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# *A tale of two extraordinary* GARDENS



OPPOSITE The lush landscape of Babylonstoren.  
BELOW A Baroque-style apple tree maze is situated on the grounds of The Newt.

*Tucked away in the picturesque landscapes of Franschhoek and Somerset lie a pair of garden paradises shaped by a visionary*

text LYNETTE BOTHA



## Babylønstøren An ode to simplicity and abundance

Former magazine editor and design luminary Karen Roos, is well-known for channelling her creative genius into transforming the gardens of Babylønstøren in Franschoek and The Newt in Somerset, UK, with her influence not only evident in the refined aesthetic of these estates but in their lush, edible and ornamental landscapes.

Babylønstøren's roots stretch back to 1692, when it was established by independent farmer Pieter van der Byl at the foot of a hill that, to the 17th-century farmers, resembled the biblical Tower of Babel. Today, the farm's iconic Cape Dutch werf is surrounded by 15 meticulously planned sections of garden, each a masterclass in design and function. In collaboration with French architect Patrice Taravella, the garden is both a feast for the eyes and a source of sustenance, offering everything from espaliered fruit trees to unexpected mazes.

Walking through Babylønstøren's garden feels like entering a different world. Pergolas adorned with fragrant climbing roses, water canals that trace the earth's contours, and gravel pathways guiding you through clusters of seasonal vegetables, edible flowers and lush citrus groves, all create a serene yet vibrant tapestry. A prickly pear maze invites exploration while collections of succulents, indigenous cycads and clivias speak to the farm's botanical significance. 'We want guests to feel anchored,' says Karen. 'To enjoy the surrounding mountains as much as we do, pick healthy fruit and veggies, play pétanque, swim in the farm pool. Then relax for an hour in the spa, eat a simple, fresh dish at one of the restaurants, and welcome the sunset with a glass of wine in hand.'

This ethos extends far beyond the garden. Babylønstøren's culinary offerings showcase the farm's produce in its purest

form. The farm-to-fork restaurants, Babel and The Greenhouse, celebrate the bounty of the land, with dishes dictated by the garden's ever-changing harvest. Whether it's a salad of freshly picked herbs or a light meal enjoyed under a canopy of oak trees, the food speaks to the farm's philosophy of simplicity and authenticity.

Guests who wish to experience more than just the gardens – which can take a full day to fully explore – can extend their stay and retire to the contemporary Farm Hotel, where the understated, elegant design mirrors the calm and clarity of the natural surroundings. A visit to the Garden Spa promises rejuvenation through a range of treatments inspired by the botanicals grown on the farm and, for the more curious among us, Babylønstøren offers various workshops, guided garden tours and activities that delve deeper into the farm's history, sustainable practices and artisanal craftsmanship. ▶



**OPPOSITE & ABOVE** The garden is home to more than 300 varieties of plants, which are edible or have medicinal value. Vegetation includes wild olive trees, thousands of clivia lilies, citrus groves, almond trees and prickly pears.  
**LEFT** Karen Roos, the visionary behind Babylønstøren and The Newt.  
**BELOW** The espaliered trees create surprises around every corner.





OPPOSITE & ABOVE The Newt mixes countryside charm and natural beauty with rustic ideals, introducing a harmony of colour among architecture and lush plant life.



## The Newt A fusion of beauty and purpose

Across the water, The Newt in Somerset tells a similar story of agricultural history reimagined through a modern lens. Spanning 2 000 acres, the estate is a horticultural masterpiece shaped by centuries of care and innovation. Under Karen and her husband Koos Bekker's ownership, The Newt's gardens have been revitalised by Patrice, who has expertly woven together ornamental beauty and practical productivity.

At the heart of The Newt's landscape sits the Parabola, a walled garden with a twisting apple tree maze, boasting over 70 varieties of apples. Awarded prestigious National Collection status, this maze is just one of the many features that reflect The Newt's dedication to both heritage and horticultural excellence.

The Kitchen Garden, where a thriving 350 varieties of fruits, vegetables and herbs are grown, feeds the estate's two restaurants with dishes that embody

the very essence of seasonal, locally-sourced cuisine. 'Our eateries serve fresh, seasonal fare, led by what is growing in our gardens,' Karen explains. 'It's about using what's at hand, what's been nurtured from the soil to the table, and crafting a menu that respects the land.'

The Newt's latest Four Seasons Garden, is a year-round spectacle. Each season is dedicated its own space, connected by fragrant walkways and tunnels. Spring's Japanese cherry blossoms give way to summer's heady roses, while autumn's vibrant arboretum is followed by the stark, sculptural beauty of the Winter Garden. This deliberation allows visitors to experience the shifting moods of nature, framed by Patrice's disciplined eye for geometry and balance.

A stay at The Newt offers luxurious yet understated accommodation, providing a sanctuary for guests with sweeping views of the gardens and the Somerset

countryside beyond. The estate also offers a wealth of experiences from hands-on workshops and cider tastings to the interactive Story of Gardening museum, which uses virtual reality to transport visitors to some of the world's most iconic gardens, including Monet's Giverny and Babylonstoren. The estate also offers aerial walks through the ancient woodland, where native wildlife — deer, birds and, of course, the eponymous great crested newts — can be observed in their natural habitat.

Although continents apart, Karen has transformed these two estates into inspiring, living landscapes. 'The gardens are an invitation to pause, to observe, to be present. They remind us that the greatest luxuries are often the simplest things: perfectly ripe fruit, the scent of a rose, or the sound of a bee in flight,' she reflects. ■

📍 [babylonstoren.com](http://babylonstoren.com)

📍 [thenewtinsomerset.com](http://thenewtinsomerset.com)

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