

by Gerhard R. Damm

Book Review: From the Veld-Recipes and Reflections from Namibia



This is Danene's declaration of love—for her family, her team, the wide-open spaces of Namibia and the country's wildlife: an inspirational collection of ideas for the hunter and forager on how to use the gifts of the land, spiced with anecdotes from life in rural Namibia.

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Danene van der Westhuyzen. 2020. Tip Africa Publishing, South Africa. Hardcover, white linen embossed in gold with open-spine binding. 190x230mm, 240 pages, color and B/W illustrations. ISBN 978-0-620-90234-2. Direct order via WhatsApp +264-81-129-5536 or online. Limited leather-wrapped edition N\$1,395 (€80 or \$94). Trade edition N\$825 (€47 Euro or \$56)—15% of the proceeds to the Namibian Chamber of Environment to fund conservation in Namibia.

Namibia, a seemingly harsh desert country with the world's second-lowest human population density, offers an abundance of nature's wild animals, fruits and plants to be harvested sustainably, prepared with love and served with pride. Celebrating the wild harvest and capturing the pioneer spirit of living off the land is the theme of Danene van der Westhuyzen's new book. The bespoke cow-leather wrapping of the limited edition feels and smells pure Namibia.



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Each leather cover of the limited edition is unique, individually cut and sewn by hand and with a hand-embossed title

Harshness of land and climate forge the existence of Namibians and teach them discipline and respect for nature's balance, as survival depends on holistic conservation and responsible use of what the land offers, says Danene. Paging through her book, we can smell freshly baked bread, biscuits and rusks, and taste her homemade jams.

In Danene's kitchen, fresh ingredients—milk, cream, butter, yogurts and cheeses from the family's dairy herd; vegetables and herbs from the house garden and, most prized of all, !/nabba, the famous Kalahari truffle—are paired with the harvest of the hunt. (Hunting is an integral part of the Namibian conservation model; it benefits communities, wildlife, natural ecosystems and habitats.) Cuts from eland, gemsbok, hartebeest, springbok, kudu, zebra and warthog as well as guinea fowl, sandgrouse, francolin and ostrich are the centerpieces of many recipes. (And not only the prime cuts—every part of the animal is used.) These meats are supremely natural, unadulterated and truly organic.

Danene's recipes are a tribute to the parched Namibian landscapes and the rare smell of long-awaited rains, spectacular sunsets, star-studded skies, the camaraderie around sweet-smelling, crackling camel-thorn fires, and exhilarating memories of exciting hunts, when all your senses are focused on the moment, forgetting past and future.

From simple dishes like scrambled ostrich egg and fire-food prepared from different cuts and bones, to more elaborate ones like hartebeest sirloin stuffed with mushrooms (replace the mushrooms with !/nabba truffles?), liver-and-kidney phyllo baskets or gemsbok Wellington, Danene shows that everything the veld offers can be used.

Her *Ouma* Peet's recipe books with their flour-smearred and fat-blotched pages launched her passion for cooking; formal training wasn't necessary. As you leaf through the pages, it becomes obvious that, as intricate or simple as Danene's recipes are, they promote moving from rampant consumerism toward connecting with the earth as source of food.

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This Aru tree (*Albizia anthelmintica*, worm-cure Albizia, Wurmrindenbaum, Oumaboom, kxàrì, Omupopo) is the namesake of Danene & Gysbert van der Westhuyzen's lodge, but it was eaten by a wandering herd of eland during the recent drought. (The eland may have been battling intestinal parasites and stomach aches; Aru bark is a cure for these ailments). Author's photo

Almost a decade in the making, *From the Veld* features color and black and white photography by Ivan Volschenk, Zak van Biljon, Gritmedia, lodge guests and friends and family. The images offer intimate glimpses into a family's everyday life on a Namibian farm.

David Higgs, one of South Africa's best-known chefs and co-owner of two of Johannesburg's famed restaurants (Marble and Saints) celebrates *From the Veld* unequivocally:

"Having spent my first 10 years in Namibia, I realized over the years that this is where my love for food and cooking started. An incredible country with produce from sea to land. Mostly wild. Catching a fish and cooking it on the beach, or hunting and feeding your family, Namibia supplies this all. Danene's recipes, from Veronica Peace Bread to Wildebeest Steaks, provide simple tasty food and also give good reason to visit this beautiful country."

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Gerhard Damm is Editor-in-Chief of Conservation Frontlines.

Banner image: At the launch of From the Veld (showing the trade and limited editions). Author's photo

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