



SPEKBOOM FOREST SPURS BOPLAAS'S CONSERVATION VISION

Few people understood Boplaas cellar master and Boplaas owner Carel Nel's motivation to buy a large swathe of land for the sake of wild plants that grew on it. Some two decades later, however, that foresight has made the wine and spirit producer a regional leader in conservation.

It has also been a rare gift for Carel's children, with Boplaas marketing executive Rozanne Nel having inherited amongst others the task as chief evangelist for this treasured haven for the small-leafed succulent species *Portulacaria afra*, commonly known as Spekboom.

"Everyone knows my dad as being fairly reserved, but he has always been outspoken about issues such as the overgrazing of Klein Karoo veld," she says. "Since I was young, he said it would only be a matter of time before people would be paid to plant trees. With ever more talk about things like carbon credits in the global economy, my dad may still be proven right in his lifetime!"

It was this vision that drove Carel to acquire 2 200ha of Klein Karoo veld for the express purpose of conservation. More recently, he added 2 500ha to the initiative.

The abundant Spekboom found on this land is more than vegetation typical of the region. Science has revealed it to be among plants particularly valuable to the environment because its efficiency in carbon sequestration.

Essentially, Spekboom is so successful because when it gets too dry or hot, the plant carries on working at night. All plants trap carbon dioxide in order to photosynthesise and grow, but the Spekboom differs in that it does so even when the plant's breathing pores are shut.

Acid that is stored as carbon dioxide is then broken down and metabolised, while requiring very little water.

This wonder of nature on Boplaas land has been embraced by the next generation of Nels at the Boplaas helm, who share his love for the environment. A portion of profits in the sale of its world-renowned wines and spirits are used for this conservation initiative.

Boplaas has also teamed up with Jobs for Carbon (J4C), an initiative endorsed by the SA National Biodiversity Institute that specialises propagating Spekboom across the region. Boplaas's hometown of Calitzdorp now has its very own J4C team comprising of locally unemployed people.

Boplaas further promotes its message of conservation by encouraging buyers of its products to plant Spekboom, and offers cuttings whenever wines or spirits are purchased from either of its tasting rooms in Calitzdorp or at Klein Brak River on the Garden Route.

"If everyone tried to leave the planet in a better position than how he or she found it, we'd be better off," says Carel. "Earth does not need us, we need the earth. Our survival depends on it."

For more information about Boplaas, visit www.boplaas.co.za, email admin@boplaas.co.za or call 044 213 3326. Boplaas is also on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/Boplaas1880/>).

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