

## Leisure Time



THERE ARE HAPPILY still many intellectual and physical pursuits. I have always been an avid reader, switching often between simultaneous readings of trashy thrillers, biographies, and history, in which I have been a fascinated dilettante. Music and theatre are also a passion, but the quality and availability in Johannesburg is sad and infrequent. Happily, circumstances have made a home in London possible, and a twice or thrice yearly travel schedule abroad and to Plettenberg Bay counter the disadvantages of Gauteng. There are few countries that we have not visited and those remaining are high on the future list. I must confess to a broad hedonistic streak.

Holiday homes have always played an important role in our family and in its happy togetherness. There was always an escape from urban life which began with the availability to us of "Mbulwa", the magnificent stone and wood house, designed by our friend Steffen Ahrends for Charlie and Jane Engelhard. I was involved in the initial choice of site, in its planning and execution, and in its management by David and Audrey Hull. For the children, visits to "Mbulwa" were an adventure. There were horses, walks in the woods, trout fishing and a happy mix with the Hull children. "Mbulwa" was, I firmly believe, unique not only for South Africa, but anywhere. Its architecture was country understated, and it blended into the landscape on the edge of a knoll off the majestic Mount Anderson pass, and overlooked the beautiful Sabie River valley that was often shrouded in mist or clouds that floated between us and it. The "Mbulwa" garden was an integral part of its appeal. It was a rocky indigenous garden, created and presided over by a perfectionist Audrey, and soon became famous.

We were fortunate to be there often as a family, as it was my official Sabie home for many years, situated as it was in the heart of the SAFI forests and being part of the Engelhard holdings. In its time it hosted just about every notable South African from the business, political and social spheres, and a large number of American and British business-men and

politicians, and the ever-present smattering of active or indigent representatives of European royalty and aristocracy. The visitor's book makes fascinating reading.



*On safari, 1975*

Alas, with the demise of the Engelhard magic and the take-over by corporate Anglo American, "Mbulwa" was enlarged from its original seven beautiful suites to an executive conference centre capable of housing up to 60 people, under the eagle-eyed control of a company committee. The main house and its location are still and unalterably superb but the magic of the place, its lavish but tasteful and beautiful décor, the warmth of the Hull's, have all gone. Hedda and I have returned on rare occasions, but reluctantly. Hedda had been intimately involved in its décor, and I of course in its management. To return today is a sadness. The passing from our lives of this lovely home left a void for all of us. Concurrent with the latter years of "Mbulwa" was the purchase and development by David Hull and me, for Charlie, of the "Ntoma" game property in the Klaserie game reserve, adjoining the Kruger Park. We spent an exciting few months and were rewarded with one of the best of the small game viewing establishments in South Africa. Again, it was freely available to our family, until it was sold after Charlie's death. We all enjoyed it enormously for the short period of a year or two when it was under my control. It was eventually bought by the Oppenheimer family and we have occasionally returned to it.

At about this time, Irvine and I were looking for a place of our own and we and Hedda fell in love with a substantial stone and thatch cottage on a hill overlooking the Indian Ocean at Sheffield Beach, just north of Salt Rock on the Natal north coast. It had a wild feel to it although it was within a few kilometres of the villages of Salt Rock and Umhlali. We acquired an open beach buggy and many happy hours were spent

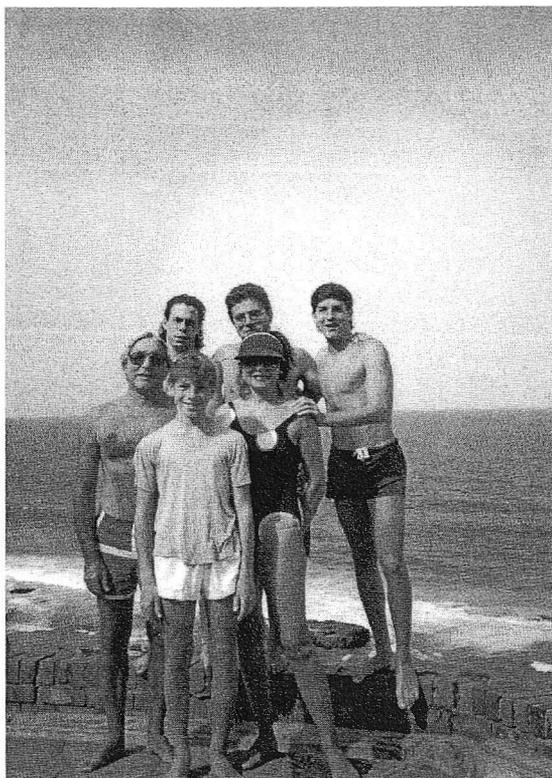
exploring the neighbouring countryside. We christened the house Ylang-Ylang, named after a Malaysian perfume tree, the name of which had come up during one of our frequent scrabble games. Unlike “Mbulwa”, it was very much our own house, sharing it as we did only with Irvine, and the interior had the benefit of Hedda’s great gift for imaginative décor. We left Ylang-Ylang and its Zulu house-keeper, Atalina, with much regret. It had been a lovely holiday and beach house in the true sense of those words, but we had outgrown it and it had become too far from the action for our rapidly maturing family.

Furthermore, it had become close to one of the Zululand “war-zones”, and crime was an increasing problem requiring a full time guard when we were in residence. Today a high fence separates the house from the beach and rock pools – a grim reminder of reality.



*At Ylang-Ylang, 1985*

A holiday house had nevertheless become a necessity, and as we had been occupying rented houses in Plettenberg Bay for many years, this was an easy choice. We found an open stand, high on Beachyhead road close to Beacon Island Hotel, and there we have built our dream holiday house, its design and architecture reflecting a happy mix of the great ability of our architect, Menno Meneisz, Hedda’s instinctive eye for beauty, and perhaps my practicality. The interior décor is purely Hedda, and it and the house are acknowledged as being quite unique. Whilst Ylang-Ylang



*The family at Ylang-Ylang, 1986*

and “Mbulwa” will always lie quietly in our minds, No. 2 Beachyhead is a very successful successor and “Plett” has everything that each family member in his or her own way, wants in a holiday home. There are current threats of yacht harbours and developments which may crowd us, but these are vague and hopefully far in the future – if ever.

Finally, there has been the recent acquisition of a share in the late Charles Fiddian-Green’s Three Falls Farm, a lovely farm on the edge of the Lydenburg escarpment with eleven kilometres of good trout stream running through it. It has three beautifully located and equipped lodges, arguably the best fishing in South Africa, and is superbly managed by Jan and Pierre d’Hotman. Our allocation is 20 days a year including three week-ends, and these are avidly booked by Antony and me. Mark and Chetty do not fish but enjoy the walks and the river pools. John and Peter look on enviously from London. The family share is in fact owned by the four boys. It is a highly successful venture.

That is part of the “second home” history. There is a third, making us rather long on homes. It is a very comfortable, attractive Mews house

in Belgravia, usefully close to Sloane Street and Harrods, and an easy distance from the cultural and other delights of the West End. It has changed our approach to stays in London which we both love, but which became onerous after a week or two in an hotel room. We are now at home, and eight weeks covering June and July are something eagerly to look forward to, both for the London experience and as a home base for forays into Europe. Hedda's décor is again uniquely tasteful.

On the physical side there has been, and still is, trout fishing at Three Falls and trail-riding in the wild. I caught my first trout in the Umzimkulu river on the family farm at Underberg in my early teens and have been hooked ever since. The joy of being alone on the bank of a mountain stream and the thrill of the take and run of the fish are difficult to surpass, but there is an alternative, very different but at best equal. That is trail-riding in the wild, and in pursuit of this I have ridden in the magnificent scenery in the mountains behind Plettenberg Bay, in the rhino fastness of the Waterberg Lapalala Wilderness, in and through the game-rich water-meadows of the Okavango delta, and in the vast plains of the Serengeti, riding joyously with the zebra and wildebeest migrations. There is no adventure thrill that I know of to match it, and I now reluctantly view wildlife from a motor vehicle. When a horse is your vehicle you are part of the environment that surrounds you, and not an interloper, a voyeur. You are integrated. You and your horse are one, another animal, accepted as such with all of the joys and hazards implicit in that integration. (Appendix vi).

Sadly, this has partly ended. I was already affectionately known as the "galloping grandfather" and the realisation comes quite rapidly that with age comes the increasing reality that when and if you fall – as is sometimes unavoidable – something is very likely to break. Also, whilst there is as yet no problem, the long eight or nine hour rides of the Serengeti or even the six to seven hours in the Okavango will become difficult, and there is nothing worse on a trail ride than the rider who cannot keep up. I, at Hedda's correct insistence, have agreed to give up the safari rides, but not the gentler trail rides in the Waterberg and Plettenberg Bay.

In addition to all of this activity there is of course the human side of family, friends, and social activity. We are blessed with four marvellous sons, plus their wives, partners, girl friends, and now two grandsons and a granddaughter, all of whom are close to us, and to each other. They are all a delight and I cannot imagine life without them – their widely differing interests and occupations, their joys, and even their problems.

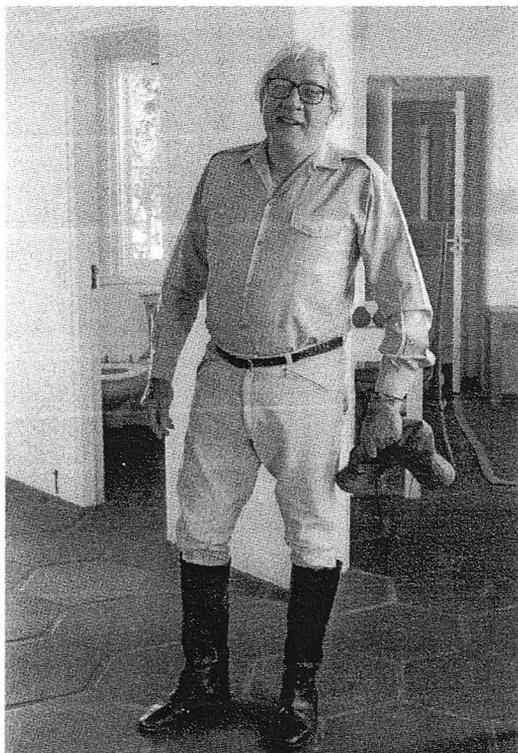
Socially, we have always had the ability to mix in widely differing groups, without becoming a locked-in part of any. This yields an

astonishing array of good friends, but since my bachelor days, and then with the break with Irvine, there has never been an intimate friend, other than Hedda. She has replaced them all, and I do not in any way miss male intimacy. I have little need to confide other than in her.

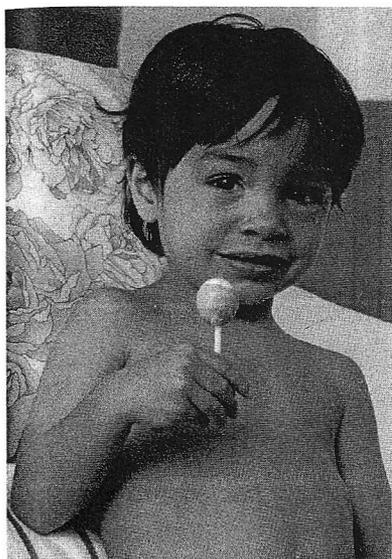
Ruby died, at the good age of 85, peacefully and perhaps mercifully as she was beset by senile dementia. She was an unforgettable character and an integral part of my life. I can do no more than reproduce the eulogy which I delivered at her cremation. (Appendix vii).

A year later Jocelyn also died at 82. She had bravely suffered numerous ailments, some dating back to an aircraft disaster some 50 years ago in which she was badly injured and burned. Before her death I visited her in her hospital ward. She told me that she had had enough. She died, unexpectedly, that night.

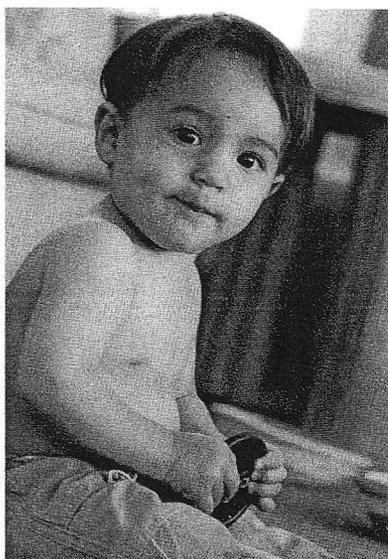
But with Leo and Joshua and Lois the family saga continues, and they are a delightful vanguard of the next generation. There has also been Antony's marriage to Francesca, a delightful Irish girl who, in their lengthy courtship, had already become part of our extended family. She recently gave birth to Lois, the first girl in our heretofore all-male family.



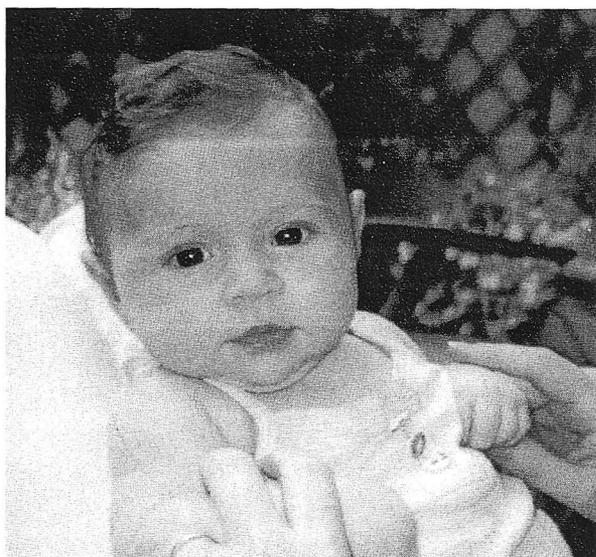
*David, 2005*



*Leo, 2005*



*Joshua, 2006*



*Lois, 2006*



*Antony and Francesca on their wedding day at Gravetye Manor, 13 February 2006*