

**Response from Anthea and Ryan to questions
posted on 27th /28th /29th January 2016**

Existing botanical garden and craft centre in Melkhoutfontein

Hi, Andrea, Doing a little more research on the area I have noticed that on on the tourist pages for Still Bay, they are mentioning Melkhoutfontain as having the botanical gardens and the Soete-Arbeid craft centre. Do you have any details on this please? Many thanks Cat

Hi Cat thanks for this question..... don't believe everything you read on the internet ;) The information is over a decade old.

Anthea was involved in developing a retirement and care home for destitute, ageing and physically challenged members of the Melkhoutfontein community in 1998. She sat on the board and oversaw the project with the community and was involved in the project until 2003. This included developing sheltered accommodation for people in need and also a day care centre. Attached to the care home was indeed a very small botanical garden. However this was much smaller than the one being developed and had only a few indigenous species which concentrated mainly on seasonal high intensity blooming flowers and ground covering shrubs. There was also a very small craft centre which focused on one off pieces.

The primary purpose garden/craft centre was to improve quality of life of the residents on site and therapy through crafting/gardening. It centred predominantly on fabric painting and painting onto shells (see images below). The aim was to also invite tourists to come and visit the community during spring/when flowers were blooming and buy crafts – the revenue of which helped to fund the care home and keep costs low as possible for the residents, plus crafters received an income. The project served as a trial to ascertain if tourists would visit the community. The project was very successful and generated revenue which gainfully used to benefit the residents.

There was a change in the board and management at the care home in 2004 and the decision was taken to focus more on respite care, a higher level of medical care and increased sheltered housing. Therefore the care home received subsidies from the state and grants which negated the incentive to keep the garden and craft centre running which unfortunately became disused. This upset members of the community particularly those involved in the project and many are now involved in the development of the new garden (see images below) which is considerably bigger and will be recognised as a botanical garden with higher visitor numbers and greater opportunity for job creation in the wider community.



Top left – Image from 2000 of the original botanical garden- including Lisa who was a resident of the care home and involved in the maintenance of the garden. **Top right** – Image from September 2015 in the first days of developing the new garden. Many members of the community involved in the original garden are participating in the project – including Lisa (yellow head scarf). **Middle image** – Image from 1999 of members of the community fabric painting – including Anthea. **Bottom images** – examples of fabrics painted embracing local culture and heritage.

Questions on housing

What are the arrangements like inside the houses? Do they have furniture, beds tables, storage space etc? Or they most empty adaptable spaces?

The houses are predominantly very small – see images from the project launch. Again remember that approx. 50% of households are established housing and 50% are informal housing/shacks.

Established housing

The established housing consists typically of a very small lounge (which in most instances serves as a place to sleep), 1 or 2 small bedrooms (which are typically shared) and small kitchen and bathroom with a bath. The houses have mains electricity which they pay for by a top up card however there are regular power outages (load shedding). They are also on the water mains. There is no central heating and whilst some have electric heaters these are expensive to run and note the previous comment on load shedding.

They have furniture which normally is second hand from households in Stilbaai or from cheap furniture stores. There is very limited space for large furniture items. Small furniture/shelving or ways of utilising the available space would be useful.

Note the houses are typically built to a standard specification and a significant number do not have ceilings (see image below). The roofs are normally made from corrugated iron or asbestos sheets. Typically they get very hot and very cold. Throughout the year people like to sit outside their house – in the summer as its cooler than being inside and in winter often as its warmer outside! So any ideas to improve thermal properties would be welcome.

Most have a small garden. However the culture is for the eldest son to have his own shack/space in the back yard. Note fencing around housing is haphazard and many don't have front gates. In general there is a need for better fencing, corner posts and paving.



Informal housing

In regards to the informal housing/shacks there is significant variation in the make-up/layout of housing. See some examples below. Most are a hybrid of different materials.





Wreaths

What do their memorial wreaths look like ? are there any particular traditions for colour, shape, wording?

The community is predominantly Christian and wreaths would be the same as you find in the UK for funerals/Christmas – also in South Africa at Easter which is still seen as a very important public holiday and a time to visit relatives. Most wreaths don't have wording – their main function is ornamental to keep the flowers in place.

Also note that Melkhoutfontein is located almost directly under the Southern Cross star constellation.