


**MANOR HOUSE:** The Grand Dédale Country House boasts a typical Cape Dutch façade.

# A place of buffalo and fine vineyards

Take a pleasant drive from Cape Town and find yourself in a beautiful valley, far from the stress of city life, writes Nerine Doman

**W**HEN I told my mates I was spending the weekend in Wellington, a number of them quirked a brow and asked me what on earth was happening in Wellington. They were of the opinion it was just another Boland dorpie.

Dorpie it may be, but it had been ages since I'd driven through and my interest was immediately piqued. Although our visit would be short, I immediately fell for the town's atmosphere and its many historical buildings just begging for a camera.

But our road still took husband Thomas and me a bit farther, to the mysterious Doolhof valley and into the embrace of Grand Dédale Country House. "Are you sure you know where you're going?" Thomas asked, echoing the sentiments of explorers past who'd possibly got lost in the many valleys surrounding the town.

Grand Dédale is a stately Cape Dutch manor house dating back to the late 1700s situated on Doolhof Wine Estate – producing some of my favourite wines, incidentally – and I was curious to see both estate and home for the first time. Our road turned from tarmac to gravel, became narrower and very soon we had slipped into a narrow valley beneath oaks, the bright orange dust staining the walls of the buildings we passed.

Before Thomas could ask for the nth time whether we were lost, we arrived at the wrought-iron gates with their characteristic double "D" lettering. Angelo Casu, the Grand Dédale owner, met us at the door, and we were immediately delighted by our lodgings. Although the manor house maintains the traditional gabled Cape Dutch exterior, the interior is a fairytale world of mirrors, white-tiled floors and a cool green and blue pastel-shaded palette. With my thoughts flying to tales of Versailles's fabled Hall of Mirrors, I took in the many Baroque elements such as enormous gilt-framed mirrors, crystal chandeliers and silk flower arrangements, so real they had me fooled until I took a closer look. Every nook held some item that drew our interest, from collections of china to old prints and Asian objects.

We slept in the Andrew Bains suite on the ground floor. Small details, such as the heated towel rails and the mysterious comings and goings of the staff, who honestly moved about like fairies – we never did see when they went in to turn down our covers – reminded us we


**FAIRYTALE WORLD:** Inside The Grand Dédale.

were very much escaping our daily grind. That night chef Heila Basson treated us to her subtle arts. Some of the highlights included a starter of one of Wellington's delicacies, authentic buffalo mozzarella, which Angelo rightly assured us would ruin us for any other cheese masquerading as mozzarella.

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They crowded the fence to see us... their milk produces the most devilishly divine cheese

Salmon to melt in the mouth and other delicate tastes ensured we were ready for only one thing after dinner – bed.

The following morning Thomas and I rose early and walked the labyrinth laid out in the fields below the manor house. Quirky, yes, but there's something to be said for slowing your pace

and taking time to breathe the cold, crisp air while gazing up at the mountains. Of course Thomas didn't have the patience to walk the convoluted loops of pathway, soon chasing me back to the manor house for breakfast.

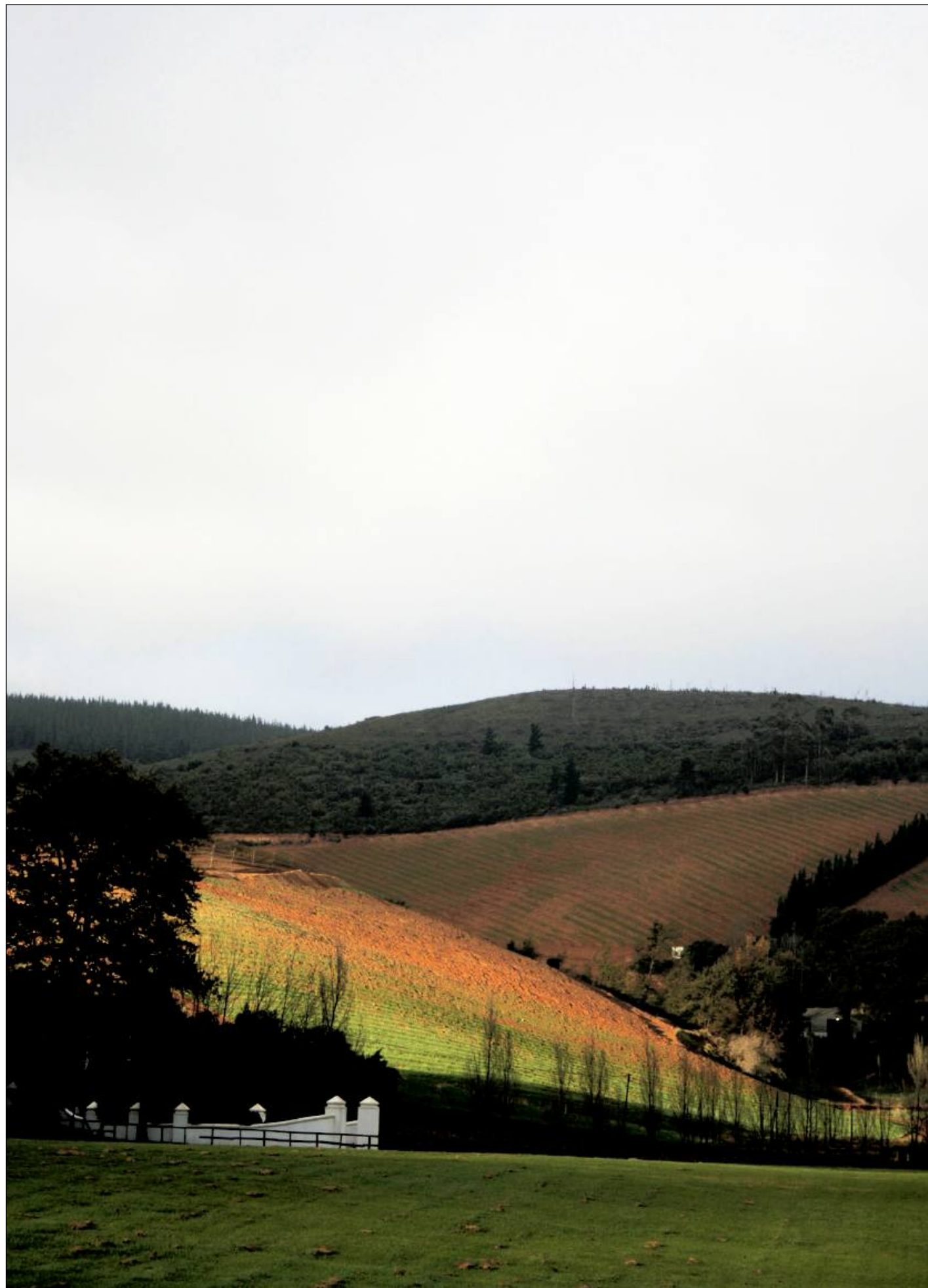
A word on breakfast: the muesli is to die for and, although it was nippy out on the veranda, I wrapped up warmly and enjoyed my omelette with coffee, watching the mist filter through the trees. A busy day lay ahead of us, however, so that hearty breakfast provided an important boost.

Our first stop was Buffalo Ridge where Wayne Rademeyer maintains a herd of about 60-odd Italian water buffalo. Used to incurious cows, I found the rather more intelligent buffalo a bit odd, especially when they all crowded the fence to stare at the puny humans.

Their milk produces the most devilishly divine cheese, which is available from selected delis, so if you can lay hands on it, you're in for a treat.

Next on our list of activities was Foxenburg Estate, where lovers of a quiet weekend breakaway can indulge in not one but three epicurean delights during a stay in one of the estate's self-catering cottages: oyster mushrooms, award-winning olive oil and some of the tastiest goat's milk cheese I've ever encountered – with none of the usual "goatiness" I normally associate with the product.

Last on our schedule was a game drive at Wellington's Bontebok Ridge


**SWEETING HILLS:** The picturesque Doolhof valley.

PICTURE: DR-BENWAY


**THE REAL THING:** Curious Italian water buffalo.

PICTURE: DR-BENWAY

Reserve. Although the weather was turning, we warmed up with a quick tot or two of sherry at the lapa featuring quaint huts overlooking a lake. These are available for visitors to sleep in the reserve and I made a mental note to plan something with my friends for the future.

I can think of nothing better than

## Travel adviser

**Grand Dédale:** 021 873 4089, web address: www.granddedale.com or e-mail info@granddedale.com

**Buffalo Ridge:** 082-375-0977.

**Foxenburg Estate:** Self-catering holiday cottages, oyster mushrooms, organic olive oil and goat's milk cheese. 021 873 5617

**Bontebok Ridge Reserve:** Team-building, game drives and special occasions. 082 576 9657.

sitting by the fire in the evening and soaking in the quiet. Bontebok Ridge Reserve features an impressive range of game, including eland, springbok, bontebok, eland, wildebeest and, of course, the star of the show: quagga.

They are part of a quagga breeding project I've followed since its inception and was very excited to see how much progress they've made with these animals that now feature very few stripes on their rumps and may well soon fully resemble their ancestors.

But we ran out of daylight and it was time to hit the road back to the Mother City. One thing we realised is that we'd seen but a fraction of what Wellington has to offer, a destination that definitely begs more than one return visit, especially since it's so close to home yet feels as if it's a million miles from the rat-race.


**COOLING:** Grand Dédale's swimming pool.

PICTURE: DR-BENWAY

## Drink in the natural beauty or relax in style at Protea Hotel Clarens


**STYLE:** The Protea Hotel Clarens is situated in an artists' haven in the foothills of the Maluti Mountains.

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Alternatively, call 011 633-2341 (am) with your credit card. This includes a three-month subscription to Saturday Star or Pretoria News Weekend. If you join or renew your membership this year you could

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The Protea Hotel Clarens is located in the best-kept secret in Free State art and culture circles – the picturesque village of Clarens, which is framed by majestic mountains and sandstone cliffs.

This artists' haven is steeped in history and rich in legend. It is in the foothills of the Maluti Mountains, close to the Golden Gate National Park and Lesotho.

Protea Hotel Clarens exudes style, luxury and design that blend in with the natural splendour that has inspired artists, nature lovers and tourists, who simply enjoy the art of living, to explore this tran-

**THE SUNDAY INDEPENDENT TRAVEL Club**

**PROTEA HOTEL CLARENS**


**FINE DINING:** The restaurant in the Protea Hotel Clarens.

quil, magical landscape.

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is valid for a minimum two-night weekend stay. Full prepayment is required at time of reservation.

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