

Lodge 23 • South Africa

Exotic sanctuary

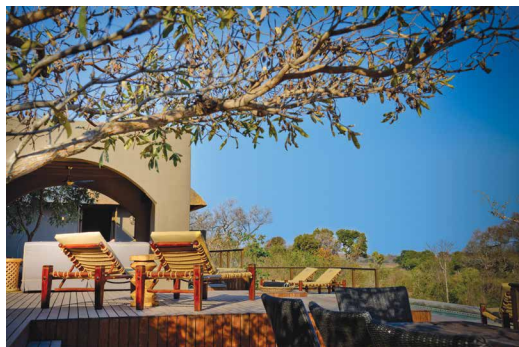
Everything about Lodge 23, the exclusive-use villa overlooking the wild expanse of the Kruger National Park across the gently flowing waters of the Sabie River, is about relaxing and creating special memories with friends and family. And the Moorish design influence adds the extra delight of a roof-top retreat with far-reaching views.

Padding barefoot up the stairs to the game-viewing terrace on the rooftop with an early morning cup of tea to witness the break of dawn is a bush experience that always leaves you yearning for more. Breathing in a deep lungful of the freshest air, redolent with the scent of recently grazed grass still moist with dew, is the most distilled moment of each day - time to curl up in a chair under a blanket and wake up gently while watching the age-old rituals of bushveld mornings when

game begins to emerge quietly from the bushes and drift down to the water to drink. Hippos grunt and snort in their favourite pool near the boma, and a chorus of birdlife surrounds a lone buffalo idly chewing in the steadily warming rays of sunshine. At the same time of day, in exotic lands as far away as Morocco, Zanzibar or India, muezzins can be heard across the roof tops where everyone gathers to share meals or simply chill when the heat of the day calls for a siesta or a



Lodge 23 is designed for relaxed family living, with warm and welcoming living areas both indoors and out.



card game together, a way of life that Lodge 23 owner Sue Lederle wanted to recreate in her bushveld villa, and even more so after a holiday in Vanessa Branson's extraordinary boutique riad in Marrakech, El Fenn. Inspired by the colours, lifestyle and design of historical Moroccan riads, Sue returned to her bushveld project with a new vision. The four-bedroom family villa that was being built in Elephant Point, a 290-hectare private reserve bordering the Kruger National Park, was to have a game-viewing terrace with a bar and lounge area, as

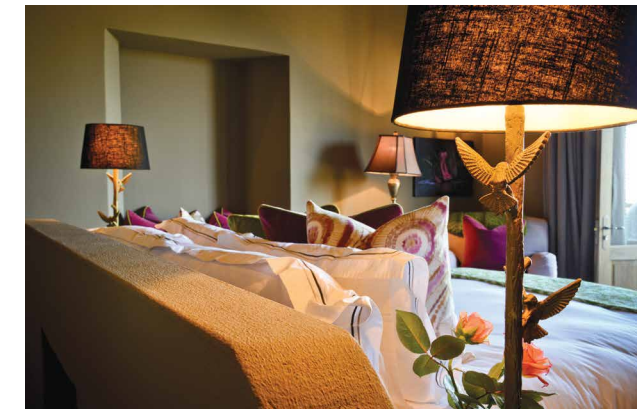
well as an uncovered rooftop deck for sun worshippers to enjoy. Together with designer and architectural advisor, Jack Andrew, she interpreted what was needed to adapt the plans for the villa on the banks of the Sabie River. Railings were sourced from a global artefacts trader in Johannesburg, and their Indian design used as the inspiration for the custom-made wrought metalwork over the windows. Sue, an interior designer and travel agency owner who has travelled frequently to far-flung corners of the earth, instinctively knew what it was



about Morocco that resonated with her desire to create a distinctive style for her new bushveld home. Everything about the architectural proportions of the ancient riads and the relationship with the elements of nature made sense – whether it was the effect shafts of sunlight cast through a tiny square window at a certain time of day, or the patterned shadows created by decorative wrought-metal window screens. Inspired by the architectural details, Sue decided that all wood, especially the local dark meranti, would be aged. It was 'literally pickled in vinegar'



Fresh palettes of colour were used in the four riverfront suites, each one individually decorated and a soothing sanctuary.



For guests who book this exclusive-use self-catering villa, an extensive shopping service is provided before arrival, so that the fridges are stocked with everything from favourite wines to the best cuts of meat for an outdoor barbecue. The latter can be held under the stars in the circular reed boma, set down near the river where the hippos love to come up onto the sandbank, and protected by a gully behind. Lanterns are lit and meals outdoors on balmy evenings are unforgettable. If cooking's not your thing, a private chef may be booked for an additional fee. Housekeeping, however, is daily and discreet, giving guests maximum privacy and downtime. Breakfast is a laid-back affair if no game drives are planned, especially if everyone simply chooses to laze about around the pool. After stepping off the plane at Skukuza, and taking a 45-minute game drive through the Kruger en route to Elephant Point (about 17 kilometres from the airport), a lie-in for the first morning is excusable. Besides, a good range of antelope or even an elephant or two can be spotted from the comfort of the chaise longue on the deck. It's best to have the binoculars at hand for some bird watching, too. But self-drive game

to achieve the grey-blue tones in the ceilings, doors and windows. Once that look was achieved, the villa was beautifully finished with alcoves, tiling detail and clever design elements seen on her travels. Today, a citrus-filled, tiled courtyard has become a green oasis cooled with the tinkling sound of the water fountain, bathrooms are lit with a magical array of candles at night, and bunches of fresh roses add rich reds and pinks to the exotic touches of colour that's become her signature throughout, especially in the open-plan living area. A bright and breezy space, it's easily the

heart of this home-away-from-home and the kitchen is a dream to cook in together as a family or with friends. Here you'll find nothing less than a Lacanche stove, and everything from an ice-cream maker to Kitchen Aid appliances and a bread maker. An ex-chef herself, Sue has second-guessed the fact that her guests might never have made their own bread so she's thoughtfully shared her recipes for faultless loaves (after all, being in the bush means that you can't jog down to the nearest bakery) and even handmade pizza bases for the popular pizza oven.



The striking front door is one of many characterful architectural features. It and all the meranti used in the house was aged in vinegar to give it a blue-grey effect.

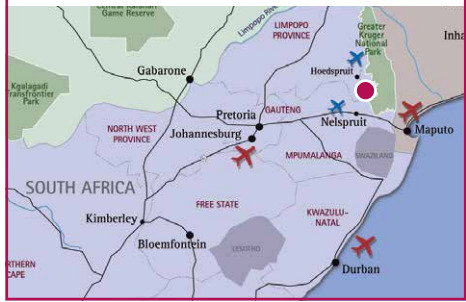


Lodge 23



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Lodge 23 is set on the banks of the Sabie River about 11 kilometres from the Paul Kruger Gate to Kruger National Park. It's 17 kilometres from Skukuza Airport, or a five-hour drive from Johannesburg. The four-bedroom lodge sleeps eight and is booked on an exclusive-use basis.



PHOTOGRAPHS: LODGE 23

viewing in Kruger is easy enough in the eight-seater Hyundai available for hire with the villa – and, more importantly, whenever it suits everyone. Time is blissfully unstructured but for anyone keen on taking a guided game walk on foot, private rangers can be booked, as well as open game vehicle drives at dusk and dawn. And for avid golfers who feel they've done enough game viewing, a Gary Player golf course is 10 kilometres away, as are a multitude of other attractions in the area. Whatever the day's activities though, as the sun dips and an evening barbecue

in the boma beckons, it's time to slip upstairs again for cocktails on the roof deck and do a last spot of game viewing and bird watching. Slowly, but surely, the stress of the city dissipates, and the real meaning of a holiday in the bush begins to take shape. And as the heat of the day subsides, elephants move away, following each other along the well-worn river pathways and the hippos once again fill the night skies with their playful snorts and deep grunts... one of the many unforgettable sounds of the African bushveld that will be etched in memory forever. ■ Michelle Snaddon