

JOBURG NORTHERN SUBURBS

GET IT

FREE!

FASHION VINTAGE
WITH LOVE **PLUS**
DAZZLING JEWELS,
BEAUTY AND COCKTAILS

Talking flirting
with Craighall Park's
ZURAIDA JARDINE

*Lonehill's Devi ... Carte
Blanche's crybaby
(yes ... really!)*

3 LOCAL MOMS
(WHY THEY'RE
SO LOVED)

Great Gatsby

WE'VE GOT THE WHOLE 20s GLAM THING COVERED!

SHOPPING, PEOPLE AND LIFESTYLE IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

MAY 2013

GET Into the country

A country affair

Picnics. Polo. Phenomenal food. And Great Danes on the sofa. We've a new favourite country getaway ... Oaklands Country Manor.

Sisters Caroline, Annie and Kathy.

Remember those wonderful holidays we had as children ... off to a guest farm where there were trampolines and pony rides, tree houses and monkey rope swings. When we ran amok while the grown-ups lay by the pool and drank G+Ts and went for long walks or outrides and then had lazy afternoon snoozes. Places like this are few and far between nowadays ... but we've found one such spot ... which offers all that and more.

Oaklands Country Manor in Van Reenen (so just a three hour drive from Jozi) is run by three talented sisters – owner Caroline Bruce-Clifton – who'll be found more often than not down at the stables or on the polo field, the gregarious Annie Barnard – who's front of house and just manages to be everywhere at once, making sure

everything's running as smooth as farm butter and that guests are more than happy, and Kathy Romer-Lee – who you'll find in the kitchen or the organic veggie garden, picking tiny beetroot or fresh herbs for dinner.

And what a dinner. One of the highlights (hell, probably *the* highlight) of a stay at Oaklands is Kathy's food. Using ingredients sourced locally from nearby farms or grown at Oaklands, the menu changes daily and the food would, honestly, put most Jozi restaurants to shame. We feasted on Dargle Valley pork roast with roast potatoes, aged Angus sirloin with just-picked veggies, and braised beef shin Stifado with mash, sour cream and gremolata. There were Tempura prawns and a wonderful smoked salmon bruschetta with baby beetroot and feta to start, and to end, classics like Eton Mess and the most magnificent molten chocolate pot imaginable ... if it's not on the chalkboard menu when you visit, throw a tantrum until Kathy adds it!

When you tear yourself away from the dining room table, there's loads to do. A game of tennis, fishing in the dam, relaxing by the pool, a mountain walk or cycle (take your own bikes). Or you can just do as we did, and sit in the gazebo by the stables and watch the goings on ... there was polo practise in the arena and an outride coming in and one going out and youngsters having pony rides and, good grief, here comes a horse through the trees from heaven know's where, being ridden by a child looking for his shoes!

It is the perfect destination for a family getaway, but not, warns Annie, for anyone who doesn't 'do' animals! Sophie the donkey wanders up to the verandah looking for a pat and maybe a treat, two pigs loll around in the field, there are hens in the barn and it's very likely that one or all of the three Great Danes – Caesar, Inja and Moo – will beat you to the sofa in the lounge (and who's going to argue with a dog the size of a small horse?).

It's obviously a brilliant option for the horsey crowd, as it's one of the country's premier polo locations. Hugely popular with the UK just-learning-to-play polo set who come for a fortnight's polo tuition, local guests who're keen to learn this gentleman's sport can choose between a five day polo package, or just sign up for the one day starter pack special ... which includes coaching on the wooden horse, followed by riding and stick-and-ball lessons in the arena. Those less sporty but still wanting the whole 'I went riding' experience can opt for an outride – they'll tailor-make a ride for beginners and the more experienced.

After a day in the country air doing



Comfy sofas appeal to visitors and the Great Danes!

everything or nothing, it's into the manor house's quirky pub, where everyone mingles ... when we visited there were British polo players and their coach playing snooker with the three sisters, while what appeared to be a whole classroom of their teenage children home from boarding school for the hols chatted with Paddy, out from Ireland enjoying a gap year. Three generations of one family were celebrating a birthday and some youngsters were having a terrifically competitive ping-pong match.

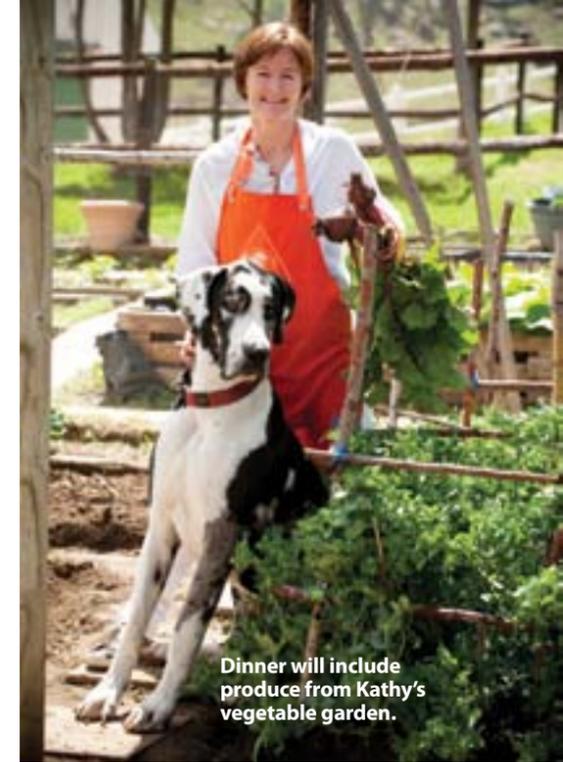
While the stories got taller and the laughter louder, we learned about the history of Oaklands ... which was founded in 1860 by Bob Hall, an English millionaire who acquired the property as a gift for his wife, and has since been owned by a string of colourful characters including a clairvoyant (who's said to have hosted séances) and one time South African provincial cricket captain David Dyer. In 1995 it was bought by Sir Hervy James Hugh Bruce-Clifton, an ex-Major of the British army, who ran it until he died three years ago, leaving it in the more than capable hands of his wife Caroline and her two sisters.

The three are perfect hosts ... making this a destination to consider for a family weekend, a 'house party' for a significant birthday (book out all the rooms and spend a wicked weekend with a few dozen of your closest friends), a country wedding or a small conference and team building event (Annie arranges incredible team building exercises ... from horsey events to 'ready-steady-cook' braais).

With comfortable but not OTT rooms overlooking the dam, paddocks, mountains and polo field (a combination of en suite cottages, self-catering family suites with day beds for the kids, and the Hilltop House, which sleeps six), Oaklands has a maximum of 32 guests at a time ... and we highly recommend it. A weekend stay is a little like living in a Jilly Cooper novel for two days ... in the nicest possible way!

Info

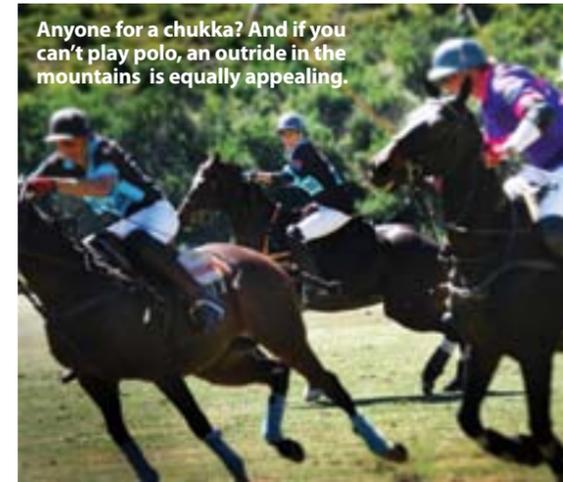
En suite rooms (two guests) from R1200 a night, including breakfast. All inclusive rates for conferences, team building, weddings and house parties available on request. *Details: 087-943-8738 or www.oaklands.co.za*



Dinner will include produce from Kathy's vegetable garden.



Meals really are a highlight of your stay at Oaklands.



Anyone for a chukka? And if you can't play polo, an outride in the mountains is equally appealing.

Riding, fishing, walking ... a real country-weekend destination.

Text: Kym Argo