

MARCH 2025

# livingspace

DECOR & LIFESTYLE

## ROCK & ROLL

Explore an Eastern Cape sanctuary

## GATHER 'ROUND

Bomas & firepits for your space

## THE STONE AGES

Dabble with various natural countertops

**SAVE  
R300**

WHEN YOU SPEND  
R1 500 OR MORE  
AT @home

# OF THE EARTH

DISCOVER WHAT LIES BENEATH THE SURFACE

# THE LAY OF THE LAND

A hub for all things earthy, Babylonstoren, located in Franschhoek, is seen as a grounded sanctuary for everyone, and if you've never been there, why wait?



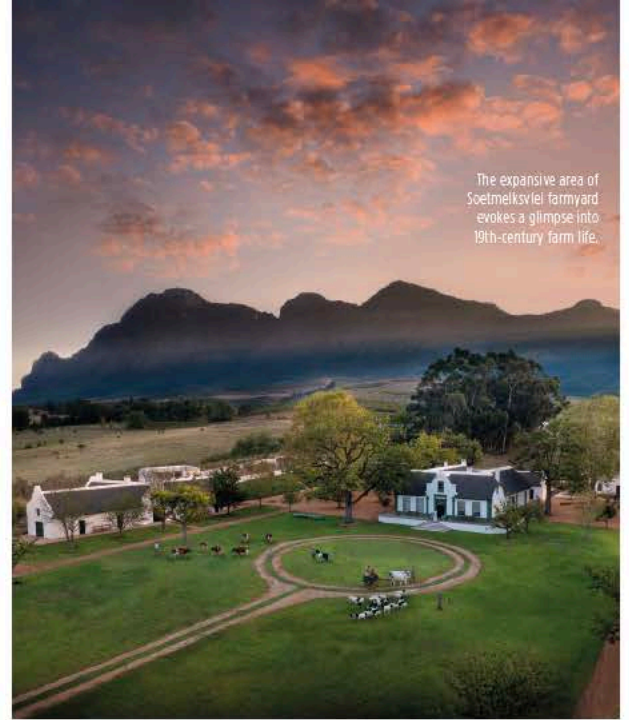
**O**wner and former magazine editor Karen

Roos and her husband Koos Bekker initially purchased the Babylonstoren farm as their weekend retreat space. However, its history and beauty caught them completely off-guard, and they knew instantly this place offered something so special that it needed to be shared with the world. Karen as well as Dalené Claasens, director of the Babylonstoren hotel and hospitality, shared a few hidden details about this utopia that has become a sanctuary for many.

**Can you tell us a little bit about the farm?**

**Dalené:** Babylonstoren's life started in 1692, when Governor Simon van der Stel granted the free burgher Pieter van der Byl a piece of land at the foot of a conical hill. It was dubbed, in Dutch, Babilonische Tooren, later Babilonstoring or Babylonstoren, as the 17th-century farmers thought its shape resembled the Tower of Babel mentioned in the Bible. An interesting speculation is that the name also suggests the linguistic melting pot the valley became at that time, with Dutch, French, German and various Khoi and San languages intermingling, and exotic Asian words sailing in with the spice trade – all of which evoke the biblical story of the Tower of Babel.

The oldest buildings were erected in the late



The expansive area of Soetmelksvlei farmyard evokes a glimpse into 19th-century farm life.

17th century, with the Manor House dating back to 1777. After the property was bought by the current owners in 2007, they entrusted French architect Patrice Taravella, owner of Prieuré Notre Dame d'Orsan (near Bourges in France), to design the garden. Over the next few years, pergolas, gravel pathways and water canals were built. During 2009, the gardeners started preparing the soil and did most of the planting for the formal garden. Babylonstoren officially opened its doors to the public in November 2010.

**What has been your intention for the public in sharing this space with them?**

**Karen:** Our intention was

for the visitors to ground themselves again. To enjoy the mountains all around as much as we do, pick their own healthy fruit and veg, play pétanque, swim in the farm dam, enjoy an hour in the spa, eat a simple fresh dish at one of the restaurants, walk up the conical hill, await a sunset with a glass of wine in hand and reconnect with nature.

**How are you involved in the community?**

**Dalené:** Babylonstoren is proud to be rooted in the Boland community. We believe that the success of our own farm ultimately depends on the success of our employees, their families as well as the community. Although it's an ongoing journey, our aim is to encourage such success in

all facets of business on the farm. To this end, we have several endeavours ongoing, including the Babylonstoren Learning Centre.

This centre has been a core part of the farm's overall vision since day one. The purpose is to provide youngsters of the family with every opportunity to follow their dreams and give their parents (who are part of the farm workforce) peace of mind that their children are being well educated and cared for, close by.

**Tell us the inspiration behind the design of the garden.**

**Karen:** The historical Cape Dutch manor house, with its formal fruit and vegetable garden, is the heart of the farm. The garden's design



The orange grove is as much a focal point as it is a source of sustenance on Babylonstoren's working farm.



was inspired by the original Company's Garden in Cape Town, which supplied sailing ships of the Dutch East India Company with fresh fruit and vegetables during the days when the Cape was a halfway station between Europe and Asia. But we also link it back to the mythological hanging gardens of Babylon, thought to have been created by Nebuchadnezzar for his wife in the sixth century BC, who longed for the mountains and valleys of her youth.

In 2007, when we approached Patrice to begin the redesign of the garden, we knew we couldn't go wrong. There, he had reconstructed a medieval cloistered garden on the site of a restored 12th-century monastery. I was drawn to Patrice's inherent discipline. It is almost Cartesian in the tradition of classical

French gardens. And he's remarkable in that he really understands the movement of people: how to make a garden hold you and calm you down.

**Tell us more about the water channels: How do they contribute to the farm?**

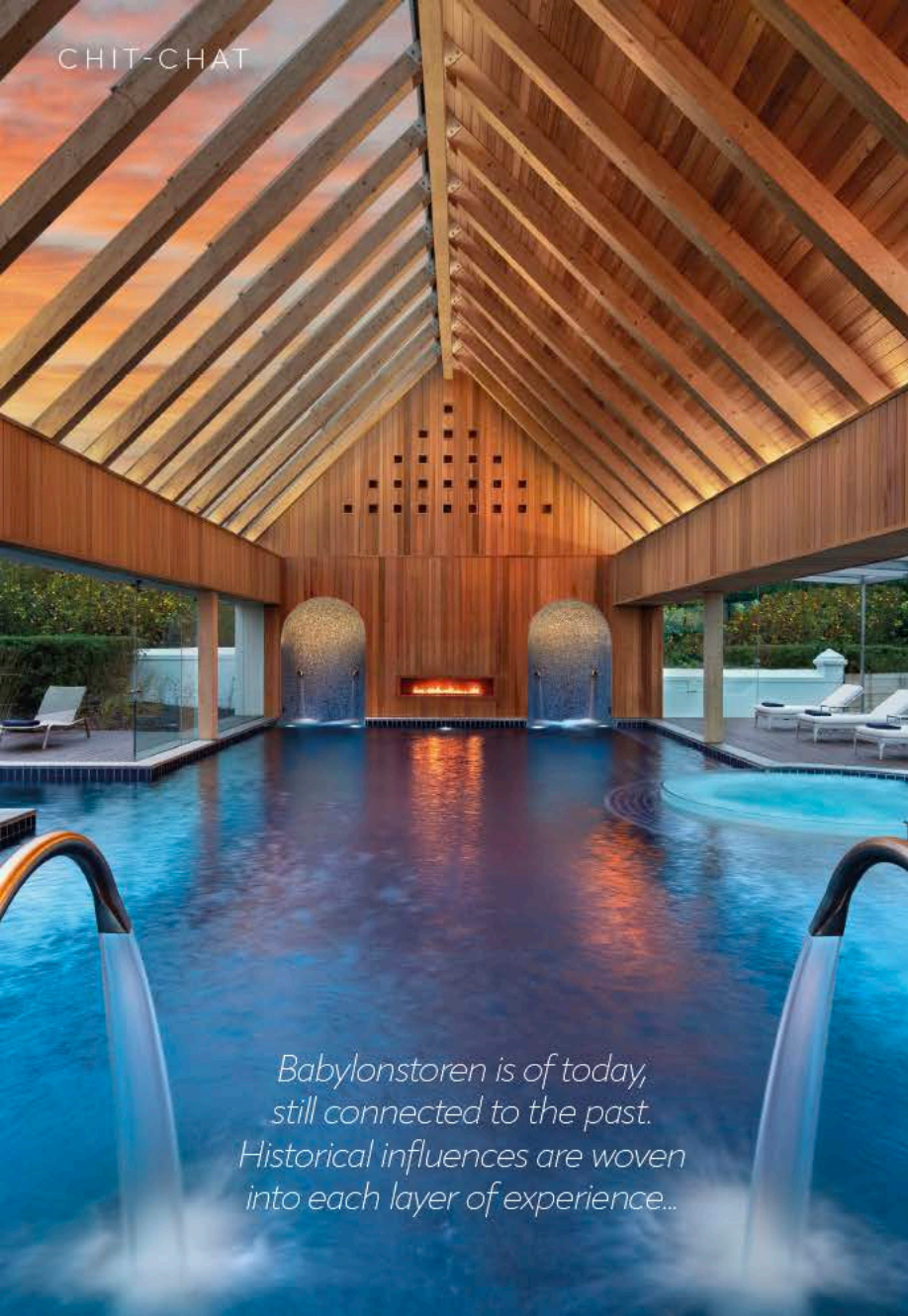
**Dalene:** Even though the farm is situated in the rainfall-scarce Western Cape, it is blessed with a supply of water that has its source in the mountain streams that feed the farm. A variety of water channels and features seamlessly augment the grid layout of the garden.

Water channels traverse the garden and some – centred on an aged, leaning oak – are charmingly edged in simple river stones. Water flows quickly, gurgling as it goes and reflecting light from the sky. Drainage channels in the garden



SCAN HERE

to experience a walk through the farm



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still connected to the past.  
Historical influences are woven  
into each layer of experience...*

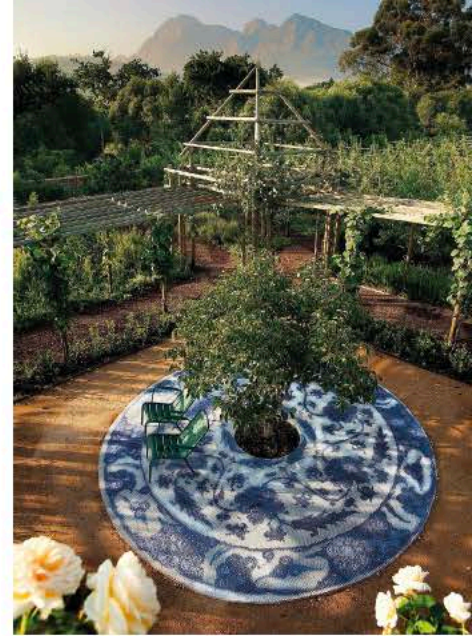
also allow for run-off of excess water. The northern side of the garden is bounded by a raised water channel running alongside the walkway.

This leiwater channel supplies three fish ponds at the lower end of the garden. It also feeds two smaller ground-level transverse water channels, one of which detours to provide the flood irrigation system in the citrus block. Water flow is controlled in an age-old manner, with a system of wooden sluice gates operated with crafted wrought-iron handles and locks. A citrus hedge runs above the leiwater channel, giving privacy to the guest cottages behind.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS SUPPLIED

**How would you say that Babylonstoren connects its historical past to its present-day experience?**

**Dalené:** Babylonstoren is of today, still connected to the past. Historical influences are woven into each layer of experience, and allusions to gardens of the past abound. We all have ideas of how the Garden of Eden might have looked. Paradise gardens of the Middle East with their grids of water channels and fountains are referenced, as are the walled, monastic kitchen gardens of the Middle Ages and the geometric patterns of the Renaissance. We hope Babylonstoren will remain an iconic space for everyone to create memories at.



Originally a family home dating back to 1777, the Manor House still maintains its Cape Dutch architecture.

