



Chateau Sallandrouze (above); and Annemarie Meintjies with Heidi Finestone (top right)



Bites and

The owners of this kind of fancy French project usually find themselves haemorrhaging money, so Lanie has four sets of partners: Wynand Wilsenach, the architect doing the revamp, and his wife Yvette; real estate broker Elisabeth Kretschmer; lawyer Penny Plougmann; and Steve and Pam Gain, who own the Meeting Place restaurant in Simonstown.

They've all invited everyone they know, who've invited the rest of the city. Jokers in berets and fake moustaches are queuing up on the red carpet outside – not the sort of thing captains of industry like Christo Wiese and Ton Vosloo enjoy – while inside it's a battle to reach the Port Salut and smoked salmon, let alone either of the screens showing continuous footage of the chateau's revamp journey from the day Lanie first found it in August 2005, billiard cues still on the wall.

Worse, the microphones are playing up. So it's only the pushy swine in front who catch the pearls cast before them by Annemarie Meintjies, *Visi's* assistant editor. The magazine is doing a feature on tonight's party. The focus is Lanie's Sallandrouze



Anita Lategan and Madeleine Lass

YOU DON'T HAVE TO PISS OFF to Perth to escape the crime. You can become part of the small South African enclave beginning to root itself in deep rural France, in that beautiful lonely section, more or less in the middle geographically, that the French lovingly call *la France Profonde*.

It's a term that suggests awesome depths of spirituality and awareness. But don't be fooled. Those baguette-chewing peasants can be as small-minded and mean to new arrivals as Yves Montand was to Gerard Depardieu in *Manon des Sources*, and Alfred Molina was to Juliette Binoche in *Chocolat*. They're the only Frenchmen who can stand living so far from Paris. Which is why the place is empty, and property affordable, even for a few South Africans.

A lot of the South Africans creating glamorous toeholds here

are *boeremeises*; and I don't mean Louis Janse van Vuuren and Hardy Olivier, who found a little chateau for themselves seven years ago in Bouszac.

Maybe it's because their Huguenot forefathers came from around these parts, or because they fancy the Marita van der Vyver image – your kids all chirping "*Je t'aime, Maman!*" as *Maman* churns out another best-seller. Whatever, these descendants of the women who got oxwagons over mountains are now pioneering France.

Marlene van der Westhuizen, wife of the plastic surgeon Deon, is running cookery courses at her *manoir* in Vichy, and Lynn Chaulieu, who married a French graphic designer, has opened the breathtakingly stylish Aux Jardins des Thevenets guest house in Auvergne.

Lanie van Reenen is the latest. She chanced upon her 1883 chateau in the tapestry town of Aubusson, and she's turning it into a boutique hotel a few notches up from the guest house she had in Oranjezicht for 10 years, Welgelegen.

Tonight is the launch of her Chateau Sallandrouze, which opens in March. The party's at the iArt Gallery in Loop Street, an elegant downtown venue whose two spacious floors are overflowing with guests.



Left to right: Melissa Williams, Kobus Olivier with Karina and Petré Prins

pieces

furniture range, a locally available offshoot of the décor she's done for the chateau. Seductive four-posters and a fleet of spindly-legged fauteuils and chaises and divan-lits of the decadent Versailles kind that once supported the not so spindly derriere of Louis Quatorze.

These dainty pieces have been



strategically placed for maximum effect under the big, bold paintings of big-balled bulls that gallery owner Elana Brundyn knows the corporates can't resist. One gloriously realistic beast priced at half a million rand is the work of Paul Emsley, the Cape Tech-trained artist who's just won Britain's BP Portrait Award.

Naturally quite a few artists are here tonight.

Holding court on a divan-lit is *avant garde* icon Christo Coetzee's feisty widow, Ferry Bingham-Coetzee, who at 81 is still painting.

Hanging around the roast vegetable tapenade with the fey, beautiful mother of his children, Catherine Boraine, daughter of Alex, is Hardy Botha, the virtuoso who went to Dakar to meet the ANC and seems never to have quite recovered.

Checking out the chaises are the décor gurus. Singita's award-winning interior designer Boyd Ferguson, here with Brad Pitt clone Kurt Pio, is talking about his new outlet – a branch of Cecile and Boyd. Block 'n' Chisel's Lynn and Sibley McAdam, just in from Shanghai, are also talking about a new outlet, in Knysna.

While Abe Swersky's bubbly daughter Aimee would love an art



Henda, Gerhard and junior (18 months) Van Deventer

gallery in Sallandrouze country, not everyone here is anxious to invest in a tiny piece of France. Ton and Annette Vosloo already have theirs. So does Lanie's French South African lawyer who has the curiously ungrammatical surname Le Breton Le Vieux Ville. (When was Ville ever not feminine?)

Some of the guests think this fun bash is another art launch.

They didn't get the invitation, couldn't hear the speeches, and have been too busy piling into the lumpfish, under the impression that it's caviar, to notice the French visuals being screened on the walls – exquisite stonework, chapel, landscape, etc, and Lanie and Monsieur Pizon fighting over the plumbing. **W**



Natalie Smit and Uys Meyer