



Living their dream

When it comes to looking for eutopia, you don’t have to look too far, with an idyllic balance between work and family, Michael Jordaan has found it.

Words by Norman McFarlane

I’m sitting in the stylish Bartinney Wine and Champagne Bar in Bird Street, Stellenbosch, the heartland of all that is trendy and chic in this university town that doubles as the wine capital of South Africa.

Opposite me, sit Rose and Michael Jordaan, in two ridiculously chic scuffed leather easy chairs, a glass of Chardonnay each in hand, Michael munching thoughtfully on some biltong. “our payoff line for Bartinney wines, is ‘Wine made on a mountain’, and of course our Bordeaux-style red brand is named Elevage, which is a French winemaking term for the stages of winemaking between fermentation and bottling, and it literally means ‘to lift up’....,” explains Michael.

Rose has been sitting quietly throughout this explanation, staring ahead, almost lost in reverie, a thousand yard stare if I ever saw one. She looks up at me. “Passion and balance,” she says, “that

sums up our brand.” And I think back over the almost hour we’ve sat chatting about how and why they acquired farm, what they’ve done to it since, and how they are living their dream. And it all falls into place.

The farm, perched high on a mountain side overlooking the Banghoek Valley at the top of Helshoogte Pass, was originally owned by the Jordaan family, but it was sold at one point. “When the farm became available, I knew that we had to buy it,” explains Michael. “I had to get it back into the family.” He smiles ruefully. “I think we paid more than we should have, but it was something I had to do. There was some emotion in the purchase. Besides, we’re elands born and raised, so for us it was a home coming.” The sum paid is undisclosed, and I do not ask.

But that happened some nine years ago, while Michael was still at the helm of First National Bank,



Michael and Rose Jordaan, and three daughters xxxxx, xxxxx, xxxxx



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just two short years before the world was tipped into a financial crisis the effects of which we are still feeling to this day.

With fingers being pointed at the financial sector for precipitating the crisis, it couldn't have been easy. "We were fortunate," explains Michael, "because we have a robust regulatory regime in place, and very competent regulators, we were far better off than many other countries around the world." But the fallout did hit South Africa, and as the CEO of one of the biggest banks in the country, Michael had his time cut out steering the bank through the storm.

The decision was taken to put a manager onto the farm, but it didn't really work out. "We decided that the only way to make this work would be for us to take control of the farm and progress our plans," says Rose, "and that's when we decided that I'd relocate here with the children." And so, about five and a half years ago, Rose and the children took up residence on the farm, and Michael commenced a gruelling schedule of commuting weekly between Johannesburg and the Cape. "It was hard," says Michael, "but it was the only way for us make it work." He would leave the farm in Stellenbosch every Sunday evening, to fly to Johannesburg for a taxing work week, returning each Friday to the family.

The children settled into local schools, and Rose tackled the monumental task of overhauling the farm, vineyards, cellar and buildings, in preparation for Michael's retirement from FNB, which he announced in May of last year, effective December.

He's the self-appointed chairman of the board," says Rose. "And sometimes I'm asked for advice," quips



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Michael, but as Michael told me when I arrived for the interview, Rose runs the wine business. "She's managed the farm through significant change," says Michael, and that change permeates the vineyards, which are farmed as naturally as possible, seeking harmony with nature, balance.

By way of example, fynbos is used instead of more conventional cover crops, and spraying is kept to a minimum.

The farm is a Biodiversity in Wine Initiative (BWI) Champion, by dint of sheer hard work. Aliens have been uprooted ruthlessly, and a fynbos nursery has been established on the farm to

MAIN PICTURE, Michael and Rose relaxing in their Stellenbosch Bartiney wine bar; ABOVE left and right, rustic charm abounds, with the wine bar's decor that reflects a cellar that produces 'wine made on a mountain'.



ABOVE, Michael and Rose ‘draw’ off a sample of their four and a half star Elevage bourdeaux-style red.
RIGHT, Rose and her wine making team

facilitate a replanting program, which includes 5000 indigenous trees thus far. And Rose leads the charge, out in the field on any given day with her team of farmworkers.
When he’s not lending advice to Rose, Michael is forging ahead with his latest venture, Montegray Capital, a private investment vehicle, with a focus on what Michael calls disruptive technologies and disruptive business models.

He was recently appointed chairman of the board of Stellenbosch-based mobile messaging platform Mxit, where his involvement will be strategic in nature, drawing no doubt on his extensive experience with technology which played such a significant role in his achievements at FNB.
But above all else, Michael wants to create jobs: “What we need most in South Africa is jobs, and the focus of my activities in Montegray is to do just that: help with initial funding for promising start-ups that will lead to job creation.
Government’s role is to provide the infrastructure, but it’s up to the private sector to create the jobs we need.”
“Is the farm profitable?” I ask. Michael hesitates, and Rose answers. “If you discount the capital investment we’ve made in the farm, then we’re almost there,” she says. The sum is undisclosed, and once more I do not ask.
But beyond the farm itself, the regard for the staff who make the farm tick emerges in discussion. Rose has implemented a program where each farm worker can farm a veggie patch during the course of the day, and she has put in place laundry facilities on the farm for the staff to use while at work. “Our people are up early to get to work, and they only get home late. This is just some small way to make their lives easier.”
They are both intensely aware of the privilege that they enjoy, and they are determined to put as much back into the community as they can. Clearly they do.
The cellar is small, 118 ton capacity, producing 4000 cases annually of premium quality wine. The Barminey range which consists of a Cabernet Sauvignon, a Bordeaux-style red blend (Elevage), a Chardonnay and a Sauvignon Blanc, are all estate wines, made exclusively from grapes grown on the farm, and the current releases all sport four or four and a half Platter stars. Sold locally by selected premium retailers, and available in selected restaurants, the wines are also exported.
“Looking back, would you do anything differently?” I ask. “No,” they answer simultaneously. Michael continues: “Except we might do a couple of things with less haste.” He pauses, then says reflectively: “If I were to give anyone advice, I’d have to say ‘drink wine, don’t get into the business of making it’.” But it’s said with an impish smile, mirrored by Rose.
Clearly, they are living their dream.

