

Gowrie Farm

NOTTINGHAM ROAD

From the Pastures & Fairways of Gowrie Farm

Gowrie Farm is hot on solar energy



PHOTO: ALAN BENEWITH

Gowrie Farm's eco-sensitive ethos is highlighted by the developers' emphasis on the use of an often under-appreciated energy source: solar power. The Gowrie clubhouse will utilise solar energy, and all homeowners are encouraged to consider installing solar heating when designing their new homes.

So far, solar power is used in about 1% of South African homes, despite the ideal sunny climate and obvious cost-savings. Solar power is also eco-friendly: it doesn't pollute, unlike major power stations, and does not require the use of non-sustainable fossil fuels or nuclear power. Research shows that an average South African family of four people spends more than a third of their monthly electricity budget on heating water. Most homes use one or more electric geysers, which are relatively cheap to buy and install, but expensive to run.

A solar system consists of a collector panel made up of a series of pipes, fitted inside a box, which is usually painted matt black and covered with hail-proof glass or acrylic sheeting. Water is fed under normal household supply pressure at the bottom of the piping, and connected via a top outlet to a hot water storage tank fitted with an electrical element for back-up. The tank can be fitted directly above the collector panel or placed discreetly out of sight, perhaps inside the roof of the home. As sunlight strikes the

collector panel, water inside the piping heats up and flows through to the storage tank. When a hot water tap in the house is opened, heated water from the tank will flow out, and a fresh supply of cold water will enter the collector panel to be heated to replenish the storage tank.

A solar unit is usually installed on an exposed, unshaded roof and aligned to face the equator for maximum sun-collection. It can also be free-standing in an open spot near the house. As aesthetics are naturally important, today there are sleek and unobtrusive solar units, often in different colours to blend with the roof colour.

People sometimes worry that there will not be sufficient energy on cloudy or winter days to produce enough hot water. However, research shows that radiation in South Africa is more than adequate. Solar power can supply as much as 99% of hot water needed in summer (based on an estimated daily use of 160 litres). Even in mid-winter, in July, solar power can produce 52% of hot water needed, with electricity used to top up the family's hot water requirements. This would equate to just 20% of the family's hot water needs being electrically heated. Even in the colder months and on completely overcast days, invisible ultraviolet radiation will continue to provide enough energy for the solar panels. In an area where freezing occurs, such as the Midlands, an indirect solar unit can be installed, which uses an anti-freeze solution contained inside the closed-circuit piping, which transfers heat to the water through a heat exchanger. To cope with larger demands, more than one solar unit can be installed.

As the better solar units should last about 20 years, the installation of solar power will prove to be an affordable and intelligent investment for homeowners. It will also make them less dependent on electricity, which is a wise move, seeing as Eskom's older coal-fired power stations are apparently nearing the end of their service life. Not to mention the chances of snow in the Midlands terminating power supplies in winter!



PHOTO: ALAN BENEWITH

ABOVE: Judy and Tiny sample some of their own wines.

From grapes to Gowrie

Two new owners at Gowrie Farm are Judy and Tiny van Niekerk, who have purchased a plot by the dam overlooking the main fairway (and their local watering hole, the Bierfassl pub and restaurant). They plan to start building soon, and hope to move in within the next 18-months - a move necessitated because their Nottingham Road wine estate, The Stables, has literally taken over their home on the farm.

'Last month we had to move out of our bedroom to the guest-room to allow for storage of our newly bottled wines, a red blend, plus Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc,' laughs Judy. 'Our home is already being used as an office, our dining room is full of desks, computers, fax

machines and printers, and our living room is the meeting room, with boardroom tables!'

Judy and Tiny started The Stables wine estate in Nottingham Road a few years ago, and it is expanding at a rapid rate. Harvesting of the almost 100 tons grapes started recently, and they have already made some Pinot Noir. If winemaking isn't enough, they also plan to open a restaurant on the estate as well as a luxury cottage for rental later in the year.

The couple is excited about their new home at Gowrie. 'By living at Gowrie Farm we will still feel like we are experiencing farm-living', says Judy. 'The setting is absolutely awesome and we are so chuffed to have acquired a plot on one of the dams.'

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Agents for Gowrie Farm

Peter Greene and Rob Dickson of Meander Real Estates are the Midlands agents for Gowrie and Gowrie Farm. Their main sales office is located inside the Junction, adjacent to Gowrie. They can be contacted for sales queries and brochures, and are also the best people to ask about site placements, the Gowrie architectural code etc.

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