

A labour of love and the result of years of preparation, the Eden that is Babylonstoren, between Franschhoek and Paarl, is a lesson in well-laid plans coming to fruition. The passion project of decor doyenne Karen Roos, the garden's transformation, scale and magnificence is down to a carefully picked team of gardeners and a grand vision. Where a few years ago there was swampy wasteland and a few gnarled and scattered fruit trees, now extends an artfully composed wonderland of fruit, vegetables, water features, flowers and fowl. Story trees from Newton's garden or Gethsemane, heirloom varieties and indigenous herbs are just some of the wonders you'll encounter on a garden tour.

Heading up the team is Liesl van der Walt, whose incredible depth of experience gives her a skillset uniquely suited to planning ahead, tending plants and working with people. Having spent 20 years as a horticulturalist at Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden working with annuals and perennials, she studied landscape architecture and acquired her Masters all while working and raising a family. A move to Stellenbosch, prompted by her husband's winemaking venture, left her perfectly placed to accept an invitation to design the fragrance garden at Babylonstoren, a role which ▶

FROM TOP Liesl van der Walt in the fragrance garden she designed; Babylonstoren boasts a blend of loose and structure planting, these santolina, and other herbs between the plum trees, adding a fresh meadow feel



Garden of EARTHLY DELIGHTS

Babylonstoren's bounty is matched only by its beauty and the passion of Liesl van der Walt and her team of gardeners



FROM LEFT Produce is selected fresh every morning for the farm's two restaurants; a prickly-pear maze provides sculptural interest; Van der Walt and Simoné Rossouw



FROM TOP The format of the garden is designed for functionality as well as aesthetics; in The Greenhouse, herbs from the garden are used to concoct teas – the gardeners are always looking to expand their selection of edible flowers and plants

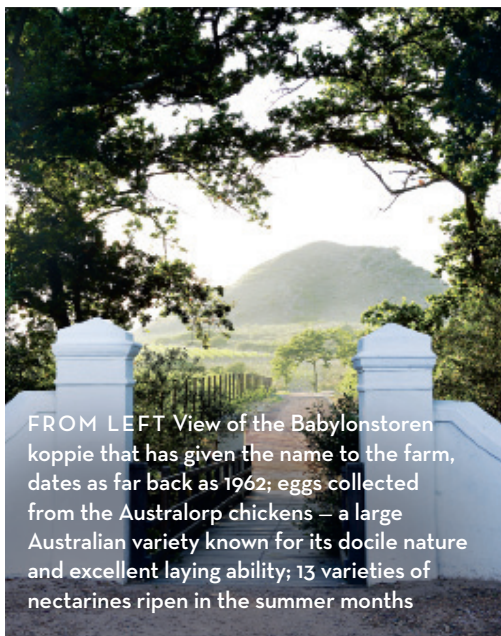


FROM LEFT Among the large team are Gundula Deutschländer and Terry de Waal, the estate manager; ducks and chickens form part of the well-rounded ecosystem

has grown over time. Humble to the point of self-effacement, she's adamant that the reason for Babylonstoren's success is the team behind it.

And indeed it is – the committed gardeners, experts and foodies all contributing their particular breed of expertise to a garden that is a work in progress. 'In landscaping terms, this one is still very young,' she explains. Which makes its like-clockwork functionality and bounty all the more impressive. The kitchen team for the farm's restaurant Babel, chef Simoné Rossouw and one of the waiters, join Van Der Walt and veggie-garden head Constance Stuurman every morning from 7am til 10am selecting what's ripe and ready for the day's dishes. Everything in the three-and-a-half hectares is usable or edible, she explains. And little goes to waste – what doesn't get used in the restaurant or eaten that day is preserved or sold, or even recycled as compost. The sense of resourcefulness may sound practical but there is a sense of magic and romance in everything here. 'We're working on extracting the fragrance from the waterblommetjies to use in the spa – as a uniquely South African scent,' she says. Heavenly.

The prosaic and poetic combine in the minutest details – from crushed sea shells which line the walkways in the fragrance garden to decorative floor inlays made with the Dutch blue-and-white pottery shards found on the property. Contributing French architect Patrice Taravella – whose Prieuré d'Orsan gardens in France provided many elements of the design, also drew on Cape Town's Company Gardens as a source of inspiration for the layout. ▶



FROM LEFT View of the Babylonstoren koppie that has given the name to the farm, dates as far back as 1962; eggs collected from the Australorp chickens – a large Australian variety known for its docile nature and excellent laying ability; 13 varieties of nectarines ripen in the summer months





‘I love the sense of novelty inherent in the garden’s design – the owners have been very conscious about keeping it fun and introducing elements of surprise,’ says Van der Walt as she leads the way through varieties of lavender and thyme onto terracotta dams filled with waterblommetjies and talapia which then lead onto rows of vegetables and the exquisitely wrought fruit-tree blocks, berry bush enclosures, apiaries, a pen with what must be the world’s glossiest-looking chickens and even a prickly-pear maze. Old methods of espalier and pruning, mulching with fruit pips and watering citrus trees are combined with some fun contemporary elements. Water spouts in the spekboom labyrinth patch are activated by footsteps, a source of delight for the children especially. She goes on to mention that these plants are popular as they are water wise and super hardy. Her depth of knowledge is clear as facts and information sprout forth throughout the casual stroll. And it’s equally apparent in this garden that the investment in that expertise has paid off in spades.

■ *Babylonstoren* ☎ 021 863 3852;
 ☎ www.babylonstoren.com

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The Drakenstein Mountains, a dramatic backdrop to the garden; the vegetable team digging up sweet potatoes – (from left) Constance Stuurman, Benjamin Simons, Van der Walt, Wendoline Collins and Goodman Mfanyanga; scented climbing rose ‘Crème Caramel’

