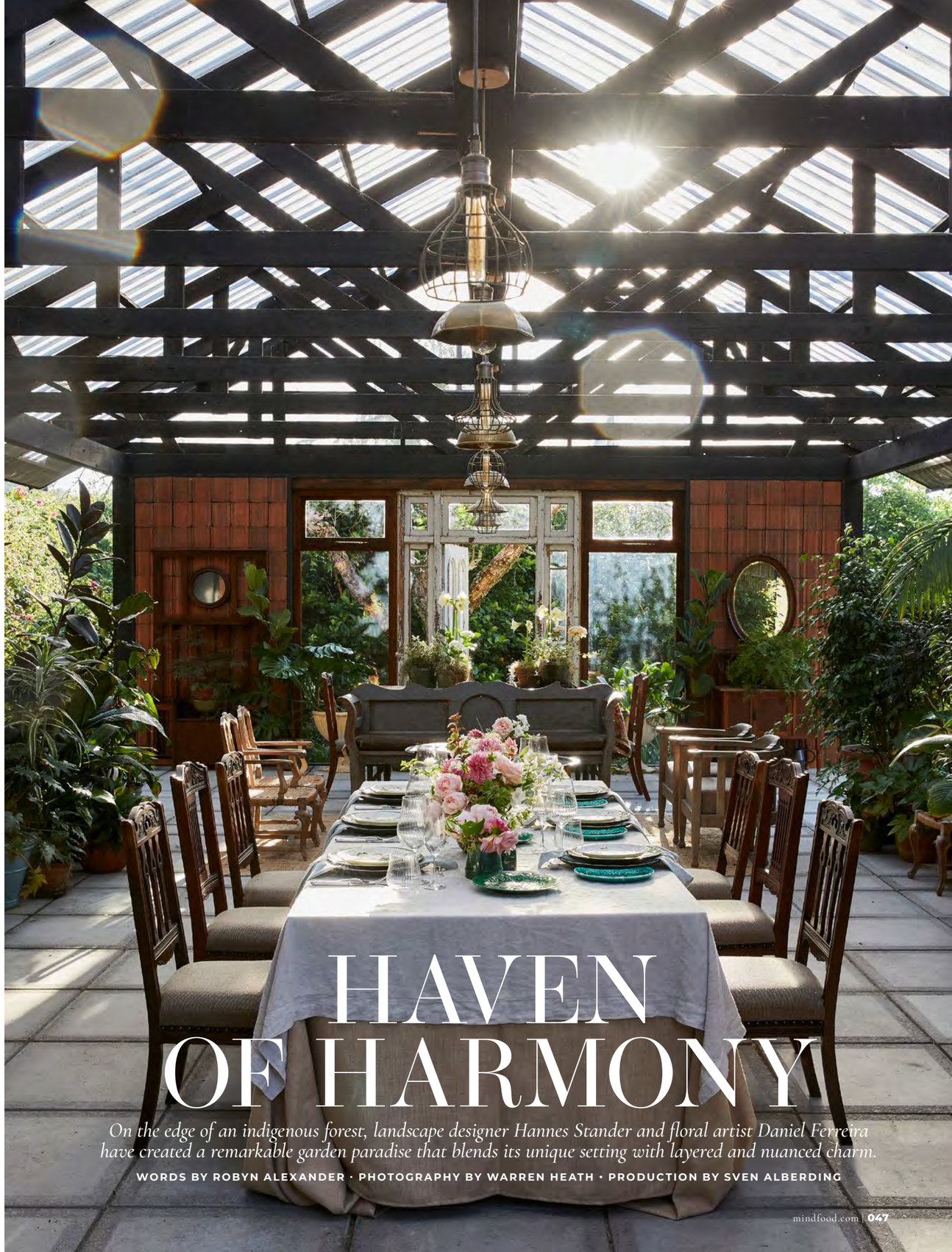
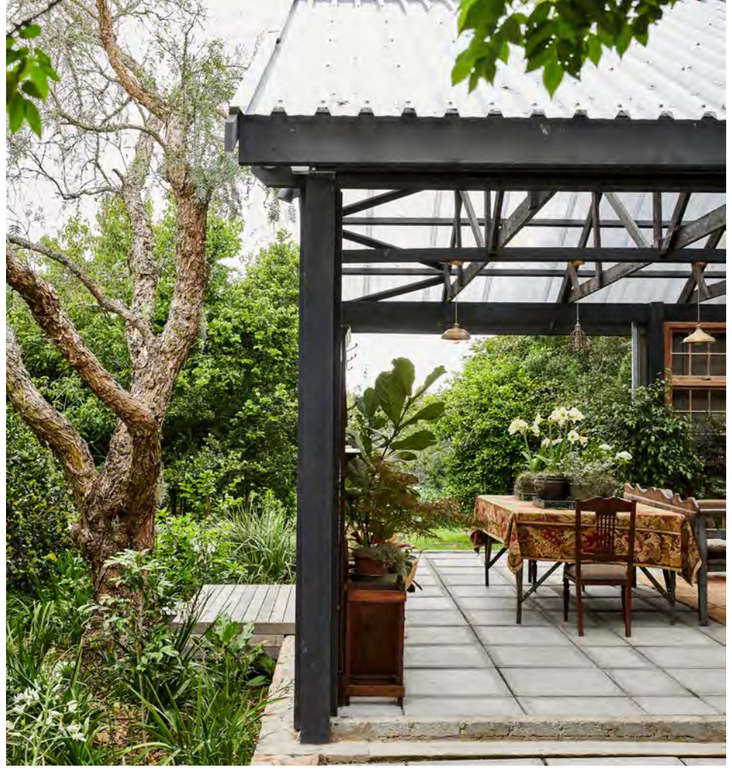
Clockwise, from top left: Landscape designer Hannes Stander with Shinto, one of the couple's three cats; The table is set with Villeroy & Boch fruit plates, vintage Wedgwood majolica green glazed salad plates, vintage silver cutlery and Bohemia Crystal Tulipa wine glasses; The conservatory is ideal for entertaining; Hiram takes a break on the verandah of the cottage; Elegant pots of Hydrangea macrophylla and Amaryllis belladonna in the conservatory.



HAVEN OF HARMONY

On the edge of an indigenous forest, landscape designer Hannes Stander and floral artist Daniel Ferreira have created a remarkable garden paradise that blends its unique setting with layered and nuanced charm.

WORDS BY ROBYN ALEXANDER • PHOTOGRAPHY BY WARREN HEATH • PRODUCTION BY SVEN ALBERDING



Clockwise, from left: A cosy corner in the pretty conservatory; Greenery abounds inside and out; A farmhouse-style kitchen in one of the cottages.

"THE CONSERVATORY IS BOTH A GREENHOUSE AND A SPACE FOR SMALL EVENTS."

-top tip-

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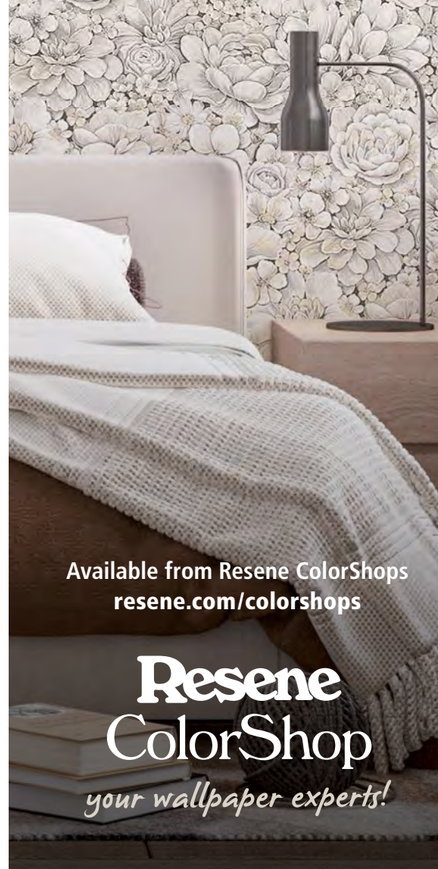

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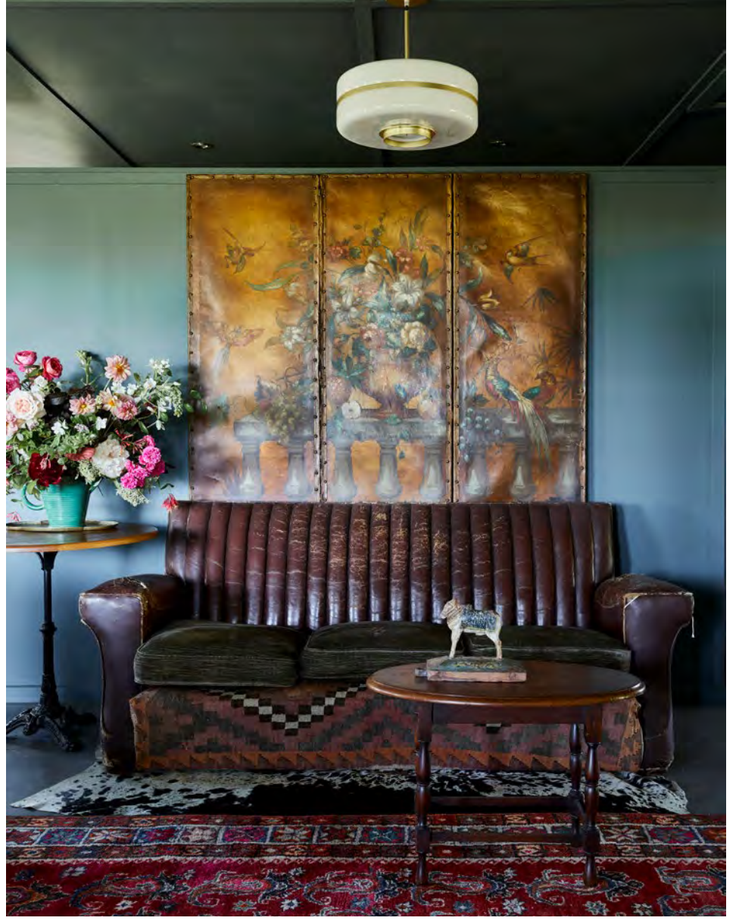
“GUESTS ARE INVARIABLY REJUVENATED AND UPLIFTED BY SPENDING TIME HERE.”

From left: A blue-painted wall features a collection of found natural objects and quaint memorabilia; The living room stars a vintage leather sofa, Persian rug, Masina pendant light, and flowers from the garden.



WILDLY REFINED

Homes that blur the line between the indoors and out have a magic all their own. Embrace a natural palette that celebrates the beauty of the landscape, blending rustic textures with refined simplicity. Fresh greens, warm browns and sun-baked pinks balanced with deep, moody accents. Together they create a space that feels grounded, welcoming and full of character. *Visit your local Resene ColorShop or for more ideas, visit resene.co.nz*

The early morning sun over the garden, with the awakening of an abundance of life and birdsong, makes it a magical place to be,” says landscape designer Hannes Stander. Over the past 17 years, Stander and floral artist Daniel “DP” Ferreira have been hard at work at Highacre, creating a harmonious haven that is their “home, retreat and playground” and now also hosts intimate gatherings as well as regular overnight guests.

Ferreira, who has a degree in fine art, and Stander, who studied landscape architecture, purchased the property that is now Highacre Garden almost two decades ago. They were attracted in part by its location on the edge of Knysna Forest, a wilderness area located close to the coast and characterised by indigenous afromontane vegetation, and which has long been renowned as one of South Africa’s loveliest locations. The property had an original woodcutter’s house on it – constructed from old adobe bricks – as well as several other structures, including two timber cottages.

A ‘CLEAN PALETTE’

“The buildings were neat and beautifully built with basic materials and minimal fittings,” says Stander, recalling what their small farm looked like all those years ago. “Small pockets of garden with larger areas of lawn surrounded the buildings, and the rest of the 1.75 hectares of land was maintained with a tractor-mounted mower that kept the field low, promoting the growth of buffalo grass. Scattered with Australian blackwood and pine, it had a good number of water tanks for storage of rainwater, which is the only source of water. It was very liveable and basically a clean palette for our vision.”

Visiting Highacre today, it’s difficult to picture this previous incarnation of the landscape: the lushly planted, multifaceted garden spaces that the couple have created and grown could not be more different from what was here before.

Initially realising their vision was a challenge. Highacre is on the edge of an indigenous forest reserve, so “wildlife such as baboons, bushbuck, porcupines and bush pigs raided newly planted areas,” Stander says. “We had to fence off a section of the garden and in time, we managed to protect our territory

Left: The timber-lined shower space leads out onto a private courtyard in which one can take a semi-alfresco bath.

with our family of dogs." This wonderfully disparate pack of 12, ranging in size and breed from a diminutive (but very assertive) Jack Russell terrier to a gentle but speedy giant Boerwindhond, roams the garden freely, forming a very effective deterrent.

Marauding wildlife was not the only difficulty, moreover. Heavy clay with a relatively thin layer of topsoil necessitated painstakingly labour-intensive and time-consuming preparation of the soil during each phase of development of the garden. In several areas, too, "we used permaculture practices to prepare areas for planting," says Ferreira. And water is an ongoing challenge. A resource that requires ongoing husbandry, the garden's only source of it is rainwater, and there is no irrigation system. As a result, much attention has been paid to the need to use it sparingly. Ferreira adds that "watering only when needed has ensured a garden that would be resilient over time". This area does usually get fairly good rainfall – although of course it can vary in a time of climate change – but the abundant feel of all Highacre's various garden spaces is testament to what can be achieved with careful soil preparation, ecologically sensitive planting and water-wise planning.

REST & REJUVENATE

No wonder, then, that guests to the farm are invariably rejuvenated and uplifted by spending time at Highacre; the property now includes multiple different spaces, each with its own special identity and atmosphere. Overall, the garden is a masterclass in beautifully textured, naturalistic planting, and includes a large pond and surrounding wetland, an area that in high summer is filled to overflowing with the blooms of 19 different species of agapanthus, a restful round lawn surrounded by walled seating that defines its circle, an elegant gravelled walk enclosed by high hedges, a fragrant rose garden and an abundance of beautiful trees. All of the various spaces of the garden are linked via pathways that twist through the landscape, enabling visitors to meander at leisure. In addition, there is the delightfully layered and rustic conservatory, which is both a variably semi- to fully-enclosed greenhouse in which potted plants can be nurtured, and a wonderful space in which small events are hosted. Combining the conservatory with the beautiful garden pavilion – a fairly newly developed part of Highacre that straddles the boundary between the more intensely developed garden and the natural environment, and is reached via a long pergola – makes for a truly special environment in which to celebrate a wedding or birthday. And two charmingly appointed guest cottages provide overnight accommodation for visitors.

> "INITIALLY, BABOONS, BUSHBUCK, PORCUPINES AND BUSHPIGS WOULD RAID NEWLY PLANTED AREAS."

Stander mainly works in landscape design and Ferreira in events and floristry, but their mutual love of plants is clearly key to both their professional and personal lives. Asked about what it is about working with plants that has always attracted them, they respond: "Their presence as a life force in our environment – and how they can be grown, nurtured and shaped to fulfil a desired function in the garden."

Stander's office and landscaping yard are located on the property, making Highacre a busy place on a daily basis. Meanwhile, Ferreira's studio in the nearby town of Knysna, where he keeps a beautiful collection of vases, furniture, glassware, cutlery and crockery for the events side of the couple's business, is a hive of activity too. But the Highacre garden itself remains a focus. This is Ferreira and Stander's home as well as a place for hosting events and guests, and they "spend as much time as possible here to make sure that it is continually developed, kept in a beautiful state and nurtured sufficiently."

Unique and special places – especially gardens – can't be brought into existence overnight. It has taken many years of effort and care to create Highacre. Aesthetic skills, bucketloads of patience, dedication and hard work enabled the development of this unique and special place.

BUREAUX