

weekend life

'Fill your bucket' at Wildehondekloof

Game reserve outside Oudtshoorn just the place to recharge before silly season rush

It's become something of a pilgrimage for me, visiting Wildehondekloof Private Game Reserve in the heart of the Klein Karoo's Swartberg mountain range — and for many people living on the Garden Route who know about this little gem, it's that metaphorical "fill your bucket" kind of place.

The holiday pace is picking up in Mossel Bay, Plett and Knysna and while this is great for tourism in the area it means more traffic, more shopping jams, more mayhem actually for a few weeks now.

Our dorps get overwhelmed with visitors.

But ah, if you know about the Klein Karoo, it is where you can go to hide and recharge your spiritual man before the silly season kicks in — and you might still be lucky and find the odd vacancy even at the height of season.

For Garden Route residents, this Klein Karoo area is what the Drakensberg is to Natal people.

I always think of the beautiful psalm that says, "I look to the mountains from whence my help comes" in this part of the world — nestled and flanked by cliffs and koppies so far greater than anything and everything — all the wars happening in the world right now.

The first time I visited Wildehondekloof was right after Covid when masks were still the order of the day, but here in the mountains, the pandemic faded right out of the picture.

Then when the wide-scale looting happened in July 2021, we took a sabbatical from watching the madness unfold on TV and hothotfooted it to this neck of the woods.

The Klein Karoo is only between 40 and 60km wide,



People & Places in the Garden Route

ELAINE KING

sandwiched between the imposing Swartberg Mountains in the north, and the continuous Langeberge and Outeniqua Mountains in the south.

It's a magnificent drive up through the Outeniqua Pass as you leave George and head up through the mountains.

Then as you pick up the scenic Route 62, the vegetation changes from the tropical green of the coastal towns to scrubby fynbos where the mountains usurp sea views.

Wildehondekloof is about an hour outside the main town of Oudtshoorn and while there are lots of choice spots to stay in the Swartberg area, this place comes up trumps for me — simply because it's as good as it gets, from the location to accommodation to food and warm hospitality from owners Paula Potgieter and her husband affectionately just called "Pottie".

I know that in winter there is a fireplace in the rooms and an electric blanket, in summer there is a swimming pool and in all seasons the poplar trees which hug the river are dressed in gold or green depending on the time of the year.

This visit, Paula has invited me to see some new things: a fresh walk she staked out herself, an addition to the buck family, a new self-catering lodge — and food from this kitchen which is embracing the

healing properties of the veld and fynbos.

Since I last visited, Pottie recently brought Sable antelope to the already impressive family of buck here (Springbok, Oryx, red and black hartebeest, eland, steenbok, kudu, blesbok duiker and klipspringer) and there has been lots of rain so everything is greener than it's been in a long time.

The nyala buck are strolling the lawns right past the guests' rooms and there are babies.

The poplar trees are resplendent in full bloom and song, the only sound apart from the birds and the burbling river are their rustling leaves — a Wildehondekloof choir.

Wildehondekloof Private Game Reserve came about 4½ years ago.

Pottie comes from several generations of farming family in this area, including ostrich farming during the boom in the '80s.

The Potgieter family bought this 4,000 hectare paradise and since then it has grown from a single homestead to nine luxurious en suite rooms all with views, a honeymoon suite, and most recently a self-catering house perfect for a family or three couples.

It was once a hunting farm, but it's now home to buck, giraffe and zebra, leopards have been spotted, and a plethora of

creatures from porcupine to hare and tortoises roam the mountains.

While Paula has been busy setting up the accommodation, her husband has been occupied with the actual reserve, the "farming" aspect of the business.

I was under the impression that a game reserve takes care of itself, but talking to Pottie dispels this notion.

There is 30km of fencing which needs to be maintained, there are the access roads, then there are the animals somebody needs to keep tabs on.

Since they bought the property, Pottie has spent two years removing alien black wattle and oleander.

The river bank needs attention so it doesn't get silted up and there is never-ending maintenance.

There is also the ongoing challenge of setting up animal tracker cameras that cannot be dismantled by baboons.

One of the highlights of being here are the walks. The yellow and blue route, doable by couch potatoes, was established a while ago, but now there is a new trek called the Rooikoppie route, which is a beauty for more serious hikers.

I never really appreciated how much work goes into trails of this nature and how fit Paula is given she is the trail-blazer who finds the route, marks it and then Pottie follows with the equipment to cut bush back and make the trail safe.

A Swiss couple did this Rooikoppie walk with Paula leading the charge and were blown away by the fynbos and the views, but they also came back to the lodge feeling their legs.



TEAM WORK: Paula Potgieter has brought the healing properties of fynbos onto her menu. Chef Andre Goliath, right, puts a pinch of them into the food he prepares while field guide, Quintin Lottering, harvests the herbs on the farm

A blue route trail is also in the making. **SIDEBAR:**

Hippocrates said: "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food."

Paula and her people harvest a range of fynbos and veld herbs here at Wildehondekloof farm and they have introduced it into food, for delicate flavour, but also for its healing properties.

There are some 7,000 species of fynbos, indigenous to the southern tip of Africa, with many of them being recognised nowadays as having healing properties.

It's become the fashion to put fynbos into seasonings, bake and cook with them, steep healthy teas, put the herbs into oil and even vinegar

tinctures.

For a comprehensive picture, Veld Medicine from the Klein Karoo by Salomie de Jager covers the subject in depth.

Andre Goliath has been the chef here pretty much since Wildehondekloof was opened to guests.

His passion for food is evident in all the meals he serves such as the vegetable quiche he makes in the shape of a Christmas tree.

He is a wizard when it comes to cooking with ostrich meat, he makes traditional South African cuisine like bobotie, a soup of the day based on what's seasonal, he offers guests lactose- and gluten-free dining options. He loves baking and feeding

people and now he's stepped it up a notch by adding healing fynbos herbs to his dishes.

There is a pinch of renosterbos in his roosterbrood. There is a hint of kapok bos in the sauce for his mussel dish, there is wilde mint as a garnish on desserts, while he steeps honeybush and kankerbosie tea.

He loves sharing his knowledge so guests should ask him what magic is in their dinner.

Quintin Lottering is one of Wildehondekloof's field guides who takes guests on game drives where he shares his wealth of knowledge about the fauna and flora, but he is also very clued up when it comes to nutritional healing literally from the fynbos and veld.

He grew up in the Karoo and says from a young age his

father used to collect plants for his mother.

He knew about the healing properties of wilde als and kankerbosie as a child.

Wilde als has become so famous for its immune-boosting properties it's now sold online and in pharmacy-type stores (the artemisia has been taken from the plant) and isn't cheap, Lottering tells me.

His grandmother is 96 and she takes kankerbosie and renosterbos every day.

"She's never been sick," Lottering said.

He says that just one leaf of spekboom a day is packed with Vitamin C if you don't have an orange.

If a sprig of honeybush is put into a pillow case it induces good sleep, he says.

Oodles of Christmas gift choices for wine lovers

Scratching your head for the perfect gift for your favourite wine lover?

Fortunately, with the wide range of wines, wine opening and storing gadgets, accessories and books out there, the challenge is not so much finding gift options but in narrowing them down.

Some suggestions then from the highlights of wines tasted this year:

Antonij Rupert Wyne recently unveiled the 2020 Optima (±R250), a beautiful Bordeaux-style blend released only when it's considered well matured and ready for optimal enjoyment.

The blend components of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot, from Franschoek and Darling vineyards, are matured separately in oak, 30% new, for 30 months before blending and further bottle maturation.

The result is silky-smooth yet structured, the deep red colour hinting at the dense, concentrated dark red fruit accentuated with cedar and oak spice, cocoa and aromatic herbal notes.

Elegant, sophisticated, well-rounded, a real treat to savour now or cellar for later.

Also from Antonij Rupert, the maiden vintage released this year of the L'Ormarins Private Cuvee Cap Classique (±R450) is not only beautiful to look at — an ornate designer bottle in decorative gold gift box — but a super-elegant refined bubbly to drink.

From cool-climate Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, it has been matured on the lees



A Vine Time

SAM VENTER

for 72 months, allowing the wine to develop complexity and character, balancing vibrant citrus fruits with the richness of toasty sourdough, subtle honey and marmalade, a sumptuous celebratory drop.

Gifting a bottle of wine is gifting the person a moment of indulgence and enjoyment, but if it's a longer-lasting gift you're after, consider the wide range of gadgets and accessories out there — openers, stoppers, decanters, aerators, wine racks, wine coolers and coolers ...

Le Creuset is a good option, for quality goods with name brand appeal — from the basics of corkscrews, foil cutters and wine cooler sleeves to stylish still and sparkling wine stoppers, through to the funnels, aerating "wine fountain" decanter, wine pump, specialist corkscrews and other goodies with geek appeal.

Riedel glassware is another luxury wine gift option (www.yuppiefest.com has a wide selection).

Recognising that the shape

of the glass influences the aromas and taste of different wines differently, each type of varietal-specific Riedel crystal glass is designed to enhance enjoyment of a specific wine.

For the wine-loving reader, the latest Platter's SA Wine Guide is always a good option, providing the most comprehensive listings of just about all SA wines, with detailed info on each winery, star ratings and comments on the wines, guides to technical terms, cultivars, winelands maps and all kinds of useful info. Find it in bookstores for about R400.

For those who prefer reading on the screen, there's a digital subscription from www.wineonplatter.co.za at R175 with access to the ratings and reviews online and on the mobile app. It's not nearly as comprehensive as the printed guide, though, but does have the advantage of easy comparison of a wine's ratings from 2008 to date.

Another great read comes from the original Platter's author, John Platter, in My Kind of Wine (R105 at Exclusive Books) — as he puts it, "a ramble through the winelands" rather than a comprehensive tour.

It's an entertaining ramble too, featuring interviews with leading and upcoming winemakers, some of Platter's favourite estates and wines, recipes and notes on what wine goes with what food, and his frank take on the quirks and foibles of the wine world.

Best enjoyed with a glass of wine at hand.

Happy festive shopping!

Time to stop resisting resistance training

Devlin Brown

Why do you always suggest strength training?

Is it because you're a man who enjoys being buff and not a woman who's happy doing yoga and going for a run?

If you are happy doing yoga and going for a run, then do yoga and go for a run.

It will continue to be of enormous benefit to you.

If you ask me what a rounder fitness and exercise regimen should look like, you will always get: strength (preferably weight) training, cardiovascular exercise, mobility and flexibility, prehab (yes, that's the word) and potentially rehab movements.

Yes, I am a man. I did a quick Google search to see what "buff" actually means.

Let's address that. I fundamentally believe that form should follow function and that movement patterns and characteristics such as strength, power and endurance should be the goal.

Yes, weight training is central — but not the only factor — in building large and, in some instances, oversized muscles.

This is not what we are talking about when we discuss strength training.

In fact, it's the opposite. Throughout the years I have witnessed many women resist the concept of weights, and then seen how their lives changed when they did it properly.

But, don't take my word for it.

Zing Tseng, a journalist and author of the Forgotten Wom-



en book series, wrote this in The Guardian a few weeks ago: "I have grown two hard lumps on my arms. They are deltoids, apparently. I have never been remotely aware of having deltoids before — I always assumed my shoulders simply elongated into a formless mass of flesh that eventually gave way to the rest of my limbs. But now I have deltoids."

After referencing the Ozempic craze — that's where people who aren't type-2 diabetics buy up all doses of the drug to

lose weight while threatening the health of those who actually need the injections — she writes: "Weightlifting allowed me to reach into the recesses of my 2000s-poisoned mind — the decade that made me believe that protruding clavicles were the height of red-hot sexiness — and gently rearrange everything."

"Not enough to stop me from looking at weighing scales with the tender longing and repulsion of an ex-lover, but just enough to make me rethink

my relationship with my body: that it isn't about what it looks like on the outside, but what it can do."

She references being able to carry things, unpack heavy suitcases from high places, jump over fences to chase her dog, and much more.

But she also references peer-reviewed science showing resistance training is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Perhaps you need more? Here are more benefits of

weight training, not spewed by gym bros, but written by scientists who need to withstand the critique of their peers: improved metabolism, strengthening of the bones to reduce the risk of osteoporosis, improved mood, reduced anxiety and depression, enhanced sleep quality and a healthier hormonal environment.

Suggesting that people take up weight training, or another type of resistance training if they really don't like dumbbells or barbells, has nothing to do with gender, nor a like or dislike for buff bodies.

It's about making suggestions that are good for the body and mind.

Not all weight and strength training is equal, though.

There are so many bad habits and fruitless exercises being repeated daily in gyms where the average person has no clue what to do and just mimics other clueless people around them.

This is not likely to happen at a respectable, smaller facility where the business model is coaching and not memberships.

If you're a member of one of the beautiful commercial gyms, go to their information board and find qualified trainers and biokineticists.

Invest in learning how to incorporate strength training into your regimen in a way that's suited and tailored to your body and needs.

It won't replace downward dog and crow pose.

On the contrary, the two disciplines, when done properly, will benefit each other tremendously.