

SPIRIT OF THE TREES

A well-designed safari lodge should reinforce the design story of a place without attempting to reinvent it; and it should tread lightly on the earth - disrupting quietly and without causing harm. As it is at Silvan Safari.

PHOTOS &
PRODUCTION
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WORDS
**TRACY
GREENWOOD**



In each of the six pods – or suites – that make up the accommodation at Silvan Safari in Sabi Sand Game Reserve you will find a copy of *Thoreau and the Language of Trees* by Richard Higgins, with a foreword by Robert D Richardson. American naturalist Henry David Thoreau wrote prolifically about trees during his lifetime. “He looked at trees every day. He observed their shape, colour, texture and stance on his daily walks. His eye took in all – root, trunk, bark and branch, crown, leaf, blossom and cone,” Richardson writes.

Trees are such an integral part of the Silvan experience that the presence of the book in each pod is fitting and in keeping with the names given to each suite: Knobthorn, Kierie Klapper, Cassia, Blue Guarri, Tree Wisteria and Leadwood, indigenous trees around which the suites have been woven in an architectural tapestry, a little dance between the man-made structures and the natural world.

“The brief,” says architect Marcus Smit of Marcus Smit Architects in Somerset West, “was to design a compact high-end lodge with a fresh take on lodge architecture, challenging the norm of game lodges. We interpreted typical game lodges to include the use of rustic materials, pitched thatched roofs, poles, tree stumps and organic shapes. The construction had to be sensitive to the site, and the design had to fit in with the surroundings.”

The contrast between the angular buildings and the natural environment makes the majestic trees on the site stand

out. “Another important aspect is the dark colours we used, which make the buildings disappear into the shadows,” says Marcus. “Scale played an important role, too – and even though the floor level had to be raised to allow for the river flood line, the buildings were kept as low as possible. In time, the trees will hide the buildings even more.”

The brief from owners David Ryan and Charl Brink was to preserve the trees on the site. “Charl has a thorough knowledge of the trees in the area and we worked tirelessly with an environmental consultant to preserve as many of them as we could, even the saplings,” says Marcus. The team went to great lengths to mark out buildings, reposition them where necessary and redesign some of the deck areas to accommodate low branches, bushes and existing game paths.

“The magnificence of the surroundings is paramount,” says interiors guru Jacqui Hunter of Imagenius Interiors. “We wanted to accentuate that beauty, not compete with it.”

And accentuate it she did, creating a sense of harmony and understated elegance that extends throughout the private and public areas, starting off with the majestic wall of stone that has a small aperture of an entrance through which visitors are ushered onto the premises.

After all, in the contemplative words of Thoreau, “What is the use of a house if you haven’t got a tolerable planet to put it on?”

imagenius.co.za
marcussmit.co.za
silvansafari.com

PREVIOUS SPREAD The furniture on the deck of the Cassia Suite – named after the cassia tree – were custom-made by Homewood in Durban.

LEFT, FROM THE TOP The resident leopard is called Tiyani. | Silvan Safari is situated in Sabi Sand Game Reserve in the Bushveld. | Vanilla yoghurt panna cotta with chocolate crumble and honeycomb candy. | Animals like zebra roam freely between the Kruger National Park and Sabi Sand.

OPPOSITE, TOP The yellow colour and the commissioned artworks in the Cassia Suite reference the colloquial name for the cassia tree, the golden rain tree. In the living area of every suite, an embroidered Casamento piece celebrates its namesake tree – Jacqui Hunter of Imagenius Interiors had the sofa and ottoman made in collaboration with Starry-Eve Collett and the rest of the Casamento team.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM The roomy bathrooms – in this case the Tree Wisteria Suite’s bathroom – give one the feeling of being in a hammam. The decor was kept simple, with white linen curtains, a giant armchair and hand-forged metal stands and tables.



NISI MPUMALANGA SAFARI LODGE

Butler Xolisa Khatu walks past the ironwood dining table, which is laid for a feast. The delicate chandelier by Gregg Brill features more than 1km of antique copper chain and "leaves" of copper and coconut husk chips. The artworks against the back wall are by Anastasia Pather, who was commissioned to depict the Rain Queen Modjadji, and The Grand Living was commissioned to make the bronzed-metal Twig server.



A boardwalk winds through a fever-tree forest and then past leadwood trees and cycads to an unobtrusive opening in the great granite "spine", the wall that forms the backbone of the lodge.





In the main living area, a baby grand piano, another Casamento masterpiece and a bee-eater swarm art installation by Gregg Brill are the heroes of the space. The ceramic-topped side tables are by Ceramic Matters and Wiid Design, and the rug is a "reworn" and overdyed Persian.



Seared scallops with a cauliflower and cashew nut purée on a plate by Mervyn Gers Ceramics. LEFT Dawid Minnie relaxes in a Porky Hefer Nest chair against a Poetry cushion by Karien Belle.



Butler Phindile Singwane. The Bobo ottomans and slipper chairs were designed by Jacqui and Peter Wunder.



A magnificent jackalberry tree presides over Vogel loungers next to the 25 m lap pool, from which elephants sometimes drink.