

# HOUSE & GARDEN

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# Reverie in LIVING



Soetmelksvlei is Babylonstoren's homage to life at the turn of the 20th century — where a slower pace, craftsmanship and pastoral living have been recreated with accuracy and artistry

text HEIDI BERTISH

It is not often, especially in the current culture of frenzied novelty, that you find something genuinely transporting. Not metaphorically — truly, physically and almost soulfully transporting. Babylonstoren has achieved just that with Soetmelksvlei, its newest and most quietly ambitious venture: a living homage to farm life of a time past, that exists somewhere between a pastoral dreamscape and a study in thoughtful historical reconstruction.

Soetmelksvlei is not a themed attraction — it is, rather, an invocation of memory. Here, the year is 1897. The internet is unimaginable. The pace is poetic. And the living is beautifully, deliberately slow.

Upon arrival, guests are gently ushered into the temporal slipstream by a brief

PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED

## 'Soetmelksvlei is not a THEMED ATTRACTION — it is, rather, an INVOCATION OF MEMORY'

introductory film. It sets the stage, framing the lives of the (fictional, though entirely believable) Bosman family: Wynand and Magriet, with their children, Attie and Katie. They are the heart and narrative thread of Soetmelksvlei, and their imagined daily routines on the farm — preserving fruit, separating cream, raising oxen — provide the scaffolding for a deeply immersive experience.

The attention to detail is meticulous in the best possible way. You can sense it in the delicate lace curtains of the Farmhouse windows, in the hand-dipped candles casting a honeyed glow over the wooden kitchen table or in the fragranced herbs tied with twine in the bathrooms. Even the surfaces — laid in burnished peach pips —

speak of a time when resourcefulness was second nature, not a curated aesthetic.

In the Old Cellar, farming tools and techniques from the turn of the century are not just displayed but actively demonstrated. Flour is ground by hand in the Mill, an exact replica of a 19th-century water mill. Carpentry hums from the Workshop and the blacksmith, heat shimmering around his forge, fashions cast-iron cookware as though Amazon had never been invented. The pleasure is not in performance, but in presence — watching craft masters at work, unhurried.

Daily events are designed to enchant as well as educate: ox-wagon rides trundle across the grounds; kraal tours offer a glimpse into pastoral animal care;

### Plan your stay

Set aside three to four hours for your visit. The daily schedule is rich, but not rushed. Cream separation, blacksmithing, kraal tours, milling and witblits distilling are staggered throughout, with enough space in between to wander, watch, and simply be. Children are welcome (though supervision is essential around open water and machinery), and the farmyard's gentle chaos adds a charming unpredictability.

- **OPEN:** Wednesday to Sunday, 9–4pm (Winter) and 9–5pm (Summer).
- **TRANSPORT:** A shuttle leaves from Babylonstoren Wine Estate, at 15-minute intervals, from 8h30am to 1pm Wednesday to Sunday.

cream separation and witblits distillation (a potent local spirit) are revealed with theatrical flair. Children are gently absorbed into the rhythm, invited to play in the indoor barn-style playhouse or to feed the more docile farm animals under watchful supervision.

Lunch is as grounding a ritual as everything else here. At the Old Stables Restaurant, the fare is deeply comforting — freshly baked bread, creamy buttermilk, a generous farm table and simple stews simmered for hours. It's food that speaks of effort and warmth, free of pretence. After, guests are encouraged to wander through the Jonkershuis Farm Shop, a treasure trove of traditional keepsakes: jars of preserves, freshly baked rusks, handmade accessories and beautifully balanced iron pans made by the resident blacksmith — each item a gentle rebuke to throwaway presents.

Like all great luxury experiences, Soetmelksvlei leaves you changed. Not because you were pampered, but because you were reminded of how to be human — with a loaf of bread under one arm and a warm enamel mug of *moerkoffie* in hand. ■

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