



# Belfast boys

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childhoods in the  
city and their  
acclaimed new film  
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# The Observer



## Partygate: PM's removal now inevitable, warns loyalist

- More MPs to submit resignation demands
- New chief of staff as No 10 rejigs team

**Toby Helm, Mark Townsend & James Tapper**

Boris Johnson's desperate efforts to save his premiership were undermined yesterday as one of his most loyal backbench supporters said it was now "inevitable" that Tory MPs would remove him from office over the "partygate" scandal.

In an interview with the Observer, Sir Charles Walker, a former vice

chairman of the 1922 Committee of backbench Conservative MPs, implored the prime minister to go of his own accord in the national interest, and likened the events in the Tory party to a Greek tragedy.

"It is an inevitable tragedy," Walker said. "He is a student of Greek and Roman tragedy. It is going to end in him going, so I just want him to have some agency in that."

Walker said that in his view Johnson had got many things right, including the handling of the vaccine rollout, and deserved to be remembered for them, rather than suffer the indignity of losing a leadership challenge.

But he said the succession of parties in Downing Street during national lockdown had focused the anger of a traumatised country on No 10 in a way that could only be addressed if the prime minister moved aside. "It is just not going to get better," he said.

Last night, Johnson moved to shore up his operation at No 10 – which was rocked by the resignations of five key aides on Thursday – by appointing the chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Steve Barclay, as his

A slice of history



The Queen, who today becomes the first British monarch to reign for 70 years, celebrates at Sandringham yesterday. She also announced Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, will be Queen Consort when Charles accedes. (Full story, page 5) Getty

## Give me back my £200,000, major donor tells Tories

**Jon Ungood-Thomas**

A major Tory party supporter is demanding the repayment of £200,000 in donations after complaining that he was excluded from elite political events and was never given auction prizes he had bid for at fundraising dinners, including breakfast with Boris Johnson.

Telecoms businessman Mohamed Amersi paid £50,000 for membership of Tory donor club the Leader's Group in December 2020. But he says he was excluded from the invitation list for high-level events last year, and that officials were instructed not to invite him to the party's winter ball last November.

He says he also paid £150,000 for auction prizes he never received, including the breakfast with the prime minister, a Japanese meal with Jeremy Hunt and a "magical show" by former defence secretary Penny Mordaunt, who once worked as a magician's assistant.

Emails and documents regarding Amersi's donation reveal how anxious officials in Conservative headquarters were to secure his support. One note even proposed he be helped in his ambition to become chair of the National Lottery Community Fund, a £40,000-a-year post for which he had been shortlisted.

Amersi said this weekend that while the donation system appears

**The PM and the Bard**  
Johnson could be Falstaff: carnal, cheerful, pragmatic. But beneath lies something venal  
*Emma Smith, Focus, p 33*

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# Dutch courage

An 18th-century farmhouse in South Africa's Cape Winelands has been restored to its rustic yet grand origins

Words SALLY RUTHERFORD Photographs BUREAUX



Hearth beat: the kitchen with thick stone walls, a huge refectory table and a chandelier made from a wine-bottle drier. Facing page: the garden, where 300 varieties of edible and medicinal plants are grown



**T**he air hums with the work of the bees in Babylonstoren's garden of Eden. Here, owners Karen Roos and Koos Bekker grow more than 300 varieties of edible or medicinal plants in the extraordinary gardens inspired by the farms that supplied ships passing the Cape of Good Hope in the 17th century.

Today, the *werf* (farmyard) and its structures remain among the finest unspoilt examples of traditional Cape Dutch architectural styles. In this positively utopian setting in South Africa's Cape Winelands, the Owners' House – the Babylonstoren estate's principal home – is irresistible. Roos's deft touch and nuanced appreciation of tradition are unmistakable in the simplicity of her homestead, which has been not so much restored as fully reinvigorated.

The farmhouse itself dates back to 1777. When Roos, the former editor of South Africa's *Elle Decoration*, and Bekker, a telecoms billionaire, first bought Babylonstoren, one of its many attractions was the fact that the house had never been restored. The most recent work, in fact, dated back to 1931 when a Victorian renovation to remove the gables was undone and the gables replaced.

The couple – who also own the Newt in Somerset, a magnificent, newly restored 300-acre hotel and estate – have long had a commitment to authenticity. In the sitting room at Babylonstoren, for example, Roos supervised the painstaking removal of 23 layers of paint to reveal the original ochre-hued brown wall paint finely edged with stripes of teal, cream and dark brown. The colours were exactly matched and the room carefully repainted. "It has



the benefit of downplaying the heaviness of the dark wood built-in cupboards that the Dutch loved so much," says Roos. "They have the potential to be overwhelming if the walls are whitewashed, but here they just melt in with the original wall colour."

The sitting room – with its contemporary linen, leather and steel furnishings that meld seamlessly with the 240-year-old structure – is cool and calm, and forms the crossbar of the home's traditional H-structure. As such, it has doors linking to the two perpendicular rear wings of the house. To the left is the door leading to the main bedroom suite and to the right is the kitchen.

Throughout the home original fittings have been reconditioned to their original

## Roos supervised the painstaking removal of 23 layers of paint to reveal the original ochre-hued wall paint

splendour – worn flagstones polished to a high gloss, and wide yellow-wood floorboards, ceiling beams, wooden windows and sills set deep into the thick clay-brick walls all restored.

Despite the grand heritage of Babylonstoren, this is unmistakably a farmhouse. Much of the action takes place in the kitchen, with its huge open hearth and enormous refectory table. There's an Aga gas hob and wood-burning stove and the kitchen chandelier – made from an antique wine-bottle drier – is rustic yet contemporary.

While the sitting room and bedrooms are the essence of comfortable, traditional minimalism, the library-cum-study (*voorkamer*) is a room of wonder. Cabinets are filled with collections and objets, from shards of pottery dug up on the farm and original VOC Delftware to massive ammonites and an encyclopaedic collection of butterflies. When it's time for a rest, a scarlet-covered couch is the perfect place for an afternoon nap in front of the fireplace.

The floor-to-near-ceiling-high windows in the *voorkamer* are typical of Cape Dutch homes. The windows are deep-set, revealing the thickness of the stone and clay-brick walls built to withstand the intense heat in summer. The curvaceous Norman Cherner vintage chair is perfectly at home in this eclectic yet cohesive space.

The magnificent wetroom evokes spa-like Edwardian bathrooms. The marble double basin and taps are from a salvage building yard, the mirror was custom made, and the rainshower is from Axor. The glass-and-wood display cabinet from a junk shop is filled with a vignette of bathroom luxuries reminiscent of an old-school apothecary.

It is fitting that this home, which has been continuously occupied for 240 years, is no stiff museum piece. Its interiors pay tribute to its traditional heritage, but it is Karen's appreciation for contemporary aesthetics that brings the Owners' House to life. The ensuite bathrooms are a wonderful example of this. Individual in style, they evoke a grand era of Edwardian spas and the lavish luxury of indoor plumbing. You can just imagine splashing about in the massive circular bath or languishing under the rain shower in the wetroom.

All in all, Babylonstoren's principal home is a living, fresh celebration of Cape Dutch style. ■ [babylonstoren.com](http://babylonstoren.com)