



GARDEN **OF** FEDEN

The winelands' newest culinary offering, Babel, promises to be as fresh and unique as its garden setting on the historic farm Babylonstoren in the Groot Drakenstein valley

PHOTOGRAPHS **DOOK**
PRODUCTION **ANNEMARIE MEINTJES**
FOOD STYLING **MARANDA ENGELBRECHT**
TEXT **LAURIAN BROWN**

Opposite: In the cool and sparkling interior – once a cow shed – chefs' recommendations will be written up daily on a tiled wall, under the watchful eye of the bull.



Back in 2007, when décor whiz Karen Roos undertook the restoration of the beautiful old Cape Dutch manor house and *werf* at Babylonstoren farm in the Groot Drakenstein valley, everyone familiar with the author and magazine editor knew this project would be one to watch. Due to open its doors this month, a new wine cellar awaits the first harvest and, among the venerable oaks and wild olives, 14 suites in thatched cottages are ready for guests. The former cow shed,

THE FORMER COW SHED HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO AN AIRY RESTAURANT

meanwhile, has been transformed into an airy restaurant, Babel, that promises a memorable new kind of cuisine.

The real heart of the farm, however, is a fruit and vegetable garden of serious splendour. Eight acres of formal abundance embrace an astonishing range of fresh produce and many layers of gardening history. The garden's geometry echoes that of Cape Town's Company Garden in its flourishing 18th-century heyday, but also harks back to the horticultural traditions of the medieval monastery and the ancient paradisiacal gardens of Mesopotamia. Pattern upon pattern, variety upon variety of espaliered trees, trellised vines and neat blocks of

This page: Newly fitted glass walls open onto a terrace shaded by young plane trees.

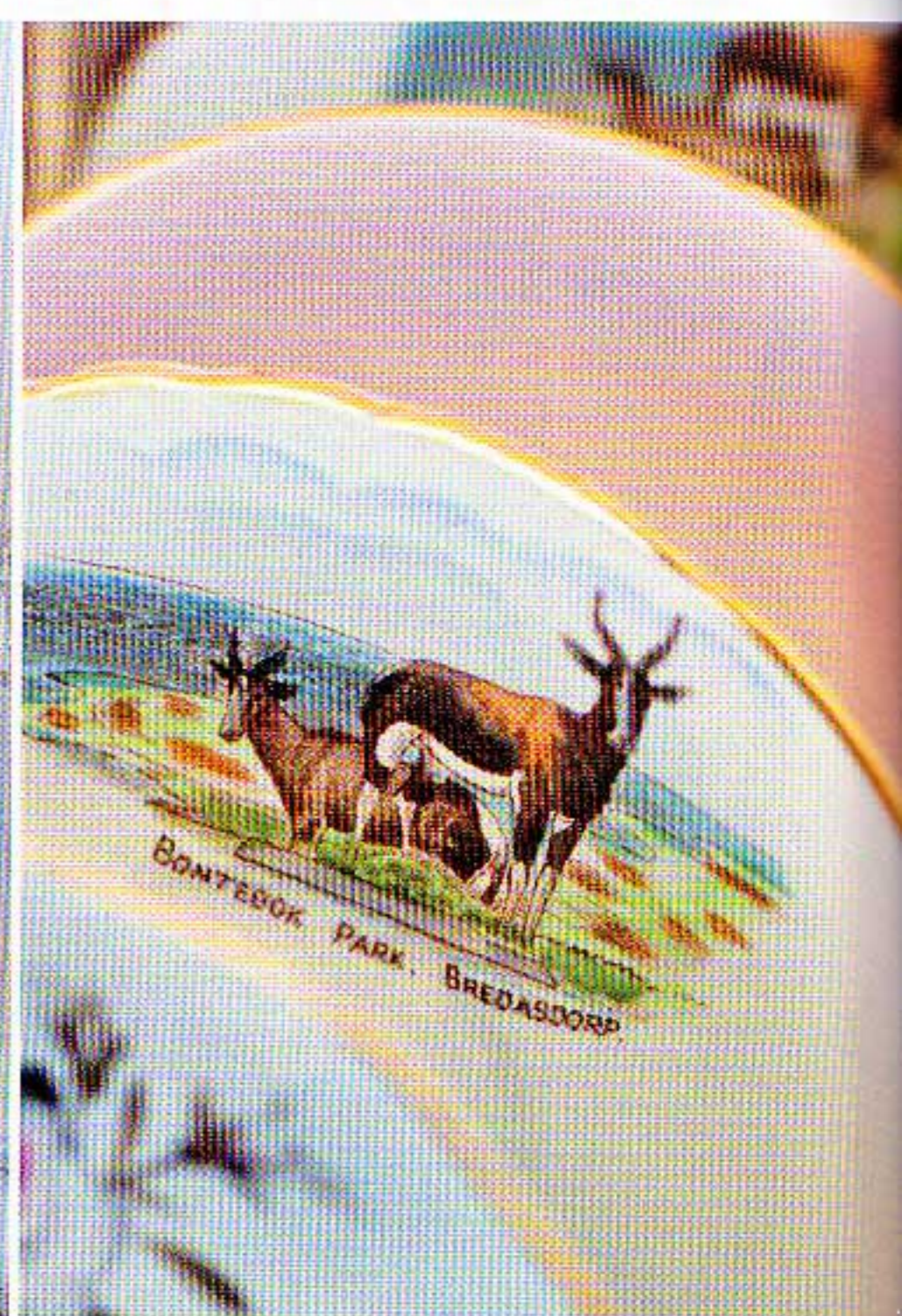




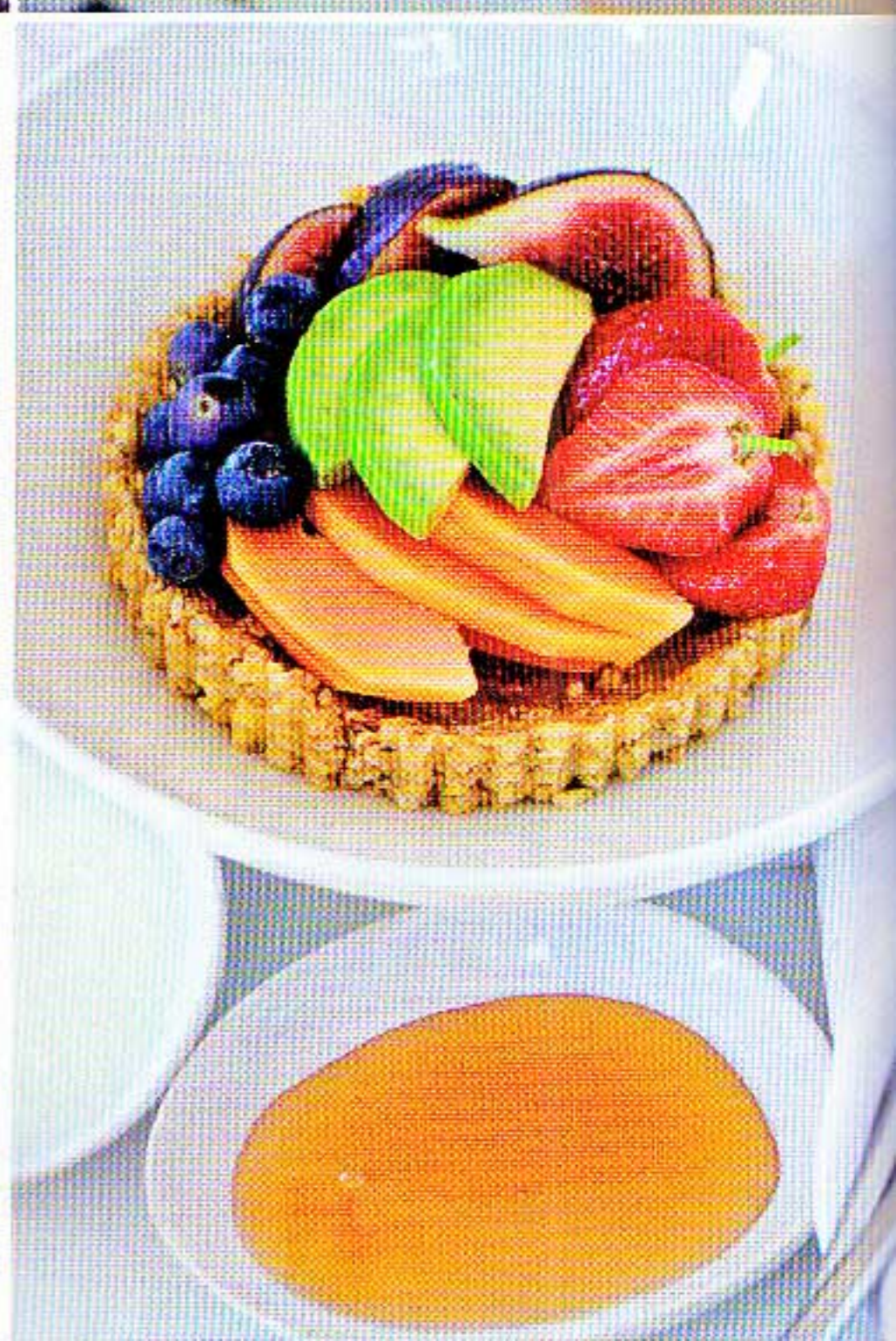
BETROOT AND STRAWBERRY CAKE WITH SAGE,
BERRY AND BETROOT SORBET

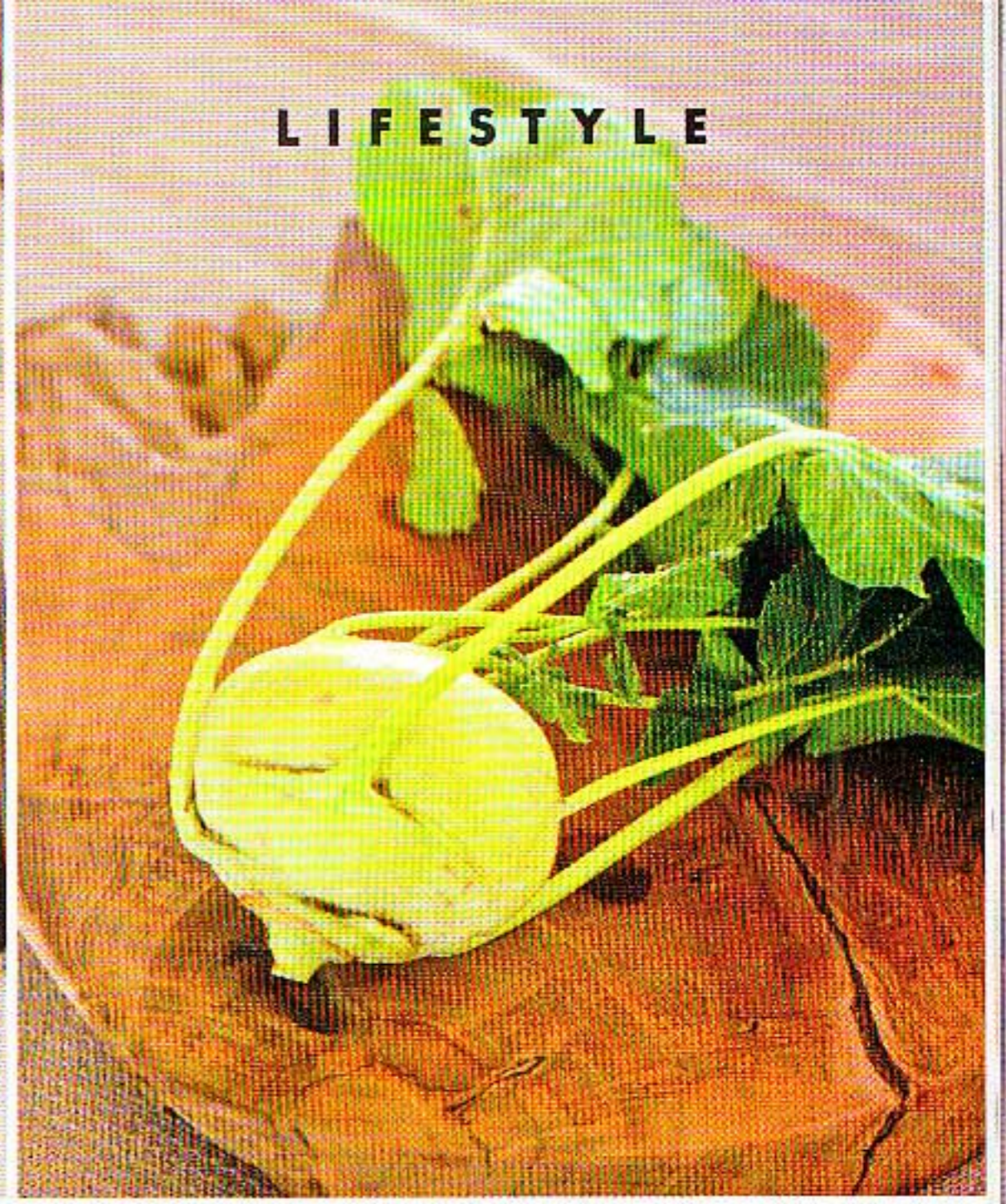


THE GARDEN HARKS BACK TO THE HORTICULTURAL TRADITIONS OF THE

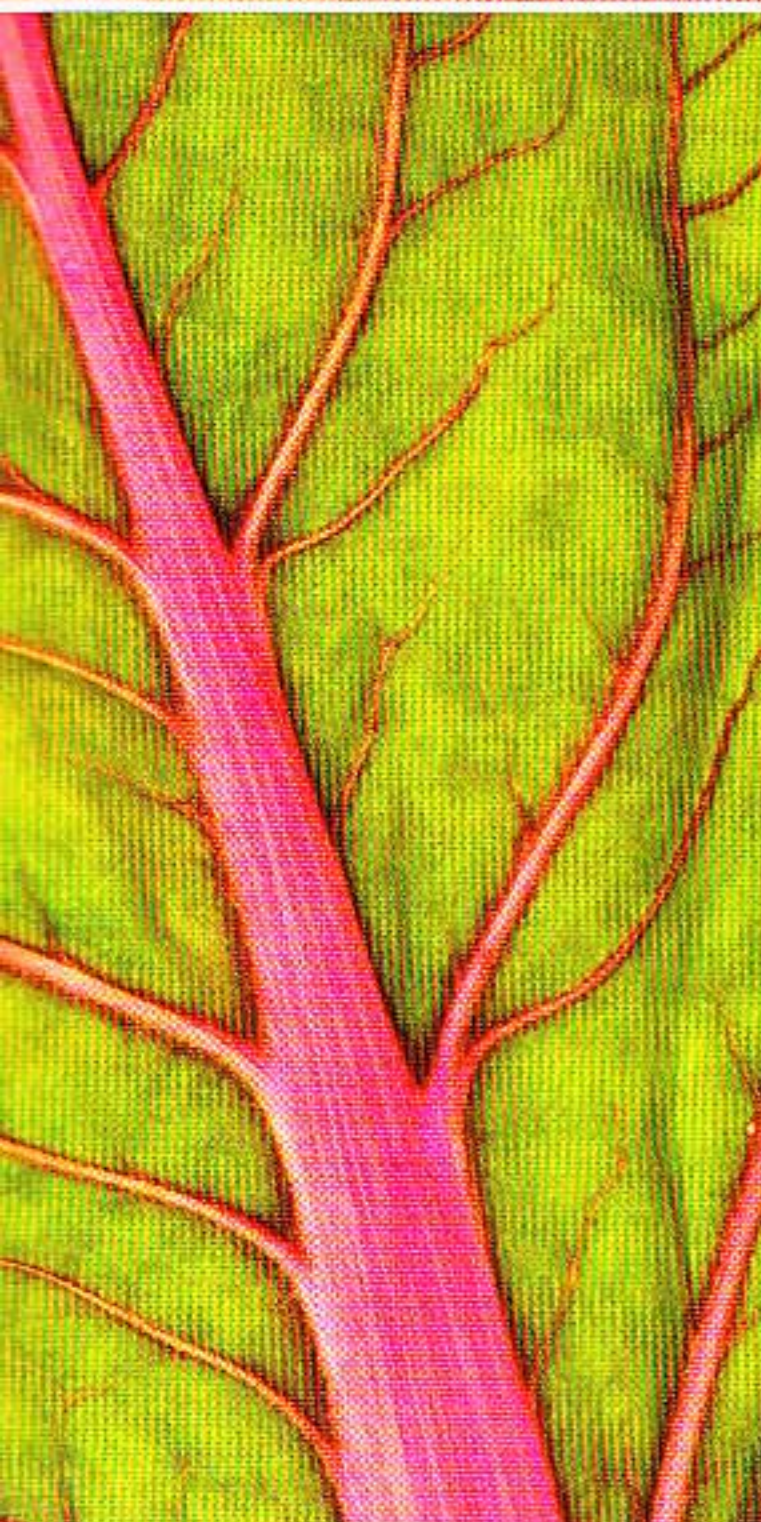


This spread: Food magician Maranda Engelbrecht lends her expert touch to exquisite dishes like slow-roasted leg of lamb in a nest of wild mountain rosemary (this page, top right) and Babel's irresistible breakfast tart (this page, bottom right) using fresh produce from the Babylonstoren gardens.





MEDIAVAL MONASTERY AND THE ANCIENT GARDENS OF MESOPOTAMIA



vegetables and herbs are a feast for the eye as well as a celebration of the great heritage of fruit-and-vegetable cultivation handed down across continents and millennia.

And it is this abundance that will provide daily inspiration for the chefs at Babel, who will be working under the guidance of Maranda Engelbrecht, renowned stylist and Woolworths' food consultant for the past 11 years. "I was thrilled when Karen approached me because I just knew that this would be different to anything else I've ever done," says the former owner of Cape Town's Manna Epicure restaurant. "I also realised it would take my knowledge of food so much further – it would give me the opportunity to learn about different fruit and vegetable cultivars and experiment with the best ways to enjoy them."

Guests should brace themselves for a completely novel dining experience. "We're done with caviar and foie gras and truffles, and it's no longer necessary to have 15

suppliers can provide. "Because of our extensive garden, we will try to buy in the absolute minimum."

Accompaniments will include the starches – potatoes, grains and bread. If you fancy one of Babel's hearty farm loaves, you can design your own sandwich. Of course, there will be certain constants: one or two of the best local cheeses and Serrano-style ham from Wellington. "If you want your salad with cheese you can slice your own and have it weighed," explains Maranda, "It will all be very personal, with a lot of bespoke options."

There will also be a selection of delicious sweet things – "somewhere between cake and dessert" – all, naturally, based on fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as various herbal teas and concentrates to refresh those returning parched from their exploration of the garden.

The old cow shed is now as cool and sparkling as one of these infusions. Glass walls open onto a little herb garden on one side and

BEETROOT AND STRAWBERRY CAKE WITH SAGE, BERRY AND BEETROOT SORBET

Serves 4 ■ A LITTLE EFFORT ■ GREAT VALUE

Preparation: 30 minutes, plus chilling time

Cooking: 20 minutes

For the cake:

4 medium beetroots, cooked and skinned

350 g strawberries, hulled

honey, for drizzling

For the sorbet:

2 medium beetroots, cooked and skinned

1 cup frozen mixed berries

60 g caster sugar

15 g sage, stalks removed

To make the cake: Slice the cooked beetroot into 5 mm slices. Slice the strawberries into 3 mm slices. In a 15 cm loose-bottomed tin, layer the beetroot and strawberry slices, alternating as you go. When the tin is full, gently press down on the filling, then wrap tightly in clingfilm. Chill for 3 to 4 hours. To serve, remove the outer ring of the tin and carefully slice the cake with a sharp knife, then drizzle with honey.

To make the sorbet: Combine all the ingredients in a food processor, then churn in an ice-cream machine according to the manufacturer's instructions.

To serve: Serve slices of the beetroot and strawberry cake with generous spoonfuls of sage, berry and beetroot sorbet.

IT'S NO LONGER NECESSARY TO HAVE 15 INGREDIENTS IN A SINGLE RECIPE

ingredients in a single recipe," says Maranda firmly. "It's now about reinventing fresh garden produce, keeping it simple but introducing new flavour combinations so that you actually taste what you are eating."

Expect to be surprised when you see the menus. "I find menus are often quite static, so we're taking an approach that will involve the diner in a different way," she continues. "The offering will begin with the pick of the day from the garden. Fruit and veg will be grouped according to colour – red, green or yellow – because each hue represents their different nutritional values. Guests will be able to choose whether they want their fresh produce combined in a salad or lightly steamed."

So, choose, say, artichokes, fennel, chervil, kohlrabi, celery, apples and mint, and the chef will compose a green salad for you – Maranda foresees that each plate emerging from the kitchen will be absolutely unique. Then, add to that your choice of protein: fish, meat and poultry will be the best that local

a terrace shaded by young plane trees on the other. It's a light and airy space, with the open-plan kitchen up a few steps to the north end. Furnished with a mix of wood, steel and Perspex, everything is light, white or transparent: Luxembourg chairs, *bankies*, scrubbed wooden, zinc-topped and Kartell tables; informal but elegant, plain yet festive, all in inimitable Karen Roos style.

Babel's wine list will be an evolving one. The aim is to support smaller, more exclusive wineries, while looking forward to adding the estate's own wine to the list. "I want Babel to be an inspiration," says Maranda. "We will accommodate what guests want, but also guide them to a different experience every time. A visit to Babylonstoren will always be a special occasion because it demands time. Time to come here, time to explore the garden, time to eat and time to enjoy." **W**

Babel, Babylonstoren, off the R45 on the Klapmuts-Simondium Road; tel: (021) 863-1804; www.babylonstoren.com

SLOW-ROASTED LEG OF LAMB IN A NEST OF ROSEMARY

Serves 6 to 8 ■ EASY ■ GREAT VALUE

Preparation: 15 minutes

Cooking: 2 to 3 hours, plus 30 minutes resting time

1.5–2 kg free-range leg of lamb, bone in sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 head garlic

1 onion

2 fresh bay leaves

extra virgin olive oil, for drizzling

1 T whole-grain mustard

1 large bunch rosemary

12 stalks rainbow chard, leaves removed and stalks lightly steamed

Preheat the oven to 160°C. Place the lamb in a lidded roasting pan and season to taste. Add the garlic, onion and bay leaves and drizzle generously with oil. Close the lid and roast for 2 to 3 hours, or until the meat pulls away from the bone. Remove from the oven and allow to rest for 30 minutes. Pour the pan juices into a small saucepan placed over a medium heat and reduce by half. Strain through a sieve, then add the mustard and season to taste. Remove the lamb from the oven, wrap in the rosemary and secure with string. Return to the roasting pan, drizzle with the reduced pan juices and roast for a further 20 minutes. Remove the meat from the rosemary nest and slice, then serve warm with stalks of lightly steamed rainbow chard.

SLOW-ROASTED LEG OF LAMB IN A NEST OF ROSEMARY

