We process 400 to 500 carcasses per day at the plant in Mossel Bay. The only part of a carcass that gets thrown away is the head,” he says, and laughs. “No, f—, why does it feel like I’m losing my own head! Where was I again? Oh yes, we were talking about the wool...”

“On the day that Meiringspoort was opened in 1858, the first group of ox-wagons transported wool through the pass. It was the shortest route to the closest harbour at Mossel Bay. Would you believe that by 1870, more than one million kilograms of wool had moved through Meiringspoort to the sea? At one stage, 800 tons of wool were being washed at Klaarstroom annually.”

The village and wool-washing facility were founded because the transport wagons, traders, travellers and the mail coach needed somewhere to stop, and a place was needed where the farmers could wash their wool. It wasn’t long before an inn, a hotel, three shops, two blacksmiths and a butchery, as well as a mill, were all doing good business here.

“In 1860, thirty plots were demarcated for a town they wanted to call Pietersburg,” says Frans. “Luckily that name was quickly forgotten, and the place became known locally

ABOVE Instead of hiring a marquee for his son Koot’s wedding, Frans decided to build a barn on the foundations of the original wool-washing works. The current tenant on the farm, Chris Borchers, will be using it to store onion seeds.

ABOVE LEFT There’s not much you can tell businessman Frans Steenkamp about ostrich – and even kangaroo – by-products. Even though he and his wife, Salomie, have made De Rust their home, he’s still the owner of De Claar Stroom farm on which the town was planned and where the wool-washing works were built in 1874. The Steenkamps were responsible for restoring the old hotel in Klaarstroom to its former glory in 2015.

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HIDDEN SECRET

RIGHT Morning services are held every second Sunday at The Good Shepherd Anglican Church in the main street. It was built sometime between 1863 and 1895 and designed by architect George Wallis, who was also responsible for the design of the wool-washing works on the other side of the river.

BELOW There are five graves on the Anglican Church premises. This photo shows the last resting place of the German Adolph Gustav Bernhardt (the small gravestone to the far right), the last owner of the wool-washing works in Klaarstroom. He died near the Gamtoos River in 1909 at the age of 65. The other graves are those of his first wife, Louisa (left), who died in 1895, and his second wife, Petronella (middle), who took her last breath in 1926. The church grounds also house the graves of two British soldiers, Lance Corporal Boyd and trooper Gishford (misspelt as Hirschford on the gravestone), who both died on 2 February 1901 in a skirmish in the area during the Anglo-Boer War. The building in the background, formerly the Dutch Reformed Church hall, is the only property for sale in Klaarstroom at the moment. Call 082 335 3037 for more information.



Meet the people

Bernadene Prinsloo and Johan de Beer

Owners: Klaarstroom Farm Stall

"I believe we were destined to end up in Klaarstroom," smiles Bernadene. "Everything fell into place perfectly for us, because our plan was actually to retire somewhere on the West Coast."

Johan, a millwright, "complete petrolhead and original *bosvelder* from the Maasroom area between Lephalale (Ellisras) and Alldays", says he spent "so many years rushing from Polokwane past the Klaarstroom turn-off on the way to the Buffalo Rally in Mossel Bay, but never had time to turn off".

Bernadene had visited Klaarstroom several times in the early 2000s, when her friend and colleague from the former Eden District Municipality (now the Garden Route District Municipality),

Marlene Steyn, bought a holiday home in the town.

In 2019, Johan and Bernadene started chatting online and finally met in Mossel Bay, where Bernadene had lived for 32 years. In the meantime, Johan had moved to Knysna and the two visited Klaarstroom several times, always saying that they'd like to live in this quiet place one day, although they knew that it was rare for properties to become available.

"If it hadn't been for Frans Steenkamp, we would never have ended up in Klaarstroom," says Johan. "He asked me to come repair a tractor and then asked if I didn't want to set up my workshop at the Goods Shed, which had been standing empty since the pandemic."

Johan says he didn't have the strength for a full-on workshop but as he and Bernadene both love cooking, they decided to give a farm stall a try –

especially since Frans had built the Goods Shed as a place where local women could sell their homemade wares and crafts.

Frans said he would give them three months and, in the meantime, offered them an old workers' cottage to live in. They rented out Bernadene's house in Tergniet and stored all their furniture in the holiday flat beneath the house.

"We didn't want to move here lock, stock and barrel because we didn't know if the farm stall would work. During those first three months on the farm, we only had two single beds and two camping chairs, but we were very happy living there."

The Klaarstroom Farm Stall opened its doors on 8 December 2023 and soon became a popular gathering place for travellers and local residents. They decided to give it a year and put the Tergniet house on the market in May last year. It sold within six weeks, and in July they closed the farm stall for the first time in 18 months and went to the West Coast for a week to see whether their future might lie there. But none of the towns or available properties appealed to them at all.

"We had barely returned to Klaarstroom when we heard from Robin and Allan, who are now our neighbours, that Uncle Chris, who had been living in the old Marincowitz clinic in the village, wanted to sell the building to someone who truly wanted to live in Klaarstroom and loved the town... the cards simply fell perfectly into place."

The two of them say that it's the farmers and community that make Klaarstroom so incredibly special. "We slotted into the community immediately; there's none of that newcomer syndrome you get in so many platteland areas. The people here are just plain, ordinary, down-to-earth folk. It doesn't matter whether you're rich or poor. We've not met a single person here who's upstairs. People are hospitable and calm, just like the surroundings. The silence here feeds the soul. When we sit on the back stoep in the evenings, looking out at the Swartberg, we know we wouldn't trade it for anywhere else." >



Meet the people



Magriet Jantjies

Housekeeper

As Eunice Visser sings her praises as “the area’s roosterkoek and needlework queen” and “the pillar upon which our house stands”, Magriet looks down shyly and runs her hand contemplatively over her beautiful quilt and embroidery work – from wall hangings and handbags, to table runners and washcloths – which she sells to earn extra income.

“The animals are fonder of her than of us; she’s even appeared in some of Koos’s films and helped with the wardrobe; Magriet can really do anything except catch snakes,” Eunice jokes about their housekeeper’s mortal fear of the reptiles that sometimes appear in the garden.

Magriet, 62, a native of Lootsplaas on the far side of Beaufort West, was 19 when she moved to Klaarstroom with her grandmother in 1980. She married her late husband, Oerson, here, and together they had four children.

“The eldest was a girl, then came twin girls of which only one survived, and the last was my son, who lived with me in the house. He was the breadwinner... I lost him two, three years ago. Murdered. Stabbed with a knife.”

Magriet falls silent for a moment, then looks at her quiltwork. “To lessen the terrible pain in my heart, I keep myself busy with fabric in the evenings. I’m not one for walking around and making small talk. I like using my hands. I do everything with them and will carry on like this until I can’t anymore. I don’t like struggling with a sewing machine.”

Magriet says on Women’s Day in 1997, she pleaded with the Lord to take away her love for wine, which for so many years had made their lives hell. “Oerie and I fought terribly when we drank. I was the kind of person who fought naked; I would take off all my clothes, then smash our window panes trying to hit him. The blood would run there on the bed where he had passed out. I injured his arm and leg badly... but I thank the Lord that I came to my senses and that my son never knew a drunk mother.”

She picks up a wall hanging she is working on. “With quilting, you have to always start with the dark shades and work towards the light.”

Francis Ruiters

Reservations manager and front of house: Klaarstroom Hotel

Francis has lived in Klaarstroom all her life and is following in the footsteps of her grandmother Sebien (now 92), who worked as a cleaner at the Klaarstroom Hotel “in the years when it was still a house and later a shop”.

She received training in the hospitality industry through Networx and completed her practical training at the hotel in 2018 when it still belonged to the Steenkamps. “I started as a cleaner, then became a waitress, and in 2023, I moved to reception and bookings because my passion is working with people. But because it’s a small hotel, we can all do each other’s job and help out when things get busy. I love the local people and farmers; I know exactly what each one eats and drinks.”

Little has changed in her three decades in Klaarstroom.

“The summers, especially February, are just as hot and everything is really the same as it was on the day I opened my eyes. The streets have been paved and tarred, the e-learning centre and library came along... and that’s it. Sometimes one misses the shops, and people occasionally ask why they can’t buy petrol here, but it’s a small price to pay for living in such a safe, peaceful place.” >



Like many platteland towns in South Africa, one is also reminded of the country's apartheid history in Klaarstroom. The town has two entrances – this one, the first on the N12 if you're driving from Beaufort-West, takes you through the non-white suburb – locals refer to it as the township – into the historic part of the town.



If you take the second Klaarstroom turn-off, you also arrive in the historic centre of the town. Residents refer to this house as "the blue house". (*It's just after "the red house". – Eds*) Further down the road, the Klaarstroom Hotel is visible to the right.





ABOVE We were surprised to discover a French school and cultural centre, École Française du Karoo, in Klaarstroom's main street. At the helm, we were told, is Benjamin Marchand, who is fluent in French, English and Afrikaans. The school follows the CNED distance-learning system as well as the school calendar of the northern hemisphere. According to residents, Ben, his wife and child are seldom seen because they work from home according to different time zones. "They sleep during the day, and when their hens go to bed, they get up to work."

ABOVE RIGHT Residents refer to the house opposite the Klaarstroom Farm Stall as "the red house".

RIGHT Another house in main street that stole our hearts. A simple Karoo home with a windpump for water, three pepper trees for shade and a delightful rock with the word "welcome" spray painted on it.



Meet the people

Robin Dyers and Allan Lange

Public health specialist and advocate

Cape Town advocate Allan Lange knew Jeremy and Sharon Witts-Hewinson, owners of the Klaarstroom Guest House, and introduced them to one another long before the couple decided to swap the Cape for Klaarstroom. He often came to visit them over the years, before buying his own weekend-and-holiday home here in 2017.

"The first transfer of this erf took place in 1861, and the building was originally constructed as the village's first school," Allan explains over FaceTime from the Cape, where he's busy with a court case when *Platteland* visited his partner of the past 15 years, Dr Robin Dyers, in Klaarstroom. Robin is a specialist in public healthcare who works, among others, for the University of the Western Cape, Stellenbosch University, the National Department of Health and the Medical Research Council.

When Covid-19 struck in March 2020, Robin suggested that they move to Klaarstroom – with a dog, a cat and Robin's parents, who lived with them for the duration of the lockdown. "We've lived in Klaarstroom permanently ever since, even though we need to travel to Cape Town occasionally for work. Then we stay in Robin's flat," says Allan.



He adds that the open spaces of Klaarstroom speak to him; perhaps it's a kind of nostalgia for his youth, when he spent several years in the Karoo.

"We both love the peace and quiet. This is a place where you can have a proper garden, walk your dogs and take an afternoon nap if you feel like it, especially after a glass of wine," laughs Robin, and Allan nods his head on the TV and cellphone screens. "We also find that it's more enjoyable for us and our friends when they visit Klaarstroom, spending quality time together, rather than those parties in the city where you never really get a chance to talk properly."

"Robin and I were a bit of an odd couple for Klaarstroom, although many unusual people tend to wash up in small towns. Generally people have been very welcoming, inviting us into their homes. We've experienced huge

generosity, kindness and hospitality. People are always willing to help, and it's reciprocal... it's nice to help others and to know that they will help you when you're in need."

They laugh when you ask what they miss in Klaarstroom. "Definitely not the traffic and noise and stress! In the city, you get sick more often because you're mixing with so many people. We do miss the restaurants. We ate out a lot in Cape Town and now we must drive to Prince Albert or De Rust, but it's a challenge to get home because we love a glass of wine with our food."

But the shortage of eateries here has improved their cooking skills. "I stick to the traditional favourites," says Allan, "but Robin takes care of the braaiing and has become a real master of Asian cooking – he buys the ingredients in Cape Town."



Mina Pienaar

Manager: Poort-pourri

At 63, the friendly but reserved Mina Pienaar has officially retired. This born-and-bred Klaarstroom resident says that until she turned 60, she mostly worked in the Cape, including at guest houses in the Northern Suburbs. Since last May, she has kept herself busy by helping at her niece Fileca's roadside stall (see page 66), located at the entrance to the town.

"I like to keep busy," says Mina, "and there really isn't any other work in the area."

No, she doesn't miss the Cape. "Klaarstroom has always been a quiet little place; not much happens here. That's how we've known it since we were babies and it's why we love it," she says. >



"Yes, we know these trees are aliens," laugh Sharon and Jeremy Witts-Hewinson as they stand in the shade of an enormous prosopis tree in the yard of their guest house. Over the last 22 years, they have prepared and served countless dishes during the autumn, summer and spring months. "Believe us when we say, you'll be grateful for the shade, alien or no alien, when you're ready to drop dead from the heat. This is why we call it the tree of contentment."

>> From page 57

as Klaarstroom. I still have the map and title deeds for each of those Pietersburg plots, which lie just behind the wool-washing facility on the other side of the river. A few years ago, I still had a plan to maybe build a replica of a Karoo town there, but I think I'm getting too old for things like that now."

JEREMY AND SHARON Witts-Hewinson, who have run the only guest house in Klaarstroom for the past 22 years, were both full-time teachers in Cape Town when their old Passat got a flat tyre while they were driving past the town on their honeymoon in January 1996.

"We were actually on our way to the waterfall in Meiringspoort," says Sharon. "I fell asleep and when I woke up, Jeremy had stopped the car on this godforsaken dirt road. I think I even imagined a tumbleweed rolling towards us..."

Jeremy knew Klaarstroom because his gran lived in Beaufort West and his father was the Anglican priest in Graaff-Reinet in the '70s. We stopped where Poort-pourri is now and bought a bottle of gingerbeer from Tannie Annie."

At the waterfall, the newlyweds looked at each other and decided they didn't want to return to Cape Town. "We both knew that we didn't want to spend our lives in the city or suburbs, but we also didn't have a solid plan either. All I knew was that I wanted to have my own windpump one day and Jeremy dreamed of owning a country inn.

"After the waterfall stop, we returned to Tannie Annie and asked the question we're being asked now at least once a week: Is there perhaps a plot for sale in town? And would you believe it, there was! Opposite the shop, which is now the hotel, the Marincowitz Clinic was standing empty because the



government had recently built the community hall in the township. The three-room building didn't have a kitchen or bathroom – Klaarstroom was still using the bucket system! – but we bought it anyway. Soon afterwards, Tannie Baby, who offered boarding, put her house on the market and we made an offer because I was in love with that windpump," laughs Sharon.

"As teachers, we didn't have money, but we did have two houses in Cape Town," says Jeremy, who managed to convince a sympathetic bank manager to give them a loan.

"We desperately wanted to move to Klaarstroom but had no idea what we'd do for an income. So, we decided to start a guest house. But we needed more money for the renovations and all the bathrooms."

To fund the building project, the couple went to England in 1998 to teach. They returned in 2003,

ready to start their new life. Their daughter, Edwina, was born here in 2004. "While we were overseas, the house across the road belonging to Tannie Baby's brother also became available and we bought it because we could – without even setting foot inside!" says Sharon.

Today, Tannie Baby's house is the Klaarstroom Guest House, while Sharon and Jeremy live across the road in Tannie Baby's brother's house, which they've since enlarged.

"We don't know how to explain it; there was just this incredible pull towards this place. It must have something to do with looking out at the mountains and the way that makes us feel. We have made big sacrifices to live here. We sort of understood what we were doing, but only while we were doing it. There was no solid plan. We'll never get rich in Klaarstroom, but when you live here, you're already rich." >

ABOVE Sharon Witts-Hewinson has always had a thing for windpumps, while her husband, Jeremy, always dreamt of owning a country inn one day. "In 1996 Jeremy bought me a windpump, and then we got Tannie Baby's boarding house at the same time," laughs Sharon. "Two birds with one stone."

TOP LEFT The Klaarstroom Guest House has five en-suite bedrooms and is the only guest house in the town.

ABOVE LEFT One of the three guest rooms in the main house; the other two rooms were installed in the wagon house outside.



Klaarstroom Farm Stall



Poort-pourri



Klaarstroom Hotel

Do, wander, shop

Klaarstroom isn't a place you visit with a colour-coded list of activities to tick off. Not a lot happens here, but if you're looking for silence, mountains and a beautiful Karoo landscape with friendly residents, you've definitely come to the right place.

Head for Meiringspoort

This small town lies at the foot of the magnificent Swartberg, at the northern entrance to the breathtakingly beautiful Meiringspoort Pass on the N12, which connects the Great Karoo with De Rust (and the Little Karoo). Meiringspoort is part of the Swartberg Nature Reserve, which forms part of the Cape Floral Region UNESCO World Heritage Site. Over the years, the pass, which winds over the Groot River 25 times, has often been badly battered by floods. There are five rest stops with ablution facilities – the most popular one is at the waterfall about 11 km from Klaarstroom. (On scorching days, you can take a plunge into the dark, icy nine-metre-deep pool below the waterfall!)

Sleep (or eat) at the hotel

The Klaarstroom Hotel, where *Platteland* stayed during our visit, was built in 1874. It was a private residence and also a general dealership before Frans and Salomie Steenkamp restored it to its former Victorian glory with their son Koot in 2015. It now forms part of the Fire Island Eco Retreats portfolio of eco properties and boasts nine en-suite rooms (some with air-conditioning),

wifi, a swimming pool, a bar and The Fat Fig restaurant, which are open to the public. The menu offers everything from breakfast, steak, burgers and schnitzels, to Karoo lamb chops and curried offal.

📍 klaarstroomhotel.com 📞 info@klaarstroomhotel.com
☎ 067 302 3076

Book at the town's only guest house

Sharon and Jeremy Witts-Hewinson, both former teachers, have run the only bed-and-breakfast guest house in Klaarstroom for the past 22 years. They restored the Victorian home with its high ceilings, wooden floors and personal heirlooms beautifully, and it offers five en-suite rooms (three inside and two outside in the old wagonhouse), and a swimming pool. Guests who don't want to use the kitchen facilities can order home-cooked lunches or dinners.

📍 klaarstroom.co.za ☎ 082 488 8370
✉ klaarstroom@telkomsa.net
📍 Klaarstroom Guest House

Shop or eat at the farm stall

Stop by (any day except Mondays) at Johan de Beer and Bernadene Prinsloo's quirky roadside stall in the large Goods Shed built by Frans Steenkamp in 2019. Aside from the preserves, spices, crafts, and soap and body products, you'll also find an airplane, a few beautifully restored vintage cars, and a mini-museum that honours Koos Roets and features some of his old movie cameras and photographs.

Buy a souvenir in the form of a bottle of chilli sauce Johan makes himself from, among others, cayenne, habañoero and jalapeño peppers. (Most of the sauces are available to taste on the tables if you order something to eat.) Watch out for the "Carolina Reaper" though. "It burns so much that steam comes out of your ears," warns Johan. The menu includes breakfast, roosterkoek, sandwiches and burgers with various fillings, including caramelised onions in honour of all the onion farms around the town. Behind the farm stall, there's a small labyrinth and a hill with a cross offering a beautiful view of the town and the Swartberg.

☎ 082 800 1263 (Bernadene)
📍 Klaarstroom Padstal

Pop in at Poort-pourri

This second, smaller farm stall – but the first one you see when entering the town from the N12 – is located in a building that was used years ago as Klaarstroom's school. At first you might think you're in a Christian art gallery because Bible verses greet you everywhere, including on the stones in the garden. The fairly modest stock – rusks, biscuits, preserves, crafts (including washcloths by Magriet Jantjies – see page 60) and art – is displayed on a few tables and along the walls. Fresh roosterkoek, vetkoek, pancakes and chicken pies, all baked by Mina Pienaar herself, are available to buy.

The farm stall is open from 08:00 to 18:00 (09:00 to 17:00 in winter) and is closed on Sundays. 📍 Poort Pourri-Klaarstroom ☎ 084 050 3609 (Fileca) 📍

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FARM CRICKET

It's not just a game...
It's what
dreams
are made of!



It might sound a little far-fetched, but the Prior Grange Oval – a beautiful cricket field on a farm near Springfontein in the Southern Free State – really is a place where platteland dreams come true, writes **Willem van der Berg** after taking to the field himself.

TEXT AND PHOTOS WILLEM VAN DER BERG



You don't have to be a cricket fan to appreciate this view. If it appeals to you, why not stay a night or two at the Oval Cottages situated alongside the Prior Grange cricket field? Find out more at priorgrange.co.za.

It's quite unfortunate that the first person I encounter at the Springfontein Cricket Club is the Australian Basil Doonan. Although he isn't here to participate in the annual six-a-side tournament, bumping into an Australian at a cricket ground is really annoying. It's as if their very presence scrambles your memory banks with a googly. Suddenly, all the triumphant moments vanish and all you remember is Allan Donald in the semi-final against Australia in the 1999 Cricket World Cup. Confused and without his bat, he runs hopelessly to the centre of the pitch of the Edgbaston Cricket Ground in Birmingham, Britain, surrounded by the toxic yellow of the opponent. It is futile and he is run out with the scores level. South Africa will not play in the final.

That moment caused great damage to my psyche when I was 15, and the scar has remained lodged in my chest. This is why I look away from Basil, who is chatting to the farmers about farming in his country. Instead, I think of Temba Bavuma, who held the trophy aloft after the Proteas finally triumphed over Australia in the ICC World Test Championship at Lord's in London last year.

HERE IN SPRINGFONTEIN, cricket and farming go hand in hand. It was on a farm in this very district that Ewie Cronje grew up and learnt to play cricket. A cricket shoe that belonged to his son, Hansie, turns in a glass case in the clubhouse as a reminder that amazing things can happen when dreams start in the platteland.

The Springfontein players are all still farmers, which is why the club and field have been based on a farm just outside this Southern Free State town since 1998. Between matches, the De Swardt family of Prior Grange use the cricket field as a pasture for their sheep.

"Before we can play, we have to follow a particular ritual," explains Blackie de Swardt, who, with his wife, Sheryl, arrived at Prior Grange to farm in 1985. (*Read Blackie's winning letter in our Spring 2025 edition, #48. – Eds.*)

"Five to six days before a match, we will relocate the sheep and give the field a mow. Two days before we play, the pitch is cut and rolled and the outfield gets a final cut. On the morning before the match, the boundary is marked, the pitch is measured, the creases are painted and the stumps are planted."



ABOVE A shoe that once belonged to Hansie Cronje turns in a glass case at the Springfontein Cricket Club and offers inspiration to all platteland children who aspire to play for the Proteas. Hansie's father, Ewie, grew up on a farm in the area and watched his first cricket match at this very club.

RIGHT You'd be hard-pressed to get members of the fielding team to leave the cool shadows of the poplar trees during afternoon play.



The sheep-pasture pitch is very batsman friendly, says Blackie.

This is a beautiful cricket ground. An island of green in the vast, drab landscape of a Free State spring. Poplars cast long shadows and a row of willows sways and sighs in the northwesterly wind.

Aside from the matches that Springfontein plays here against other platteland teams, Prior Grange also hosts the popular Sixes Tournament every October. Teams of six players travel from far and wide to play matches of five overs per innings. In 2025, the weekend was marketed as the Wickets and Wine Festival for the first time. The event includes a market, a tasting of Alvi's Drift wines, a performance by a singer, and agricultural talks. The latter is the reason for Basil's presence – he was the final speaker before the cricket commenced.

"I don't want to say that South African farmers are lazy," says Basil, "but on average our farms are bigger and, unlike you, we don't have farm workers. We do all the work ourselves."

The Aussies just can't leave us alone...

By Friday afternoon at 14:00, the clubhouse is abuzz as pads and gloves are put on, groin protectors adjusted and helmets are contemplated.

"Helmets are only for the guys who can't bat," says Blackie, and a few men return theirs to their bags.

Blackie's son, Stephen, explains the rules, and makes it clear that bowling protocols must be adhered to. Any delivery deemed a wide or no-ball counts as five runs. Bowlers are also only allowed a run-up of five paces. >

In addition to the main field, there's a second field on the other side of the poplars and sight screen that's also used for the Sixes tournament. All the teams get a chance to play on both fields, which differ considerably. So, you need to watch your step.



FARM CRICKET

For the Sixes tournament, all the bowling takes place from the same side of the cricket pitch, which speeds up play. Here, Shaun Dean from Springfontein's Slog Seekers waits for the next bowler.





“So, *relax*, you are not Rabada. Pace and bouncers won’t work here. Just keep the ball on the stumps,” advises Stephen. “And, if it feels like things are getting too serious, come drink a beer at the bar,” he adds.

A LOOK AT THE NAMES of the 14 participating teams reveals that most of them aren’t taking things too seriously. There are the Slog Seekers, Creamers, 4 Bulls and 2 Cows, Alcatraz, and Benson and Hedges. The Jägermeisters and Best Bier offer a clue as to where their focus lies. Six Appeal makes one wonder... Chambers, H.O.C. and Agricor sound like the guys who are here to win.

And then there are the Benoni Bombers, the team I’ve been allocated to by Stephen. We’re an interesting bunch, and not one of us comes from Benoni. The two Gunter brothers are from Senekal and attend school in Bloemfontein.

Cornelius has only just started high school and Christiaan is still in primary school.

Martiens le Roux and his son, Emile, are from a farm in the Bethulie area. Emile is wearing his shirt from the Gary Kirsten Cricket Academy in Rondebosch, Cape Town. This looks promising.

Zandr  Pienaar from Bloemfontein is honest about what we can expect from him. “I’m not a cricketer. I don’t think I should bowl and will bat last. Fielding will also be interesting. As you can see, I’m not really built for running or diving.”

It is indeed so. It’s very clear that Zandr  could shoulder a small tractor out of the road, but it’s something he would not accomplish with speed.

I also bring the fragments of a shattered cricketing dream to the team. As a child, I was crazy about cricket. My father, who was very conservative and the minister of >

After the cricket, delicious lamb ribs and chips are on offer. No Aussie is going to beat Prior Grange’s braai team experts, Petrus Makamba (left) and Wilfred van Wyk, in this department, that’s for sure.



a church for white people, believed I should rather find my fulfilment in Biblical and Afrikaans matters.

State schools weren't good enough and I attended small private schools where the numbers were too low for team sports. No selectors came to watch me bat against the rectory wall almost every afternoon or wreck my mother's garden and front lawn while practising Jonty Rhodes's fielding techniques. No one saw me bowl for hours. Just like Allan Donald and Shaun Pollock and Waqar Younis would do – those fast balls that sent the stumps flying.

IN OUR FIRST MATCH, against the Jägermeisters, my fast balls cross the boundary for four runs. Another five are added for the wide delivery – two like this have already cost us 18 runs. The rest of my over isn't much better. The Jägermeisters are clearly a lot better and more serious

than their name suggests, and they frequently knock our bowling over the poplars into the lucerne field. It's important to watch a ball rolling over the field towards you very closely – it could bounce off a clump of grass at any moment and shoot right past you to the boundary. Or hit you on your upper lip. If you want to dive like Jonty, you must be courageous and plan it carefully, because the ground is definitely not even or equally soft everywhere. Sheep pasture is not like kikuyu lawns at home. If you're lucky, there will be a clump of sheep droppings exactly where your hip and elbow hit the ground.

Our batting also doesn't start well and Emile is bowled out by the very first ball. It's a bad loss for the Benoni Bombers and we are disappointed. Too disappointed. We take Stephen's advice and go find beer. Those of us who may.

Watching the game from the sidelines at the Prior Grange Oval >

A team photo against an exceptional backdrop. Springfontein's Slog Seekers prepare to play the Chambers from Bloemfontein in the decider.





ABOVE Stefan le Roux (left) and Paul Corbett contemplate downing a Jägermeister before their next innings...

TOP Cricket is important at the Prior Grange Sixes tournament, but equally important is that everyone who attends has a good time. Aside from the wine garden, spectators and visitors can enjoy browsing a variety of stalls selling food, delicious goodies and other products made by locals.

RIGHT The tournament provides the ideal outing for the whole family. There are plenty of picnic spots, play areas for the children, and enough shade and cold refreshments to ensure everyone enjoys themselves.



FARM CRICKET

is a special experience. Clouds gather across the wide open spaces, come together briefly, then drift further on towards the Gariep Dam. The poplar shadows grow longer and cooler. The players enjoy fielding in their shade. The ridges on the horizon turn increasingly red. Every now and then, someone must climb through a wire fence to search for the ball among the redgrass and scrubland. At deep midwicket, Jan-Hendrik Gunter (Cornelius and Christiaan's father) suddenly falls to the ground and can't get up. We have a good laugh at his theatrics until he limps over and explains that he'd stepped into a hole and torn his hamstring. The blue bruises on the back of his thigh are no joke.

"Bloody porcupines," he mumbles as those who had laughed the hardest scramble to soothe Jan-Hendrik's injury with a cold drink.

In the late afternoon, birds fly across the pink and orange sky to their nests. In the tent, preparations are underway for tonight's wine tasting and singing performance. It really is a wonderful gathering here beside the cricket field – as long as the porcupine holes don't get you...

On Saturday morning, the first match starts at 07:00. The Jägermeisters against the Slog Seekers.

"We'll have to see how the Jägermeisters do today," says Stephen. He doesn't appear to have had much sleep. "They kept me busy at the bar until late. Eventually I just locked up and turned out the lights. But I think they carried on with their own alcohol. Maybe they still are. Who knows?"

Indeed, some of the team members still have glasses in their hands... and they don't appear to contain coffee. (*Must be good old*

police coffee then... – Eds.) Yet they manage a few solid deliveries, an outstanding catch and a very entertaining batting session.

For the Benoni Bombers, things don't go any better than they did the day before. There are moments when Emile's Gary Kirsten expertise shines through. Or Martiens' old tricks and experience. Or my wilted Protea dreams. Zandr  amazes everyone with a massive six and a series of fours. With each match, the Gunter brothers grow less afraid of the Ooms they're playing against.

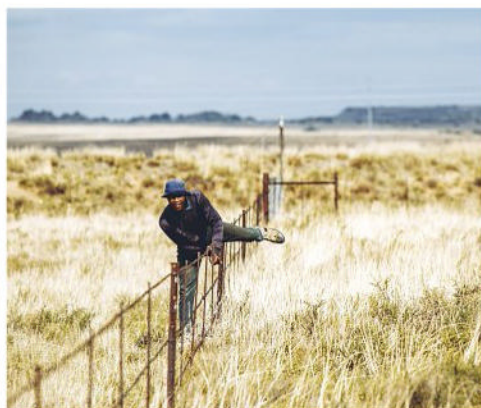
But we're still losing. And losing is no fun, even though we try to remain lighthearted. Even though the day is beautiful and the atmosphere is absolutely lovely.

IT REALLY IS QUITE A FESTIVAL here at Prior Grange, and because Peet



ABOVE Townspeople, like Pieter M ller (far left), are constantly getting stuck in the barbed-wire fence trying to retrieve balls that have been hit into the veld. It's up to the workers from Prior Range to show them how it's done.

RIGHT Another ball is smashed to the boundary...



van Biljon, Morné Pienaar and Andre Greyling know it, they climbed onto their mountain bikes and cycled for 248km to come join in the fun. Peet also wants to see how his son is playing. And indeed, Pite is now standing at the crease. He played for the Free State for a long time and also for the Proteas for a while before retiring from professional cricket in 2024.

“He better not want to take it up again. My arm is still lame from all the bowling,” says Peet.

One of Pite’s shots hits a boy next to the field on the leg.

“Oh dear, let me move before Pite comes and asks if I can get the child something.”

Pite steps closer to apologise but when the poor child sees the cricket bat, he cries even harder.

“I’ll have to give him something,” says Pite, and ends his innings

right there to go in search of some consolation prize.

My fellow Benoni Bombers and I walk onto the field for the last time. Slightly reluctantly, because we have to take on one of the better teams, Alcatraz, at the end. My left elbow has a big graze and a blue bruise after a moment of desperate fielding earlier in the day – in vain, of course. I’d pulled my right hamstring in the previous match while racing to take a catch. Also in vain.

We bowl first and I’m leading the charge. It doesn’t go too badly. Nor does it when it’s Cornelius and Emile’s turn.

But when young Christiaan gets hold of the ball, he beats the bat with beautiful flight. Six of the best deliveries of the day. In the end, there are still 63 runs to chase. We swing and swing, and some of the

shots do make it to the boundary. In the last over, Emile shows what he can do and smashes ball after ball into the Karoo scrub.

In the end, the Benoni Bombers manage a huge shake-up and sink Alcatraz’s chances of making it to the final.

Wonderful. A beer tastes ten times better when you’ve won!

I’ll be coming back for more. Whether it’s with the Benoni Bombers or the Bloemfontein Babers, we will play until we taste the sweetness of victory. This isn’t just a game, boys. This is our dream!

The next Wickets and Wine Festival at Prior Grange guestfarm takes place on 23 and 24 October. It costs R5 000 per team to participate in the tournament.

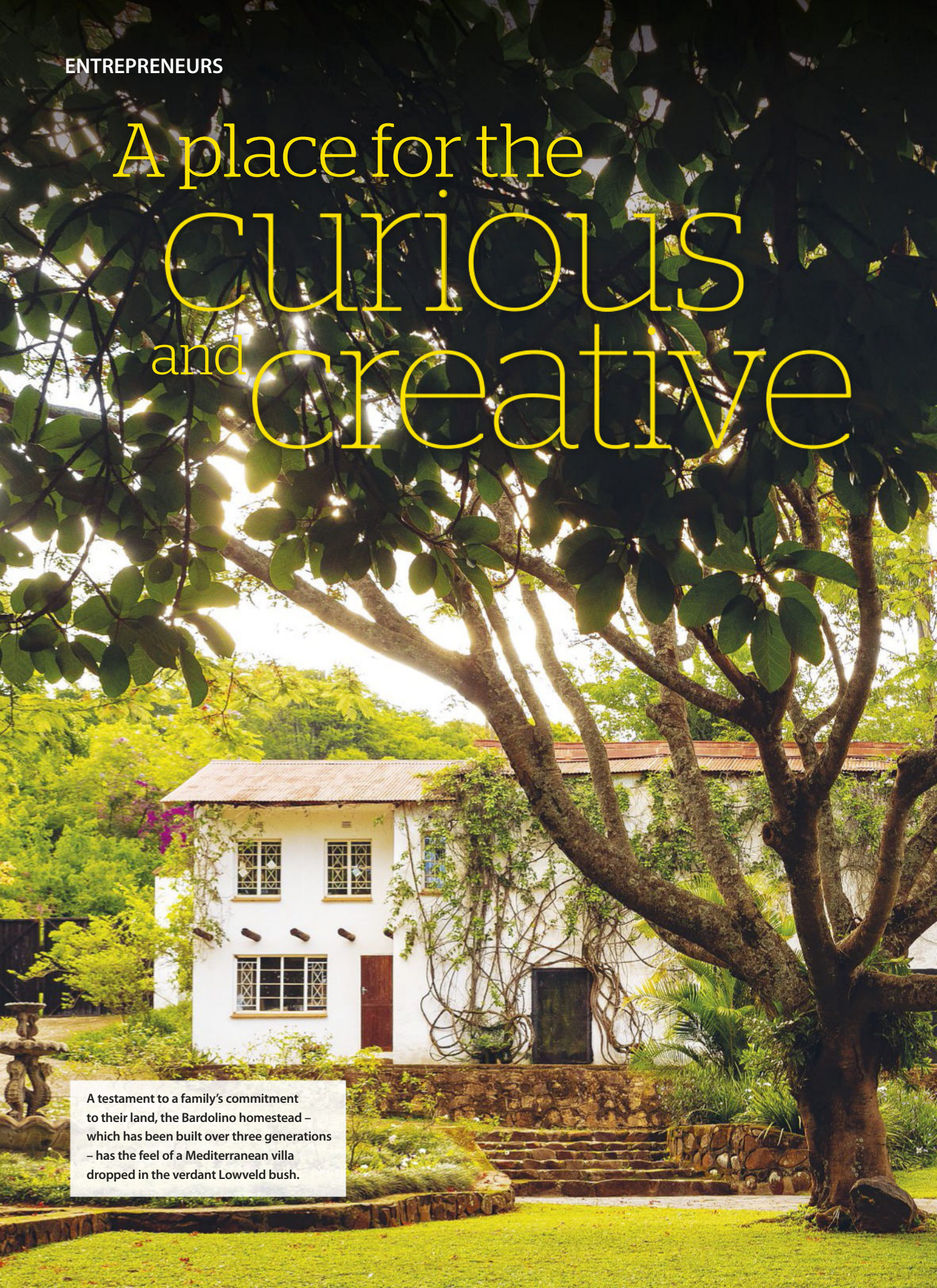
Contact  Springfontein Cricket Club
 083 382 6616 (Stephen de Swardt) 



The Sixes tournament was won by the Bloemfontein Chambers team for the second year in a row. And they’re already preparing future champs for this well-loved annual event. The winning team gets their entry fee of R5 000 back.

ENTREPRENEURS

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A testament to a family's commitment to their land, the Bardolino homestead – which has been built over three generations – has the feel of a Mediterranean villa dropped in the verdant Lowveld bush.

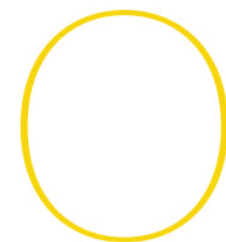
**A decades-long commitment to the simple mantra
of doing what you love has shaped a business
model that has transformed a family farm in the
Lowveld into an incubator of ideas for its owners and
an inspiring retreat for artists and artisans.**

TEXT HANCU LOUW PHOTOS MIA LOUW





Walter Thornhill, Jennifer Schormann and Pablo the Weimaraner. A chance meeting between the two during a trip to India led to Walter joining Jennifer on the farm in 2019.



n its original title deed, the property is listed as an *uitspan-plaas* – an outspan farm – that

must make provision for anyone travelling by wagon to stop and rest and water their draught animals. “As the landowner, it’s your duty to accommodate travellers,” explains Jennifer Schormann of the farm that has been home to the last three generations of her family. Although the days of weary visitors making their way through the wild unknown of the Lowveld are long gone, this spirit of offering a place of refuge has been kept alive at The Bardolino Artists Retreat.

Roughly 10km from Mbombela (Nelspruit) along the R40 to Barberton, a sign directs you to Hermansburg Road. Winding its

way up a koppie, this rutted gravel track leads to a large archway: the portal to The Bardolino Artists Retreat. The weathered cobblestone driveway, sprawling homestead with its stone terraces, white walls, large arches and parapets remind one instantly of a Mediterranean villa.

But it took decades of dedication to the land and much ingenuity to turn the 39-hectare farm into the lush retreat it is today.

“All of this was mudbrick, real Voortrekker-era stuff,” Jennifer says, pointing to the rooms behind her where photographs of her grandparents and her grandmother’s *wakis* (travel trunk or chest) stand testament to her connection to her past and the history of the farm.

“My grandfather was born in Barberton in 1887. By 1912 he was the stationmaster at Elandshoek in the Elands Valley on the eastern railway line to Mozambique, so he

knew the area well and grew very fond of it.” Although his work took him across South Africa, as far as Namibia, and eventually to Pretoria, his love for the Lowveld never ceased, and in 1950 he bought the farm that Jennifer calls home today. “He wanted a place in the bush where he could spend time with his family, away from the bustle of the city.”

And for many years the farm remained just that: a rustic refuge tucked away in the Lowveld bush.

“Bardolino is a reference to a small town in Italy,” says Jennifer of the origin of the farm’s name from the shade of a large patio that spills onto a lawn hemmed by colourful flowerbeds and bougainvilleas.

“In the 1960s, my father had the opportunity to study at Utrecht University, so my parents moved to the Netherlands.” During this time, they spent three months travelling

across Europe and came across Bardolino, a small town on the coast of Lake Garda in Northern Italy. "They loved it so much, they nearly stayed there for good."

But family responsibilities forced them to return to South Africa. At the same time Jennifer's grandparents were trying to sell the farm, which was at that stage little more than a collection of mudbrick structures in the bush.

Despite the daunting task of settling on an undeveloped property, her parents took the plunge.

With her father teaching at the only high school in Nelspruit at the time, Jennifer's mother, Joan, took charge of developing the property which was "liveable but ramshackle, with no electricity or running water".

She was a 21-year-old city girl from Irene in Pretoria, but she had an eye for a building and a plan for

everything. Most of the building was done according to rough lines drawn in the sand, says Jennifer of her mother's ingenuity and courage.

"Those doors are from the old ABC Shoes building in town," she says, pointing to two ornate wooden doors that lead to a large, comfortable stoep. "And my mother salvaged those windows from the dump during the renovations of the Standard Bank building in Nelspruit many years ago," she adds.

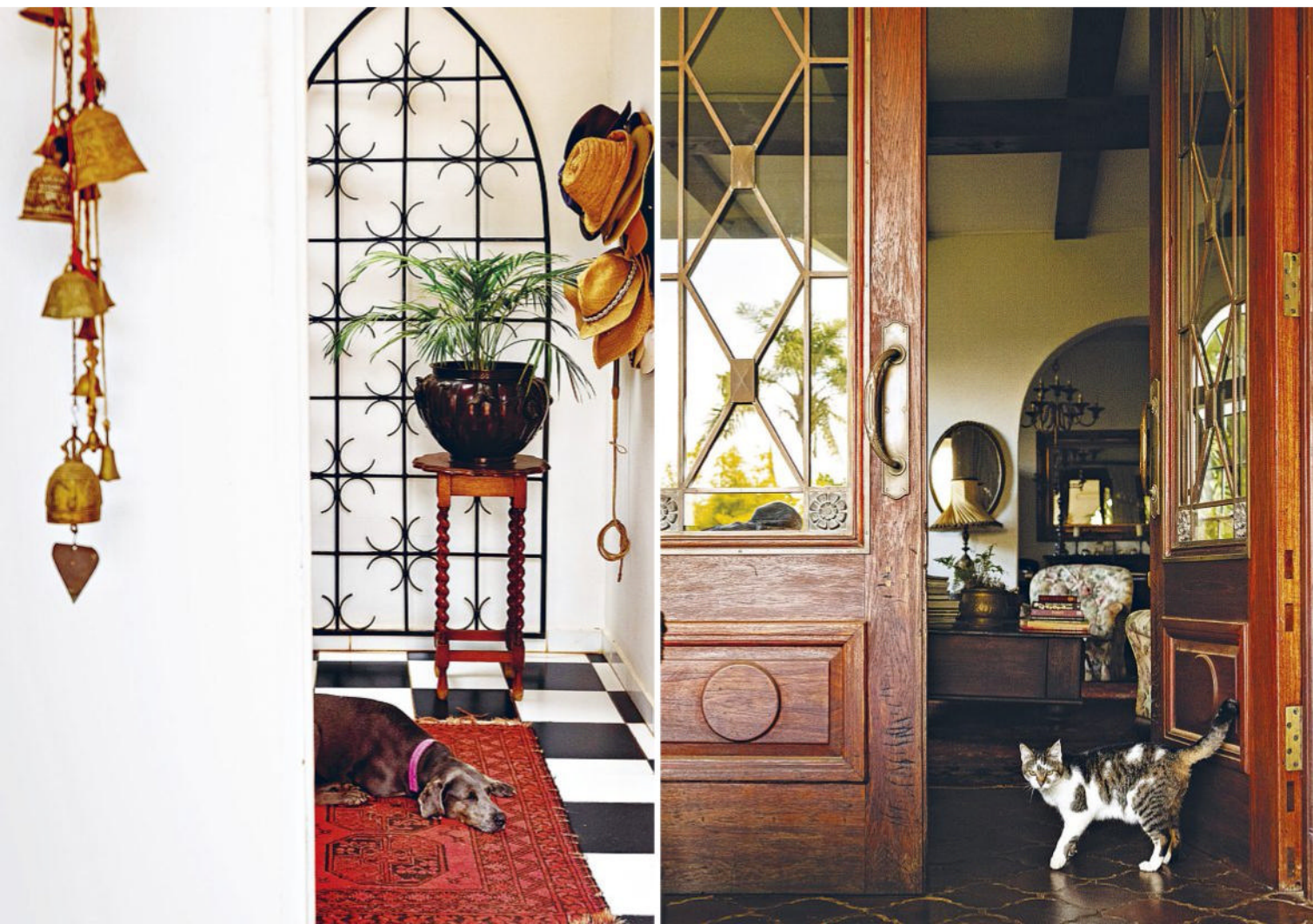
One of the most striking aspects of Bardolino's architecture is the clay roof tiles, many of which were sourced from Mozambique. "In 1972, my parents went on holiday to Mozambique and came across hundreds of these tiles stacked along the road next to a house that had been demolished."

With an eye for a bargain and a plan for Bardolino, Jennifer's mother convinced the owner to >



BELOW LEFT Luna the Weimaraner taking a nap in one of the many little passageways characteristic of the main farmhouse designed by Jennifer's mother, Joan.

BELOW RIGHT Georgie the cat in the doors which Joan salvaged from the ABC Shoes building in Nelspruit in the 1970s.



sell them the tiles. “They loaded their caravan to the brim and brought them all back to the farm.”

Today, tiles stamped “Lourenço Marques” or “Colonial Portuguesa” can be seen on the farm where they have been used to decorate parapet walls. “It was my mother’s way of achieving a particular kind of architecture that reminded her of Bardolino in Italy, but also a way to hide her patchwork approach to building,” Jennifer chuckles.

In addition to renovating the homestead, Jennifer’s mother invested a great deal of time in the development of the land. “To make ends meet, she grew vegetables and sold them at the farmer’s market. She collected rainwater and made her own compost. She was following permaculture principles out of sheer necessity, long before it had become a buzz word.”

Jennifer employs the same

principles in her daily management of Bardolino, a responsibility that fell on her unexpectedly when her mother decided to move from the property to retire and travel.

“It was perfect; my mother needed someone to take over the farm and I needed a change of pace.”

With a background in tourism and social development, Jennifer spent much of her early career working with people. “I trained people in tourism and tourism development, and for a number of years I worked in conjunction with the government.” But the pressure of large government contracts with many moving parts began to take its toll.

“I decided that to be truly happy, I needed to do what I enjoyed the most, while also generating an income. I have always found pleasure in meeting people and learning from them. So, a large >

OPPOSITE Building on her mother’s legacy, Jennifer devotes much of her time to the upkeep of the lush gardens at Bardolino which boast little walkways and hidden benches and play host to more than 100 bird species during the course of the year.

BELOW Kid’s pottery sessions have been one of the most enduring regular events which Jennifer has hosted at Bardolino over the course of the past decade and a half. At least once a month a two hour long pottery session is facilitated by a local artist and attended by a group of primary school-aged children.



"My mother was following
permaculture principles out
of sheer necessity, long before
it had become a buzz word."





Enjoying the fruits of his labour: Walter samples a sprig of mint which has been growing in soil which he keeps fertile by using his own compost – this is made according to the Berkeley method.

part of what I wanted to do with Bardolino in the early years was to create a communal space where people could come to learn new skills and develop their creativity.”

MUCH LIKE HER MOTHER, Jennifer’s first step to realising this dream was to start building.

“While I was settling in at the farm, I bumped into an old friend who was looking for a space to set up a dance school. So, I converted three garages on the property into a studio for him.”

With the first conversion done, a deliberate process of renovations began, and Jennifer slowly started establishing the farm as a gathering place for the curious and creative.

“It’s about building blocks, taking things one step at a time and being open to the needs and interests of the community around you,” she says of the staggering array of crafters markets, workshops,

seminars, classes, courses, shows and retreats that Bardolino has hosted over the past 15 years.

In spacious studios, under huge trees or on rolling lawns, people have gathered to paint, sculpt, make pottery, do yoga, or attend figure-drawing or beekeeping courses. “Over the years, I think we’ve managed to foster a Bardolino community,” she says of the lasting ties that have been forged between Bardolino and the host of people – both local and international – who have visited and regularly return.

But markets, classes and courses alone do not sustain the daily operations of a 39-hectare farm, and to keep things ticking over, Jennifer and her partner, Walter Thornhill, have used the resources at their disposal to generate an income in a variety of ways.

Three homes on the farm, each with permanent tenants, provide a predictable passive income, while five cottages aimed at local and

international travellers add short-term rental revenue. These sources of income have allowed Jennifer and Walter to pursue projects that not only contribute to the sustainability and financial feasibility of the farm, but also provide them with a great deal of joy.

“I’ve chosen to spend my working hours doing things I enjoy. If that allows me to generate an income, it’s a bonus,” says Walter, who swapped the affluent suburb of Richmond upon Thames in London for a pastoral existence in the Lowveld. He met Jennifer on a trip to India. “I *never* book package tours, but this was the exception and, well, here we are,” she says, laughing about a series of unexpected events that led to Walter joining her permanently at Bardolino in 2019.

With a background in international banking, commodity trading and commercial consulting, Walter’s current life is a far cry from the one he once knew. But

on the Schormann family farm, he has come to reimagine business and entrepreneurship.

As a former Springbok road and track cyclist who still competes internationally, Walter applies the same dedication and focus required of a professional athlete to the various ventures he manages alongside Jennifer at Bardolino.

"You see all of that? That's propolis," he says, while his assistant, Mangaliso Twala, scrapes away at a sticky brown substance, resembling something between wax and resin. "I have always wanted to try my hand at beekeeping, but never had the time or space," he says while checking a frame of honeycomb ready for harvest.

What started as a hobby has turned into a sizable commercial venture, with Walter tending to more than 180 hives across the Lowveld and as far as the Cradle of

"I've chosen to spend my working hours doing things I enjoy. If that allows me to generate an income, it's a bonus."

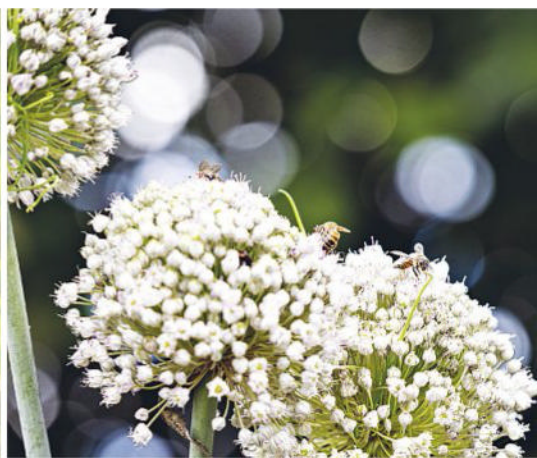
Humankind in Gauteng. "I manage hives on behalf of farmers and land-owners who either want pollination or honey, or both," Walter explains.

In addition to the income he generates by managing hives, Walter sells organic honey and propolis, a substance made by bees that is known for its antioxidant, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory and antiviral properties. Due to Walter's dedication to organic farming practices on Bardolino, his hives produce honey free from pesticides and other chemical pollutants. "It's important to remember that it's not my honey. I have very little to do with it; it's all about where the bees are

foraging," he says of the honey that was awarded best in the country by the Honey Judges and Stewards Guild of South Africa, at the 2025 World Mead Day and Honey Festival that was hosted at Bardolino in August 2025.

"The bees have been a fantastic journey of growth for me, and have contributed to the sustainability of the farm, both in terms of the environment and the business it creates," he adds.

BUT BEEKEEPING LED to another one of Walter's pastimes, which has also grown into a business: mead making. >



ABOVE A couple of Walter's honeybees pollinate onion flowers in their flourishing vegetable and herb garden. With more than thirty beehives on the nearly 40-hectare farm, there is no shortage of pollinators to take care of the various fruits and vegetables produced at Bardolino.

LEFT Jennifer with a harvest of fresh herbs and vegetables from their veggie patch which they manage according to permaculture principles which includes a no-till approach.

ENTREPRENEURS

"I was trying to create as little waste as possible," he says. "After we rinse and clean the honey-harvesting equipment, a large amount of what I can only describe as honey water is left behind." In an effort not to let his precious honey go to waste, Walter started exploring alternative uses for the solution that would otherwise be dumped. "Mead was the next logical step, and I got to work."

Today Walter produces a fair amount of mead annually and his dedication to his craft scored him a first prize at this year's South African Mead Masters Association's annual competition, which was hosted at Bardolino. This success, which he attributes to having healthy bees and hives, has led Walter to hosting mead-making courses at Bardolino as an additional business venture. "This year we had 17 new mead makers graduate from the course and seven of them achieved podium positions in their various categories at the annual competition," he says brimming with pride and appreciation at the success of his students.

Strolling from the honey room, the two Weimaraners, Luna and Pablo, lead the way to the vegetable garden. "My favourite part of the day is coming here and harvesting fresh, organically grown herbs and vegetables," says Jennifer. "We don't use pesticides or herbicides and keep the soil healthy by farming



ABOVE Walter uses a hydrometer to test the sugar levels of a batch of mead he is busy making. Testing the sugar levels of the mead is crucial for adjusting sweetness and predicting the final alcohol level of the mead.

TOP Walter's assistant and fellow beekeeper Mangaliso Twala examines a frame of honeycomb, ready to be prepared for processing and harvesting. Each frame yields an average of one kilogram of honey.

LEFT Mangaliso and Walter harvest propolis from a frame of honeycomb. Sticking to their permaculture principles, nothing is wasted: Walter uses the propolis to create a medicinal tincture which is sold at Bardolino for its antioxidant, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory and antiviral properties.



with nature,” she explains, pointing to a series of unassuming plastic pipes protruding from each of the raised vegetable patches.

“In each pipe, a colony of red wriggler earthworms turn garden waste into nutrient-rich compost and their nutrient-dense excrement seeps into the soil,” says Jennifer of a system which allows them to farm without the use of chemical fertilizers.

This approach to sustainable living led them to yet another business venture: composting.

“We have reduced the compost-making process down to 18 days,” says Walter who follows the

Berkeley composting method that has seen Bardolino generate not only enough organic compost to supply their own needs, but also enough surplus to sell locally.

Despite this mix of hobbies turned business ventures, Jennifer and Walter’s curiosity and drive to learn and try new things mean they’re constantly looking for new avenues to explore. “The vegetable garden, bees and composting are ticking over nicely, so the next step is to start keeping chickens,” she says.

This seemingly inexhaustible capacity for finding ways to make the sprawling homestead not only a place of business, but a refuge

for all who visit lies at the heart of what has made The Bardolino Artists Retreat one of the Lowveld’s most enduring cultural and creative institutions.

“Almost everything we do at Bardolino comes from a desire to quench our own curiosity. It’s been an incredible privilege to have access to this space and to use it as a refuge and incubator for our own and other’s creativity.” 

Contact Jennifer Schormann, Bardolino Artists Retreat 📞 072 609 3737

✉ jennifer@bardolino.co.za

📌 The Bardolino Artists Retreat

📷 [the.bardolino.artists.retreat](https://www.instagram.com/the.bardolino.artists.retreat)



More on mead making

Mead, or honey wine, is widely considered one of the oldest alcoholic beverages.

The drink, which can take sweet, dry or semi-sweet forms, is made by fermenting honey with water, yeast and, in many cases, additional ingredients like tea, fruit or spices.

The ingredients are mixed and allowed to ferment, which converts the sugar in the honey into alcohol, a process that takes between three to six weeks.

Following fermentation, the mixture is transferred and left to clarify and mellow before being bottled. If kept unopened, mead can remain unspoilt for many decades.

LEFT A bottle of Walter’s mead which is made from the organic honey produced at Bardolino. Walter took to mead making by pure coincidence in an attempt not to waste the honey left over from each round of harvesting.

OUR COMMUNITY

PRINCE ALBERT

Skills give
true
hope

A photograph of a long-table dinner held in a lush garden at night. The scene is illuminated by warm, yellow string lights and large, glowing paper lanterns. People are seated along a long table covered with a white cloth, surrounded by dense foliage and trees. The atmosphere is intimate and communal.

The Prince Albert Community Trust's long-table dinner was held in the beautiful permaculture garden behind The Langhuis, a 19th-century building at 34 Kerk Street. Here ONS Botanicals has its shop, and you'll also find ONS restaurant and cooking school, as well as the new Hospitality Academy.

Ground-breaking community projects by the Prince Albert Community Trust – from a brand-new Hospitality Academy, to a range of bodycare products and the Journey to Jazz Festival at the end of April – are proving how hands-on skills development can turn hope into reality.

TEXT JOHAN VAN ZYL PHOTOS INGA TERBLANCHE AND PETER VAN NOORD

In Prince Albert, it's been a long time since "hope" was just an abstract dream or empty buzzword used to add impact to speeches.

"Opportunities are often rarer than rain in Karoo towns," says Ingrid Wolfaardt, "which means that developing your skills not only improves your chance of finding a job, it also gives you self-confidence, dignity and the knowledge that your future isn't something that just 'happens' to you, it's something you can actively build yourself."

Ingrid is the founder and current executive trustee of the Prince Albert Community Trust (PACT), a non-profit organisation started in 2013 to develop and empower capable young people in the community through teaching, the creative arts and micro-enterprises.

"I should definitely not be the focus of this story, because it's not about me," she smiles purposefully. "It grieves me that so many so-called 'community organisations' have an old white *tannie* wielding power behind the scenes. Our big dream is to ultimately transform the entire South African platteland, but we're starting by creating a legacy here in Prince Albert – a legacy with principles that other towns can hopefully follow."

"So many people, especially privileged people, are totally trapped in negativity about the future. On the other hand, others are understandably distrustful because,

over the years, they've been taken advantage of for political goals, or become disillusioned about non-governmental organisations starting projects with great fanfare, then getting tired of it all, or running out of money. Often, when these projects end, everything collapses because they never built the depth, capacity, substance, self-confidence or skills to empower people practically. That's why it was music to my ears when Azuke Ntapane,

the general manager of PACT, recently said to me: 'Ingrid, if a train runs over you, we'll be able to continue this.'"

TO LAUNCH THE organisation's new Hospitality Academy in collaboration with the Franschhoek Hospitality Academy, as well as the restaurant where students will gain practical experience, PACT's youth-driven initiative for social transformation, skills development and job creation,



Ingrid Wolfaardt is the founder and executive trustee of PACT. She and her husband, John, established Fruitworks in Paarl where they grow fruit for export. Her debut novel, *Heartfruit*, was launched in 2008. The mural behind her was painted by Rebecca Haysom, who is also responsible for the designs of ONS's new range of tote bags and aprons.



called ONS, invited *Platteland* to a magnificent long-table dinner in the town centre. The event was held in the abundant permaculture food garden that Brett Bard, better known as Brett the Vet (featured in *Platteland* #31, Winter 2021), began behind *The Langhuis* at 34 Kerk Street. The 19th-century *Langhuis* was once the home of the African Relish cooking school, started by Cape Town entrepreneurs Philip and Lisa Key. In December 2021, *Platteland* attended a veld food course here hosted by Loubie Rusch, which we wrote about in *Platteland* #34 (Autumn 2022).

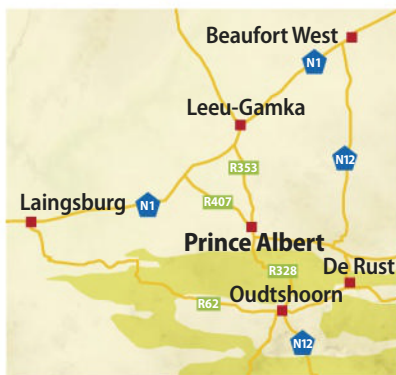
The Keys are great supporters of PACT and still own the property but have transferred its management to the organisation.

Following a rigorous selection process, this is the location, at 34 Kerk Street, where six young people from the town began their accredited training in the chef and hospitality industry in February this year. A professional training academy like this is a major asset for a Karoo town of relatively modest size, where, astonishingly, more than 10 restaurants and bars, as well as many guest-houses, operate. >

Fifty-four people, all of whom believe in the Prince Albert Community Trust's dream and vision, were invited to a long-table dinner on 20 November 2025. It marked the introduction of the Hospitality Academy with Shane Jacobs at the helm as well as the new ONS Botanicals range of skincare products. The man wearing the red scarf (second photo from left) is veterinarian Brett Bard, known as Brett the Vet, who designed the permaculture garden behind *The Langhuis* at 34 Kerk Street in midtown. The harvest from the garden determines what you'll see on the restaurant menu each week.



Cape entrepreneurs Philip and Lisa Key own the property at 34 Kerk Street. They established the African Relish Culinary Venue here, but the couple have since transferred management over to PACT, which runs a shop, salon, restaurant and the new Hospitality Academy from the premises.



Chef and mentor Shane Jacobs, who grew up in the town and heads up the academy and ONS kitchen, says he started cooking in his grandmother's kitchen at the age of six, "in the years when you didn't find men in the kitchen in Prince Albert". This is where he mastered the art of creating traditional Karoo flavours, and one of his all-time favourites remains his grandmother's *vetlappie* – *kaiings*, or scratchings, made from rendered sheep fat, wrapped in dough and baked under coals.

"My grandmother, who was paralyzed, did most of her cooking on a gas stove beside her bed. You could call it authentic farm food. These days I go about things completely differently: I see what's ready to harvest in the vegetable garden and then decide which dishes will appear on the restaurant menu during that week."

Shane says he was a participant in the Networx for Career Development programme when Philip and Lisa gave him the opportunity to work in the African Relish garden in 2017. "I was still very shy in those days. I didn't want to open up and share how I felt about our food... I didn't even know how to hold a knife or the right way to chop an onion.

"Then one day a bread course was held here and everyone on the premises was invited to attend. I was the only one who knew how to knead properly and could make bread that turned out exactly right and had flavour. That was when I moved across to the cooking school kitchen, where I've learnt so much over the years from chefs like Chris Erasmus and Mynhardt Joubert when they presented cooking classes here. That opened me up >



ABOVE Jeremy Davids (left), manager of the Franschhoek Hospitality Academy, happily shares his curriculum with their satellite campus in Prince Albert. Local chef Shane Jacobs acts as instructor and mentor to the six local students who will receive their training at the academy this year.



LEFT 34 Kerk Street in Prince Albert's midtown is the one-stop-shop for many of PACT's concerns. It houses the new Hospitality Academy, a restaurant and pizzeria where cooking lessons are offered, the ONS shop and salon, a tea garden and an event space for special occasions.



Who was Outa Lappies?

The “outsider” artist Jan Schoeman, son of *karretjiesmense* Stefaans and Delia Schoeman, christened himself Outa Lappies. He was known for the cart he rode in, as well as the multicoloured patchwork jackets he made himself, which he wore as an act of protest against children who had mocked a childhood friend for his patched-up clothing.

Outa Lappies made works of art and lanterns from found items such as tin, bottles, fabric scraps, glass, car lights, porcelain shards, wood and wire, which he sold to local and foreign tourists.

He was a much-loved resident in Prince Albert and especially in Noordeinde, the coloured neighbourhood, where he taught young people how to turn discarded items into art. According to an online report published after his death at the age of 87, he also created work with his Chapters project, where the women of Noordeinde embroidered the chapters of his life story for him. Some of these chapters were acquired by the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the Bruce Campbell Smith collection and the Rupert Museum in Stellenbosch. In 2001, Outa Lappies was honoured as the Western Cape Tourism Personality of the Year. His life came to a tragic end on 7 July 2011, when he succumbed to burns he sustained after his colourful cloak caught alight beside his campfire.

to the idea that I should stop thinking so little of myself and start revealing what I was hiding inside. And now, at last, I have the chance to plough my love for cooking, and my knowledge and experience, back into the community.

“It’s wonderful to know that, in my new role, I will be able to change the life of at least one child,” Shane says on the morning after the dinner, before he meets with Jeremy Davids, of the Franschhoek Hospitality Academy who has kindly shared the curriculum with the new academy.

Jeremy says of the planned one-year course: “Students, whether they will ultimately work as chefs, wait staff, bartenders or front-of-house staff, will learn more about cooking and the hospitality industry.”

He adds that Shane has already visited them in the Boland to see how to apply everything in Prince Albert, which is basically their first satellite campus.

Since opening in 2018, the Franschhoek Hospitality Academy and Learning Centre, with ambassadors such as chefs >

The organic vegetables, herbs and fruit that are ready for harvest in the permaculture garden behind ONS pizzeria will determine what Shane Jacobs puts on his seasonal chef’s menu each week. Here, we see pizza maker Steward Skaarnek picking fresh baby spinach, rocket and thyme for the kitchen.



Meet the people

Melony Moos

Manager: ONS

"Hospitality is an art," says Melony, "and it costs nothing to be friendly. We want to teach children that it's possible to be hospitable and friendly, even when you have nothing. 'Something from nothing' was also the motto of Outa Lappies, who made magic with things other people had thrown away." (See the box "Who was Outa Lappies?" on the opposite page.)

Melony was born in Prince Albert,

attended school here and has lived here all her life. She manages ONS, which, until the launch of the Hospitality Academy, largely consisted of the shop at 34 Kerk Street where the ONS Botanicals product range is sold, as well as a salon where trained members of the community offer manicures, pedicures and massages. On the same premises, there is also a cooking school and restaurant that was initially only open on Wednesdays and Friday evenings, as well as on Saturday mornings for tea.

But this year, they plan to be open from Tuesdays to Saturdays.

"But for me, the heart of ONS and PACT is at the centre in Noordeinde where we create opportunities and offer training. I'm especially fond of the 'Ek is Oulik' programme. It cares for children and the elderly, and it's our way of giving back to our community. We seat them in front of the mirror, give them hair and nail treatments, and talk to them about the old days. This gives them the chance to share their stories with us and then we tell the children how the elderly folk grew up."

Melony, along with "a whole lot of other children from the community", was raised by her grandmother, Francina Moos, known as Ouma Fanie or Mamma Fanie, who passed away in 2025, shortly before her 85th birthday.

"My grandmother loved me very much, but I was a terrible rebel and she wanted to strangle me against the fence with her bare hands when I fell pregnant at 16. In those days, teenage pregnancies were a terrible curse. It was the biggest embarrassment for me, but, these days, school girls go for grand photo shoots when they fall pregnant. Today I understand that was a big lesson I needed to learn. It's why I now warn my three daughters: That is not what I want for you, I want you to be more. I want you to grab the chances that life gives you. In Prince Albert, it's not possible for people to say they don't have any opportunities. There are a lot; you just have to take advantage of them yourself because no one is going to do it for you."

"In Prince Albert, it's not possible for people to say they don't have any opportunities. There are a lot; you just have to take advantage of them yourself."





Aside from ONS's body and lifestyle products, the shop also sells works by local artists. The prices of Louis Schoeman's wire figures on the top shelf range from R200 to R800 based on their size and the materials used. He also makes armbands and bracelets. On the middle and bottom shelves are succulents that the artist Karin Terblanche makes from potter's clay. The prices range from R100 to R1 500.

Margot Janse, Matthew Gordon, Reuben Riffel and Chris Erasmus, has gone from strength to strength. In 2021, the private school, which accepts only 24 students a year, was announced as the best hospitality school in the Western Cape. Approximately 96% of the students who complete the one-year course will find permanent employment.

"One of the biggest problems in South Africa," says Jeremy, "is that 56% of people between 18 and 35 years of age are unemployed. If young people have a job, they have a purpose, they have a structure to their lives. They are off the so-called streets, they are not breaking into someone's house, but, most importantly, they have self-worth.

"Back then, the founders of the school, Michaela Julian, Tarryn Corlett and Brian Moor, wondered why so many students with a three-year chef diploma behind their

name couldn't find work," he says. "They identified a gap in the market for a shorter course with a smaller theoretical component and specific focus on the practical skills required in the kitchen and the hospitality industry as a whole. This is why, several times a year, we meet with the 69 restaurants, 8 hotels and 114 guesthouses in and around Franschhoek to find out more about the needs of guests *and* the industry, so that we can adjust our curriculum if necessary."

THE LONG-TABLE DINNER catered for a total of 54 guests and was also a great opportunity to launch the latest products in the Karoo-inspired ONS Botanicals bodycare and lifestyle range. Made by Wilscha van Heerden of Wilscha Skincare, the range includes soap, liquid hand and body wash, body cream, mosquito



LEFT A bottle of Cape Snow Bush & Citrus Body Lotion (R220) and, to the right, soap made from geranium and pomegranate oil (R120).

BELOW LEFT New soap fragrances were introduced last year. From left are Prickly Pear & Lemongrass, Cedarwood & Activated Charcoal, and Neroli. The soaps are available instore for R100 each (unfortunately, there is no online shop yet) and are made by Wilscha Skincare.



Jazz in the Karoo

Approximately 80 young people from the local community who have received months of training in hospitality, events, media and marketing, and sound and stage management, will welcome local and international artists including Vusi Mahlasela at PACT's fourth Journey to Jazz Festival. This year, the event will be held in six venues in and around the town between 30 April and 3 May. Apart from music concerts, the programme also includes masterclasses, workshops, delicious food, and guided tours to Dr Sue Milton-Dean's private nature reserve, Wolwekraal, just outside the town. Tickets can be booked at Quicket.

Although the Journey to Jazz Festival is now a welcome economic injection for the town, it was born from the idea that music, and jazz in particular, is a universal language that brings people together. In Prince Albert, music and the performing arts have been used for several years to drive positive change among the town's youth. Journey to Jazz is not only about world-class music but also the creation of a welcoming experience where hospitality is key – a way to make visitors fall in love with Prince Albert... and return year after year. **Contact** journeytojazz.co.za

spray, massage candles, chocolate (by Honest Chocolate in Cape Town), bracelets and fabric products such as dishcloths, table runners, tote bags and aprons that feature lovely botanical illustrations by local artist Rebecca Haysom.

ONS Botanicals combines natural, ethically sourced ingredients with an important goal: youth empowerment and social justice. Each product is carefully developed to ensure that it not only cares for the body but also supports the local community. All proceeds from the sale of ONS Botanicals products are used to fund the work of PACT and specifically the "Ek is Oulik" project, a welfare and wellbeing project that supports children, young people and vulnerable communities in Prince Albert and surrounds.

Self-confidence and dignity are restored through the salon programme, which offers hair and

nailcare, hygiene products and access to mental health resources. "There is something really exciting happening in this *dorp*," Ingrid shares the next day when she says goodbye. "Life is too short to do ugly or mediocre. The children of Prince Albert have to be sensitised to what beauty is without being pedantic."

She laughs and widens her eyes at the same time. "Donations and government funding are always decreasing, which is why, here at PACT, we're giving more thought to how a non-profit organisation such as ours can both make a positive difference in people's lives and become financially independent through our projects. This is where the trust is headed, and it's not just the white *tannie* who thinks so!"

Contact pactrust.co.za
onsprincealbert.co.za franschhoek-hospitalityacademy.co.za

'Dr. Christo here,
how can
I help?'



In Bethlehem in the Eastern Free State, a young veterinarian is living out his passion for animal care and husbandry – in a community that has the greatest appreciation for his work.

TEXT DAWID YZELLE PHOTOS DEODET DE CONING





The life of a vet in a small farming community, where the welfare of the animals is just as important as that of the humans – and sometimes even more so – can be quite demanding. They're a friend, adviser, doctor and even psychologist, much like Dr James Herriot in *All Creatures Great and Small*, the popular BBC series (1978-1990) about the trials and misadventures of a Yorkshire vet. (Find the original series on YouTube.)

Bethlehem in the Eastern Free State is home to a vet just like this, a 36-year-old man who serves the animal lovers of the area – horse owners, cattle farmers and pet owners – with heart and soul. Going the proverbial extra mile is nothing out of the ordinary for him. He is also a family man and, what's more, has established a functional fitness community, a tight-knit "family" of people who not only train together

but support one another. (Read the box "Fit and healthy... and happy!" on page 105.)

Here and there

Christo du Plessis grew up on a farm in Tzaneen and inherited his love of animals from his grandfather Piet du Plessis. "I spent a lot of time with him and his Brahman-Limousin-Charolais crossbreeds, which led to my belief that I could build a life working with animals."

And that's exactly what Christo did. After studying at the Onderstepoort Campus of the University of Pretoria, Christo started working with a partner as a veterinarian in Bethlehem towards the end of 2014. "My brother Petrus had already settled in Bethlehem and Lana's parents [his university sweetheart, whom he later married] live in Vrede, about 150km away."

It therefore made perfect sense for him to settle in the town known as the breadbasket of the region. But barely a month later, Christo's

business partner heard that he'd been offered a job overseas and Christo had no choice but to move to Ladybrand to start working there. A month later, a position as a state veterinarian became available in Bultfontein. But before he made the move, he heard that Bethlehem also needed a state veterinarian. So, back to Bethlehem it was – this time for good.

Christo admits that his four years as a state vet were quite dull.

"No one recognises you as a vet; you're generally working with controlled diseases, which means you wait for a private vet, farmer or pet owner to contact you about an outbreak of something like rabies in dogs and cats, or contagious abortion in cattle. And there's a lot of paperwork involved."

For a proactive man who never sits still, this was hugely frustrating. Fortunately, his "can do" attitude, along with a growing client base, led to him knocking on the door of Dr Piet Louw's practice. Christo helped out when needed and when



he was available, and finally joined the practice full-time in 2019.

Eventually, in August last year, he took over the reins of what is today known as Union Vets Bethlehem, where he is supported by doctors Jano du Toit and Marzelle Steyn (locum), as well as Christel Pretorius (practice manager and veterinary nurse), Dinono Mokoena (animal assistant), Puleng Jacobs (receptionist) and Israel Lethuli (general worker).

Christo says the past six years have sometimes been difficult, but that the time has also shaped him. He has learnt that no late-night call is unimportant, no distance is too far to drive for a calving or a pregnancy test, and there is no good reason to not open the practice doors after hours to deal with an emergency.

Long-standing relationships

Christo says that approximately half of his work day involves treating small animals and the other 50%

is devoted to large animals. “My day starts with practice work, consultations, attending to animals in the hospital, and surgeries. We conduct a lot of sterilisations and castrations, including for the local Animal Welfare Society.”

Structuring his time like this was something Christo learnt from Dr Piet; he acknowledges that if it were down to him, he would already be on a farm at 08:00, working with the cattle. His great passion, and the area he wants to focus on even more in future, is the full spectrum of farm-animal reproduction, including fertility tests in bulls and cows, pregnancy examinations and embryo implantations, calving, and ensuring that newborn calves are healthy. He says he finds it extremely satisfying to be involved step-by-step in animal care, monitoring the whole process and seeing the final results.

“Even though I am not a nutritionist, I’m focusing more on nutrition these days. In my line of work, everything revolves around >

PREVIOUS PAGE, LEFT Dr Christo du Plessis examines the German shorthaired pointer Rusty at Union Vets Bethlehem. Rusty belongs to Jaco de Villiers who farms at Strydfontein between Bethlehem and Reitz. Christo spends half his day tending to domestic animals at his practice, then heads off to the farmlands to inspect the cattle.

PREVIOUS PAGE, RIGHT Christo conducts pregnancy tests on the Jersey dairy cows owned by farmer Henri Smit from Ametis just outside Bethlehem.

ABOVE Improving reproduction in herds is Christo’s great passion as a vet – from fertility testing in cows and bulls to calving.

OPPOSITE Early morning at Ametis outside Bethlehem. The young vet is in his element during his farm visits.

nutrition, and the role it plays in animal care is unbelievable. It can determine whether a cow will abort a calf, because the cow's life takes precedence over the calf's.

"The phenotypic composition – or observable characteristics – of an animal is determined by its genotype (the genetic makeup) and environment. A genetically good animal will have a poor appearance without proper nutrition. And with good nutrition, a genetically weak animal can look good. There is a fine balance between high feed costs and weak genetics. The ideal balance is good genetics, with minimal expenses to produce the best phenotypic animal."

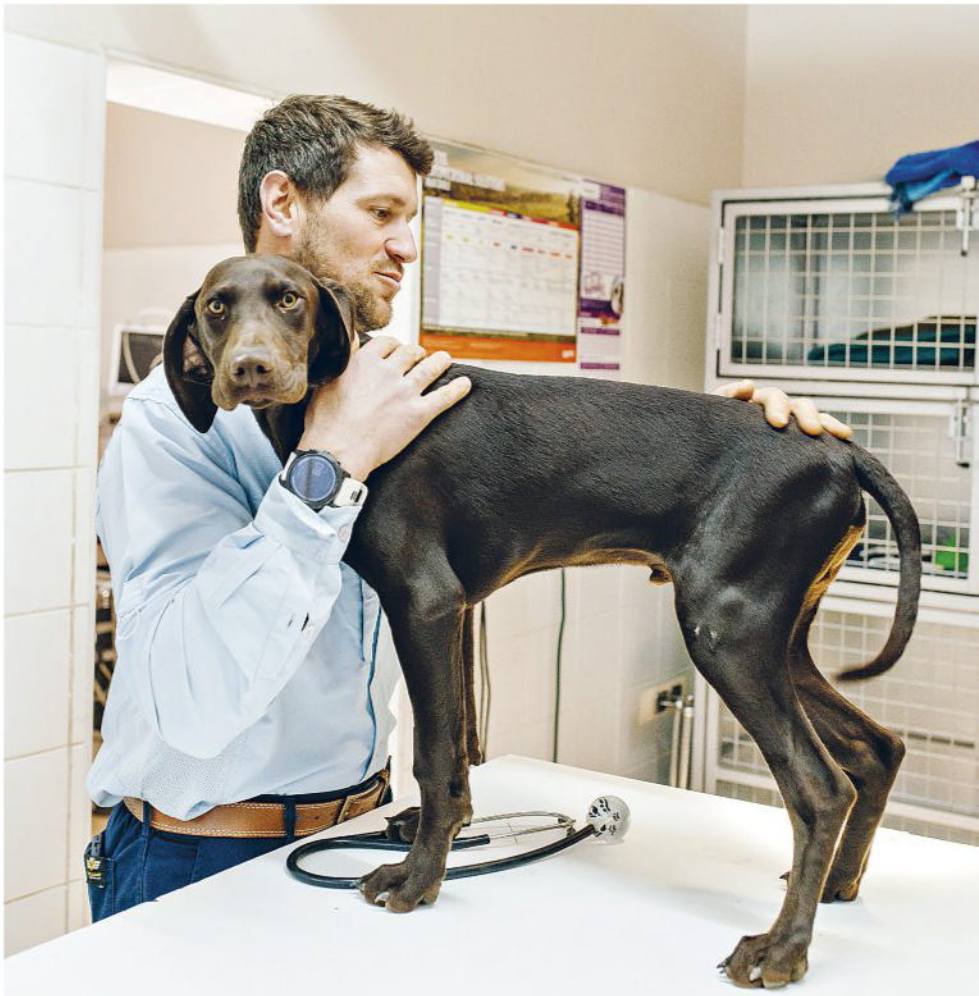
Christo finds it extremely satisfying when small adjustments in treatment produce results. "But it's equally disappointing when you work hard for a long time to improve an animal's health, making big adjustments, only for it to make hardly any difference at all. The thing is, you're working with biology."

Nature also plays a role. An unusually wet year can result in mud stress for the animals, or grass that grows too quickly, which affects its nutritional value .

Christo's work with small animals sometimes demands greater tact and compassion, as the owner of a dog or cat often responds more emotionally to a poor diagnosis than the farmer who has just heard bad news about a farm animal. It's important to Christo that he walks the journey with the farmers, building lasting relationships with them. After all, this part of the Eastern Free State is ideal for

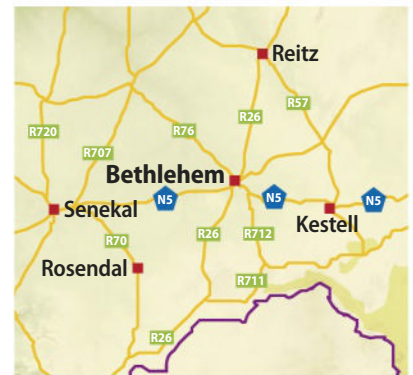
TOP RIGHT High milk-yielding dairy cows are administered medication containing minerals and vitamins.

RIGHT Christo examines Rusty's locomotive abilities during a clinical examination. Rusty remains peaceful and relaxed, a sure sign of a good vet.





LEFT Christo analyses the sperm from a bull under a microscope to assess its fertility levels.



a vet who specialises in livestock reproduction. “This is good cattle country and, just as the crop farmers have done for a long time, cattle farmers demand precision in their farming, *and* in the service they get from their vet.”

In a region where Bonsmara, Beefmaster, Angus, Brangus and Brahman crossbreeds are popular, the standards for a quality animal are relatively simple and not necessarily based on breed: “Ideally, you want a cow with a medium frame, as this reduces feed costs, and a small calf to avoid complications during birth, which also reduces costs and is, of course, much better for the cow’s welfare. The calf should be weaned when it weighs between 220 and 240 kg (known as a “heavy weaner”) – you don’t want a calf with poor genetic growth. When it comes to fertility, your animal should have a good calving interval of at least a year.”

What is a weekend?

Each month, Christo covers an average of 4000km in the region, travelling as far afield as Ficksburg, Reitz and Senekal. This means many hours spent in his bakkie, which also means that sometimes there just aren’t enough hours in the day – and only just enough diesel in the bakkie’s tank. Luckily, he’s never had to stop along the road, but, if he thinks there’s a chance this could happen, he always lets Lana know where he is.

They met as second-year students and have been married for nine years. She studied animal science but has spent the past six years being a full-time mom to the Du Plessis clan: Joshua (7), Arthur (5), Christoff (2) and their little sister Areli (six months).

The Du Plessis family live with a heart for their community. It’s a home where life can get incredibly busy, but it’s never so busy that

their door isn’t open to others. And you can expect to go home with Lana’s freshly baked sourdough bread, fresh meat she has processed herself, or Christo’s homemade jam. People have even left with a guinea fowl pie!

Being the wife of a vet in a small community like this involved quite an adjustment, and still demands patience and sacrifice. “It can be lonely, and plans easily fall by the wayside,” says Lana. “An emergency takes precedence over a braai, a visit, or time with family. The phone rings at all times of the day or night – for emergencies and advice about animals, but sometimes also for life advice. Weekends can sometimes be so busy that it feels just like a weekday.”

But when it’s a matter of life and death, the sacrifices are worth it, she says, especially when her husband’s work is making a difference.

In the beginning, it was exciting >

The Du Plessis clan are adapting to a vet's life. Lana holds six-month-old Areli in her arms, Christoff (2) is on Christo's hip, and the two oldest boys, Joshua (7) and Arthur (5), complete the picture.



Fit and healthy... and happy!

For this vet, working hard isn't restricted to his practice and farm visits. Functional fitness has given him focus and balance, which not only helps him in his work but also meets a need in the community for improved fitness, healthy living and mutual support. And it also helps to keep the stresses of life at arm's length!

"Functional fitness involves a range of natural movements," explains Christo. "It doesn't just focus on one specific group of muscles but engages a wide variety, which improves your overall fitness, balance and coordination."

His fitness routine had always consisted of running and spinning, but then he tried functional fitness for a week at a Crossfit gym in Bethlehem.

"I started doing it to lose weight and develop a 'honeymoon' body, but, over time, my perspective changed. It's a process that makes you a little better today than what you were yesterday. And it provides me with the stamina and strength that I need for the demands of the day."

Christo has been a coach since 2018, and his love for this sport discipline is so great that he and Lana, together with another partner, Leandr  Nel, opened a gym in Bethlehem in 2021. They called it Salt Functional Fitness and their motto is "We dare you to be better".

The people who come here to train form a tight-knit community. "There's a bond between athletes in a class that makes one feel at home. Everyone becomes stronger, within their own capacity and within the group, too. This is a community where we support each other. When someone doesn't arrive for a class, we reach out to one another to make sure that our 'family' is okay."

to accompany him on his work drives, and she would often lend a hand. But with three busy little boys and a baby girl in the house, this is no longer always possible. The three boys do get the chance to go to "work" with dad, though. "They love joining their father on his 'adventures' and have been exposed to many different situations. I'm grateful that, from a young age, they've been able to see their dad follow his passion and understand that job fulfilment is important; Christo is a wonderful example of how you should enjoy your job."

Of the three boys, it looks like Arthur will fill his father's shoes one day. "He's the one who walks through the practice doors, goes straight over to the animals and asks after their wellbeing," says Christo.

But the most important lesson he wants to teach his children is that there are no shortcuts in life – only hard work. 

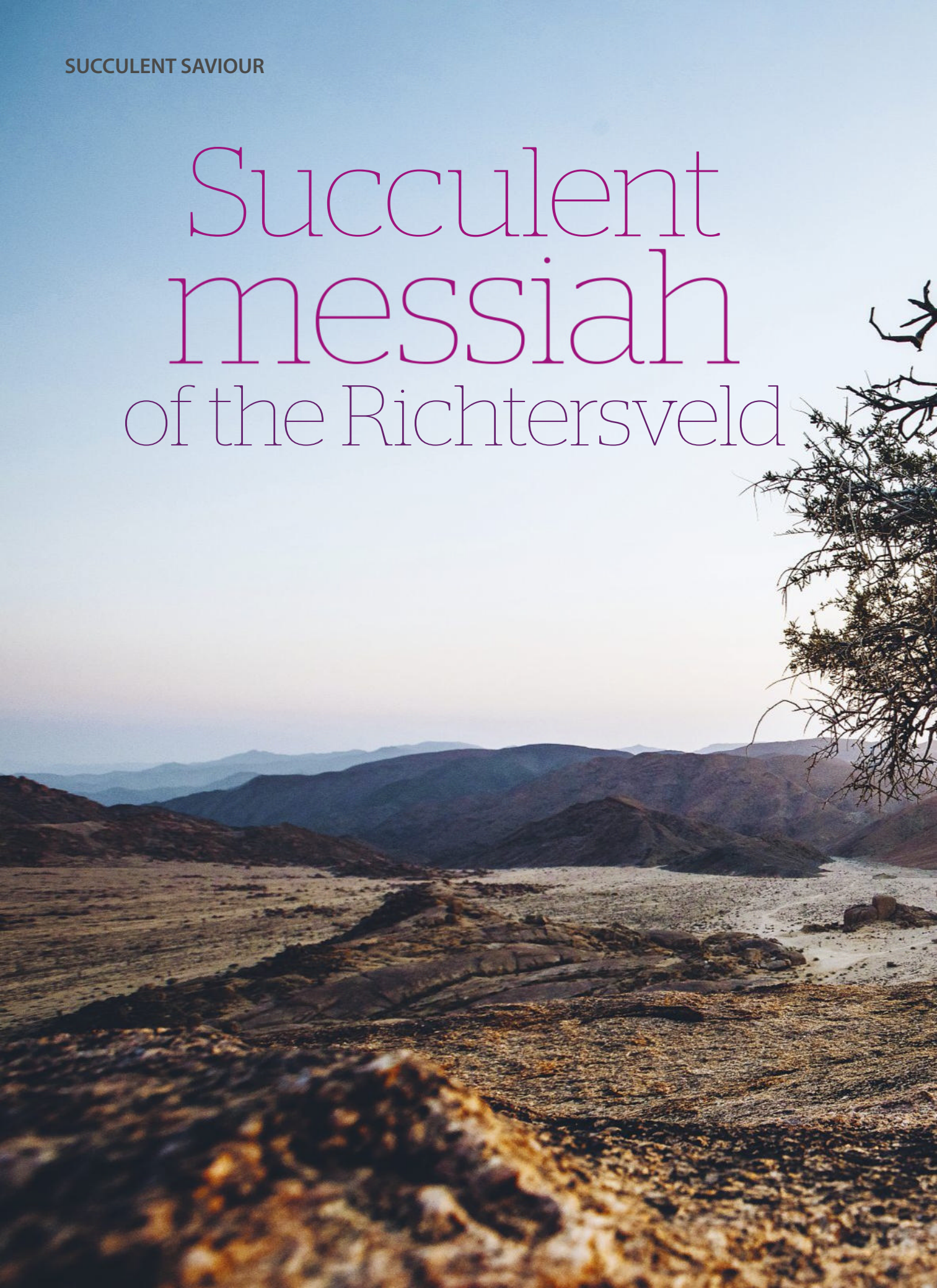
PHOTO DAWID YZELLE



Salt Functional Fitness in Bethlehem, the gym that brings balance to Christo's life. Together with Lana and a business partner, a tight-knit fitness community has been established within the broader community Christo serves as a vet.

SUCCULENT SAVIOUR

Succulent messiah of the Richtersveld



A photograph of a gnarled, twisted tree trunk growing from a rock fissure in a desert landscape. The tree's branches are dark and intricate, reaching out against a bright, hazy sky. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the scene. The ground is rocky and uneven, with some small, low-lying plants. In the background, rolling hills or mountains are visible under the soft light of the setting or rising sun.

Few people know that the Richtersveld is home to rare and beautiful succulents and other plant species that grow quietly among its sand and stones. **Pieter van Wyk** decided long ago to intercede on their behalf and is crusading diligently to ensure the survival of the vygies, quiver trees and elephant's trunk that can be found here.

TEXT AND PHOTOS WILLEM VAN DER BERG

The plants and trees of the Richtersveld have devised the most incredible ways to survive. This shepherd's tree has grown through a fissure in a granite rock on a mountain slope, so gravity ensures every little drop of available water runs down to its roots.



Pieter van Wyk was given the nickname !khubu-rub ("ant" in Nama) as a child, because he just couldn't sit still. "When I was older, someone suggested I start a tea ritual in these beautiful landscapes – you can observe nature so much better when you're calm."

Pieter van Wyk stands on the rough slope of one of the Five Sisters, the row of ancient hills that lie – like the weathered backbone of a long-dead mountain – just south of Sendelingsdrif, the main camp and entrance of the Ai Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. The earth surrounding the hills is inhospitable and barren and appears to contain no life. Only stone and sand, with clouds of red dust drifting in the late afternoon light.

"But this terrible harshness is home to the most beautiful, the rarest and the greatest number of succulents in the entire world," says Pieter. "As I child, I always wondered how it was possible for so much life to survive in such merciless conditions. That was when I decided there are more than enough people already taking care

of other people, and that I would fight for the succulents."

PIETER GREW UP surrounded by vygies in the mining town of Alexander Bay. In the furthest corner of the country, where the Orange River drowns in the cold, cold sea and the gale-force southerly winds gnaw at everything they can get their sandy teeth into.

"I am the youngest of four children. The runt of the house," he says. "I was born too soon after my sister, and my mother didn't have enough milk for me. I was bottle-fed, like a little lamb."

His parents are ordinary, good people, he says. Jannie "Vlakhaas" van Wyk was a fitter and turner at the diamond mine, and Sussie van Wyk worked at Lewis Stores.

"To them, a plant was just a plant, and science was a curse. My father was worried and told me a few

times, 'You'll have to give up this plant business; you're not going to find work.' But I had inherited my love of nature from them. They took us into the veld often. We camped and learned how to track. My mother's family farmed in the Richtersveld for a long time, and her mother, Ouma Nellie, taught me which plants were edible and which could be used for medicine. She could also speak Nama fluently."

One night, six-year-old Pieter listened to Ouma Nellie and Tannie Hessie Coetzee discussing jackals at the sheep kraal. According to Ouma Nellie, the only good jackal was a dead jackal. Pieter wondered why, then, God had allowed the jackals onto Noah's Ark. "When I asked the question, they were annoyed and told me to stop acting clever in front of the grown-ups. They didn't have an answer, but it just shows that, as a child, I was already thinking about nature and conservation." >



You quickly learn that in the Richtersveld there is life where none appears to be. Against bare stones or in the seas of sand, everywhere, there are small breaths, little heartbeats. And when Pieter finds them, he takes a seed to ensure he's prepared for an uncertain future.





ABOVE There isn't a book, shelf, drawer or cupboard in Pieter's house where you won't find samples of plants.

ABOVE RIGHT Pieter painted this landscape with his mouth when he was in Angola. "I keep it to remember the children I worked with there. It also reminds me that you can do anything if you put your mind to it."

OPPOSITE The giant quiver tree (*Aloidendron pillansii*) is one of the many endangered species of the area. Its seeds are harvested for cultivation at the Richtersveld Desert Botanical Garden's nursery, and then reintroduced into the veld.



School teacher René Mostert helped Pieter expand his plant knowledge and develop a better understanding of science. "But there was very little information about the plants in our area. I told her that I'd write a book about the plants of the Richtersveld one day. I started that book when I was 14 and I just kept going. I am dyslexic and struggled terribly with spelling at school. In fact, I still do. But I can remember and write the scientific names of plants. It's a new language I learnt; the 5000 species of the Richtersveld are like an alphabet in my head.

"I've already worked through 40000 specimens. My whole house is filled with specimens and photos and full descriptions of each one. I can also remember exactly where I found them. That's something I can't explain. Maybe I'm a little bit mad. There's someone walking this path with me now, psychologically, trying to understand how it's possible for me to know all these plants by heart. And how it's possible for me to remember all

the data. What she does say is that I have a form of autism, but I don't have a problem socialising. At any rate, the book is finished now. I just need to make time to focus for a while and finally put everything together. I *have* to do it. For the Richtersveld. For Miss René. And for my parents, who took me into the veld for all those years and had to listen to my plant stories, probably thinking their poor child had chewed on too much *harpuisbos*."

AFTER SCHOOL, PIETER stayed in Alexander Bay, working for the museum and library, and offering tours of the mine. In 2010, at the age of 21, he went to Angola with a missionary organisation to help children who had either lost their parents or were affected by landmine injuries or polio.

"I was meant to do this for six months, but I stayed for almost four years. It was phenomenal. One of the high points of my life.

"A school asked me to help



a disabled child to do something practical. I didn't know what the level of disability was. Long story short, I spent two years teaching children to write and draw with their mouths. Children who couldn't use their hands. I obviously also had to learn how to do it myself. Yes, it was a life-changing time. A massive lesson in gratitude."

While he was recuperating at home after contracting malaria for the seventh time, his mother applied for work at the Richtersveld Transfrontier Park on his behalf.

"It was very basic contract work, R2200 a month, and there was no accommodation available. But I really wanted to be closer to the park, so, at the end of 2014, I moved here and lived in a tent on the nursery grounds for seven months.

All through summer. It was hell. In the evenings I would shower two or three times, fully dressed in my pyjamas, just to cool down.

"Nothing was happening at the nursery, and the mine was busy turning over a piece of land nearby. I went to ask the park manager whether I could rescue the quiver trees and succulents that were going to be destroyed and plant them in our gardens. That's how my story at the park and the nursery began."

Since that early conservation work with the Richtersveld plants, the park's nursery and gardens have grown continuously and become more beautiful – and the mining activities in the area have increased just as steadily.

"The Richtersveld's greatest asset is its extraordinary minerals.

But the tragedy is that they are also the region's biggest threat, some two billion years after the earth's first mountain was formed – our Rosyntjieberg here in the Richtersveld – because of humanity's endless search for more."

Where he could – and after receiving permission – Pieter removed plants before the mine's bulldozers started digging. "One day a miner said to me: 'Everywhere we want to mine, you people keep finding rare little plants. How is that possible?' The thing is, rare plants also like rare minerals. We have seeds here from a very rare plant that has since been completely wiped out. When we collected the seeds, we never imagined that they would be all that was left."

"One day a miner said to me: 'Everywhere we want to mine, you people keep finding rare little plants. How is that possible?' The thing is, rare plants also like rare minerals."

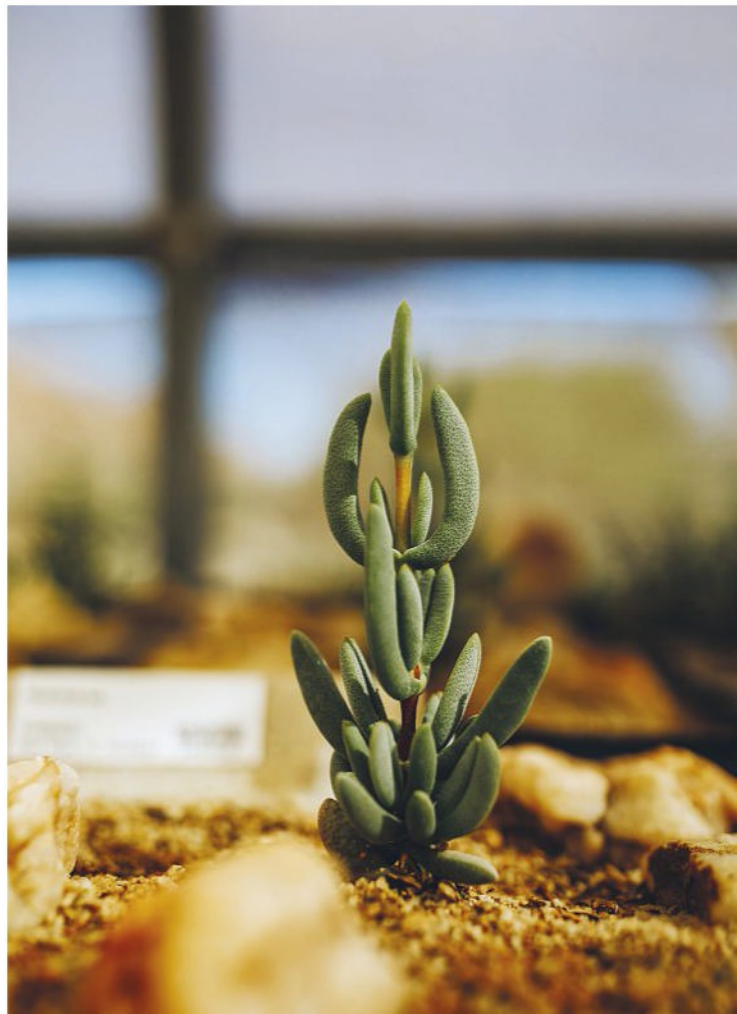
IN THE PAST 10 YEARS, however, plant theft in the Richtersveld has caused the greatest damage. In 2015, Pieter happened to see a post on Facebook that made him realise trouble was brewing. >

SUCCULENT SAVIOUR

RIGHT "If you go onto social media, you'll be shocked at how obsessed people are about our plants. It almost borders on a sick fetish," says Courtney Cockrell, a member of the nursery team.

BELOW AND BOTTOM RIGHT You'll find many of the Richtersveld's most extraordinary succulents available for sale at the botanical garden's nursery.

BOTTOM LEFT Zelda Kobis manages one of the nursery's grow tunnels, but she, like every other member of the team, also has a responsibility to the plants in the outside gardens, which have also fallen foul of poachers.





Conophytums receive special attention at the botanical garden. Known as “living pebbles”, these tiny plants are the most widely poached and endangered. “They are our special children. I keep an eagle eye on them and give them plenty of love. No one comes into this area unless I’m here,” says Zelda Joseph, who manages the *Conophytum* house.

“The post advertised newly imported plants from South Africa in Hungary and Hong Kong. All the import permits were also shown. But then I saw a bushman’s candle with a lichen on it that only occurs here in the Alexander Bay area. It’s impossible for humans to cultivate that lichen. I contacted the Department of Environmental Affairs and asked, ‘How can you issue permits for plants that occur in such a small and specific habitat?’ They conducted an investigation and informed me that no such permit had ever been issued. The so-called permits were forged.”

Following more investigation, Pieter discovered that there is a massive market for rare succulents in the East, where buyers are prepared to pay thousands of dollars for foreign plants. “It’s about status. Just to know you have one and can say, ‘I have it.’ People go crazy when they hear that something is rare.”

In 2019, the poaching of plants suddenly increased quite rapidly after the Northern Cape’s succulents were featured prolifically on social media. “They went viral, and the plants were given all sorts of exotic names like Hot Lips. And then the whole world wanted Hot Lips. It was total madness.”

During that crazy time of poaching, the Port Nolloth police caught three Chinese “tourists” with 38 plants they had stolen from the park’s nursery and gardens. “Still with the labels on, just as we had placed them in the nursery. I had to go identify our plants, and then the police asked if we wanted the poached plants they recovered. I said, as long as they’re from the Richtersveld, we can take them. Well, it turned out that every single week, nonstop, the police would come with another case. Then I had to go to court and try to find out from the accused where the plants

came from. By November 2019, we had already accounted for over 70 000 plants that had been taken.”

The situation worsened in 2020 during the pandemic. Pieter reckons this was as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown. People’s wanted to have something special in their homes.

“It was a total frenzy. The local people doing the collecting thought they were going to make a lot of money and didn’t just remove 100 plants; they would take 2000. It doesn’t work like that. The guy or syndicate you’re poaching the plants for will still only pay you for the 100 they wanted. There are places where poachers raked large sections of land to collect plants. That’s how more than 100 species of miniature succulents were wiped out on one mountain in Bushmanland. And they weren’t even all collected. They were just left there, with their guts exposed. That’s why I’ve often wondered whether I should offer >



ABOVE Gesiggiemalvas ("face geraniums"), which you'll find in one of the park's gardens, can apparently be eaten to alleviate stomach complaints.

ABOVE RIGHT "We're glad we're in a position to save these plants, but they belong in the veld," says Richard Januarie in the quiver tree garden. That's why, from time to time, plants are returned to the Richtersveld in areas where numbers have dwindled.

TOP Cuttings and seeds from rare and endangered plants are used to regenerate new life.

TOP MIDDLE Poached plants, like these dwarf spekbooms, are carefully cleaned and treated before they're replanted in the nursery or outside gardens.

TOP RIGHT A visit to the park in winter will reward you with the sight of myriad flowers blooming in the nursery and gardens.

a course for the poachers – to show them how to collect plants and what to collect so that we don't have this massive destruction."

The poached plants brought to the park are thoroughly inspected and treated by the nursery team before being planted in tunnels or the outdoor gardens. Cuttings are also taken from these plants and seeds harvested for continued cultivation. Some of the cultivated seedlings are reintroduced into the wild and the rest are available for sale in the nursery.

"Our plants are the cheapest in the world. We want people to buy them and we want them to grow abundantly everywhere. I believe the best way to stop the poaching problem is to grow the plants out of trouble."

BUT IT'S NOT EASY to get people to care about a little succulent. There's

no blood, no destroyed carcasses, no crying orphaned animal.

"I try to speak on behalf of the plants wherever I am. To tell people about this incredible, crazy place I come from. One of the driest pieces of land on earth, but the richest in plants. The most beautiful and strangest little plants that you only find here, sometimes in a patch no bigger than your living room. Many days I feel like I'm fighting alone and nothing changes. But whenever I think I've lost the will to continue, I discover something new, or something wonderful happens in nature here. And that gives me hope. Like, *incredible hope*."

For example, there was a bulb along the Orange River that made him wait for 21 years before he saw it flower. "I lay there for an hour and just gazed at it," he says.

And then there are the 25 new plant species he discovered in the Richtersveld, one of which was

hidden in the shade of the rocks on a single south-facing cliff. A family member of the sunflower.

Knowing how proud his parents are of him and his “plant business” also gives him strength to continue.

“When my father comes here, he always takes a walk through the tunnels. And each time he says the same thing: ‘I can’t believe all this comes from the Richtersveld.’”

The wounds of the veld have left scars on Pieter’s soul, and he often has to remind himself that the earth is far older and wiser than humanity. “Look at this landscape. There were once forests and lakes here. They have disappeared, died out, become desert. But life didn’t vanish. It changed, and the hardships and trials have created this fantastic place with so many unique plants. It’s arrogant to think we can destroy nature. She will still be making new plans and plants long after we’ve all turned to dust.” 📺



Watch the short documentary film *Vet vannie land* (English subtitles are provided) on Showmax, which explores Pieter van Wyk’s fight against the illegal poaching of unique and rare succulent species endemic to the Northern Cape. The film was the recipient of three awards at kykNET’s Silwerskerm Festival in Cape Town: Best Short Documentary, Best Directing (Danielle McDonald) and Best Editing (Jurg Slabbert).

ABOVE Yolanda Joseph manages the area of the nursery where plants, damaged or discarded by poaching, are replanted. “The sad thing is that we need a whole lot more of these tunnels if we want to rescue all the plants that end up here.”

BELOW Park manager Priscilla Magerman is proud of Pieter and his nursery team. They have made the entranceway to the park so beautiful and interesting that visitors can spend a whole day here.



Let's go into the garden

Ah, wonderful autumn – the season that invites you to slow down and approach life at a gentler pace. Be inspired by an accidental flower farmer, a fynbos whisperer, a Dior jeweller who's crafting botanical artworks, and a clay artist from the Koo Valley.

BY MAJA PALM



The accidental flower farmer

If you taught yourself how to grow your own vegetables during lockdown, there's nothing stopping you from cultivating cut flowers too! **Eloize du Preez**, who farms with her husband, Jean, at Rockfields Vineyards outside Rawsonville, explains how her love for displaying fresh flowers in her home grew into a business called Elle Florence.

What inspired you to start farming with cut flowers?

We started a vegetable garden during lockdown and it was lovely to be able to share our harvest. Back then, I was buying flowers for the house every second Friday. Because our veggie garden was so successful, I decided that, for one year, instead of buying a bunch of flowers, I would purchase a cut flower plant instead. Before long, instead of just 20 stems (all my personal budget would allow), I had harvested up 50 stems and there was an abundance of flowers in the house. Before I knew it, I had too many flowers, so I started selling them in 2022.

How did you decide on the name?

My grandmother's name was Florence Violet Ray. I considered using her full name but decided it was too long, so I combined it with the "Elle" in Ronelle, the name of my eldest daughter. Florence means "blossoming, flourishing and prosperous".

How many varieties do you grow?

Because this is still new to me, I'm experimenting to see which flowers are best suited to our environment. But I have successfully grown delphiniums, hydrangeas, celosias, campanulas, stocks, ranunculus, anemones, dahlias and gomphrenas.



Eloize du Preez with the fruits of her labour: an array of dahlias and filler blooms grown on her flower farm..

OPPOSITE Something for every season. Ranunculus put on a spectacular show on the farm during spring.

Your husband farms with wine grapes. Does this help your business?

It does for sure! His knowledge of our climate, environment, potential diseases and irrigation is a major advantage. He's my "employee of the month" every month!

What is the greatest challenge?

There are two challenges. The weather is at the top of the list because it's not something you can control. And then it's also very difficult to anticipate how many flowers will be ready for cutting, and whether you can promise a specific number to a florist or bride. A lot can happen in three months.

What brings you the greatest joy?

When I arrive home after spending most of the day driving the children to their sports, the first thing I do is look at the flowers. I walk through each bed, taking notes and planning. It's a ritual that brings me peace. The beds are usually at their loveliest on Sunday evenings (we start picking on Monday mornings). I walk around admiring every perfectly formed flower.

What is your favourite flower?

Although I don't yet grow them myself, St Joseph and stargazer lilies are my favourites.

What makes Elle Florence unique?

It's a small, personal business. I think carefully about every bouquet before I create it. I'm heavily influenced by the person it's intended for. I know most of my clients, so I know what they like. I have a heart for my clients.

Eloize supplies cut flowers to clients all over the Boland. Visit her stand at the PicardiPlace night market on the Slanghoek Road outside Rawsonville on the last Friday of every month.

 PicardiPlace  picardiplace.co.za
 082 788 9019

Contact  @elle_florence_
 072 289 2090 >

✿ KAROO ART

A drop of fynbos

Fynbos Drops, a simple yet magical artform that immortalises fynbos in transparent resin, was “born” in 2010 near Cape Point from Daya Heller’s reverence for nature’s cycles and the extraordinary biodiversity of the fynbos kingdom. Each drop-shaped artwork celebrates nature’s intelligent design, and also symbolises the “tears of the earth”.

Daya creates each artwork by hand on an off-grid farm near Calitzdorp in the Little Karoo. She hand-selects each flower, casts it, sands and drills the drops, takes photos, and handles all the orders and communication herself.

Her hard work has been richly

rewarded. Fynbos Drops have been sold in art galleries all over the world for a long time and are also available in the gift shops at Grootbos Private Nature Reserve and Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden.

You’re inspired by the seasonal nature of fynbos. Do you make the drops all year round?

I work throughout the year but the flowers I use change with the seasons. I dry the fynbos to enable me to continue casting, but there are months when certain flowers aren’t available. The most popular flowers – blushing bride (*Serruria*

florida) and proteas – bloom from July through spring. Beautiful ericas flower in winter and everlastings in summer.

Where do you source your flowers?

In July I buy blushing bride and king proteas from Pomona Farm outside Piketberg and Florburgh Proteas in George. I also gather flowers on the farm where we live. And every year Grootbos sends me a species of erica that only grows on their reserve.

For what reason do you choose to work with fynbos?

Fynbos are drier plants that retain their colour better when cast

These drop-shaped artworks immortalise fynbos in resin, symbolising the intelligence of nature’s designs and depicting the “tears of the earth”.





ABOVE The founder and owner of Fynbos Drops, Daya Heller.

ABOVE LEFT Pink ericas are one of Fynbos Drops' best sellers.

LEFT Proteas and blushing brides are among the most popular flowers immortalised in Fynbos Drops.

BELOW After the flowers are cast – a process best accompanied by music under the Karoo night sky – they are left overnight to set. Once removed from the moulds, they are sanded, polished and sealed. The flower's colour and form come to life in the final product (as seen in the bottom photo).



in resin. Their structure is also perfectly suited to the process. Softer flowers like roses or daisies quickly lose colour and texture.

What are your favourite and most popular flowers?

King proteas and blushing brides are the most well known and most striking, but I'm always on the lookout for new plants. Pink ericas, everlastings and blushing brides are the top sellers, and I love white bristle bush, brunias and leucadendrons.

How long does it take to make a drop?

The process involves a number of steps. First the flowers are dried and cast before being left overnight to set. They are then removed from the moulds, sanded, polished, sealed and finished. Finally, they are given one last finish to prepare them for standing or hanging.

We currently make 20 to 30 drops a week. Raphael Moyo, a young man from Malawi, has been working with me since 2020 and he is meticulous and patient. I trained him in the sanding, polishing and sealing work. It takes a lot of patience, time and a keen eye because each drop must be perfect.

What is the most enjoyable part of the process?

I still get excited when I remove a drop from its mould; it's always a surprise to see what the final flower looks like. Once I start polishing the drop, I see the plant's colour and shape for the first time. It's also a very special experience to do the casting under the stars with beautiful music playing in the background.

Prices R700–R3 000, depending on the size, which ranges from 9cm to 19cm.

Contact @fynbosdrops
fynbosdrops.co.za >

GELLI PRINTS

The finest detail...

Gelli printing is a fairly unknown technique that captures the unique details of plants in printed works of art. Beulah Liebenberg of Lieben Printmaking Studio offers workshops demonstrating the technique. She studied jewellery design and printmaking and has designed jewellery for fashion shows by Dior, Givenchy and Dries van Noten in Paris. She explains more about gelli printing.

What is gelli printing?

A botanical gelli print is a mono-print made with a gelli plate, ink and botanical material such as flowers, leaves, grass and even roots and weeds.

What is used to make the gelli?

There are different recipes on the internet, but I developed my own one for a very firm plate. The main ingredients are gelatine, glycerine and water. The gelli plate can be melted and poured into different shapes over and over again.

How does one start?

You begin by mixing your chosen ink colour with a palette knife. Then you cover the roller evenly with the ink and roll a thin layer of ink over the gelli plate. Afterwards, you place your plant material onto the ink. The gelli plate is soft enough to

capture the unique delicate details of each plant. When you remove the plants from the ink, you really notice all the detail. Now your plate is ready to make a print. You place your paper over the plate – I use Fabriano – rub it, then carefully pull it away. Voilà! The most difficult part of the process is rolling the correct quantity of ink onto the plate. Incidentally, I only use Speedball ink.

Which plant material do you prefer?

The more veins and textures the plant material has, the more visible they will be on the print. Unusual leaf shapes, grasses and roots work well, as do vegetable leaves such as spinach, tomatoes and celery. Hibiscus is the most popular flower to use because it reveals so much detail. Soft or smooth leaves such as roses and succulents are less successful, and hard bark and thorns damage the plate.

Tell us more about your workshops.

I love gardening, just like my mom, Beulah, and grandmother, Cathy. The garden on their farm in

Zimbabwe was huge and full of colour. That's probably where I developed an appreciation for the finer details of plants.

At my workshops, I show everyone how to master the technique and also discuss composition. It's always lovely to see how people enjoy discovering that they too can create wonderful works of art. Each workshop lasts for 3½ hours, during which it's possible to produce around 10 unique prints. And once you've started making gelli prints, you won't want to stop!

Sometimes there'll be three generations of the same family at a workshop, which I find really special.

Wine-tasting is an extra element of fun at the workshops. My husband, Alwyn Liebenberg, is a winemaker in South Africa and the Netherlands, and we invite the attendees to try our very own Lieben Wines.

Keep an eye on Beulah's social media for dates.

Contact @@lieben_printmaking_studio

f Lieben – Printmaking Studio

☎ 082 896 5269

RIGHT The main components of the gelli plate are gelatine, glycerine and water. Beulah developed her own recipe, which creates a firm plate that she can use over and over.

FAR RIGHT TOP Beulah Liebenberg, owner of Lieben Printmaking Studio, studied jewellery design and printmaking.

FAR RIGHT BOTTOM The more veins and textures the plant material has, the more visible they will be on the print. Hibiscus flowers work particularly well.





FAR LEFT Lize creates special designs using indigenous herbs for the Montagu Herb Festival.

LEFT Deep green is one of Lize's favourite colours to work with, but she says it's also the most challenging.

BELOW Lize Rossouw, owner of Hartspotteri in the Koo Valley.

HARTSPOTTERI

Clay art from the Koo Valley

Brookhill Farm stretches extensively through the Koo Valley northwest of Montagu – so much so that the farm is embraced by fynbos on one side and Karoo vegetation on the other. This is where Lize Rossouw finds inspiration for her unique clay artworks, called Hartspotteri.

"We're fortunate that the Langeberg runs through our farm," says Lize. "Beautiful fynbos grows at the foot of the mountain and I like to use silver stoebe, white bristle bush and heath in my designs. On the Karoo side of the farm, I pick helichrysum and rhinoceros bush."

For the annual Montagu Herb Festival, Lize creates special designs using indigenous herbs from the area: wild sage, pelargonium, wild rosemary, lion's ear and buchu. "I also love using garden herbs such as mint, oregano, thyme and basil. But my favourites are sagewood and plectranthus."

Lize says she grew up under her grandmother's feet in her clay studio. "We were crazy about shaping flowers and mice from the clay."

Then, about eight years ago, Lize finally bought her own kiln with money her grandfather had left for her when she was 20 years old. She set up a studio in an outbuilding on their farm and got to work.

She doesn't use a potter's wheel or readymade moulds, but makes each item by hand. Her two assistants, Jacqueline and Rieke Verhoog, help with the sanding and firing.

Lize says she loves working with clay as it's so forgiving. "It's a wonderful medium. When something isn't working, you crumple it up and start over. If it dries out and cracks, you add water and start again. You can inject as much energy and passion into your work as you want to. Clay *wants* to be worked."

And yet, she says, it keeps you on

your toes. "You never know what will come out on the other side when you arrange the pieces in the oven for firing. It's a fickle process. I'm over the moon if I can sell three of every five pieces that come out of the oven."

This year, Lize is offering workshops on the farm for groups of eight to 10 people. They are usually planned for Saturdays from 10:00 to 15:00.

"You really don't have to be artistic to attend or enjoy one of these sessions. It's wonderful to watch people start to relax as soon as they start working with their hands."

Visit Lize's Instagram page to see her creations. Everything she uploads is usually for sale. Simply send her a message.

Price R850 p.p. (food and wine included).

Bookings 📧 hartspotteri@gmail.com

Contact 📱 @hartspotteri 📺

RENETTE'S AUTUMN FOOD

Autumnal fare in *Rosendal*

Autumn is a transitional season, which means when you're planning a meal, you first need to sit down, take your time and give it some thought. Something has passed; something new – yet unknown – is on its way. We invite you to take a seat at **Renette Vosloo's** delicious traditional autumn table.

RECIPES AND STYLING RENETTE VOSLOO

PHOTOS WILLEM VAN DER BERG





Every season and region has its own distinctive character with sharp and softer edges. Just like people. But the two “in-between

seasons”, autumn and spring, are like true “middle children”. They display some of the quirks of their older and younger siblings, without being completely like them. They each have their own unique mix of attributes, which, for those who watch them closely and love them, can inspire the most wonderful creativity. Autumn and spring are an inspiration to all.

While the colourful splendour of spring blossoms heralds the arrival of sunny days and new life after an unforgiving winter, autumn offers a slower pace, the chance to reflect, gather around the fire with cosy knee blankets, and savour slow-cooked, fragrant foods that hint at things to come during the harsher months that lie ahead. But, there's still time for lighter socks and blankets, and to start unearthing the winter clothes packed at back of the cupboard.

I arrived in Rosendal at the end of March 2025. The beginning of autumn. The pomegranates were abundant and there were still dahlias in the beds. But the rain had followed me from the Cape, and there was already a nip in the air.

I quickly familiarised myself with the Jewel coal stove and immediately started preparing delicious, long, slow stews and Malay dishes – like Tannie Cass Abrahams's *denningvleis* – that simmer overnight in heavy cast-iron pots, then slowly cool down as the stove burns out while I lie dreaming under the feather duvet!

Of course, I had my own grand plans for what I wanted to include regularly on the menu of my home restaurant, Rooitamatie. Duck and salmon were on the list. But, oh dear, I quickly learnt what it means to live in a small, remote town. “Bohemian” supplies come from far away! >



MENU

STARTER

Butternut gnocchi with
spiced nut sprinkle

MEAT COURSES

Venison leg with caul fat,
mushrooms and sherry

Easiest orange duck and
duckfat potato molehills

SIDE DISHES

Creamy white pepper beans

Turmeric cauliflower with
paprika and garlic butter

Clove and honey-roasted
beetroot with shredded
dates

DESSERT

Upside-down pear tart with
cardamom and sweet-wine
sauce and clotted cream

Duck and fish arrive only occasionally and by goodwill, which, believe me, is plentiful! That's why their arrival on the menu is announced with great fanfare!

I discovered duck for the first time in the autumn of 1974, when I was 10-and-a-half years old.

We lived in the platteland of the Highveld. In April, we were already well into autumn and it was properly cold, which meant that in May, when my mother, Marie Claassen, celebrated her birthday, we had already stopped playing outside for quite some time.

I was lying on a rug with beautiful leafy patterns, listening to the radio as the sun-filter curtains danced lightly in the breeze. In my hands was the most beautiful recipe book I have ever seen. I was accustomed to church-bazaar recipe books containing every imaginable kind of biscuit, along with homemade sweets, tarts and large cakes, but there were no photographs to accompany them.

Then we acquired the cookbook *Kook met vertroue* (Cook with Confidence). I couldn't tear my eyes

away from the recipes! I started reading from the beginning. There was everything from a cheese-and-apple-juice party for teenagers to Chinese fried chicken and even homemade ice cream made with evaporated milk. And the recipes were accompanied by the most dazzling photos. Banana-pineapple salad was presented as a candle, with a drizzle of mayonnaise dripping down like candle wax and a red cherry as the flame. Everything was decorated with glacé cherries and parsley.

It was the '70s. My mouth was hanging open, practically watering. I couldn't get past the duck. Banana duck with orange sauce. I read the recipe like a story. It shone. It spoke to me. It was May. My mother's birthday month. I wanted to, and I could.

I made a list of the ingredients. The next day I was on the bus to Middelburg. First to Volkskas bank with my savings book, then to OK Bazaars. Mommy would have a lunch of melon and parma ham as a starter, and banana duck with orange sauce as the main course. I have no memory of the dessert.

But enough reminiscing. Let's cook!

Renette and Rooitamatie

Renette Vosloo and her husband, Emile – or Mielie, as everyone knew him – started the Rooitamatie guesthouse in 2015 in Muckleneuk, Pretoria, where they soon became known for their legendary dinners. A dream team like few others.

Shortly before that, in 2014, Renette had made it to the top four in the second season of the popular Afrikaans reality cooking show *Kokkedoor*.

In 2018, Renette and Mielie moved to Pringle Bay, where they established a home restaurant. But then Covid-19 descended on the world in 2020 and the lockdown regulations brought their small business to a standstill. A further setback struck Renette in September of the same year when Mielie passed away suddenly.

After a few years of living in various places in the Cape, Renette decided in March 2025 to make beautiful Rosendal in the Eastern Free State her home and to revive Rooitamatie. Located in the Blacksmith's Stables in Kriek Street, Rooitamatie is where guests can enjoy a two- or three-course dinner every day of the week (bookings are necessary). On Mondays and Tuesdays, she hosts tea time from 10:00 to 15:00, where guests can enjoy light savouries such as crêpes, scones and quiches, as well as decadent temptations like New York cheesecake, Black Forest cake and "the best ever" milk tart!

Contact 📧 renette@rooitamatie.co.za 📱 Rooitamatie 📷 @dierooitamatie
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Butternut gnocchi with spiced nut sprinkle

I can think of nothing better than pumpkin or butternut to usher in autumn fare. Of course, one can make delicious soups with them, but if I get the chance to serve gnocchi, I grab it. When I close my eyes and think of the word “gnocchi”, I see soft little sponge cushions straight from Italian food heaven. My butternut gnocchi gets a little bit of potato, too, for texture *and* flavour. You’ll find a recipe for gluten-free, low-carbohydrate pumpkin gnocchi in my book, *Die Rooitamatie storie – van Huiske tot prentjies* (*The Rooitamatie Story – from Home Cooking to Picture-Perfect Food*).

Serves **6–8**

Preparation time **45 minutes**

Cooking time **30 minutes to roast the vegetables and 20 minutes for the gnocchi**

YOU NEED

- 2 medium-sized butternuts, cut in half lengthwise, seeds removed
- 1 large potato
- ± 200 g cake wheat flour
- 1 extra-large egg
- butter, to serve

FOR THE SPICED NUT SPRINKLE

- 100 g toasted salted almonds, finely chopped
- 50 g toasted sesame seeds
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) toasted coriander seeds, finely ground using a pestle and mortar, or crushed as finely as possible with the flat blade of a large knife
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) dried thyme



THIS IS HOW

Make the nut sprinkle Mix all the ingredients for the sprinkle and set aside.

Preheat the oven to 190°C, and roast the unpeeled butternut and potato together until soft but not dry. The potato might take a bit longer to cook. Peel the potato and scoop out the butternut flesh with a spoon. Mash the potato and butternut well and press the mash through a sturdy sieve until it’s as smooth as possible. Weigh the mash, add one third of its weight in cake wheat flour, mix the egg into the mixture, then knead it lightly to form a soft, pliable dough.

Cover a work surface with a reasonably thick layer of flour. Shape the dough into sausages approximately as thick as a man’s thumb. Cut them into pieces 1½ cm thick and, if you like, use a fork to press each one to create a ridged pattern. Bring a saucepan containing well-salted water to the boil and cook the gnocchi in batches – when they start to float, they’re ready. Transfer the cooked gnocchi to a suitable dish in which you can keep them warm until you are ready to serve. You may have to refresh the water during the cooking process.

Place knobs of butter onto the gnocchi after you remove them from the cooking water. Just before serving, lightly sprinkle the nut topping over the pumpkin gnocchi, or serve separately so everyone can add according to their taste preference. >

Venison leg with caul fat, mushrooms and sherry

Venison is one of my favourite meats. Hunting season in South Africa, specifically in the northernmost province, Limpopo, starts in March, which is why I like to include venison on my autumn menu. Larger chain stores often stock good, conveniently packaged cuts in the meat section. When I was growing up, impala and kudu were the most popular meats for making biltong and for the table. I was recently introduced to reedbuck in the Free State, which I find has a similar flavour to impala. So, I'm going to be serving reedbuck leg as the red meat on my autumn table this year, accompanied by an easy yet tasty rich mushroom-and-bacon cream sauce flavoured with sweet sherry. I've sifted through venison recipes for many years and still think this is the very best flavour combination. I like to add cream because the meat itself contains little fat. And when you add red wine, it "stains" the cream, giving it a strange purplish-blue colour. Or at least, that's how this cooking *tannie* sees it. Since I'm talking about personal preferences, I must add that when it comes to choosing meat, I generally make sure I'm at the front of the queue for venison rather than abattoir meat whenever possible. And yes, I know this is a huge privilege.

Serves **6–10**

Preparation time **35 minutes plus 3 days' standing time**

Cooking time **± 60 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **1 leg of venison, approximately 3 kg, deboned (reedbuck, impala, springbok or blesbok work well)**
- **2 ℓ boiling water mixed with 1 tablespoon (15 ml) non-iodized salt, such as kosher or sea salt, then cooled**
- **3 cups (750 ml) amasi or buttermilk**
- **5 or 6 whole garlic cloves, halved lengthwise**
- **150–200 g bacon, cut into cubes of about 2 x 1 cm, for stuffing the leg**
- **±1 teaspoon (5 ml) salt**
- **a pinch each of black pepper, nutmeg, ground cloves and allspice**
- **1 whole sheep's caul fat, big enough to pull over the leg**

FOR THE SAUCE

- **200 g smoked bacon, chopped very finely**
- **1 medium-sized onion, finely chopped**
- **1 packet (200 g) portobello mushrooms, sliced (or use brown mushrooms)**
- **1 sprig fresh rosemary, leaves stripped and finely chopped**
- **1 cup (250 ml) sweet sherry**
- **1 cup (250 ml) fresh cream**

THIS IS HOW

Start preparing the leg three days before your lunch. Place it in the salted water in a plastic container in the fridge. This step begins the tenderisation process and helps to make the meat less "bloody".

After two days, remove the meat from the salted water, pat it dry, then place it in a clean dish containing the buttermilk, which should properly cover the meat. Let the meat stand overnight, then drain off the liquid the next day. Thoroughly dry the meat using a cloth.

Using a sharp knife, pierce even holes into the flesh, alternately inserting the halved garlic cloves and bacon cubes. Rub the meat thoroughly with salt, black pepper and the spice mix.

Roll up the meat as well as you can and cover it with the sheep's caul fat. Secure it with toothpicks or butcher's twine. Using your hands, lightly grease the leg with butter or oil. Place the meat on the rack of a roasting pan and cover with foil. For a well-cooked, extremely tender result, roast the meat at 160°C for at least 1 hour. Test it to see if it's tender enough according to preference. If you're satisfied, remove the foil, increase the oven temperature to 190°C and continue roasting until it's golden brown (approximately 15 minutes).

For a wonderfully juicy, medium-rare result, roast the leg under foil for 20 minutes before removing it from the oven. Then increase the oven temperature to 200°C and place the leg back in the oven, uncovered, to roast until it's golden brown all over (approximately 20 minutes).

Allow to rest for 15 minutes before slicing and serving.

Make the sauce

Fry the bacon in a heavy-based pan with a little oil until almost brown, then add the onion. Once the onion starts to soften, add the mushrooms. Sprinkle in the fresh rosemary and season with salt and pepper. Fry for 5 minutes over medium heat. Add the sherry and allow the mixture to reduce by half.

Stir in the cream and allow to reduce until the sauce is thick and clings to the back of a spoon, rather than dripping off it. Pour the creamy sauce over the slices of cooked venison and serve it with turmeric cauliflower with paprika and garlic butter (recipe on page 131). >



The easiest orange duck

Many years after cooking duck for the first time for my mother, I am still incredibly fond of this meat and it's often on my table. If a 10-year-old child can cook a duck, so can you. My duck recipe is very easy, I promise.

Serves **6–8**

Preparation time **30 minutes**

Cooking time **90 minutes, plus 20 minutes for finishing and roasting until crisp**

YOU NEED

- 1 whole duck (approximately 2,2 kg) – remember to remove the bag containing the liver, neck and stomach if it's included (see Tip)
- roasted orange wedges to garnish

FOR THE SAUCE

- 1 cup (250 ml) sugar
- juice of 3 large oranges (or use 1 cup – 250 ml – shop-bought 100% orange juice)
- 1 cup (250 ml) stock – make your own (see Tip) or use a good instant chicken stock (*For us, Ina Paarman's remains the best.* – Eds.)
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) Robertsons Steak & Chops Spice
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) finely grated orange zest, or 1 tablespoon candied mixed citrus peel, for baking purposes
- 30 g cold butter, cubed

THIS IS HOW

Cook the duck You can do this one day – or even three – before your meal. Preheat the oven on the roasting setting to 160 °C. Prepare the duck by cutting off the wing tips at the first joint – save them for your homemade stock (see Tip). Place the duck on its back, breast side up, on the rack of a roasting pan and cover it with foil. Roast the duck for 90 minutes and let it cool.

Now carefully remove the “pope’s nose” (the little tail tip). Keep the duck



fat in a suitable container so that you can use it later for the duck-fat potato molehills.

Using a sharp knife, cut the duck vertically down the middle into two halves. Carefully remove the fine rib bones with your fingertips, as well as any soft bones you can loosen from the inside.

Place the two duck halves on a baking sheet or in an ovenproof serving dish, cover them with cling film, and let them rest in the fridge until about three-quarters of an hour before you plan to serve them.

Make the sauce Brown the sugar in a heavy-based saucepan over moderate heat until runny and golden brown. Add the orange juice, stock and spices. The sugar will set. Reduce the heat and let the sauce simmer slowly until the sugar

has melted again. Add the zest. Let the sauce simmer a little longer before turning off the heat. Quickly stir in the cold butter.

Finishing Preheat the oven to 200 °C. Place the prepared duck halves on the centre oven rack to bake for 15–20 minutes until crispy. Slice each duck half into three – breast, thigh and leg – and drizzle over the sauce. Garnish with roasted orange wedges.

TIP Use the neck and wing tips to make your own flavoursome stock. Add a chopped carrot, onion, celery stick and a few black peppercorns. The liver is delicious pan-fried quickly in some duck fat or butter. Season with salt and pepper and enjoy on a slice of toast.



Duck-fat potato molehills

Soft, buttery, creamy mashed potatoes will always be one of my favourite sides to serve with meat. But when it comes to crispy roast chicken or leg of lamb, I can't help thinking of crunchy golden fried potatoes. This is why I thought of making potato "molehills," which have an extra-crispy crust and the luxuriousness of potatoes fried in duck fat. I don't add cheese – the flavour of the duck fat shines on its own.

Serves **6–8**

Preparation time **20 minutes**

Cooking time **55 minutes**

YOU NEED

- **6 large potatoes, suitable for making mash**
- **60 g butter**
- **1 tablespoon (15 ml) baking powder**
- **a splash of milk**
- **1 tub (330 g) duck fat (or use the fat from your orange duck)**

THIS IS HOW

Boil the potatoes in salted water until soft, drain and let them cool down until handleable and you can remove the skin. Mash the potato to your preferred consistency. I find this a matter of

personal preference, because I quite enjoy a small lump here and there.

Stir in the butter and baking powder well, season the mixture with salt, then stir in a small amount of milk – be careful, as you want a fairly stiff mixture.

Grease an ovenproof serving dish with butter or duck fat. Arrange spoonfuls of mashed potato in rows, rounding the tops to look like molehills. Heat the duck fat slightly and lightly drizzle it over the potato molehills. Bake the potato molehills for 20 minutes in a medium-hot oven (180°C) or until beautifully golden brown. Serve them hot. >



Creamy white pepper beans

These beans are a must with traditional Sunday boerekos. I always serve them with comfort food, and they make me long for both my grandmothers. It was only much later in life that I discovered the decadence of adding a splash of cream, but white pepper with mashed green beans is absolutely non-negotiable. And I simply cannot forgive anyone who doesn't buy "pure" white pepper. That cheaper "white pepper compound" is really no good!

Serves **8**

Preparation time **20 minutes**

Cooking time **30 minutes**

YOU NEED

- 1 kg fresh green beans, trimmed and thoroughly washed
- 1 large onion, coarsely chopped
- 3–4 potatoes, peeled and cut into cubes
- 1½ teaspoons (7,5 ml) salt
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) white pepper
- 100 ml butter
- 100 ml fresh cream (optional)

THIS IS HOW

Place the trimmed green beans with the chopped onions in a bowl of cold water.

Place the diced potatoes in a pot with just enough warm water to cover them

well. Boil the potatoes rapidly until they are almost completely soft.

Drain the cold water from the onions and beans, then add them to the hot potatoes. Reduce the heat to medium, cover and allow the vegetables to steam. As soon as the beans are soft enough to be mashed with a fork, turn off the heat.

There shouldn't be too much water left in the pot – if more than 3 tablespoons remain once the vegetables are soft, pour it out. Immediately add the salt, pepper, butter and cream, and mash the vegetables with a potato masher. Serve warm, as soon as possible.

Turmeric cauliflower with paprika and garlic butter

This turmeric cauliflower is my own invention. I love the colours and flavours of paprika, garlic and lemon, which my mother loved placing on top of soft-cooked potatoes. She called them “Portuguese potatoes” and often served them with braised meat. I think they also work well with cauliflower, which has a gentle, singular taste and easily absorbs the flavours and colours of the other ingredients.

Serves **6**

Preparation time **30 minutes**

Cooking time **25 minutes**

YOU NEED

- 2 whole cauliflower heads weighing approximately 400 g each
- enough water to cover the cauliflower
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) ground turmeric
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) salt
- 100 g salted butter
- 3 or 4 garlic cloves, sliced lengthwise as thinly as possible
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) smoked paprika
- fresh parsley, to garnish

THIS IS HOW

Place both cauliflower heads in a large pot and add enough warm water to just cover them. Stir in the turmeric and salt until dissolved. Heat to boiling point and cook the cauliflower for about 6 minutes until tender but firm. Drain and place the cauliflower in an ovenproof dish.

Melt the butter in a heavy-based pan and fry the garlic slices until light brown. Stir through the lemon juice and paprika and evenly pour the butter mixture over the cauliflower. Shortly before serving, roast the cauliflower for 15 minutes at 180°C. Finally, sprinkle over the parsley. >



Clove and honey-roasted beetroot with shredded dates

As part of the golden rules of traditional boerekos, we grew up with two savoury side dishes and one sweet. There was also always a balance between green and yellow! For the sweet vegetable on this menu, I thought I'd go all out with the reddest red of autumn and use dark beetroot and dates as a striking addition to the reed buck leg.

It just isn't possible to serve anything more delicious with venison than the combination of dates, a hint of clove, and crispy roasted baby beets that don't "bleed" all over the plate. You can thank me later!

Serves 6

Preparation time 10 minutes

Cooking time 30 minutes

YOU NEED

- 2 packets (500 g each) vacuum-packed cooked whole baby beetroot
- 4 cloves, crushed (or use 2 ml ground cloves)
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) salt
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) brown sugar
- 50 ml honey
- 6 whole dates, pitted and shredded
- a little olive oil for drizzling

THIS IS HOW

Preheat the grill and place the oven rack on the lowest position, or set the air-fryer to grill at 190°C.

Place the whole beetroot in a suitable ovenproof roasting dish and sprinkle over the cloves, salt and sugar. Pour the honey evenly over the beetroot, scatter

the shredded dates on top, and finally drizzle lightly with olive oil.

If you are using the oven Roast the beetroot for 15 minutes, then shake the dish to roll the beetroot and distribute the shredded dates evenly. Continue grilling the beetroot for another 15 minutes, or until they turn beautifully dark and crisp, but not dried out.

If you are using the air-fryer Roast the beetroot for 10 minutes, shake the dish well, then continue roasting for another 15 minutes. Keep an eye on the beetroot until it reaches the same colour and texture described above.

This beetroot can be served hot or at room temperature, but not straight from the fridge.



Upside-down pear tart with cardamom and sweet-wine sauce and clotted cream

Oh, the delight of pears, soft-baked with the warm flavour of caramel, and the golden glory of tender sponge cake on top. For the first six months in Rosendal, I lived without an electric oven and relied heavily on my air-fryer. The recipe I'm sharing here is my adaptation of Martha Stewart's upside-down pear cake, and, believe me, it works very well in the air-fryer. It bakes for a full hour and works best at 150°C on the baking setting. I've also recently started making my own clotted cream in the same little oven – it's a long process, but absolutely worth it!

Serves 8

Preparation time **30 minutes**

Baking time **45 minutes**

YOU NEED

- 4 tablespoons (60 ml) butter
- ½ cup (125 ml) light brown sugar
- 3 ripe pears, peeled and cored

FOR THE DOUGH

- 1½ cups (375 ml) cake wheat flour
- 2 teaspoons (10 ml) baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon (1,25 ml) salt
- 8 tablespoons (120 ml) butter
- 1 cup (250 ml) sugar
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) vanilla essence
- 2 extra-large eggs, separated
- 1 cup (250 ml) milk
- ½ teaspoon (2,5 ml) cream of tartar

FOR THE SAUCE

- 4 whole cardamom pods
- 2 whole cloves
- a light shaving of nutmeg
- 200 ml Multana white wine
- 45 g ice-cold salted butter, cubed



Turn over
for the clotted
cream recipe

THIS IS HOW

If you are using a regular oven, preheat it to 180°C. If using an air-fryer, set it to 150°C on the baking setting.

Make the top pear layer Melt the butter in a pan suitable for use in the oven or air-fryer and add the sugar. Slice the pears into even slices and arrange them in a neat circular pattern in the melted butter and sugar. Fry the pears gently with the sugar and butter for about 2 minutes, not too much longer. (You can also do this step in the air-fryer, on a high heat, to melt the butter and give the pears a little colour.)

Make the dough Mix the flour, baking powder and salt together in a mixing bowl. Beat the butter and sugar in a separate mixing bowl until creamy, then add the vanilla essence. Mix in the egg yolks, one by one.

Alternate stirring the milk and dry ingredients into the egg mixture until you have a lovely smooth batter.

Beat the egg whites with the cream of tartar to stiff peak stage, then fold them into the mixture. Spread the mixture evenly over the pears. Bake the pears in the oven for approximately 45 minutes until golden brown and cooked (or for 1 hour in the air-fryer).

Make the sauce Gently heat the spices in a heavy-based saucepan and pour in the sweet wine. Heat the mixture to boiling point and slowly reduce it by half. Carefully remove the whole spices from the sauce. Lastly, stir the cold butter through and remove the sauce from the heat – it should be glossy and light.

To serve Carefully turn out the cake onto a beautiful serving plate and allow to cool completely before serving with clotted cream – turn over for an easy version – and the spiced sauce cooled to room temperature. You could also use regular whipped cream. >



Make your own clotted cream

You can make your own clotted cream in an air-fryer. It's a long but very easy process. I make it overnight, when I don't have to worry about timers or the beeping of the appliance telling me the cycle is finished. So, start the process just before you go to bed. Believe me, you'll never look back.

THIS IS HOW

Pour 2 containers (250 ml each) of good-quality cream into an ovenproof glass dish that fits into the air-fryer. There should be at least 2 cm of space

above the surface of the cream to allow for evaporation. The dish I use measures 15 cm x 15 cm x 5 cm and works perfectly.

Set the air-fryer on the dehydrate function with the temperature on 76 °C and the time on 12 hours. Place the dish containing the cream inside the air-fryer, press the Start button and go to sleep.

The next morning, remove the dish from the air-fryer and let it cool slightly. **Take note** The cream produces a yellowish to slightly brown layer on top. Don't let this bother you as it will mix in nicely later.

Cover the dish with foil or a clip-on lid (if your dish has one) and refrigerate for 8 hours.

Now, use a spoon to loosen and lift one side of the top layer that has formed. Tilt the dish slightly over a bowl or jug and pour off as much of the runny, thin milky liquid as possible – do not discard this liquid; you can save it to use in baking or coffee.

Gently stir the cream with a fork until it is more or less smooth and clotted.

The cream tastes rich and slightly sweet, and it can be stored in the fridge for up to five days. 



Cracking the nod

Curried eggs are not only delicious and easy to make, but also true comfort food – perfect for the Easter break.

Curried eggs

This traditional South African treat was one of the late food and wine commentator Michael Olivier's favourite dishes. Served with rice and salad sambals, it's an excellent option for lunch or supper.

Serves **4–5**

Preparation time **10 minutes**

Cooking time **20 minutes**

YOU NEED

- 1 cup (250 ml) long-grain rice
- 2½ cups (625 ml) water
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) Ina Paarman's Garlic Pepper Seasoning
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) butter
- 6 large eggs
- Ina Paarman's Seasoned Sea Salt or Green Onion Seasoning
- fresh coriander leaves, to garnish

FOR THE CURRY SAUCE

- 1 x 250 g Ina Paarman's Butter Chicken Cook-In Curry Sauce
- ½ cup (125 ml) coconut cream or fresh cream

THIS IS HOW

Cook the rice for 12–15 minutes in water. Add the Garlic Pepper Seasoning and stir in the butter.

Cook the eggs and peel them (see Ina's tips at the end). Cut in half, lengthways, and season with Seasoned Sea Salt or Green Onion Seasoning.



PHOTO ILSE VAN DER MERWE

Make the curry sauce Pour the sauce into a big glass measuring jug or medium-size mixing bowl. Mix in the coconut cream or fresh cream. Cover with a paper towel and microwave for 1½ minutes on full power, stirring halfway.

To assemble Spoon the rice onto a serving dish, arrange the eggs on top and pour over the hot curry sauce. Garnish with fresh coriander and serve with a sambal salad of chopped onion, tomato and coriander leaves.

TIPS **Boiling eggs** Place the eggs in a pot half-filled with cold tap water. Bring to the boil for 1 minute only. Switch off the heat, cover and leave to stand for 10 minutes. For extra-large and jumbo eggs, allow an extra 2 minutes. **Shelling boiled eggs** Drain off the hot water and cover the eggs with cold tap water. Crack the eggs while still in the water and leave them there so the water seeps in under the shells. Dip the eggs in the water from time to time while peeling to float off the shells. **P**



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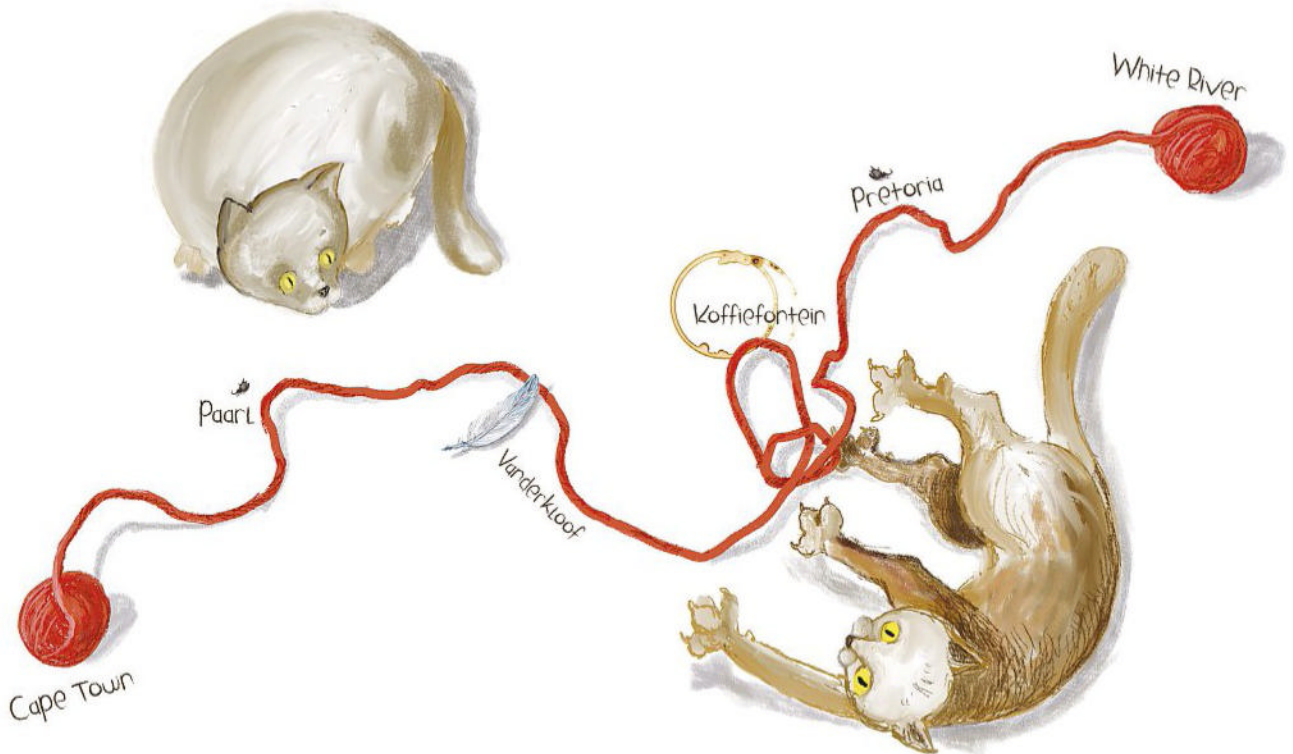
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A return to silence

When you've grown up in a small town, life in the city can eventually begin to smother you. For **Willemien Calitz**, the time had come for her to load her two cats into her car and head back to her roots.

ILLUSTRATION DIEK GROBLER



I grew up in the platteland, in a small town in Limpopo called Thabazimbi, and from the moment I set foot in the city – Cape Town – I’ve yearned for the silence I’d been so accustomed to. That longing lasted until August last year, when I finally made the great trek from the Cape to Mpumalanga. With my two cats.

Admittedly, I did experience some measure of relief during my time in the city. During the Covid-19 lockdown period, I moved from the CBD to Muizenberg, which does have a small-town feel, albeit with a unique Cape twist: the residents are all surfers and hikers.

However, my peace vanished after the threat of the pandemic had passed and the tourists and people from the interior returned in their droves.

Those who could no longer afford to live in Cape Town moved out to the northern or southern suburbs, including the so-called deep south along the coast. On some days, I felt as if I was living in an edgier version of Sea Point. The town-like atmosphere began to evaporate and it became almost impossible to find affordable cat-friendly accommodation.

I began to find it quite difficult to breathe.

“COME STAY with us in Paarl for a while,” my brother offered. But he has a dog, which made me hesitant. “Won’t Gabby chase Ginny and Joey?” I wanted to know. His reply became the motto of my entire trek: “There’s only one way to find out...”

Gabby the cross-breed cocker spaniel did indeed chase my cats into the tree, despite our attempts to introduce them to each other peacefully. The solution was to walk her until she was tired. And by that I mean dog-tired. The Paarl Arboretum is magnificent. This stretch along the Berg River honours biodiversity worldwide – there is an Asian, European, American and,

of course, an African section. When you walk here, you'll be forgiven for thinking you've stepped into a poem. The silence makes it easy to forget that the town is hosting its annual sports derby between Gimnasium and Boys' High.

In the meantime, I draw crosses on a map of the country. Since I work remotely, I have made the decision to return to my platteland roots (and hopefully find some relief when it comes to rent). But where do I want to be? Where are the most beautiful parts of our country? And, importantly, where will my two cats also be welcome? I don't have children of my own, which means they are like my children.

Cats are not welcome everywhere, I realise when I started considering places in Hoedspruit, a conservation town. They can disturb the eco-system, even if they have been sterilised and wear a collar with a bell, as mine do.

DURING THE HOLIDAYS when I was a child, we would visit my gran and grandpa on their farm outside Burgersfort in the Spekboom River Valley in Limpopo. This prompts my mom to ask the question: "You have a connection to the Lowveld, why not look there?"

I start asking around and realise that people are crazy about Nelspruit, and even more so about White River. I make my decision.

Mpumalanga is far away and so I ask my mom to join me on the drive up to White River. We decide to tackle the long distance in shifts. My mother's sister lives in Vanderkloof, a retirement town on the border of the Northern Cape

and Free State. It's one of those little towns that songs are written about: "Just one garage, a liquor store, a corrugated-iron house and a post office..." Except, you have to drive to Petrusville 15 km away for petrol, and the post office no longer exists.

My aunt smiles at the way I speak to my cats, as if they are four-year-old toddlers, but my uncle is clearly uncomfortable about having these two in his kitchen. "My father bred homing pigeons, so for us, a cat was something that had to be killed," he says. I pretend not to hear him.

As we leave Vanderkloof, my mother asks if we can make a quick stop in Koffiefontein. "Your grandfather was interred in a camp here," she says. But we see no traces of historical camps... indeed, there are scarcely any signs of life at all.

"Your grandfather didn't want South Africans to fight under the British flag in the Second World War, so he stole petrol from the railways and hid it on the farm. He believed that if they could keep the police occupied, it would shift their attention away from the war. Yes, you could say he was a rebel."

I smile. Those genes run deep.

"But someone betrayed them and your grandfather was imprisoned, first in Johannesburg and later in the internment camp here. And guess who was in the camp with him?"

How could I possibly guess that, I want to say, but I stop myself. She continues: "John Vorster, who later became president." I nod.

"And you know what else? Your aunt Welma always battled with asthma. One day your grandfather decided to just put her in the car and drive. When they passed through White River,

her chest suddenly opened up. Your grandfather said this would be where she would attend school. He decided to go have a word with the principal and when he walked in, the principal, a Mr Toerien, said, 'Dirk Winterbach, I remember you. We were in the same internment camp at Koffiefontein!' Remember that when you are there."

ON THE WAY TO PRETORIA, we drive on the highway through Johannesburg. Six lanes of traffic. Cars hurtle towards me as if they are target shooting. Ginny and Joey, beside themselves with anxiety, hide under the seats. The CalmEze gel I'd rubbed over their paws is of no use now. My mother looks panicked and I realise it's because she thinks I look panicked. In our eyes, the message is clear: "This is not for us". I plead, "Mom, I feel totally overwhelmed. Please will you help me take the right turnoffs."

This is how we and our cortisol levels navigate the trip.

We spend the night with my sister in Pretoria, which is where my mother will stay. My sister treats Joey and Ginny like children. Because she loves her dogs so much, I'd expected nothing less.

"I'm coming to visit you," she says when I leave. "I feel a deep need for some silence."

The cats are exceptionally calm for the last three-hour stretch in the car, as if they know we are almost there. Just before my turn-off, I drive across the Crocodile River and the tears well up in my eyes. The river has the same name as the one at Thabazimbi where we played *kleilat* with the mud as children!

I'd barely stopped and the cats were already running up the hill, ready for sunshine and red earth, just as I'd promised them.

I inhale deeply and listen. Nothing. Apart from the sound of the birds that clearly know who I am, because they sing in chorus: "Welcome home, Willemien." 

"The cats are exceptionally calm for the last three-hour stretch in the car, as if they know we are almost there. Just before my turn-off, I drive across the Crocodile River and the tears well up in my eyes."

A treehouse is forever

By **Heletta Avenant** from De La Haye, Bellville

– Bellville, Western Cape –

The house where we've lived for the past 38 years is currently on the market. While I was sorting through things, I came across this note that my son, Helghardt, wrote 22 years ago just after he started high school. Now 36 years old and living and working in San Francisco in the US, he's always been quite sentimental about the treehouse on the property.

“It all began before I was even a twinkle in my father's eye. My parents bought a fairly large property, on which stood a very ordinary house and a sky-high pecan-nut tree, from an elderly lady. It wasn't easy for her to hand over the keys to two young lovebirds and I think I know why...

I sometimes wonder why everything happens so fast in life and you constantly feel like you're getting nowhere. It's almost as if the ground is spinning, offering little chance to gain a stable footing.

It's true that times change over the years, but one fact remains: a man's house is his castle!

Any father worth his salt builds a treehouse for his sons. My father built ours in the lush green foliage of the berry tree in our front garden. It was more than enough to make the neighbours' boys jealous. I became quite skilled in the childhood game of hide-and-seek. With a little creativity and no fear of spiderwebs, any child could get thoroughly lost in our jungle of a garden.

These days, the neighbours' youngest children are the ones playing in the treehouse, throwing berries at each other, which stain everything. The stains of childhood, symbolic of the heart of a home that pumped fresh blood into the dreams I wanted to follow.

One day I'll be the one with a lump in my throat, just like the old lady who surrendered her house to us. And then I'll think back and long for the days I spent within the four corners of our plant-filled garden and the walls of our house, my life spinning round and round. **”**



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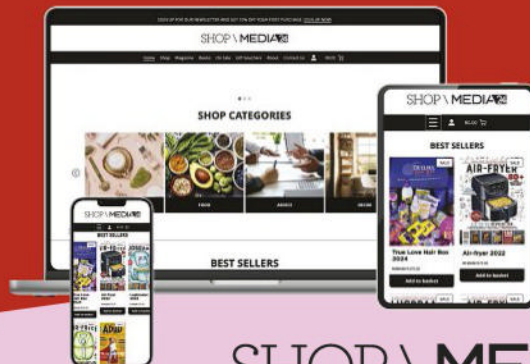


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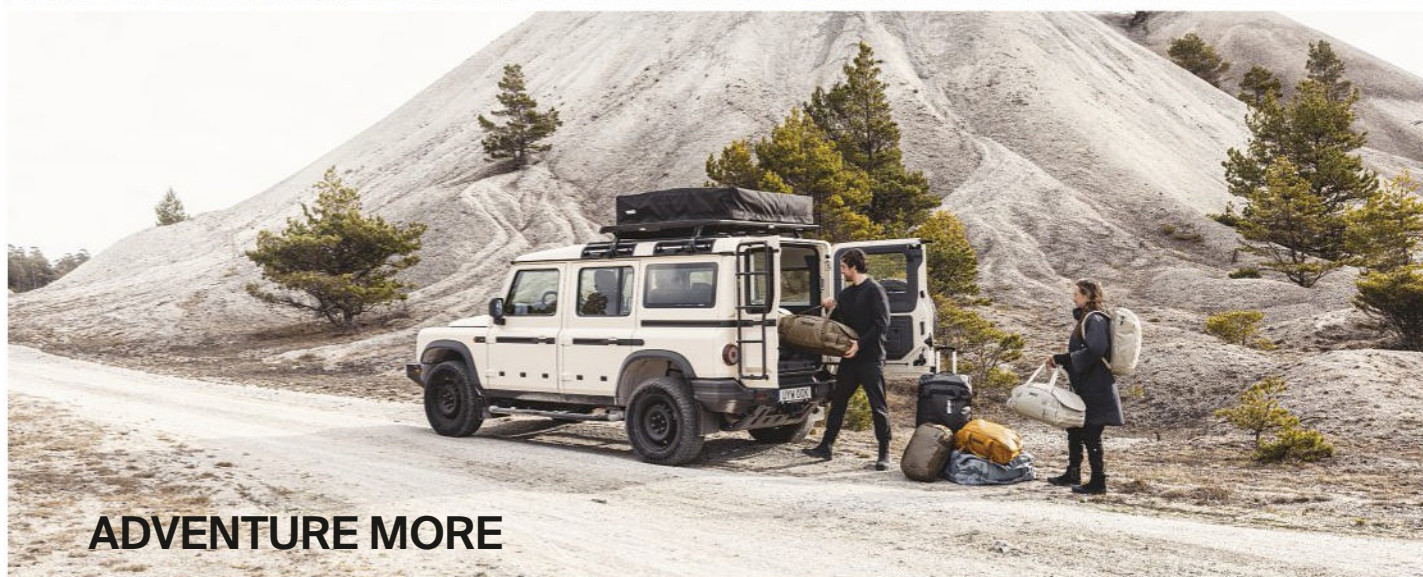


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