

Dec. 31th 2020, 14 °, sun

## THE LAST NEWSLETTER OF 2020

Tonight, we'll be eating spinach. Wild spinach. As we had quite a lot of rain lately, the grass is shooting up. And so is the spinach. It didn't take long before I had enough.



I am a real wild harvester. Mint, camomile, centaury, olives, oregano, blackberries, figs, loquats: while I dry the one, I bottle or preserve the other. It makes me feel close to Jean Auel's Ayla and that makes me happy. One thing I do not harvest are medronho berries. I do pick one every now and again, when I'm thirsty during my walk. The locals pick them all through October, November and December. During those months, even our gardener has no time for us. These berries are picked to produce the local fruit brandy, the medronho. It is many purposes, killing all kinds of bacteria.

And currently, I'm hunting for fungi. There is a wide range of them, various species and sizes, and I think I have found the edible ones. Still: better safe than sorry. So I'll wait for my fungi man to visit us. He is due early next week.

Even if it has rained, it is not nearly enough. Our reservoir could do with another metre or so of water. Last summer, it was so dry that the soil only seems satiated now. And only if the hinterland is soaked through, the streams will start flowing and the reservoir will start filling up. That will only take a few days. The reservoirs in the neighbourhood are not at all full either. Santa Clara is only just 40 percent full and Corte Brique falls short of that by a few percent. I must add that it has been a few years since they were completely full. Obviously, I don't need to tell you that it is getting increasingly hotter and dryer. The weather forecast has it that we will have more rain this week. That would be great, because then we won't have any problems next summer. Without water, we can forget about the kitchen garden and the grapes.

Surprise: by now, we have 36 bottles of white wine. 12 bottles of sauvignon blanc and 24 of chardonnay. Had, I should say, as we drank a number of them. They are both lovely, although I prefer the chardonnay. The red wine is barrelled. It will be April or May before we can bottle it. According to our mentor, it will be a fine wine. So, dear guests: as from next year, you will no longer be welcomed with a bottle of supermarket plunk, but with a real Casarão.

Another surprise: we finally have orange trees. Three to be exact. Real Portuguese navels. Bahias. And two lemon trees. For years, we have been trying to grow orange and lemon trees, but so far without success.

They cannot stand the frost. Three years ago, we potted eight of them, and these now winter higher up in Casa Basta.



We were just in time. We have already had below freezing temperatures in the early hours of the morning. If it stays that way, the weather is lovely, and you can sit out in your T-shirt during the day. The downside is that we don't have any hot water until 10 a.m. We have a sun boiler, which also provides hot water for the washing machine. In spite of our efforts to insulate the pipes, they get frozen. However, once the sun has been out for a few hours, our suffering is past. Of course, we are not really suffering. It feels more like adjusting to circumstances. And there's nothing wrong with those.

Which brings us to the year of Covid-19. Currently, we are quiet. There aren't even any Portuguese guests. The Portuguese rules are very strict, and during these last days of the year, nobody is allowed out of their municipality. Anything to prevent the virus from spreading. Monte do Casarão itself is corona-free. There is plenty of sunshine, we have a nice breeze, the air is clean, and it is no problem at all to keep 2 metres distance (which is obligatory in Portugal).

Even if a fair amount of guests has had to cancel their holidays, we were full last summer, while everybody could still do what they felt like. On arrival everybody was (temporarily) wearing a facemask and the suitcases were disinfected. Every family had their own spot by the pool. The weekly BBQ was not as weekly as in former years.

Obviously, the painting week in April was cancelled due to halted air traffic. As a result, making the new art teacher's acquaintance had to wait, unfortunately. Until October, as planned. And yes, in October we welcomed Margot Verhoeven. We couldn't have done better.



All that remains for me to do, is wish you a fortuitous 2021. Let's hope that we meet again soon. Stay healthy,

*Nel*

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### Painting weeks 2021

from

April 13th to april 20th

and from

October 5th to okober 12th

### HENK INJURED AGAIN

Henk spent another night in hospital. This time, he was admitted to check if he was concussed, after another close encounter with a car. He was in terrible pain and looked a sorry sight, but the damaged was not life-threatening.

Actually, Saar was to blame. She's the one chasing cars. Henk, the macho and show-off thinks: 'I am so much more of a daredevil', and runs ahead of the car.

Now, they are no longer allowed to go off together and we have raised the fence. That should help.