

nature's gate

TEXT MANDY ALLEN PRODUCTION LAUREN SHANTALL PHOTOGRAPHS MICKY HOYLE

Kleinood, the farm on which this perfectly formed garden grows, means small and precious. And it's here where vegetables, fruit and flowers are tended with free-thinking passion and tenacity by its spirited owner





Close your eyes and imagine your dream garden... A fruit orchard that doubles as an enclosure for a brood of chickens. A colourful rose garden where layer upon layer of old-fashioned fragrances subtly perfume the air. A vegetable patch yielding everything from tomatoes, limes and aubergines to herbs and blossoming zucchini – all protected from pests by a voracious resident duck. And all this earthy abundance based on a philosophy of recycling, composting and excluding harmful pesticides and poisons.

It's a garden that most of us would covet, and it's made real on Libby and Gerard de Villiers's farm, Kleinood: a boutique winery, enveloped in the folds of the Stellenbosch mountains and surrounded by vineyards, olive trees and forest. The estate's charming garden is testament to Libby's creative vision and 'the dedication, sweat and muscle that my team of guys put in with me'. Just as it's hard to believe that the de Villiers's settled-in farmstead (featured in DECO's Back to Basics issue 61) is a relatively recent build, so too is it difficult to fathom that much of what appears as a thriving garden began some 18 months back.

Libby and Gerard bought the property several years ago but it was only last year that the family relocated from Tamboerskloof. Although areas were plotted and prepared during the building process, work on the garden only began in earnest once the farmhouse's decoration was complete.

As Libby explains, the garden is landscaped 'like a long train, all within the parameters of an avenue of ancient oak trees and incorporating the built structures of the winery and farmhouse. The vines come right up to our home, which also dictated the layout.'

Heading up this neat linear procession is the orchard and chicken run, then the winery (flanked by artichoke plants and violets). Next is a rose garden with two formal ponds, a visitors' parking area, the vegetable garden and the farmhouse with its enclosed inner courtyard. Finally, you reach the 'front' garden with its impossibly green grass, indecently beautiful magnolia trees, 20 varieties of lavender bushes, ponds, and the decorative flourish of a series of heart-shaped planters woven from wattle – designed by Libby to hold her beloved violets.

Each section merges easily with the next and is connected to the architecture of the house and winery by a series of gently trickling water rills. These have been designed using distinctive Cape Dutch klompjes bricks, giving them a local provenance. Also local are the fynbos and indigenous flowers, set slightly away from the house.

Within the garden's precise structures, the plantings are soft, billowy and eclectic. 'I fool myself into thinking I'm restrained', laughs Libby, 'but I'm totally impulsive. I always head to the nursery with one thing in mind and end up leaving with something else. But that's when the charm comes in, when you allow a bit of spontaneity and chaos to take over in your garden. It makes things feel real and honest'.

If you harboured any notions that a change of pace from city living to the country was synonymous with a romantic slowing of pace, Libby is the first to hold up her hands in disagreement. 'Gardening, no matter the size of your plot, is damn hard work. But every inch of love and sweat you put in, you get back a hundred-fold. Establishing this garden was, and is, an ongoing learning curve of trial and error. The weather, the soil, the intensity of the wind compared to our previous garden, everything is different. But that's gardening for you. It's a love affair where, despite all the deaths along the way, there really is nothing more rewarding'. ■

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PREVIOUS PAGE The lattice supports encourage trailing plants and add a vertical dimension to the low-lying kitchen garden

THIS PAGE An aerial view of the kitchen garden with the vineyards (the source of Kleinood's Tamboerskloof wine) in the background; an enamel pot is a rustic vessel for chicken and duck feed; the entrance to the wine cellar and rose garden

OPPOSITE An Australorp rooster amidst the artichokes and rambling roses

LITTLE GREEN BOOK OF CONTACTS

Ludwig's Roses ☎ 021 884 4552,

WWW.LUDWIGSROSES.CO.ZA for 'an enormous variety and unmatched expertise'

Van den Berg Garden Village ☎ 021 884 4095

'an organic collection to die for and Tania Fouché and Collette Dodkins are my garden angels'

Habitat Mature Tree Nursery ☎ 021 855 4400

'has a fantastic selection and are so helpful'

Aaron Bakana ☎ 083 208 5192 at the

Montebello Design Centre made Libby's woven wattle heart-shaped planters

Western Cape Poultry Club NAOMIDT@BREDE.CO.ZA

Overberg Tile and Clay for klompjes bricks

☎ 028 514 1244; WWW.OVERBERGTILE.CO.ZA





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Formal beds in the kitchen garden with mature oaks beyond; Libby's gardening journal ; an artichoke with real heart – Libby has quite a crop of these surprisingly tall plants; stainless steel rills run water from the kitchen garden to the rose garden and cellar; sun-loving lavender; a magnificently coloured Leghorn rooster strutting his stuff

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW? LIBBY'S BUDS OF WISDOM

- 'Once you start gardening, your hands will never be the same again! But eating deep-fried zucchini flowers or fresh artichokes grown in your garden makes it worth saying goodbye to that perfect manicure.'
- 'A gardening journal is essential to jot down ideas, record the names of plants, note what did well and what didn't and keep an ongoing list of contacts.'
- 'I have a big basket containing everything, from the journals, to pencils, sun block, gloves, hat and tools. I lug it around with me when I'm gardening and don't scramble around anymore to find things.'
- 'I tend to choose roses for their fragrance. My top five are: Roberto Cappuci, Antico Amore, Black Madonna, Addo Heritage and Coppertone.'
- 'I prefer spending my time (and money) at smaller, family-run nurseries. Their staff get to know you and your tastes and, importantly, what grows well in your specific garden.'