

# GARDENS OF BABYLON

A HISTORIC VINEYARD AND FARM JUST OUTSIDE CAPE TOWN HAS BEEN GIVEN A NEW LEASE OF LIFE AS A CONTEMPORARY FARM STAY, THANKS TO THE INSPIRED VISION OF ITS OWNERS.

PHOTOGRAPHER **ADRIAAN LOUW** PRODUCER/WRITER **KERRY N FISCHER**



Garden Salads

Green - Crisp green vegetables & fruit  
- 100% organic, hand-picked - R12

Red - Red fruits & vegetables with a balsamic  
- hand-picked, organic, delicious - R12

White - Cress, green beans & vegetables with  
- 100% organic, hand-picked, delicious - R12

Other menu items:

Grilled Chicken	R12
Grilled Fish	R12
Grilled Lamb	R12
Grilled Pork	R12

ADRIAAN LOUW AND KERRY N FISCHER COURTESY FRANK FEATURES

Babel, the main restaurant at Babylonstoren farm and vineyard in Franschhoek, is situated in a renovated cow shed. The pillars date back to the early 19th century, and the main wall features a large tiled image of a bull, which was discovered at the Salone del Mobile in 2010.

The all-white interiors of the farm stay are designed to create a still space, allowing you to enjoy the garden, mountains and nature on your doorstep. **OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT:** along with a bakery, Babylonstoren also sells locally produced cheeses and charcuterie; some of the delicious produce available at the Farm Shop; the Green House's conservatory was custom-built in France by Serres et Ferronneries d'Antan, who specialise in creating and restoring greenhouses and conservatories.



**W**ith one of the best preserved *werfs* (farmyards) in Cape Town, the fortunes of Babylonstoren, a Drakenstein Valley farm dating back to 1690, took a dramatic turn when former magazine editor Karen Roos and her husband Koos Bekker, chief executive of Naspers, one of South Africa's largest media groups, took ownership. Together, their combined passion for and knowledge of historic Cape Dutch properties and formal gardens has ensured its survival for the future, with an authentic yet contemporary restoration.

The original manor house, along with 11 immaculately restored Cape Dutch cottages, make up the Farm Hotel. They are set within three hectares of cultivated fruit and vegetable gardens against the backdrop of the majestic Simonsberg, Du Toits Peak and Franschhoek mountains. Divided into 15 areas, which incorporate vegetable plots, berry growing, bees for pollinating, indigenous plants, fragrant lawns of thyme and a prickly pear maze, the garden is an ever-changing tapestry.

Inspired by The Company's Gardens — a park and heritage site in Cape Town that once supplied passing ships with food — all of the 300 plus plant varieties at Babylonstoren are edible. Many of the trees were sourced according to their historical significance and provenance. Good examples include olive trees more than 100 years old, and the willow tree at the dam that is said to have originated at Napoleon's grave.

The original cottages emulate a farm stay experience with their thick walls and curved gables, but are paired with contemporary furniture from design brands such as Kartell, Magis, Philippe Starck and Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec. The effect is both relaxed and well-heeled. A contemporary glass box has been added to each cottage to house a kitchen and dining area for those travelling gourmands who prefer to experiment with the produce firsthand.

With two restaurants plus a bakery and deli, you won't go hungry. Babel, the farm's beautifully appointed main restaurant, delivers a menu that celebrates the flavours of the garden in fresh, original and deliciously simple dishes designed by Maranda Engelbrecht, a food stylist and author. The wine tasting area also hosts pizza and pasta evenings. And then there's the Green House, a 26m-long conservatory that dishes up farm-fresh fare all day long.

At Babylonstoren, the days are intentionally unscripted. Guests are encouraged to wander through the magnificent gardens and pick fruit, herbs and vegetables, and even partake in harvesting, pruning and planting if the mood takes them. Or you can sample the excellent treatments on offer at the spa or exercise in the gym and swim in the farm dam that has been converted into the most stylish of pools. Mountain bikes are available, as well as canoes on a larger dam on the farm. The farm shop is a delight and the guided garden tours an absolute must. **VE+T**  
*Babylonstoren; babylonstoren.co.za.*

## ARTISAN DELIGHTS

If you're going to make the trip to Babylonstoren, add on a day to visit picturesque Stellenbosch village, just a 25-minute drive away. When you arrive, head straight to Fritz Schoon's artisan bakery, De Oude Bank Bakkerij.

Situated in an old bank in the town's Church Street, the rustic bakery is an enchanting place where delicious bread and pastries, excellent coffee and all the associated accoutrements are found in plentiful supply.

There's something magical about the process of making bread and for Schoon, who trained as a quantity surveyor, it's a dream come true. "All I wanted to do was bake bread," he says.

It started with a wood-fired oven that Schoon built himself. Then a coffee machine was installed in case someone had to wait for their bread. And then it gradually metamorphosed into a restaurant.

In June this year it was expanded further to accommodate a new section called Schoon De Companje, which sells everything from fresh fruit and vegetables to flowers. Walk up the carved wooden staircase to find the wine shop hidden away in the loft. There's also a butcher (Nice To Meat You), coffee roaster (Het Roosterij) and ice-cream parlour (Fanny Chanel Artisan Ice Cream) — all housed in an old-world space characterised by high ceilings, old tiled floors and stained-glass windows. It's a feast for the eyes and the tummy, and well worth the side trip. *Visit [decompanje.co.za](http://decompanje.co.za).*