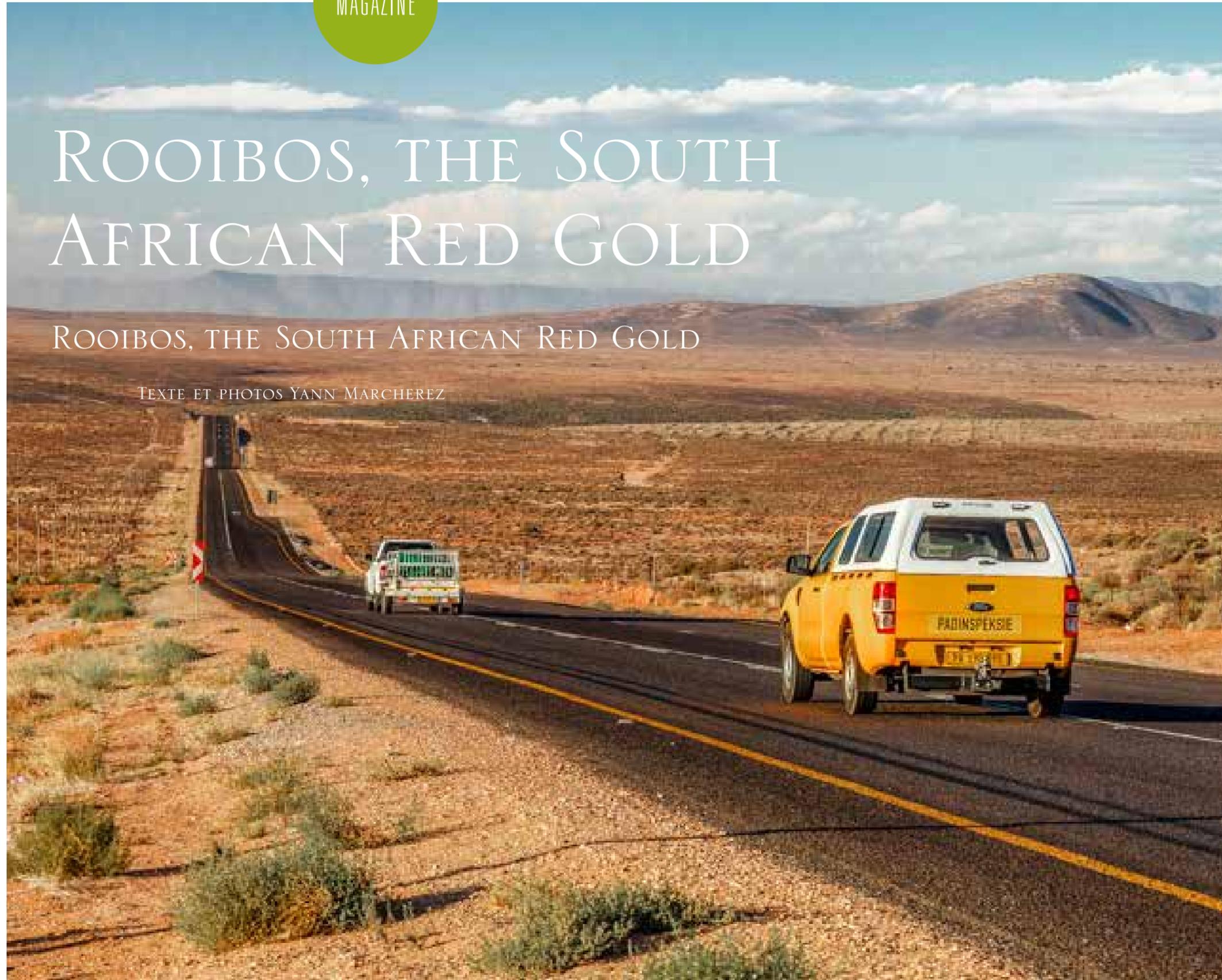


ROOIBOS, THE SOUTH AFRICAN RED GOLD

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TEXTE ET PHOTOS YANN MARCHEREZ



NATIONAL DRINK OF SOUTH AFRICA, ROOIBOS IS A REDDISH COLOURED INFUSION THAT INVADES THE PLANET TEA! KNOWN AS AN ENDEMIC PLANT, THIS «RED BUSH» GROWS MAINLY IN THE HIGHLANDS OF BOKKEVELD, LOCATED 320KM FROM CAPE TOWN. AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE FOR ISOLATED LOCAL POPULATIONS, WHICH GOES FAR BEYOND SIMPLE ECONOMICS.

It is in the small town of Nieuwoudtville, nestled in the northern part of the Cederberg Mountains, that is based the «Heiveld» cooperative. It brings together 64 members and producers of Rooibos, all from the «colored» (mixed) population group, whose plots are spread throughout the plateau.

Founded in 2001, it is the culmination of many years of exploration and cooperation between local producers, Rooibos trading partners and other consultants. Above all, it represents the fulfilment of a dream. The dream of a handful of producers who, during apartheid, had the crazy idea of one day becoming the owner of their land. In order to exist and to be free, and to live instead of surviving.

« Wupperthal producers (neighbouring city) just created their cooperative. They showed us the way. From then on, we knew it was possible. It was the glimmer of hope we needed.», says Koos Koopman, one of the producers behind the project.

From 1998, under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture, workshops were set up across the region. A space where different speakers came to share their knowledge and expertise to local communities. It is during one of these workshops that Noel and Bettina, couple in life and members of NGO «Environmental Monitoring Group» (EMG) and «Indigo», discover the project of an entire community. They then met motivated producers but clueless with regards to logistical problems.





«During the first meetings, everything seemed possible. The glimmer of hope in their eyes filled me with optimism. Concerning the project, nothing was really defined”, says Bettina.

After only two workshops, they decided to settle in Nieuwoudtville with the desire to create real relationships with project stakeholders. They soon faced a problem they had not considered.

«Producers soon felt vulnerable when they proposed their ideas. Still affected by apartheid, we could feel how much they remained suspicious of us, white people. It was necessary to create a relationship of trust”, continues Bettina.

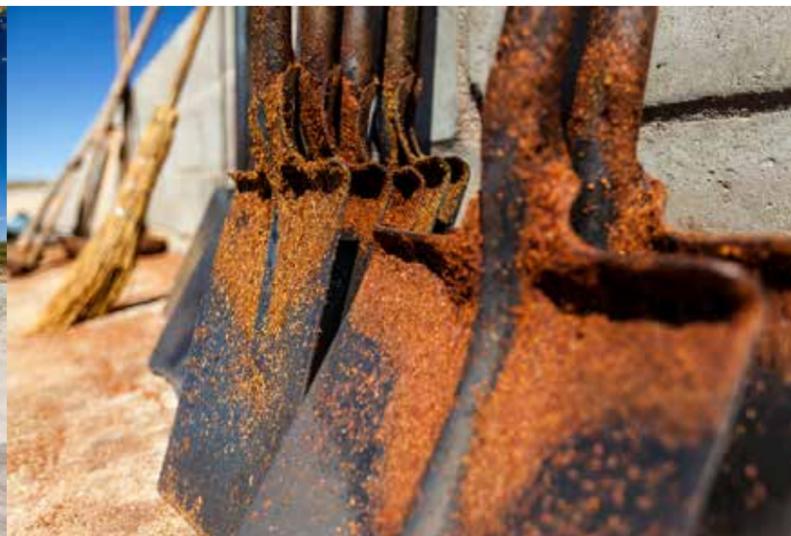
No sooner said than done. Through on-going communication and permanent involvement, the Apartheid demons were gradually vanished.

Today, with a percentage of exports of 90% and a turnover in

constant growth, the cooperative position itself as a significant player on the Rooibos international market. In France, the brand «Alter Eco» is one of its most serious supporter and customer. Their ancestral know-how, their production stemming from organic agriculture and their fair trade attract each season new buyers concerned about product quality and the future of small producers.

In the land of the «Ubuntu» philosophy, success is always shared. The cooperative was able to take advantage of its resources and expertise to the entire community: educational workshops, professional training, and personal accompaniments. Many opportunities for this generation were often left abandoned only because of skin colour!

«Rooibos has given us much more than we could have imagined. We became independent and united. This is my idea of freedom», concluded Pieter Koopman, president of the cooperative, perched above the valley. In silence, his gaze arises on wild rooibos fields stretching to the horizon, on the land of his childhood.



Where dreams come true.
Where souls bind in the same destiny.
Where only a now colour predominates,
The Red.