



# Bosheuvél brings the farm to the city

By Izak Hofmeyr

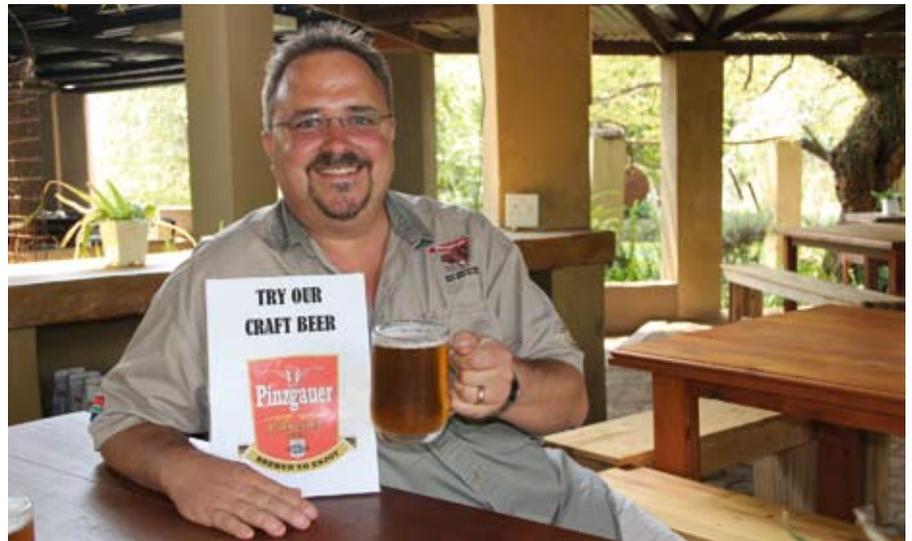
**W**hile searching for a suitable name for their new farm, Mitch van den Bos read somewhere that Jan van Riebeeck's farm, in other words the oldest farm in the country, was named Bosheuvél. It was a perfect match – the Bos of his surname, combined with the fact that the farm is situated on a hill, and last but not least, the Dutch connection, as both Mitch's parents immigrated here from the Netherlands!

Bosheuvél, situated in the Nooitgedacht area just north of Roodepoort in Gauteng, consists of 33 hectares on which 270 Pinzgauer cattle, 150 free-ranging pigs, 25 hectares of instant grass, a feedlot, an abattoir, a butchery, deli shop, restaurant and soon also a boutique hotel, are housed. And if this is not enough, there is also an organic compost unit and an *apiesdoring* tree nursery. Because they are very aware of the possible impact of farming activities on the environment, they plant at least 100 trees every year to minimise their carbon footprint.

## The dream

"I always told my wife, Juanita, a medical doctor, that I want a farm near the city one day. This is why we bought the farm ten years ago and started to develop it.

"I knew that I wanted to farm with cattle, but it took me a while to decide on the breed. I asked myself one question: Which breed will give me a beautiful piece of



A proud Mitch van den Bos with the beer that he has brewed himself.

steak? With this I had in mind what I tasted in Japan, Wagyu Kobe beef, of which the criteria is clearly defined: taste, tenderness, marbling, manner of feeding and presentation.

"I then evaluated the approximately 26 breeds available in South Africa in terms of criteria such as fertility, feed conversion, average daily gain, disease resistance, temperament and availability. I ended with a shortlist of three breeds and decided to go for the Pinzgauer."

## The city farmer concept

It was not long, he says, before family and friends approached him about the possibility to also keep a beast or two at Bosheuvél. The identification of this need has led to the

city farmer concept.

"One doesn't realise how many city dwellers there are who have a burning desire for contact with farming. Suddenly we were in the position to give people the opportunity to actually become part of a farming set-up by owning a few beasts. As we have a stud, we can sell first-class heifers to interested people and keep the animals on the farm for a fee. Such an owner is then registered as an independent stud breeder and gets his own stud name and prefix from SA Stud Book."

A small farm close to the city offers advantages and challenges. The biggest advantage is accessibility to a market that is virtually outside the gate, but the biggest challenge is using every single square me-

Candice Shelley in the deli. Look at the delicious meat products hanging above her head.



A sow raises the next group of free-ranging piglets.



A Bosheuevel Pinzgauer steak with excellent marbling.

tre productively. It is the combination of these two aspects that makes Bosheuevel so unique.

### The Bosheuevel piggery

“It was very clear that we couldn’t just produce a commodity. We had to do something to make our product special. Then we got the idea to process our own products and sell it on the farm. The result was that, in addition to the cattle, we started a pig unit where we produce the pigs on a free-ranging basis.”

Currently the farm can accommodate approximately 170 pigs on a free-range basis. When they had to decide on a breed, they chose the Great White, specifically because of its high fertility rate and ability to produce big hams. The pigs are fed only vegetables, and by exception also soy

or oil cake. They don’t get any hormones or other additives.

“They grow a bit slower because they are not on a commercial ration, but we prefer it this way. In our opinion the meat that we get in this way is simply fantastic. The carcasses are processed into wonderful chops, ham, bacon and sausages. There are also all kinds of smoked products. Everything is sold at our deli shop and also available at the restaurant.”

In their area clients value the manner in which farm products are produced. There is a big market in favour of products produced on a natural basis. Veld meat and free-range pigs are therefore very popular, and Bosheuevel fulfils this need.

“However, the veld meat market is not big enough to fulfil all our clients’ needs. Therefore we have a feedlot with a capacity for 450 animals. We buy cattle in to keep the feedlot full, but the producer must meet our production standards. We prefer to buy Pinzgauer-type animals. Farmers who buy bulls from us often bring the progeny of these bulls back to our feedlot again.”

### Hog to ham

Mitch’s right-hand, Candice Shelley, has a passion for meat processing. It is here, she says, that the concept of “farm to fork” really gets meaning.

“We have a licensed countryside abattoir where we slaughter our animals,” she says. “They are exposed to minimal stress because they are not transported from the farm. The carcasses hang in our cold room for two to three weeks to mature on the bone. The meat is then packed by cut and sold in the deli. We also offer various processed beef and pork products.”

Because the Pinzgauer is a dual-purpose breed in Austria, Mitch decided to test whether a profitable dairy line could also be established at Bosheuevel. Currently eight of the older cows are milked and cheese is made from the milk. Carmen Jacobs is the cheese-maker and the cheese is sold exclusively in the deli.

“We separate the cows from their calves in the evening and milk them in the morning,” says Candice. “Thereafter the milking cows and calves go out together on the pastures, where the calves can drink freely.”

### Sweet as honey

Another aspect of the farming which started randomly and has led to another product in the deli, is their honey. They originally kept the bees to ensure effective pollination of plants in the area. Today they have five beehives and the honey is sold in the deli.

Mitch, who is always ready to tackle new challenges, also entered the micro beer brewing industry recently. After having completed a brewery course, they now brew Pinzgauer Pilsner at Bosheuevel. The beer is in big demand at the restaurant.

“We also sell approximately 30 stud heifers each year and approximately 40 feedlot cattle each month. Then there are the pigs – approximately 160 are slaughtered each year. We also sell 15 hectares of instant grass each year, and then there is the deli and restaurant which are both being run profitably.”

A long-term project which is gradually beginning to develop, is the building of a boutique hotel with facilities for conferences and other functions. The goal is a resourceful integration of farm and city, a place where the city dweller can unwind, but also a place of business for the farmer. 