



Fully Booked

To celebrate 21 years of really good reading in COUNTRY LIFE, Henrietta Dax of Clarke's Bookshop in Cape Town chooses 21 enduring South African titles

WORDS NANCY RICHARDS PICTURES ANDRÉ SALES

“As a bookseller, everyone thinks I’ve read everything – it’s a terrible burden,” says Henrietta Dax with a laugh. She may not have read everything but, over the decades she’s been in the business, she has developed a relationship with books that makes them like family – a very extended family.

Henrietta took over Clarke’s Bookshop in Cape Town’s vibrant Long Street in 1981. She’d worked for original owner Anthony Clarke for a while and, before that, at Exclusive Books and Stuttafords Book Department. “I absolutely loved it at Stuttafords,” she remembers. “I worked with the legendary Miss Cranfield, and Pieter-Dirk Uys and Brian Astbury used to pop in and have tea at the Bird Cage.”

“Every independent bookshop,” she believes, “is inevitably curated to reflect the taste of the owner,” and what reflects at Clarke’s is that her taste is both broad but selective. “New and second-hand South Africa, out-of-print, valuable and general second-hand,” she quotes their mandate. “So we have books from 1650 up to the very latest release. And in the end it’s the customers who

are our readers and reviewers.”

In terms of numbers, new books now outsell the old and, interestingly, two of their most asked for books are Nelson Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom* and Steve Biko’s *I Write What I Like*. What saddens her, though, is that some books go out of print when they shouldn’t. “Less than five per cent of books published really stand the test of time.” Part of her daily endeavour is to keep feelers out for those that do. “At auctions, or when people are moving house or clearing out. Some people have even left their books to us in their will. It’s quite extraordinary to see how people’s libraries reveal the lives they have led.”

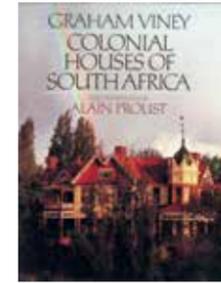
Looking back on choosing 21 titles for the COUNTRY LIFE milestone, she says “At first I thought I’d battle to find ten – now I wish it had been 50. It was a combined effort. We (she and her team Isabel Birkby and André Sales) walked around the shelves – and they just kept popping out. Love is too strong a word, but finally we chose on the basis of the deep affection we have for these books. André

swears by Antjie Krog’s *Country of My Skull* (he personally has sold hundreds of copies), Isabel chose *Mother to Mother* by Sindiwe Magona as a must – it’s about to go into reprint. Me, I would like to have slipped in Zoë Wicomb’s *October* – but we have one of hers on the list already.”

She sighs and agonises further over leaving out Eve Palmer’s *The Plains of Camdeboo*. “This is the hardest list I’ve ever had to make.” But, finally, she says of the choice, “These books, not in any order of importance, are what South Africans can be proud to have on their shelves.” ■

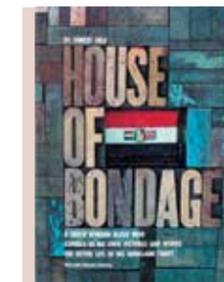
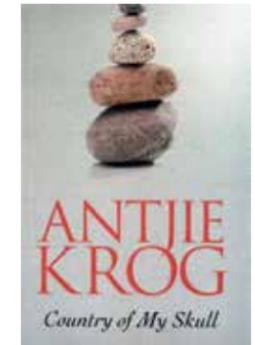
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1 Colonial Houses by Graham Viney (Struik Winchester).



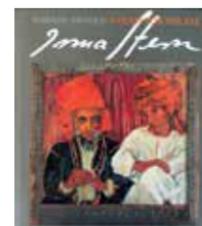
Timeless text on extraordinary houses, beautifully photographed by Alain Proust. Twenty-three houses from across the country, from Cape Dutch to Cape Regency to Victorian. First published in 1987 and reprinted many times before sadly going out of print.

2 Country of My Skull by Antjie Krog (Random House Struik). An extraordinary account of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, by poet and journalist Krog who reported on the TRC for SABC radio. First published in 1998. In print.

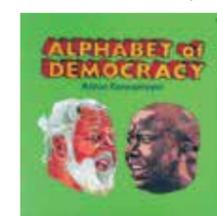
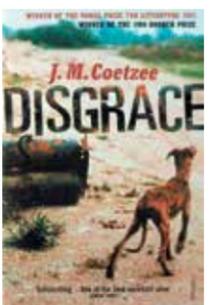


3 House of Bondage by photographer Ernest Cole (Ridge Press/Random House). A Drum magazine photographer exposes the injustices of apartheid. Cole left South Africa on an exit permit in the 1960s with only these photographs. The book was published in New York and London and was banned in South Africa. He died in 1990, never returning to South Africa. First published in 1967, now out of print.

4 Feast for the Eye – Irma Stern by Marion Arnold (Fernwood Press). Lush, all-colour biography of South Africa’s greatest painter. Only a visit to the wonderful museum in Cape Town will give you a better idea of her work. First published in 1995. Out of print.



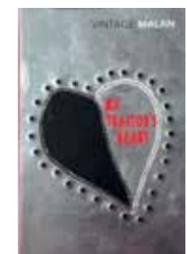
5 Disgrace by J.M.Coetzee (Vintage). Unforgettable if disturbing Booker Prize-winning novel by Nobel Prize-winning author. First published in 1999. In print.



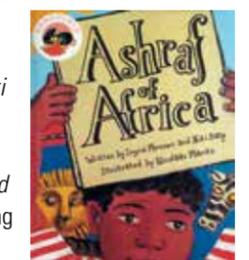
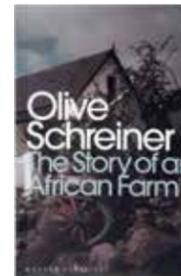
6 Alphabet of Democracy by illustrator Anton Kannemeyer (Jacana). Wicked, funny, satirical collection of drawings on the

madness of South African society. Not for the faint-hearted. First published in 2010. Out of print.

7 My Traitor’s Heart – Blood and Bad Dreams: A South African explores the madness in his country, his tribe and himself by Rian Malan (Vintage). Sub-title tells it all. The new edition has a very funny interview with Malan by himself. First published in 1990. In Print.

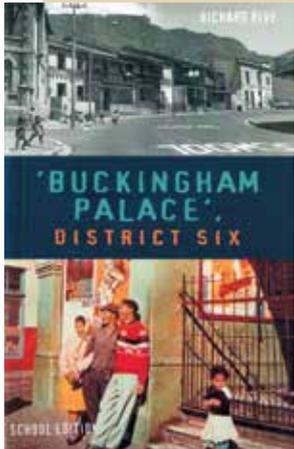


8 Ashraf of Africa text by Ingrid Mennen and Nikki Daly, illustrations by Nicolaas Maritz (Shuter and Shooter). Charming children’s book.



about a little boy walking through Cape Town to get his favourite book from the library. First published 1990. In print.

10 'Buckingham Palace', District Six by Richard Rive (New Africa Books).

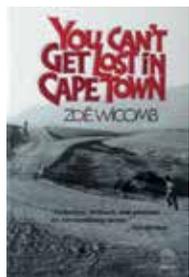
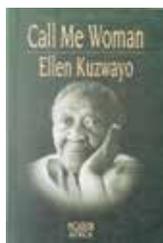


Compelling classic novel set in District Six in Cape Town. Rive grew up in District Six and paints a vibrant portrait of this long-vanished community. First

published in 1986. In Print.

14 Call Me Woman

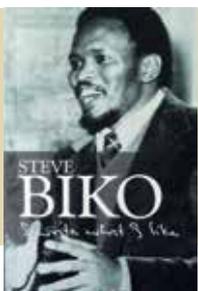
by Ellen Kuzwayo (Picador). Autobiography of a brave social worker, teacher and activist, starting with her childhood on her father's farm in the Free State, then to the slums of Soweto. First published in 1996. In print.



17 You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town

by Zoë Wicomb (Umuzi). Beautifully written, interconnected short stories about a coloured woman from Namaqualand and her life over thirty years, from

being sent to Cape Town to school, leaving to live in England and finally returning to South Africa. First published in 1987. In print.



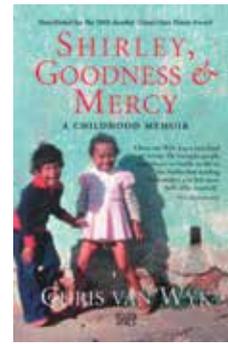
20 I Write What I Like by Steve Biko (Picador). Our most requested book after Mandela's Long Walk to Freedom. Collection of Biko's journalism, speeches, letters and interviews, with a long memoir by Aelred Stubbs. First published 1978 by Bowerdean Press in London, first published in South Africa by Ravan Press 1996. In print.



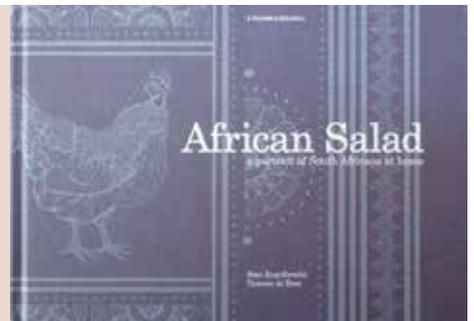
11 Askari – A story of collaboration and betrayal in the anti-apartheid struggle by Jacob Dlamini (Jacana). Fascinating story of Glory Sedibe, ANC member, MK fighter turned collaborator. Also

a wide-ranging exploration of the nature of collaboration and torture. First published in 2014. In print.

13 African Salad – A Portrait of South Africans at Home text by Tamsen de Beer, photographs by Stan Engelbrecht (Day One Publishing). Handwritten recipes by everyday South Africans with heartfelt photographs of the cooks, their kitchens and houses. First published in 2005. In print.

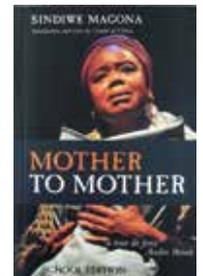


12 Shirley, Goodness & Mercy – A Childhood Memoir by Chris van Wyk (Picador). Beautifully warm and tender memoir of growing up in the coloured townships of Johannesburg in the 1960s. First published in 2004. In print.



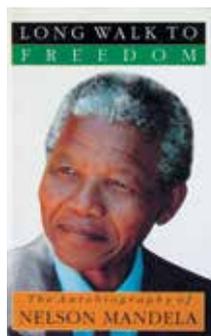
16 Mother to Mother

by Sindiwe Magona (New Africa Books). Based on the murder of American student Amy Biehl in Gugulethu 1993. A moving fictionalised story trying to explain this terrible act, written by the mother of one of the killers to the mother of Amy Biehl. First published 1998. In print.



15 Triomf by Marlene van Niekerk (Jonathan Ball).

Gritty novel about an Afrikaans family living in the then 'poor-white' suburb of Triomf in Johannesburg. First published in 1994. In print (English, translated by Leon de Kock. Originally published in Afrikaans by Queillerie).



18 Long Walk to Freedom by Nelson Mandela (Abacus). An absolute must-read for all South Africans, telling the story of the single most celebrated South African. First published 1994. In print.



19 117 Days by Ruth First (Bloomsbury). Harrowing diary of the writer's 117 days in solitary confinement in 1963. First published in 1965. Out of print.

21 Khayelitsha – uMlungu in a Township

by Steven Otter (Penguin). White journalist Steven Otter moved to Khayelitsha, a black township outside Cape Town. His adventures are alarming, funny and always interesting. First published 2007.

