



Architect by day and actor by night, Tony Bentel doesn't disappoint us with his magnificent bear-loom, Teddy, who has been in the family for generations. "He was my wife's bear when she was a little girl, and before that my mother-in-law's bear," says Tony. "Now Teddy belongs to my children." It's not all these changes of ownership that has caused Teddy to need psychoanalysis, however, says Tony, speaking from his analyst's position at the head of a handy chaise longue in the Market Theatre's Green Room. "Teddy suffers from Johannesburg paranoia," he explains. "In order to make ends meet, he has to moonlight doing Teddygrams and it's giving him an identity problem." Tony understands Teddy's predicament since he once had to do gorillagrams and suchlike to pay the rent.



Photographer Desmond Bowes-Taylor has a rather special bear — a puppet teddy who's over 70 years old and looks like Winnie-the-Pooh. The other bear is a mere cub at 22 and belongs to Desmond's son, Charles. "Although I'm a Christian I'm afraid neither teddy has been christened," grins Desmond, adding that "you just can't get nice, attractive teddies any more. They're such funny colours nowadays, too." Desmond's teddy used to protect him when he ventured into the woods behind his home as a little boy: "My aunt told me there was a witch in the forest and this frightened me, so I took teddy along as backup." Did he talk to teddy? "Not as one would to a cat or dog or not as one sometimes doesn't talk to one's wife and kids, but I suppose I muttered," explains Desmond, who still uses his teddy's charms to amuse babies when he's photographing them.

Bear Your Soul

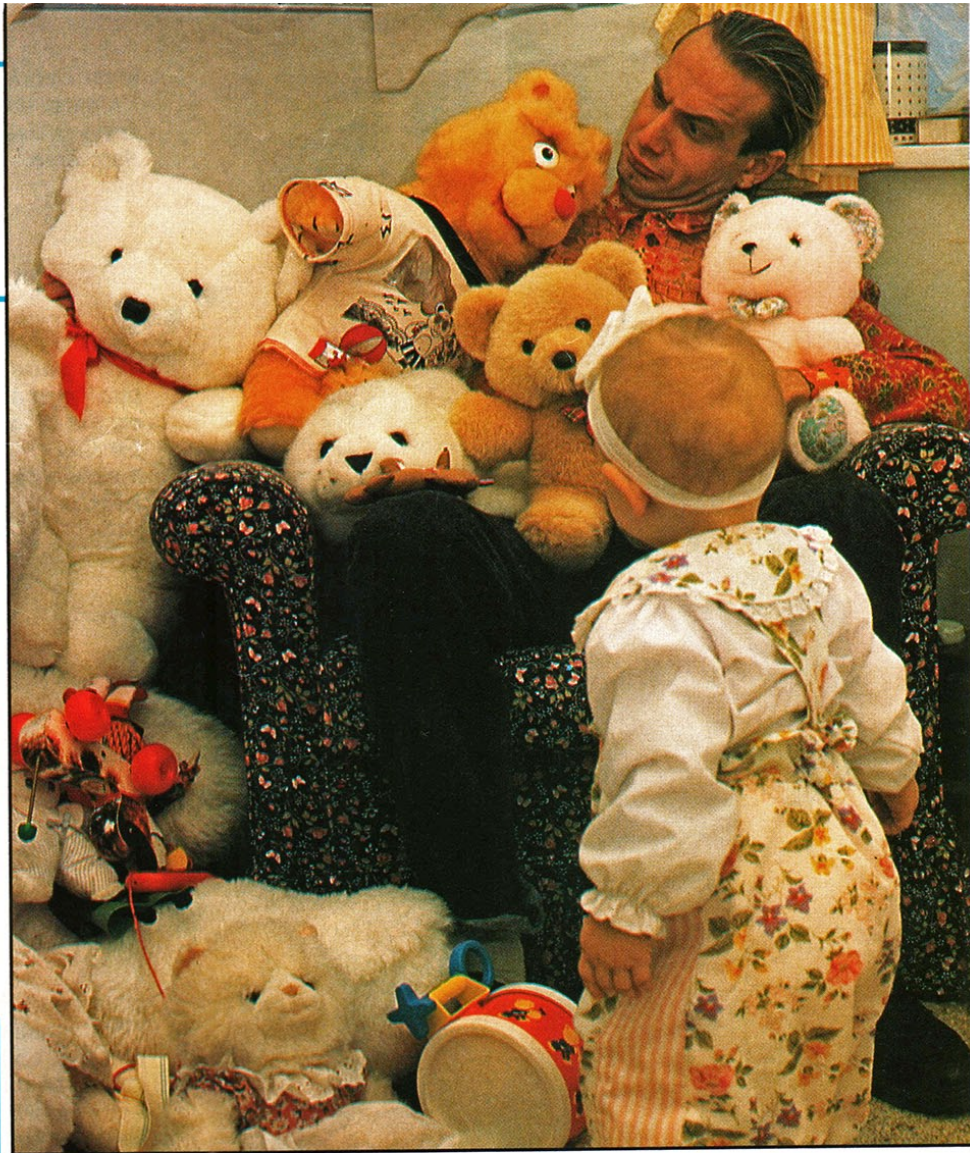


Grace Galland, international hair stylist, says of her bear: "Teddy has supported me for about 30 years, I've cried on him, laughed with him, told him things I'd never tell anyone else. He never complains or answers back. I've even given him a short, back and sides cut. I just haven't given him a colour job, although he might look good in amber." Teddy was a present from her grandmother but Grace wouldn't go so far as to describe the day she got her bear as the biggest moment of her life. "I've had bigger presents and they weren't bears," she laughs wickedly. "It's just as well Teddy can't talk."

Finding the cold a bit much this winter? A teddy bear must be one of life's necessities

by Chantelle Benjamin

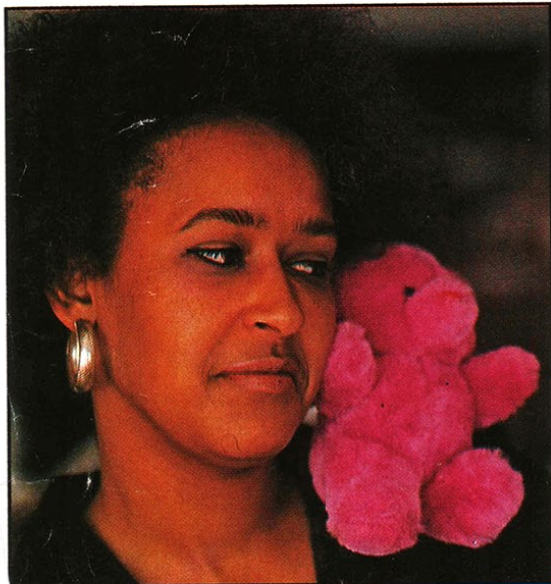
Can you bear it — look at this prodigious collection. The proud owner is Radio 5 deejay Alex Jay, who boasts sought-after American teddys Humphrey Bear-gart and Lauren Bear-call in the ensemble. Deejaying is simply theatre on air, and Alex takes it in his stride having paid his dues on the bear-boards as both an actor and stage technician.



Kim Saville, a music promotions agent, has the hottest bear around — “but I don’t use him any more because I’ve got an electric blanket now,” laughs Kim. Teddy is a 22-year-old hot-water bottle cover who Kim saw in a shop window in Johannesburg when she was eight and wouldn’t budge until her father bought it for her. “I wanted Teddy more than anything in the world at the time,” says Kim, who was distraught when her dog, Soekie, bit off Teddy’s nose. “To this day when one of my friends has a cold I give them Teddy and they pack up laughing,” she says. Well, not all her friends — only one beau has seen Teddy.



Eunice Beaton and daughter Diane Sturgess show off some of their favourite bears in their shop, Thread Bear.



Actress Vicky Sampson took time off from rehearsals to introduce **PERSONALITY** to her bear, Red. We asked why he was so small? “I guess he makes me feel protective now, but when I was little he was just the right size,” she says.

It might be a secret relationship but everyone has a teddy bear! Britain’s Princess Anne does and so does her father, Prince Philip. Former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher still has her childhood teddy, called Humphrey, and TV star Larry Hagman has one.

Even American general Norman Schwarzkopf, hero of the Middle East war, kept a bear on



Meet Bearlock Holmes, the famous bear detective.



There's nothing like a good book and a rock on the ol' chair for this mechanical bear.

his desk in the operations room throughout the campaign. It was a light-hearted Christmas present from his sister.

Whether they are short and squat, missing an eye or nose, balding or a little tatty around the seams, teddy bears are guaranteed to bring a warm glow to anyone's heart.

No one is left untouched by these furry creatures. The immortal bard's most famous stage direction is "Exit, pursued by bear." And because of it his home town of Stratford-upon-Avon has fallen prey to a hug of teddy bears, with bear guest-houses, bear museums and even a bearfest.

Teddy bears have been around for nearly 100 years and are the world's most enduring and lovable toy. Some have even become VIBs (Very Important Bears) in their own right.

Take Paddington Bear, Rupert the Bear and *The Muppets* star Fozzie Bear, for example

— they're probably more recognizable than most world leaders. An eastern religion has even adapted Winnie-the-Pooh, endearingly known as the "bear of little brain," as a symbol of their teaching. Taoists uphold the tubby little bear as a symbol of their philosophy, which advocates a simple honest life and noninterference in the course of natural events. Other bears are the alter egos of famous characters, like Bearlock Holmes, the famous detective.

Whatever the interest, teddy bears have become a multi-million rand industry for collectors and investors. In fact, they're one of the fastest growing industries in the world — the third most popular hobby after stamp and coin collecting.

They're so popular that there are now international teddy bear conventions and sales, teddy bear museums, teddy bear books and magazines and even teddy bear "brokers" who buy

prize bears for investors. One Florida museum boasts an impressive 1 500 teddy bears, the largest being 1,8 metres tall.

In America alone, it's estimated that 140 million people own teddy bears. Bears of a standard variety can be bought for a reasonable price but antique bears change hands for thousands of rands. Take a bear made

Star of the hit children's series *The Muppets*, Fozzie is instantly recognizable and classifies as one of the VIB bears.





It's not unusual for these popular toys to be dressed by some of the top designers, among them Christian Dior, Benetton, and Liberto.

Talk about beating your own drum! This mechanical bear is just one of the unique pieces designed by bear makers.

Bears come in all shapes and sizes — this little artist bear is only five centimetres tall.



by the famous German manufacturer, Steiff — it would sell for more than R24 000. It's nothing for collectors to pay R100 000 for these toys, and in 1989 a California collector forked out R258 000 for a rare bear at a Christie's auction in London.

According to Florida antique-toy store owner Frederick Slayter, people buy bears for the same reason they buy good antiques and good stocks and shares — because they know they're going to go up in value. Slayter, who is considered an authority on teddy bears, makes his own special bears from antique paisley fabric which the Scottish mills stopped making in 1876. They cost R1 000 to R4 500 a time and Slayter has a waiting list.

In South Africa the teddy bear industry has grown in leaps and bounds. There's a Bear Mania Club with its own newsletter in which bear lovers, bear makers and bear collectors can catch up on anything which — you guessed it — bears any significance to the industry.

The newsletter and last year's Teddy Bear Fair, the first of its kind to be held in South Africa, were the brainchild of a

keen teddy-bear lover and maker, Eunice Beaton, and her daughter, Diane Sturgess. Their shop, Thread Bear, based in Durban, is one of seven specialist bear shops nationwide.

Thread Bear offers bears of all shapes and sizes, from limited edition four-centimetre miniature bears to imported North American bears, the Van de Bears. There's even a Zulu Bear, a popular gift for people with friends overseas, and fortnightly bear-making classes for people keen to learn the now-specialised art. And if your favourite furry friend is looking a little "threadbear," there's a bear hospital where the most tatty of bears can be restored to their former glory.

Not that restoration is a picnic — new fur has to be carefully matched and distressed to

as personalised gifts for members of her family has blossomed into a fully-fledged career for Eunice, who started making bears 10 years ago.

"A woman who owned a local gift shop asked me to make her a family of bears and she kept ordering more after that," says Eunice, who spent a couple of months in the UK researching the history and techniques of bear-making. "We went to the Cotswolds because for me it's such bearish country, with all those honey-coloured stone cottages and Stratford-upon-Avon being so near."

Inundated with queries on how to make bears, Eunice decided to start a workshop and put together bear-making kits: "I wanted to help other women unravel the mysteries of bear-making, remembering the diffi-

blend with the patient's existing fur, eyes, imported from overseas, also have to be carefully matched and just the right material has to be found.

What started

culty I had getting the joints to match on jointed bears."

Eventually Eunice's home was so "bogged down with bears" that she decided to open a shop which could showcase the goods made by her students and other bear makers. "I wanted to remain involved with bears in any way I could," she says.

"We have a loyal fraternity of bear collectors who come into the shop every now and then to browse around for something new to add to their collection," she says. While there's no restriction on age — collectors can be anything from seven to 70 — most tend to be women.

But why are teddy bears so loved? "I think they remind us of our past," says Eunice. "They give us something to love and arouse our compassion."

"A teddy bear is soft and warm," says a leading psychologist. "It's a very reassuring companion for someone who sleeps on their own."

And then perhaps it's because teddy bears are such good listeners. They're never critical, always reassuring and allow a small part of us to remain a child for ever.