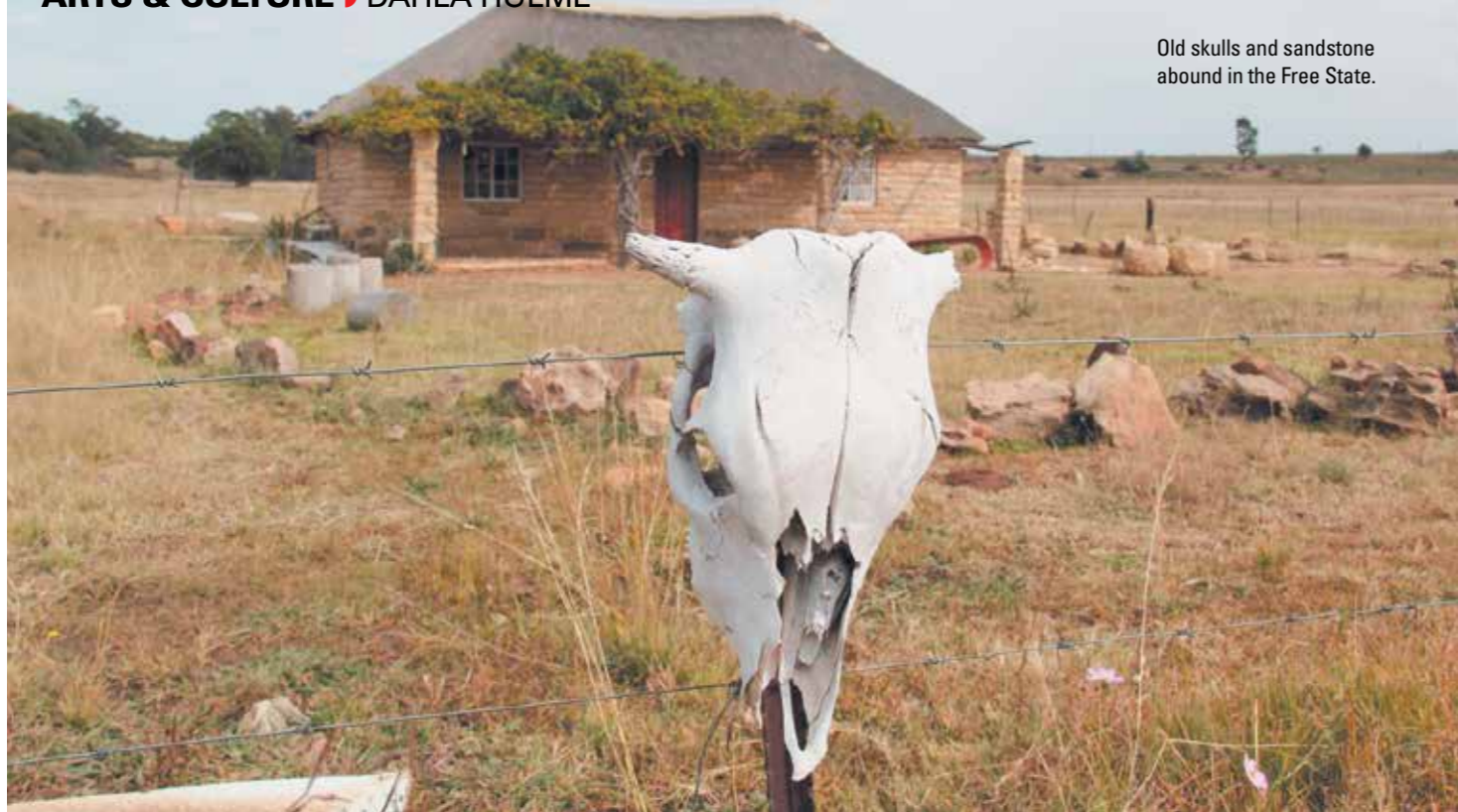
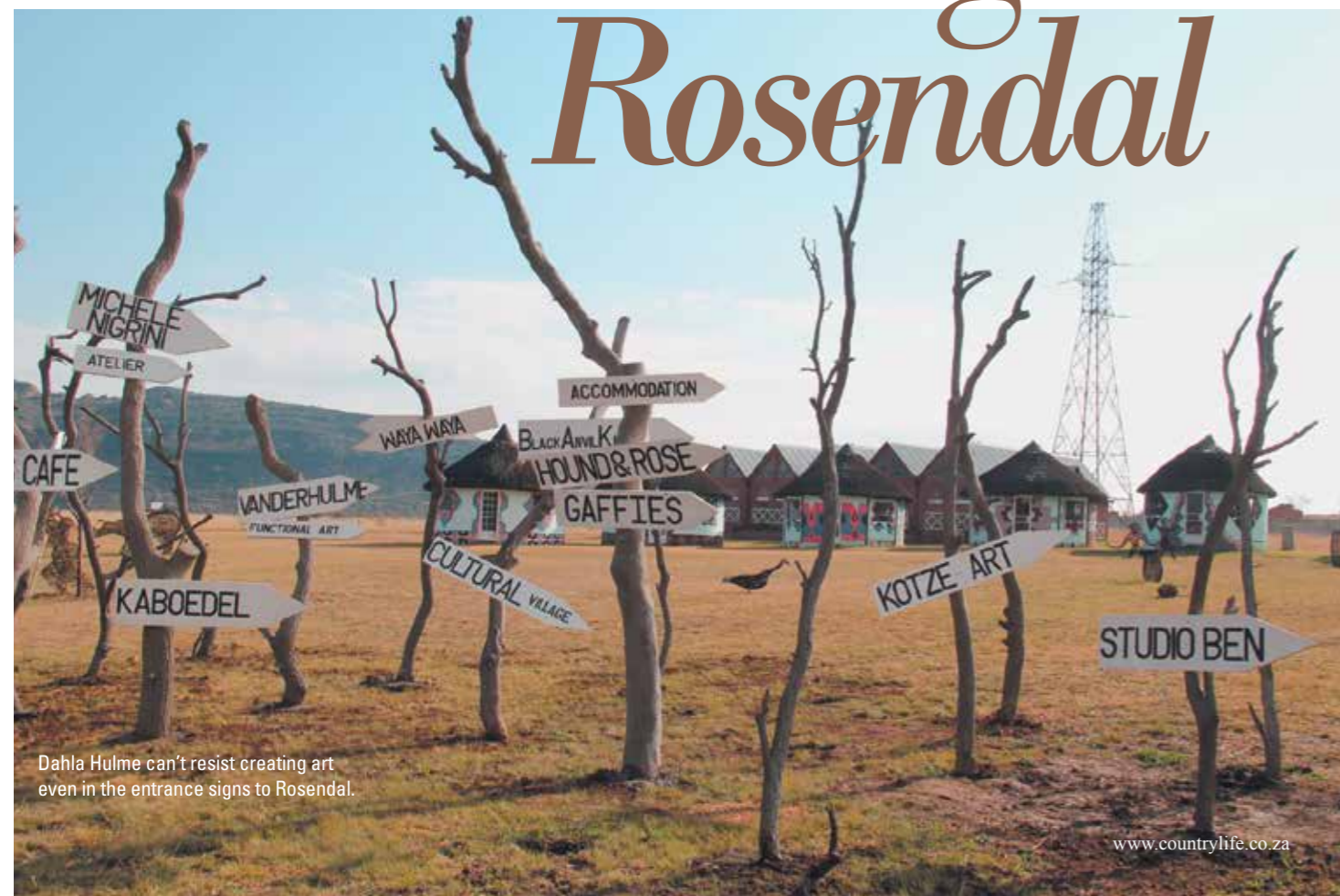


Old skulls and sandstone
abound in the Free State.



Rich Pickings in Rosendal



Dahla Hulme can't resist creating art even in the entrance signs to Rosendal.



ABOVE: Dahla Hulme in her studio. TOP RIGHT: Part of the *Sacred Ox* series.



Rumour has it that splendid designer furniture is being produced in a tiny Eastern Free State town. SUE ADAMS investigates

Dahla Hulme has done many things in her life, from being an aspiring Olympic javelin thrower to studing photography and becoming a commercial pilot. But in the sandstone town of Rosendal, not far north of Ficksburg in the Free State, she has chosen to design and make furniture.

A gypsy, is how Dahla describes herself. "My mother always said you can travel but must always have a base. But I got weary of travelling and was ready to settle and Rosendal just seemed right." Fascinated by the old rusting farm implements lying around Rosendal, she began a business of recycling them into furniture.

Dahla's early life goes way back to a Namibian cattle farm near Etosha. "There wasn't much else to do then but throw stones on the farm," she says with a wry smile, as she explains that her javelin-throwing skills at school led to a bursary to study in the USA. She chose photography and afterwards moved to Germany to train with the Olympic javelin team. "But an injury put an end to that part of my life, although I must say that, yes, I was given an amazing talent but I was the laziest athlete in the world and would rather read a book than train."

As for her next choice of becoming a commercial pilot, she says, "I love travel so I thought it would be fun to fly. I saw life from a new perspective but the constant movement was so tiring." And so she settled in Rosendal and looked around for something to do.

"I fell in love with the bits of machinery lying in the backyards of farmers. I couldn't bear that these farm implements lay about, useless and neglected," says Dahla, who wanted to do something to celebrate their beauty and engineering. "I love things that aren't instant or disposable, and I love as much the work that goes into creating something from them."

So Dahla began to design and create, making abandoned objects useful again. "All of these pieces were only made in the last 100 years and, with new technology, they will soon disappear," she says. "I want them to be passed down and treasured."

Behind her workshop is a junk collector's delight, where old ploughs crouch in the grass, hand-carved, sandstone blocks lie tumbled about like toys, and a rickety splintered table is piled high with cattle skulls. And in them all Dahla sees potential.

"I am very focused on line, balance, composition and texture. I don't see in colour.

TOP RIGHT: Jonathan van der Walt and Dahla always have a new idea. ABOVE RIGHT: Van der Hulme's shop is a constantly changing display of their work. BELOW: Rush hour in Rosendal. Cattle have right of way in Africa.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Give Henriette van der Walt a skull and a few bits of wood and she is happy; Van der Hulme's indoor/outdoor workshop; Jonathan van der Walt likes to be able to do it all – design and build; Dahla's backyard is a treasure trove of rust waiting to be given new life.

now mixing my talents, one day designing and the next day manufacturing. Very few creative people can get to do that. If you're an architect you don't get to build houses but I get to do it all – design and build."

Now Dahla Hulme furniture design is known as Van der Hulme. "We are not trained," says Dahla, "so we don't do the obvious. We go the unconventional route because we don't know otherwise." When I ask how they begin to design something there is no straightforward answer. Sometimes we start with an object and sometimes with an idea.

We might have two or three objects and we need to put them together," she explains.

The combination of Henriette, Jonathan and Dahla is working well to create unusual work. Apart from using farm implements they also use wood and bone, as in their *Sacred Ox* series. "I have a reverence for the cow and I want to make those old bones and skulls beautiful once again, and give them a place of honour," says Dahla. "The cattle of Africa are part of us. And they certainly have right of way on our roads." She laughs and points to a cow wandering past the workshop.

All three of them love the community spirit in Rosendal and the rural life it offers. Dahla also feels strongly about creating work for others in this community, and has put together a local team that does the welding, grinding and finishing touches.

So what does the future hold for Dahla and Van der Hulme? "I want to enjoy exactly what I am doing right now," says Dahla, "and for others to get joy out of what we are doing." ■

Map reference D6 see inside back cover

www.dahlahulme.co.za

I see in line and form." It might be hard to believe when you see her artistic pieces, but Dahla says she can't paint to save her life. "If I paint, the sky is blue and the grass is green."

Dahla combines her sense of design with wood, metal, bone, leather and a touch of magic to create pieces that are unique. I've never seen anything quite like these pieces that have a clean, industrial look and yet a sense of history and warmth.

Her business was a one-man-show until she joined up with Henriette van der Walt five years ago. Tall, willowy and elegant, Henriette looks more like she should be on the diplomatic circuit in Rome and

Switzerland, where she spent some time, than getting covered in rust and dust in a workshop in Rosendal. But Henriette feels she has rediscovered her artistic self here. She had moved 31 times in her life at last count and says she lost the artistic part of herself as life took over. Now she is perfectly happy on the cement floor sorting out skulls and helping design works of art.

Henriette's son Jonathan arrived in Rosendal to work as a chef in the local restaurant, but recently joined Dahla and his mother. "I have always been involved in something creative and I found city life a burden. Now, this is bliss," he says, waving at the grasslands. "I love that I am

