

It's never too late ...

to open a guesthouse

Noeline Okes, 56, loves her new life and her new guesthouse in the Stellenbosch winelands.

'In February 2008 FEMINA printed my letter about taking the plunge to relocate from Johannesburg to the Cape to open a guesthouse in Stellenbosch. Things didn't quite go according to plan: the sale of our house in Johannesburg fell through and my husband, Duncan, decided to stay on in Johannesburg.

But I moved to Stellenbosch anyway, with my younger son Michael, and I'm very proud of what we've achieved. The property we bought was a student digs and now it's the Apple Tree Guest House, an eight-bedroom, four-star establishment. The project was all-consuming, challenging, exciting and stimulating – I dropped two dress sizes in the process!

I did all the decorating and together Michael and I sorted out the garden and parking. I had to learn about three-phase electricity and building, fire and health regulations. It was a steep learning curve, but we encountered nothing but good humour from workers and kindness and support from our neighbours.

Now I am reaping the rewards of the wonderful lifestyle that Stellenbosch has to offer. It's been a mind- and body-altering change for me. My daily walks with my dogs in the surrounding vineyards and mountains have made me strong and healthy and when Duncan comes to visit, every five or six weeks, he is always amazed by how well I look.

Having been in the restaurant business before, with Michael and my older son, Chris, it's easy for me to manage the catering side of the venture. I enjoy meeting new people and have no shortage of friends and family coming down to visit me in this beautiful part of our country.

I haven't been back to Johannesburg once – I feel quite depressed at the thought of going there – and am so glad that I was inspired to make the move. I'd encourage anyone who has a dream to give it a try. This life change has been so invigorating that I'm already dreaming of opening my next guesthouse!' – *Catherine Eden*

Visit appletreeguesthouse.co.za for more information.

