

# KLOOF OF THE ANCIENTS



The area north of the Boesmanskloof is dotted with wine farms, eateries and galleries that don't catch as much shine as Franschhoek or Stellenbosch, but whose world-class quality will no doubt surprise you. We base ourselves at the gorgeous Gooding's Country House for a weekend of exploring

WORDS **RICHARD BROWN**

**HOW ARE WE ONLY DISCOVERING THIS PLACE NOW?** My partner and I ponder incredulously. As we crest the rise in search of our accommodation, we marvel at the grove-lined valley falling away before us, bounded on one side by a craggy range of mountains, while fynbos-mantled hills frame the other. We crawl along a rutted dirt road down into the kloof, with pretty irrigation canals snaking along it – the lifeblood of this strath's various agricultural endeavours.

Finally, we spot the whitewashed manor off to our right, perched princely on a parcel that spills abruptly into the olive groves below.

Joburgers Malcolm and Salomé Gooding created Gooding's Country House on their olive farm just north of the Boesmanskloof, 20 km east of McGregor, 20 km west of Bonnievale and 40 km south of Robertson. It's ideally situated to explore the best of all of the above, but also ensconced in its own little valley and sequestered enough to escape other humans entirely.

The Karoo-Georgian style architecture of the house was patently deliberate and is worthy of its idyllic locale. A sweeping verandah flows on to a lush lawn, an infinity pool, and a grove of 3 000 mature olive trees beyond, guarded by a long avenue of bluegums at its eastern perimeter.



*From opposite page:* The Country House looks out over an infinity pool and olive groves beyond; quirky dining furniture; beautifully decorated master suite; the house's front facade

## KNOW THIS:

- Gooding's Country House have three en-suite bedrooms that sleep six total, one bedroom with a shower/bath combo and two with showers.
  - Strong WiFi
- Also on the property are the self-catering and equally lovely Hartbeeshuisie that sleeps two, and the newly-built and stunning Kasteeltjie that sleeps four and is ideal for small families.
- The Country House – R1 650 per night, Hartbeeshuisie – R700 per night and Kasteeltjie – R850. Book directly and mention *Escapes Magazine* and you could qualify for a 10% discount.
- Contact 083 233 1333 or visit [countryhousebonnievale.co.za](http://countryhousebonnievale.co.za)



As we enter the house, we are immediately greeted by a certain farmhouse flair: the Nguni hide is somehow effortlessly complemented by the Persian rug alongside it; the quirky Union Jack-adorned dining chairs perfectly offset by the stately dark-wood armchairs stationed by the massive central fireplace.

The Country House is completely self-catering, but the modern and practically-appointed kitchen with its large island worktop and gas hob make cooking a pleasure.

The nouveau farmhouse decor continues in the three bedrooms leading off the lounge: all three are en suite, with comfortable beds, and each is individually decorated with charming personal touches.

Immediately and utterly enamoured, we're confused as to why this place isn't booked out a year in advance. We've struck gold, it seems.

**WINE + DINE**

The next day we manage to drag ourselves away from our new favourite country house to effect the strenuous and onerous task of inspecting what the area’s vintners have to offer. Our first stop is De Wetshof Estate to sample some of their renowned Chardonnay. This whole area straddling the Breede River is limestone country, a compound prized when it comes to the cultivating of chardonnay – a practice that De Wetshof has certainly perfected. We start with the gentle and unwooded Limestone Hill, and progress to the deep and complex Bateleur Chardonnay 2016 – a wine that is a true testament to De Wetshof’s century-old and inimitable Chardonnay legacy.

Next, we make our way across the road to sit on Viljoensdrift’s lovely river deck. On a whim, we book a boat ride and buy a snack platter and bottle of Shiraz Rosé to take on board. The barge does a few loops up and down the Breede: it’s pretty and peaceful, if a little bit monotonous. Importantly, the platter’s various cheeses



From top: De Wetshof is renowned for their Chardonnay; Quando’s grapes are grown high in the Langeberg Mountains; enjoy a barge cruise at Viljoensdrift



and charcuterie line the stomach so that further vineyard adventures may be pursued (rest assured, though, we have a designated driver).

Quando is next on the winetinerary where we taste two lovely wines: an easy-drinking Chenin Blanc Viognier blend that tastes of rose petals and apricot, and the deeply impressive Quando Pinot Noir, which is grown

on one of the highest vineyards in the Breede River Valley halfway up the Langeberg Mountains, with flavours of dark fruit and forest berries.

Finally, we decide to quit while we are ahead, and head home in a merry mood, where we braai a pair of succulent steaks and enjoy the achingly beautiful sunset views from Gooding’s Country House’s terrace.



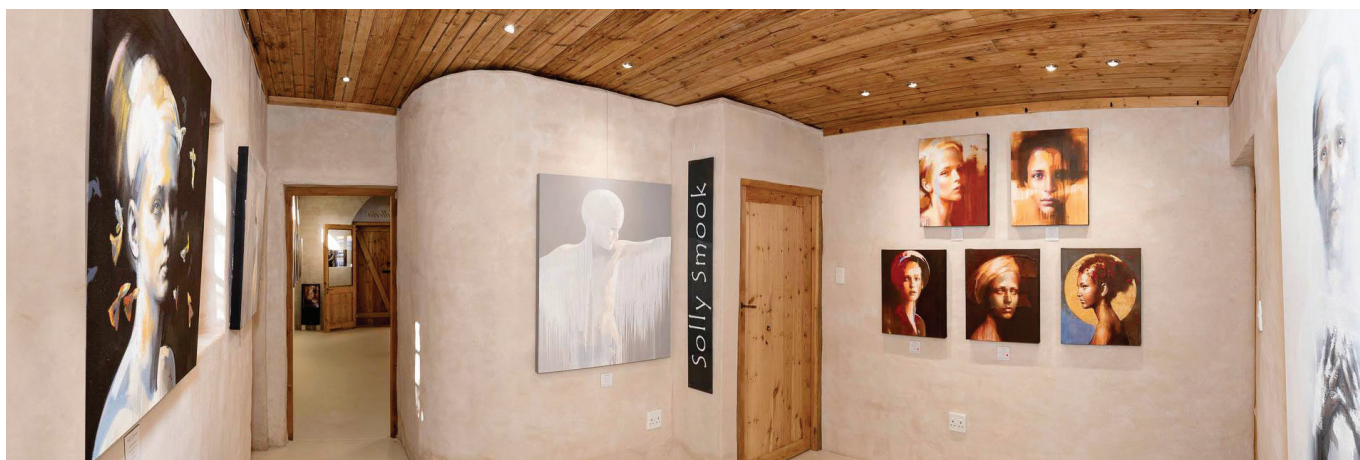
HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

We decide to drive west the following day; a neat dirt road delivers us straight to the small town of McGregor. ‘Quaint’ comes to mind when first entering McGregor. It’s reminiscent of an old English village, but with a few Karoo traits mixed in, evident in some of the wonderfully quirky and sometimes hybrid architecture on display as we make our way down the main drag.

We stop for a delectable salmon lunch on Tebaldi’s shaded patio at the Temenos Retreat, and walk it off in the enchanting, well-manicured and surprisingly large garden on the same property.



From top: The lovely workshop venue at Temenos Retreat; exhibits at La Galleria regularly feature some of SA’s best artists; the sprawling garden at Temenos is good for the soul



Artists seem to be drawn by an invisible force to McGregor. Some say it’s the staggering views that inspire and attract artists of all sorts to the sleepy little town. Others say it’s the area’s ley lines that lure and beguile creatives from all walks. Whatever it may be, we can’t leave without admiring the work of a few of McGregor’s creators in chief, so we head to La Galleria on Bree street where we encounter Dani’s Photos’ latest excellent and thought-provoking photography and fine-art prints. Opened in 2017, La Galleria also regularly hosts solo exhibitions by other extraordinary artists.

In the same road is Millstone Pottery, where we find a wonderful pottery studio and showroom run by Paul de Jongh and Nina Shand. It’s a treasure trove with a diversity of work, from wood-fired stoneware, terracotta and more conventional electric-fired functional work, to the more sculptural and abstract. Paul and Nina also host workshops,

including their annual and highly popular Jamboree.

Thirsty, we make our way to the Old Post Office Whisky Bar, a cosy, inviting bar in a restored 19th-century building owned by charming UK native John Oldham. John proceeds to regale us with a wonderful repertoire of tales, and introduces us to a few top-notch whiskies, too. He claims to have the second biggest whisky collection in the Western Cape.

When we return to our home away from home, we decide to take a stroll on one of the trails through the olive groves, which loops around and through the bluegum and Port Jackson forests that line the Gooding property. We hear the easily identifiable and forlorn call of a fish eagle close by, and look up to see the massive, marvellous predator perched on its nest high up in one of the bluegums.

Later, we light a fire in the Country House’s wonderful hearth, sipping on red wine and reflecting on the genuinely sublime weekend that was.

For a blissful break in a valley criminally undersold, give the Goodings a call. ✈



PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD BROWN, ROGER METCALF, UNSPLASH, COURTESY IMAGES