



Food, wine and spirits



Author Bridget Hilton-Barber hosts a lunch at her ancestral home, Kings Walden, now an exclusive guest house run by Belgian gourmands Steven Jacobs and Sophie Pierre

By SUE DE GROOT Photographs by GRAEME WYLLIE Recipes by STEVEN JACOBS

“I’ll look like that one day,” says Bridget Hilton-Barber, pointing to a photograph of her grandmother, Ess Tooley. Grandma Ess, who was 85 at the time, looks frail and liver-spotted, but twinkles playfully as she raises a respectably charged wine glass.

The picture hangs in the entrance to Kings Walden, in a room that until a year ago was the Hilton-Barbers’ dining room. Outside, the famous gardens straddle an escarpment in the clouds above Tzaneen in Limpopo province.

In 1904, Bridget’s grandfather Billo Tooley bought 800 hectares of wild land and named it after his Hertfordshire village. The gardens sprang from the imagination and planter’s hands of his young wife Ess. Their daughter Tana – Bridget’s mother – inherited Ess’s gift and the gardens. Bridget’s father David Hilton-Barber (whose ancestors founded Barberton) had the idea to provide

lodging for visitors too spellbound to leave. But it is hard to share space with paying guests, particularly those unwilling to worship the resident feline deities, and after years of hospitality the Hilton-Barbers longed for solitude. They would as soon eat their cats as sell their roots and remembrances, but no one was willing to take on the management of the place... until along came an attractive family of Belgians.

Chef Steven Jacobs has run exalted restaurants all over Europe and has published two food books. His wife Sophie Pierre’s family had farming interests near Tzaneen, a place that beguiled Steven, Sophie and their three children. They met the Hilton-Barbers, saw Kings Walden and a deal was struck. Steven and Sophie took on the refurbishment and running of the hotel, while Tana and Dave moved to a house on a nearby hill, leaving a few

family portraits on the walls of Kings Walden to appease the ancestors.

For the past five years Bridget has been living and writing just down the hill in a house called Stone Cottage that has a poignant history of its own, as told in her family biography, *Garden of my Ancestors*. Accustomed to trotting through the forest to borrow a cup of wine or a bag of cat food from her parents, she was initially anxious about strangers occupying her former home.

“But Steven and Sophie just seem to belong,” she says. “They feel the place.”

Steven and Sophie understand the Hilton-Barbers and the spirit of Kings Walden. Their massive refurbishment, which has transformed a house slightly frayed at the edges into a sophisticated hotel, has been done so sensitively that Tana can walk into what used to be her bedroom and say, with graceful sincerity, “It looks lovely!”

Even lovelier is the new kitchen and what comes out of it. The restaurant is open for dinner and food-loving locals have begun booking in advance for Steven’s innovative set menus, based on available seasonal ingredients.

“Generally I find the bigger a menu is, the worse the food becomes,” he says. “The same applies to the size of the pepper grinder. Here our menu is small and so are our grinders. Every morning I go out to source fresh local produce. I only decide what I’m making once I know what I have to work with. When people book, I ask if they’re allergic to anything or if there’s anything they particularly dislike, and aside from those limitations I am free.”

Today Steven has been cooking since before the dawn mist cleared (when you live on top of a mountain the mornings are usually misty). It is almost three when we sit down in the

elegant new outdoor eating area, but food like this is worth waiting for.

Photographer and guest Graeme Wyllie cautiously tastes the slow tomato terrine and his eyes widen.

“I hate tomatoes,” he says. “But this is not tomato. It’s the essence of tomato.”

The dishes that follow are all proof of Steven’s ability to bring out intense flavours with simple, focused dexterity.

Beauty aids the digestion, so we take a post-prandial stroll in the garden, starting beneath the Lightning Tree, a bluegum skeleton alive with fat copper lizards. Killed by lightning on the same night Ess Tooley died, it watches over the garden with the fiercely benevolent gaze of the woman who planted it.

Mossy steps descend through an acre of agapanthus (in summer a purple gallery) to the Bibigar, an ornamental lake of contemplation. The name comes from Paul Scott’s *Raj Quartet* and means

“female spirits”, perhaps the same ones that float through Bridget’s book, which is partly a family history and partly a tribute to the garden’s healing power.

“This is a gentle place,” she writes, “whose rocks and soil cover the secrets of other women spirits who also came here to admire the view long before we invented gin and tonic.”

Replete and content, we clasp our gins and tonics as blue shadows glide into the valley below. Perhaps the garden spirits have soothed and warmed us, or perhaps it was Steven’s supernatural food. Perhaps it is a state of grace only ever reached in places such as this.

Kings Walden Garden Manor, call 015-307-3262, email info@kingswalden.co.za or visit www.kingswalden.co.za. Read *Garden of my Ancestors*, by Bridget Hilton-Barber (Penguin).



Terrine of slow tomato confit, spinach and creamy goat's cheese



Pissaladière with onions, thyme and goat's cheese



Greek tava



Frozen macadamia nougat with granadilla sauce (recipe on page 104)

Terrine of slow tomato confit, spinach and creamy goat's cheese

Serves 6 **A LITTLE EFFORT** 3 hours
30 mins plus extra for chilling
TO DRINK Landskroon Cinsaut, a less powerful red, will match this nicely, or good old Tassenberg will also do well!

TOMATO CONFIT

4kg ripened plum tomatoes
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
30ml (2 tbsp) fresh rosemary, chopped
30ml (2 tbsp) fresh thyme leaves
80g light brown sugar
Maldon salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
200ml extra virgin olive oil

15g gelatine leaves
200ml dessert wine, warmed
250g spinach
olive oil, for frying
salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
50g fresh goat's cheese
150ml fresh cream

1 Preheat the oven to 90°C.
2 For the tomato confit, make angled cuts through the stems and bottoms of the tomatoes, plunge them into boiling water for 10 seconds, refresh in iced water and then peel.
3 Cut the tomatoes in half horizontally, remove the seeds and stems and drain.
4 Place the garlic, rosemary and thyme in a large metal roasting tray. Put the tomatoes on top of them and sprinkle with the sugar. Season, pour over the olive oil and roast for 1 hour, then reduce the oven temperature to 80°C and roast for a further 2 hours. Open the oven door slightly during the last hour of cooking so that the moisture can evaporate.
5 Soak the gelatine leaves in cold water for a few minutes, then drain and stir into the warm wine until the gelatine is dissolved.
6 Stir-fry the spinach in a little oil and season to taste.
7 To assemble, place alternate layers of tomato confit, spinach and gelatine mixture in a terrine dish until all the

ingredients are used. Place a weight on top of the terrine and refrigerate for at least 5 hours before serving.
8 Blend the goat's cheese and cream in a food processor until smooth and well combined. Season to taste and serve with slices of the chilled terrine.

Pissaladière with onions, thyme, goat's cheese and rocket and beetroot salad

Serves 6 **EASY** 45 mins
TO DRINK Paul Cluver Gewurztraminer, Zevenwacht Gewurztraminer, or De Wetshof Rhine Riesling.

PISSALADIÈRE

400g puff pastry
60ml (¼ cup) olive oil
6 small onions, diced
15ml (1 tbsp) garlic mousse (see cook's tip)
15ml (1 tbsp) fresh thyme leaves
salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
3 small logs goat's cheese, sliced
15ml (1 tbsp) honey

DRESSING

30ml (2 tbsp) white balsamic vinegar
30ml (2 tbsp) olive oil
salt and freshly ground black pepper

SALAD

large bunch fresh rocket
3 beetroot, boiled, peeled and sliced

1 Preheat the oven to 180°C.
2 Roll the puff pastry out onto a baking tray and prick it all over with a fork to prevent it rising too much.
3 Bake until golden brown, about 12 minutes. Remove from the oven and set aside.
4 Heat the oil in a frying pan and gently simmer the onions until caramelised. Add the garlic mousse and half the thyme and season.
5 Spread the onions on the baked pastry and top with the cheese. Drizzle with the honey and sprinkle over the remaining thyme. Place under a hot grill just until the cheese begins to colour slightly.
6 For the dressing, whisk together the

balsamic and oil and season. Arrange the rocket and beetroot on serving plates, pour over the dressing and serve with the hot pissaladière.

COOK'S TIP

To make subtle garlic mousse, simmer 5 garlic heads in hot water for 1 hour. Cool, cut and squeeze out the pulp, push through a sieve and whip with a pinch of salt and a dash of olive oil.

Greek tava

Serves 6 **EASY** 3 hours 20 mins
TO DRINK A good mature cabernet sauvignon, such as Le Riche, Neil Ellis Camberley, Edgbaston, Nederburg Manor House or Zonnebloem.

18 small lamb chops
12 potatoes, peeled and quartered
6 small red onions, chopped
45ml (3 tbsp) garlic mousse
large bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley, coarsely chopped, plus extra to serve
30ml (2 tbsp) ground cumin
15ml (1 tbsp) salt

5ml (1 tsp) freshly ground black pepper
200ml olive oil
6 tomatoes, thickly sliced
100g butter, cubed
250ml (1 cup) water

1 Preheat the oven to 150°C.
2 In a large bowl, mix the chops, potatoes, onions, garlic mousse, parsley, cumin, salt, pepper and oil until well combined.
3 Transfer to a roasting dish with the meat on top of the potatoes. Lay the tomatoes on top of the meat and place the butter cubes on the tomatoes. Pour in the water, cover with baking paper and foil and roast for 2 hours and 30 minutes.
4 Remove the foil and paper and increase the oven temperature to 170°C. Continue roasting until the liquid evaporates and the meat and tomatoes brown slightly, about a further 30 minutes. The meat should be very tender, almost falling off the bone.
5 Serve the tava hot, garnished with the extra parsley.



Frozen macadamia nougat with granadilla sauce

Serves 6 EASY 40 mins plus extra for freezing

TO DRINK Nederburg Eminence or the less rich Zevenwacht Gewurztraminer.

NOUGAT

- 500ml (2 cups) fresh cream
- 80g icing sugar
- 4 large egg whites
- small pinch of salt
- 45ml (3 tbsp) honey
- 150g macadamia nut brittle, chopped
- 5ml (1 tsp) cinnamon

GRANADILLA SAUCE

- pulp of 6 granadillas
- 30ml (2 tbsp) sugar

- Whip the cream together with 60g of the icing sugar and refrigerate until ready to use.
- Beat the egg whites with the remaining icing sugar and the salt

until they form soft peaks. Gently stir in the honey.

3 In a large bowl, combine the cream mixture with the egg white mixture. Add the nut brittle and the cinnamon and mix gently.

4 Line a loaf tin or cake tin with plastic wrap, leaving some plastic hanging over the edges. Spoon the nougat mixture into the tin, cover with the excess plastic and freeze for at least 5 hours or overnight.

5 For the sauce, sieve the granadilla pulp and discard the pips (reserving a few for garnish). In a saucepan, simmer the granadilla juice with the sugar until reduced and slightly thickened. Add the reserved pips to the sauce just before serving.

6 Gently turn out the nougat, slice and serve drizzled with the sauce.



Steven Jacobs



Maria Makwela



Bridget Hilton-Barber



Sophie Pierre and daughter Cezanne