



BAKING *A* DIFFERENCE



“We love spending time together but our lives in Utrecht, the Netherlands, had turned us into passing ships”



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Mo and Steve Lewis only stopped in Calitzdorp because a friend told them about this tiny Klein Karoo town's award-winning ports and brandy. A week later they bought a small farm on the outskirts of town and three years later found themselves fully embedded in the Kannaland community as first generation farmers of mainly stone fruits (also turned into jams), olives (olive oil) and grapes (bottled into wine for them by Axe Hill Wineries). They describe their life as “the manifestation of a bigger vision to make a difference in the world.”

“Serendipity and pure chance is what brought us here,” says Steve as he shows me around their beautifully renovated house and guest accommodation overlooking what they like to call their BIG little farm, Lenies Hof.

“Our small farm, of which less than five of the 11 hectares are arable, is the physical manifestation of our biggest dreams. It is a symbol of who we are, the role models we want to be in our community and the life we choose to live,” says Steve.

Their biggest challenge so far has been the ongoing drought but their regenerative and environmentally conscious approach is carrying them through and also inspiring other farmers to follow suit.

Mo calls us over for lunch which is served on the deck at their bakery/eatery aptly named ‘The Accidental Baker’. It is here that locals gather daily and tourists come to enjoy the sweeping views.

Maria Adams (Mo's right hand) delivers freshly baked rye bread, ciabatta, lemon cheesecake and homemade plum jam to the table, this delicious lunch is paired with Mo's special Kombucha.

Mo explains that the Accidental Baker was born purely from their own need to eat proper bread.

“Being Dutch we love our bread and when we struggled to find decent bread here I taught myself how to bake it and from there it's taken off.”

She explains the secret to good bread: “I bake breads that are simple in ingredients and complex in process, using ancient techniques in fermentation mixed with patience, time and love.”

“I started with the book Do Sourdough by Andrew Whitley and from there I found inspiration and recipes through the internet and books; tweaking them to get the recipes I use now. I'm still learning and experimenting every day,” says Mo.

As a result of these culinary efforts, Mo was nominated as a finalist in this year's Food XX

Womxn in Food Awards (‘baker’ category), a South African platform dedicated to recognising and honouring women in the food and drinks industry.

She is training Maria and also Ricardo Damons, both locals from the neighbouring settlement, in the art of bread-making, one of the many small things that she and Steve do to give back to their community. She is also planning to run workshops.

Unlike the bakery, their decision to escape successful but busy lives to do something more meaningful together was no accident. “We love spending time together but our lives in Utrecht, the Netherlands, had turned us into passing ships,” says Steve, gently touching Mo's hand which rests on his shoulder as she pours him coffee.

Steve's work, as both the owner of an architectural practice and project manager, took him away from home regularly, while Mo, a boutique manager and owner of a small Art Agency, would seldom be there when Steve returned.

“We wanted to do something more meaningful together that would make a small difference somewhere in the world. Africa seemed like a good place to do that,” says Steve. In 2015 they packed up and travelled through East, West and Southern Africa in a kitted-out 4x4 Overlander covering more than 38000 km before they found Lenies Hof.

“It wasn't until we stood on top of the Swartberg Pass that we both felt it. There is something special about this place that captured us. It's hard to explain, but we just felt it was right,” says Steve.

The following four years were not easy. They had to change direction several times.

“It's like jumping in at the deep end and trusting, not only oneself, but your partner, and learning to let go and live in the here and now” says Steve.

“Learning that ‘good is good enough’ was perhaps the most difficult thing for Steve - he is such a perfectionist,” chuckles Mo, who says she herself is more relaxed now despite the fact that they have never physically worked so hard in their lives.

Enquiring about propagating plants for the essential oils market also led to them buying into a small, but fast growing company called Still Pure (based in Riebeeck Valley) that specialises in essential oils and hand-crafted natural, botanical body products.

Working side-by-side, Mo with her boundless energy and Steve with his head for business, the couple have created their own piece of paradise here. They have rediscovered the fun in each other as they work their land themselves. Serendipity brought them here where they have created a beautiful life but as Steve says, who knows where serendipity will lead them next?...



“Being hands-on with things that are tangible is truly gratifying as is learning to let go and just live in the here and now, in the present.”

