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BABYLONSTOREN IN BLOOM • TOP BIKE TRAILS • JAMESTOWN ART ROUTE



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BLOOMIN' GORGEOUS

They may not hang like the gardens of Babylon, but the clivias of BABYLONSTOREN are no less a wonder to behold. Head gardener Liesl van der Walt suggests you come to see them this, and every, spring.



There's lots to explore in the 3,5-hectare garden, inspired by the historic Company's Garden in Cape Town.



LEFT: *Clivia* flowers usually have six petals, but many of the new hybrids have more. This orange multi-petal flower has eight petals.
ABOVE LEFT: This is a specimen plant and show winner with four flowering stems of yellow blooms.
ABOVE RIGHT: Flowers with splashes of white are known as watercolours or ghosts.

with the best". Hybridising clivias is a mathematical game that requires patience: once the male pollen has been selected, it is carefully deposited on the female stigma – and then you wait between three and seven years before you can evaluate how well the seedlings flower. Many of the less than perfect seedlings found a home at Babylonstoren and have flourished beyond expectation. Between 2008 and 2010, Hans sent us almost 7000 plants that flowered with such overwhelming abundance that the clivia display is now a not-to-be-missed highlight on the Babylonstoren calendar.

In 2011, the clivia collection of Mick Dower also found a new home at Babylonstoren. Mick, a well-known lawyer in Cape Town, amassed clivias with a passion. Over 20 years he built up an extensive collection of species and hybrids by trading with other clivia breeders from around the world. Accompanied by his good friend John Winter (retired Kirstenbosch curator and a great plantsman and clivia expert), he went on collecting trips to some of the more hidden corners of clivia habitat in southern Africa and there they selected from the wild (with permits) for the Kirstenbosch collection and added new energy to the breeding programmes of many clivia enthusiasts. Among the numerous variants they collected were the well-known Apple Blossom strain, the Komgha Red, the Mbashe and the Umtamvuma Pastels. When Mick died, his clivias – almost 600 plants in pots – were brought to Babylonstoren. To display this much-admired collection, a shade structure known as the Puff Adder was designed and built and now this 70-metre tunnel of slatted balau timber 'slithers' among the wild olive and blue gum trees.

The clivia is a proudly southern African plant and there are only six species: *Clivia miniata*, *C. robusta*, *C. gardenii*, *C. nobilis*, *C. caulescens*

I AM OFTEN ASKED which is my favourite part of the garden and it's a question I find difficult to answer. My response changes with the seasons and often from morning to evening. But in September and October, predictably, we all fall in love with the walk along the stream where the clivias flower in the shade of ancient wild olive trees – a magical mingling of colour and energy that brings joy every year.

The first plants came to Babylonstoren as a gift from clivia expert Dr Hans Roos, who recognised that the shade under the wild olives would be the ideal growing spot for them, with healthy ventilation provided by the generous south-easterly wind that blows through during Cape summers. He sent a few thousand plants from his garden in Johannesburg, where he selects and hybridises "the best



Individual clivias are displayed inside the Puff Adder, a 70-metre shaded walk.



LEFT: A mass display of clivias in the shade of wild olive trees at Babylonstoren.

OPPOSITE BELOW LEFT: Mick Dower used this plant with variegated leaves, known as De Villiers Peach, in many of his hybrids.

OPPOSITE BELOW RIGHT: It is the dream of many clivia enthusiasts to breed a plant with a flower head in the shape of a large football.

BELOW: Nakamura Red has tulip-shaped, deep red flowers.



BABYLONSTOREN: WHAT & WHERE

This historical Cape Dutch farm on the slopes of Simonsberg has at its heart a 3.5-hectare garden of fruits and vegetables where guests are invited to pick and taste the diversity of crops harvested daily for the guest cottages and restaurants. The clivias, as well as a growing collection of indigenous plants that include cycads and succulents, flourish alongside the likes of prickly pears, plums, berries, nuts, citrus fruits, mulberries, figs and persimmons.

When you stop to appreciate the colour and catch the sweet perfume, your

experience of clivias changes forever.



and, the rarest of them all, *C. mirabilis*. Discovered fairly recently near Nieuwoudtville, *C. mirabilis* was an unexpected botanical miracle when it was found in the semi-desert of the Northern Cape, a landscape that is in sharp contrast to the traditional summer-rainfall, forested habitat favoured by the other five species.

Clivias are evergreen, slow-growing, long-lived and remarkably drought resistant, all characteristics that equip them well to flourish in gardens and homes. *Clivia miniata* is the species most commonly grown, with its large heads of many trumpet-shaped flowers in colours that range from yellow to orange and red in the wild. Pollen deliberately transferred from one flower to the stigma of another has resulted in hybrids between species that have many different shapes, sizes and colours, and when you walk among Mick Dower's collection, you can enjoy this variable kaleidoscope that clivias offer breeders. Nor is it just the flowers that engage breeders' attention. In China and Japan, the beauty of the

foliage is considered supreme and dwarf clivias with short, wide and variegated leaves are produced.

To you and me, just looking at the massed display may be a wondrous experience, but a clivia breeder will tell you that not all flowers are equal in beauty. When you stop to count the flowers per head and the number of petals per floret, to consider the shape of the flower head and of the petals, to appreciate the colour of the flower's throat and to catch the sweet perfume, your experience of clivias changes forever. (I am not always sure that this is a good thing – you may get hooked!) But take the time to look closely at the many well-known and desirable hybrids in the Mick Dower collection – such as the green and yellow Hirao; TK Best Bronze, an unusual bronze bred in Japan by Toshio Koike; Vico Yellow with its large yellow flowers; the floriferous Cameron Peach and Lipstick, red tipped with white – and you'll understand what I mean. ▼

JOHAN WILKE - COURTESY BABYLONSTOREN