

# University of the Third Age Plettenberg Bay

## Newsletter June 2023

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Dear Members

We are delighted to announce that we now have a website: https://plettu3a.org.za .

Here you will find information about Plett u3a, our membership form, events, news and interest groups, and also information regarding the international movement of the University of the Third Age (U3A).

Our website is designed to operate seamlessly across all devices, namely desktops and laptops, notebooks and notepads and mobile phones. Let us know if you encounter any problems.

The Links page is a bonus feature. It provides links to organisations and information that may be of interest to you, such as free online learning opportunities, other branches of U3A in South Africa, Plett clubs, associations and societies, as well as retirement and related information.

Be sure to test our Programme Calendar, which allows you to view our forthcoming events by day, week or month. It is also printable. After clicking on a specific event you can either click to invite a friend, RSVP, or copy the event and its details to your calendar.

Please visit our website to explore all of the features available and let us have your feedback via u3aplett@gmail.com. Don't forget to tell us what you think needs to be added in future upgrades.

Best wishes
Plett u3a committee

## Welcome

A warm welcome to our new members:  Colleen Scott-Brown and Mrs Helfet.

A very special welcome to Mrs Helfet, who joined us on Monday 12 June to watch the documentary film Orbit, which she thoroughly enjoyed.  Mrs Helfet used to be a Plett u3a member, but was absent for a few years.  Now that she is 101 years old she wants to make up for lost time!

## Plett u3a events programme and notifications

This may be the last time that the calendar of upcoming events is sent as a separate document together with the newsletter, as you now have the ability to view, print and download the calendar of our forthcoming events from our website.

'Upcoming events' email notifications will continue to be sent about two weeks prior to the event.  A reminder is sent approximately 24 hours before the event.

## Interest groups

Please note that in some cases it is not practical to have groups larger than eight people. This is especially the case where groups meet in private homes and there is not enough seating for big groups. Also, in the language groups everyone needs attention and time to speak.

People wishing to join our interest groups must be Plett u3a members. Please always contact the group leader for more information - see contact details at the end of this newsletter.

**Beginners' bridge**

We are busy arranging a new convener and details will follow at a later stage. If you are interested in Bridge for Beginners classes please contact us via u3aplett@gmail.com.

**French beginners group**

Ingrid James held the inaugural meeting of this group on Tuesday 6 June. It went so well that two attendees want their friends to join and two other people have also decided they wish to be part of this group.  As mentioned before, groups are generally limited to eight people. Ingrid will be away for about three weeks in July.  Otherwise the French Beginners Group meets every Tuesday morning at the home of Ingrid James.

**German beginners or conversation group**

Doris Engelhardt, directly after joining Plett u3a in May, offered to start either a beginners or an advanced German group, which is a wonderful new opportunity for our members.

Doris taught German as a first and foreign language for 30 years. Her parents were from Germany. She majored in German at the University of Johannesburg and then taught German as a foreign language at Bryanston High in Johannesburg for 5 years. She moved to Cape Town in 1993 where she taught at the Deutsche Internationale Schule Kapstadt from 1997 until she retired in 2021. Doris mainly taught German as a mother tongue, but also was involved with foreign language teaching and adult teaching.

Please contact Doris if you are interested in learning German. Alternately, if you are a German speaker, Doris would like to start a German Conversation Group. Doris will be away from mid-July until the end of August.

**Italian conversation group**

We are in the process of establishing an Italian group for those who wish to converse in Italian, rather than for those who want to learn the language. Please contact us via u3aplett@gmail.com if you are interested in joining this group.

**Poetry interest group**

In the June meeting we explored the poetry of e.e.cummings. Each participant selected and read one of his poems, which was then analysed and discussed by the group. The next meeting will be held at Chrissy Hay's home on Thursday, 13th July at 10h00. Topic: limericks.

## Past activities

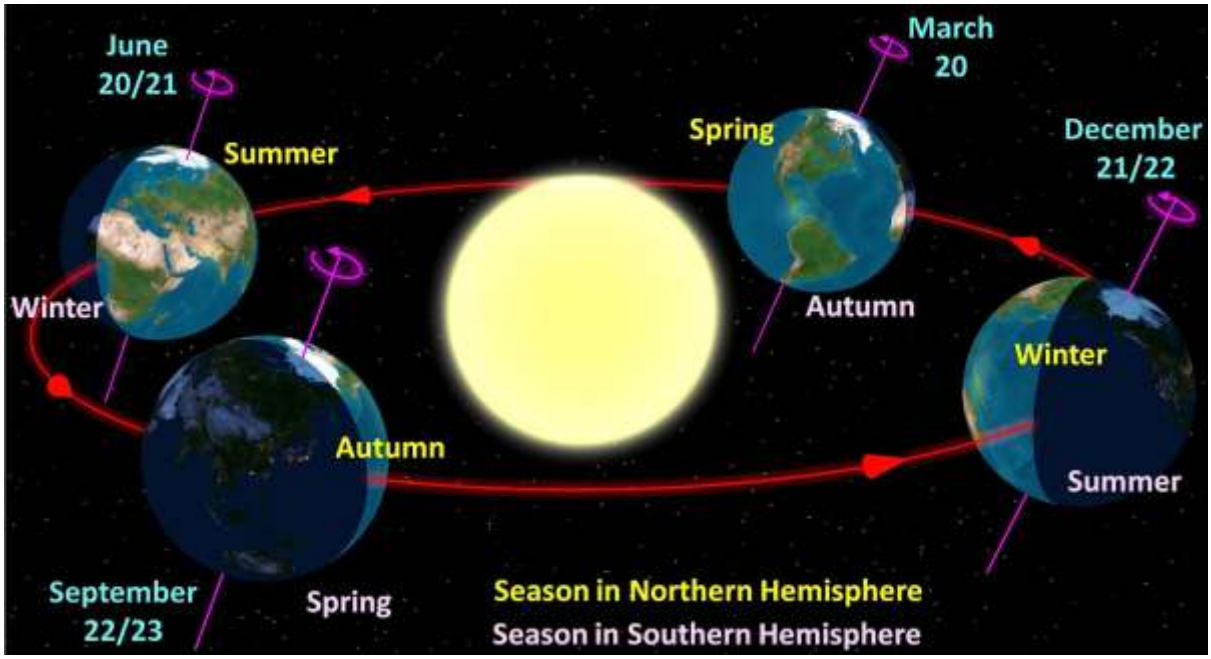



**Monday 29 May: Orbit – E1: July to December solstice**

Earth orbits the sun at an average distance of 149.60 million km (92.96 million miles) in a counter clockwise direction as viewed from above the Northern Hemisphere. One complete orbit takes 365.256 days (1 sidereal year) during which time Earth has travelled 940 million km (584 million miles). Currently we're hurtling around the sun at 100 000 km an hour.

Kate Humble and Dr. Helen Czerski follow the Earth's voyage around the sun for one complete orbit. They travel from July to the December solstice, experiencing spectacular weather and the largest tides caused by the Earth's movements. The presenters show why the planet tilts and how this creates our seasons, as well as the long nights and days of the polar winters and summers. Some of the smallest changes in the Earth's movements caused ice ages.

The Earth's rotation is also responsible for the circulation of air in the atmosphere, as the sun heats the Earth more at the equator than at the poles. In the tropics, near the equator, warm air rises. As the Earth is spinning, the air that moves north and south of the equator also turns with the spin of the Earth. Air going north turns to the right, air travelling south turns to the left. This is known as the Coriolis Effect, which causes the prevailing winds — the trade winds — to move from east to west on both sides of the equator. It also causes weather events such as monsoons and hurricanes and is why we have rain forests and deserts. To show how the Earth's orbit affects our daily life, Helen jumps out of an airplane and Kate briefly becomes the fastest driver on the planet.




The Earth at the start of the four (astronomical) seasons as seen from the north and ignoring the atmosphere - no clouds, no twilight. (Not to scale.)

**Monday 5 June: Orbit –E2: January to March equinox**





During the single year it takes the Earth to orbit the sun, the orbital path changes the Earth's position relative to the sun's energy. This drives changes in climate and weather across the globe in some surprising ways. Our planet enjoys a precise and narrow band of temperatures which means that water can exist in all of its states, as a solid, liquid and gas. The film crew travelled from South America's glaciers to the frozen seas of Greenland and the arctic circle to witness ice movements; to the cloud forest of Calilegua (in the Andes) to watch the growth of intense thunderstorms; and to Lake Ontario to film the development of 'lake-effect' snow, which causes the heaviest snowfalls in the world (up to 196 cm in a day).

Some 20 000 years ago the entire surface of the world's oceans was 120 metres below where it is today, as indicated by the Great Blue Hole off the coast of Belize in Central America, where stalactites are found 40 m below the sea's surface. Most of Earth's water was frozen and trapped on land in continental glaciers during the ice ages. The Earth has experienced regular ice ages going back millions of years. The next ice age is expected to start in five to ten thousand years.

Scientific records show that the polar regions have been warming and the ice has been getting thinner. As global temperatures rise further all life on Earth may be in real trouble. The Earth's orbit and relationship with the sun, its tilts, wobbles and cycles of tiny changes have precipitated climate changes that radically changed habitats and also changed the course of human history. It is a sobering thought that we ourselves have become another significant agent for climate change.

**Monday 12 June: Orbit –E3: March equinox through to the end of June**

Equinox is the name given to an astronomic event in which both day and night last exactly the same time. The northern Spring equinox occurs around March 20th to 22nd, and the southern equinox around September 21st to 22nd. Equinoxes happen when the Earth is located right in the middle of its orbit surrounding the sun, so both equinoxes correspond to the moment when season changes occur in both hemispheres. We watch the arrival of the equinox at the Mexican Chichen Itza Kukulcan (snake) Pyramid Temple, as the shadow of a snake descends the main staircase.



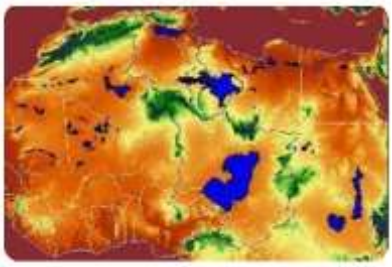
As it orbits our planet also spins and is tilted over to the side. The power of spin creates hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons and monsoons, which generally occur around the equinox. We observe the formation of a tornado and the build-up and downpours of the Indian monsoons.



At the end of the last glacial period, about 10 000 years ago, the Central Sahara was a much wetter place than it is today, as evidenced by the cave of swimmers' rock art in Gilf Kebir, Egypt. About 8,000 years ago, the Earth's axis started tilting from about 24.1 degrees to the current day 23.5 degrees. This shift increased temperatures and decreased precipitation, which led to the abrupt desertification of North Africa about 5 400 years ago and created the Sahara, the largest desert on the planet. The Earth's constantly changing orbital rotation around its axis repeats itself every 23,000 years, which means the Sahara could potentially one day be green again.



Every step of the Earth's 940 million kilometre, one-year journey around the sun is essential to maintaining life as we know it, giving us the ever-changing weather and seasons that transform our planet. However, scientists can't predict how human-caused greenhouse gases will affect this natural climate cycle. Although the change in solar radiation over North Africa was gradual, the termination of the Green Sahara took only 200 years. It's an example of abrupt climate change.



**Breaking news**, as of 15 June 2023. Groundwater loss has changed the Earth's tilt by 80 cm. The Earth's pole has drifted toward 64.16°E at a speed of 4.36 cm per year during 1993–2010 due to groundwater depletion with a resultant sea level rise. An estimated 2 150 gigatonnes of water (enough to fill Lake Victoria) have been pumped from underground reservoirs, mainly for irrigation, especially in north-western India and western North America, shifting enough mass into the oceans to cause 6.24 millimetres of global sea-level rise between 1993 and 2010. The study found that among climate-related causes, the redistribution of water has the largest impact on the drift of the rotational pole. (Reference: Geophysical Research Letters)

**Related information:** Lake Victoria has dried up three times in the past 100 000 years and it could happen again. These predictions are based on historical and geologic data from the last 100,000 years. The research findings are that the lake could dry up again in as little as 500 years because of changes in temperature, rainfall and orbital forcing – the effect on climate of slow changes in the tilt of the Earth's axis.

**Monday 19 June: Private life of a masterpiece -E20: Michelangelo - David**



The statue of the Biblical hero David was created by Michelangelo between 1501 and 1504. *David's* history actually began a hundred years before. The statue was commissioned by the Overseers of the Office of Works (the Operai) of the Duomo, Florence's cathedral church, as one of a dozen Old Testament-themed sculptures for the cathedral roof. A block of marble of exceptional dimensions (517 cm × 199 cm) was provided from a quarry in Carrara, a town in the Apuan Alps in northern Tuscany.

In 1463 Agostino di Duccio was contracted for the project. Agostino only got as far as beginning to shape the legs, feet, torso, roughing out some drapery, and probably gouging a hole between the legs. In 1475 Antonio Rossellino took up where Agostino had left off, but his contract ended soon thereafter. The block of marble remained neglected for 26 years, exposed to the elements in the cathedral's courtyard.

In 1501 Michelangelo (then 26 years old) was asked by Operai to complete the unfinished project. He worked on the statue for more than two years.

When the sculpture was nearing completion, Florentine authorities acknowledged there was little possibility of raising the 5.17 metre high statue weighing more than six tons to the roof of the cathedral. Nine different locations were suggested. In June 1504, *David* was installed in the public square in front of the Palazzo della Signoria, the seat of civic government in Florence. In 1873, the statue was moved to the Galleria dell'Accademia to protect it from weather damage. In 1910 a replica was erected in the original location.

Originally *David* was considered to be controversial. Nobody expected such a revolutionary interpretation of the biblical hero. Traditionally, David had been portrayed after his victory, triumphant over the slain Goliath. Instead he is depicted before the battle – and nude (in the classic Greek style). The hero's gaze was fixed in direction of Rome, the place to which Florence's recently deposed rulers — the Medicis — had fled. David thus became a political symbol of liberty and freedom of Republican ideals, showing Florence's readiness to defend itself.

Michelangelo's statue of *David* is widely recognised as an iconic statement on physical perfection, although some features are disproportionate, such the large right hand, which may have been exaggerated for spectators on the ground. However, the most challenging problem for Michelangelo was the narrowness of the marble block in relation to its height, which made carving of the torso risky. Thus the figure, although muscular, is slim. To ensure the statue's stability one leg rests against a tree stump.

Other than the Statue of Liberty, *David* is probably the best known sculpture in the world and it has been reproduced many times in many media, signifying an attempt to lend an atmosphere of culture, even in settings such as beach resorts and gambling casinos. Nowadays images of *David* are used widely to market various products, including underwear by Calvin Klein.

**Monday 26 June: Private life of a masterpiece -E21: Degas – The little dancer aged 14**

Now revered, the original wax version of *The Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* by Edgar Degas was reviled by most critics when it was shown at the 1881 Impressionist Exhibition in Paris. Art critics described it variously as “repulsive,” “vicious,” “a threat to society,” the "flower of precocious depravity," with a face "marked by the hateful promise of every vice" and "bearing the signs of a profoundly heinous character." The dancer was compared to a monkey and a “Mexica” (primitive being). Degas added to the controversy by exhibiting the sculpture like an anthropological specimen in a glass vitrine, alongside some of his sketches of criminals on trial for murder.

Degas never exhibited the sculpture again, and *The Little Dancer* was largely forgotten until it was rediscovered in the artist’s studio after his death in 1917. Degas's heirs decided to reproduce the sculpture in bronze. Today there 28 bronze casts in museums and galleries around the world today and the tutus worn by the bronzes vary from museum to museum.

Degas began working on *The Little Dancer,* his first sculpture, in 1880. His model, Marie van Goethem, was a young student of the Paris Opera Ballet dance school, a Belgian girl from a poor working class family. Degas first made a wax sculpture of her in the nude. Then, aiming for a naturalistic effect, he dressed it in clothing made of real fabrics. The exact relationship between Marie van Goethem and Degas is a matter of debate. It was common in 1880 for the "Petits Rats", the term given to the young (from ten upwards) ballet students of the Paris Opera, who sought protectors from among the wealthy male visitors at the back door of the opera.



***The Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*** **(1878–81) by Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917).**

**Sculpted in beeswax (left) and cast in bronze (right) showing different tutus.**

The sculpture is one-third life size. To construct the statue, Degas used pigmented beeswax, with a metal armature, rope, and metal paintbrush ferrules covered by clay for structural support. The sculpture is dressed in a real bodice, tutu and ballet slippers and has a wig of real hair. The wig, slippers, and bodice were covered with a layer of wax to help unite them with the rest of the work, while preserving their special texture. At some point Degas extensively reworked his sculpture. X-rays reveal a lower head inside the now taller version. The artist's many sketches prior to making the sculpture show that Degas flattened the model's facial features, exaggerated the low forehead and made the jaw protrude, features that then conformed to popular scientific notions that linked physiognomy and degeneracy.

The barely adolescent figure is simultaneously vulnerable and proud. The arms are stretched uncomfortably behind her back and the legs and feet are placed in a ballet position akin to fourth position at rest. There is tension in the pose and her face is contorted. People thought it was a deliberate image of ugliness, but you could also say it's the image of a gawky adolescent who is being made to do something she doesn't totally want to do.

Ballet students today are mostly from wealthy families, whereas in Degas's day the "opera rats" mostly came from working-class families and were popularly understood to be vulnerable to moral corruption at the hands of well-off suitors. The sculpture was a deeply unsettling challenge both to academic artistic tradition and to French bourgeois society. It forced viewers to confront the seamy side of ballet, which was then the cultural institution at the centre of Parisian metropolitan life. Degas's novel use of unorthodox materials and his realistic depiction of a provocative subject set the standard for modern sculptural practice.

## Talks

**Wednesday 31 May: Rodney Grosskopff – History of St. Peter's Anglican Church**

Rodney Grosskopff gave us an entertaining talk on the history of St Peter's Church, which today is still the centre of worship for the Anglican community. The story started soon after the arrival in 1847 of William Henry Newdigate (builder/owner of Forest hall in 1862), who bought five farms in the Plettenberg Bay area and wanted to build a church for his family and dependants. He started a fund for the church in 1848. Bishop Robert Gray's wife, Sophy, designed the church in 1849.

As the funds for the erection of a stone church were not sufficient, a small wooden chapel-cum-school was built on the site in 1855. In 1872 Bishop Gray reported that the wooden chapel was 'out of the perpendicular'. In 1875 the building was blown down during a seasonal storm. William (Billy) Jones, a man of many careers (sometime schoolmaster, innkeeper, postmaster, amateur lawyer, trader and harbourmaster) submitted a tender of £150 for building the present stone edifice 'within two years'.

Having contributed £120 and donated furniture to the church Jones became a churchwarden and powerful vociferous member of the church council. He had prolonged battles with Aaron Toplis, another churchwarden and treasurer (builder/owner of the buildings now known as 'Old Nick Village') regarding the church's interior adornments. Toplis felt strongly that lime-wash was the only suitable decoration for church walls. The church was consecrated by Bishop William West Jones on 14 August 1881.



**Wednesday 28 June: Matthew Matthee – Global economic and market update**

According to the World Bank the size of the global economy by GDP is $ 74 trillion (1.37 quadrillion rand). The largest economy is the US (24.32%) followed by China (14.84%). South Africa, regarded as an emerging market, accounts for 0.42%. One of the big questions for 2023 is whether the US – and other economies – will go into a recession or not.

COVID was the starting point for discussing recent global and economic changes, as we are still dealing with the repercussions from a market and economics perspective. During the lockdowns all economies ground to a halt and then fell off a cliff. Markets lost 35% of their value. People lost their jobs. America stayed afloat during the pandemic thanks to a $5 trillion government stimulus package paid directly to households and businesses during 2020-21. Prices soon began increasing across the entire economy, with knock-on effects for other global economies. US inflation rose at its fastest rate in 40 years, from an average of 2% it hit 9% in 2022. To control inflation the US Federal Reserve Bank implemented a rapid series of interest hikes, the sharpest seen in over 100 years. By April 2023 US inflation had dropped to 5%, indicating they were past the worst of the inflation cycle. Nobody is sure how far the situation will continue to moderate. For the US stock market 2022 was 'The Great Inflation' year.

Several key US market indicators (manufacturing, home sales and consumer confidence) have fallen significantly, back to their levels during Covid and the 2008 global financial crisis. The indicators show that some components of the economy are weakening and that the US may be heading for a recession. However, US employment rate is currently at an all-time high. In the last six months 200 000 jobs were created, the unemployment rate is 3.4% and there are 11 million job openings. The labour market indicators say that US economy is growing at good pace. If job losses increase then the market will drop again, so the message for now is to be cautious.

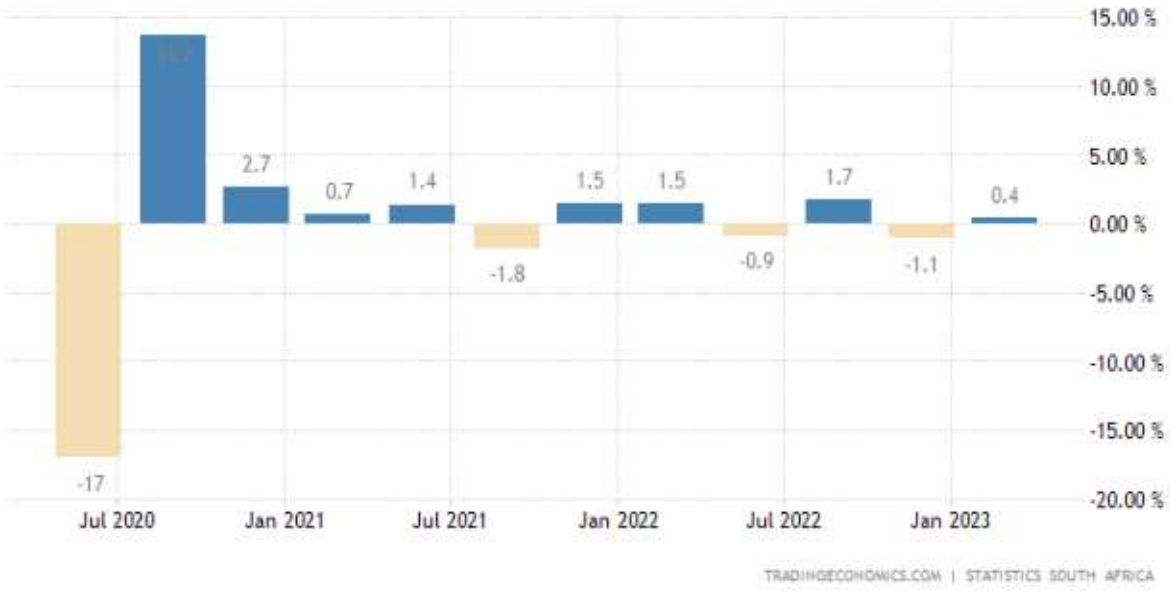
China had the longest and most severe Covid lockdown, which caused its GDP to fall to 3% in 2022. The country needs a minimum growth rate of 5%, which it hopes to secure by creating demand. However, its long-term recovery is negatively affected by trade tensions, public debt, disrupted supply chains, property sector problems as well as depressed global and local demand.

South Africa has a stagnant industrial base, which is being dragged down by load shedding. Companies cannot be expected to invest when there is an electricity crisis and policy uncertainty regarding future electricity production and supply. Many other factors also negatively affect investors' sentiments regarding this country, such as property expropriation without compensation, crime, mismanagement, grey listing, bad political policies and decision-making processes, corruption and incompetence – to name a few. Unsurprisingly SA's business confidence and consumer price indexes have dropped in tandem.

During the past year the rand lost almost 26% of its value and hit a record low in May with the SA-arms-to-Russia scandal. A weaker rand raises inflation risks, so the South African Reserve Bank hiked the interest rate to 8.25%. Since November 2021 the bank has raised interest rates by 475 basis points. While SA inflation has eased (as in the US) one can argue that higher interest rates haven't had time to have their desired impact. In April 2023 the South African Reserve Bank announced that load shedding is costing South Africa R900m a day, which caused it to lower its economic growth forecast for this year to 0.3% from 1.1%, saying that power disruptions will shave 2 percentage points off output growth. SARB has estimated a 0.5% impact on inflation because of load shedding. As South Africa recorded a slight growth in the first quarter of 2023 it is not currently in a recession.

Despite South Africa's economic problems the Johannesburg Stock Exchange continues to show strong growth, even after Covid. Why? The top JSE listed companies are Richemont (22%), a supplier of luxury goods, mainly to Europe; mining companies (about 30%) that export their commodities; and Naspers and Prosus (12%), online publishing and retail companies. In other words, 64% of the JSE's top companies derive their income from outside South Africa. The South African bond market currently represents a good investment opportunity.

The data stories of South Africa and the world's two largest economies indicate that recessions may be imminent. Only time will tell what happens next.




**GDP growth rate in South Africa.** *Source*: Statistics SA.

## Outings

**Wednesday, 14 June 2023: Wine tasting and lunch at Kay and Monty Vineyards**



Despite the cold and heavy rain driven by wind gusts of up to 40 km/h, everyone who booked for this event turned up. Anton Smal, the winemaker, gave us a comprehensive overview of the history of wine growing around Plettenberg Bay, most of which occurs in The Crags. As this is a cooler area than the traditional Cape winelands, the wines created here are typically cool climate wines and particularly suited to producing Méthode Cap Classique (MCC) wines (bubbly – one is not allowed to use the word 'champagne').

The cool climate and soil, which has a high carbon content, is perfect for growing Sauvignon Blanc grapes. Other grapes that do well in this region include Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Wine farms in The Crags tend to harvest earlier due to the higher temperatures they experience. Some of the problems local wine farmers need to contend with before they ever harvest, apart from mildew and other bacterial and fungal diseases, are grape-loving birds, bush pigs and baboons.



Anton (who is also the winemaker of other local vineyards) explained how the terroir (climate, soils and aspect) affects the taste of the wine. The soil alkaline levels (low pH) produce wines that are low in acid and sulphites, which means less sulphur dioxide (which preserves wine, preventing oxidation and browning) needs to be added, resulting in lighter wines with a lower alcohol content.



Kay and Monty produce four wines, three of which are award-winners: blanc de blanc cap classique, sauvignon blanc, rosé (blend of shiraz, chardonnay and pinot noir) and a red wine blend of shiraz, mourvedre and grenache. Anton explained the cap classique method of making champagne by creating a second fermentation in the bottle that has to be regularly turned and tilted until it is finally ready to be corked. This explains why champagne is so expensive, especially when compared to sparkling wine, which is carbonated wine.



Jennifer Woods, manager of Kay and Monty, took us through the wine tasting process whilst we enjoyed a delicious meal. Lizette Mills (our super-supportive receptionist of Formosa Garden Village) gave us a brief overview of what life was like when she grew up on a farm next door to the present Kay and Monty vineyard. It was a richly informative and wonderful outing: thanks to all involved!





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| Outings | Beth Hackland | 072-266-1821 |
| Programme coordinator | Lynette Timme | 079-313-9641 |
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| **Special interest groups** | | |
| Computer basics | Peter Grube | 083-381-5929 |
| French conversation (full) | Merle Decot | 084 581 7379 |
| French for beginners | Ingrid James | 076-689-5245 |
| German | Doris Engelhardt | 082 626 0212 |
| Music (Monday Music Memos) | Peter Grube | 083-381-5929 |
| Poetry group | Chrissy Hay | 083-648-0306 |
| Science group | Henry Timme | 078-877-5829 |
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