

uplifting a community one seed at a time

On a trip to The Jardim Farm in Noordhoek, contributing sustainability editor, Jackie May, discovers a unique garden that feeds a family and serves a community, all of which is symbolised in its unique stained glass window...

It's a windy day when I visit the The Jardim Farm, located about two kilometres from Noordhoek beach. From my car, clutching my sun hat, I walk past a striking stained glass window, the only opening to the south eastern side of a renovated barn. This wall faces the Gomes family home, while the other sides of the barn open to south peninsula views, nature's elements and a large firepit.

Rotem Shachar, one half of MR Design Studio's creative duo, is responsible for the barn renovation, and explains how the building is an album of family memories executed not in images but in materiality. The interior wood cladding represents Justin Gomes' upbringing in Cape Town; a lattice-like brick wall evokes images of Angela Gomes' childhood in Benoni; the round window, designed by artist Andrew Whitehouse and made by stained glass artist, Anika van der Merwe, is a reference to the Notre Dame cathedral and the years Angela and Justin lived in Paris. While the window is a reminder of more carefree days, its design is an interpretation of an aerial photograph of the family's vegetable garden. In the middle is the harvest table, with five purple strips symbolising Justin, Angela and their three children, while around the table are the beds of organic vegetables.

Although a private property and home to the family, and a menagerie of animals, the barn is used for public functions and their vegetable garden has become a community hub. Stretching across the front of the property, the vegetable garden is an oasis of verdant, organic vegetables. Planted in 2015, Angela harvested her first crop in 2016 and since those early days the garden has grown to provide food not only for the family, but

also the surrounding community. On Saturdays, families visit to pick vegetables and during the week, Angela offers workshops and school programmes about food growing and the meaning of organic. She is also integrally involved with food growing in neighbouring community, Masiphumelele. Here she assists Yandiswa Mazwana, founder of the Masi Creative Hub, with seedlings, workshops and networking. There is a quiet global revolution underway and The Jardim Farm is a part of this revolution of growing food, sharing seeds and knowledge about local and organic food systems. In cities across the world, communities are using open spaces – curb sides, pavements, empty plots, their own gardens – to grow food.

I wander around the garden once more and spot a small shed. The previously underutilised space has been transformed into a meditation room filled with indoor plants. This is where Justin wrote his illustrated book, 'The Cloud that Helped People See', an allegory about the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has helped people understand the devastation we have caused to the planet. Justin writes about a tribe of faceless people with their machines who 'took more from the Kingdom than they could ever eat or drink'. After a cloud envelopes the tribe, they were forced to stop and be still and they realised that the small things are the big things.

Before I leave, Angela picks up a halved green pepper to show me the seeds she is saving. These will be planted, shared and then offered to her family and to her community once more. It truly is the small things that are the big things. ●

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212



Above Jardim Barn has been designed as a place for real, in-person connections; previous collaborations have included artists like Andile Dyalvane (above, left), Mpho Vackier, Zizipho Poswa and Candice Lawrence