

Escape

THE CITY



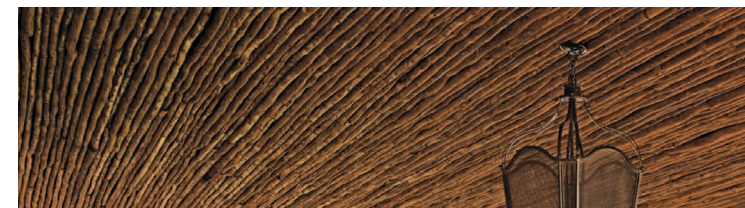
Luxury is certainly going through a colossal change. Everyone seems to have been everywhere, seen everything and managed to gain access to everything. And so luxury needs to change direction completely in order to find the next level of what we can confidently call 'luxurious'. So where has the wind taken it, and what exactly is in store next?

By **Daniel Scheffler**

From the pundits of luxury, Singita Castleton in South Africa's Sabi Sand, therefore becomes the ultimate in this new form of luxury - complete privacy and utter exclusivity in what has been termed a 'hotel home'. What used to be the private bush home of Singita founder Luke Bailes's grandfather since 1971 is now an exclusive-use lodge that provides the paramount experience in terms of freedom from interference and access to the wild.

The lodge comes with six bungalows, or cottages if you will, and sleeps 12 guests and then also romances with a main lodge with its many accessories. This gift from the African gods is set on 45,000 acres of private reserve and is accessible easily by small plane from Nelspruit's international airport, KMIA. What makes this lodge so distinct is that it certainly feels like a home setting but it comes complete with all the services and delicacies that you expect from a top five star hotel. Impeccable service to the constant feasts, all the way to that intuitive assistance, only Singita gets it totally right.

The design house Cécile and Boyd's created what they call an 'unbuttoned, lived-in appeal' with this lodge. Castleton, the latest Singita project for the design house with both Cape Town and London ▶





studios, upholds a certain casual sophistication and allows for a very specific and discreet exclusivity to drive the design. It's a country or farmhouse in Africa in essence but renews the vows of being totally bespoke and also wholly intimate. A perfect nostalgic and time-honoured ambience expected from this level of luxury.

The main lodge is described by Cécile and Boyd's to have 'a palette of warm, earthy tones, cloudy grey and dried parchment grass colours complementing the South African botanical art etchings commissioned exclusively for the house, each reflecting an example of local indigenous flora.' The textures throughout the lodge are honest and humble and combine worn leather upholstery, linen, ticking stripe fabrics and bagged washed walls, pewter chandeliers and hand-woven grass lampshades to create this classic simplicity the design house is known for and Singita loves. Antiques are hand picked and horn and tribal artifacts are layered with modern touches to create an eclectic boutique destination. The pared down aesthetic here allows the house to breathe and harmonises the English and Asian influences with a sublime African feel. A perfect retreat in the African bush is therefore born, or reborn in this case.

The rooms are overly comfortable with large beds, flagstone floors, smartly layered antiques and country furniture with almost raw industrial elements and then

contrasting with the beautiful hand-loomed linens. Walls are textured all over and then bestrewn with painterly floral and fanciful botanicals referencing days of yore. As described by Cécile and Boyd's, the bedrooms are a delicate balance of masculine and feminine sensibilities in sepia tones and slight colours. The bathrooms, entered by large doors, are sweet and romantic with angle poise lamps dotted around, and the oversized basins cast in wood workbenches and ball and claw baths for two add to the lure. 'There is a vintage industrial design, but with a modern conversation but is fresh and interesting,' says Geordi Da Sousa Costa, Director at Cécile and Boyd's.

These rooms are fringed with large verandahs set wide and deep, in true African style, on the cottages and comes with wholehearted sink-in-seating that provides the best locale for watching the nearby watering hole, taking in the surrounding nature and drinking the bush basic – a strong gin and tonic with plenty of ice. Then there are also the vast gardens that beckon for exploring. Whether you want to lie at the pool – a rocky rim flow – on big loungers that look towards the watering hole, or play lawn games like croquet, the choices here are bountiful. There is always the tennis court with pavilion just above the bungalows that is

It's a country or farmhouse in Africa in essence but renews the vows of being totally bespoke and also wholly intimate.

ideal for an afternoon game followed by delicious snacks and ice-cold drinks under a shady tree or in a comfy lounge. The gym, fully equipped of course, is also next-door and the treadmills facing out towards the bush can provide the perfect situation for training.

If all camp activities are almost exhausted, besides for long visits to the on-site wellness spa, it's certainly time to explore the wildlife that lies beyond the lodge – game rangers take guests out on private Land Rovers for an intimate and educational drive across the Sabi Sand area. Known for its game it's not a surprise to find a pack of wild dogs hunting with their young on an afternoon's drive out. Then of course expect to find Big Five lurking around an unexpected corner waiting to be discovered and admired.

Eating, or feasting as it is here, is done family style. Platters of country fare get dished out aplenty and are paired with the finest wines from the on-site cellar. For the culinary inclined the kitchen is open to guests for visits and participation in a casual yet fine cuisine workshop. Roasted chicken with arms full of freshly picked vegetables and salads finished off with crème Brûlée and cheesecake feels homely and familiar. Dinner at the half-moon boma with the night sky low and the traditional singing from the Castleton choir add that certain African magic to all of the decadence.

After a day in the sun, a decadent feast included, and intimate time with friends and family in this private-use lodge there certainly no option but to sleep deeply with the noisy silence of the African bush all around.

For more on Singita Castleton at the Singita Sabi Sand Game Reserve, call 0027 21 683 3424, or visit www.singita.com