

OUTDOOR *retreats*

Early autumn is the perfect time to transform your patio or courtyard into a glamorous entertaining area

Sumptuous country

"I wanted something sumptuous and abundant," says Bernice Morrell, "a courtyard setting that would have an immediate sensory appeal." We're standing in a sheltered, stone-walled space at the heart of Morrells Boutique Venue in Johannesburg's Northcliff. A Virginia creeper softens the walls and an outdoor fireplace glows gently in the late afternoon light. Owner Bernice puts the finishing touches to a vase of full-blown roses and adjusts two weathered metal rabbits that add an offbeat, humorous touch. Rattan underplates and wicker chairs give a relaxed, textural elegance to the setting.

"I'm a total rose lover," she enthuses. "There are 400 rose bushes on the property and I chose a climbing Figaro to trail over the courtyard pergola. There's the scent of roses and wood smoke, the gentle sounds of the fountain and the crackling logs. It's about whetting the appetite for the wonderful meal ahead and it's a gorgeous spot to retreat to.

"I think the secret is to be generous with everything," she adds. "Pick masses of roses (or whatever's blooming) from your garden. Or you could use terracotta pots filled with herbs. And I always add fresh fruit, especially grapes, which guests love to nibble on throughout the meal. It's OK to keep it casual and throw together all your favourite things. Crockery can be mismatched, so can cutlery. As long as it's a welcoming, bountiful place to be."

As the *pièce de résistance*, Bernice has planned portions of crispy duck with cranberry sauce, served on a generous bed of country mash. "I'll serve that with seasonal roasted veggies, individual mini loaves and plenty of champagne," she says. "What I love most about this setting is that it's a year-round entertaining space – perfect for summer nights, but just as lovely on crisp autumn days." >

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