

• SOUTH AFRICA •

## GARDENS of BABYLON

Visit this historic vineyard in the Franschhoek valley, just outside Cape Town, and discover a contemporary farm hotel where food is served fresh from eight acres of beautiful gardens

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When we bought the farm six years ago, I knew I would have to devote all of my time to making this project happen,' recalls Karen Roos, the former editor of ELLE Decoration South Africa who, with her husband Koos Bekker, now owns Babylonstoren, one of the best-preserved *werfs* (farm yards) in the Cape.

Today, the original 18th-century manor house and 13 classic Cape Dutch cottages make up a restored farm hotel, which is set against a majestic backdrop of the Simonsberg, Du Toitskloof and Franschhoek mountains. The cottages' thick walls, curved gables and hearty fireplaces suggest a traditional farm-stay experience, but with a contemporary twist: furniture is by brands such as Kartell, Magis and Driade, and an ultra-modern glass extension houses the kitchen and dining area.

Then there's the eight-acre garden, a constantly changing tapestry that informs every aspect of life here, and one of the real draws for guests coming to stay. Split into 15 sections, it features fruit and vegetables, indigenous plants, fragrant lawns of thyme and a prickly pear maze. Many of the fruit orchards have trees more than 100 years old and all of the 300 varieties of plant are edible, from blood oranges and persimmons to asparagus and mushrooms. And with

two places to eat on the property - Babel and The Green House (pictured opposite), a custom-built conservatory where snacks are served - plus a bakery, charcuterie, fromagerie and bees for making honey, there's no chance of anyone going hungry.

The main dining zone, Babel, celebrates the flavours of the garden through fresh, no-fuss dishes overseen by food stylist and author Maranda Engelbrecht, who groups the food on the menu according to colour and taste. A 'fresh from the garden' section showcases fruit and vegetables in a choice of red, green and yellow, paired with optional extras such as salmon trout, smoked chicken, biltong and cheese. Meanwhile, the home-grown approach is carried through to the interior, where table arrangements artfully combine heads of savoy cabbage with striking clusters of broccoli flowers. 'We are beholden to the garden,' Engelbrecht explains.

Days are intentionally unscripted, with guests encouraged to take part in harvesting, pruning and planting if the mood takes them. There are also wine-tasting evenings, a spa, and a reservoir that has been converted into the most stylish of pools. Borrow mountain bikes, go canoeing, visit the farm shop - and, of course, take a guided tour of those gorgeous gardens. [babylonstoren.com](http://babylonstoren.com)

PHOTOS: WAREHOUSHEALY/FRANK FEATURES (THIS PAGE); ANDRIANUS/STANISLAV KREJCI (OPPOSITE)



This page: The Babylonstoren farm hotel's verdant gardens provide a wide variety of fresh food for guests. Opposite: Snacks are served in the lush surroundings of custom-built conservatory The Green House ▶





Garden Salads

- Green - Crisp green vegetable & fruit  
with shaved, braised chicken  
- Macadamia & walnut dressing - R10
- Red - Apple, fruit & vegetable with a chicken  
pancetta, potato, mushroom & feta  
- Eye herbaceous dressing - R10
- Yellow - Carrots of yellow fruit & vegetable with  
zesty chicken, potato & cornmeal soup  
- Herb & olive herbaceous - R10
- Other like to light
- Green Chicken R10
- Grilled Tuna R10
- Spring Chicken R10
- Grilled Lamb R10

**Opposite** The hotel is made up of 13 original Cape Dutch cottages, whose traditional architecture belies their ultra-modern interiors.  
**This page** The menu at Babel – one of two restaurants on the property – is dictated by availability in the garden and grouped according to colour, as befits its creator, a food stylist. **15**