

Hilda's Kitchen: A 21st century take on Victorian recipes

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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If the cooking channel had been around in the early 1900s, [Hildagonda Duckitt](#) would have probably given the likes of Nigella Lawson (minus the cleavage) a run for her money.

As it was, her mastery in the kitchen, along with her hostessing skills, had Cape society vying to crack the nod for a spot of her table. She was also an accomplished author. Her two books *Where Is It?' of Recipes* and *Hilda's Diary of Cape Housekeeping*, not only set the benchmark for Victorian home cooks and housewives, but also provide a tantalising glimpse of day-to-day farm life more than 100 years ago.



Hilda's Kitchen from on high

Why the history lesson? Well, besides the fact that I'm a complete history nerd and love a good story, my family and I recently had the opportunity to sit at the grande dame's table when we visited Hilda's Kitchen, the 21st century homage to Hildagonda Duckitt and her recipes. The restaurant can be found at Hildagonda's childhood home, [Groote Post Wine Farm](#), not far from Darling on the West Coast.

But don't make the mistake of thinking Hilda's Kitchen echoes the stiff formality of her era. Yes, you are still surrounded by the high ceilings, white-washed walls, wooden floors, and heavy furniture of a traditional Cape Dutch farmstead, but the atmosphere is mellow, ideal for long, lazy summer Sunday lunches.



Camembert and tomato tart

Now, that I've set the scene, on to the important stuff. The food is fab. The small, but varied menu is hearty and comforting with modern twist, and all the dishes are perfectly paired with Groote Post's award-winning wines.

Starters were a split between the moreish goat's cheese and tomato tartlet, and the meat platter with homemade relish. For mains, the youngsters in the group opted for the Old Man's steak roll with handcut chips and garlic mayo – even the two strapping lads admitted defeat at the generous portion. We oldies chose the lamb tagine (so tender that the meat flaked off the bone with the merest brush of the fork) and a dish that strayed a bit far from its home turf – lamb bunny chow – which did, however, get a definite thumbs up from a very partisan KZN girl.



Lamb bunny chow

On to my favourite part of any meal – dessert. While the kids tucked into the malva pudding with gusto, all I need to say is

that the white chocolate cheese cake was eye-rollingly sublime. Rose water meringue was also on the menu, which was also pronounced delish.

A visit to [Groote Post](#) is well worth the longish drive from Cape Town, and no doubt Hildagonda is smiling that her legacy lives on.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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