SOUTH AFRICA JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2025

# the gardener

## 5 FUN PROJECTS *for the New Year!*

The colour Teal is trendy!

## Brahman HILLS

*a garden for all seasons...*

## UP THE ENERGY!

*with orange plants*

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# *Evolving for* LONGEVITY

A continuously transforming garden has longevity, which is certainly true for the garden at Brahman Hills in the Midlands of KwaZulu-Natal.

**Silence needs a home (2022 Noah Maubane)**
Noah Maubane is a young artist with a passion for forms. He sculpts in plaster of Paris, which is then cast in bronze to bring it to life. His three men standing on the wall, waiting for the light to come over the hill and light them up, is entitled 'Silence Needs a Home'. All the sculptures in the garden have a story behind them and showcase many of the incredible artists in this country, like Noah.

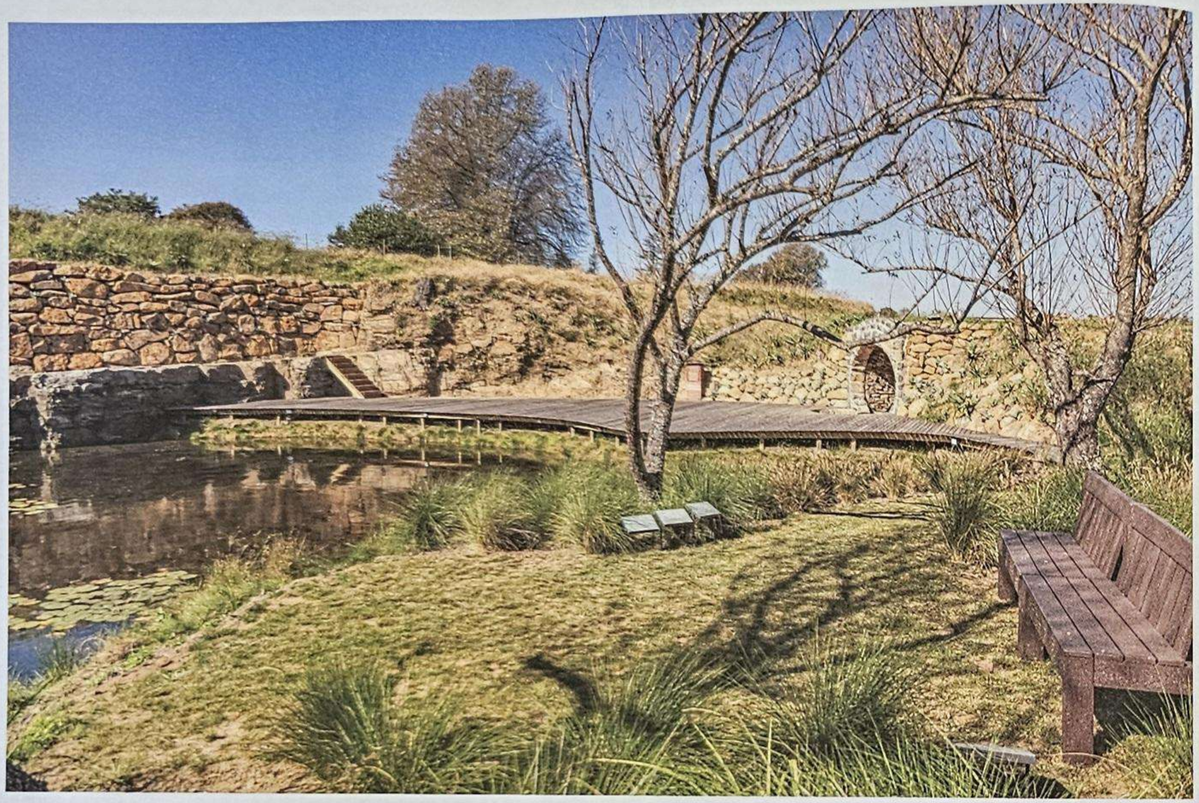
**TEXT and PHOTOGRAPHS:** Wendy Moulton, Brahman Hills

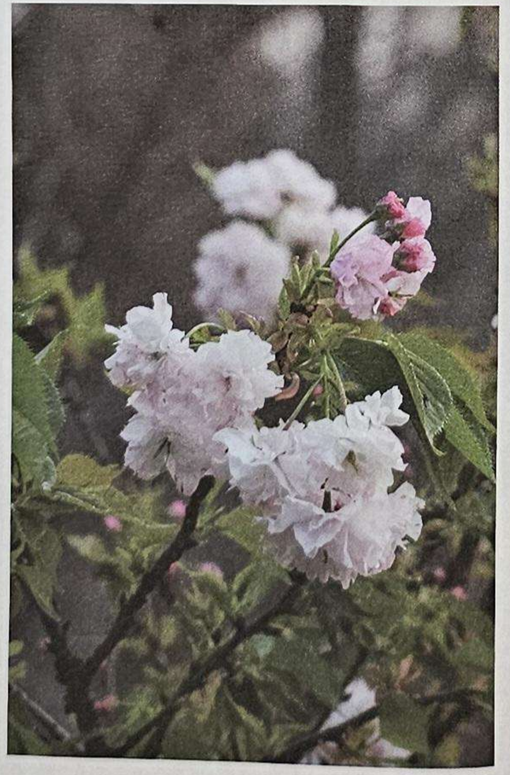
An iconic garden that only last year received the coveted status of being a Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Partner Garden, the only one in South Africa, Brahman Hills has embraced the term excellence. This is seen in everything they do, from trimming the hedges to weeding and planting. But it's not only the maintenance of the main garden that gets this treatment; it's also the addition of new sections of the garden so that at any given time, a visitor can revisit the garden and see something new. I must mention that it's great to be inspired by the images on these pages, but seeing it yourself is truly uplifting.

## The importance of plant choice

The landscape architect Tim Steyn has made sure that in every season, there is something to see in the garden. Even if it's the dead of winter, because the garden is laid out in rooms, there will at least be some rooms that look good at any given time. The challenge in the Midlands is that they are dealing with extremes in weather: extreme heat, torrential rains, hail storms, black frost, and even snow. Although they have propagating tunnels as a backup, the choice of framework plants was very important.

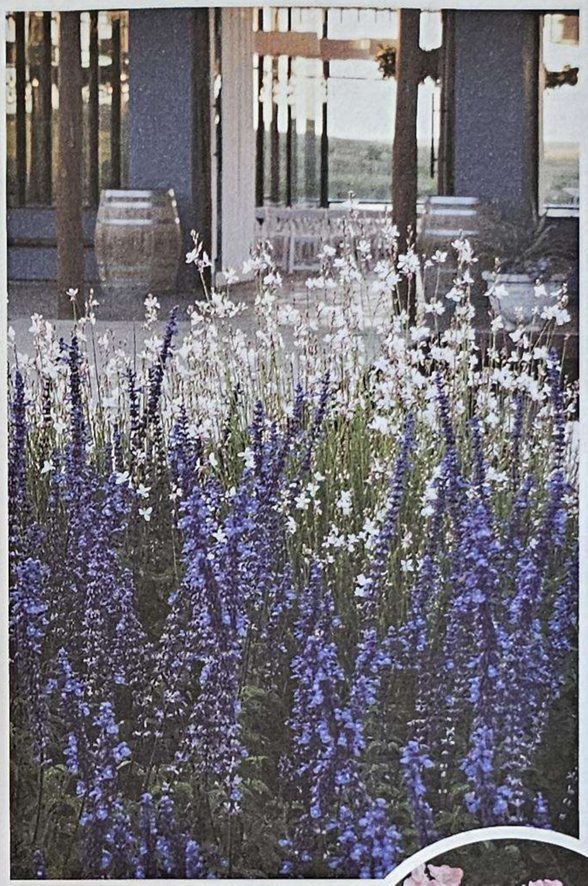
The backbone of the design is the evergreens and the vast array of flowering perennials and grasses. These are also backed up with hard landscaping elements like the stone walls, pathways, water features and





**ABOVE:** If you flew over Brahman Hills, you would come across the form of a Dragon's Eye etched into the side of a hill. On the ground, this secluded, intimate space is accessed through a stone tunnel. As you step onto the curved wooden deck, you get the view of the tranquil pond filled with waterlilies against the stone wall backdrop, over which flows a cascading waterfall. If you ever want a bit of peace, you will find it here. **RIGHT:** Still in their infancy, the fruit trees planted all over the property will eventually produce an abundance of all types of fruit for the hotel and the enjoyment of the visiting guests.





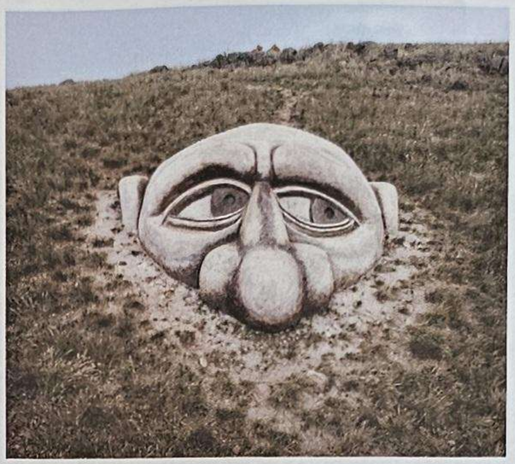
pergolas, which create interest in the bleakest weather.

Spring and summer are naturally the most colourful seasons, but autumn is a stunning time to see the grasses at their best and the colours of the many salvias still blooming. In winter, the form of the garden holds strong and they will only start cutting plants back in August just before spring.

As a wedding venue, a lot of the emphasis has been on giving brides and grooms a background for their wedding photos, and there is no shortage of spots to choose from.

**TOP LEFT:** Bright blue ***Salvia* 'Mystic Spires'** contrast beautifully with the pure white ***Oenothera lindheimeri*** (previously ***Gaura lindheimeri***). The planting was chosen based on what brides would like when getting married in the chapel overlooking the lake behind. **TOP RIGHT:** The Midlands is known for its roses, so they have been included in the garden, trailing over pergolas such as this one and in a collection in the dedicated rose garden. **LEFT:** Spring colour in pink and white is eye-catching under the giant plane trees. Azaleas grow very well in the Midlands, which is why they look so good.

**ABOVE:** Sheltered from the elements, the sunken garden is the perfect place to enjoy a cocktail before attending an event at The Glass House, up a few stairs past the fire pits (in case it gets a bit cold). **BELOW:** Brahman Hills is host to many glorious weddings. From The Glass House function venue, this beautiful walkway with pure white spirea welcomes wedding guests to The Lake House for the marriage ceremony.



**ABOVE:** Next time you drive along the N3 towards Durban, look to the left at Nottingham Road, and you will see the Giant beckoning you towards Brahman Hills just over the hill. **RIGHT:** In the early mornings, as the sun comes up over the hill, there is a tranquillity in the garden that is calming and peaceful.

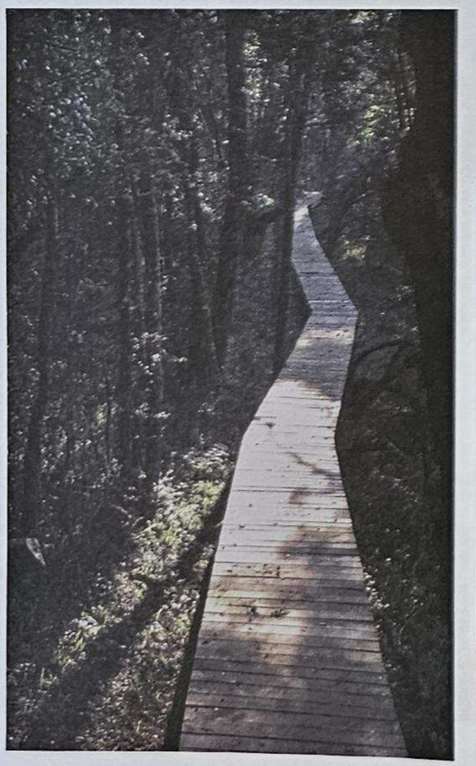
## What it takes

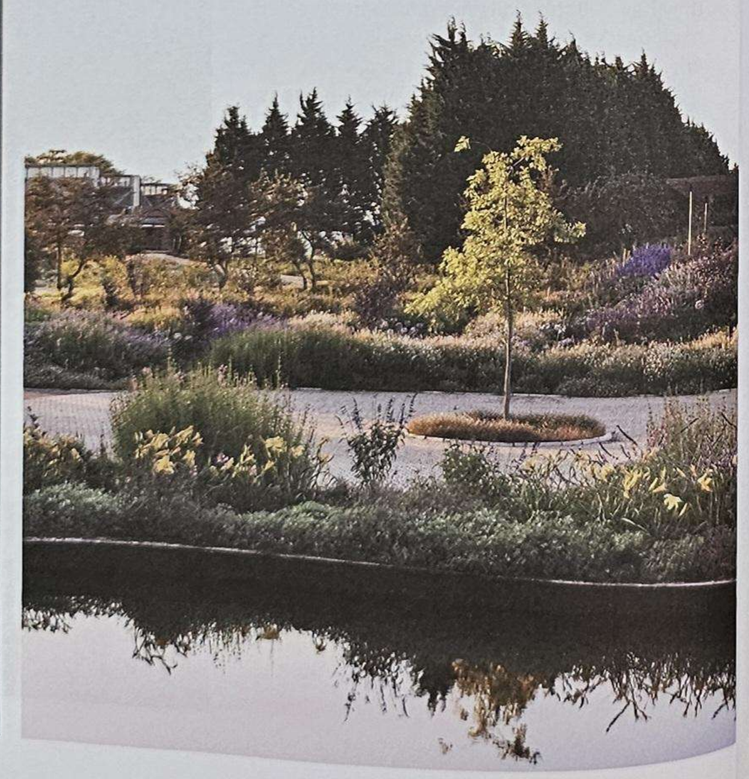
It takes a team of people to keep up the exacting standards of the garden. Eleven gardeners led by the Garden Manager Abongile Majola work on rotation to ensure they have all the skills needed to be directed to all parts of the garden. Weekly, the teams are split into the machinery team, which trims the hedges, mows the lawns and does anything that needs a machine. One team will be simply weeding all week, another will be on the propagation and planting, and another will be on irrigation. They take many cuttings of the plants on site so that they always have stock to replace any damaged or done their time. Two 30 m tunnels are set aside for propagation.

The propagation section is imperative to ensure that the gardens' standards are at their best and that damaged plants are removed and replaced. This was the case in late September when the snow was thick and heavy on the ground, affecting many of the plants.

During spring and summer, the team composts and feeds the plants every six weeks. Compost is made on-site, which is in keeping with the Brahman Hills philosophy of sustainability. A large solar farm also powers the property.

**ABOVE:** Among the many grasses that adorn the landscape at Brahman Hills, this ***Ampelodesmos mauritanicus*** is quite stunning in summer. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The grass garden is filled with beautiful grasses like this one, ***Carex* 'Sea Green'**. This beautiful garden has been dedicated to the late Carol Buchan, wife of Iain Buchan, the owner of Brahman Hills. **BELOW:** Visitors can stroll through the natural forest in a part of the property on the wooden walkway that leads through the majestic trees. **BELOW RIGHT:** The gardens are built to be impressive in every season. You can enjoy a new seasonal look by visiting at different times of the year. The colour is provided by flowering perennials that form the backbone of the garden.



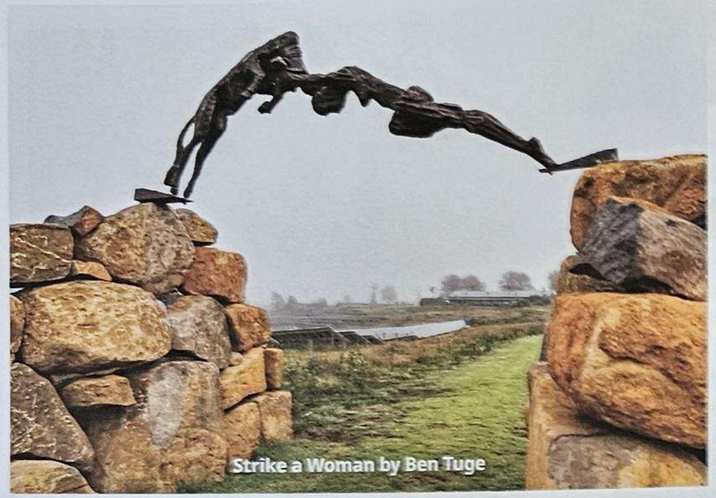


## The beekeepers garden

One of the fascinating new areas of the gardens features a circle garden surrounded by a pond, which makes it into an island on which are set twelve incredible beehives. They are set on stands of varying heights and adorned with artistic ceramic and bead covers. Each one is different, and it isn't easy to choose a favourite. The beehives are inside these structures and can be accessed by loosening a few bolts and lifting the covers to the side by the metal handles.

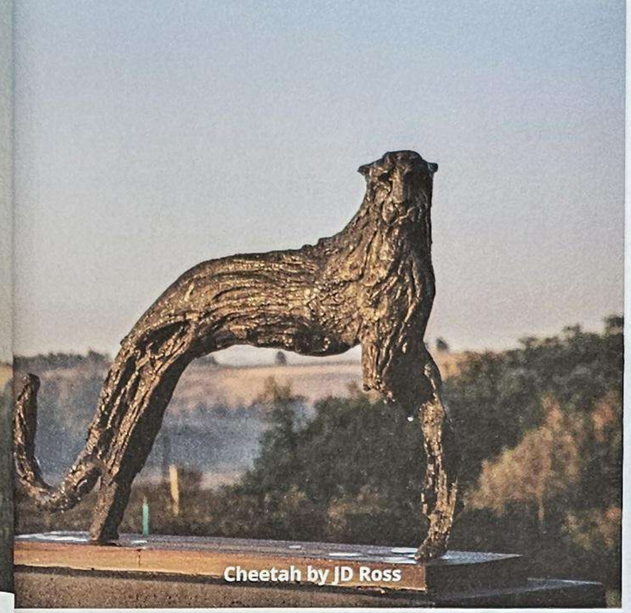
Underneath the beehives is a circle garden filled with plants that bees will enjoy in colours that attract them, such as purple, yellow, white, and pink. This flurry of colour contrasts with the rest of the garden, which is very considered when it comes to colour. Many plants here are annuals that will be replaced next season to encourage more bees.

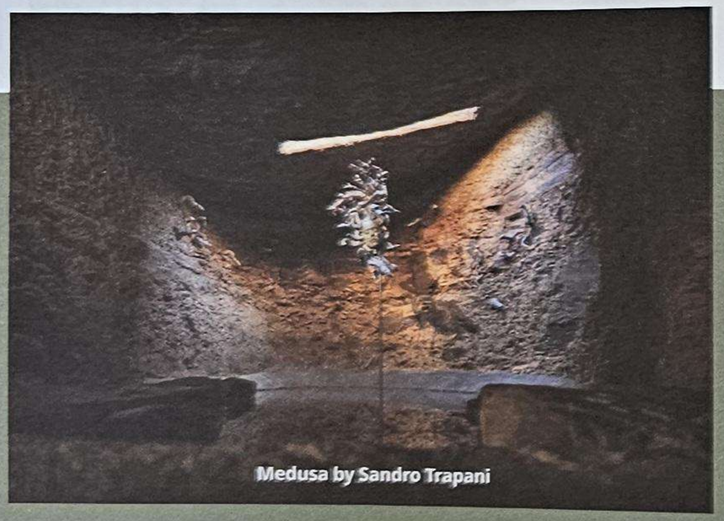
**Some beehives are beaded, while others are constructed with sections of ceramics attached to a frame like petals or Post-it notes. The colour combinations are serene and earthy, and although they have different patterns, they all work together as a group.**


Strike a Woman by Ben Tuge

## Statues and sculptures

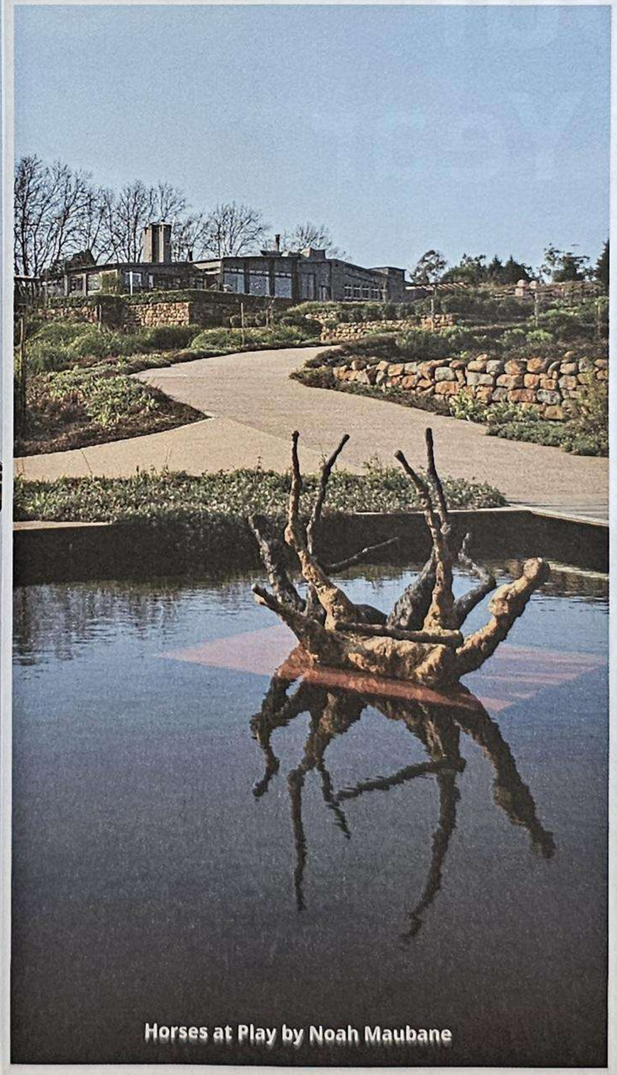
Art in this garden is not only in the design of the garden itself but also in the sculptures and statues placed in perfect positions, each with a story to tell. From the large giant on the hillside that beckons as you drive past on the highway to my favourite, the three men standing on the wall, happy in their own company, there are many sculptures to admire.


Cheetah by JD Ross


Medusa by Sandro Trapani

Leda and the Signet by Joyce Carreira

Stargazer by Louis van den Heever


Horses at Play by Noah Maubane

## What it takes to become a RHS Partner Garden

It's a big deal to be recognised by the Royal Horticultural Society in the Partner Garden scheme. To just apply, you must meet an exceptional list of requirements.
These include:

- ***Horticultural excellence:*** Demonstrated through plant quality, garden design, and maintenance.
- ***Public access:*** Gardens must be open to the public for a minimum of 20 days per year.
- ***Educational value:*** Gardens should provide opportunities for learning, such as guided tours, workshops, or interpretive signage.
- ***Conservation and sustainability:*** Gardens should demonstrate environmentally friendly practices.

Brahman Hills deliver on all of these!

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