

orchids, is highly recommended. Of particular interest is the collection of Peter Horrocks' and botanist Darrell Plowes' that include red and purple *Vanda lombakensis* from Malaysia; *Phalaenopsis* of all shades from East Asia and *Dendrobium*, *Arachnis* and *Bulbophyllum* varieties.

The most treasured orchid is the rare *Vanda lombakensis* "Virginia Courtauld" that the Courtaulds found in Java in the 1930s. They brought it back to their home at Eltham Palace where it flowered just once. After the palace was bombed in the Second World War pieces of the orchid were rescued, and brought to Zimbabwe by the Courtaulds. Under expert care and attention the orchid has flowered three times, including last year to much excitement.

In 2016 Organic Africa approached the NTZ with a view to entering into a long term partnership to build a regional

agricultural training centre of excellence at La Rochelle. The concept has seen the establishment of ten hectares of "field test" (trial plots) of organic herbs, and small-scale farmers (mainly women) are already gaining practical "hands on" experience. Visitors are encouraged to wander around the fields and collect fresh herbs for a cup of herbal tea or to select a few to garnish an evening sundowner.

The Old Craft Hall has been restored to its former glory, and offers excellent conference facilities. The project fulfils Lady Virginia's request in her will to use La Rochelle as "a venue for conferences either of a public, national, international or educational character".

The Country House facilities and entertainment areas have been designed for a comfortable and relaxing stay, offering an instant homely feeling in a luxurious and friendly environment. The restaurant, main lounge and coffee shop are great spots for larger crowds while the Snuggery Bar and day lounge are suited for more private or intimate occasions.

A guide book is on sale with which one can use to explore the house and formal gardens. The booklet provides an important insight into the property and its history. An array of relaxing massages and beauty treatments are on offer at the Fantasy Spa. The sumptuous day lounges are perfect for catching up on emails or relaxing with a book, while the snooker room features a reconditioned 100 year old British championship table. Board and card games are available to entertain the younger visitors.

The more athletic visitors can explore the endless trails traversing the arboretum and gardens. Hiking, biking and horse riding trails are also available. As well as the carefully preserved indigenous bush lands the estate has a unique botanical garden covering twenty acres of land filled with exotic plants and trees collected from all over the world. The exotic trees in the arboretum include palms, cycads and azaleas. This diversity provides ideal habitats for a large variety of bird species, making La Rochelle a great spot for birders and bird watching.

Other activities include volleyball



TOP: Pruning lemon verbena from the herb garden.

ABOVE: Misty morning over the trial herb fields.

