

SOUTH AFRICAN

JULY
2016

THE REAL HEART OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

Slackpack Plett and the Waterberg

Meet bone
detective
**LEE
BERGER**

ARTIST
**GWELO
GOODMAN**
*the master
of sunshine*

Loggerheads
& leatherbacks
in **PONTA do OURO**

Into
the forest
with Dalene
Matthee

COUNTRY LIFE

FOOD
GLORIOUS FOOD
*Stellenbosch artisans
Haute Cabrière's
new chef*

ERNST VAN
JAARSVELD'S
big fat plants

*Wild about
Wellington*

Searching for the
DAMARA TERN

The Great Escape
Karoo unplugged
& Eco-friendly hideaways





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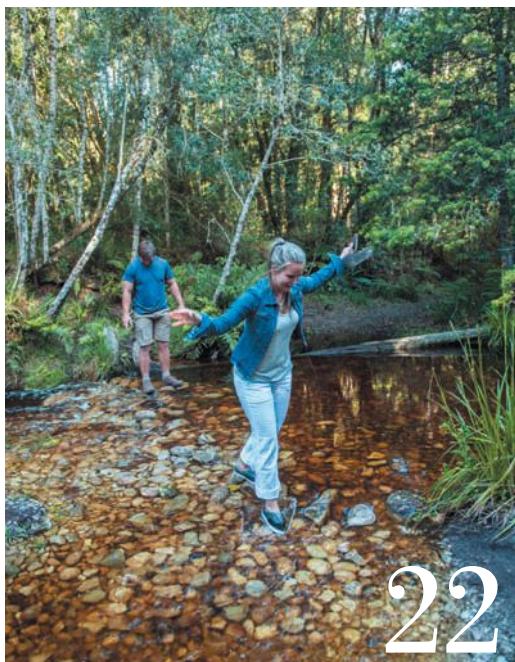


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EDITOR'S CHOICE We uncover some real treasure for you in this issue, from around our coastline. Just outside the town of Ponta do Ouro in Mozambique we witness one of the greatest natural spectacles, when thousands of tiny turtles hatch in the dunes and make their hectic beeline for the sea – only one in a thousand survives. From there

we travel to the southern Cape to follow in the footsteps of the great author Dalene Matthee, and find out what inspired her in the Knysna Forest. Then our search for the rare, endangered Damara Tern leads us to the southernmost tip of Africa, where not much more than 100 breeding pairs have found sanctuary in De Mond Nature Reserve.

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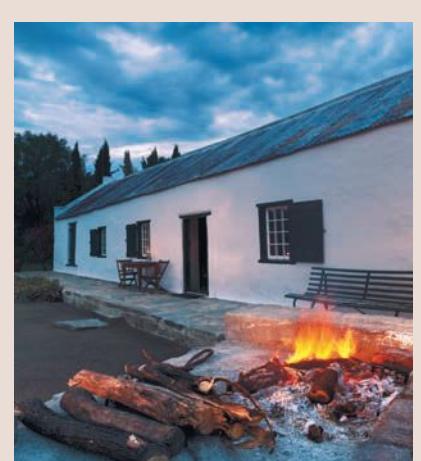
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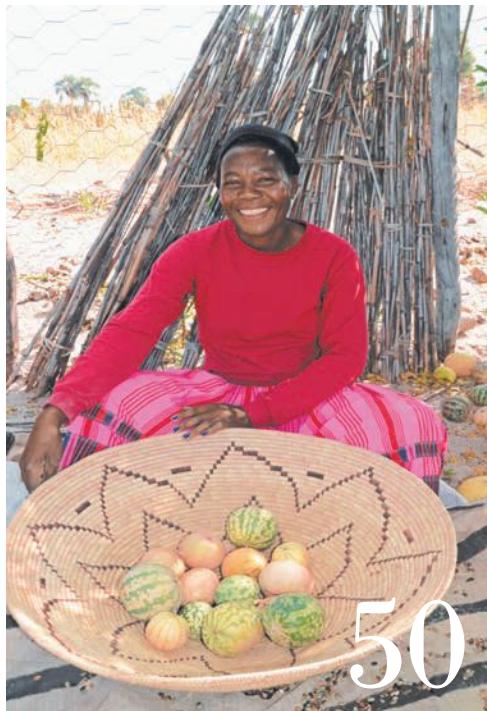
ON THE COVER

The cover photograph by Obie Oberholzer was taken at Letskraal farmstay outside Graaff-Reinet in the Karoo. Read our story *Karoo Unplugged* on page 60.



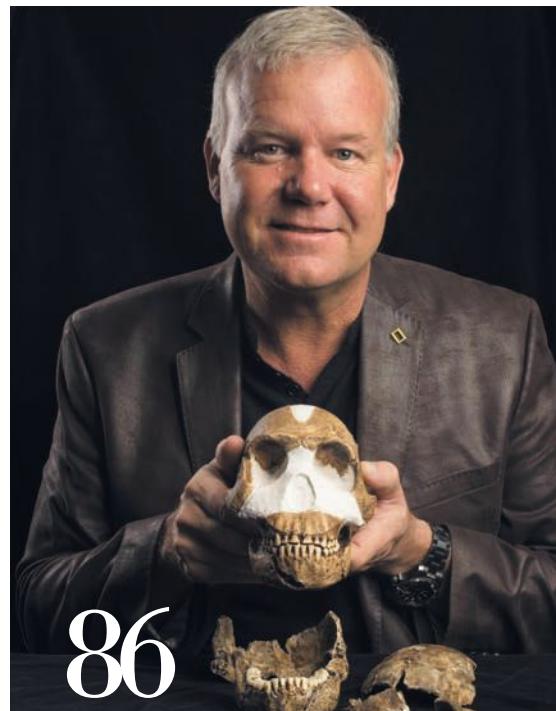
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It's what happens when you bring a brilliant botanist and his big fat plants to Babylonstoren

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Roast chicken
*came up tops
when you were
asked what the
favourite
family
meal is*



For more results of our FOOD questionnaire,
go to www.countrylife.co.za

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Name dropping is considered the eighth deadly sin (or did I just make that up?) If so, I'm a dead duck. In this issue we feature several celebrities – mind you, they're not all the two-legged or rich or famous variety, or even alive.

Perhaps most famous is bone detective Professor Lee Berger who has certainly put the sexy into palaeoanthropology. Last year he rocked the fossil world with his discovery of a new type of prehuman that lived perhaps 2.5 million years ago. *Homo naledi* might not qualify as the missing link, but it sure got scientists up and talking, and catapulted the prof onto *Time* magazine's list of The 100 Most Influential People. (The only South African-born to make the list is the lovely Charlize Theron, actress turned activist).

I see *Homo naledi* also features on the Top 10 New Species list, compiled by an important-sounding institute (look it up on www.esf.edu/top10). For more on Berger and Naledi read Sue Adams' *Fossils, Stars and Skinny Scientists* on page 46.

If you're a keen gardener you probably have a copy of *Waterwise Gardening in South Africa and Namibia* on your bookshelf, and author Dr Ernst van Jaarsveld is a household name to the many who read his articles, columns and numerous books. Recently he stepped down as curator of the conservancy at Kirstenbosch

National Botanical Garden in Cape Town, but landed his dream job – establishing a succulent garden and a *veldkos* garden of indigenous edible plants at Babylonstoren outside Franschhoek. (*Breaking New Ground* page 38)

Knysna Forest has achieved near-mythical status in South African literature through the novels of Dalene Matthee. In *Circles inside a Forest* (page 22), Justin Fox traces the paths of her most famous book and explores the places that inspired her.

Artist Gwelo Goodman comes under the spotlight in Nick van der Leek's series on old South African masters. The English-born



artist had considerable impact on South African art and mastered what many consider the most difficult subject, the harsh South African sun (*Master of Sunshine* page 54). Interestingly, nearly 80 years after his death, Goodman's art is still much admired. Six of Goodman's paintings came under the hammer at a recent Strauss & Co auction, fetching from R35 000 to just under R400 000.

But our fascination with celebrities is not restricted to humans. I like *Time* magazine's creation of The 100 Most Influential Animals in the World (time.com/Animals100). And who tops the list? Cecil the lion. (Mickey Mouse is 8th, by the way). In the same spirit we nominate the endangered loggerhead and leatherback turtles of Ponta do Ouro Partial Marine Reserve, which battle survival odds of a thousand to one (*Looking for Leatherbacks* page 42). Our number two is the diminutive Damara Tern that has a global population of less than 13 500 and now also finds itself in the *Red Data Book of Birds*. Lucky for local twitchers the southernmost point of Africa is one of only two places to spot this rare little bird. (*Birding Hotspot* page 73).

But that's enough humblebrag for one day.

Nita

Nita Hazell
Editor

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are welcome but MUST include relevant, top-quality pictures on a CD.

Send your contributions to the editor.

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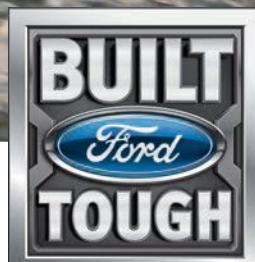
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Contributors

Justin Fox

Circles Inside a Forest **Page 22**



Justin Fox is a travel writer and photographer who has travelled the length and breadth of Africa on assignment, and his short stories and poems have appeared in various anthologies. Justin's recent books include *The Marginal Safari*, *Whoever Fears the Sea* and *The Impossible Five* (Tafelberg, 2015). In this issue, Justin sets off on a quest to walk in the footsteps of Dalene Matthee in Knysna Forest. It's part of a project that has become something of an obsession with him – to visit the places where great books have been written and try to climb inside the skin of the writer to experience the place through their eyes. Read his feature **Circles Inside a Forest** on page 22.

Petro Kotzé

Looking for Leatherbacks **page 42**



Photojournalist **Petro Kotzé** has finally given up the façade that she is a travel writer. She is really a conservationist posing as a journalist to try and feed people as much information about the spectacular protected areas and rich biodiversity of Southern Africa, as possible. This time she visited Ponta do Ouro in southern Mozambique, and returned with a story on the conservation underway in Ponta do Ouro Partial Marine Reserve, and the endangered leatherback and loggerhead turtles that breed there in the dunes. And why you should never try and bribe a marine ranger. Read **Looking for Leatherbacks** on page 42.

Nick van der Leek

Master of Sunshine **page 54**



In his tenth article on epic South African artists, photojournalist and bestselling author **Nick van der Leek** goes in search of the master of the South African sun, Robert Gwelo Goodman, which you can read about in **Master of Sunshine** on page 54. Unlike Nick's great-grandfather Tinus de Jongh, and virtually all the artists featured so far in the magazine, Gwelo Goodman is different in a very special way. His territory was neither here nor there, it was everywhere. In a sense he was a man without a country and a man without a name. So where do we find him? Nick says that, like veritable Harry Potters, we have to gather our wands, find the right track, and then go off it.

Greg Landman

Restaurants **page 96**

Fine Wine **page 97**



As a long-time food and wine reviewer of renown, who lives in Cape Town ("Heaven on Earth") and who, for many years, has written our regular winemaker profile (page 97), and oftentimes our restaurant reviews (page 96)

– **Greg Landman** is a veteran of dining out. But he says his love for great food started much longer ago, when his previous life in film distribution had him eating in restaurants from Cannes to Hollywood. Now, trips to France, Greece and Spain keep him in touch with the kind of food that really appeals to him, even though he still thinks that the perfect poached egg on toast is food for the gods.

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Take the Wildflower Tour

Join COUNTRY LIFE on a wildflower-spotting trip up the West Coast. From Clanwilliam we explore the many flower paradises of the region, picnic among the daisies and meander the back roads of blossoms. There's also wine tasting and history thrown in for good measure

THE TOUR IN A NUTSHELL

DAY 1: Leave Cape Town for Saldanha and a visit to the popular SAS Saldanha Nature Reserve, a wonderland of spring flowers against a marine backdrop. Explore the area around Aurora and Elandsbaai and meander along country roads for amazing flower discoveries. After a picnic lunch among the flowers continue to Lambert's Bay for an easy stroll to Bird Island Nature Reserve, a 3-hectare breeding site for Cape Gannets and Crowned Cormorants. In the afternoon travel to Clanwilliam to visit the Ramskop Nature Reserve's wildflower garden, home to more than 350 species of flowers. Dinner and overnight in Clanwilliam.

DAY 2: After breakfast, join a local expert on a historical walk through Clanwilliam. Depart for the Kokerboom Nursery in Vanrhynsdorp, cultivators of rare succulents and quiver trees, before heading over the Knersvlakte, part of the Succulent Karoo, to Nieuwoudtville. This town is the 'Bulb Capital of the World' and a biodiversity hotspot. Spend the day there exploring, and discover the waterfalls and the quiver tree forest of more than 3 000 trees. Visit the spectacular flower farm at Matjiesfontein and enjoy a picnic among the blooms. See the flower carpets in the Hantam National Botanical Garden. Dinner at The Dam Bistro.

DAY 3: Depart for Wupperthal and stop at the grave of the famous poet C Louis Leipoldt who grew up in Clanwilliam. There are also some rock art paintings on the

site. Enjoy a light lunch at Traveller's Rest before continuing to Lambert's Bay. Dinner is at Bosduifklip restaurant, built in among huge rock formations, where our hosts Kobus and Aletta Engelbrecht cook up a storm of Sandveld cuisine. Return to Clanwilliam for overnight.

DAY 4: Travel towards Strandfontein and Doringbaai via Vredendal and Lutsville, passing the northern region of the Olifants River Valley with its vineyards and vegetable plantations. Strandfontein, one of the most popular holiday spots along the West Coast, is our next stop for lunch and a wine tasting at Fryer's Cove. Return to Clanwilliam for dinner at Reinhold's Restaurant.

DAY 5: A morning visit to the Groenkol Rooibos Tea Estate in Clanwilliam includes a fynbos safari. Enjoy lunch at Hebron, before taking the coastal route to the West Coast National Park, with Langebaan Lagoon as its focal point. During spring the park is a tapestry of flowers. Stop to enjoy a picture-postcard view of Table Mountain from Bloubergstrand, before returning to Cape Town.

Please note: The flower spectacle depends on winter rain, cloud cover and other weather factors on the day. The tour operator will contact the tourism offices and 'flower-route watchers' for up-to-date information on the best flower viewing.



TOUR DETAILS

Date: 14-18 August 2016
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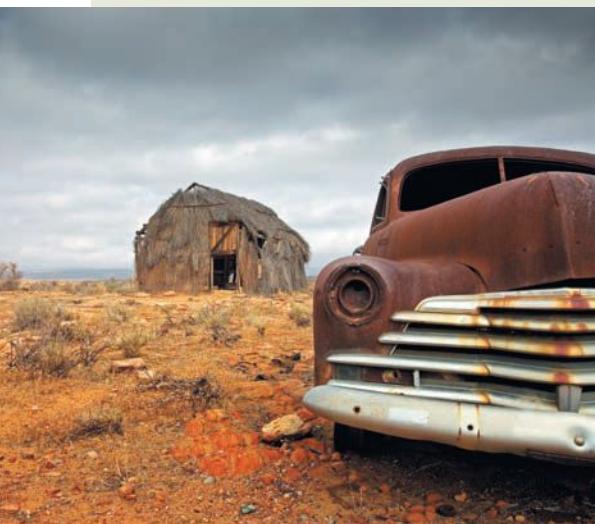
Ah, that Chevy

Parting Shot in the May issue refers. What a delicious dose of déjà vu! Travelling towards me down memory lane is a gunmetal '48 Chevy, registration plate CCW 1011, proudly owned by my dad. And thereby hangs a tale... There were two identical gunmetal Chevies in Kokstad – the other owned by the Burnetts. The only perceivable difference was that their number plate was CCW 1101. (But maybe my ageing memory is stretching a w-e-e-n-y bit too far on THAT one? Take it or leave it as you will).

One busy Saturday morning, when there must have been at least a dozen other vehicles around, my dad parked in Main Street. On returning he found his car missing. (Can you 'find' a car missing?) What? A car *stolen* in Kokstad in 1948/49? Sergeant Peverett studied my dad through narrowed eyes as though he were crazy, or had been side-swiping the bottle.

His suspicions were 'confirmed' when they returned to examine the scene of the crime – the Chevy was there in all its glory. Hoo boy! Yep, you guessed it, and even the keys were identical. An apology from Mr Burnett, who had discovered that the backseat parcels were not what he had purchased, resulted in the police docket being cancelled. The good sergeant (who was a holy terror to us kids without the requisite bicycle licence) was later heard expressing his deep satisfaction at successfully having solved the 'Crime of the Year'. (edited)

Geoff Harris , via email



Wonderful wind turbines

It was with great interest that I read your article on the wind turbines in Cookhouse in the April issue, *Silver Linings for Cookhouse*. I stay in Jeffreys Bay where we also have wind farms, and include a photo of one of the blades of 44m with my car parked next to it.

W.D.Basson, via email



Love the Battlefields

I have a small group of friends who share a common interest with my wife and myself regarding the interesting Anglo-Zulu War and the two Anglo-Boer Wars. Each year we spend about four days with an expert guide and we tramp the battlefields. The wives love the birds and the countryside, and the gents get down to serious understanding and learning. We have great times together and stay in places that normally we would not consider, but which surprise and excel.

Recently we completed our 13th tour and visited Bethulie. What an interesting little town. It is packed to the rafters with history, and the drives around the area to (for example) Burgersdorp were very pleasant and interesting. While often hot and a bit stark, it has a beauty similar to the Karoo.

The local hotel, the Royal, was very good, and the owner most obliging and well versed



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Your amusing letter has won you a personalised saligna wine rack valued at R899. This handmade and lazer-engraved wine rack is easily mounted on your wall with two strong brackets on the back. It holds ten bottles and is a great way to display them, and have them at hand. A really decorative storage solution.
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in the town's history and the second Anglo-Boer War. We helped support local artists by going to an excellent piano recital, then on a second evening to see a young guitarist, and a poet. The local restaurant serves super lamb.

For cyclists and the motorised version, the roads in the area are all good and free of traffic. For readers looking for something different which stimulates the mind, we recommend Bethulie. (edited)

'Sandy' Buchanan, via email

Dreams do come true

Many years ago I picked up one of your first issues during a visit to my doctor. The travel bug bit me really hard. So much so, that I enrolled for a tour-guide course. Unfortunately, after just a few stints as a tour guide, my late husband became seriously ill and it was necessary for me to look after him and my three school-going daughters, until his death. I then went on to do



caregiving in England where I met my second husband, who followed me to South Africa. Needless to say, I read COUNTRY LIFE again, became a subscriber and have since taken my husband to many wonderful destinations. Thank you for such an inspiring, informative magazine. I keep a year's collection and plan my trips around the information contained on the pages. All my other copies from previous years, I give to the retirement-home residents here and the folks tell me how much they enjoy reading them and the memories the articles bring back for them. So, thank you, COUNTRY LIFE for helping me to achieve my dream of travelling, and to be able to give inspiring talks to the residents here, who can no longer travel, but enjoy hearing about the trips my husband and I have undertaken to explore this beautiful land. (edited)

Yvonne McDonald, via email



Etosha magic

The article *Into the Great White Place* by Ron Swilling in the June issue provided my wife and I with much-needed information about Etosha. We were reminded that on our trip there in 2011, we had our best game viewing in the western section of the park (see photo). After reading in the article that the Galton Gate is open to individual tourists, we will make every effort to visit this area of the park, on our next trip to Epupa and Ruacana falls.

Martin Briggs, Onrusrivier

Rusticus mus vs urbanus mus

It took me three years at university to pass Latin I. All I remember was a story about a *rusticus mus* (farm mouse) and an *urbanus mus* (city mouse). They met in some dark alley and something profound happened. What it was I can't remember.

Some time ago, when I was going through my midlife crisis, I bought COUNTRY LIFE every month and scrutinised it, starting with the property section. I was intent on buying a small farm with an old cottage and a rusty gate. I'd look like your many happy 'life changers', selling organic stuff at markets in an apron and smiling with bright white teeth. The wife would be close by, unpacking another box of apricot-flavoured organic honey. The honey would fly off the table faster than she could unpack it. We'd make R12.34 profit, excluding labour and capital invested, simply for the love of it.

And then life happened. I outgrew the crisis, invested whatever I had in a provident fund and continued working. The safe option, some may say. But what, after all, do I know about honey? I made 60 the other day and looking back I have no regrets. I still work, but on my own terms now. We still live in the same house, same suburb and we hang out with the same friends. We all just got older. We laugh more, drink more and take ourselves a lot less seriously. Maybe some of us are just *urbanus mus* and others *rusticus mus*. Which brings me to ask: Have you ever published an article about anybody who took the plunge and discovered it was a huge mistake? Or does no one confess? (edited)

Freddie Human, Hout Bay

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR APRIL 2016 WINNERS

THORNBYBUSH COMPETITION

Darryn Newcombe from Blairgowrie has won a three-night stay for two valued at R30 000



FACEBOOK

GOLDEN (ALL) ROUND

When Gay van Hasselt started her dairy business, she managed it entirely herself – everything from milking to deliveries. Twenty six years later, her 'golden rounds' (cheese) are much sought-after and enjoyed by locals and tourists alike. This lady has got a good thing going and when we shared her story recently, you could not get enough of it (it reached more than 19 500 people), with comments such as, 'Still the best cheese I've tasted in SA', and 'Now the story has reached the UK!' Gay's hard work and success is a Proudly SA story to feel good about – here and abroad. She certainly is Prince Albert's Big Cheese.

Prince Albert's Big Cheese: It all started with three cows, two kids and no cash. Now Gay's Guernsey Dairy in this Karoo town is famous for its milk, yoghurt and award-winning cheese... <http://goo.gl/EbsCXR>



19 507 people reached

242 Comments 68 Shares

Boost post

TINTSWALO COMPETITION

Caren Botha from Centurion has won a two-night stay for two valued at R30 000



July Diary

This month is all about festivals, carnivals, cultural pursuits and Christmas in July



16-17



8-10

Dullstroom Winter Festival Mpumalanga

Set off to this historic flyfishing village for their Christmas in July festival complete with all the traditional lights and decorations. Don't forget to pack your winter woolies and boots, and bring a picnic blanket. There are food stalls, artist exhibits, whisky-pairing stands, trail runs, a kiddie zone, and more.

012 326 0560, info@dullstroomwinterfestival.co.za, www.dullstroomwinterfestival.co.za, 8-10 July



Christmas in July Graaff-Reinet

Graaff-Reinet is celebrating a Christmas weekend to raise funds for the local Vuyani Safe Haven children's home. Events include a show at the John Rupert Theatre, Christmas crafts for kids, as well as carols and choirs. The main event is a gala dinner at the SA College of Tourism with the venue decor by Stephen Falke. Fabulous prizes are being auctioned off, like Christmas decorations from all over the world and stays on private game farms.

083 599 9302, rose@tasteofthekaroo.co.za 15-16 July



1-10

Knysna Oyster Festival Garden Route

This beloved festival is about oysters, oysters and more oysters. But there's more... delicious food, quaffable wine, live music, a market with a variety of stalls, art, and exciting events for the fit and outdoorsy such as cycling races and trail runs.

044 382 5510, proyster@oysterfestival.co.za
www.oysterfestival.co.za, 1-10 July

Franschhoek Bastille Festival Winelands

The 'little France' of the Winelands celebrates all things *très magnifique* and the cosy food and wine marquee is a good place to start, set against the backdrop of the Huguenot Monument. It's within comfortable walking distance to and from the village. Sample superb wines and gourmet fare available to buy from some of the well-known eateries. Add a quirky caricature artist to capture your Bastille experience, a barrel-rolling competition, boule and a dedicated kiddie area, and you have all the ingredients for a fun-filled day.

021 876 2861, www.franschhoekbastille.co.za

16-17 July



21-24

Schreiner Karoo Writers Festival Cradock

Mingle with authors and bookworms, indulge in Karoo hospitality and feast on farm food. The programme also allows for informal fireside chats and open microphone sessions. Take the Cradock Literary Walk and view the historic graveyard where celebrities are buried. Most events take place in Victoria Manor and Schreiner House, an easy walk from the legendary Die Tuishuise where many festival folk are staying.

karoowritersfestival@gmail.com
www.karoowritersfestival.weebly.com

21-24 July



30

SA Flyfishing and Flytying Expo **Somerset West**

While aimed at the flyfisherman, this expo at the Lourensford Wine Estate appeals to any outdoor enthusiast. It's your chance to interact with the flyfisherman and flytyers who have made a huge contribution to the craft, and quiz them about their techniques. Some are giving demos, including COUNTRY LIFE contributors Tom Sutcliffe (considered the doyen of the sport) and Peter Brigg. You can also check out the new products and developments. The festival concludes with an auction of flies tied at the festival, the only collection of its kind in the country.

011 467 5992, flyexpo.info@gmail.com, www.fosaf.org.za 30 July



1-2

Delheim Wild Mushroom Hunts **Stellenbosch**

Forage for wild mushrooms in the private forests of Delheim Wine Estate, under the guidance and expertise of Nora Sperling-Thiel of Delheim and Gary Goldman, a field expert and mushroom cultivator. After an invigorating morning on the hunt, enjoy a mushroom-inspired, three-course lunch at the restaurant.

021 888 4607, restaurant@delheim.com, www.delheim.com 1-2 July



1-3

Winter Wonderland Carnival Weekend

Gordon's Bay

The seaside village is abuzz for two days with a carnival atmosphere and great entertainment for the family. Enjoy a festival of lights, live bands, beer tent, food stands (don't miss the pancakes and Mexican chow), craft stalls and a *langarm* competition.

071 606 3261, theboss@winterwonderland.co.za

www.facebook.com/WinterWonderlandGB 1-3 July

12-13



July Diary

Email the details of your event, with a photograph, to diary@caxton.co.za



10

1000 Paws Walk for SPCA KZN Midlands

Dig out your walking shoes, it's time for the popular Midlands outdoor pet event. A joint fundraiser between the SPCA branches of Pietermaritzburg, Umgeli-Howick and Mooi River & District, the walk takes place at Hilton College, with hundreds of doggies keeping pace with their owners on a choice of 2km and 4km walks around the scenic grounds. There are also agility events in the arena.

033 267 7920, glawson@global.co.za 10 July



23

The Old Mutual iMfolozi Challenge KwaZulu-Natal

The Old Mutual iMfolozi Challenge is an exciting and gruelling MTB event taking place at the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve. With your participation, you're making a significant contribution to conservation efforts as this event supports the Wildlands organisation. This ride focuses on the endangered African wild dog of which only 412 remain.

www.wildseries.co.za 23 July

2-3

Knysna Cycle Tour Garden Route

Celebrating its 29th year, this cycling festival, part of the activities around the Knysna Oyster Festival, features four events including MTB and road races, a family fun ride, and a children's tour. Staged in the picturesque town of Knysna, experienced cyclists who enjoy scenic and challenging routes, as well as beginners, are welcome.

079 796 7834, enquiries@knysnacycle.co.za, www.knysnacycle.co.za 2-3 July



8-10

Christmas in July at De Hoop Collection Nature Reserve Bredasdorp

Christmas comes but once a year, as the saying goes, but not at De Hoop. Come join in the merriment at this weekend crammed with a chocolate-making workshop, a visit from Father Christmas – especially sleighed in for the kiddies – a High Tea, music, and a traditional Christmas dinner at the Fig Tree restaurant.

021 422 4522, info@dehoopcollections.co.za, www.dehoopcollections.co.za/com 8-10 July



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WIN

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bedset WORTH R6 000**



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cushioning materials ensure comfort where you want it and support where you need it. The beds are scientifically tested, ensuring total muscle relaxation and deep restful sleep, so you'll wake up refreshed and ready to take on every new day.

For more information visit www.sealy.co.za
or Sealy South Africa on Facebook

TO ENTER

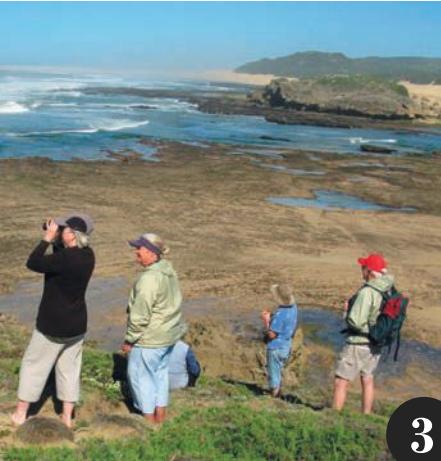
SMS the word SEALY, your name, email and postal address to 48402 before 31 July 2016

**SMSes are charged at R1.50 per entry.
Free SMSes do not apply.**

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: 1. SMS errors will be billed. 2. Employees of Sealy, CTP Caxton, their advertising agencies and immediate families may not enter the competition. 3. The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 4. The prizes are not transferable and cannot be converted to cash. 5. Offer valid for SA residents only. 6. To comply with the Consumer Protection Act, postal entries will no longer be accepted and winners will be required to supply their ID number. 7. There is no limit to the number of entries per reader. 8. The first correctly completed entries to be drawn will win the prizes. 9. Entries close on 31 July 2016.

July Diary

Email the details of your event, with a photograph, to diary@caxton.co.za



3 Three Sisters Saunter Port Alfred

Join this eco tour, led by a registered and accredited FGASA guide, starting at Riet River, 11km east of Port Alfred. It covers aspects of the environment, birds, shipwrecks and history with a focal point being the Three Sisters – sandstone promontories with caves, tidal pools and an abundant diversity of plant life thriving on them despite harsh conditions. It's an easy walk of about 2½ hours and an experience for the family. Booking essential.

046 675 1976, anne@annesbirng.co.za 3 July

3 The Terracotta Army, brought to you by COUNTRY LIFE Joburg

Discover the mysteries of Ancient China and the armies of the First Emperor, at The Terracotta Army exhibition at the Silver Star Casino. These sculptures were created in honour of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi and his army in 209BC. Now on display is a complete reproduction of more than 300 objects such as bronze chariots, horsemen, kneeling archers, and the emperor himself.

021 418 0738, www.exporza.co.za

15 June-20 August

23-24

Queensburgh Annual Orchid Show Kloof

Did you know there are more than 30 000 species of orchids in the world plus tens of thousands of artificial hybrids? Feast your eyes on these gorgeous blooms at the Kloof Town Hall on Old Main Road. Plants are also on sale and refreshments are available.

082 809 1572 23-24 July



15-24

Joburg Ballet presents *Romeo and Juliet* Johannesburg

This year is the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death and Joburg Ballet celebrates The Bard and the many ballets inspired by his plays, by staging the classic *Romeo and Juliet*. With magnificent sets, sumptuous Renaissance-inspired costumes and Prokofiev's evocative music, Shakespeare's tale of star-crossed lovers is brought to life.

011 877 6900, fionaw@joburgballet.com, www.joburgtheatre.com 15-24 July



Henri Matisse Rhythm and Meaning Exhibition Johannesburg

The Standard Bank Gallery is holding an exhibition of art by the French modern master, Henri Matisse (1869-1954). Of particular interest to South Africans is the inspiration he took from African and other non-Western art forms during the early 1900s.

011 721 5562, dianne.graney@standardbank.co.za

www.standardbank.co.za

13 July-17 September



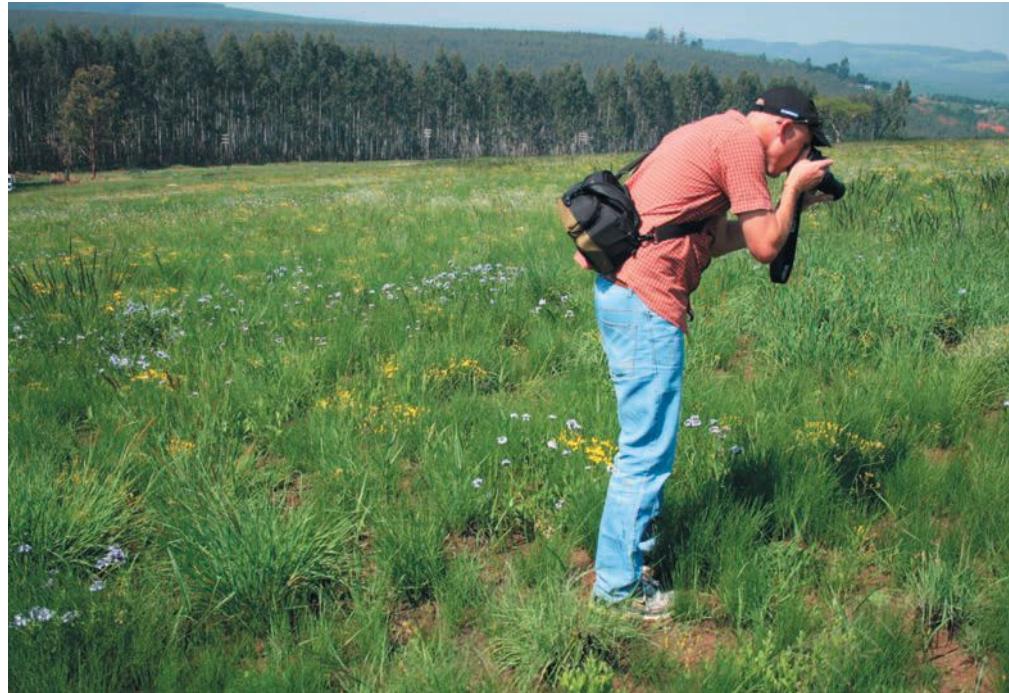
Solo Studios

Riebeek-Kasteel & Riebeek West

This art event is once-off opportunity to meet the artists of the Riebeek Valley in their own studios, and to buy art 'fresh off the easel'. Participating, world-renowned artists include Tamlin Blake, Solly Smook and André van Vuuren. Solo Studios also has an outreach initiative – The People's Gallery – where visitors are able to view and buy artwork by artists from the local disadvantaged communities.

074 209 6838, klaus@solistudios.co.za

www.solostudios.co.za 29-31 July



Out & About with KZN Midlands Conservancies KwaZulu-Natal Midlands

Learn more about the Midlands fauna and flora on guided walks through grasslands, yellowwoods and forests. A highlight is the Boston Forest Walk (3 July), which takes the form of a gentle stroll through a forest patch, crossing some streams and listening to birdsong. Afterwards a freshly prepared, healthy brunch awaits you. Also pencil in the delightful, regular country markets in Dargle, Rosetta and Lidgetton.

072 198 1556, www.midlandsconservancies.org.za

HOLE IN THE WALL

039 312 8190 www.holeinthewallresort.co.za

RUSTIC WILD COAST

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Near Coffee Bay, on a secluded beach with breathtaking scenery, Hole In The Wall is a fisherman's paradise, ideal for families, romantic breaks and backpackers.

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Image Club

The countryside through our readers' eyes and lenses.

Here are this month's four winning entries
in our photographic competition



First Prize

A R1 000 cash prize

This is a nice and simple capture of a Cape Sugarbird near McGregor in the Western Cape, one that stands out due to the narrow depth of field that has been used. It's sharp on the bird's head and feet and also on the flower, while the rest of the frame is pleasantly diffused. The simple placement of the bird in the middle of the frame works well, and the colours are vibrant and cheerful, if not a little cluttered in the bottom right of the frame.

PHOTOGRAPHER Hilda le Roux

CAMERA Canon EOS 5D III, 500mm lens

SETTINGS f4 at 1/3000 sec, ISO 250

Our judge this month is **Dale Morris**, a regular contributor to COUNTRY LIFE. Born in the United Kingdom, Dale purchased a one-way ticket at the age of 18, and thus became an exceptionally well-travelled refugee. He finally put down roots but that hasn't ended his regular photographic adventures into Southern Africa and beyond. Dale's award-winning writing and wildlife and travel photography have been published worldwide. See his images on www.geckoeye.com



Second Prize

A R750 cash prize

An unusual night-time image of white rhinos drinking, taken at sunset from an underground hide in Zimbabwe. Jenny set her white balance to tungsten to create a blue effect and the otherworldly, cold colours instantly captured my attention. The blue really works in this image. Jenny has been careful not to cut any of the reflections out of the frame, and the composition is also good.

PHOTOGRAPHER Jenny Hishin

CAMERA Nikon D750, 70-200mm lens at 125mm

SETTINGS f6.3 at 2sec, ISO 1600

Image Club



Third Prize

A R500 cash prize

A quiet early morning visit to the Vermont salt pan near Hermanus suddenly came alive when there was action between the Common Moorhens. It's the mirror-like quality and sharpness of this image that got my attention and, together with the little splashes and the symmetry, make this a very pleasing photo indeed. A little bit more empty blue space on the bottom of the frame and perhaps just a little more space at the right for the bird to 'run' into would have improved it even more. But it's still a great capture.

PHOTOGRAPHER James Luckhoff

CAMERA Canon EOS 700D, Sigma 150-600 at 600mm

SETTINGS f6.3 at 1/2000 sec, ISO 320



Fourth Prize

A R250 cash prize

This was taken from a boat on the Chobe River where the elephant had just left the water and was about to have a dust bath. I love the fluid lines of the dust. Its almost as if the elephant is getting artistic. The low angle, and the sharpness on the elephant and dust trail, make this an eye catcher. The framing might have been improved by either having the elephant more to the left of the frame or perhaps dead center in a square crop.

PHOTOGRAPHER David Owen

CAMERA Nikon D4, Nikkor 80-400mm lens at 320mm

SETTINGS f6.3 at 1/1000 sec, ISO 500

ENTER OUR IMAGE CLUB COMPETITION Email your entry to imageclub@caxton.co.za or enter online at www.countrylife.co.za. Read the competition rules online or phone Carlyn on 011 889 0726 for an email copy.

OUT & ABOUT

Dullstroom



MRS SIMPSON'S

Bryan Wolmarans and Stephen de Meyer are a Dullstroom institution, having run restaurants here for 21 years. So why the name Mrs Simpson's? Well, there's a fishing fly with the name, and Bryan is fascinated by Wallis Simpson. "She caught the biggest trophy – the King of England," says Bryan. He collects memorabilia to do with that historic time and also has a collection of shoes that hangs on the dado rails including Jimmy Choo and Manolo Blahnik. The restaurant is filled with interesting objects, and is famous for its great food – it featured in the *Eat Out* Top 500 restaurants in 2015. Try the lamb shanks and the chicken prawn curry, and you'll know why. Look out for Wallis the cat who is happy to eat leftovers. For another food experience pop into Bergen Cheese where they have a wide variety of home-made cheeses that you can taste.

Mrs Simpson's 013 254 0088
www.mrssimpsons.co.za
Bergen Cheese 071 875 7106

THE BLUE SHOP

Anyone who knows Dullstroom knows The Blue Shop, which is now 99 years old. This is your classic small-town general dealer with everything piled up on shelves. I remember buying my first gumboots there as a child and it's always been the place to buy your flyfishing equipment. The 5th-generation Vaid family still run it, and Fatima and her daughters, Sabeeah and Khadeejah, are always happy to help. Arbee's at the other end of town is more like a supermarket but has everything you might have forgotten to take on holiday.

The Blue Shop
013 254 0173



TRAMS ANTIQUES & COLLECTIBLES

"You never know what treasure you will find," says Wilma Hunter, manager of Trams Antiques. Owners Sue Meiring and Guy Williams spend their time sourcing new bits and bobs from deceased estates and house clearances – anything from silver jewellery to copper kitchenware and Toby jugs, teaspoons to furniture.

I coveted an old blue travelling trunk but dithered too long and when I went back sadly it was gone. At the bottom end of town near the Dullstroom Inn is their sister shop Trams Trading with second-hand furniture, where they also do some furniture renovation.

013 254 0121

So you thought Dullstroom was just Mpumalanga's flyfishing Mecca? This Town of the Year finalist has plenty more to offer

WORDS AND PICTURES SUE ADAMS



THE CLOCK SHOP

The tagline for this shop is "A magic corner of time" and this really is a strange little gem in a tiny town like Dullstroom. It began as a toy shop and then the Finders Keepers competition (with a million rand up for grabs) made Dullstroom famous when the loot was found behind the clock in the Dullstroom Inn. And so co-owner Michelle Meacher says the idea of expanding the clock side of the business grew. Now this shop is filled with clocks of all shapes and sizes from miniatures to grandfather clocks. People send clocks from across South Africa for clock repairs, and you can also have a customised clock made for you, or buy a grandfather clock kit and make your own.

013 254 0022

www.theclockshop.co.za



MAVUNGANA FLYFISHING

What would Dullstroom be without flyfishing and all the kit that goes with it? Every flyfisherman knows that you have to buy new flies each time you fish and where better than consulting with the experts at Mavungana? Owner Jonathan Boulton began by stocking and looking after other people's waters. John Thobala started as his assistant and really only knew about bait fishing but is now a fly convert. The two of them run flyfishing trips across the world, will advise you on what to buy, and offer flyfishing waters for you to try out in the Dullstroom area. They also have a lovely range of leather bags, both travel and fishing bags, which you can see being made on the premises.

013 254 0270

www.flyfishing.co.za

WILD ABOUT WHISKY

The way owner Dave Gunns explains how they started their whisky tasting shop begins like this. "After going on a distilling trip to Scotland my wife, Eve, and I came back juiced up on culture, heritage and whisky. Our tenant had just given notice so we decided to introduce South Africa to Scotland's whisky." From just an initial nine bottles on offer they now have 1 180 varieties and they know them all. When you start you might not be so keen on whisky but I promise you it is a fascinating experience.

For craft-beer tasting try Anvil Ale House at the other end of town.

Wild About Whisky
082 600 5388, www.wildaboutwhisky.com
Anvil Ale House
073 168 6603,
www.anvilbrewery.com





Circles inside a Forest

JUSTIN FOX escapes the Garden Route crowds and slips into the wildness of Knysna Forest and the leafy world brought to life by Dalene Matthee



Knysna Forest has achieved a mythical place in South African literature through the novels of Dalene Matthee. I set off to trace the paths of her most famous book, *Circles in a Forest*, looking to explore the places that had so inspired her.

Just east of Knysna, I turned off the N2 onto the R339 and headed into deep, subtropical forest. After half an hour of climbing along a rough road, I reached Diepwalle Forest Station, which has a SANParks camp set in the heart of the Knysna Forest. The accommodation, such as it is, has raised decks, each with a lean-to eating area, braai facilities and a platform on which to pitch a tent.

Diepwalle is great for hiking and there are five excellent trails in the area. I went walking with ranger Wilfred Oraai, who's lived in the forest for 27 years and has the face of a Khoisan hunter-gatherer. He slipped through dense foliage ahead of me, his footfall making no sound.

Suddenly, he held up his hand. "Bosloerie," he whispered. Above us on a bough sat a Narina Trogan, its scarlet and green body haloed in a leafy dapple. "Hoot-hoot, hoot-hoot," it cried, and with one beautiful beat of its wings it vanished. On we walked.

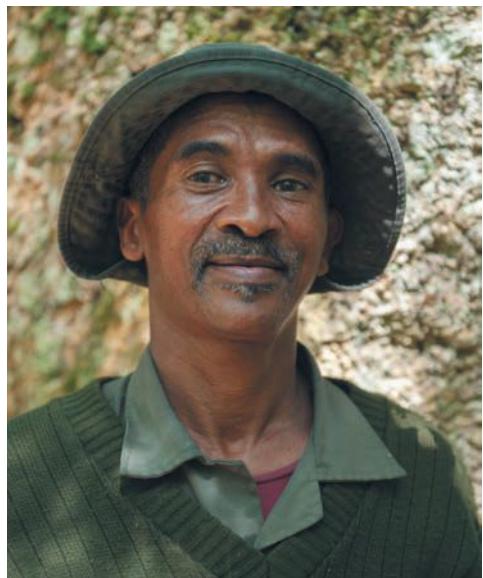
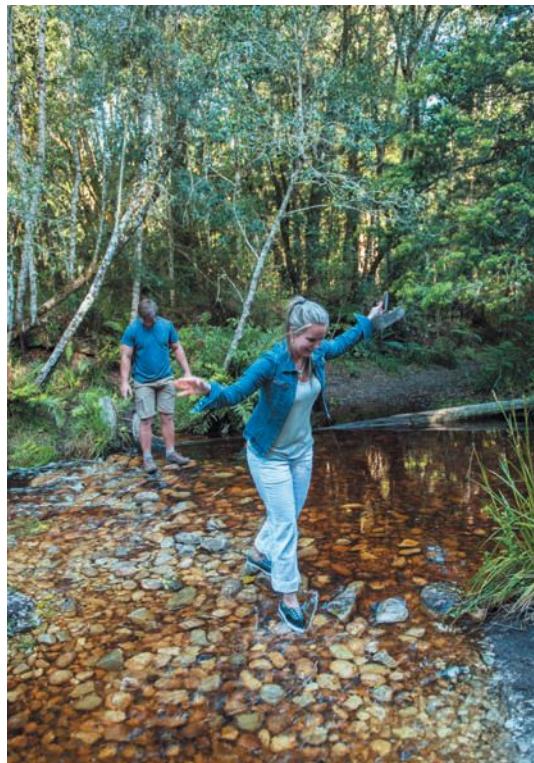
Through Wilfred's eyes, I started to notice the details of my environment – the texture of bark, the leaf colours and forms, the small creatures of the forest floor. Wilfred paused to allow a millipede to pass, then helped a dwarf chameleon onto a branch.

"Look here, elephant spoor," he said, pointing to a soggy indentation beside the path. He spoke of the elephants of yore and his many encounters with a female pachyderm that frequents Diepwalle. On one occasion, he bumped into her on the road at night, as he was walking to Knysna. "She just *mos* stood there and I just stood there and neither of us said a word. Then she stepped back into the forest. As I continued down the road, I heard her in the trees beside me. You know, I think she was escorting me, watching over me."

In *Circles in a Forest*, it's the relationship between the hero, Saul Barnard, and an ancient elephant bull, Old Foot, that is at the heart of the story. Matthee was a passionate conservationist and her book is, in part, a lament for the loss of the great elephant herds that once roamed the forest. Today, only a handful remain.

That evening, I sat on my deck reading *Circles* once again. The low sun added dusty columns to the forest architecture. I lit a fire. A velvet monkey eyed my chips

OPPOSITE TOP: The Outeniqua Mountains viewed from Spitskop lookout point. BELOW LEFT: The Garden of Eden alongside the N2, east of Knysna. BELOW RIGHT: The graceful spiral of a young fern. THIS PAGE ABOVE RIGHT: Crossing a stream on the Jubilee Creek Trail. RIGHT: SANParks ranger Wilfred Oraai knows the forest like the back of his hand. BELOW RIGHT: A dwarf chameleon on a mission. BELOW: The camping decks at Diepwalle.





ABOVE: Meagan Vermaas runs fascinating Dalene Matthee forest tours. ABOVE RIGHT: This is all that's left of the old mining settlement of Millwood. BELOW: Exploring the old mine shafts at Millwood. RIGHT: The Dalene Matthee Big Tree Memorial.



and meat but, on careful reflection of my brandished braai tongs, decided against a raid. Hadeda Ibises clattering about in the trees overhead sounded as though they were moving furniture.

Greater Double-collared Sunbirds tweeted shrilly from all sides; distant choristers echoed from the woods. I'd already worked my way through the better part of a bottle of red juice of the grape, and was singing along to their calls, "And the coloured birds go, "Doo doo do doo do do do..." As one does when alone in a very big forest.

I remembered how Matthee eulogised the solitary camper. She writes in *Circles*, 'Peacefulness comes to a man when he sits by his own fire and rakes out his own sweet potatoes from under his own ash. As if something inside opens up slowly... Your eyes see things you did not see yesterday: the gossamer-fine moss twining round the blue buck rope... the specks of mauve in the feathers of the Grey Cuckoo-Shrike... Then one day, sitting in front of your shelter, you suddenly realise that the old leaves do not fall from the forest roof –

they fluttered to the ground in a slow twirling flight like wings without bodies.'

Outings from the camp at Diepwalle took me to Knysna town, where I wanted to retrace Saul Barnard's footsteps and see the historical sights. Millwood House Museum on Queen Street was a good place to start. It pays tribute to the abandoned forest town that features prominently in the novel. Gold was discovered near Millwood in 1876, but yields soon diminished and the mining town was abandoned. The structure that



ABOVE: A long-legged spider on his forest perch. RIGHT: The Prince Alfred Big Tree (yellowwood) near Diepwalle.

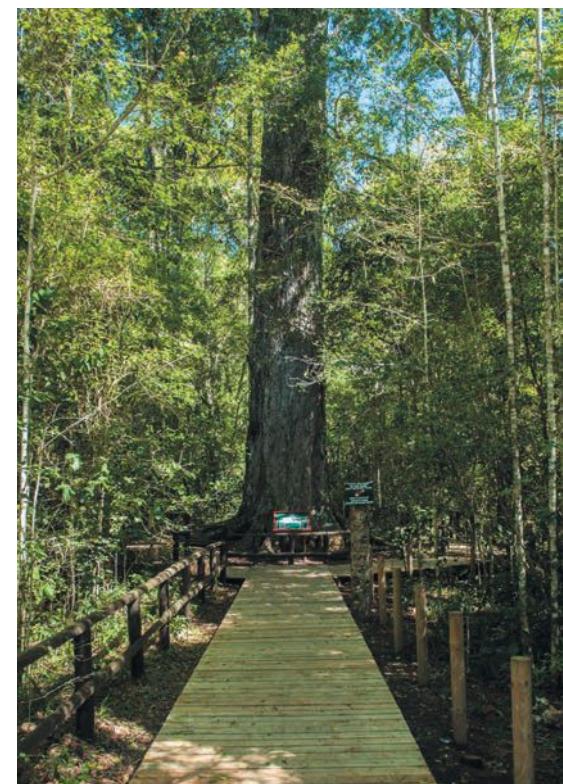
houses the museum was built in Millwood during the gold rush, then dismantled and re-erected in Knysna.

Today, hardly anything remains of Millwood town, but the museum preserves artefacts and photographs from that heady period of gold rush. The complex has a number of buildings, each presenting an aspect of Knysna history and featuring the gold mines, timber industry and the town's enigmatic founder George Rex.

From Millwood, I took a walk around town looking for *Circles* locations. Just up the street was Woodmill Lane shopping centre, site of the town's original sawmill. I recalled Saul's shock when he first saw the mountains of wood, stacked and ready for shipping. The forest he so loved was being siphoned out through this terrifying timber factory.

In 1884, after more than a century of sawmilling, the operation closed and the buildings were converted into shops. Scattered throughout the complex I found old machinery – a giant crosscut saw, a geriatric generator – all brightly painted and recycled as sculptural items. Dinosaurs all.

On another day trip from Diepwalle, I signed up for a forest walking tour. Parking beside the Dalene Matthee Big Tree Memorial, I joined a group of hikers led by Meagan Vermaas. She's a talented guide who uses



Circles in a Forest as inspiration for her walks.

We stood beside the grey, pedimented memorial, erected soon after Matthee's death in 2005. "Dalene often came here to Krisjan-se-Nek to replenish her soul and gain inspiration for her wonderful stories," said Meagan. "This is where she now rests. The tree behind you is 900 years old and was one of Dalene's favourite *kalanders* (yellowwoods)."

We crossed a tea-coloured stream, the water gurgling over polished boulders. The banks were overhung with boughs, tall ferns filtered the light. Meagan showed us old furrows that led from the river to sluice boxes for extracting gold. I thought of Saul panning

in the icy water until he was blue with cold. Sometimes days would pass with not even a speck of gold clinging to the corduroy.

At the end of a narrow kloof, we came to a waterfall that stepped down in two cascades. "Elephants sometimes bathe here," whispered Meagan, as though the Big Feet were listening. I pictured the creatures splashing about in the pond, rolling in the mud – a bathing ritual in the forest's heart. I thought, too, about how elephants were still the spiritual guardians of this place, even if their numbers were tragically reduced. They remained the forest's apex mammal, its totem.

On my last afternoon at Diepwalle,

I took a walk into the forest and sat beneath a giant Outeniqua yellowwood, enveloped in its flying-buttress roots. The sun was low, sending dusty shafts through the branches. A fragrant muskiness leaked from the soil.

I sensed the forest breathing, as though it were one enormous creature. I could feel it growing: all that upward yearning to reach the light of the canopy. This was a perfect, fully evolved system. It needed nothing more, nothing less. Only man could destroy its harmony.

A golden softness settled over the forest. If I wasn't careful, I might lose myself completely in its leafy embrace. ■

Map reference G4 see inside back cover



ABOVE: An elephant skeleton in the Forest Legends Museum at Diepwalle.
BOTTOM: The Knysna Heads through which Saul Barnard watched sailing ships come and go.



Where to Stay

- There are 10 camping decks and a clean ablution block at Diepwalle Forest Station (starting from R190 a person a night). Bring your own food, bedding and tent (or one can be provided for an extra R410). There's a tearoom on site. 044 302 5606 www.sanparks.org.

Where to Play

- There are good walking and mountain-biking trails, bird watching and picnic sites. Visit the Forest Legends Museum at Diepwalle which gives the history of forest dwellers, especially woodcutters, as well as information on indigenous flora and fauna (don't miss the elephant display).
- Do a walk with guide Meagan Vermaas (R200) that uses *Circles in a Forest* as inspiration. Starting at the Matthee memorial, it follows the Jubilee Creek Trail. Meagan's accounts are fascinating. 073 363 6522, www.forestguidedtours.co.za
- Millwood House Museum, Knysna 044 302 6320
- Visit the remains of Millwood 'town', the gold-mining settlement that flourished briefly in the 19th century before being abandoned and swallowed by forest. Andrew Aikman runs informative tours of the old mines on foot and by game-drive vehicle (R200) from Mother Holly's Tea Room. 061 972 7080

Dalene Matthee

- Matthee was born in Riversdale in 1938. She began her writing career with children's stories and short stories, but is best known for her four forest novels: *Circles in a Forest*, *Field's Child*, *The Mulberry Forest* and *Dreamforest*.
- Her close relationship with Knysna started when she first hiked the area in 1978. Over time, she developed an intimate connection with the forest and was a strong advocate for its preservation.
- *Circles* has become a South African classic, much loved, translated into many languages and much prescribed for school syllabi.

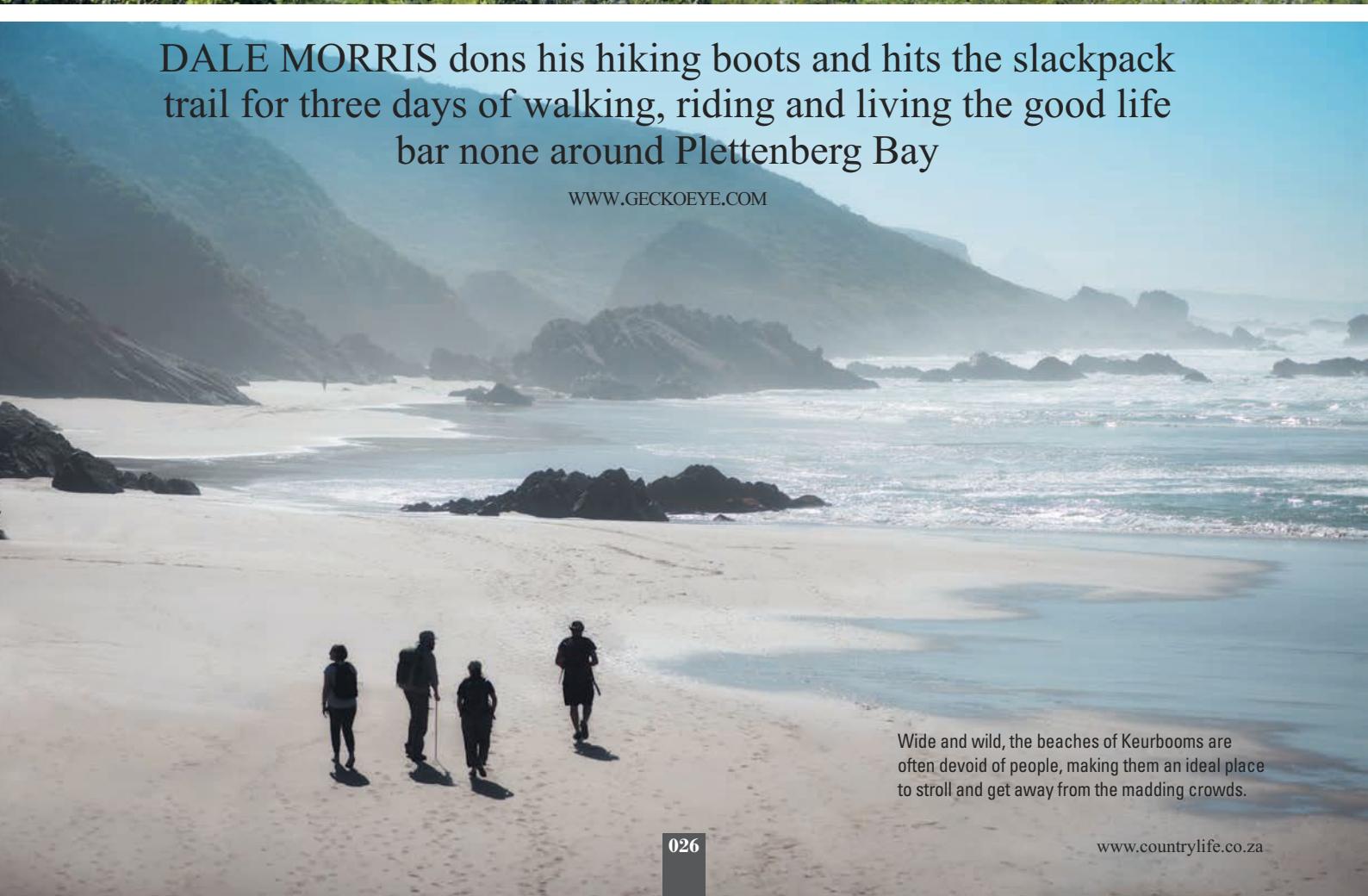


The Salt River estuary is a beautiful and little-known location near Plett.

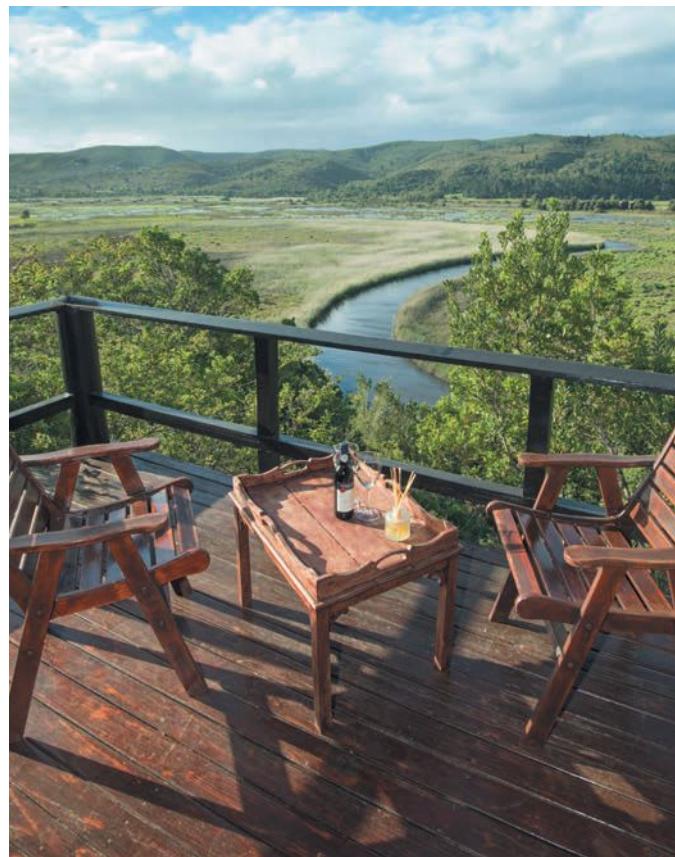
Pampered Rambling

DALE MORRIS dons his hiking boots and hits the slackpack trail for three days of walking, riding and living the good life bar none around Plettenberg Bay

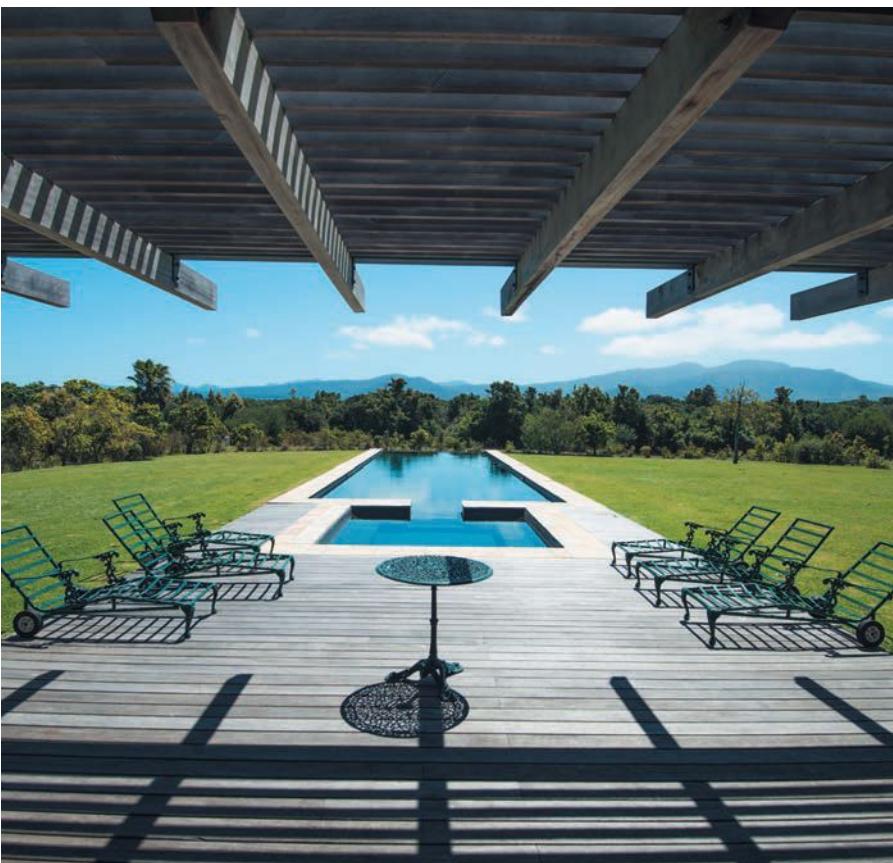
WWW.GECKOEYE.COM



Wide and wild, the beaches of Keurbooms are often devoid of people, making them an ideal place to stroll and get away from the madding crowds.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Part sand, part pebble, part cliffs and rocky coves and coastal. The first day of hiking took us along a beautiful stretch of seaside; A view of the Bitou River from the decks of the Emily Moon lodge; A lunchtime swimming option at the Forest Hall estate; Oops, we time the tide badly, but wading across the Salt River estuary really is quite good fun.





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Colin Wylie has been a specialist hiking guide for many, many years and is local to the area; Sasha, the author's wife enjoys the view from one of Trogon House's many wooden decks; The 'hikers' pulling into the driveway of the upmarket Kurland polo and horse estate; Debbie Fermor is the owner of Hog Hollow Horse Trails.



As the years advance and my body morphs inexorably towards a state of greater corpulence, I have come to truly appreciate slackpack trails. Generally, your heavy baggage is transported for you, accommodation is in nice places with rooms and roofs, rather than in damp huts and tents, and you are fed.

But that's not to say they're always a walk in the park. The trails themselves can be long and exhausting even without a backpack, and this can end up excluding many folk who otherwise would love to roam.

Now comes something new, The Plett Trail – a combination multi-day hike, horse ride, and vehicular route around the Plettenberg Bay area that comprises moderate distances, upmarket dining, superb accommodation, and best of all, lots of delicious wine.

Over a bottle of local wine and a meal of

oxtail stew, enjoyed on a patio decorated with African and Asian bric-a-brac, I met the other hikers, six of us in all, at Emily Moon, a delightful, luxurious lodge overlooking the snaking Bitou River. It's also where I met Colin Wylie, the man who was to be our guide for the next three days of indulgent exploration.

"It all starts tomorrow," he told us as we finished our fourth (was it the fifth?) glass of Merlot, followed by a decadent chocolate mousse. "But don't worry. It's not a very long trek. Enjoy your drinks and dessert and go get a good night's rest."

Which is precisely what we did. My wife and I woke for breakfast at 08h00, slightly hungover, but a salmon breakfast with a selection of cheese and some freshly ground coffee helped banish the babalaas. We were taken by minibus shuttle to Keurbooms Beach to start the first leg of the trail, a ten kilometre



stroll along one of the most beautiful stretches of coastline on the Garden Route.

Oystercatchers welcomed us, tiptoeing between rocks and spires, pecking at shellfish and ‘tweeping’ like battery-operated children’s toys. Noisy gulls wheeled overhead like grey and white kites. “They were once almost extinct, these oystercatchers,” Colin told us as we took in the surrounding views. “But they have made a comeback thanks to conservation efforts.”

Away to the west we could see the white houses of Plettenberg Bay, framed by a cobalt ocean and the craggy walls of Robberg Nature Reserve. Directly behind us, forested cliffs soared above a beach of sand and stone and soulful solitude. There was no one else around.

The walk for this first morning took us eastwards along fisherman paths to pebbly coves, past craggy islets and across wide sweeping beaches. The flowers were out

in profusion, the fynbos pretty and the sea fresh and so blue. There was a bit of rock hopping to be done from time to time, and the occasional bit of surge threatened to wet our feet but, by and large, the walking was easy.

Colin, a naturalist, would point out animals and plants and significant geography along the way, giving us plenty of information and entertaining stories. “These are ancient shell middens” he told us, as we clambered over mounds of castaway molluscs. “They date back hundreds if not thousands of years. Maybe even more.” I picked up a periwinkle and thought about how the world had changed since this shell had first been cast away by a Strandloper. But this particular stretch of coast had hardly changed at all. “It’s mostly nature reserve here,” said Colin. “That’s why it’s so quiet and undeveloped.”

Later, as tummies began to rumble, we ascended from the beach through a forest of milkwoods to the manicured grounds of Forest Hall Estate, our lunch stop for the day. There, a colonial-style swimming pool was surrounded by manicured lawns and stately oaks. “Take a swim,” implored Colin, but we passed for fear of leaving a sunblock slick upon the glittering surface. “This is also where you can bow out if you’ve done enough hiking for the day,” he told us.

Because The Plett Trail is a series of loops and shortish hikes it’s always possible to call in the shuttle bus and make a quick getaway at almost any point in the day. But we all chose to continue and, after a break and a snack, off we went to Nature’s Valley via a series of forested paths with views of the ocean and the nearby Tsitsikamma Mountains.

The only ‘drama’ of the day came when we reached the shores of the stunningly



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Sue Land, proprietor of Newstead Wine Estate and proud developer of several award-winning wines; Colleen and Clive Noble in front of the country manor lodge in Redford House private nature reserve; Accommodations are anything but basic at Kurland estate; Kurland has beautiful grounds and surroundings.



SLACKPACKING ▶ THE PLETT TRAIL

beautiful Salt River estuary. "It's a bit deeper than I predicted," said Colin as he waded across up to his neck "But at least there's no current." Usually, if you get the tides right, you can cross with no more than wet knees. However, we had dilly-dallied too long and now had to swim. But it was great fun and nobody lost a camera, cellphone or relative.

The day's walk ended an hour or so later at Nature's Valley, an oasis of homes surrounded by mountains, forests, lakes and beaches, in the Garden Route National Park. It's also where the legendary Otter Trail ends. There, we were picked up by our shuttle and whisked off to our digs for the night, Trogon House – a superb lodge of glassy chalets, wooden walkways and expansive decks, hidden under the boughs of a dense, mature forest.

After a long soak in a big hot bath, we assembled in the lounge for a slide presentation from local bird expert Mike Bridgeford, about why Plett should be on every twitcher's bucket list. "We have

numerous habitats from wetlands to forests," he told us. "That means a lot of different birds."

Almost 40 per cent of South Africa's 846 species can be found around Plett, and there are eight true endemics, which amounts to 45 per cent of the country's total. And every single fynbos species can be encountered. "It's a birder's hotspot," Mike told us. "I hope you find lifers on this hike of yours"

Dinner that evening was superb, again with some of the extensive selection of locally produced boutique wines. Four or five bowls of fish later, I nodded off to sleep to the sound of owls and nightjars calling from the forest.

The following morning found us nervously perched in saddles. "We're all incompetent," I answered, when Debbie Fermor, proprietor of Hog Hollow Horse Trails, enquired after our horse-riding experience. Some of us had never been on a horse before. "Not to worry" she said with a smile. "Most of the riders we get here are novices, and our horses are ever so gentle."

I was on Ginger, a russet creature that quickly assessed me, and found me wanting. Not a single command, kick or pull of the reigns had the slightest effect on him, but he knew the route like the back of his hooves so, in the end, it really didn't matter that I had no control. He pulled into position behind my wife, whose mount was a large, shiny, black beast that suffered from flatulence.

It was a most fragrant and pleasant ride that morning as we ambled through farmland meadows and patches of indigenous forests. No one fell off and, because of the soporific pace, there were no abrasions to the calves and nothing was bruised and battered. What a lovely way to 'walk' a trail, I thought, and things got even better when we sauntered through the gates of Newstead Vineyards at The Crags above Plettenberg Bay for lunch.

Sue Land, owner of the award-winning estate, had set a table for us, brimming with delectable nibbles and cold meats, cheeses and salmons. We even had a full-on wine tasting session of various bubbles, blends, reds and crisp whites, all locally produced on the estate.

Now, far be it from me to promote drunk driving of any sort, but my mother raised me never to spit in public. So rather than simply 'taste' the wine on offer, I drank every last drop that was proffered. So did my wife. Afterwards, we were hoisted back into the saddle by Debbie's staff, and there we sat, like floppy pickled fish in a pleasant haze, moseying through polo fields and pretty wine estates. Thank heavens for Ginger's autopilot setting.

As the sun sank, we clip-clopped down leafy pathways to the very posh Kurland polo estate and hotel, also at The Crags, and I felt for all the world like a drunken lord from Downtown Abbey or some such period drama. I half expected to see a pack of faithful beagles race out to meet me. Tally-ho!

The surroundings and grounds were oh-so colonial; white gables and country mansions, shaded by the branches of ancient oaks. There were expensive-looking horses in nice jackets in paddocks that resembled



ABOVE: A colonial era-style library at Kurland.
RIGHT: Paradise found – the beautiful Nature's Valley.





ABOVE LEFT: Ericas are a common sight in the fynbos biome through which much of The Plett Trail passes. MIDDLE: A coastal succulent plant with thick fleshy leaves seen on rocky section of coast close to Plettenberg Bay. RIGHT: Because the Garden Route area has many different habitats, such as coastal fynbos, grasslands, wetlands and forests, it's a smorgasbord of floral delights. BELOW RIGHT: The Plett Trail is a great opportunity to do a spot of birding.

golfing greens, and there were ponds with carp, and rose gardens and whatnot. I even spied a cake display cabinet on the veranda of the main house, and instantly relieved it of its burden of scones.

Chamber music and string quartets played melodies in my mind as we settled into our grand accommodation for the night. That evening we dined in a colonial-style restaurant on petite steaks and fancy puddings in front of a roaring fire and paintings of stern-looking ancestors who glared at us from their ornate frames.

The third and final day took us, on foot, up to the slopes of the Tsitsikamma Mountains, through pine plantations and sections of lush indigenous forest. It was quite an uphill schlep at first, especially with a bellyful of ‘full English’ breakfast and a glass or two of bubbly. But it wasn’t long before we were walking along a level crest with views across the sprawling Kurland estate and beyond to the ocean and Plettenberg Bay.

Colin called out some rare and endemic birds for us to see, including the rather plain but ever so tuneful Victorin’s Warbler. “That’s one of the species real birders go nuts for,” said Colin, when I failed to display excitement at what, to me, was naught but a drab, brown, sparrowy thing.

But not to be discouraged, he continued for the rest of the morning, showing us insects and all sorts of birds and interesting

flowers in the fynbos.

We drank from bubbling brooks and strolled down old logging roads and paths, and it wasn’t long before lunchtime was upon us and we found ourselves ambling downhill and through the gates of the Redford House private nature reserve.

Clive and Colleen Noble, owners of a historic country mansion on the property, had baked us a hearty lunch of pie and cake before we were shown to a lovingly restored farm cottage, our accommodation for the night. There were various options on the table for the rest of that afternoon. We could take art lessons in Clive’s studio or continue hiking down to the nearby Whisky Creek Nature Reserve.

Colin also offered to take us birding, but we gave in to lassitude and instead stayed at home and listened to Colleen and Clive tell stories from the past. Both are accomplished historians, naturalists and talkers of note, and it was a charming experience to sit in their home and have them regale us at their hearth. And of course there was plenty of local wine.

It was a splendid close to our trail, and we came away with memories of walking, riding, magnificent landscapes, plenty of food and local wine, and the people of the area who made the journey so special.

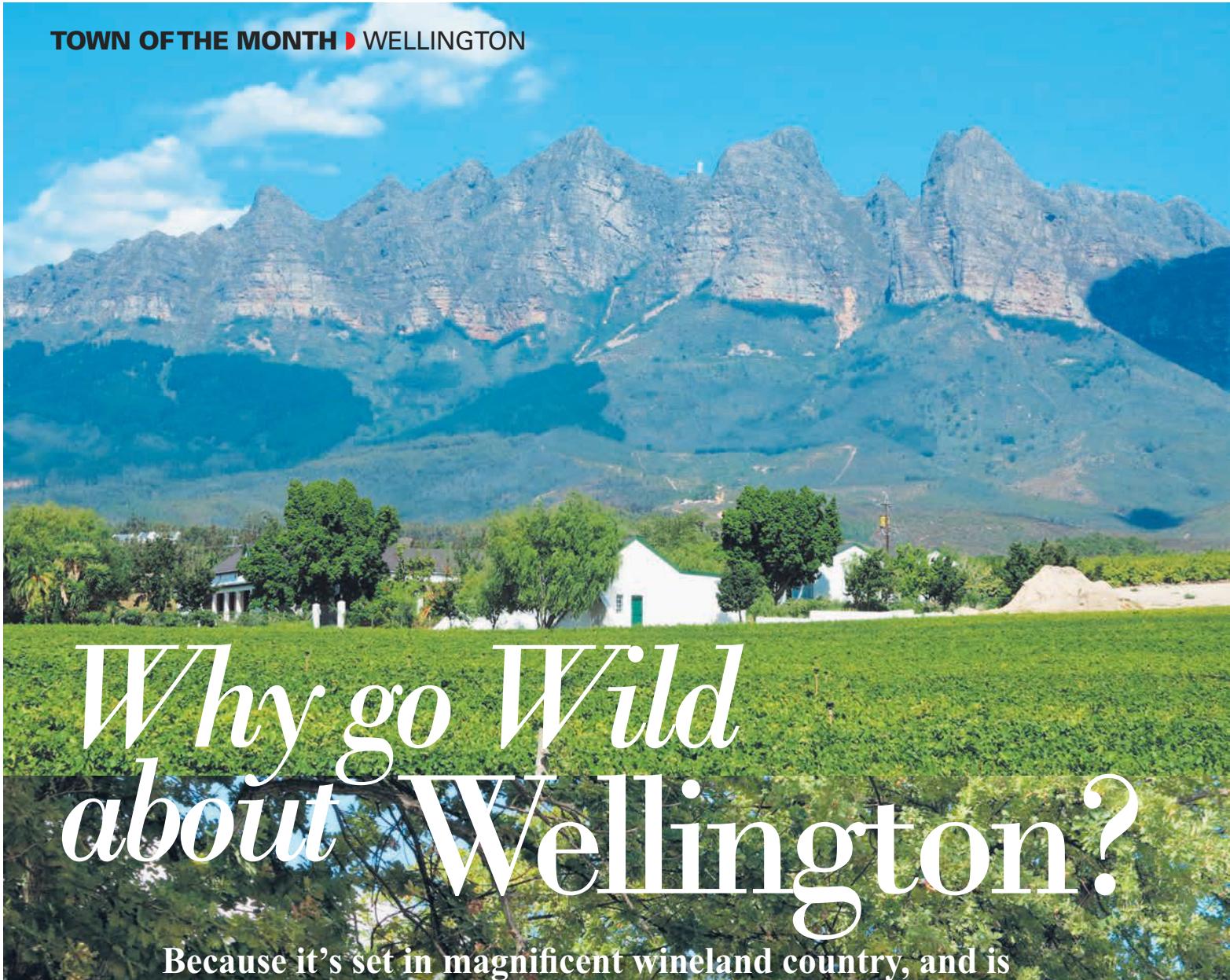
And best of all, unlike after most multi-day hikes, we suffered no blisters or aching old joints. It was slackpacking at its very best. ■

Map reference G4 see inside back cover



The Bigger Picture

- The three-day Plett Trail is just the first leg of a ten-day odyssey incorporating a community trail (highlighting the local Griqua culture) the Robberg Nature Reserve, and various mountain, coastal, forest and wetland locations.
- There are visits to important palaeontology sites, guest speakers in the evenings, an emphasis on birding and, perhaps most importantly of all, a great deal of wine tasting at some of the 16 wine estates in the area.
- You choose to do the whole route, or just certain portions, and can hop in and out as you please.
- 082 924 8349, www.plets-tourism.co.za

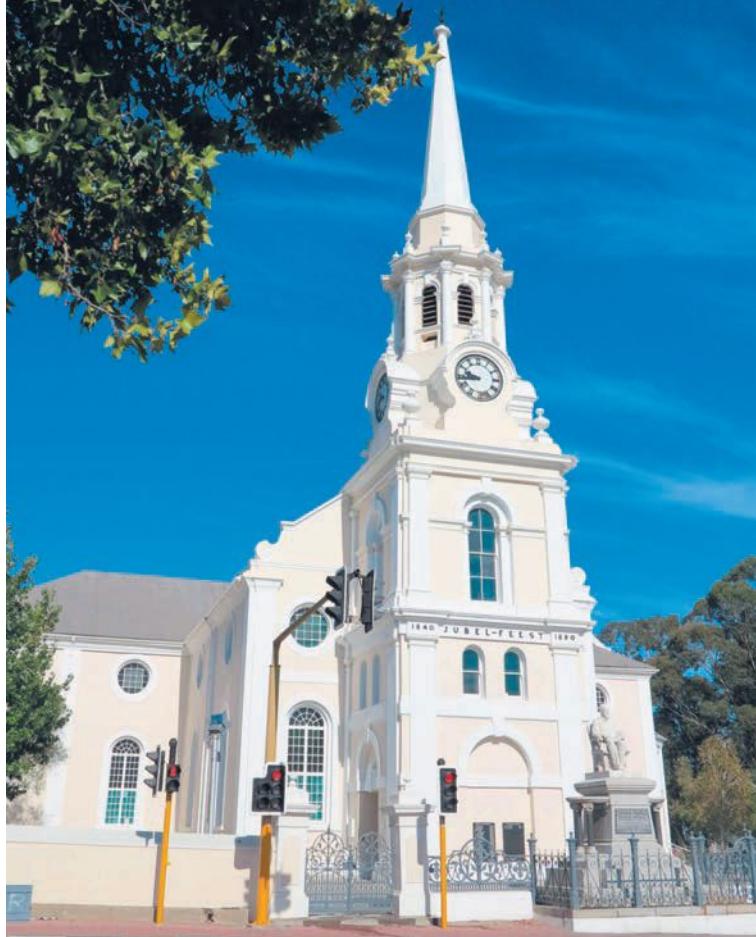


Why go Wild about Wellington?

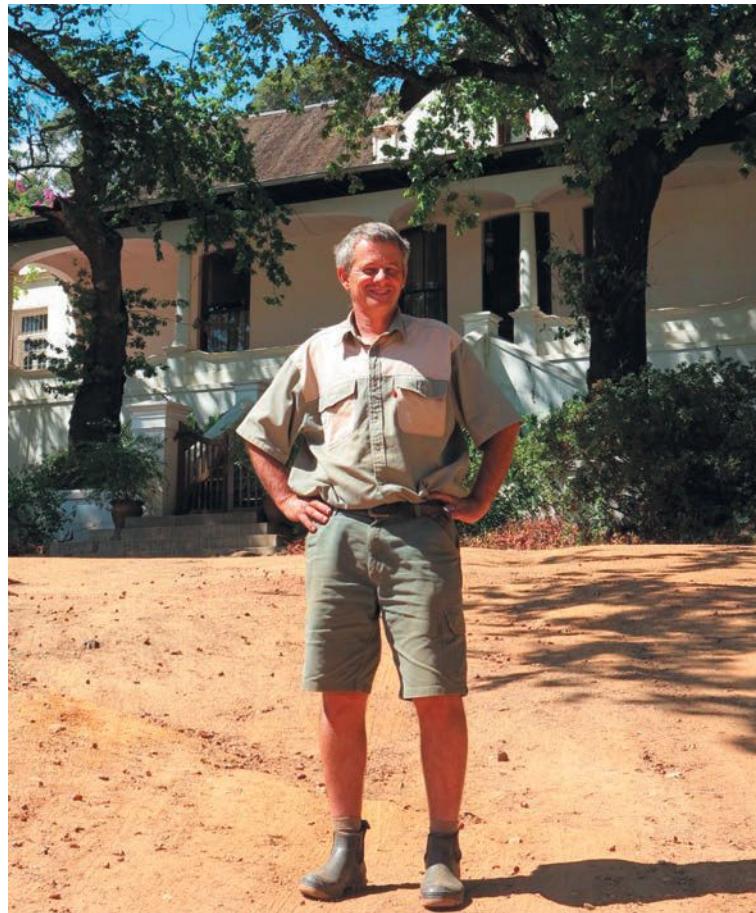
Because it's set in magnificent wineland country, and is steeped in history, with beautifully restored Victorian buildings and welcoming people. And that's just the surface

WORDS AND PICTURES KERI HARVEY WWW.KERI-HARVEY.COM





CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE: Beautiful Welgegund wine farm, once owned by Cecil John Rhodes, rests at the foot of the Limietberg mountains, so named as they were, in those days, the boundary to how far you could travel; Standing tall and proud at the top of Church Street is the Dutch Reformed Church and iconic statue of the city father Rev Andrew Murray keeping watch over the town; Tourism manager Annelize Stroebel has her office in the historic Old Market building, right next to the church; Cellars and wine estates virtually surround Wellington; Dan Retief is a proud descendent of Piet Retief and farms on Welvanpas Family Vineyards.





TOP LEFT: Wellington has plenty of cosy coffee shops and cafés but The Perfect Place is an institution – at the bottom of Church Street. LEFT: Thomas Bain's house is now a private residence in Bain Street. ABOVE: Ouma Granny's House is a historic home on the Heritage Trail. BELOW LEFT: The late, local author Winnie Rust documented much of Wellington's history.



“**T**’s off the beaten track, yet accessible. Rural, untouched, quaint and creative with truly unique attractions,” says Wellington Tourism manager, Annelize Stroebel. “You also need to go a little further to experience the real Wellington, beyond the beautiful church and busy main street.”

Annelize moved to Wellington a decade ago and says, “I was immediately struck by the people here. Complete strangers look you in the eye and greet you with a smile. For me, the people create a unique atmosphere that’s friendly and sincere.”

Wellington is located in a valley and was only proclaimed in 1840 with the establishment of the Dutch Reformed Church, but the Khoi-Khoi and San lived there long before – followed by French Huguenots who settled there in the late 1600s. Named after the Duke of Wellington, the town quickly became a hub of activity and, in 1853, a wooden bridge across the Berg River officially linked Wellington to Cape Town.

The Lady Loch Bridge was later replaced by an iron bridge, the first of its kind in South Africa. Bain’s Kloof Pass, over the mighty Limietberge outside town, was also opened in 1853 and linked the Cape to the interior. Andrew Geddes Bain achieved this impressive feat without any formal engineering training, using dynamite and convict labour.

However, it was Dr (and Reverend) Andrew Murray who changed the course of history in Wellington – and if the town has a patron saint, it’s him. A strong proponent of women’s education, he inspired the building of the Huguenot Seminary, and Wellington is now known as the birthplace of education for women in South Africa.

Walking the self-guided Heritage Trail takes you past many of the graceful buildings the good reverend inspired. The trail starts at the old Market Hall – now the Wellington Tourism office – to about 30 historic buildings that include Bain’s House, Ouma Granny’s House museum, Wellington Museum, the Post Office and the Standard Bank buildings, Victoria Park and the Jubilee

Arch, and the Dutch Reformed Church and Andrew Murray statue. Don some tough shoes if you walk it all.

Take a drive up Bain's Kloof Pass for a good overview of Wellington. Freewheeling back to town, you'll see the signposts to renowned wine estates flash past the window. There's Val du Charon, Wellington Wines, Bosman Family, Oude Wellington with its renowned gourmet restaurant, and Jacques Smit to name few.

Then there's also Welvanpas Family Vineyards where Dan Retief farms as an 11th generation Retief. He's a descendant of Piet Retief with a keen interest in history and says, "I have very deep roots in this place of God-given beauty." He also farms citrus and proteas, and hosts mountain-bike trails on the farm. For those wanting to sip wine on historic farms and still stay sober, the three- or four-day Wellington Wine Walk might be the option. It's leisurely, luggage-free, and happens from March to November.

"These are drought-resistant fruit and vegetables," says Gerhard Swart, with characteristic dry wit. He's referring to ceramic pieces that are so lifelike you'd be excused for breaking a tooth on them. He and lifelong partner Anthony Harris moved to live and work in Wellington five years ago. Here, sculpture and ceramics are what their life is all about, and their business Ceramic Matters exports pieces around the world.

"The town is honest and unpretentious and there's real energy and integrity here," says Gerhard. Anthony adds, "And it's small enough for people to look out for each other." Their 300-year-old home is a theatrical collection of ceramic skulls and bones, sculptures and art pieces collected over a lifetime. "They're the ancestors," whispers Anthony of the skulls.

This is something the late author Winnie Rust knew all about. She penned half a dozen or so books, all telling the facts – and some fictions – of Wellington's history. Most renowned is *Martha – a story about the black Countess of*

Stamford. She called the work "creative non-fiction, because all the facts are there but it's a good story too – about a black slave woman who married aristocracy."

Winnie's uncle was the renowned poet Boerneef. Other famous poets, composers, singers and authors from Wellington include Breyten Breytenbach, Adam Small, PH Nortje, ML de Villiers and Valiant Swart. The Breyten Breytenbach Centre in town is in the same building where the renowned Afrikaans poet spent his childhood, and is a popular cultural and art centre.

On advice from locals, lunch is a home-made lamb pie at Red Pepper Mill, with a few more to take home. Then great coffee on the stoep of The Perfect Place at the end of Church Street, opposite the Wellington Museum. Stomach well lined, I head south-east out of town to Upland, an export, certified organic brandy, port, grappa and wine estate. Edmund Oettlé has been farming here for 26 years and distills the hard tack himself. On the wine side, he presses Pinot Noir and hanepoot grapes by foot.

"They say distilled brandy is like

RIGHT: Alpacas at Quenti Alpaca Farm and Mill come in many colours and each has a unique personality.
BELOW: Edmund Oettlé distills the hard tack himself in this distillery opposite his homestead.





TOP LEFT:
Welcome to
Ou Kaya and its
cactus garden.
LEFT: Julene van
Zyl with the huge
cacti collection at
Ou Kaya Padstal.
ABOVE: Gerhard
Swart and
Anthony Harris
in their Ceramic
Matters home
studio.

a snake," says Edmund. "The head is poisonous, the heart is good, and the tail stinks. But that's oversimplified because the tails have good flavours for brandy distilling." As we walk through his compact cellar, Edmund points to spiderwebs in the high corners. "These spiders are always drunk," he jokes, and offers me a brandy tasting. I opt for a 'sniffing' and the aromatic scent is enticing.

So too the fields of roses at Langkloof Roses on the opposite side of town. Shop-bought roses seldom have scent but, here among the 14 000 rose bushes, the perfume is intoxicating. The antique-style roses are harvested for vases in nearby delis and for use at the on-site wedding venue, while the rose-inspired coffee shop is also filled with fresh roses with names like Silk Bottom and June's Joy.

Enjoying afternoon tea and cake here, literally smelling the roses while watching Persian sheep and a few fat cows grazing on the surrounds, is meditative. Or I could swap roses for cacti and bonsai and head for afternoon coffee at Ou Kaya Padstal en Kwekery in town.

Braam van Zyl is Wellington's cactus king, Julene his wife the bonsai queen. Today Braam is out of town, but his vast cactus collection stands proud at Ou Kaya. For 15 years he's collected and sold cacti from Madagascar, Mexico and beyond. Ten years ago Julene started growing bonsai from seed. Over coffee and rusks she says, "I love the miniature trees that look old." But Julene nearly gave up when one of her chickens sat on her first bonsai and broke its branches. She patched it up and the little, old acacia tree is still in her prized collection.

Possibly even more unusual is Quenti Alpaca Farm and Mill on Klein Limietrivier Farm. Linda Nessworthy has loved alpacas since she was a child. Now retired, she and husband Stephen are

If you have a taste for the unusual, the beautiful, the scenic or the historical side of life, Wellington will check those boxes

working harder than ever and loving it. Their 150 alpacas in different colours are all known by name and personality, Linda shears them herself and on the farm is a mill to process alpaca fibre into clothing. It's finer than wool or mohair, comparable only to cashmere – light, warm, elegant and utterly beautiful. Socks were bought for winter, and a shawl awaits me still. Linda does craft yarn workshops too, and alpaca

tours are done by prior arrangement. More curious, friendly and entertainingly quirky animals you will not find.

More unusual animals, yes, will be found down the road at Bontebok Ridge Reserve, where a handful of quaggas live. The quagga was found to be a colour variation of a zebra and not genetically different, so a rebreeding programme has produced pale-rumped zebra or quagga. Bontebok Ridge Reserve is part

of this programme and offers game drives by appointment.

If you have a taste for the unusual, the beautiful, the scenic or the historical side of life, Wellington will check those boxes. It offers the best of many worlds – inspiring country living without hardship, surrounded by friendly folk who always have time for a quick chat in the street, or at the very least will flash you a warm-hearted smile. ■

Map reference F2 see inside back cover



LEFT: Quagga roam again at Bontebok Ridge Reserve, just outside Wellington.

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Eat

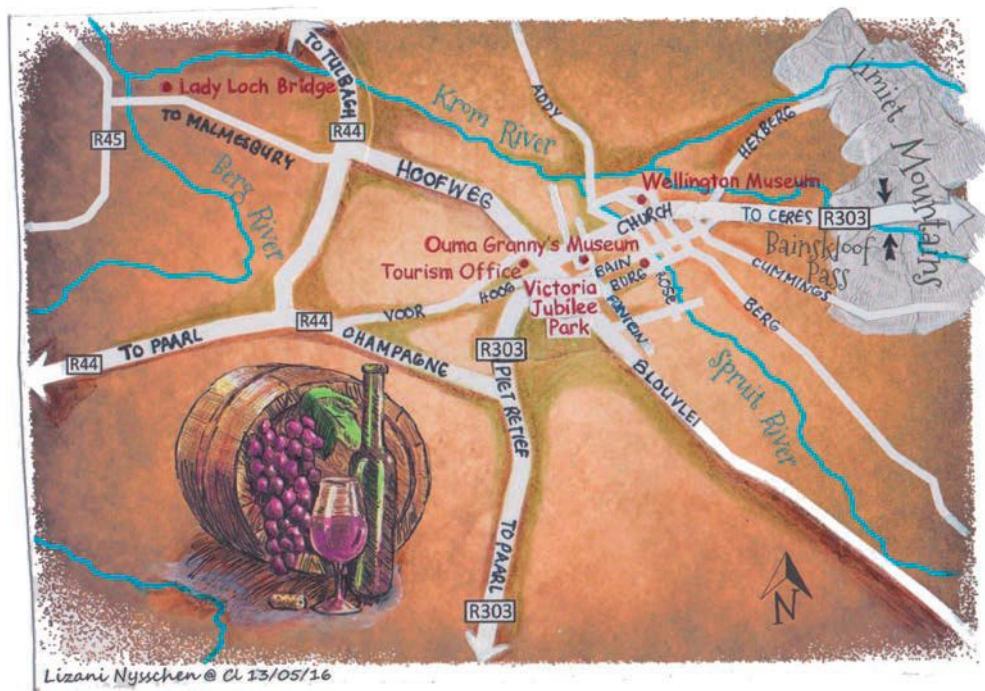
- Oude Wellington restaurant is a 1795 Cape Dutch barn where the chef-owners are hands-on in the kitchen. 082 836 8924

Enjoy

- Drink coffee at numerous inviting spots along the main street.
- Taste Wellington's famous dried fruit.
- Visit Redemption Fine Handcrafted Leather for unique goods made in town.
- Walk Bain Street with its restored Victorian buildings.
- Drive up Bain's Pass for the view.

Property Peep

- MBC Estates' Gerhard Fick says many people choose to live in Wellington for its country atmosphere, though they work in Cape Town.
- Two-bedroomed townhouses range from R800 000 to R1 million; three beds are R1 million to R1,4 million and mid to top-end houses are R1.5million to R3 million. Open land in town starts at R700 000 for 500m² to 700m² plots.





Breaking New Ground

With renowned botanist and horticulturalist Ernst van Jaarsveld at the helm, a splendid succulent garden and a *veldkos* garden of indigenous edible plants are underway at Babylonstoren

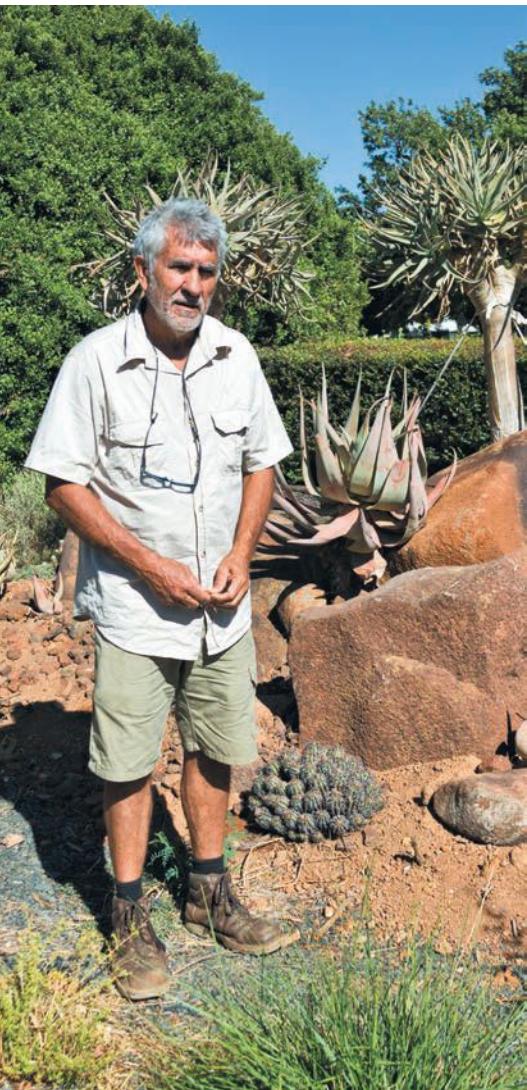
WORDS AND PICTURES ANITA DE VILLIERS

For Dr Ernst van Jaarsveld, the ultimate dream job came his way at a time when retirement to Kleinmond on the Overberg coast was beckoning. Not that he didn't fully live his passion for all things botanical up to then, but the new horizons that came with his retirement job, sat right there at the end of the proverbial rainbow.

Over the years, Ernst has become a household name to the big family of nature and garden enthusiasts who know his regular and numerous articles and columns, plus the books he has authored that include the popular *Waterwise Gardening in South Africa and Namibia*. His association with Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden in Cape Town stretches back 42 years, where his position was that of horticulturalist and later also curator of the conservatory.

It is from here that media mogul Koos Bekker offered to transplant Ernst to the ground-breaking gardens of Babylonstoren in the Drakenstein Valley between Franschhoek and Paarl. Babylonstoren is the visionary project of Koos and his wife Karen Roos, one that fuses elements of the historical and horticultural to create a cultural and botanical legacy. The gardens are designed along the lines of one of France's most beautiful gardens, Prieuré d'Orsan.

The horticultural blueprint for Babylonstoren is the Company's Garden



TOP Babylonstoren's prickly pear maze. There are several varieties of prickly pears, all suited to drier areas. LEFT: Botanist, horticulturalist and succulent specialist, Ernst van Jaarsveld in the succulent garden he is establishing at Babylonstoren.



LEFT: One of the rarest plants in the world, *Encephalartos woodii* (Wood's cycad). Only one plant was discovered in the oNgoye Forest in KwaZulu-Natal. All specimens, like this one at Babylonstoren, are clones of the mother plant. ABOVE: The rocks, stones and succulents typical of the Robertson Karoo. Rocks that have split show surfaces with a blue tinge, hence the name blue ironstone.

in Cape Town that the Dutch East India Company commissioned Jan van Riebeeck to create, to supply passing ships with fresh produce. Van Riebeeck kept a detailed diary of the garden during the ten years (1652-1662) that he was Commander of the Cape.

At Babylonstoren, a great and interesting variety of fruit, vegetables, herbs and ornamental plants are grown. Ernst's first task was to establish a succulent garden, a project very much in line with his extensive knowledge and years of research on indigenous succulents and other drought-adapted plants.

The succulent garden is divided into four blocks representing the Robertson Karoo, Hantam Karoo, Eastern Cape and Simonsberg, the mountain that towers over Babylonstoren. Adhering to the finest detail

of nature's blueprint for each area, Ernst is carting in lorry-loads of rocks and stones that hold each area's ancient geological history in their shape, formation and texture. He takes great care in positioning the rocks, to replicate the way they naturally occur in the areas of origin. The stacked rock formations in the Hantam Karoo block seemingly placed one on top of the other by a giant hand are ironstone (dolerite) rock, formed about 200 million years ago and typical of the Karoo.

"The rocks come from a geological era of enormous volcanic activity, and nature delivered us these interesting formations," explains Ernst. "With time they gradually weather, although much slower than sandstone. When they split, you can often see a blueish

inner surface, like some of the rocks I'll show you in the Robertson Karoo block."

Another interesting aspect of the Hantam garden is the shattered pieces of shale that cover the ground, so typical of the Hantam Karoo, that high plateau around the town of Calvinia. Afrikaans poet C Louis Leipoldt wrote a poem called '*'n Handvol Gruis uit die Hantam* (*A Handful of Grit from the Hantam*) in which his love and nostalgia for this part of the Karoo are expressed. This detail of nature providing a cover to facilitate the preservation

BELOW LEFT: A tiny, newly planted vygie snuggles into its rocky habitat in the Robertson Karoo block. **BELOW RIGHT:** The elephant's foot Karoo succulent is named for its large round tuber in which it stores water and food.



To the top of Namibia's Brandberg, down the cliffs through which the Umfolozi River cuts, these are some of the places that this man ventured to find a total of 220 succulents and bulbous plants that grow exclusively on rocks



ABOVE: Ernst van Jaarsveld, in his capacity as gardening and succulent expert, and botanist Liesl van der Walt welcome participants to a workshop on waterwise gardening at Babylonstoren. BELOW: Newly planted, mature cycads are strapped and anchored to ensure that they stay upright.

of moisture in the ground, would surface again a few days later during a workshop at Babylonstoren on waterwise gardening.

After all the groundwork is done the plants are planted, from the tall quiver trees (*Aloe dichotoma*) in the Hantam zone, to the tiniest vygies (*Mesembryanthemaceae*, called mesembs for short) in the Robertson zone, and all the varieties and species in between. With time, each block will draw insects, birds and reptiles, evolving into a microcosm of its mother zone.

As we walk around the Robertson block, Ernst picks a few dried-out fruits from a vygie plant, popping one into his mouth and swirling it around. "You will see what happens to this thankful little fruit when it gets a bit of moisture. The structure of the vygie's fruit is the most complicated in the world's plant kingdom," he says.

"The fruit has a capsule with keels. So the vygues wait for rain and then the moisture activates the keels to press the capsule to open and eject the seeds. The classification of all vygues, of which there are about 1 800 species, is determined by

the structure of the capsule. This one has five cages with five keels." And lo and behold, after a few minutes, Ernst spits the tiny fruit into the palm of his hand and it has transformed into a little star.

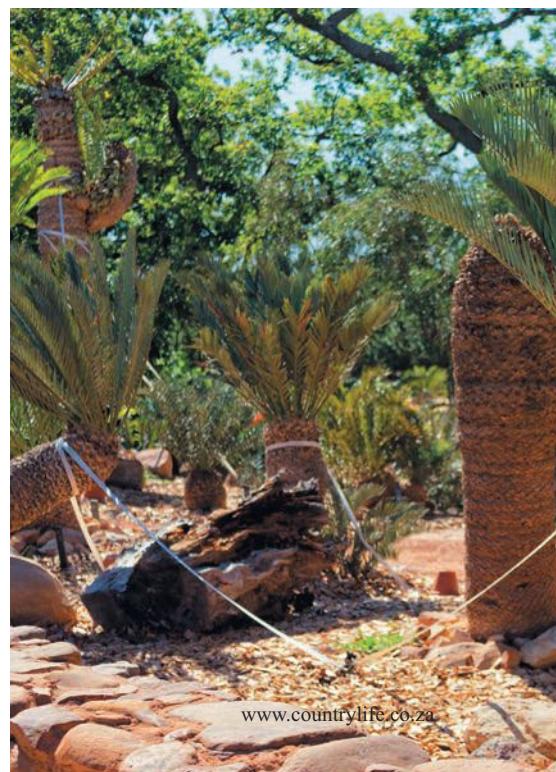
It is the scientist speaking, known and respected worldwide for his extensive research and knowledge about Southern Africa's indigenous plants. But by no means does Ernst resemble the stereotype of the dry academic. His passion for nature and the way he translates his scientific knowledge into advice on plants and guidelines on gardening, is enlightening, as is his homage to the humble vygie: "I am crazy about vygues because they are such thankful plants and their diversity is enormous."

Ernst points out the elephant's foot (*Dioscorea elephantipes*), a climber plant that stores its water and food in a huge roundish tuber exposed mainly above the ground. "The tuber is toxic, it will set your heart a-galloping and you can get into serious trouble," Ernst explains. "But the indigenous people knew how to prepare it to get rid of the toxins."

This spectacular plant grows to a height of 1.5 metres, with the round tuber resembling the foot of an elephant. Its interesting shape and texture make it a sought-after garden and container plant around the world because "each plant has its own character; they are like people", Ernst says. "Each one is unique."

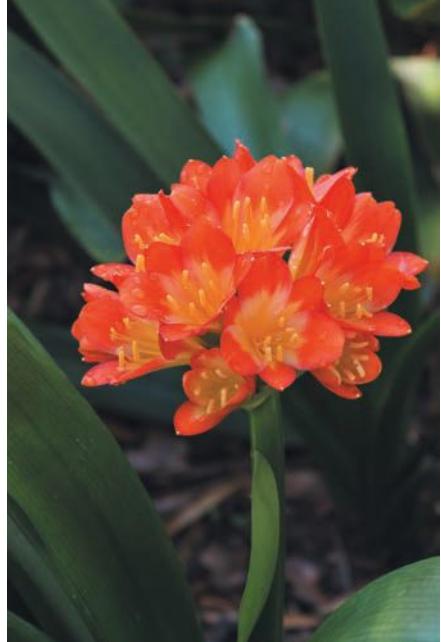
The ability of succulent plants to adapt to a hostile environment in order to survive, specifically plants that grow on rocks, was the subject of Ernst's PhD thesis. For ten years he had researched, collected and studied rock plants of Southern Africa. To the top of Namibia's Brandberg, down the cliffs through which the Umfolozi River cuts, these are some of the places that this man ventured to find a total of 220 succulents and bulbous plants that grow exclusively on rocks.

Ernst's account of his findings sounds like a 21st century treatise along the lines of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. He had classified the rock plants into three groups – hanging plants that have succumbed to gravitation; singular plants that grow on rocks; the group that clings to rock faces. Because these plants





ABOVE: A walkabout through the extensive gardens starts off the day of hands-on learning during the waterwise gardening workshop. RIGHT: Indigenous, waterwise clivias love shady areas. To appreciate the spectacular show of thousands of flowering clivias at Babylonstoren, spring is the time to visit.



do not stand the danger of being grazed by animals, they do not need, as Ernst describes it, “so many teeth to defend themselves, and have smoother leaves and are less bitter and poisonous.”

However, to ensure maximum survival, they have adjusted the way they propagate. Ernst cites the Kaokoveld klipblom (*Dewinteria petraphila*) that has two propagation systems. “It has the usual system of beautiful white trumpet-shaped flowers and seeds, and then it also has fine tendrils at the base that grow away from the plant, down into deep crevices.

“When I carefully removed these tendrils

I saw that they too have tiny flowers, but are self-pollinating. If the mother plant dies during extreme drought, there are seeds that she has deposited deep in the crevices as insurance against extinction.”

The idea strikes me that there is an analogy to be drawn between the klipblom and the people of this country: we have deposited our reserves deep into the crevices of this beautiful land. And we have scientists like Ernst who continue to discover and research our natural heritage. All the veins that his life’s work has flowed into are finding new and exciting channels in his wide-ranging projects at Babylonstoren.

“Koos is very supportive of my research and I can continue with that,” says Ernst, who is busy updating his PhD research data that he wants to incorporate into a book. His unique collection of plants brought from Kirstenbosch to Babylonstoren are soon to be housed in a newly built greenhouse that will form the nucleus of his research at Babylonstoren.

The groundwork for his next project – to establish an indigenous, edible plants or *veldkos* garden – is underway, and an aloe garden is also on the books. A huge bonus for the public is the workshops he regularly presents on a variety of gardening subjects, such as waterwise gardening.

I join him and a group of visitors on a walkabout to the newly established cycad garden with its variety of species small and tall; the prickly pear maze where Ernst used his pocket knife to skin a few of the juicy fruits; the snake pathway along the stream where plectranthus and clivia flourish in the shade of giant oaks, and a field of vygies that stretch their fat little fingers towards the blue-blue sky.

“My career has been and still is a big adventure for me,” says Ernst. “I never really stop doing research and I am so thankful for this opportunity. I said to my wife that life begins at sixty.” ■

Map reference F2 see inside back cover

Babylonstoren 021 863 3852
enquiries@babylonstoren.com
www.babylonstoren.com



Good Reads by Ernst van Jaarsveld

- *Succulents of South Africa*
- *Gasterias of South Africa*
- *Wonderful Waterwise Gardening: A Regional Guide to Indigenous Gardening*
- *Waterwise Gardening in South Africa and Namibia*
- *South African Plectranthus*

Don't Miss

- 2016 workshops by Ernst van Jaarsveld at Babylonstoren
- Indigenous Veldkos 27 July
 - Succulents of South Africa 7 December

RIGHT: A newly hatched leatherback turtle makes a dash for the sea. (Photo Matthew Prophet) BELOW: An adult leatherback turtle lays her eggs on the Ponta do Ouro beach. (Photo Werner Myburgh) BELOW RIGHT: Evidence of The Great Escape – hatching tracks from their nest to the sea. (Photo Matthew Prophet)



Looking for Leatherbacks

And loggerheads. It's breeding time in Ponta do Ouro, when bales of turtles hatch in the sand and make a run for the sea. Only one in a thousand survives

WORDS PETRO KOTZÉ PICTURES PETRO KOTZÉ AND SUPPLIED

This was cowboy country," said Miguel Gonçalves. "There was lots of drinking and illegal developments. Everybody was driving on the beach and many people fished illegally." Case in point, he fetched a couple of confiscated spearguns from the corner of his office, some crudely put together, others slim and expensive looking.

He pointed to one of the latter. "This belonged to a tourist who tried to bribe me with R100 not to fine them for the illegal use of spearguns in a marine protected area."

The hapless South African got away with a formal apology and a morning of cleaning the beach under the watchful eye of a marine ranger. He should have known better. Miguel is the first park warden of the Ponta do Ouro Partial Marine Reserve, and he loves it.

Yet to the uninformed, Ponta do Ouro is deceiving. The town almost hugs the border between South Africa and Mozambique at Kosi Bay. Coming from South Africa, the tarred road stops as you cross the border, splitting into many un-signposted sand roads, constructed over the dunes by countless 4x4s. The best direction to get to Ponta, is to keep right.

The town itself is a road or ten lined



ABOVE LEFT: Ponta do Ouro Partial Marine Reserve park warden Miguel Gonçalves during turtle monitoring season at Ponta. (Photo Werner Myburgh)
ABOVE RIGHT: Marine guard Vicente Matsimbe with a couple of the many ghost crabs that scuttle across the beach at night.



with a menagerie of fruit and veg stalls, curio sellers, restaurants and dive camps. In the peak season, rowdy crowds take over the dusty streets and clutter the paradise-like beaches. Then there are the R&Rs – a mind-numbing cocktail of rum and raspberry, described to me by a local as something similar to battery acid.

Somewhat surprisingly, Ponta is where I headed to see one of the most spectacular natural events on Earth. As it turned out, the town had many surprises up her colourful sleeve.

“The Ponta do Ouro Partial Marine Reserve was proclaimed in 2009, and covers an area of 678km²,” said Miguel. On a map in his office, he traced the borders of the reserve along the coastline, stretching from Ponta do Ouro in the south to the Maputo River mouth in Maputo Bay to the north.

The terrestrial section reaches just until the dunes, but covers three nautical miles into the Indian Ocean, and includes the waters around Inhaca and the Portuguese Islands.

“It’s a terrestrial and a marine hotspot,” said Miguel, launching into a careful explanation as to why this finger-shaped area needed protection. He explained that it’s



LEFT: Ponta do Ouro Partial Marine Reserve park warden Miguel Gonçalves. (Photo Graeme Smith)

one piece of a puzzle of protected areas, which could eventually form a corridor for species such as elephants to migrate through again. It is part of the Lubombo Conservancy-Goba Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA), an inspirational cross-border conservation area facilitated by the Peace Parks Foundation.

Already, when the marine reserve was proclaimed, it became part of the first marine TFCA in Africa, linking with South Africa’s iSimangaliso Wetland Park World Heritage Site. The TFCA also includes the Maputo Special Reserve, a mosaic of lakes, floodplains, mangrove swamps, woodlands and forested dunes sweeping down to unspoilt beaches. Inland, it is connected to the Tembe Elephant Park via the Futi Corridor.

Together this forms a roughly 100 000ha protected area rich in endemic fauna and flora. It’s also part of the Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Biodiversity Hotspot and, as such, is one of the 25 biologically richest and most endangered terrestrial ecoregions on Earth.

We were here for a tiny part of it – turtles. Every year around February, thousands of endangered loggerhead and critically endangered leatherback turtles hatch along the coastline from Kosi Bay to Maputo Bay. “Only one in a thousand will make it,” Miguel said. The rest will be annihilated by crabs before they reach the water, or be snacked on by seabirds or other predators in the ocean once there. Many more will meet their end as by-catch in fishing nets.

So far, we had not seen one. We drove

35 kilometres both ways along the beach and back with marine guard Vicente Matsimbe on our first night. We didn't spot one turtle, perhaps in part because the beach was covered with thousands of scuttling ghost crabs. As far as the eye could see, they jostled for scraps and space.

Vicente's phone rang three times. Each was a call from a local alerting him to the vehicle driving on the beach. "We get a lot of support from the people now," said Matsimbe. "Recently it was the locals who alerted us to a community member who poached a turtle." For us, the night brought few other sights. Only the lights from secluded developments that stained the beach here and there, and the waves that rushed to

meet a waiting carpet of pale-white crabs.

The turtles hatch when the scorching heat has dissipated, and we had to wait for low tide at about 21h00 on the following two nights to look for them again. So our days were free. Ponta is perhaps most well known as a diving spot, and we happily obliged. We opted for Steve's Ledge, a shallow reef in the partial marine reserve only about 14 metres deep and a 10-minute boat ride from the shore. There, a boxfish lurked in the distance, a huge honeycomb eel peeked suspiciously from under a ledge and a massive green turtle rested on the reef, while three others swerved past like ancient spirits.

Blowing bubbles really did work up an appetite, and we tackled the sweaty heat and thick sand of Ponta in search of *pão* – the local bread. From the main beach, the road from our house went past a number of stalls. Mr Price was first, followed by Mr Cheap.

Both sold a selection of beautifully carved wooden angels, fish, beadwork and sarongs. Mr Cheap also catered for the South African crowd by displaying one or two carved Blue Bull figurines.

We decided to return later, not feeling the inspiration to drag a wooden potato bass through the heat. We made it as far as the first restaurant, dusty and hot, before we had to break for an ice-cold 2M, the local beer. Shopping in Ponta was hard work. We settled for a couple of samosas and spicy chicken livers to line the stomach before we continued.

Eventually, we made it to the bakery to find that the *pão* was sold out. Oh well... at least it was next to famous Fernandos, a rickety bar and religious stop for the meanest R&R in town. We settled for a delicious-looking pineapple, some sweet mangoes and a gut-wrenching chilli sauce from the market



LEFT: A menagerie of markets, curio shops, restaurants and dive camps line the dusty streets. RIGHT: Oros, our friendly fish vendor down the road. BELOW LEFT: The fresh fruit market is your stop for anything from tomatoes, pineapples to a chat with the vendors. BELOW: In the peak season, rowdy crowds take over the dusty streets and clutter the paradise-like beaches but, out of season, the town is quiet.



next door before we headed home sans *pão*. We made up for it with a mountain of fresh prawns from vendors along the road, punting the fare from their cooler boxes. Ponta was growing on me.

Still, she didn't hand out her favours randomly. Our second nightly mission was scuppered when bolts of lightning ripped the skies above Ponta and released torrents of rain that drenched the coastline and drowned all possibility of carousing over the beach on the hunt for tiny turtles.

With it, the power went off – something the locals assured us was not too unusual – and, to round it off, our cellphone reception did the same. Our nightly entertainment was provided by two pale geckos hunting moths around the light as the power returned in drips and drabs.

Eventually, when we did see the turtles, they did not disappoint. Huddled in a park vehicle with Miguel after 9pm on our last night, we patrolled the beach for hatching turtles. Miguel suddenly stopped, alerted by hundreds of tiny turtle tracks from the top of the beach to the watermark. We found the nest, but missed the turtles.

On we went, until Miguel stopped for the second batch of Morse Code strewn



LEFT: Arrie van Wyk of the Peace Parks Foundation and Miguel Gonçalves, park warden of the Ponta do Ouro Partial Marine Reserve.
ABOVE: The turtles are attracted to light, which is why developments on the beach are problematic. The turtles are lured in the wrong direction.

across the sand. We thought we had missed them again, but were in luck. Three tiny loggerhead turtles were still making a dash for the water, fervently pushing themselves over the sand. We watched them go. If they made it past the crabs and the waiting predators and the fishnets to a long life in the deep sea, they could grow to awe-inspiring specimens of close to 100kg. They might even return to this very beach

in 30 years or so to lay their eggs. Their chances were gut-rendingly slim, but they had the hearts of a tiny crowd of people

on a Ponta do Ouro beach behind them.

I underestimated Ponta do Ouro. She was somewhat of a regal lady dressed in colourful skirts that dragged in the dust. On the outside she was all lewd R&R-infused banter but, inside, she was warm, blue ocean sweeping over lively reefs and endless white dunes. She had a hint of lush forest here, over there the promise of heavy elephant footsteps on the beach. And everywhere a giant loggerhead turtle, longing for the deep sea.

I left the broken roads of Ponta the next day, hoping that she stayed that way, and understanding why she needed protection for that to happen. ■

Map reference C9 see inside back cover



Where to Stay

- There are many accommodation options in Ponta do Ouro
www.wheretostay.com
We stayed in the four-person, two-bedroom Walkersway Chalet in the Ntsuty Lodge complex. walkersway.ponta@gmail.com

Where to Eat

- There are a number of restaurants within walking distance of each other in the village. The Love Café is a quirky and beautiful option (the coffee is great). Upstairs (also called the Neptune's Bar) has a lovely view, and is deservedly known for its delicious prawn-curry bunny chow.

Handy Contacts

- For more info on Ponta do Ouro Partial Marine Reserve contact the Peace Parks Foundation on 021 880 5100, www.peaceparks.co.za
- Miguel Gonçalves chifununo@yahoo.com

Fossils, Stars & Skinny Scientists

Professor Lee Berger of Wits University is to palaeoanthropology as Pavarotti is to opera

WORDS SUE ADAMS

PICTURES SUE ADAMS

WITS UNIVERSITY AND

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

When an advertisement reads, ‘Skinny people needed’ who would imagine that it’s to do with exploring one of the most exciting fossil finds in the world? But that’s who palaeoanthropologist Lee Berger – on this year’s *Time* magazine list of The 100 Most Influential People – was looking for to get at fossils hidden in a deep cave in the Cradle of Humankind.

These skinny cavers had to be able to enter Rising Star Cave, in the Bloubank River valley near Krugersdorp, go through a tunnel called Superman’s Crawl – so narrow you had to keep one arm at your side and the other extended above your head, and then climb a jagged wall of

rock called Dragon’s Crawl. Sounds like something from a fantasy movie.

“I could not believe my eyes when cavers first showed me a photograph of what they had found on an expedition into this cave,” says Lee, his face still alight with excitement more than two years later. “I realised we had won the palaeo lottery, hit the jackpot.”

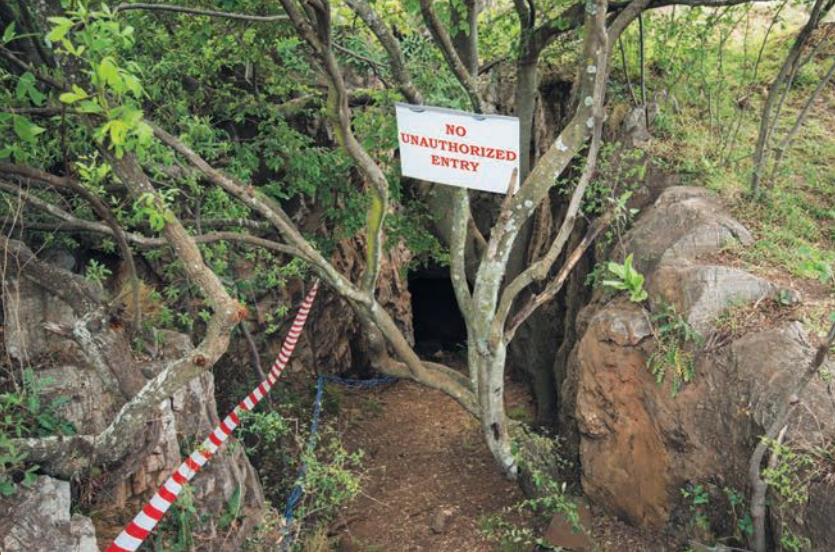
Steve Tucker, one of those cavers, has a slightly different memory. “Lee knew there were unexplored caves and had asked Rick Hunter and me, as cavers, to look out for bones. We didn’t really know what we were looking for but when I found a jawbone in 2013 I knew it was something different. We arrived on Lee’s doorstep late one evening with photos. At first he was speechless and then he just started swearing,” says Steve

with a grin. “That was when we realised it was big.”

The big find is what is now known as *Homo naledi*, one of the puzzle pieces Lee Berger has been looking for all his life. There is a huge gap in our fossil knowledge and records, and Lee always wanted to find fossils that would shed light on the mystery of the origin of our *Homo* genus. *Naledi* means star in Sotho. The name *Homo naledi* was chosen to correspond to the name of the Dinaledi chamber of the Rising Star Cave system where the fossil was found.

How old is *Homo naledi*? It has not been accurately dated yet as there was no volcanic ash and no flowstones around with which to date the bones. So other techniques are being looked at. But Lee Berger says, “No matter





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The man who says he won the 'palaeo lottery' – Lee Berger with a replica of a *Homo naledi* skull; The entrance to Rising Star Cave is rather unprepossessing; Steve Tucker and Rick Hunter discovered *Homo naledi*; Lee Berger called the skinny scientists his 'underground astronaut explorers'.



the age, it will still have a tremendous impact on the way we look at our evolution."

On the oldest side of this gap are apelike australopithecines like the famous Lucy found in Ethiopia in 1974. After this comes this gap in fossil knowledge, where a bipedal animal turns into a human being. On the youngest side of the gap is *Homo erectus*. "The message we are getting from *Homo naledi* is that of an animal on the cusp of transition from *australopithecus* to *homo*," says Lee Berger.

Big-boned Lee Berger knew he could not get into the cave where the fossils were found, and sprang into action. After advertising for skinny scientists, he chose six out of 60 applicants from around the world, all of them women, and called them

his 'underground astronauts'.

He set up an above-ground command centre at the Rising Star Cave, with science tent and sleeping quarters, and then threaded kilometres of cable down into the bowels so he could stay in communication and watch proceedings. And so the fossil gathering began, with Lee in the tent watching avidly on cameras.

After the initial excavation of a few weeks there were more than 1 500 bones from one square metre of soil. And most exciting, there were bones from at least 15 individuals. This was unheard of in the fossil world.

Back at Wits University the fossil fun continues. The fossils are divided by body parts. There is, among other sections,



a 'tooth booth', a hand section and a table for skulls. It seems that *Homo naledi* had a modern hand but with very curved fingers as if for tree climbing. It had large apelike shoulders but human hips and a human-looking skull with, however, a tiny brain.

Among the many mysteries there is a huge one still to answer. Lee Berger is quick to point out that *Homo naledi* is not human. But he says, "There is a strange anomaly that raises questions about what makes us human. These skeletons appear to have been placed or cached in this cave." There is no sign that they were killed and brought in by predators, there is no sign that they were washed into this cave by river action, and the bones were found on a slope."

Lee asks, "What is our human uniqueness

— why are we different? Why do we know we are going to die? This is the first time we have met another animal that ritually caches its dead over time. We may be alone in that behaviour now but we were not alone in the past.”

Lee also explains that our way of thinking about our human development has changed. “We used to think there was one ladder-like progression. Then we began to talk about a family tree. Now our view of evolution is that it is like a braided stream or a woven braid. Some paths split and then come together again at different times. We can’t draw lines – nature is not about lines.”

Lee has always looked at things a little differently. “I come from rural Georgia in the United States and not from the Ivy League, and I don’t always stick to the rules and do things like others expect me to,” he says, with his signature wide smile. He arrived in Kenya in 1970 as an enthusiastic young explorer palaeoanthropologist and was told in no uncertain terms that there was not a lot of room for someone new.

“But I’ve never minded being told the truth so I looked around. In South Africa there was Robert Broom and Philip Tobias, who were operating on a shoestring with no support. Tobias had a safe full of fossils that had never been really studied and I thought there was potential. There was change happening in South Africa and I decided to jump into these waters feet first.”



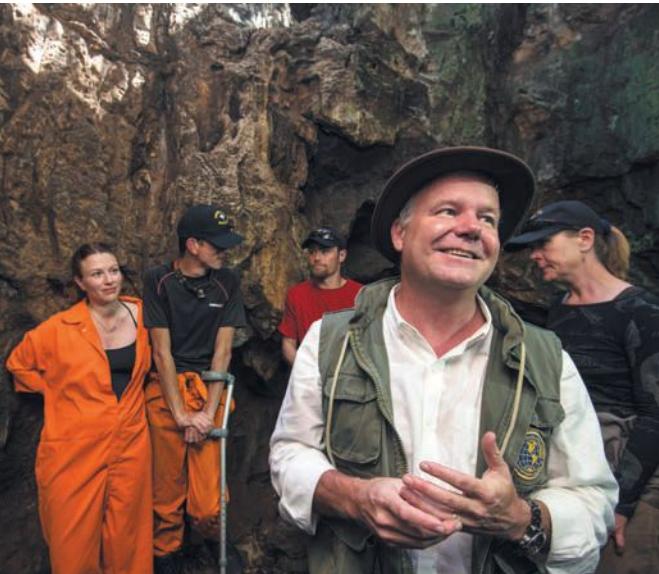
Lee made his mark very quickly. “My first big news was finding some teeth at a site called Gladysville in the Cradle area in 1992. It was the first new hominid site in 48 years and the teeth were very rare objects. Then I was given Tobias’ chair in 1996. I was very young – 31 years. Was this a mistake?” Lee asks, and then answers himself, “Yes it promoted me to the highest level of incompetence. But it thrust me into the centre of world science. It put me in charge of the largest undescribed collection of fossils in the world. I was on a heady and fast learning curve.”

Then Lee took another look at the

Taung Child (discovered in 1924) and the marks on its skull, and came up with a new idea – that a bird of prey had killed it. Lee explains, “This started a whole new field of science. It was previously thought that only mammals killed humans. The Taung bird of prey idea was revolutionary. Primatologists agreed that birds of prey are huge in evolution and have affected the development of many mammals.” Lee was making waves in the scientific world.

In 2008 Lee and his son Matthew made a really important discovery at Malapa Fossil Site in the Cradle of Humankind – hominin fossils that turned out to be two skeletons

TOP: The above-ground command centre from which Lee directed exploration into Rising Star Cave. BELOW: Lee Berger's excitement is infectious to the other explorers. RIGHT: Limestone caves within caves at Sterkfontein.





about two million years old. They were named *Australopithecus sediba* and Lee feels they are critical to the origins of *Homo*. But many prominent worldwide researchers rejected his views. However, as Lee says,

"I'm used to criticism and I just continued my research – until the cavers appeared on my doorstep in 2013."

So is Lee lucky or is it that the harder you work the luckier you get? The more I talk to this dynamo the more I realise he never stops questioning and thinking. "I must have been the last person in the world to find Google Earth," he says with a laugh. "When I did, none of my old handheld GPS points were accurate but I began to realise what caves looked like from outer space. They just look like narrow fissures and I realised there were more out there than we'd imagined, even in areas where we thought we had discovered everything. Even then I knew this was impossible. I knew the Cradle area so well – but there they were. In March 2008 I found

21 new cave sites. By July 2008 we had 600."

At Maropeng Visitor Centre, I look at the fossils in the excellent exhibition hall, and bob my way in a boat down the Pathway of Time, and realise it is people like Lee Berger who make million-year-old skeletons come alive through their sheer enthusiasm and excitement. "I get such a kick out of seeing people queue to see *Homo naledi*," says Lee.

He may be seen as an iconoclast and a maverick – words that make him laugh – but Lee Berger has certainly taken the dust out of palaeoanthropology, and made riveting the story of these 'detectives' painstakingly hunting for ancient bones. As a result South Africa has become quite the rock star of the fossil firmament. ■

Map reference B6 see inside back cover



ABOVE LEFT: *Homo naledi* had a human hand but curved more than ours is, as if for climbing trees.
LEFT: The Tumulus building shaped like a burial mound is the centrepiece of Maropeng.
BELOW: Maropeng Visitors Centre is easy to find.



Rocking the Cradle of Humankind

- In 1999, the large 47 000ha Cradle of Humankind north-west of Johannesburg was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site. The system of limestone caves is a treasure chest of fossils.
- A major attraction of the Cradle is the Sterkfontein Caves, mined for more than 100 years for limestone but only excavated by palaeoanthropologists since 1936. They are the site of famous discoveries such as Mrs Ples and Little Foot. The tours start above ground and go deep down into the stalactites and stalagmites – so prepare to get muddy and do a little crawling. The tours run every half hour, every day except Monday.
- The interactive exhibition at Maropeng Visitor Centre that focuses on the evolution of mankind is world class.
- Buy the combined ticket to see Sterkfontein and Maropeng and go early. 014 577 9000, www.maropeng.co.za

Where Else to Rock the Cradle

- Hot air ballooning 083 356 2435 www.air-ventures.co.za
- Hiking and mountain biking 082 825 9205 www.hennopstrails.co.za
- Caving. If you really like Sterkfontein Caves there are many more. 082 486 2464, www.wildcaves.co.za



Desert Secrets

From Namibia come oils nutritious, delicious and a balm for body and soul

WORDS AND PICTURES RON SWILLING

Liquid gold, I thought, as my host poured a dash of nutty marula oil over one of my favourite meals in Namibia's north-central region: ekaka, a wild spinach that is dried in patties on hut roofs. I scooped it up with chunks of mahango porridge, a millet-like grain that is a staple in the area, often accompanied by a crunchy residue of sand. "Best not to chew too hard," I was advised with a mischievous grin.

It was the delicious oil that caught my attention. I had watched women sit in the yard of their homestead, painstakingly removing kernels from marula nuts or

stones, which were then pounded into this popular condiment.

The marula is a king of trees, often owned by the women in the family. It is of such value to the Owambo groups that their cultural life centres on its generous harvest in the early months of the year, when even the traditional court is suspended for the Marula Festival. The festival usually takes place after the marula harvest between March and May, and the date and venue change from year to year as it rotates between the seven Owambo groups in Namibia.

The fresh fruit is made into a juice, and a generous amount is fermented for the festivities. The nuts of the fruit are piled in

homestead corners to dry until winter, when the mahango fields have been harvested and there's time for the women to pause from their many duties and start the laborious task of producing oil.

Another use for marula oil has been identified in the last two decades. Rich in fatty acids and high in antioxidants, the oil has been shown to improve skin hydration and elasticity, keeping it soft and supple. At a small processing facility in Ondangwa – the Eudafano Women's Cooperative – the kernels are manually cold-pressed to produce the high-quality oil, which is sought-after by skin care companies like the Body Shop.



LEFT: The marula tree is valued in north-central Namibia where it plays an important role in the cultural and social lives of the Owambo people. **ABOVE:** Marula oil, produced from the kernels of the marula fruit, is high in fatty acids and natural antioxidants, and has been proven to soften and rehydrate the skin. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The fruit of the marula tree is an important food source for humans and animals alike, and elephants are known to travel for many kilometres to feast on its bounty.

Rural women carry out the kernel extraction at home, delivering bags of kernels to the cooperative. This provides them with a much-needed livelihood in areas where there is scant opportunity for employment. Eudafano also produces oil from the seeds of the Kalahari melon or tsamma melon, one of the San/Bushmen's prime sources of food and moisture in the desert.

I was becoming better acquainted with these golden oils and sensational natural ingredients. While giving lifts in the Kunene region to the arrestingly beautiful Himba women – coated in ochre and clad in traditional wraps – I became familiar with the fragrant cloud that remained in the vehicle along, with the ladies' distinctive shade of red, after they had been dropped off at their destination.

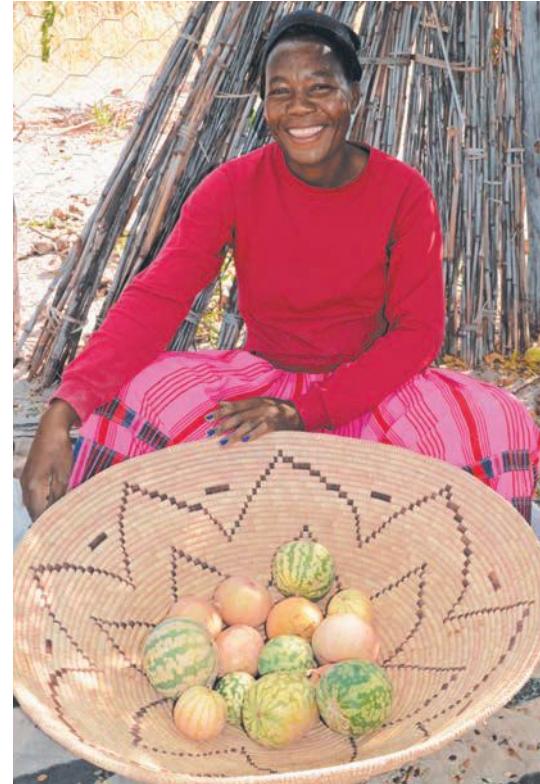
It's a heady combination of fat, herbs and a strangely alluring and deeply organic, earthy smell. The women use pieces of Namibian myrrh or commiphora



ABOVE: The oil from Kalahari or tsamma melon seeds is rich in antioxidants and omega 6 and 9, and is a valuable ingredient in natural skincare products for restoring skin elasticity. **RIGHT:** Rural women take the oil-rich seeds of the melons to Eudafano Women's Cooperative in Ondangwa where they are cold-pressed to produce oil for natural body-care products.

to infuse their traditional beauty mixtures with the intriguing scent. I had caught whiffs of a similar resin in the markets of Egypt and streets of Ethiopia, and it haunted me until I brought some home to throw onto the coals for the rich aroma.

Recently, when I was invited to the opening of the Commiphora Processing Factory in Opuwo, north-western Namibia, I discovered that an essential oil is produced from Namibian myrrh. *Commiphora wildii* had been recognised as the Himba woman's essential perfume ingredient, and



a community project, managed by the local conservancies, was initiated to distil the oil for use in perfumes and body products.

The Himba women collect the crystallised droplets of resin that fall to the ground and take it to collection points, from where it is transported to the processing plant to be steam-distilled to extract the earthy oil.

Although commiphora is the processing plant's main interest, they also distil mopane oil from the tiny beads of resin found on mopane seeds. One of Namibia's best-loved trees, the mopane, with its butterfly-shaped



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The butterfly-leaved mopane is a common sight in north-central Namibia; A rough covering encases the mopane seed, which glistens with tiny droplets of golden resin; The resin from the commiphora tree is exuded and drops to the ground, where it is collected and sustainably harvested by the Himba women; Himba women use commiphora resin to infuse their traditional skin lotion with its intriguing scent.



leaves, is the first tree to burst into green before the rains, when the earth is still brown and dry. Its wood is popular for building and its leaves are browsed by wildlife. The leaves are the preferred food of the fat, speckled mopane worm, a delicacy enjoyed by many people in Africa.

Mopane seeds, glistening with their golden treasure, lie scattered on the land and, until now, have been one of the only products of this hardy and friendly tree that has not been well-utilised.

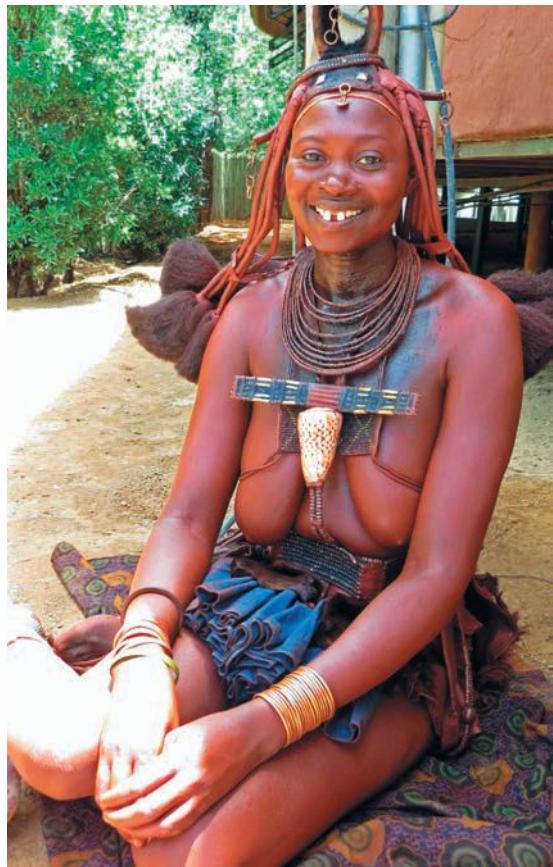
More and more indigenous Namibian plant products are being identified, and are being discovered and used by those who recognise the abundant wealth lying at their fingertips. I met just such a person in Windhoek, who has developed her natural flair for combining Namibian oils and essential oils into a range of beauty products.

Through her I began to learn more about

the properties of oils and subtleties of scent, which in ancient Egypt wasn't meant to accost the senses like many perfumes today, but to provide a more intimate experience, responding to body heat. I was just a novice. Sophia Snyman would teach me more.

Sophia grew up on a farm in Aus, south-western Namibia, bordering the Namib Desert, and was always aware of the unusual smells around her, especially after a winter rain when her nose would lead her to specific plants. When she learned more, she started a small distillery, distilling some of the natural flora that had caught her attention – and her senses. Over freshly squeezed juice at the Craft Centre in central Windhoek, she light-heartedly explained, "I have always had a natural feel for scents. That's my strong point."

She was hooked. Over the years she attended various training courses, read up





NAMIBIA'S INDIGENOUS OILS ▶ LOCAL FLAVOURS



CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT: Sophia Snyman blends Namibian plant products to create her natural body-care range; Makalani nuts are carved into innovative gift boxes for Desert Secrets' solid perfume and lip balm; The small and hardy commiphora tree exudes its aromatic resin, which falls to the ground. The resin is sustainably harvested without damaging the plant.



They are intrinsically linked to the women who sit and laboriously extract gold from oil-rich kernels, or walk the arid reaches of the Kunene region, collecting small globules of resin from the ground

on oils and essential oils and experimented. In April 2013, she was presented with an opportunity that changed her life. She entered a competition set up by the Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich, with financial support from the Millennium Challenge Account-Namibia Indigenous Natural Products Innovation Fund.

Participants were required to produce body-care products using Namib myrrh, *Commiphora wildii*. As one of the two finalists in the competition, Sophia received additional training as part of the prize, allowing her to refine her formulations. The finalists were required to launch their products at the Namibia Tourism Expo in Windhoek two months later.

In a remarkably short time, Sophia transformed her hobby into a small business, using marula and Kalahari melon-seed oils with mopane and

Namibian myrrh essential oils. By the end of the year she had given up her job at one of Namibia's top banks. "I had to pursue my dream, my passion," she told me enthusiastically, her eyes twinkling.

At first Sophia manufactured her Desert Secrets Natural Body Care Products in her kitchen until her husband complained that there was sticky beeswax everywhere. So she moved into the garage, until it proved too small for her creations – or the business grew too big for it. She eventually opened a small production facility where she could expand and perfect her range. She also sources Namibian olive oil and Atlantic sea salt for some of her products, and depends on local craftspeople for some of her innovative packaging, like the nut from the makalani palm tree, which makes a perfect Namibian gift box for her solid perfume and lip balm.

The indigenous Namibian plant products

encapsulate the character and the essence of the land. They are intrinsically linked to the women who sit and laboriously extract 'gold' from oil-rich kernels, or walk the arid reaches of the Kunene region, collecting small globules of resin from the ground. And to the people further along the chain at the processing facilities, and those like Sophia, who have the talent for making these oils precisely combined, beautifully packaged and easily accessible. ■

Handy Contacts

Desert Secrets Natural Body Care Products

+264 (0)81 275 5283, desertsecrets@afol.com.na

www.desert-secrets.com,

www.facebook.com/desertsecrets

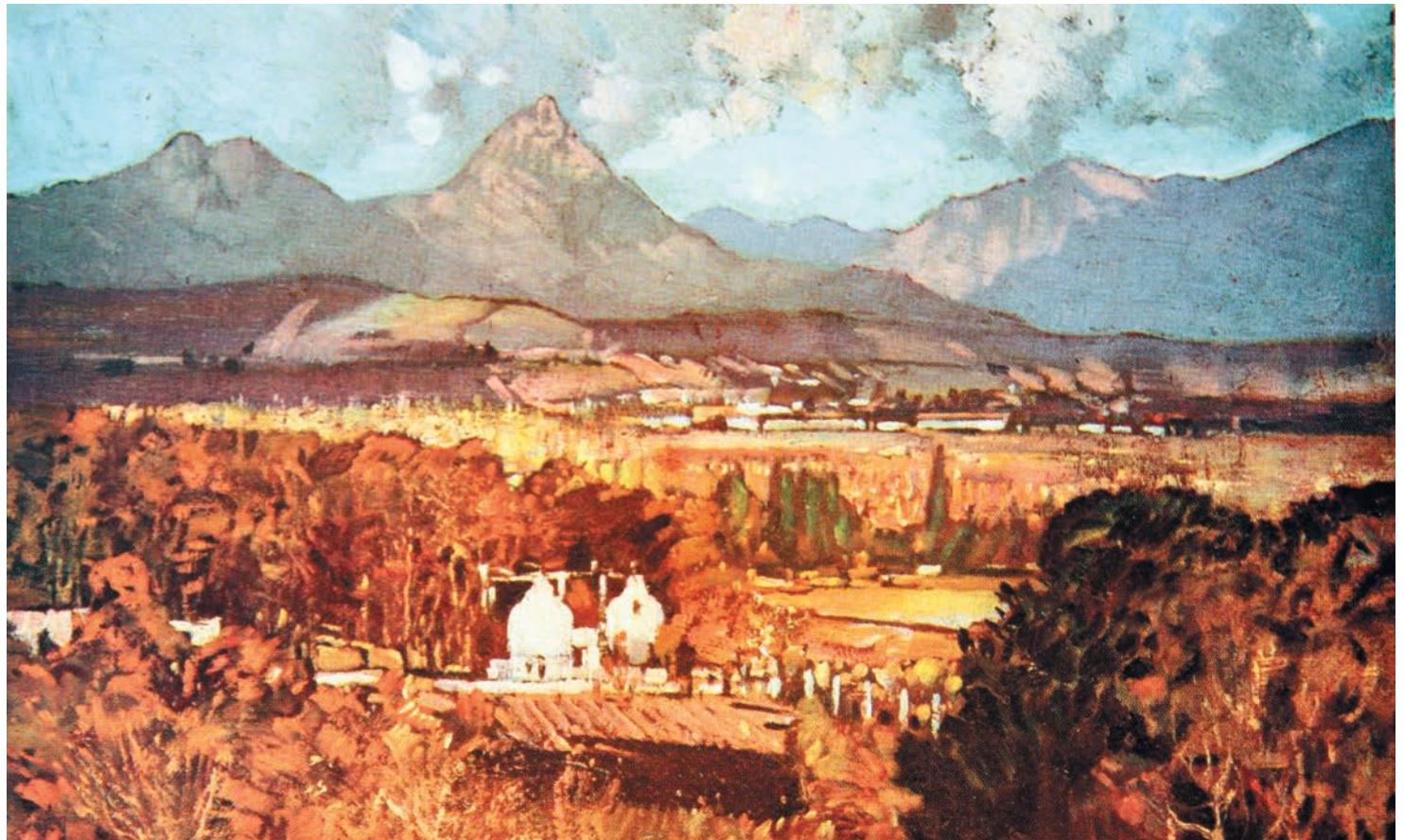
Opuwo Processing Facility & Visitors' Centre

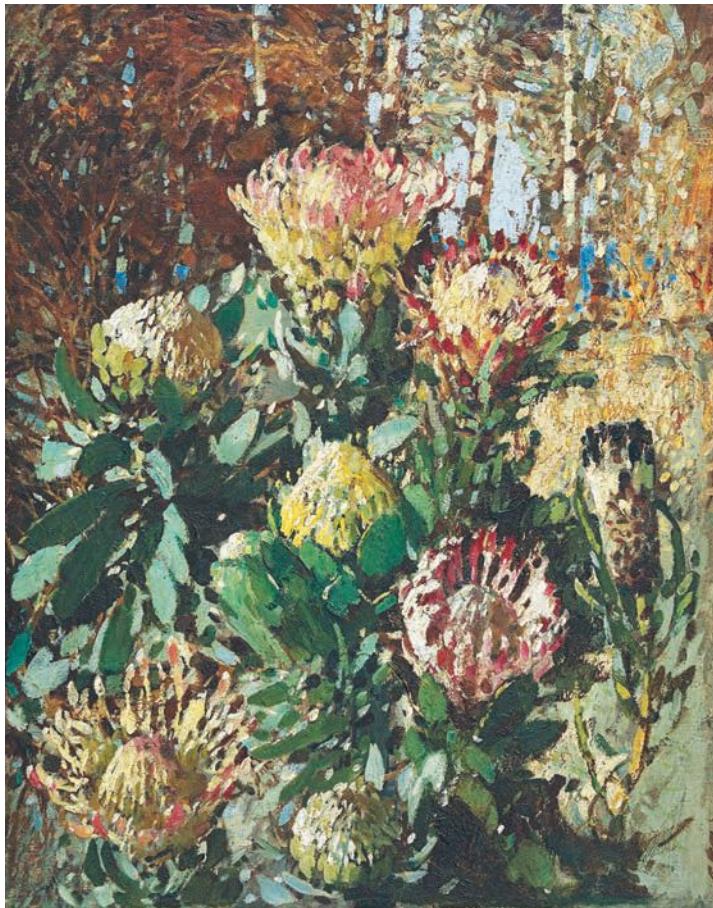
+264 (0)81 214 8448,

namibian.essential.oils@gmail.com



Master of Sunshine





NICK VAN DER LEEK reflects on how Robert Gwelo Goodman had to change to matter as an artist

NICK VAN DER LEEK @HiREZLIFE IMAGES COURTESY STRAUSS & CO

To find the Englishman who came to Africa, changed his name and eventually became the master of sunshine, we have to move in the way he did. We must get away from steering wheels and controls, and allow ourselves to be transported. We're not taking the train on a whim. Goodman (1871-1939) was the son of a British Railways worker, and in 1888 the 17-year-old Goodman became a railways clerk, initially in Paarl, later in Newlands.

Our Hogwarts Express hides in plain sight. It's called the Blue Train and I'm on it right now, leaving Cape Town harbour and the present far behind. As I begin my journey north, the Blue Train rata-tatting over curling sun-kissed tracks, the dining cabin swaying slightly, a teacup tilting on its saucer, I look at the name on my notepad. Robert. Gwelo. Goodman. Why Gwelo?

I go through my notes. As the 19th century drew to a close, Goodman (not yet Gwelo) returned to Europe, spent time in

Paris and then many more years in London and Chelsea. But that's not all. Grania Ogilvie's comprehensive *Dictionary of South African Painters and Sculptors* provides this summary of Goodman's movements over a 35-year period:

1886-94 lived in Cape Town, 1894-97 in France, 1897-1915 lived in England [visiting South Africa frequently], 1903 and 1905 India, 1907 travelled to Italy, Spain, Ireland, Scotland and the Lake District, 1910 visited Venice, 1915 returned to South Africa, 1916 visited Namibia, 1917 spent six months in Johannesburg painting mine dumps, 1918-19 visited the Drakensberg and Durban.

What is the point of visiting so many places? In 1900, while ensconced in England, Lord Roberts permitted Goodman to travel back to South Africa to sketch the battlefields of the Anglo-Boer War. That's the equivalent of the modern-day embedded journalist, putting himself in harm's way. It's bold, it's dangerous, it's a sure-fire route to adventure but you know, as Maya Angelou once put it,

'Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest'.

We have to plunge ourselves again and again into the unknown, one brave act followed by another, in order to build a life of real substance. Is this train like that, a magical rail across the South African countryside? Or am I just sitting in comfort, coasting along on someone else's dream?

At Worcester I get out and stand on the platform. The train is already hot and brutal, fuming. How do we go from seeing the familiar landscape we know

OPPOSITE TOP: *Constantia Valley*, 19cm x 29cm sold in 2009 for R61 270. **BOTTOM:** *Schoongezicht*, a bright, autumn scene of Cape vineyards. (Image courtesy *Gwelo Goodman, South African Artist* by Joyce Newton Thompson, 1951) **ABOVE LEFT:** *Proteas*, 55.5cm x 42cm, sold for R54 567 last year. Goodman was also particularly fond of roses. **ABOVE RIGHT:** *Cape Dutch Homestead and Proteas* showcases Goodman's mastery of pastels.



ABOVE: Look at it quickly and you might mistake this masterpiece for an old photograph. Look at the sun on those mountains. This piece, *Hermanus*, sold for R591 136 in 2013. BELOW: Dappled sunlight over Neethlingshof, painted in 1923. (Image courtesy *Gwelo Goodman, South African Artist* by Joyce Newton Thompson, 1951)



as South Africans, to seeing it as visitors, and becoming the potential heroes of our countryside?

And why Robert Gwelo Goodman?

In 1901, when Robert Goodman was 30 years old and exhibiting Boer War artworks at Grafton Galleries in England and the Cape Town Technical Institute, he lamented to Cape Town art instructor J S Morland about the difficulty he was having in making a name for himself on the London art scene. Goodman – the name – just wasn't good enough. Morland thought Robert needed something more distinctive, more African.

The central, then-Rhodesian town of Gwelo (founded in 1895, the same year Goodman began his art career, and now called Gweru) somehow made sense. The town named after the Kalanga word *kwelu* (pheasant) exports flowers, chromite and boasts Zimbabwe's largest railway marshalling yard. It's a town founded on trade, enterprise and transport.

As my train slips further into the vastness of the Karoo, I contemplate the loss of a countryside and the loss of ourselves.

What is the essence of a land, what is the essence of a man? Memories. Moments. On one side of the window: caviar, croissants, scones, chocolate cake and Earl Grey tea. On the other side: the infinite Karoo. Rinsed skies and pale pastels washing by the window. Are past and present fused into the unquiet, unfolding moment of creation? If so, can we not be part of our own creation?

I alight from the train at Matjiesfontein. My head swims with champagne and my blood bursts with the sugary rush of vetkoek. In my delirium, with the bright Lord Milner Hotel looming against the sun, I want to know about Goodman's birthplace. Taplow. Why does that name ring a bell?

It's situated – it turns out – one railway stop before Maidenhead, travelling from London. I lived in Maidenhead for a year, and Taplow was just eight minutes' drive away. Taplow has a pit 83 million years old with evidence of oyster shells and sea-slug fossils. The pit is a sign that the sea once drowned most of Buckinghamshire. Taplow meanwhile is named after a 6th century king buried in the area under a great mound, Viking style.

Now the train has stopped in the middle of nowhere. The steely murmur of the track speaks of another approaching train. The engine, as it passes, is like a living thing, hissing, clattering. Goodman's England is like this train too: powerful, loud, vulgar and



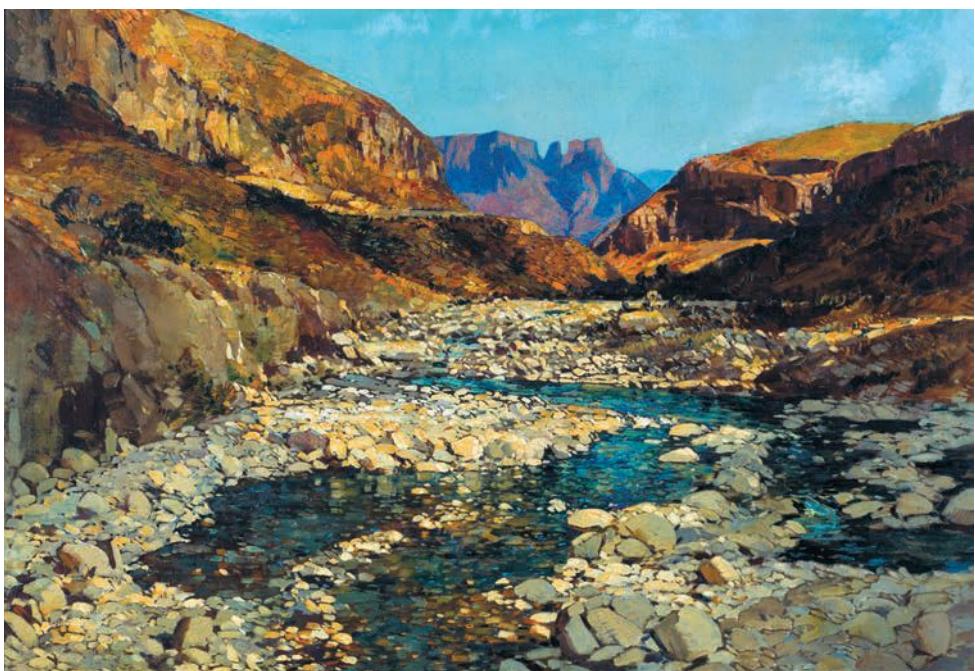
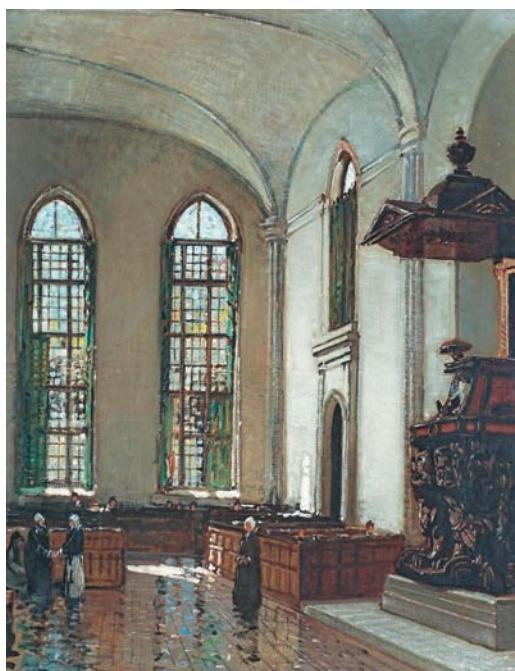
ABOVE: Gwelo, a diminutive Englishman, at work in his Newland's House studio. (Image courtesy *Gwelo Goodman, South African Artist* by Joyce Newton Thompson, 1951) BOTTOM LEFT: *Interior of the Groote Kerk, Cape Town* sold in 2014 for R306 936. BOTTOM RIGHT: *Source of the Little Tugela* sold for R334 200 in 2012.

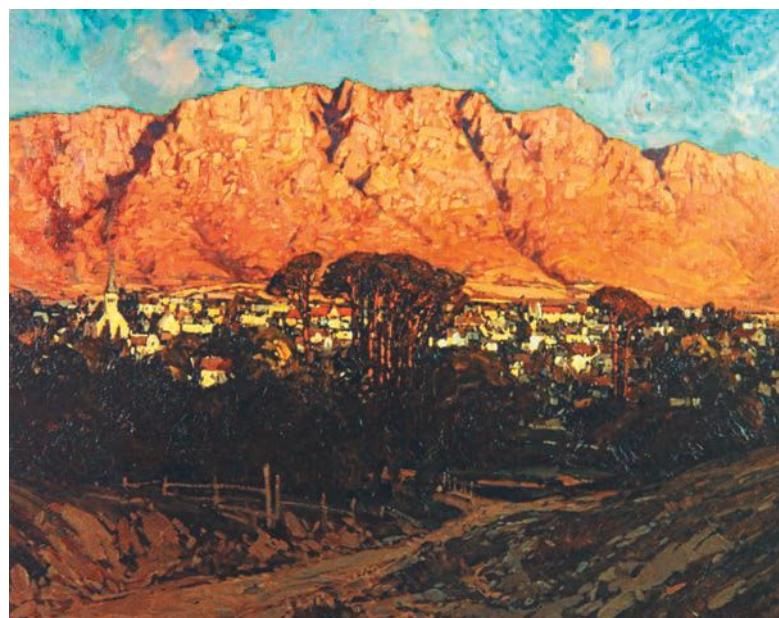
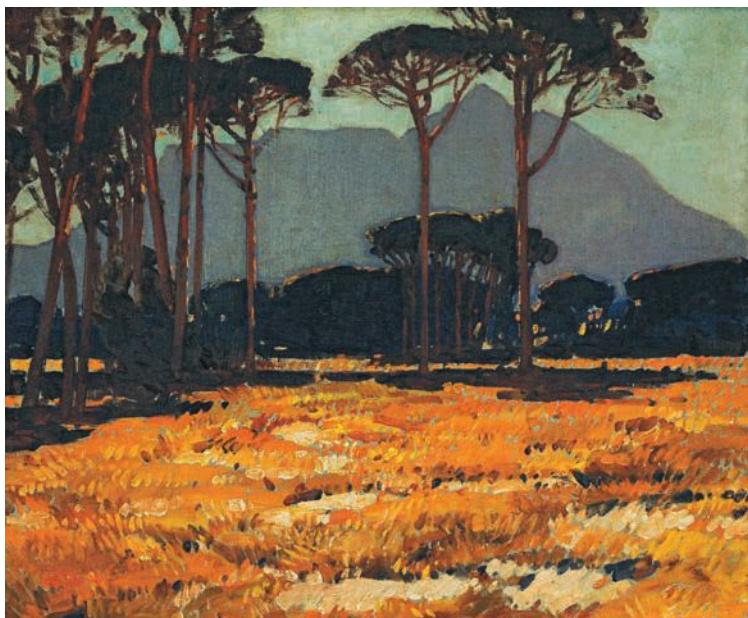
sophisticated. I wonder, was Goodman too?

In the foreword to his biography *Gwelo Goodman, South African Artist* by Joyce Newton Thompson he's described as a cocky, conceited, rude little man but the same source calls him an 'attractive,

stimulating, vital man'. I glance out the window for inspiration. The Karoo, like Goodman's birthplace, was once the bottom of the sea. How the world has changed. How the world can change. And how Goodman had to change to matter as an artist.

Goodman needed many years to appreciate the South African light for what it is. An Englishman, like my great-grandfather (Dutch artist Tinus de Jongh), will visit these shores and for many years still see his own country in the new country. He will see a pale sky and pale sunlight,





ABOVE: *View of Devil's Peak*, 37cm x 44,5cm was recently auctioned for R295 568.

ABOVE RIGHT: *Full of Flushed Heat – Tulbagh* feels distinctly Van-Gogh-like. Somehow Goodman creates nuance and detail even in his broadest strokes. Sold for R454 720 in 2013. RIGHT: *Relaxing on Deck* provides a glimpse of Goodman's own wanderlust.

and dark copses, and dreary lakes. It takes courage to let go of your schooling and experience, and step into the real world, to see what is really there and not what you are taught to see. Not one act of courage, but many, until finally, one fine day:

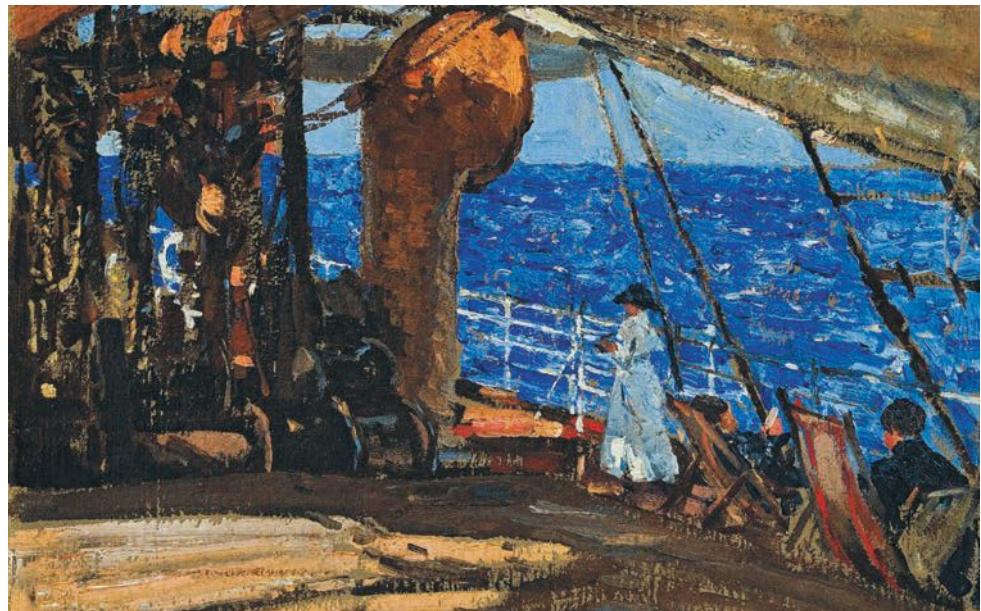
'In his sun-splashed buildings he has [given] us the splendour of our rugged mountains and the torrid brilliance of our blazing sun'. EF Watermeyer, who wrote a foreword in Gwelo Goodman's biography.

Or, as Bilbo the Hobbit put it, 'It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door... if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to.'

– J R R Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

When I awake I'm in Kimberley, and on a whim I get off there. After a restless night too close to the train station, listening to the freights of time shunting back and forth, I rise into a pale golden morning. What hope is there of finding Goodman here? From the train station to the William Humphreys Art Gallery it's a chilly ten minute walk. As I arrive, the gallery opens and Goodman is there, resplendent in roses.

On one occasion, Goodman told a reporter in Johannesburg, 'I paint roses, I was going to say as well as any man alive, but probably better. Fantin-Latour is the only rival I have ever had as a rose-painter'.



Goodman's roses are undoubtedly well done but, as art historian Esmé Berman puts it, the 'composition [of] almost all... his flower-pieces is unimaginative and academic'. Thankfully his landscapes are anything but. And now I'd like to see one.

I'm told there's another gallery two hours' drive from here that has a spectacular Gwelo Goodman. On a 180km-long, flat road, I contemplate Goodman's roses. England had its War of the Roses, and we had our wars, including with England. It was one of the longest and bloodiest wars in British history and cost England dearly – £22 billion adjusted for inflation.

Goodman may not have known about other contemporary painters of roses (Van Gogh and Georgia O'Keeffe) and overestimated his own skill at blooms, but

he eventually became a master of the South African sun. The tawny veld whispering beside my window has not forgotten the red coats Goodman painted or the press of crumbling gravestones. Salt pans and anthills outside my window are bleached by an angry sun in a blinding blue bowl. Boonzaier escaped the problem of the South African sun by painting sunless scenes. What did Gwelo do?

It turns out Gwelo was more courageous – like a train, hot and brutal, blustering. It took time but Goodman eventually 'intensified his palette' as Berman puts it. He wove vibrant orange and yellow highlights into mauve middle tones and dark, earthy shadows. Light and dark, blood and earth. I wonder, is everything a contradiction, and does truth lie in these contradictions?

It's a bright, warm, dreamy winter's day in Bloemfontein as I take the steps inside the lovely Oliewenhuis Art Museum. On the first floor is a Goodman, perhaps the largest painting in the entire gallery, sporting the most lavish frame. Behind the glass, and my own reflection in it, is a dark scene. A Scottish woodland.

What's it doing here? A Highland scene covered in snow and caught in shadow, except for a bright ribbon of ice glowing in sunlight. I step back and glance at an enormous Pierneef to my left. It's nowhere near as colossal, or as dark or bright as this.

In the basement is an even brighter work by Goodman called *The Rock*. It is so bright the archivist admits there is some controversy

about the work – is it the original or has it been retouched? Because the white sun leaps off the canvas as though applied a few hours ago rather than before my father was born.

Joyce Newton-Thompson would have appreciated the controversy over *The Rock*, and perhaps Goodman would too. Before departing the City of Roses, I have an unexpected encounter with a large spider at a front door. According to Wikipedia, so did another former resident of Bloemfontein, JRR Tolkien: 'As a child, he was bitten by a large baboon spider in the garden, an event some think later echoed in his stories...'

As the deep blue of the Drakensberg builds in the bright distance, I'm aware of a trade, born in sickness between this

country and that. Tolkien's father died of rheumatic fever, Goodman came to South Africa in 1911 to recover from it. England gave us Goodman, and Goodman gave to England and a worldwide audience a more acute sense of the South African palette, something Esmé Berman refers to as Goodman's 'flickering tapestry'. And South Africa gave Tolkien back to England, prompting him to write about the loss of the countryside and country folk:

'It was a kind of lost paradise... There was an old mill that really did grind corn with two millers, a great big pond with swans on it, a sandpit, a wonderful dell with flowers, a few old-fashioned village houses and, further away, a stream with another mill. I always knew it would go – and it did...'

Tolkien lived right beside one of only two working mills in England. Goodman lived inside beautiful Cape Dutch homesteads, and restored them from within and without. As he grew older, his interest in architecture and gardens grew, until finally, when the world wound down to war, Goodman settled on flower studies.

Like Tolkien, there was something impish about the man who grew up on and around trains. Gwelo mastered pastels first; this is where his oil paintings find their maturity. He was a man who played golf, fished for trout; he was a big-game hunter who controversially shot an elephant. The railway man had come a long way, hadn't he?

Johans Borman's online biography credits Goodman's 'considerable impact on South African art... as well as encouraging the young Gregoire Boonzaier... Newton Thompson describes his...dramatic sense of colour, its self-confidence; the profound affection it shows for the beauty of our own country...[Gwelo] remained steadfast to certain eternal verities in art, believing in the values of hard work and individualism over the emerging modernist ideas.' And to paraphrase Maya Angelou, without honesty we cannot have decent art.

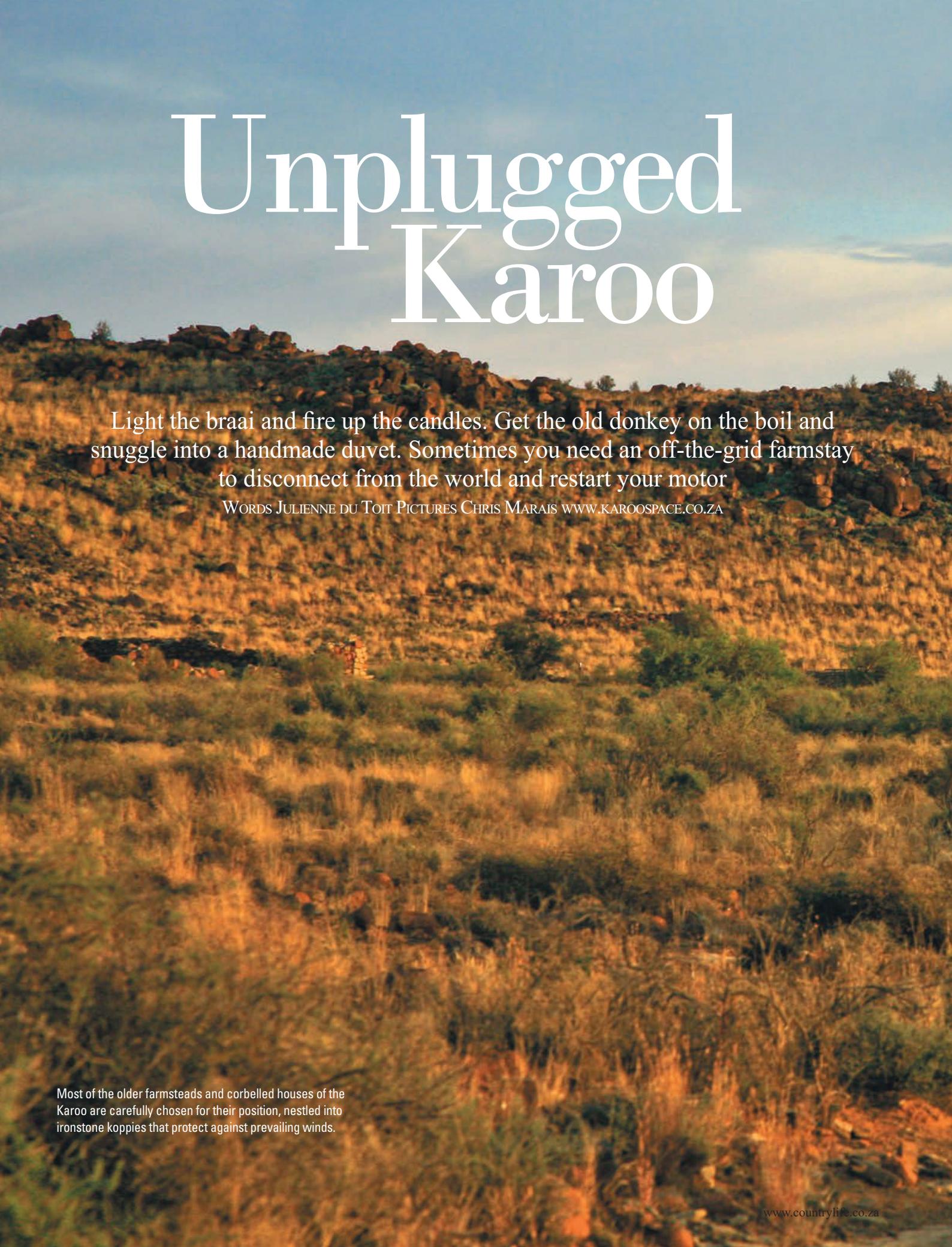
Gwelo mastered that most difficult of subjects, the South African sun. He built and improved houses and brought the vibrancy of the outdoors and the garden to put inside them. It was more than just capturing beauty, it was finding home away from home. ■



LEFT: *Venice*. Gwelo was very well travelled, he also painted in India and the Himalayas.
BELOW: The drab, muted tones of *Christ Church, Lancaster Gate, London*, 1914, demonstrate how far Gwelo Goodman needed to stretch his palette to capture brilliant, sun-splashed South African scenes. (Both images courtesy Gwelo Goodman, South African artist by Joyce Newton Thompson, 1951)



Unplugged Karoo

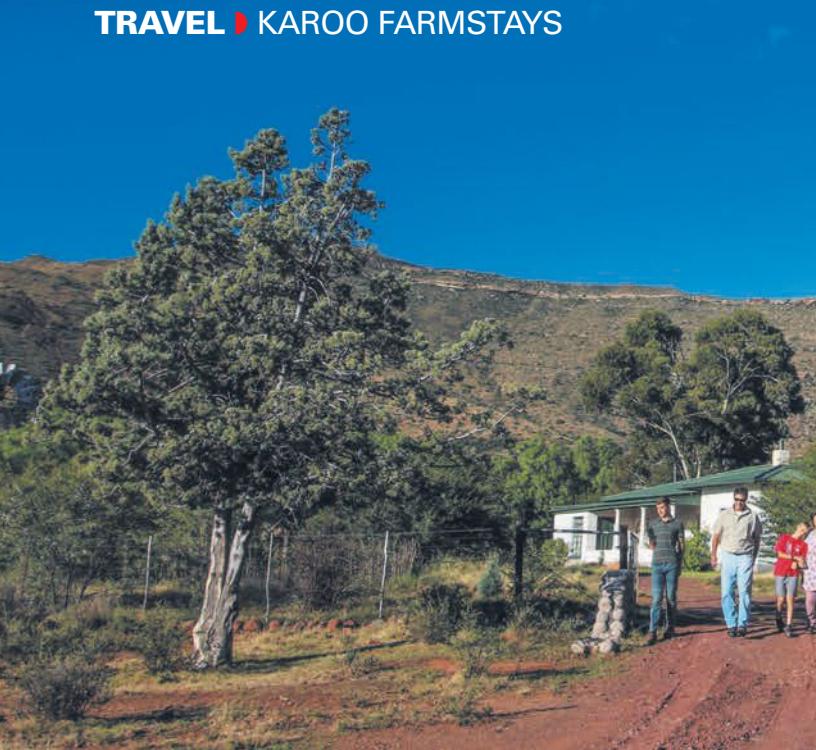


Light the braai and fire up the candles. Get the old donkey on the boil and snuggle into a handmade duvet. Sometimes you need an off-the-grid farmstay to disconnect from the world and restart your motor

WORDS JULIENNE DU TOIT PICTURES CHRIS MARAIS WWW.KAROOSPACE.CO.ZA

Most of the older farmsteads and corbelled houses of the Karoo are carefully chosen for their position, nestled into ironstone koppies that protect against prevailing winds.





Research shows that one in three people feels worse after a visit to Facebook. But nobody, barring a difference of opinion with a puffadder en route, feels worse after a walk in the Karoo veld. In fact, most of us feel marvellous after a good stroll through the koppies.

As always, the ancient ways of the Karoo are in fact as cutting edge as you can get. The new trend of holidays, for those who need serious digital detox, is to spend time on a Karoo farm where lights come from candles, hot water runs from a donkey boiler and face-time replaces Facebook time.

This is how our hardy ancestors lived hundreds of years ago on the wide plains of the Karoo. They played musical instruments, read books made from paper, took long walks together, thought a lot, probably drank a lot (OK, so some human habits defy time) and did an awful lot of cuddling under handmade goose-down duvets.

Our forebears placed great value on solitude. They made stuff. We, of the digital world, we like to consume stuff.

In the spirit of a true off-grid adventure, COUNTRY LIFE ferreted out five unplugged Karoo farms where you can re-discover yourself, your family and your frontier spirit.



1 HOME TO ROOST NEAR STEYNBURG

Staying at Home to Roost is like time-tripping 50 years back to your favourite aunt's farmhouse. Everything about it feels familiar and comforting. On the walls there are prints of pastoral scenes, children and dogs and chickens, and the kitchen is full of quaint devices from the pre-electric past, like old irons and manual egg beaters.

In the lounge, there are jigsaws, a knitting basket with an invitation to knit and donate squares for blankets for charity, and books – including old-fashioned romances with delightfully corny titles like *Nurse Gail Loves Again* and *Love Wants All*.

Make a point of watching moonrise from the outdoor area, built with stone harvested from the surrounding veld and hand-hewn by

TOP: Home to Roost farmstay, nestles among trees and koppies.
ABOVE: Supper by candle and firelight in the beautifully built stone outside area. LEFT: Ancient irons, many of which predate electricity, arranged in the kitchen.



a master mason of the name Hendrik Baartman. This is where you come after sunset, with a fire burning and the night breeze sculpting the candle wax.

And there's good walking. The plateau is a remarkable place to be at dawn, with a grandstand view of the high ironstone krantzes touched by first light.

- Home to Roost sleeps six in the house, with bunk beds outside for an additional eight people. Michael and Lesley Lord will show you how everything works, then leave you to enjoy the peace. They live on another farm nearby. Thandekile and Nancy Kose and will light the donkey boilers, ready the braai fire if needed and clean up in the morning if requested.
- 048 885 9077, 081 270 4543, michaelilord@gmail.com

2 POPLAR GROVE NEAR COLESBERG

Poplar Grove is a simple Karoo sheep farm south of Colesberg. But it is also a place of formal Zen Buddhist practice. During the week-long retreats held four times a year, one particular cottage is invariably the first to be booked out – but you can stay there any time.

The stoep sofa of the stone cottage is the perfect place to spend time with a book. Looking for a good author or a thriller? You'll find some contenders in the shelf above the bed.

More spiritual books can be found in a small library off the meditation barn, or zendo.

Go for a long walk into the poplar forest, or to the labyrinth. Watch the ironstone koppie darken and disappear while lighting the candles and fixing supper on a gas stove in the tiny kitchen.

On a peaceful Karoo farm, each moment can be a meditation. Poplar Grove is the home of Buddhist teachers Margie and Antony Osler, and the inspiration for Antony's bestsellers *Stoep Zen*, *Zen Dust* and his latest book, *Mzansi Zen*. He writes: 'In this wild and tender place may we ever hear the sound of truth in the whispering of stars, in the turning of windmills, in the silence of the veld'.



ABOVE LEFT: The lit donkey boiler surrounded by all the space. ABOVE: Poplar Grove is a sheep farm and a soul retreat. BELOW: At the farm, everything is pleasing to the eye and the heart. BOTTOM: The alluring stone cottage.



- The stone cottage sleeps two, but there are two other nearby hermitages, similarly free of electricity and Wi-Fi, but supremely comfortable. As with most farmstays, you bring and cook your own food. But there will probably be fresh milk and eggs in the fridge at the back, the only electrically powered object in the vicinity.
- 051 753 1356, 082 816 5903, margie@stoepzen.co.za
www.stoepzen.co.za





And as befits such an historical place, there is no electricity. It is also one of the most beautiful Karoo farmsteads you will ever see



3 LETSKRAAL FARMSTAY NEAR GRAAFF-REINET

Restoring a 200-year-old farmhouse, which once belonged to famous trekker Andries Pretorius, from near-ruin was a work of love over many years for present owner Johan Minnaar. It was bought by his grandfather in the 1930s, and the farmhouse structure had deteriorated to a state almost beyond repair.

Letskraal today is a model of careful and correct restoration, and almost certainly the most authentic 1800-era Karoo farmhouse is open to travellers. And as befits such an historical place, there is no electricity. It is also one of the most beautiful Karoo farmsteads you will ever see, with classic lines and a glorious smooth lawn in summer.

In the afternoon, everyone is inevitably drawn to the comfortable chairs near the cypresses and grapevine pergola, the windpump spinning and sending fresh groundwater splashing into the dam. Then comes that magical time of dusk when the candles and the paraffin lamps are lit, the veld purrs with cricket song and the stars outside sequin the sky.

- Letskraal has three graciously appointed bedrooms and can sleep seven people. There are two full outside bathrooms, and even a real wagon that can be used for sleeping during the softer seasons of spring and autumn. The accommodation is cared for by a delightful couple, Lydia and Patrick Jacobs who live a short distance away. Note that the road is best navigated in a high-clearance vehicle.
- Letskraal is pet friendly and especially fascinating for people interested in history.
- 049 892 4114, letskraal@eastcape.net, www.letskraal.co.za



TOP LEFT: The gracious lines of Letskraal at dawn.

ABOVE LEFT: The wood-fired donkey boiler, windpump and old wagon at Letskraal. LEFT: One of two water dams near the Letskraal farmstead. ABOVE: In the afternoon, everyone enjoys comfortable chairs near the grapevine pergola, the ironstone mountains of the Agter Sneueberg in the distance.

4 CORBELLED HOUSES OF THE NORTHERN CAPE

In a rough quadrangle between Loxton, Carnarvon, Fraserburg and Williston, there are a few dozen beehive-shaped, stone, corbelled houses, some now open for travellers. Built more than 150 years ago by trekboers and their servants, they remain a silent memorial to a time long past, when stone and clay were the only building materials. Those that have been restored into guest houses are mostly just as electricity-free as they were centuries ago.

Sleeping in a corbelled house bedroom is a magical feeling. The great volume of space rises above you like a deep breath, exhaling the peace of stone. Stuurmansfontein near Carnarvon is one of the best known. It belongs to Peter and Charmaine Botha who can tell you all about the bywoner (tenant farmer) family of Fanie Bergh that lived here long ago. It has been beautifully restored, combining modern-day comforts of a gas stove with a real old *asboskerm* (a semi-circular open-roofed shelter) for cooking on an open fire. You'll see the remains of the bywoner way of life – an old threshing floor and a beautiful corbelled grain store.

Rooyvlakte near Loxton is thought to be the easternmost corbelled house in the Karoo, set in splendid isolation in the vast apron of veld a short walk from a shady poplar forest and windpump, just below an ironstone plateau.

The doorways are so low you have to duck to enter. Does this mean the people of those days were tiny? No, explains owner Jan Wiese. It's just that it was inhabited for so long that the floor rose a bit every time the then-inhabitants added another layer of smoothed dung, water and blood to the floor. ■

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE RIGHT: The protruding stones around the beehive shape of the corbelled roof of Stuurmansfontein let people climb up and open or close the top stone, allowing smoke out or keeping heat in; Stuurmansfontein's kitchen has all you need; Stuurmansfontein's main bedroom; At Rooyvlakte there is that feeling of safety that comes from being in the middle of the Karoo's open spaces.



- Stuurmansfontein sleeps up to six people comfortably, while Rooyvlakte is far more intimate, better suited to a couple. Both have ingenious outside showers and toilets, and are fully equipped for catering. You could ask Charmaine of Stuurmansfontein to supply dinner and breakfast.
053 3826 097, stuurmansfontein@lantic.net
www.carnarvon.co.za
- Rooyvlakte, contact Hanneke Wiese of the Rooi Granaat in Loxton on 082 805 2982, dierooigranaat@gmail.com



Tips for the Best Unplugged Farmstays

- Book for three nights or at the very least two. Unplugged farmstays are not suited to swift overnight sleepovers.
- Check out everything before sunset and make sure the candles, torches and lanterns are ready by dusk. Bring a head torch. Moonless nights in the Karoo are unbelievably dark.
- Take along your knitting or crocheting or guitar, or a book you've been wanting to read. Also, sturdy shoes for walking and a mountain bike if you have one.
- Lie on your back and look at stars so many and so bright compared to city skies.
- Don't forget the marshmallows to roast over the coals for dessert.

Country Escapes

1 Limpopo Wild Ivory Eco Lodge **Waterberg**

If you're a responsible traveller, as I am, and value the eco-credentials of your destination, check out Wild Ivory Eco Lodge in the Welgevonden Reserve of the Waterberg Mountains. This low-impact lodge was built using eco-friendly products, and hardwoods were not used. It blends into the environment and operates off solar power, uses green products, has borehole water, and even the sewerage system is eco-friendly. The elevated, luxury, tented camp offers amazing views from the deck and pool over to the wooded plains

below, so we could expect to see any of the Big Five strolling to the waterhole while we were eating a delicious potjie, never mind the golden opportunity of seeing rhino, cheetah and lion on game drives. For me, good birding is always a bonus and this quiet corner of the reserve with its sweet bushveld habitat is a bird lover's paradise. – *Lisa Martus*

011 312 8084, reservations@wildivory.co.za, www.wildivory.co.za



2 West Coast Sea Shack **Cape Columbine Nature Reserve**

To be any closer to the ocean with four walls and a roof would probably mean you're on a sinking houseboat. Located within the Cape Columbine Nature Reserve, about 5km from Paternoster, Sea Shack is in a pristine setting and is the ultimate tread-lightly eco getaway. Sitting on the jetty in front of Sea Shack and gazing out to sea with our feet dangling in the Atlantic was natural meditation. Opened in 2015, Sea Shack has 10 beach huts or sea shacks, which are comfortable, free-standing bedrooms, plus there are three tents. Four rustic and scrupulously clean, shared ablution facilities service the rooms, and feature waterless, augur-type toilets. There's a dining/kitchen/hangout building that provides all the necessary self-catering requirements and is a natural gathering place. Lighting throughout is solar-powered and LPG. After walking the seashell labyrinth at sunset, we gathered around the central fire and watched the stars come out. Later we braaied and dined with fellow guests, telling fireside stories. – *Keri Harvey*

079 820 6824, bookings@seashack.co.za
www.seashack.co.za

Eco-friendly escapes

If solar power, no television and remoteness turn you on, read further...





3 KwaZulu-Natal Satori Farm **Dargle**

In the Southern Drakensberg overlooking the Inhlasane Mountain, Satori's picturesquesque vistas that are rolled out before you simply take your breath away. The lodge, perched on the mountain top, was constructed by the owners with hay bales and thatch – an arduous but rewarding task, they admit. The grass was grown, harvested and baled on the farm. Spring water, sourced from the underground stream, feeds the lodge and the sun provides power – no televisions here. Accommodation comprises four double bedrooms, a loft room and a communal, open-plan lounge and kitchen with a fireplace that was built to impress – and it does. Delicious, healthy, country-style meals are prepared by the hosts from homegrown ingredients. This destination, with a river running through it, provides a serene space for contemplation, as do the empowering retreats conducted here. An added bonus is that Satori is pet friendly. – *Olivia Schaffer*

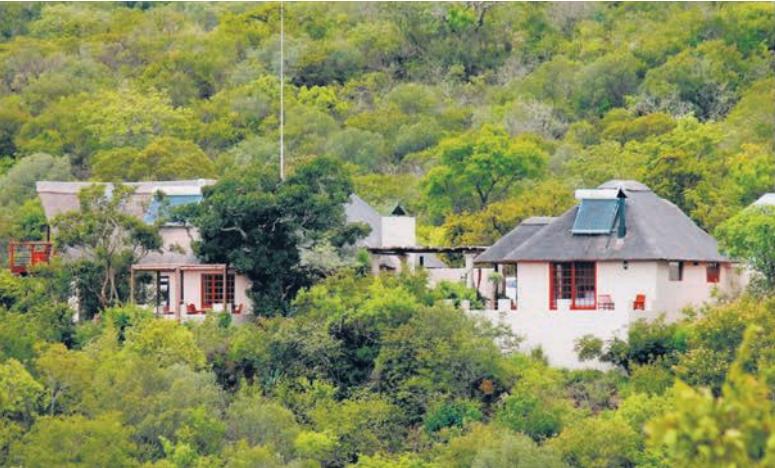
082 551 7402, louiseghersie@vodamail.co.za, www.satorifarm.co.za



4 Northern Cape Kgalagadi Lodge **Kalahari**

'Keeping it Kalahari' is how Denise Koortzen and her husband, SJ, describe their lodge 5km south of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. Ideal for the South African traveller, the easily accessible lodge offers 31 reasonably-priced and well-equipped self-catering chalets with braai facilities, a campsite, a well-stocked shop and a small, stylish restaurant. The four-year-old lodge is part of the owners' vision to 'green the Kalahari', or at least their section of it. Being a fair distance from the nearest large town (Upington is 250km away), the couple realise the need to be as self-sufficient as possible and plan to get off the grid and start their own greenhouse for fresh produce. After having sunk three boreholes, they built a large reverse-osmosis plant, ensuring a constant supply of quality water. Grey water from the laundry and showers is used to irrigate trees and compact the soft, red sand on their roads. Solar geysers, energy-efficient, inverter-type air-conditioners and compost heaps are additional features on their journey to developing a green facility in the Kalahari. A quiet base from which to explore the park, the lodge is a pleasure to return to after a day in the wild with its view of the gentle Kalahari hills and springbok wandering through the grounds. – *Ron Swilling*

082 303 8768, info@kgalagadi-lodge.co.za, www.kgalagadi-lodge.co.za



5 Limpopo Graceland Eco Retreat **Magoebaskloof**

If you want to get off the grid and away from it all, I can think of nowhere better than Graceland Eco Retreat. Run by the environmentally aware owners Douglas Walker and Anders Ragnarsson, it's powered by solar and gas with a back-up generator for emergencies. The two, renovated, thatched cottages are airy and chic and local sculptures and woodwork, sourced by Douglas, decorate the interiors and the extensive decks. Anders likes to knock up mouth-watering creations in the purpose-built outside kitchen, which has a braai and pizza oven next to the huge dining table in the vine-covered pergola. You can self-cater, but I would recommend letting Anders cook for you, as we did. This sole-use property (with no under 16s allowed) is on a game farm and comprises two double rooms in the main

house, an upstairs gentleman's lounge with views down the valley and a telescope for stargazing. The Kudu Cottage is separated from the main building by the outdoor kitchen and dining area, and has a double bed and a futon. Graceland can accommodate up to eight guests, or you can book it for you and your partner. Open the sliding doors of the master bedroom, take in the 180-degree view and close the doors on the rest of the world. – *Fiona McIntosh*

083 277 5553, info@gracelandeco.co.za, www.gracelandeco.co.za



6 Western Cape

Geoff's Shacks **Piket-Bo-Berg**

You can't get more eco-friendly than Kruisementvlei Farm. It practises sustainable agriculture and vermiculture, the compost heap generates hot water and organic matter is recycled. And you can't get closer to nature (but in comfort) than in its two log shacks, Geoff's Shacks, which sleep four each in bunk beds, and are tucked high up on the Piket-Bo-Berg with views across craggy mountains. The bathroom is open-air with a private and piping-hot shower under a rock overhang. The loo is a composting one and squeaky clean with no impact on the environment. A basic outdoor kitchen is also under a massive rock overhang and is equipped with a kettle and gas burner, cutlery and crockery. With a cup of coffee in hand, we watched the moon rise over the mountain before lighting a fire for the evening braai. Perched on pallet seating it felt like we were a million miles from anything, yet the town of Piketberg is just at the foot of the mountain. After an invigorating shower, we turned in and read under solar lights. The following morning, we woke to farmers chatting as they set up their stalls for the monthly market below the shacks. And that's where we had breakfast. – *Keri Harvey*

022 914-5652, admin@ksvfarm.co.za, www.ksvfarm.co.za



7 Garden Route

Forest Edge Nature-Lovers Retreat **Knysna**

So close to Knysna's forests that we could smell the moss and hear the loeries, the aptly named Forest Edge Nature-Lover's Retreat is almost as 'green' as the setting in which it finds itself. The five, fully equipped, self-catering cottages with fireplaces, braais and outdoor showers, run on rain water, as does the organic veggie garden on the property, where natural pesticides that the owners make themselves are used. Alien vegetation has been eradicated, honey is harvested from their own bees, they keep free-range chickens and we also spotted a few pet donkeys roaming around. All water waste is treated by a natural soak-away system and grey water is filtered through reeds before being reused in the grounds. Organic waste is 'recycled' through the donkeys or else becomes compost for the gardens. They even have a worm farm to generate vermicompost. Forest Edge is right next door to SANParks' Drup Kelders – a beautiful forest gorge resplendent with waterfalls and swimming holes. – *Dale Morris*

082 456 1338, stay@forestedge.co.za, www.forestedge.co.za

8

Western Cape

Embizweni Cottage **Karoo National Park**

On the Nuweveld Eco 4x4 Route in the heart of the Karoo National Park, the unfenced Embizweni Cottage offers visitors their own little piece of the Karoo. After a two to three hour drive from the park reception, we suddenly arrived at this remote gem, tucked away between the Nuweveld Mountains and overlooking the vast Karoo plains. It was the perfect time to light a fire, sit back and unwind. One room has a double bed and another has single bunk beds, so take your close friends or family to make memories. It is compulsory to book a minimum of two nights. The unit is fully equipped and has solar-powered lights and gas-powered appliances (stove, fridge and geyser). Take note that there are no plug points to charge phones or other electronic equipment, so let nature dictate the course of your stay. For us the only distraction was the antelope and other wild residents at the waterhole not far from the veranda. Embizweni is also a great vantage point for exploring the park's other off-road trails. – *René de Klerk*

023 415 2828, www.sanparks.org



9 Northern Namibia

Dolomite Camp **Western Etosha**

If you like remote, Etosha's newest eco desert camp in the previously restricted western side of the park offers you just that. Twenty units, on wooden decks and tucked singly into the high slopes of a rugged outcrop of dolomite boulders, are built purely of natural materials – wood, canvas walls, reed and thatch, while the decor focuses on locally crafted beading and handwoven baskets. Water is solar-heated. Retractable wooden doors fold back for sensational views of wildlife roaming on the plains below (the camp is unfenced and we had giraffe nibbling on tree tops just outside our unit, and elephants beyond them). Dolomite has an infinity pool, bar and restaurant and, to minimise impact on the environment, vehicles are parked at the foot of the hill and guests ferried up to their chalets in a golf cart. We were able to explore 15 waterholes in the area on our own, or we could join a guided game drive. Some days we simply enjoyed the daily wildlife parade from our hilltop camp. – *Mariëlle Renssen*

021 422 3761, www.nwr.com.na/index.php/resorts/dolomite-resort

These two camps are on opposite sides of Etosha; one on the most extreme western side, which previously wasn't open to the public; the other on the extreme eastern side where no other lodges exist except the Onkoshi Camp (unique as it's the only camp on the pan).

10

Northern Namibia

Onkoshi Camp **Etosha Pan**

This low-impact, solar-powered camp of only 15 units is named after the lions that roamed the area during construction. Lions are still around, but in the shifting of their territorial range, they have graduated outward. Onkoshi's units, neat rondavels built on stilts, hug the edge of the Etosha Pan. Floors, folding doors and wraparound decks of gleaming wood, together with reed-screen interiors, canvas walls and woven leather decor, all give the units a wonderfully natural feel. Every unit is energy self-sufficient with water heating, lighting and power points for charging electronic equipment all powered by solar. Most dramatic of all are horizonless panoramas across the shimmering salt flats. We slept with doors thrown open to the glittering stars, curtains billowing in the desert breeze. Exquisitely sculpted African daybeds, headrests and wood carvings fill the main reception area, floor-to-ceiling glass in the restaurant overlooks the pan, and the bar's deck serves up awesome big-sky sunsets. Activities at Onkoshi are simple: game drives, photography and stargazing, but that's all you'll want to do. – *Mariëlle Renssen*

021 422 3761, www.nwr.com.na/index.php/resorts/onkoshi-resort



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Arniston to Agulhas

De Mond Nature Reserve at Africa's southernmost tip
is one of only two places to view the Damara Tern

WORDS AND PICTURES PETER CHADWICK WWW.PETERCHADWICK.CO.ZA



A Damara Tern is spotted at its breeding site in De Mond reserve.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The historic Cape Agulhas Lighthouse stands close to the southernmost tip of Africa; A hiker enjoys the early morning views across the pristine coastline between Arniston and De Mond Nature Reserve; Cape dune mole rat burrows stretch along the beaches between Arniston and Struisbaai; A large spiny starfish searches in the tidal pools and mussel beds for prey; White daisies grow close to the ground near the Meisho Maru shipwreck along the rocky Agulhas coastline.

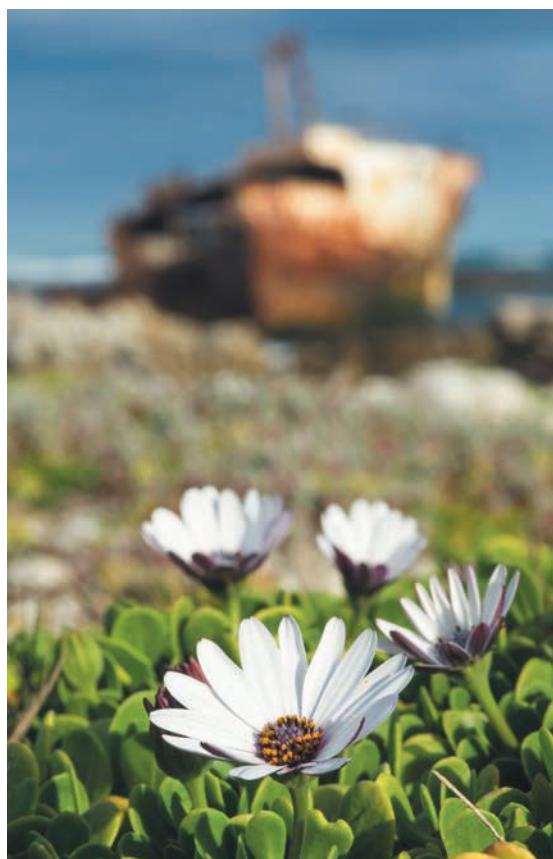
Renowned for its rugged and often storm-ravaged coastline, which has claimed the lives of many a seafarer, Africa's southernmost tip is also one of the best places in South Africa to view a diminutive tern that has a global population of less than 13 500 individuals, and is now listed as endangered in the recently updated *Red Data Book of Birds*.

Most of these Damara Terns are found along the West African coastline and in Namibia, but in South Africa there is a small local population of between 100 and 120 pairs, making this a highly sought-after species for birding enthusiasts. Measuring

only 22cm in length, and with a wingspan of 50cm, these almost uniformly pale-grey birds hunt in the shallows of sheltered coastlines. I used my search for them as an excellent excuse to hike the stunningly beautiful coastline between Arniston and Cape Agulhas.

This 30km stretch is hugely diverse in terms of coastal habitat that varies from jagged sandstone cliffs and rocky platforms to long, white beaches, a rugged boulder-strewn shoreline and what has to be one of the country's most picturesque estuaries.

Mankind's history is also deeply etched along the route, with many Khoisan shell middens half-exposed above the high-tide



mark. There are also remnants of ancient stone fish-traps or *visvywers* as they are locally known. These traps have low stone walls that allow fish to enter during the incoming tide, and when the water recedes they are trapped inside.

In the coastal hamlet of Struis Bay lies a small fishing harbour where the old wooden fishing boats – or 'chukkies' as they are called – of subsistence fishermen are anchored. After long hours and nights at sea, the fishermen and deep-sea anglers offload their catch onto the slipways, and then the price haggling begins.

The harbour has also become famous for huge, short-tailed stingrays that come to rest in the sheltered waters of the harbour and then feed between scavenging Cape Cormorants on discarded fish. The stingrays entertain throngs of visitors as they move into the shallows and sweep over your feet in their search for fishy morsels.

Beyond the harbour and the houses of

Struis Bay and L'Agulhas, is the historical lighthouse of Cape Agulhas that beams out a nightly warning of just how dangerous the seas off this coastline are. Remnants of numerous wrecks can be found, none more prominent than that of the Meisho Maru just to the west of Africa's southernmost tip.

But more than all these distractions it was the birds that had enticed me to this coastline. So off I set along the coastal cliffs of Arniston at dawn, and it wasn't long before I found a small breeding colony of Crowned Cormorants that had their nests, built out of seaweed, tucked into the hollow crevices of the cliffs.

Red-winged Starlings, Cape Wagtails and Fiscal Flycatchers fluttered around the colony, snatching at the many small insects attracted to the rotting seaweed. In the stunted coastal vegetation close by were Malachite Sunbirds, Karoo Primas, Cape Canaries, Cape Bulbuls, Cape Robin-Chats and Southern Boubous, all very busy searching for food.

Beyond the sandstone cliffs and the white beach of Shark Bay, fishermen probed their long, hooked sticks into the rocky outcrops, looking for octopus. I saw Kelp Gulls and a lone Bank Cormorant, as well as Swift-, Sandwich- and Common Terns but, sadly, not the bird I was really hoping for.

Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings, African Black Oystercatchers and a Whimbrel were also added to my growing list, as they fed between the starfishes and many other marine invertebrates in the rock pools.

From the rocky point of Arniston, I ventured along the pristine beaches, where burrows of Cape dune mole rats were etched into the sand. Gentle waves washed in ploughshare snails to search for beach detritus, hundreds of them converging on translucent jellyfish and quickly devouring the wobbly mounds.

White-fronted Plovers were common on these beaches and I was extremely fortunate to find a newly hatched and well-camouflaged chick lying motionless on the stony floor of a dune slack.

I still hadn't found my special, but was teased instead by excellent sightings of Caspian Terns plunge-diving into the surf and emerging with small, wriggling fish. Further out to sea, Cape Gannet flocks flew in extended lines just above the surface, and pods of bottlenose dolphins cavorted in the breaking waves. A large blow of rainbow-tinged spray alerted me to a southern right whale and her calf that surfaced not far



LEFT: Octopus fishermen from Arniston take a break from searching in the rock pools for their catch. BELOW LEFT: International and local visitors line up to view the short-tailed stingrays that are renowned for visiting Struisbaai harbour. BELOW: Dawn breaks over the Heuningnes River estuary with views across to the sea.





ABOVE: Flocks of Greater Flamingos are regular sightings in the shallow nutrient-rich waters of the Heuningnes River estuary in De Mond Nature Reserve. ABOVE RIGHT: These unusual circular shapes on the exposed mudflats of the Heuningnes River estuary are caused by Greater Flamingos that feed in circular movements.

behind the backline of waves.

It was only as I neared the Heuningnes River mouth in De Mond Nature Reserve, after a hike of close to 15 kilometres, that I finally saw them. There in front of me were four very special Damara Terns feeding in the water, where the river met the sea.

De Mond is well known as one of only two locations in South Africa where the Damara Terns breed (the other is Algoa Bay on the East Coast) and this population is very carefully monitored by the CapeNature staff. Sadly, human disturbance at their nest sites is the biggest threat to this species and a number of Namibian breeding colonies have been lost to expanding diamond mining, which removes the dune slacks that the birds require to breed in.

Non-breeding birds leave Southern Africa for the shores of West Africa, where strong upwelling off the Ghanaian coast between June and November brings spawning fish inshore for the birds to feed on. A chick that was ringed in De Mond Nature Reserve was recovered 10 months later almost 5 000km away in Benin, West Africa.

I settled down for a re-energising break, and enjoyed watching as the terns hovered and plunged into the shallow water of the estuary as they hunted for little fish. The small colony of less than ten pairs at De Mond breed on the secluded dune slacks between November and February, with the nest a shallow scrape on the ground, sometimes sparsely lined with small stones. Both parents incubate the single, well-camouflaged egg and remain constantly alert, quickly mobbing any approaching intruder.

From the estuary mouth, I had to take an inland detour to cross the river at the large swing bridge near the De Mond Nature Reserve offices. A narrow trail skirted the edge of the estuary, allowing good sightings of the flocks of Greater Flamingos, African Spoonbills, Cape Shovellers, Black-winged Stilts and Pied Avocets.

The migrating waders were a little more difficult to identify and I had to check my identifications carefully with binoculars. Little Stints, Sanderlings, Curlew Sandpipers, Marsh Sandpipers and Grey Plovers were all I saw this time but many a rare species has been known to make an appearance at this important, nutrient-rich estuary.

It was also low tide and I could observe the bizarre-looking shaggy sea hares as they fed in large groups on the sea grass. Evenly spaced circles in the sand had me baffled as to their origin, and it was only later, after much reading, that I was able to discover that they were the feeding patterns of Greater Flamingos that moved their upturned bills in circular patterns to filter out the invertebrates on which they fed. It was the low tide that had exposed these normally unseen patterns.

Late afternoon I arrived at the final resting place of the Meisho Maru shipwreck, a short distance from where the Atlantic and Indian oceans are supposed to meet. It seemed rather fitting that my day closed with a display of colour from the coastal flowers just as the sun began to dip behind the horizon.

What a magnificent day of very special birds in a very special place. ■

Map reference G3 see inside back cover

SEASON AND WEATHER

The climate is Mediterranean with warm summers and mild winters. Wind is present throughout the year but rain falls mainly in the winter months. Always be prepared for sudden changes in the weather. Summers are the dry and dusty months, while in winter the fynbos is lush and in flower. The best months to visit are April and September.

HABITATS

The coastline between Arniston and Agulhas is extremely diverse with long sandy beaches, rocky shorelines, a small fishing harbour and an estuary.

SPECIALS

Damara Tern
Caspian Tern
Bank Cormorant
Crowned Cormorant
African Black Oystercatcher

ACCOMMODATION & ACTIVITIES

The area has plenty of accommodation options with numerous B&Bs in Struis Bay and Arniston. De Mond Nature Reserve and Agulhas National Park offer some self-catering accommodation. The best option for sourcing suitable accommodation and determining the range of activities is through Cape Agulhas Tourism.

GETTING THERE

From Cape Town take the N2 to Caledon and follow the signage through to Napier and on to Bredasdorp. Signage clearly indicates the routes through to Arniston and Agulhas.

CONTACT

Cape Agulhas Tourism
028 435 7185
agulhas@discovercapeagulhas.co.za
www.discovercapeagulhas.co.za



CHECKLIST 10 specials to try and spot in De Mond Nature Reserve

1. The red tip of the lower mandible in the **Kelp Gull** (*Kelpmeeu*) might serve as a guiding beacon to the youngsters when being fed. The colour of this tip fades or becomes non-existent when not breeding.

2. The **Damara Tern** (*Damarasterretjie*) is a breeding intra-African migrant whose numbers have been falling considerably. They are monogamous, with incubation by both adults. The nest is a shallow scrape in the ground.

3. The **Cape Cormorant** (*Trekkie*) is one of five cormorant species found on South African waters, and is a near-endemic. They actively pursue fish underwater and grab them with their hooked bill. The wings are held closed underwater and are not used for propulsion.

4. The **Sanderling** (*Drietoonstrandloper*) possibly derives its name from the Old English 'sandyrthling'

meaning 'sand ploughing', probably a reference to its feeding pattern. A gregarious species, it occurs in flocks of up to 200 birds.

5. The smallest of the cormorant species in South Africa, the **Crowned Cormorant** (*Kuifkopduiker*) is easily recognised by its raised crown. It forages on bottom-dwelling species, with dives lasting up to a minute.

6. The colour of the **Greater Flamingo** (*Grootflamink*) becomes pinker when breeding due to the carotenoid pigments assimilated from their food. They use foot trembling to disturb bottom sediments, to help them forage.

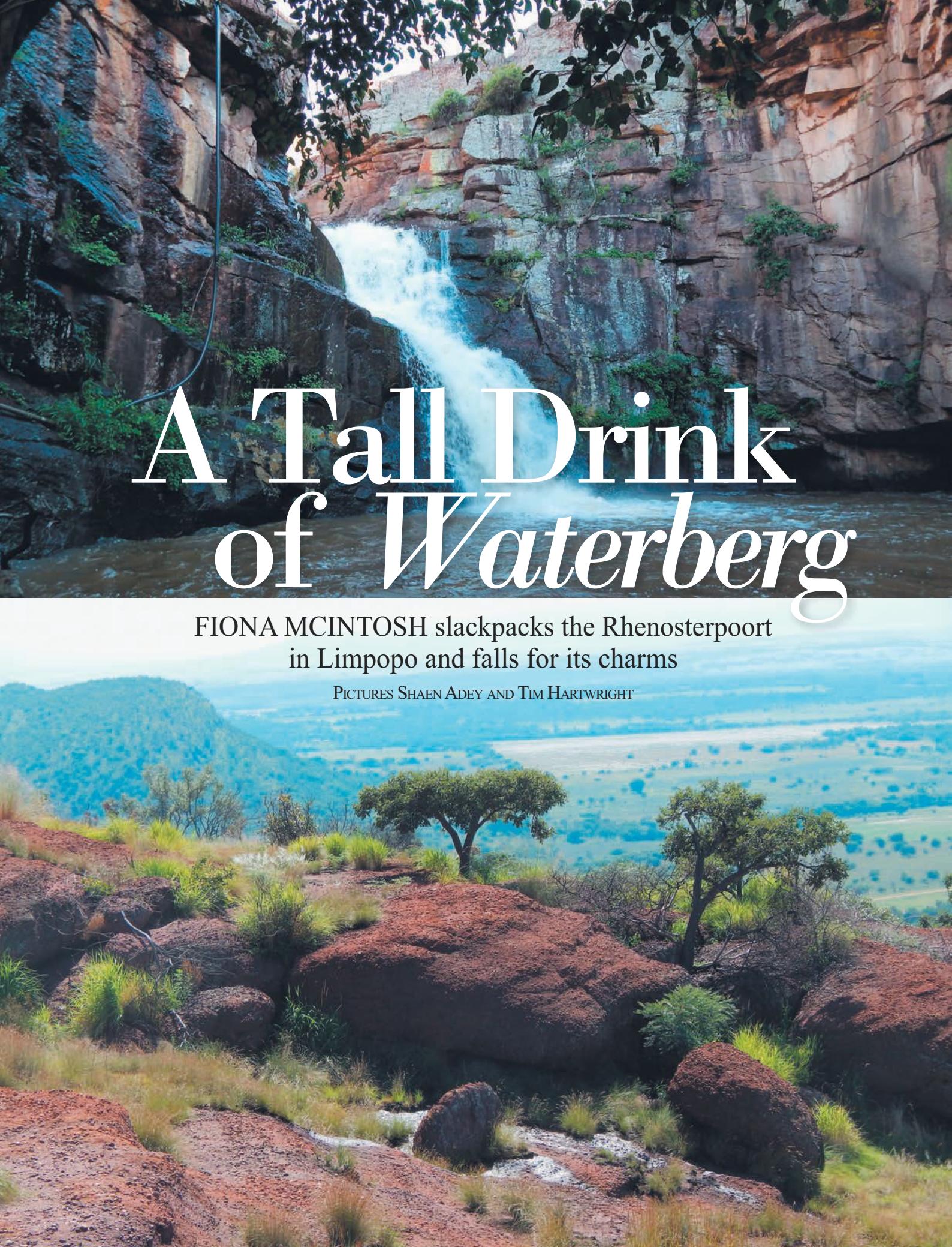
7. The **Pied Avocet** (*Bontelsie*) is highly nomadic in response to rainfall and sometimes follows storm fronts. They prefer saline and ephemeral wetlands and the upturned bill is an adaptation

for filter feeding on the water surface.

8. The **Bank Cormorant** (*Bankduiker*) is one of South Africa's most threatened seabirds, with numbers plummeting as a result of human-induced threats. It is easily identified from other cormorant species by being almost totally black with white on the rump when breeding.

9. A large tern measuring up to 55cm in length, the **Caspian Tern** (*Reusesterretjie*) has a black cap streaked black and white when not breeding. They can feed on fish up to 250g, although smaller fish 10-20g are the norm.

10. Breeding in the extreme north of Siberia, the **Curlew Sandpiper** (*Krombekstrandloper*) visits our southern shores during the summer months. It feeds on polychaete worms found in exposed sand and mud flats, and may occur in flocks of up to 2 000 birds.



A Tall Drink of *Waterberg*

FIONA MCINTOSH slackpacks the Rhenosterpoort in Limpopo and falls for its charms

PICTURES SHAEN ADEY AND TIM HARTWRIGHT



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: The trails lead to impressive viewpoints over crashing falls; Hibiscus flowers add splashes of colour to the countryside; Toktokkie beetles are regularly sighted; There are numerous river crossings on this trail. Wearing strops is a good idea, otherwise be prepared to take off your boots regularly; The trails are fairly short and well-marked, but the terrain is rugged so a reasonable degree of fitness is required; A final, seemingly endless climb on our first day took us to this scenic saddle from where we began our descent into the gorge.

Other than the Num-Num Trail, do you know of any slackpacking trails in Mpumalanga and Limpopo?" came the request from a stranger who had somehow tracked down my email address. I groaned. If I had a rand for every time I was asked that question I'd be rich.

But it's odd. The Num-Num Trail – a 3-5 day, self-guided and self-catered trail in Mpumalanga's Skurweberg, on which, in slackpacking-style, there's the option to have your bags driven around between the lovely camps – has gone from strength to strength. But for some reason there are very few multi-day slackpacking trails upcountry.

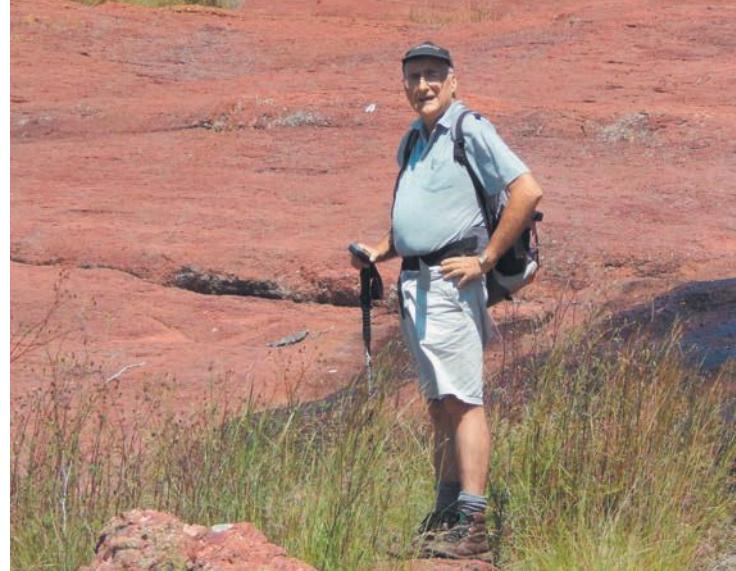
There's the new Kudu's Valley Trail (COUNTRY LIFE February 2016), which is a real spoil with luxury accommodation and gourmet food; and bag transfer can be arranged on the Thabaphaswa (September 2015 issue) and Stamvrug (June 2015 issue) trails, for example, leaving you free to hike between camps with only a daypack. But as far as I'm aware, there are no other long-distance trails that even offer just luggage transfer, never mind upmarket accommodation and other common slackpacker luxuries.

So it got me thinking. Why are slackpacking trails concentrated in the coastal provinces? Most upcountry hikes, it seems, are either traditional-style backpacking trails with rustic huts – think Magoebaskloof,

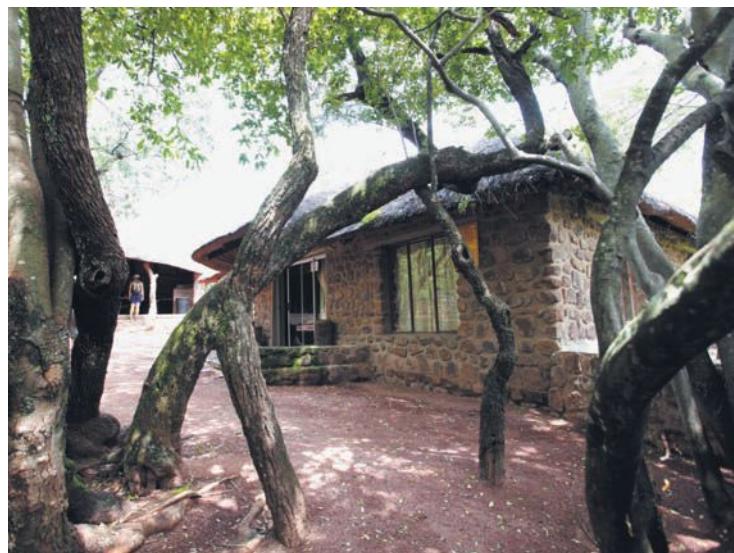
Fanie Botha, Prospector's and the other overnight hiking trails managed by Komatie Eco-Tourism – or base-camp hikes where you drive to the overnight camp and then do circular day walks.

Land access is clearly part of the explanation. Many of the well-known slackpacking trails such as the Wild Coast Meander and the Oystercatcher Trail are along the coast, on public land. Several, such as the Whale Trail and Cape of Good Hope Hiking Trail, are in national or provincial parks and reserves.

Others, such as the Green Mountain Trail, traverse conservancies (associations between state and private landowners) where the trail developers have negotiated specific land-use



LEFT: Water, water everywhere. Well, we are in the Waterberg.
ABOVE: My muse, Tim Hartwright, has walked most of the trails in Southern Africa (and many beyond). BELOW: The hikers 'huts' in the shade of lofty indigenous trees are extremely comfortable.



agreements – in this case, with a condition that all trails are led by accredited guides. There seems to be little such collaboration upcountry – partly, I suspect, because many of the farms are game farms.

And then there's the time factor. Most of the trails around Gauteng are geared towards the weekend hiking market rather than those seeking a multi-day hiking holiday in a beautiful place. So driving to a base camp after work on a Friday and not having to worry about logistics for the rest of the weekend makes sense.

"I think it's also that trail developers up here are a bit behind," suggested Gauteng-based Tim Hartwright, when I asked if he could offer an explanation. Now Tim should know.

The chairman of the Footprint Hiking Club (a family hiking club based in Johannesburg)

for many years and owner of Jacana Travel Marketing and Reservations (the largest marketing and booking organisation for hiking and trekking tours in Southern Africa) Tim's been hiking since before I was born. Having recently published *Gauteng Hikes & Walks*, he's now completing his second book, *99 Hikes in Southern Africa*. In short, Tim is South Africa's hiking fundi.

Intrigued, I asked him to point me in the direction of some of the best trails in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, and then started planning a trip 'up north' to investigate the current multi-day hiking scene. I was pleased to discover that many of the trails I walked when I lived in Joburg were still going strong, and was even more pleased that there were several unfamiliar ones. "Definitely check out Limpopo's Rhenosterpoort Hiking Trail,"

Tim insisted. So I added that to my list.

Surviving the dirt road from Alma, a small town near Vaalwater, we arrived on the Rhenosterpoort farm in the northern Waterberg after a pleasant three-hour drive from Joburg. Sharyn le Roux and her husband Anton talked us through the trail options as we greedily devoured Sharyn's home-made scones.

There are two hiker camps so you have the hardcore option of backpacking between them, or using either camp as your base and doing day hikes. We opted for the former and installed ourselves at Dassie Camp to prepare for an early start on the circular, overnight route.

The following morning we spied a couple of kudu lurking in the foliage as we strode out on the trail. A Fish Eagle called from

This is an absolute gem of a trail that exhibits all that you'd expect from the Waterberg – wonderful gorges, streams and mountains, and game sightings to boot

a high perch and, by the time we reached the first waterfall soon after leaving camp, I was grateful to Tim for the tip-off.

This is an absolute gem of a trail that exhibits all that you'd expect from the Waterberg – wonderful gorges, streams and mountains, and game sightings to boot. It had rained recently so the falls were dramatic, with deep, enticing swimming holes. And the bush was lush and alive with the chattering birds.

We climbed steeply out of the forest to a lookout point, from where, to our relief, the terrain changed to easier-angled grassland

before a rocky path took us over a ridge and down to a magnificent gorge. Taking off our boots we bathed our weary feet and clambered carefully down the small rock steps and chutes between the pools before continuing to the overnight camp, tucked away in the shade of big indigenous trees.

And what a camp it was, attractively built out of stone and thatch with a cosy braai area. In addition to the luxury of a hot shower, flush loo and gas stove there was an ice box so we celebrated a fine day out with cold beers. With sliding glass doors fronting the

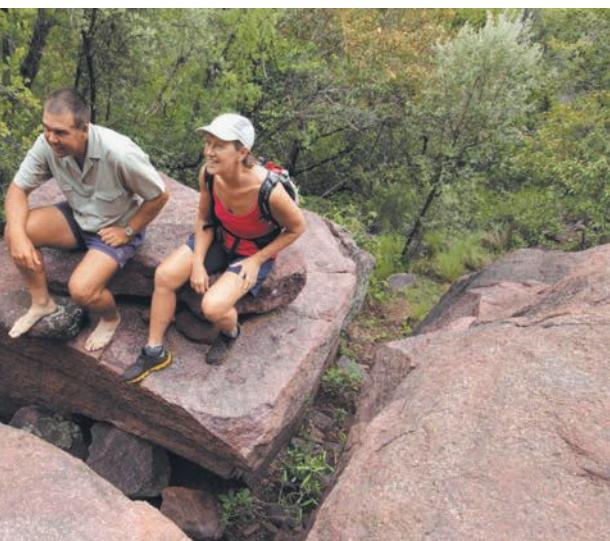
sleeping area and a large covered kitchen, it was certainly not your average hiker hut. Very comfortable indeed.

Day two saw us picking up another stream again, crossing it several times before leaving the watercourse for a final steep climb out of the valley to another spectacular viewpoint. We paused to take in the far-reaching vistas, unusual geology and diverse biomes of this rugged landscape, the dense bush and the forest birds so different to the fynbos-covered mountains of my usual stomping grounds in the Western Cape. Then it was down again on a steep, boulder-strewn track before the final gentle stroll back to Dassie Camp.

Although only eight kilometres, the day's hike had been tough so a final swim in the nearby rock pool went down a treat before we said our farewells.

Sadly, since then, Anton has passed away but Sharyn has kept the flag flying. And Rhenosterpoort is certainly one of the loveliest weekend trails in the country. The trip had been interesting. I'm no wiser as to why there's a dearth of slackpacking trails, but I can confirm that there are some superb hiking trails in Mpumalanga and Limpopo. ■

Map reference B6 see inside back cover



LEFT: Anton le Roux identifies some of the bird calls as we take a breather.
BELOW: There are plenty of tranquil spots to chill and listen to the babbling brooks.



- **Up to it?** Although the distances are fairly short (12km on day one and 8km on day two) there are some steep ascents and descents over rugged terrain so you need to be moderately fit and agile to do the two-day backpacking trail. Weaker hikers would be better to do day walks from either of the camps.
- **When to go?** The trail is open year round but spring and autumn are the best times to hike it.
- **Contact** Jacana Travel Marketing and Reservations, 0861 522 262
bookings@jacanacollection.co.za
www.jacanacollection.co.za



Pure Class for the Family

Earlier generations of the VW Passat got the job done, but weren't that exciting.

Enter the new 1.8 TSI BlueMotion with class, character and excellent ride quality, even in mist and rain

WORDS STEPHEN SMITH PICTURES STEPHEN SMITH AND SUPPLIED

Idrove through a swarm of bees the other day. The first I knew of it was a machine-gun staccato on the windscreen, followed by a macabre collage of greasy streaks. I was devastated, but hopefully the monarch didn't become one of those splatters and led her swarm somewhere beautiful where they established a new colony and lived happily ever after. The only reason I tell you this sad news is that it was the long, broad windscreen of a VW Passat upon which so many little lives were lost.

I was driving to Pietermaritzburg, cruising along with the (optional) adaptive cruise control keeping me a safe distance from the car ahead of me, the economical engine (5.8ℓ/100km) whirring along in the background, thinking why the Passat doesn't sell more units in South Africa, when the splatter of bees interrupted my reverie.

The Passat has been around for decades – I remember my grandfather had one in the 80s, with a St Christopher prestiked (prestuk?) to the dashboard – but they have never really taken off locally. It's strange, because the Passat is a spacious, handsome car from one of the country's most popular manufacturers. And while its obvious rivals are the Ford Fusion, Honda Accord, Volvo S60 and Mazda6, there's a part of me that believes that the Mercedes-Benz C-Class, BMW 3 Series and Audi A4 are well within the reach of the upper-specced Passat models. It's that good a car.

The Passat is at heart a family vehicle, and a brilliant one at that. Families need big boots, and just take a look at the Passat's boot.

Our pram slotted in lengthways, and left enough space in front of it for a bag, never mind the remaining 60 per cent of the boot's width.

The spaciousness was mirrored in the vehicle's interior, where every passenger is blessed with an abundance of leg, elbow and headroom, and fantastically comfortable quilted leather (again optional) seats. Despite all this space, the new Passat is lighter than its predecessor, which means better performance, handling and fuel efficiency.

As all our readers know, our countryside is full of forgotten gems, and Queen Elizabeth Park is one of them. Situated just outside Pietermaritzburg on the way to Hilton, QE Park is the headquarters of KZN Wildlife. But it's also a beautiful little reserve with lovely walks (or trail runs), a scattering of wildlife, and a variety of indigenous and exotic plant life. When you have a small baby, you seek out these safe

TOP: A stylish family sedan, the Passat deserves success.

RIGHT: The boot is spectacular – that's a full-sized pram tucked neatly into the right corner.





ABOVE: Classy and simple – the cabin of the Passat balances elegance with practicality.
RIGHT: The lengths parents and grandparents will go to, to keep children entertained...



open spaces, with roads for prams and animals for the loin fruit to gaze at. Not even mist or rain will disrupt a planned outing and the possibility of keeping junior entertained for an hour or so.

It was on the patchy roads of QE Park that the supple suspension of the Passat tapped us on the shoulder and brought itself to our attention. The ride quality really is excellent, and is nicely complemented by entertaining handling at faster speeds and excellent engine/gearbox combinations. There are three Passat models available locally, and all come with VW/Audi's excellent DSG automatic gearboxes, with a choice of 1.4 TSI, 1.8 TSI or 2.0 TSI BlueMotion petrol engines. Power outputs are 110kW/250Nm, 132kW/250Nm and 162kW/350Nm respectively.

The early generations of the Passat lacked colour and character and were, let's face it, a bit boring. Let's call them the accountants of the car world – they got the job done, but there wasn't much going on other than that. And while the latest, eighth generation isn't wildly charismatic, it is imbued with enough class and sophistication to have real character.

Interestingly, a Passat Alltrack is available overseas, bridging the gap between SUV and sedan in much the same way as a Volvo XC70

FACT FILE

NAME: VW Passat 1.8 TSI BlueMotion
BODY TYPE: Large sedan
ENGINE CAPACITY: 1.8 litres
POWER OUTPUT: 132kW
TORQUE: 250Nm
PRICE: R472 400

or Audi Allroad does. It would be nice to see VW South Africa adding that to the model line-up, but the popularity of the normal model would presumably need to pick up for that to happen.

One thing that I did notice was the amount of kit that was optional in the 1.8 TSI Highline, and it often included features that you'd think should be standard. That said, cruise control (the normal one, not the radar-enabled adaptive cruise control), climate control, a touch-screen entertainment system, multi-function steering wheel, park distance control and loads more is included in the price.

Prices start at R423 500 and the model we slaughtered bees with costs R472 400 without extras. Prices include a 5-year/100 000km maintenance plan and a 3-year/120 000km warranty. ■



63% of readers feel a car is a fashion statement
Most of you currently own a family car

For more results or to have your say www.countrylife.co.za/pulse

WHEELSPIN

New Fortuner is a go!

Following hot on the heels of the all-new Hilux comes the new Toyota Fortuner. A firm South African favourite, the Fortuner is available with the new 2.4 and 2.8 GD turbodiesel engine, as well



as the existing 2.7 and 4-litre petrol engines. The new vehicle has made a significant step up in terms of refinement and comfort, narrowing the gap between it and the Toyota Prado. It retains the features that have made Fortuner so popular – seven seats, great 4x4 capabilities, a reputation for reliability and quality, and keen pricing. Speaking of which, prices start at R436 400 and go up to R633 400.

Ford invests R2.5 billion in local Everest

South Africa needs good news, which is why we're happy to report that Ford has invested R2.5 billion to expand operations in South Africa at its Silverton Assembly Plant in Pretoria. The all-new Ford Everest will be produced alongside the new Ford Ranger, launched at the end of last year. The Everest range will be expanded to include other 2.2 and 3.2 derivatives. While it'll be nice to claim that you're driving a Proudly South African car, the real good news is that the investment will create 1 200 permanent jobs. Ford will also export the Everest to other Sub-Saharan countries.



300 Easy-to-see Birds

A Mrs Dikkop has been visiting our garden recently in the early hours, two chicks in tow. But last time she came, there was just one. I couldn't help her find her missing offspring but I was able to find out more about her (secretive, mostly nocturnal, thick knees, forages like a plover, pairs form long-term bonds, likes forest margins, beaches and suburban gardens) in *300 Easy-to-See Birds in Southern Africa*. What a joy. Generally a bit intimidated by weighty bird books, I found this 'condensed and user-friendly introduction to bird-watching' to be a ticket to a whole new flight path. We're lucky to have a huge diversity of birds in SA but the authors have narrowed down the field to the 'most likelys'. *Find it, Identify it, Understand it* sections mean you can get all you need to know in accessible chunks. This is a nice gift for yourself or for your kids.

Authors: Chevonne Reynolds & Nicholas Tye
Publisher: Struik Nature **Reviewer:** Nancy Richards **Price:** R170 **ISBN:** 978-1-77584-126-5
Giveaway code: BIRDS (2 copies)

Letters of Stone

The author takes us behind the full-frontal horror that was Nazi Germany into the lives of his Jewish relatives, some of whom, like his father, managed to get out, and others, including his grandparents and their other children, who perished. He does so largely with the help of a box of letters he chanced upon in the Cape Town flat of members of the broad family who got to South Africa. The exchanges mainly from those left behind give extraordinary insights into the hopes and growing despair of ordinary Jewish people as they tried to make do amid the unfolding brutality. As an anthropologist, the author is able to fill in the harrowing tale by explaining the background to Nazi ideology and such origins and echoes as it had in Southern Africa. Add to that his underlying quest to give meaning and dignity back to those whose lives had simply been snuffed out, and it

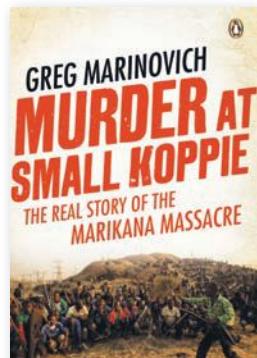
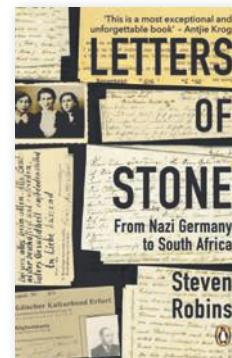
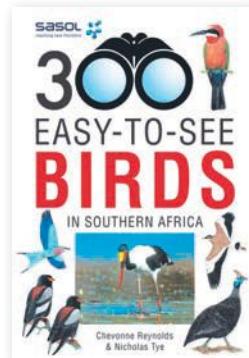
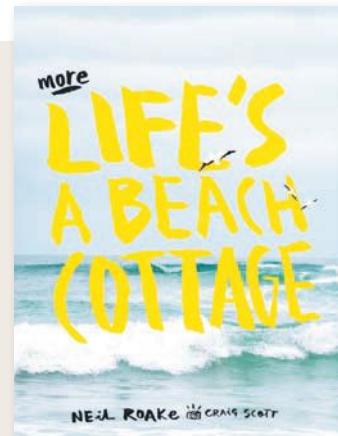
BOOK OF THE MONTH

More Life's a Beach Cottage

There is nothing stuffy or pretentious about Neil Roake's third offering of beach-life cooking. He's adamant he's not a chef but a cook.

I love the fact that he refers to himself as a flip-flop cook – "always in flops and shorts, with a drink close at hand!" This obviously sets the tone for all his cook books and this one is no exception; recipes are simple and to the point, ingredients can be easily sourced and the end results are big on taste. Neil's beloved KwaZulu-Natal coast gets a star turn this time round, but by no means is this a seafood cook book. The dishes are varied and colourful with interesting combinations like baked chicken liver pâté with gooseberries, thyme and crushed hazelnuts, beef and Gorgonzola tartare and Greek yoghurt with liquorice and pistachios. Drinks (mostly alcoholic) are an integral part of this fun book.

Author: Neil Roake **Publisher:** Jacana Media **Reviewer:** Alma Loubser **Price:** R340
ISBN: 978-1-43142-256-2 **Giveaway code:** BEACH (2 copies)



all amounts to a profoundly captivating read.

Author: Steven Robins **Publisher:** Penguin Random House **Reviewer:** Leon Marshall **Price:** R250 **ISBN:** 978-1-77609-024-2
Giveaway code: LETTERS (2 copies)

Murder at Small Koppie

In 1885 Émile Zola wrote a book about the coalminers strike in northern France of the 1860s. *Germinale* has been described as 'one of the most significant novels in the French tradition'. Despite knowing next to nothing and having little or no interest in coalmining, it left an indelible mark on me when I read it as a teenager. Decades later comes *Murder at Small Koppie* – sadly, this is no novel but

the all-too-real story of the massacre that shook the country, the days leading up to it, as well as the aftermath. Like Zola's book, this exposé of what goes on in the industry is so detailed you can smell the coal dust, the sweat, feel the fear, frustration and anger. But what sets it apart from all the thousands of column inches already written about Marikana is that author, Pulitzer prize-winning photojournalist Greg Marinovich has spoken at length to the men involved, and it's through their voices that the unfolding story achieves authenticity.

Author: Greg Marinovich **Publisher:** Penguin Random House **Reviewer:** Nancy Richards **Price:** R250 **ISBN:** 978-1-77022-609-8
Giveaway code: MURDER (2 copies)

GIVEAWAYS

We are giving away copies of all the books reviewed on this page. SMS the giveaway code (e.g. BEACH), your name, email and postal address to 48402 before 31 July 2016. SMSes charged at R1.50 and free SMSes do not apply.

TERMS & CONDITIONS 1. SMS errors will be billed. 2. Participation is free and open to anyone other than employees of Caxton Publishers, their promotional partners and printers, their advertising and promotional agencies and their immediate families. 3. The judges' decision is final. 4. The prize is not transferable and cannot be converted to cash. 5. Offer valid for SA residents only. 6. To comply with the Consumer Protection Act, postal entries will no longer be allowed and the winner will be required to supply their ID number. 7. Prizes returned to Caxton Publishers will not be resent to winners. 8. Prices correct at time of print

Author Interview

Conservationist and son of an honest Queenstown cop, Don Pinnock immerses himself in, among many other things, the wilds of Cape Town's ganglands

WORDS NANCY RICHARDS PICTURES SUPPLIED

“T

Technically I'm still a member of the Mongrels. I didn't do any robberies or drug deals, but I was deep inside their space.”

Don Pinnock's warm, shambling, conservationist's charm belies his insight into the dark underworld of gangsterism. “Syndicate bosses are nasty but 80 per cent of gangs are teens. Like anybody else, if someone shows an interest in these youngsters, they appreciate it. I've sat with characters that would horrify the middle classes – gold, glinting teeth caps, tattoos, guns tucked in their belt – but you know, if you think you're going to die at 24 as they do, you become a philosopher. I've had some extraordinary conversations.”

Gang Town is not the first book that Pinnock has written on the subject. Thirty years ago for his masters at UCT, he wrote *The Brotherhoods*. “It looked at the impact on families ripped apart by forced removals, how kids hit streets and became gangsters.” Well over a decade later, towards a post-doc, he wrote *Gangs, Rituals and Rites of Passage*.

“I was studying ancient social rituals in the Transkei, and discovered that gangs in Cape Town were doing the same kind of thing. I thought, ‘What is it about adolescence that requires ritual in adulthood?’ Seems like every time I'm near academia, I end up writing about gangs!”

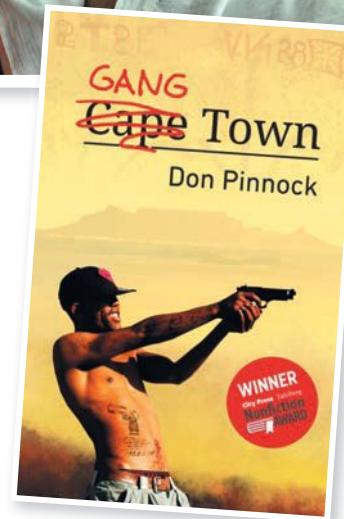
But this third book, which won the *City Press Tafelberg non-fiction award*, far from being the ‘dust-off’ of earlier research he'd anticipated, “took me in a completely different direction. My adopted city had changed almost

beyond recognition, [requiring] an entirely new perspective and a new criminology of deviance. It's also the first book on criminology I know of that uses epigenetics [refers to external modifications to DNA that turn genes ‘on’ or ‘off’] as a way to understand delinquent behaviour.”

The depth of his experience, which included being part of the three-person team who wrote the White Paper for the Child Justice Act, and his investigative skills gave Pinnock the insights to write this book – one that has become a policy manual. But it's his compassion that makes it more broadly meaningful. While he had to explore the entrenched toxicity of gangs, he was determined to add chapters of hope, “a rethink... an alternative life path”, as well as a “toolbox of things I've found to be useful game-changers for parents, teachers and community workers”.

But gang reports are far from the only markers on Pinnock's ‘zig-zagged’ career path, which pours out in a torrent: “Initially I studied electronic engineering...worked for the SABC... moved into print, *The World* [newspaper], lived in Soweto, then on to the UK – it was that or get arrested... wrote for a London communist paper, for *The Herald* in Zim, *The Argus* in Cape Town. Then I realised I really didn't know what was going on so I went to study...” To cut to the academic finish line, he now has a PhD in political science (producing *Writing Left*, a partial biography of Ruth First), an MA in criminology and a BA in African history. For a while he also lectured in journalism and radio at Rhodes.

“While I was there *Getaway* editor



David Steele sent me some copies to assess. I ripped into them. Strangely later they offered me a job.” He went on to become editor, a much-published travel writer (he even got to Antarctica) and successful photographer.

Never short of spoken words, two things that get Pinnock going are his passion for conservation – he writes copiously for Francis Garrard's Conservation Action Trust – and writing. “I just love ‘enwording’ a story, then reducing it to the very fewest required.” But when you have as many stories to tell as he has, that could take some time. ■

***Gang Town* (R225) is published by Tafelberg, www.tafelberg.com**

*Prices are subject to change

WIN

We are giving away 2 copies of *Gang Town*. SMS the giveaway code GANG, your name, email and postal address to 48402 before 31 July 2016. SMSes are charged at R1.50 per entry and free SMSes do not apply. Ts and Cs on page 84



Flower Power

Who can resist the happy face of the sunflower? Turns out there's even more reason to go for gold and tuck in to this superfood

WORDS JULIA LLOYD PICTURES JULIA LLOYD
AND SUPPLIED



Fields of ripening sunflowers in Limpopo promise a harvest of good health. RIGHT: Grow your own sunflowers and be rewarded with giant seed heads.

It's a giant of a plant that offers up everything it has – seeds, buds, leaves and stalks – as power food. The seeds, – or kernels within the hulls, are a superb treat, brimming with vitamins E, B1, B5, B6 and folic acid – a type of B vitamin known as folate that helps in the production of red blood cells (why it's so good if you're pregnant). Folic acid is also thought to help prevent Alzheimer's disease, diabetes type 2 and heart disease. Many people swear by its use in combating depression, and by its help in preventing cancers.

In the seeds (sprout them for a great energy boost) there is also a great source of protein, plus plenty of dietary fibre and all those essential minerals like iron, calcium, zinc, copper, sodium, phosphorus and potassium.

Then come the mono- and polyunsaturated fats – and the seed of sunflowers has both of these, the healthy fats that lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease, and that we all know by now we should have in our diet. Leaves and stalks contain valuable micro-nutrients and are valuable for compost, and also make important biofuel. When leaves and flower buds are young and tender they are edible and nutritious, brimming with zinc, manganese, magnesium, chromium, betacarotene and vitamins E, A, D and B. Steam them until tender and then serve with lemon juice and black pepper.

GROW YOUR OWN

Sunflowers grown commercially are the one-stalk variety, but in the garden you'll find that once your plant has (very quickly) established its primary stem, you can keep that as the chief honcho – and producer of the main seed head – and let the plant develop side



shoots, which will produce smaller flowers and seed heads.

It's a very easy annual to grow and – big bonus – is resistant to drought, and these days waterwise growing certainly is something that should be uppermost in mind. Sow seed in early spring and you'll have a harvest and plenty of time to start, grow and harvest a second crop before the cold sets in.

The plant's name speaks for itself – it must have sun. Lots of it. Double dig the soil (to a depth of two spades) and add plenty of rich compost, preferably homegrown. Create a depression when patting down the soil after sowing – it makes for efficient watering.

I've seen sunflowers in excess of 2m in height, with massive flowerheads and, if you live in a windy area, stake them early on



The A Bee C of Sunflowers

- Next time you drive through those iconic late-summer swathes of sunflowers that are so heart-stoppingly gorgeous, know that there's a buzz of activity going on inside all that gold.
- Look out for beehives along the edge of sunflower fields – sunflowers need to be pollinated by bees and so beekeepers bring their hives to work the sunflowers, and leave the farmer with some jars of delicious honey.
- Bees aren't the world's only pollinators – so are birds, bats, rodents and the wind and water. But South Africa's indigenous honey bee (*Apis mellifera capensis* in the winter rainfall region, and *Apis mellifera scutellata* in the summer rainfall region) are the most important crop pollinators.
- Bees are critical for pollination of the world's crops – for every third bite you take of food you need to thank a pollinator. If the world's bees died out there'd be a famine.
- Plan a garden that attracts bees, with sunflowers, zinnias, rocket, lavender, poppies, primula and salvia.



LEFT: Beekeepers bring their beehives to the edge of sunflower fields to help with pollination (and get delicious honey). ABOVE: For bees, sunflowers are right up there in the top ten most attractive plants.

rather than later, so you aren't hammering the stake through established roots.

Be warned that you're going to become *extremely* popular with birds but you can try to keep them away with scarecrows. Make your own – they're easy to whip up – just hammer in a tallish cross of two stakes, throw over an old shirt and pop a hat on top. But be warned again, birds are not fools, although maybe all the crafty ones just come to my garden. I've gone so far as to change the clothing of the various scarecrows on a weekly basis, and hang old CDs from stakes in and around the flower bed. All to no avail.

Mournfully I watched the birds perch merrily on the head and shoulders of my scary monsters, and swing with gay abandon on the disks, as they ponder on which head of seed to make their target for the morning. Best move I made – and the CDs were hideous to look at – was to remove all the paraphernalia, extend the bed, sow double the quantity of seed, and embark on a policy of sharing is caring.

TAKE YOUR PICK

Leave plants in the garden to dry out completely as the seeds mature. Don't remove the seed heads too early – wait for the back of them to turn brown. Hang the heads in a brown paper bag in a cool, dark, dry spot like the garage. When planting time comes just wiggle your fingers through the seed head, still in the packet, and seeds that haven't already come loose will do so.

Just don't do what I did on my first time round with sunflowers, and hang the seed heads in a knotted, plastic shopping bag, with no air. When I went to retrieve them in spring all I found was a terrible, maroonish-black, sticky, seeping mess oozing out of the packet and down the wall.

Naturally good for you

Flora doesn't just taste great, it's also good for your health. That's because the blend of seed oils protects your heart

Did you know?
Flora sources its sunflower oils from local SA farmers in the Springbok Flats, who practice sustainable farming methods.



The power of 3

The blend of seed oils in Flora gives you the essential fats your body needs. Flora contains just the right amount of naturally occurring omega-3 and omega-6 to help you maintain normal cholesterol levels and a healthy heart.

Sunflower seeds are high in vitamin E and provide a healthy source of omega-6, which promotes good heart health. **Linseeds** are a good source of both omega-3 and vitamin B1. **Canola seeds** naturally contain essential omega-3 and 6 fatty acids that help maintain normal cholesterol levels.



SUNFLOWER SEEDS



LINSEEDS



CANOLA SEEDS

Seeded Wholewheat Rusks

Makes 60 rusks

- 250g Flora Regular, melted plus extra for greasing
- 235g cake flour
- 10ml (2 tsp) baking powder
- 5ml (1 tsp) bicarbonate of soda
- 5ml (1 tsp) salt
- 285g wholewheat flour
- 165g sugar
- 90g bran flakes
- 115g oats
- 120g almonds, roughly chopped
- 250g mixture of sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds and linseeds
- 325ml (1 1/3 cups) water
- 15ml (1 tbsp) apple cider vinegar

METHOD Preheat the oven to 180°C. Grease a 27cm x 35cm deep oven pan with the extra Flora Regular.

Sift the cake flour, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda, salt and wholewheat flour together.

Add the sugar, bran flakes, oats, almonds and seeds.

Whisk the melted Flora Regular, water and apple cider vinegar together until well combined.

Add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients and mix until well combined.

Pour the mixture into the greased oven pan and bake for 40-50 minutes. Turn out on a wire rack and leave to cool down.

Reduce the oven temperature to 90°C. Slice the cooled slab into fingers and leave to dry in the oven until completely dry. Store in an airtight container.



Did You Know?

- The genetic base for all sunflowers is the wild *Helianthus annuus* (from the Greek word helios for sun and anthos for flower), that more often has many heads. There are two commercially grown cultivars – the oilseed cultivar that has a small black seed with a very high oil content, and the non-oilseed cultivar that has larger black and white striped seed used in food.
- Sunflowers originate from North America and Mexico. Native Americans have cultivated it for more than 5 000 years, for all its parts.
- South Africa is the world's 10th-largest sunflower producer, cultivating them in Limpopo, Free State, North West Province, Western Province and the Mpumalanga Highlands.
- A total of 60 per cent of the world's sunflowers are now grown in Europe and Russia. It's the national flower of the Ukraine, known as the Land of Sunflowers and the leading sunflower oil producer.
- Apparently the tallest sunflower measured 9m and was from the Netherlands and, believe it or not, a sunflower grown in Michigan had 837 heads on one plant.
- When the plant is in the bud stage, it tends to track the sun, but when the flowers open it faces east. It's probably trying to protect the seeds from the hot afternoon sun. Very clever.



ABOVE RIGHT:
Sunflowers in crops have a single stem but in the garden they'll produce a main stem with many sideshoots.
LEFT: The beautiful flower of the satansbos – or silver nightshade – belies the havoc it wreaks on crops worldwide.
(Photo Justin du Toit)
BELLOW: The genius satansbos beetle eats nothing but the leaves of satansbos – not even the leaves of other nightshades.
(Photo Justin du Toit)



The Plant of the Devil

- What's in a name? An awful lot, if you take the local common name given to *Solanum elaeagnifolium*, known worldwide as silverleaf nightshade. Satansbos. The plant of the Devil that brings Hell to Earth.
- Indigenous to the States and Mexico, it has a purple flower and yellow fruit, and is believed to have arrived here during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) in contaminated bales of lucerne brought in by the British military. It has decimated crops like the sunflower and was declared a category 1 invader which means it must be controlled and eradicated. It is so deadly and efficient that the Eradicate Satansbos Action Group in the Eastern Cape was established to try and halt its onslaught.
- It has a large root system that spreads easily, and this needs to be pulled up completely to eradicate the plant. Leave a bit behind and the plant will regenerate. It also spreads rapidly by seed.
- Enter *Leptinotarsa texana* and *L. defecta*. The brilliant satansbos leaf beetle, also from America, was brought out here in the early 1990s by the Agricultural Research Council, as a biological control. The beetle will not touch any plant other than satansbos – even other nightshades – and succeeds with an efficiency equal to the plant's infestation ability, in stripping satansbos of its leaves.
- Justin du Toit, a production scientist based at the Grootfontein Agricultural Development Institute in Middelburg in the Eastern Cape, says, "We were doing some work on satansbos control but had to terminate the trials after the loss of research infrastructure. In Middelburg, we had a district municipality-funded operation in and around the town to try to clear out satansbos. This ran for one year and initial results were very promising. However, there was no funding for the following year, so the project is on hold. We hope that it will continue in the future." ■



THE TERRACOTTA ARMY AND THE FIRST EMPEROR OF CHINA EXHIBITION

The secrets of Ancient China are unveiled in a spectacular exhibition that replicates a 209BC display of China's greatest army. The Terracotta Army was discovered in the buried mausoleum of the First Emperor of China Qin Shi Huangdi, now a Unesco World Cultural Heritage Site, and comprises thousands of beautifully crafted clay statues and objects

The First Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi had the mausoleum built during his lifetime, as was customary in Ancient China, and it spans a massive 56km². Aside from its aesthetic value, it holds numerous clues to understanding the origins of today's China. Since its accidental discovery in 1974 by three farmers digging a well, archaeologists have excavated more than 50 000 objects that testify to an inventive civilisation. Now this exhibition



brings the artefacts found buried there to life with incredible reproductions of more than 300 statues, chariots, weapons and everyday objects. But most astounding is the life-size reproduction of more than 170 warriors, who were the Terracotta Army and who, in the mausoleum, 'watched over' the emperor's tomb. Visitors will be immersed in these cultural treasures, enhanced by videos projected onto giant screens, as well as audio guides and an interactive zone.

The Terracotta Army exhibition can be seen in Johannesburg at the Silver Star Casino from
15 June 2016 - 20 August 2016

Tear out this ad, present it at the gate, and get 20% off your ticket

Tickets from R85 - R140

For more information visit www.exposa.co.za. +27 (0)21 418 0738 info@exposa.co.za



Foodie Heaven

That's what you get when there's food with heart. And where wizards are brewing everything from rooibos-wooded wine to a rich ice cream called Fanny Chanel

WORDS AND PICTURES
MARION WHITEHEAD & SUPPLIED

I's not often you get to prop up a bar while tasting vinegar, but that's what I found myself doing in Stellenbosch, heart of the country's finest winelands.

First, Alexander Ammann took me on a tour through the cellar at Rozendal, his family's organic farm. He and his sister Nathalie use the traditional French Orléans method of vinegar preparation, passed down by their Swiss father, Kurt. It's a technique that produces something very different to the ordinary spirit vinegar you find on supermarket shelves, which is very good for cleaning kitchen counters.

Rozendal's special balsamic vinegar happened by happy accident, explained Alexander as we passed between huge

7 000ℓ oak vats. His restaurateur dad started making wine, but one batch was too high in volatile acids, so he stuck it in a storeroom and forgot about it. Some years later, they opened the reject barrel of wine and found themselves sampling the most perfect, natural, balsamic-type vinegar.

"Balsamic vinegar has so many health benefits. It helps the body balance its pH. That's why it's served as an aperitif before meals – as a natural weak acid, it stimulates the secretion of saliva and prepares the stomach to digest heavy food to come," explained Alexander, an architect who renovated the old cellar and designed the vinegar bar.

"Wine will naturally turn into vinegar. It's part of the maturation process; winemakers

LEFT: Architect Alexander Ammann has renovated the cellar at Rozendal on the outskirts of Stellenbosch. BELOW: Once the vinegar is matured, Alexander places it in small oak vats to infuse the different herbs. BOTTOM RIGHT: Alexander with some of Rozendal's award-winning balsamic vinegars.



add sulphides to halt oxidation," explained Alexander. "So now we work with nature and allow the wine to mature into vinegar."

The vinegar is infused with a variety of herbs, from indigenous buchu and rose geranium to elderflower and even kelp, stuffed into oversized 'teabags' in small oak barrels. This adds subtle flavour as well as the extra health benefits of each plant. "The secret ingredient is time – what a lot of people don't value anymore," said Alexander.

Sampling a shot of award-winning fynbos balsamic, I kept it in my mouth as long as possible, swirling it around while my saliva glands instantly went into overdrive and my eyes popped with surprise. The longer I held it in my mouth, the thicker and sweeter the vinegar became. When my salivary glands could no longer cope, I swallowed and set my gastric juices jumping. It proved a great aperitif – nearly as good as the Ammann's tale of turning a mistake into an award-winning tonic.

On the other side of Stellenbosch, at the foot of the Helderberg mountains on Audacia, Trevor Strydom was trying his level best not to let his wine turn into vinegar. Depressed after a day in the cellar fruitlessly looking for local alternatives to expensive imported oak that would give his wine the edge over the approximately 16 000 labels local wine

buyers have to choose from, he took comfort in the cup of tea his daughter made for him. She left the box of rooibos on the kitchen table and he stared at it morosely.

"Then I had this light bulb moment. Why not try wooding the wine with rooibos?" Trevor told me on a tour of Audacia, where vineyards stretched below the site of the popular Root44 weekend market.

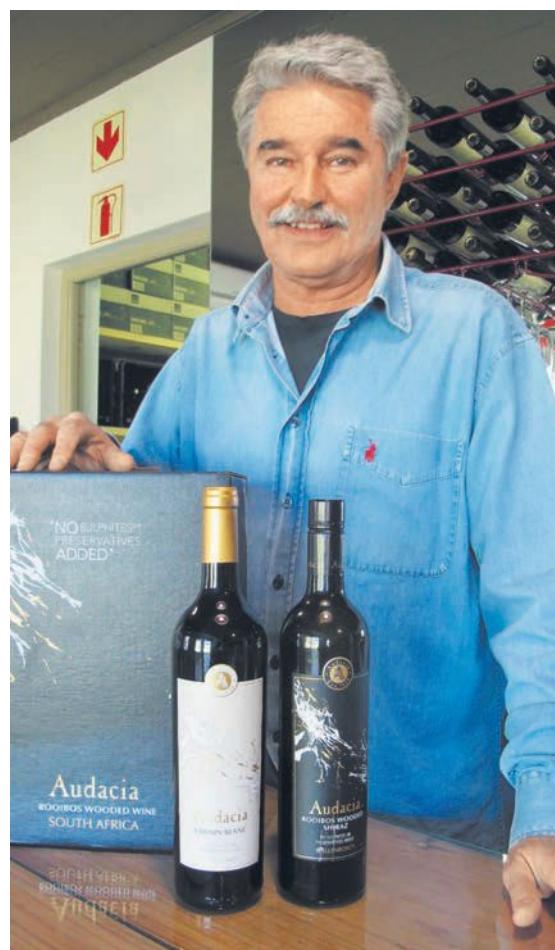
He and his winemaker, Michael van Niekerk, experimented with rooibos teabags in samples of their wines and found the indigenous tea, a natural antioxidant, stopped fermentation without having to add sulphides – a preservative that some sensitive wine drinkers have become allergic to and is reputed to contribute the lion's share to the next day's hangover.

Their trials were so successful, they extended them to honeybush. Trevor and Audacia co-owner Paul Harris brought Stellenbosch University researchers and KWV on board and soon they patented this revolutionary means of making wine without added sulphides, expanding it to include beer and cider in a partnership with local brewers. "We took out patents for 83 countries around the world. It was hugely expensive, which is why we needed KWV to join us," said Trevor.

This caused quite a stir in the local

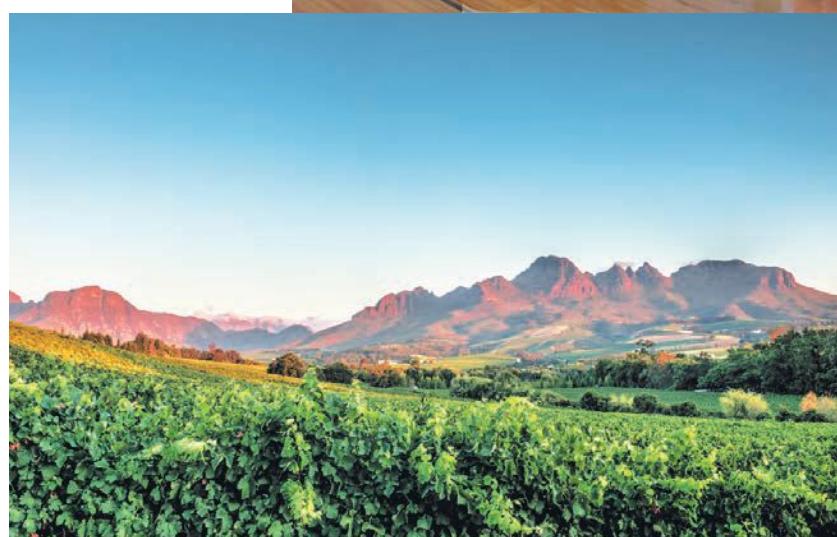
wine industry. "We want to protect this breakthrough for the South African wine industry," explained Trevor in the tasting room, pulling out samples of Audacia's rooibos-wooded wines with striking black, gold and white labels. "We've decided we will only license other South African winemakers and this will give us the edge in the international market."

My next innovator had to do with the



RIGHT: Trevor Strydom of Audacia has caused a stir in the wine industry by using antioxidant-rich rooibos in his wines instead of oak.

BELOW: Audacia lies at the foot of the Helderberg mountains.



LOCAL FLAVOURS ▶ STELLENBOSCH ARTISANS

staff of life. There's a sure-fire way to get Fritz Schoon excited – just ask him about the heritage grains he's using to make the stack of crusty artisan loaves that fill the trendy Schoon de Companje eatery, on the corner of Bird and Church streets, with their aroma.

Fritz's enthusiasm for artisan baking has taken him by surprise – he's actually a quantity surveyor who became fascinated with baking and spent two years training with master pastry chef Markus Farbinger at Knysna's famous Île de Païn. When he moved to Stellenbosch, he built his oven in a back courtyard no one wanted. "I put in a coffee machine so people could drink something while waiting for their bread," said Fritz, introducing me to Black Betty, his ferocious wood-fired oven. He also grinds the organic wholegrain wheat he uses and adds wild yeast that makes the bread spring up eagerly.

There's a romantic story behind the Fanny Chanel artisan ice cream on sale in home-made cones at Schoon de Companje. It's made by Fritz's wife, Chanelle, whom he swept off her feet after a whirlwind six-week courtship. She was fresh out of chef school, so neither of them had restaurant experience but they decided to open an eatery when the space adjacent to the oven became available. "We just want to make honest food

RIGHT: Nini Jerman uses 60% dark, Belgian couverture chocolate to tumble her fruit centres in because it's not too sweet or too dark to look as mouthwatering as it tastes. **BELLOW:** Modern look, old-fashioned values are what Mark van Niekerk (centre) and his co-owners went for when they developed De Warenmarkt.

and support local producers," said Fritz. "I believe this is the future of food."

Artisan chocolate gets a local twist in a converted garage in Paradyskloof, where Nini Jerman coats the sundried Boland fruit of her farm childhood memories in rich, dark, Belgian chocolate. "It's all bite-size pieces and the fruit is the centre, so it's a little bit healthier than the cream and butter centres we also do," she said of her Winston & Julia Tjokfruit brand of confectionery. "I don't know of anyone else doing fruit centres the way we do."

Hubby Nick helped her start the business and, for the first few years, there was a lot of experimenting. "And learning what doesn't work," said Nini. Things came together two years ago when they imported a special tumbling machine to coat the fruit, got their



ABOVE: Schoon de Companje's Dutch heritage decor was designed by Fritz Schoon's super-creative mom, Jenny Schoon, on a shoestring DIY budget.
BELOW: Fritz bakes with passion to produce honest food and nourishing, wholesome, artisan bread.





packaging right and launched themselves at the Stellenbosch Slowmarket held every Saturday morning at Oude Libertas, where I tracked her down. "It helped us make contacts and reach a wider audience," said Nini.

The name of the brand refers to a moment in George Orwell's famous dystopian novel *1984*, where the heroine, Julia, hands the protagonist, Winston, a piece of chocolate and he knows just from the smell that it's not the ordinary stuff. "We often get called Winston and Julia here," said Nini with a laugh.

There's a rich mix of accents and European languages around her stall at the Slowmarket, proving that the international swallows are as happy with her decadent treats as local shoppers.

Stellenbosch's artisan food producers recently found 'asylum' in a heritage building in the heart of the old town. Stefanus van der Walt and his partners developed what was once a police station and then a lunatic asylum into De Warenmarkt, a hub for purveyors of speciality foods. From vendors in an enclosed courtyard behind the restaurant, you can choose a charcuterie platter from butcher Ryan Boon or a cheese platter from the deli, add some of Manoli Chatzikyriaskos' artisan bread made in the wood-fired oven the way his Greek granny taught him, and wash it down with craft beer or freshly brewed coffee or juice. Or just take a basketful of goodies home with you.

"We fully support artisan and local producers of quality food," said Stefanus. "We want to create a great experience for those who love good food."

Map reference F2 see inside back cover



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: At the Stellenbosch Slowmarket people can't get enough of Ashraf Waggie's Tunisian Delights; Lance Majaji brings in fresh oysters from Saldanha; Greg Sissing of Cape Mountain Charcuterie sells his Spanish, French and Italian salamis along with South African biltong; Martjie Malan of M-Patisserie is Stellenbosch's dynamic baking and catering celeb who was runner-up on the first *Koekedoor*.

Stellenbosch Slowmarket

- Foodie heaven happens every Saturday morning at the Slowmarket under leafy trees and in a hall at Oude Libertas wine estate. Whether you're after organic chicken and sausages, sun-ripened strawberries, fresh oysters, real German cakes, gluten-free chocolate brownies, Tunisian schwarmas or unusual teas, you'll find something to tempt your tastebuds here.
- Founded by Dr Gail Blake, an integrated health practitioner, it's at the forefront of the wholefood revolution and the emphasis is on food that's good, clean and fair to consumers, producers and the environment.

Handy Contacts

- Rozendal 021 809 2600, reservations@rozendal.co.za www.rozendal.co.za
- Audacia 021 881 3052 info@audacia.co.za, www.audacia.co.za
- Schoon de Companje 021 883 2187 info@decompanje.co.za www.decompanje.co.za
- Winston & Julia 021 880 0966 www.winstonandjulia.co.za
- De Warenmarkt 083 258 1167 www.dewarenmarkt.com
- Stellenbosch Slowmarket 021 886 8514 www.slowmarket.co.za



Open Door, Constantia 021 794 3010

An enduring memory of Constantia is of being parked at that small shopping centre at the turn-off to Klein Constantia on a sultry afternoon. Two horsewomen rode up next to me, got off their horses, which they tethered to the hitching rail, removed their caps, shook out their abundant blonde hair, and entered the Woolies. They were totally relaxed and really ‘cool’ as the young people say these days. Well, one of those women was my dining companion Beryl Ormsby-Browne, whom I’m sure you remember. Beryl still lives in the area and is fiercely loyal to local restaurants, able to tell at the drop of a hat which are “off the list” and which are “terribly in, darling”.

Well one of those that is ‘terribly in’ right now is Neil Grant’s Open Door at Constantia Uitsig. When the estate was bought by someone with a lot of money, we all feared that their restaurants, legends, were gone forever. But clever Neil, owner of Burrata and Bocca in town, had other plans. Today, what used to be The River Café has been spectacularly transformed into a must-go-to dining experience. The chef, Annemarie Steenkamp, who made such fabulous food at Burrata, can be seen in the kitchen, slaving away. Here she turns out things like pork rillette with charred pineapple, black pepper mousse and melba toast (R62), the pineapple perfectly setting off the rich pork, and tuna gravlax with avocado purée, green olive beignet and a little celery salad (R65), both deliciously fresh starters.

For mains, Beryl had the braised lamb neck with Jerusalem artichoke, roasted garlic and baby carrots (R165), which she pronounced “*Très formidable!*” rather loudly. I do wish she would slow down on the pre-dinner Martinis. I had the pan-roasted linefish, which was Cape salmon that evening (R147) served with oyster velouté, peas, sweetcorn and turnips, and equally *formidable*. For pud we shared the superb baked cheesecake.

The menu offers five starters, mains, and desserts, so decision-making is a lot easier. The wine list is packed with some of the best wines from the Cape and elsewhere, meticulously chosen. Service is smooth and attentive without being stuffy.

Carne, Constantia, 021 761 0247

Beryl has always had an eye for good-looking men. She’ll deny it, saying with great sincerity, “It’s what is inside that counts.” What she’ll never admit is she’s thinking of what’s inside their bank accounts. If the man is bowled over by her, is charming, and can cook, she’s swept off her feet. Giorgio Nava, who owns Carne and 95 Keerom in Constantia, fits the bill perfectly and the fact that he has opened a branch in Constantia is “*numero uno*”.

Set in a delightful Victorian house, with cute little rooms, tastefully furnished but no frills to distract, a cosy bar, and a courtyard to relax in, the restaurant obviously specialises in meat dishes. However, being Italian, there are some excellent pasta dishes which will not offend someone who isn’t carnivorous.

To start, Beryl simply had to have the polenta gnocchi with Gorgonzola sauce (R80). “Rich and satisfying,” said she with heavy innuendo. I, however, cannot resist the best beef tartare in town – a trio served with Morgenster olive oil, anchovies (a must) and salsa verde (R85). Fabulous.

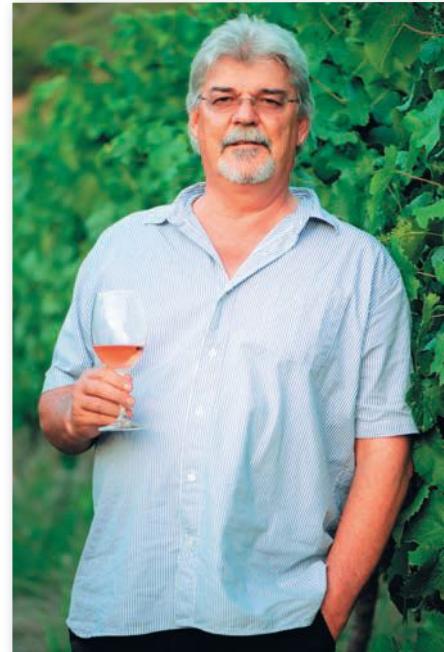
For mains Beryl chose the sirloin, done to perfection (R155 for 300g) and served with the skinniest cut fries you’ve ever seen. She likes her meat *bleu* saying, “Just rush it through a hot room dear,” which does throw some of the staff into a tizz, not realising she’s just making a point. I had a magnificent hamburger (R90), which they cunningly call La Svizzera di Manzo, with balsamic caramelised onions, tomato and Emmentaler cheese – Swiss, get it? I don’t want to denigrate some of the other hamburgers out there, but this one is way ahead of the pack, a kind of seared version of the steak tartare but better. We then shared a fabulous tiramisu (R55) and some excellent espressos. The wine list is extensive, if somewhat pricey, but you’ll find something to suit. (There’s no BYO). The staff is friendly and discreet, in the Italian manner. ■



WINEMAKER Theunis de Jongh of Kleinhoekkloof

Theunis de Jongh is a most unlikely winemaker, having had a very successful international career in the steel business in exotic places like Turkey. He completed a business degree at Pretoria University and spent many years travelling before returning to South Africa to semi-retire. This energetic 62-year-old obviously can't sit still and, as well as making great wine, has a smoking room at Kleinhoekkloof where he makes the most delicious charcuterie. Visitors to the farm, which lies at the end of a 6km dirt road, can order a platter of his fabulous meats, some fresh bread and cheeses, in addition to enjoying the wine tasting. His charming wife Ronel is usually there to assist and you may even meet the assistant winemaker, their daughter Danielle. The family enjoys entertaining at home and loves Portuguese cuisine with nuances of peri peri – a favourite. Their wines are available online; orders of more than six bottles are delivered free of charge in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town. The wines are also available at cellar prices at the Laverne Wine Boutique in Robertson, via their online wine shop, www.lavernewines.co.za

"The first time I saw the farm I knew it was something I had always wanted – without really knowing, a kind of dream come true



The small town of Ashton in the Western Cape is the centre of a vast fruit-canning business. When in full swing, the smell from processing apricots pervades the air, wafting up into the mountainous area that shields the town. Once you drive away, the terrain becomes a whole lot more appealing, quite magnificent actually.

The farm of Kleinhoekkloof lies in the folds of the lower reaches of the Langeberg, spectacularly situated. It's no wonder that Theunis de Jongh says disarmingly, "The first time I saw the farm I knew it was something I had always wanted without really knowing, a kind of dream come true."

Here he makes excellent wine in small batches assisted by his daughter, Danielle. Kleinhoekkloof produces far more grapes than it needs to, and the excess fruit is of such high quality it is eagerly snapped up by some of the famous wine estates in the area.

The first Shiraz Theunis produced here was the champion of the Robertson Young Wine Show, proving to him that he was on the right track. The other wines he and Danielle produce – a Merlot Rosé and a Sauvignon Blanc – are packed with delicious fruit flavours with very well-controlled acids that, as Shirley Valentine said, 'Won't strip the palate off you'. One can only hope that the range will continue to grow. ■

Merlot Rosé 2014

Deliciously fresh, packed with light cherry flavours and plenty of tropical fruit on the nose. Rounded mouth feel, magnificent colour, not too pink for its own good. **R50**



Sauvignon Blanc 2015

Delightfully fresh, crystal clear, crisp, clean, summer-fruit flavours on the nose and in the mouth. Very well-controlled acids, a quaffer if ever there was one. **R60**



Shiraz 2013

Intense, deep, dark-red colour, multilayered red-berry flavours and fragrances. Some white pepper, vanilla custard and almonds from 18 months in French oak barrels.

A bargain at **R100**



Read more of Greg Landman's food and wine stories in Amazing Graze at www.countrylife.co.za

KLEINHOEKKLOOF FARM, WILDEPAARDEKLOOF, ASHTON, 083 250 5775 (phone ahead)



Time for a Change

Dennis Strydom has joined the elite community of Franschhoek chefs, but now that he's at Haute Cabrière he promises to move away from fine dining to real country fare

WORDS DIANA WEMYSS PICTURES DANIELA ZONDAGH

“When I arrived at Haute Cabrière there was something

on the menu called squid ink caviar,” says the restaurant’s new chef, Dennis Strydom. “Well, it took 30 minutes to an hour to prepare, and it tasted like nothing. Why spend time on something that looks pretty, but has no purpose? That is hollow. It has no substance.”

With Haute Cabrière’s avowed intention

of moving away from fine dining and giving patrons a more robust eating experience at the restaurant, Dennis it seems is just the right choice to take food back to basics, to tastes without gimmicks.

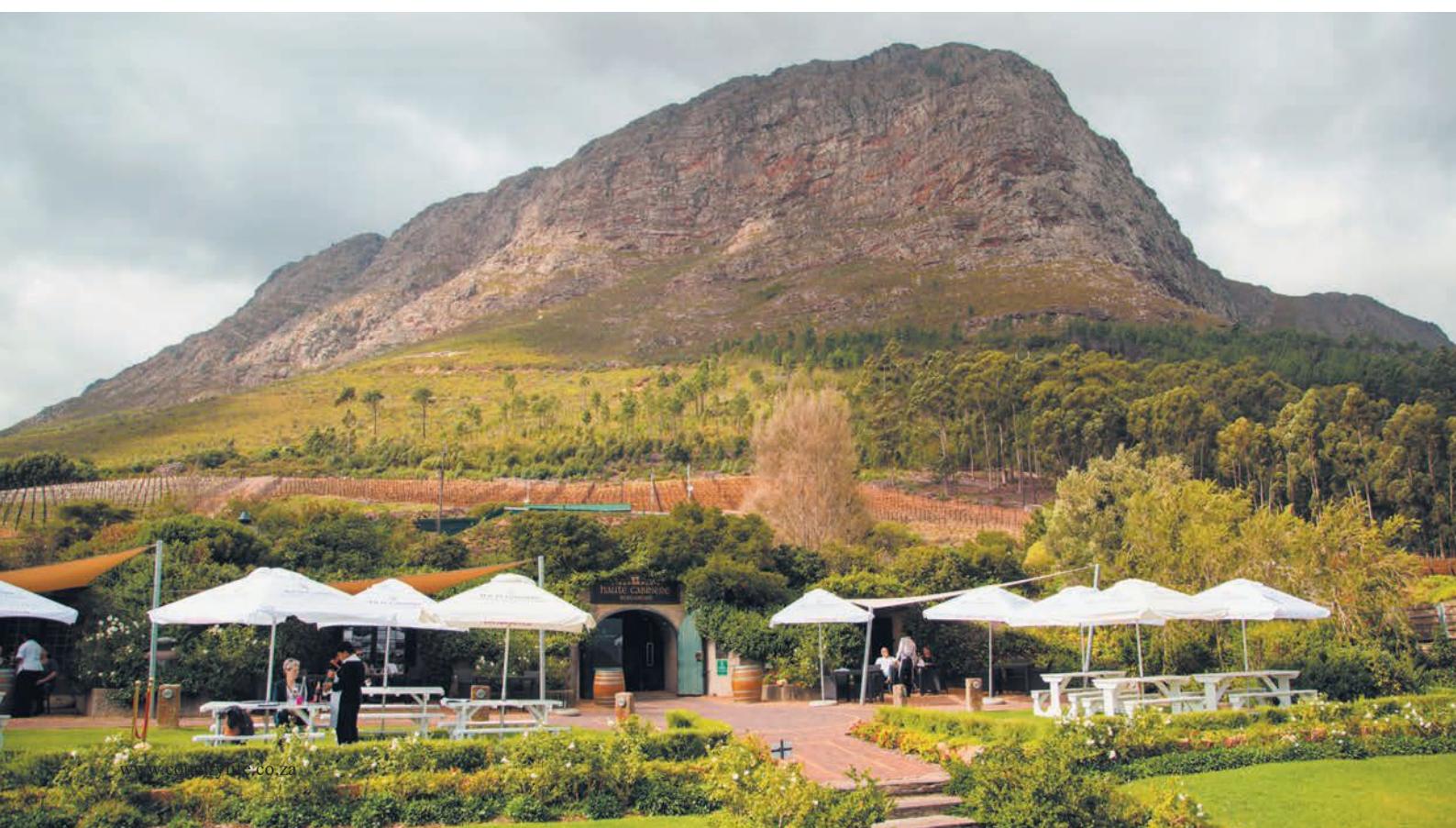
“When I grew up food was a very big part of family life,” says Dennis (32), a farmer’s son from the Langkloof area in the Eastern Cape. “My interest in cooking started at the family dinner table. My mother’s stews were heart-warming bowls of pure delight and my father, who is a great cook too, produced the most wonderful creamed cabbage.

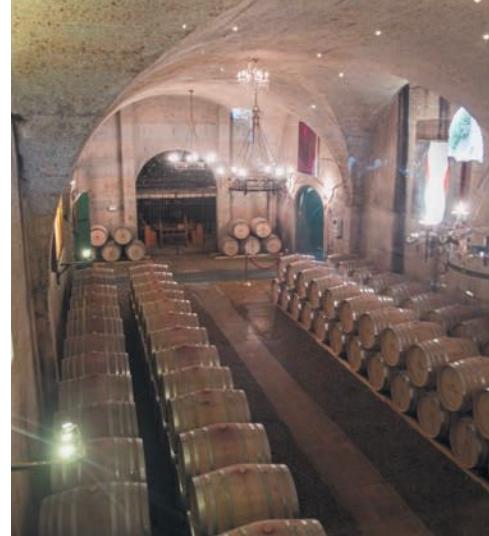
“My ouma was a first-class cook and to this day there is nothing I make that can come close to what she produced. She raised her own sheep and cattle. Our Saturday night braai was an institution, and what a meat feast, from freshly made boerewors to ouma’s sosaties, and of course the fresh roosterbrood, cheese and tomato toasties and jacket potatoes with lashings of butter and salt. All delectable.”

He says Christmas was always a big affair at Ouma’s house, with at least three meats and an array of salads and desserts.



OPPOSITE: Chef Dennis Strydom, who now presides over the kitchens at Haute Cabrière, wants to bring a more casual air to the restaurant menu with deep flavours and simple styling. ABOVE LEFT: During the building of the Franschhoek Pass a huge hole was dug into the mountainside for gravel. The cellar was built into this excavation and on top is a cavern-like tasting room and restaurant giving the building a feel of the old, traditional wine estates of Europe. ABOVE RIGHT: The restaurant has a very moody atmosphere with arched ceilings and beautifully set tables overhung with chandeliers. BELOW: Less formal is the outside terrace with the stately Middagkrans peak looming behind.





ABOVE LEFT: Restaurant staff, from left, Patricia Manti, Zoleka Ngwane, Vandeline Pienaar, Claire Blinkhorn-Street, Kelvin Mboto, Hilton Arnolds, Nandipa Mkenene, and chef Dennis Strydom.
ABOVE RIGHT: Rows of oak barrels filled with the estate's prize-winning wines. The cellar is visible from the restaurant above, through a large window.
LEFT: Barman Canary Mugisha pours a glass of something special.
RIGHT: Nandipa Mkenene in the kitchen.



"As a result my cuisine is rustic with no hang-ups, just great food made with great ingredients," he says. Dennis has no formal training and his CV contains no famous names or exotic locations.

He has travelled and travelled, yet never left our shores. "It's pointless to move on for the money," he says of his peripatetic career. "I move to gain knowledge, to be in a place where I can learn. I have done this continually."

His first job was at the Queens Hotel in Oudtshoorn and from there he moved to Rosenhof Country House, also in the town, before taking up position in Cape St Francis, the Cape Winelands, Jeffreys Bay and back again to the Western Cape.

Each new position was a new learning opportunity. Dennis says that, when he worked at Olivello outside Stellenbosch, he was carefully arranging three little bits of dill on top of a salmon canapé when one of the owners told him, "Come on. No one is going

to taste that," and thrust a handful of the herb on top of the salmon.

His avowed ambition is to create food that people will say is as good as anything they've had at home. "I want people to leave here saying that what they ordered was the best meal they ever had. If you have to think too hard to create a dish, I believe you have lost the essence of the idea. You need to cook from the heart."

Which is not to say that things are slapped together quickly. A sauce in Dennis' kitchen takes two days to make. Pasta is freshly made daily. Duck is cured for 24 hours. Pork belly is slow-braised.

Dennis is fond of telling of his childhood in the Langkloof where his oma slaughtered her cattle and sheep. He is certainly not into his own slaughtering, but he does carry with him a deep nostalgia for those childhood days on the farm and for home-cooked food. "I never will be a fine-dining chef. There are people who are constantly remodelling and

reinventing but that is not how I cook. I don't like gimmicks," he says.

Haute Cabrière estate is bisected by the road that runs up to the Franschhoek Pass. In order to build this road a huge hole was dug for gravel into the mountainside under the looming peak of the Middagkrans. It is here that the bunker-like cellar, tasting room and restaurant of Haute Cabrière were built, the earth floor and gravity-fed production unique in the industry.

On sunny days most people like to eat on the outdoor terrace with its fine view of the valley. Those who dine indoors under the stone arches of the cave-like building can look down through a glass wall into the cellar below. ■

Map reference F2 see inside back cover

Haute Cabrière Restaurant & Terrace
021 876 3688, www.cabriere.co.za
Tuesday-Saturday lunch and dinner,
Sunday lunch



French Onion Soup with Gratinated Chèvre Crostini

Serves 6

- 80g butter
- 1.5kg red onions, thinly sliced
- 8 sprigs thyme
- 5 cloves garlic finely grated
- 450ml red wine
- 1.5 tbs tomato paste
- 2 litres good beef stock
- 6 slices bread (ciabatta or French baguette), toasted
- 10-20g chèvre per person to spread over each piece of toast

METHOD Soften the onions, thyme and garlic in the butter on low heat for about 45 minutes. Add the wine and cook out. Stir through the tomato paste and cook for 2-3 minutes, do not let it burn. Add the beef stock and taste for seasoning. Simmer on low heat to infuse the flavours and thicken slightly. Dish soup into ovenproof bowls. Place a piece of toast spread with chevre on top of soup and place under a grill.

Serve piping hot.

Wine suggestion 2012 Pierre Jourdan Tranquille



Beetroot Tarte Tatin with Caramelised Onion and Danish Feta

Serves 12

- 50g unsalted butter
- 200g red onions
- salt and black pepper
- 600g cooked and thinly sliced beetroot
- 6 tbs balsamic vinegar
- 2 tbs sugar
- 1 roll puff pastry
- 20g Danish feta per person
- washed rocket to garnish

METHOD Preheat the oven to 210°C and prepare a muffin-pan base by lining each hole with round pieces of baking paper coming up the whole side. Melt the butter in a pan. Add the onions, season with salt and pepper and fry for 5 minutes on medium heat. Add the beetroot, balsamic vinegar and sugar. Shake the pan well to move sugar around. Lower the heat and allow to simmer for 10-15 minutes or until it starts to caramelise slightly. Place the beetroot

and onion in the prepared muffin pan, with the baking paper. Cut out puff-pastry discs about ½cm larger than the muffin-pan hole and prick with a fork, cover the beetroot each with a disc of pastry. Place the muffin pan in the oven immediately, lowering the temperature to 180°C. Bake for 15-20 minutes. Remove the tarts by lifting the baking paper and inverting on a plate. Serve warm with crumbled feta and garnish with rocket leaves.

Wine suggestion Pierre Jourdan Belle Rosé



Seared Franschhoek Trout with Steamed Sweet Potato and Avocado Dressing

Serves 6

Avocado Dressing (makes about 1½ cups)

- 1 large avocado
- ½ cup plain yoghurt
- 2 tbs lemon juice
- 1 tsp garlic, finely grated
- pinch of salt
- 1 cup of blended oil
(1:1 vegetable/canola to olive)

Trout and Steamed Potato

- 6 x 150-180g raw Franschhoek trout or Norwegian salmon portions

- 600g sweet potato, steamed
- splash of extra virgin olive oil
- 100g watercress
- salt and black pepper to taste

METHOD Make the dressing beforehand. Blend together all the ingredients except the oil until well combined. Slowly add 1 cup of blended oil while the motor is running. Keep in the fridge and use within 3 days. Season the fish with

salt and black pepper to taste. Pan sear the fish, usually more medium than well done. Warm the cooked sweet potato lightly, season and drizzle with olive oil, add the watercress and toss with soft hands so as not break up the watercress too much. Serve the fish flat on a plate with the sweet potato and a good dollop of avocado dressing over the fish.

Wine suggestion Haute Cabrière Chardonnay Pinot Noir



Deboned Lamb Shank, White Wine, Button Mushrooms, Garlic and Lemon

Serves 6

Marinade

- 20g garlic, finely grated
- juice and zest of 2 lemons
- 50g finely chopped Italian parsley
- 2 tsp thyme leaves
- 2-3 tsp coarse black pepper
- 1 bottle good dry-white cooking wine
- few glugs good strong olive oil

Lamb Shanks

- 2.5kg front quarter lamb shanks (6 shanks at about 400g each)
- 2 medium onions, peeled and cubed
- 2 sticks of celery, cubed
- 2 large carrots, peeled and cubed
- 2 litres veg, lamb or beef stock

To Finish

- 20x20cm piece caul fat per lamb shank
- 250g white button mushrooms halved
- splash of cream
- salt and pepper to season
- chopped parsley

METHOD For the marinade, combine the garlic, lemon zest, juice, parsley, thyme and black pepper with the white wine and olive oil. Cover and marinade the shanks overnight.

To roast the shanks, preheat the oven to 160°C. Fry off the onions, celery and carrots until caramelised. Scatter in a roasting tray about 5-10cm deep. Place the marinated lamb shanks on top and pour over the stock. Cover the tray with tinfoil. Place in the oven for 2-3 hrs, checking every 45 minutes, topping up with stock if it runs too dry. The lamb is done when a tug on the bone starts to dislodge it. Strain the leftover liquid and keep it for the next step.

Debone the lamb shanks while still relatively warm to stop them from breaking into pieces. Wrap the meat into a solid piece with clingfilm and let it cool to retain the shape. When the lamb is

chilled, cut your caul fat to size and roll the cold lamb shank into a neat package and secure with cooking thread. Have a nice hot pan handy and sear off the fat on all sides until golden. Place on an oven tray in an oven preheated to 180°C for 10-15 minutes to reheat and cook the fat. The caul fat should become crispy and give an absolutely amazing flavour to your lamb, as well as keeping it together and moist. In the same pan you used for the lamb add your button mushrooms. Fry off until cooked, add the braising liquid left over from your roasting tray, as well as good glug of cream to lighten your sauce, and reduce a little. Season to taste and add the parsley. Serve the lamb shank with fluffy mash potatoes, drizzled with the sauce and a green-vegetable stir-fry.

Wine suggestion Haute Cabrière Pinot Noir Unwooded



Toasted Honeyed Cinnamon and Pistachio Brioche, Burnt Apple Cream, Roast Apple

Serves 6

Cinnamon and Pistachio Brioche

- 250g cake flour
- 250g OO flour (pasta flour)
- 1 tsp salt
- 4 tbs castor sugar
- 5g ground cinnamon
- 50g toasted chopped pistachios
- 2 tsp yeast
- 150g soft butter
- 4 eggs beaten with 100ml water
- 2 egg yolks to glaze
- 2 tbs water

Burnt Apple Cream

- 150g Granny Smith apples peeled, cubed, griddled until black on the outside
- 150ml cream
- 2 tbs honey and extra for the toast
- 2 tbs butter
- 1 cup cream

Roasted Apple

- 3 slices $\frac{1}{2}$ cm-thick Granny Smith apple slices per person
- butter
- sugar

METHOD Preheat oven to 180°C. Put flour, salt, sugar, cinnamon, pistachios and yeast into a large bowl. Combine well. Melt butter but don't heat it up, you should be able to keep your finger in it. Whisk egg mixture into the butter. Make a well in the flour and add the egg and butter mixture, bring it together with a wooden spoon. Turn out onto a floured surface, knead well for about 5 minutes, place in a greased bowl and leave in warm place to rise for 1 hour or until double in size. Tip dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knock back. Shape the bread into 4 equal-size logs about 5cm in diameter and leave to prove for 30 minutes. Combine egg yolks and 2 tbs water, brush bread with mixture

before putting it in the oven. Bake for 20 minutes or until golden brown. Transfer to a wire rack to cool.

For the burnt apple cream, place the griddled apples, 150ml cream, 2 tbs honey and butter in a pot and bring to a boil, then simmer on medium heat for 5 minutes. Let it cool down and blitz into a smooth sauce. Whip the cup of cream until stiff. Fold the apple mixture into the cream and keep in fridge. To roast the apple slices, preheat the oven to 180°C. Place the apple slices on a baking tray that has been sprayed with Spray and Cook. Lightly dust with sugar and place the butter on top. Roast until cooked but firm. Keep to the side until needed. Slice and toast the brioche until golden brown, spread the honey over each slice to taste. Stack the toast and roasted apple slices (3 per person) adding the burnt apple cream in between the layers. Serve with vanilla ice cream.

Wine suggestion Pierre Jourdan Brut ■

There seems no getting away from it. Our economy has been moving into tougher times in recent years, last year the fourth successive year of economic growth slowdown, with interest rates gradually rising. Property markets can't defy economic gravity indefinitely.

The housing market remains well balanced between demand and supply for the time being, but the indications are that residential demand has been slowing. Nothing has occurred rapidly, it's all been very slow in coming, but various signs have gradually emerged.

Economic data has pointed to household-sector income growth slowing in recent years. Consumer confidence surveys have been weak. FNB's Estate Agent Survey data has pointed to a declining rate of households selling in order to upgrade to better properties, a reflection of a more cautious approach to home buying. No panic sell-off, just a gradual change in behaviour as financial constraints mount in households.

This change has gone a little against the higher-priced end of the housing market, which has become the relative weak spot. Why wouldn't it? Mounting financial constraints should drive a greater search for home affordability, sending a larger portion of buyers towards the more affordable properties in the market.

Then, of course, there are types of home buying that fall more into the 'non-essential' category. Holiday home buying falls into this category – a nice-to-have but a purchase that always can be postponed in tougher times. Its non-essential nature suggests that the holiday home market, and towns strongly driven by holiday home buying, should be more cyclical than those driven largely by more essential, primary-residence buying.

One should therefore expect that, in good economic times, the holiday towns' housing markets might perform better than the more stable, big-city markets, but when times get



In the next few years, we might see the holiday town property market perform somewhat worse than the city market, says JOHN LOOS

tougher, the converse might also be true, with holiday towns' markets becoming a little weaker than those of cities.

Looking for some numbers that point to this, we find them in the form of FNB's Holiday Towns House Price Index, which has recently shown a noticeable loss in growth momentum. In the first quarter of 2016, the index showed a decline of -4.1 per cent on the first quarter of 2015, while FNB's Major Metro Price Index remained in positive growth territory.

Does this mean that holiday home

markets perform worse than the big-city markets over the longer term? Not necessarily. Despite holiday-town markets hitting more extreme highs and lows, since the late 1990s, their cumulative price growth has been very similar to that of the big-city markets. However, looking forward to the next few years, this could be a period where the holiday town market underperforms against the city market a little.

The world economy has been dragged down by very high, worldwide debt levels. Too much debt is ultimately a bad thing, and the current levels have become a burden. Bad global economy equals a likely lengthy spell of weak demand for South Africa's exports, in turn dampening our economic growth.

Domestically, ongoing weakness in terms of skilled labour supply is one of the key limitations of our own making.

In short, it looks like our economy will be in a mediocre place for a while to come. This is nothing new. The world works in these long super-cycles, and property generally follows suit. We are fortunate to have the Reserve Bank that we have. Unlike the Reserve Bank of the 80s and 90s, the modern-day Bank tries to move really gradually upwards and downwards on interest rates, which contributes greatly to smoothing out the property cycle. Sharper moves in the 80s and 90s sometimes created severe pressure on the economy and its housing market.

But while the Bank can smooth out a cycle, it cannot prevent it. We will have to work our way through this stagnant phase of the super-cycle, and for a time the larger, more costly-to-run houses, and the non-essential ones, may not be the flavour of the month.

This is not always what owners want to hear. But for future buyers and investors, a better property-buying opportunity may present itself a few years from now. ■

John Loos is an economist with FNB
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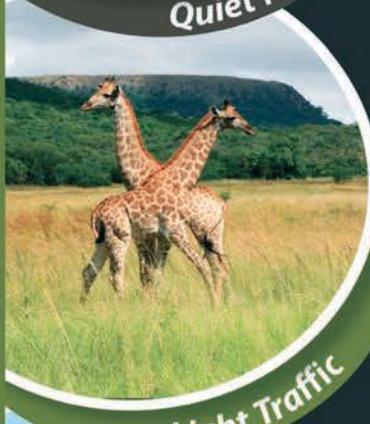
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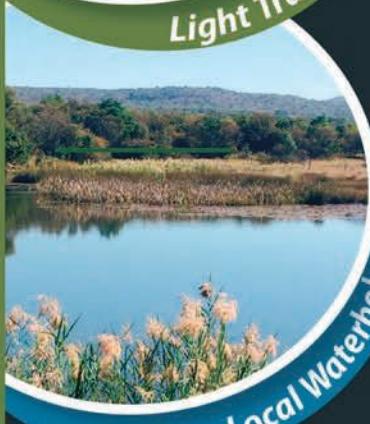
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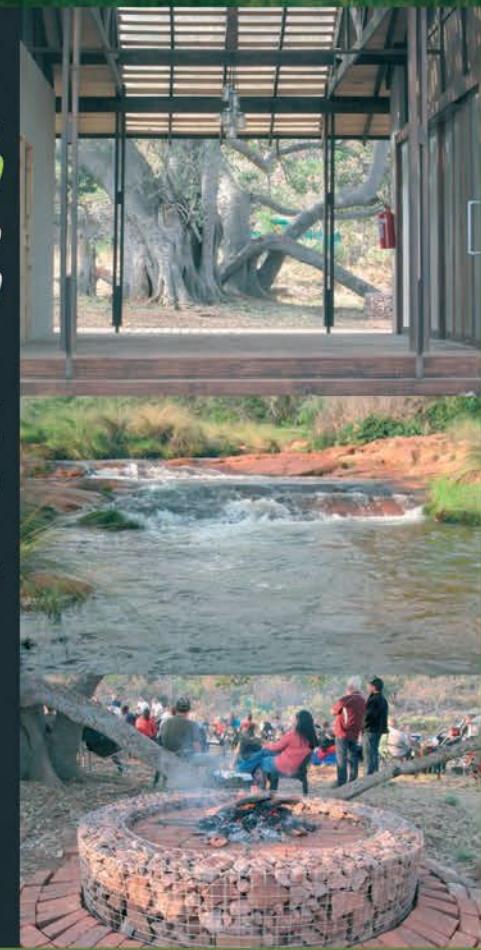
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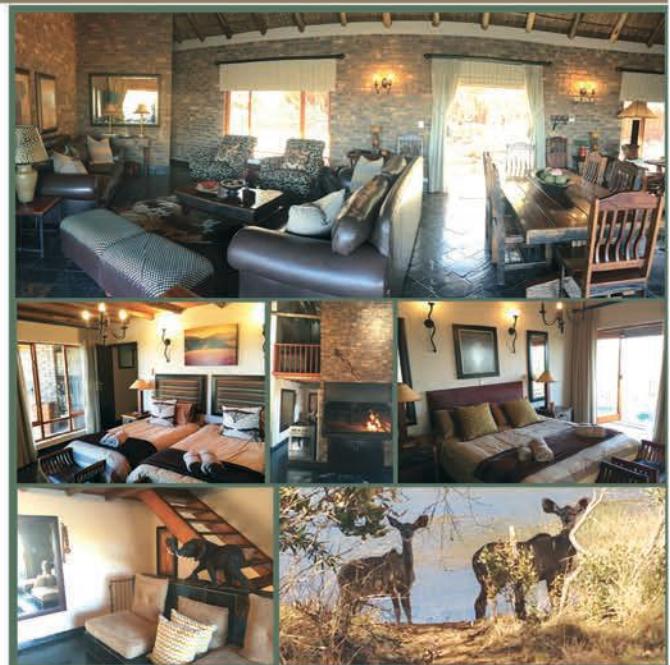
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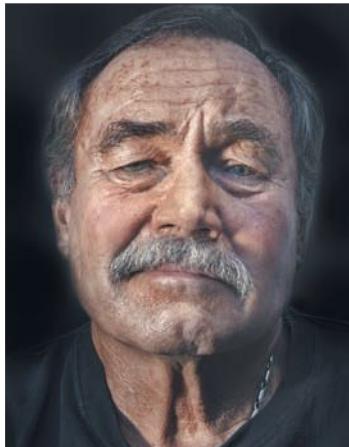
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Parting Shot



For OBIE OBERHOLZER there's nothing kiffer than a comfy armchair, a good fire and a great read. Well, maybe a jol in Bapsfontein

Dear Country Lifers. Howzit, *ek sê?* This is a bit of South African slang that I learnt in Bapsfontein in the 60s. We used to go there on a Saturday for a kif jol with thousands of other '*ek sê* howzits'.

If you don't know what kif and jol mean, then you never went to Bapsfontein. In 1961, the LM (Lourenço Marques) Talent Parade was hosted there and attracted even more people from the surrounding cities of Benoni, Boksburg and Kempton Park. Min Shaw, Barbara Ray and Lance James sang there. In 1962, the stage and dance floor were enlarged and could accommodate 750 couples, the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere.

I haven't thought much about Bapsfontein since then, until a few days ago. My wife Lynn, my 2001 Isuzu bakkie and I were rambling around the Eastern Cape's Southern

Drakensberg. My Isuzu has done so many country roads that she can almost drive them by herself. Kif, hey, *ek sê!*

All I have to do is droop my arm out the window and look cool. I want to check myself out in the rear view mirror but then I remember that it shook off years ago, just outside Swartwitpensbokfonteinberg. That didn't bother me because you can't see out of the back window with a canopy anyway.

So, we were all merrily rattling along looking for odd things like photographs, road signs that fall down when you drive past them, broken tractors, ceramic flying ducks and other lekker strange and odd things. Besides the road signs (the ones with bullet holes through them have more value) that fall off when you drive past them, I also collect dead ducks, bones, funny chairs and flat cans. I have the most fabulous collection of old flat cans in the country.

I really 'catch a gly' in people who

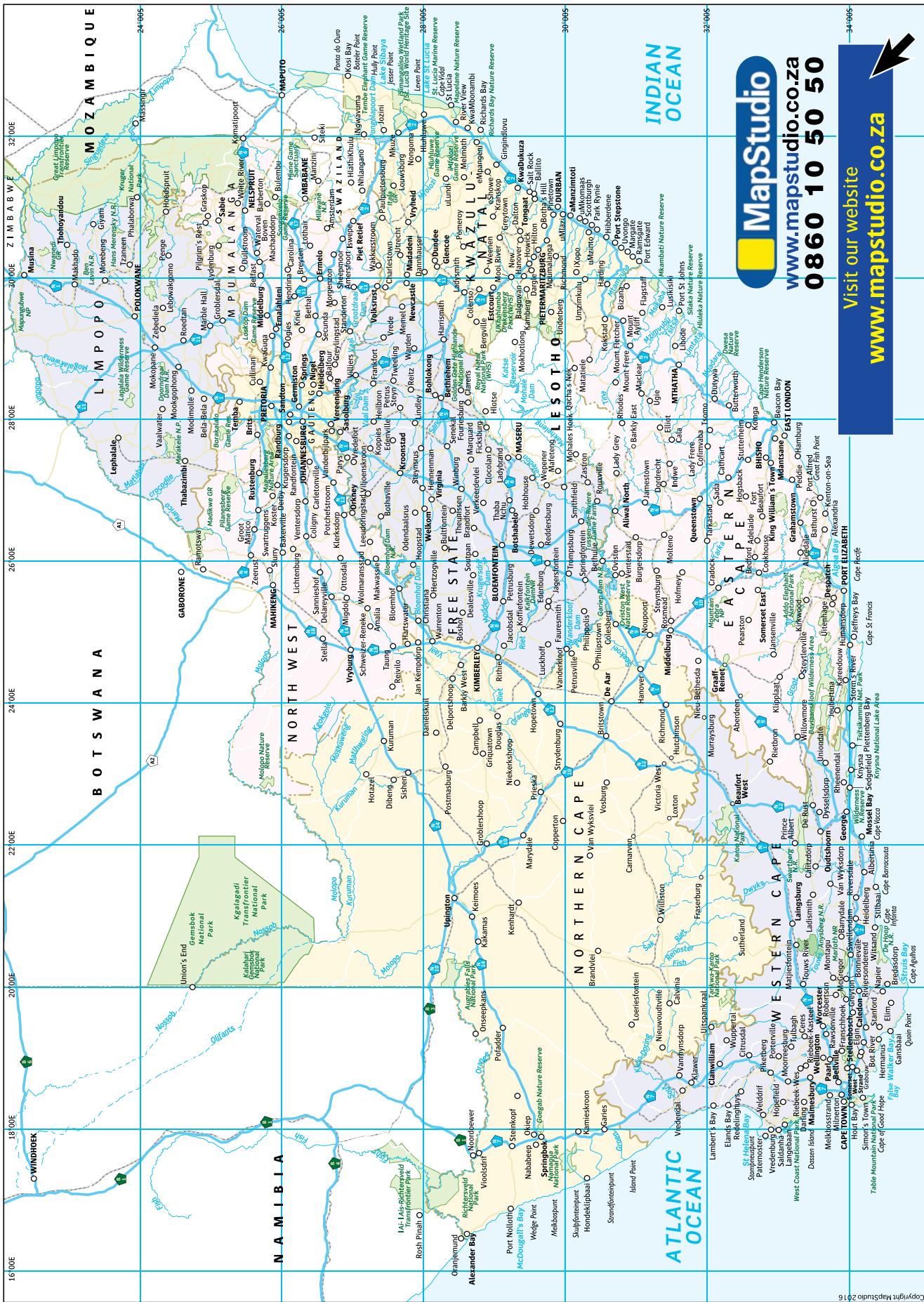
continuously say 'fabulous'. I only use the word when I talk about flat cans. Then, later that day, we found ourselves staying in a cottage on a farm in the Funnystone Valley. There, all of you dearest Country Lifers, I found this fabulous armchair that beats all of the other fabulous armchairs in the world.

I made a cosy little glowing fire that warmed my heartstrings. On the windowsill was a fabulous ornate clock of a Friesland dairy cow in a sunflower field. Then to add to the fabulousness of everything, I found a pile of old COUNTRY LIFE magazines stacked away in the corner.

There's nothing better than sitting in this fabulous chair, surrounded by nothing but country life, warmed by a crackling fire and reading about all those fabulous old country lives and days gone by. Eventually, I fell asleep and dreamt about Bapsfontein. ■

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