

By Nick Dall

Small towns with

Slow down and savour these three gorgeous, but very different towns which form the gateway to the



Robertson

BREATHE Situated 16km out of town, **Eseltjiesrus Donkey Sanctuary** provides a loving home for 20 previously disadvantaged donkeys and helps improve the lives of these animals throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Ranging from former cart-pullers to pets which were almost killed with kindness (apparently cream buns aren't good for donkeys!), they're now in a seriously happy place. The restaurant (open Thursday-Sunday) is fantastic too: Chef Lisa specialises in healthy stuff made from scratch. My veggie quesadilla was the perfect riposte to days of meaty fare. Situated on the Robertson-McGregor Rd. ☎ 023 625 1593 🌐 www.donkeysanctuary.co.za

EAT AND DRINK **Strictly Coffee** was one of the first places in the country to roast its own coffee beans and it's still ahead of the game. Pop in for a perfect macchiato and leave with a few bags of the really good single-origin stuff. The food's amazing too: Chef Ina bakes delicious breads and pastries every morning, which go perfectly with the home-made charcuterie that are owner Hanno's third passion (after his wife Rensché and coffee). 5 Voortrekker Rd. ☎ 023 626 6691 🌐 www.strictlycoffee.co.za

GET A DOSE OF ART Steelworker **Pieter Heunis** started off making gates and burglar bars, but when he lost his business in Cape Town, he returned home to Robertson

where he now blends conventional steelwork with what he calls "art metal works". The show-stoppers are full-sized horses constructed purely out of horseshoes, but Pieter also makes smaller trinkets like light fittings and wall hangings. Adderley St (next to the Green Door Pub). ☎ 076 640 9140

SLEEP Constructed in 1812, the building which houses **De Oude Opstal** is older than the town of Robertson, which was only established 41 years later. The owners live in the grand old manor house and there are three uniquely themed guest rooms. The rambling gardens are a delight and the pool's enormous. 1 Warren St. ☎ 023 626 6840 🌐 www.deoudeopstal.com



Clockwise, from top left: Strictly Coffee. Pieter Heunis. De Oude Opstal. Affie Plaas farmstall. Chef Lisa serves food at Eseltjiesrus Donkey Sanctuary.



big hearts

Western Cape's Klein Karoo and are home to some seriously creative people



Montagu

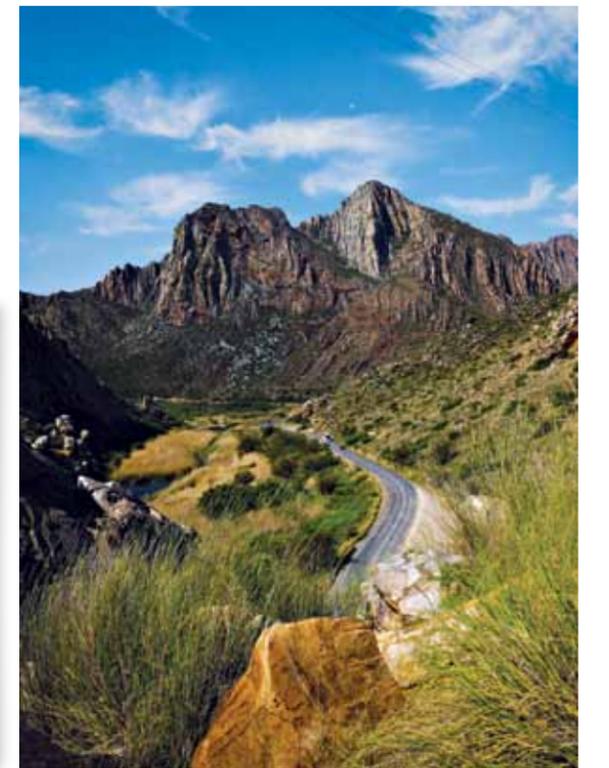
EAT Experienced husband-and-wife team Simon (the hotelier) and Wendy (the chef) have breathed new life into Montagu's third-oldest building. **Simply Delicious @ Four Oaks** is definitely the classiest restaurant in town. My lazy-aged sirloin was exceptional and Wendy's skills as a pastry chef make dessert a must. Afterwards, join them in the bar for a local brandy and a long, laid-back chat. 26 Long St. ☎ 084 525 4231 🌐 www.four-oaks.co.za

GET A DOSE OF ART **Richard Hickman's** home is also his studio and gallery, and no room is off limits. Although 15 artists are represented in total, about 90% of the works you'll see are Richard's. He's a prolific water colourist who does everything from cartoon-like bushveld scenes to quaint depictions of medieval French villages – and he's always happy to chat. 9 Joubert St. ☎ 082 453 4255 🌐 www.hicksartgallery.com

SLEEP Montagu is probably the best base from which to explore the region: not only is it "the piggy in the middle", but it's got a large selection of restaurants open for dinner. **Montagu Vines** is a tranquil tonic after the (minor) hustle and bustle of the main road. The rooms are extremely comfortable, the extensive grounds are uplifting and the resident owl is soothing. Breakfast is ample and delicious. 2 Tanner St. ☎ 023 614 3812 🌐 www.montaguvines.co.za

BREATHE About 5km before you reach the town (coming from Robertson), the road passes through a rudimentary tunnel blasted into the rockface. At the top of this cliff is an old **English fort** from Boer War days with spectacular views. The steep scramble up is well worth it and peering through the snipers' sights is eerie. ➤

Clockwise, from right: Cogmanskloof. Simply Delicious. Hick's Gallery. Montagu Vines.



MY MONTAGU

When he retired, Richard Hickman moved from Greytown in KwaZulu-Natal to Montagu, where he now spends his entire year

"My perfect day in Montagu would start with a walk in the mountains. I hike almost every day, but to leave time for other stuff, I'd probably take the zig-zag path up and then follow the contour path down to the town for an omelette at **Rambling Rose**.

I'd then head over to the **Joubert House Museum**, which has a fascinating medicinal herb garden, in addition to the usual historical exhibits. For lunch I'd go to **Viljoensdrift** wine farm near Ashton for a river boat picnic cruise and a spot of wine-tasting. I'd have supper back in Montagu at the excellent **Simply Delicious**."



Barrydale

EAT New kid on the block **Diesel and Crème** boasts one of the finest collections of South African motoring and road memorabilia I've ever seen and it gets 11 out of 10 for decor. The diner-style menu is scrummy and the sinful milkshakes, served in enormous Consol jars, are wickedly good. 2 Tennant St/R62. ☎ 028 572 1008 📧 www.facebook.com/dieselandcreme

SLEEP The **Barrydale Karoo Hotel** has existed since 1888, but it's by no means stodgy. Its 15 funky rooms (including one decorated by the chaps from Maggie) mean there's something for everyone, while the comprehensive massage service uses masseurs and masseuses from all over the very creative valley. 30 Van Riebeeck St. ☎ 028 572 1226 📧 www.barrydalekaroohotel.co.za

GET A DOSE OF ART Barrydale is home to scores of artists, but



Clockwise, from top left: Barrydale Hotel. Barrydale from above. Hand Weavers. Diesel and Crème. Shane Petzer at the Maggie Collective.

the socially conscious **Maggie Collective** takes things to the next level. This gallery would be quite at home in Cape Town or Jo'burg, and their fantastical light fittings and mobiles (all made from recycled trash) are coveted worldwide. Two of their chandeliers currently hang in the White House in Washington. The collective comprises four friends who've been in Barrydale for over a decade: "social entrepreneur" Shane Petzer is the public face, Sean Daniel and Scott Hart create the art and "former Reserve Banker" Richard Panaino balances the books. 27 Van Riebeeck St. ☎ 079 384 289 📧 www.maggieartcollective.com

GET CRAFTY When trained weaver Tivane Mavuma arrived in Barrydale many years ago, it was natural that he should join forces with Carol Morris, who'd had many years' experience in the textile industry. Together they formed **Barrydale Hand Weavers**, which is both a community upliftment project and a chic design force. Pop in to see (and hear – they're very noisy!) the looms in action and leave with an armful of pure cotton handiwork that will have your friends back home "oohing!" and "aahing!" and planning trips to Barrydale. I speak from experience... 🌈

Tennant St/R62. ☎ 028 572 1488 📧 www.barrydaleweavers.co.za

