

YO YO YO... CHECK OUT OUR SMOOTH AND FRUITY YOGHURT DISHES

FOOD & HOME

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we're crushing on **SCANDINAVIAN BREAKFASTS**

10 WINNING WAYS

WITH BASIL, THE ROYAL HERB

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A LION'S TALE

MHONDORO: THE SPIRIT OF THE LION; WHERE THE LION ROAMS,
ALWAYS WATCHING, SEEING ALL, ITS PRESENCE ALL-CONSUMING...

BY ANZELLE HATTINGH RECIPES BY KRISTINE MOODIE AND ALDEN BOEREFJN
STYLING BY KRISTINE MOODIE PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANNALIZE NEL, FRITZ BREYTENBACH AND GREG TOPLIS

The gates to Welgevonden Game Reserve – which stretches over 35 000 hectares – open and so do my lungs. ‘I can breathe,’ I think... and then my breath is stolen (like my heart would soon be) by the scene that unfolds along the red soil road in front of me. Row upon row of green hills greet us, the blue expanse a reminder that we are now in “big sky” country – welcome to the Waterberg plateau, Limpopo province.

Our allocated guide, Marcus Hack, is filling our glasses with sparkling bubbles upon arrival at Welgevonden after our 2 hour, 45 minute drive from Lanseria airport, as he rejoices in the reserve’s renowned anti-poaching measures, boasting one of the largest populations of white rhino on private land in the world. As we make our way through the reserve to Mhondoro Game Lodge, it’s clear the journey has already begun.

Marcus stretches out his hand and strips a handful of leaves from a branch in passing. He crushes the yield in his palm and holds it up in the air, the wind carrying the whiff to our noses. “Do you smell it?” he asks. ‘I smell Africa,’ I think. It’s fever tea, from an indigenous tree that holds its own elixir, great to open up the sinuses in the bush and said to possess the power to break a child’s fever. Oh, the healing the veld holds – for body and soul...

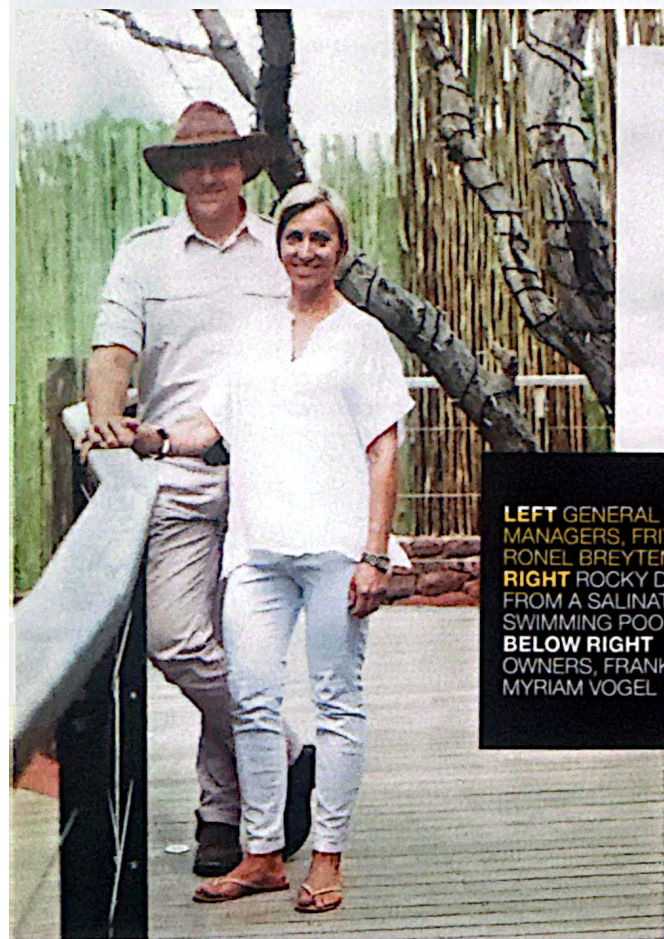
We pull up to the wooden platform adjoining the main lodge’s wooden deck, making the clamber from the game viewing vehicle ladylike and effortless. **The staff, all donned in white, greet us with the traditional Mhondoro song. General lodge managers, Ronel and Fritz Breytenbach, introduce themselves and each staff member by name, and their handshakes are as warm as the hand towels** Eddie Khosa – “the man with the smile in his voice” and our private butler for the days to come – hold out to us. We feel it, we are here: we are welcome.

We’re shown to our lavish abode for our stay – a separate, new wing to the lodge, after a devastating fire (due to an electrical fault in the living room) burned Mhondoro to its foundations in October of 2013. But from this purgatory rose a lion even stronger than before. The lodge, bought by the Vogel family in 2008 and refurbished in 2010, was then closed for two years and rebuilt from scratch, whereby the über-luxurious, exclusive-use villa was added, opening its heavy, wooden double doors on the dawn of 2016.

The ultimate in luxury, the villa sleeps six people, but can wine and dine up to 10 – complete with private chef, butler and dedicated housekeeping staff. It features a magnificent master suite and two additional bedrooms, en suite bathrooms, as well as the villa’s own gym, yoga room and a heated swimming pool. Exclusive use includes all meals prepared for you privately, a fully stocked bar, as well as a game-viewing safari vehicle with personal ranger. (Visit foodandhome.co.za for information on alternative accommodation and facilities at the lodge.)

Mhondoro offers guided game walks with trained rangers for those who prefer to experience the wild more up close and personal – also referred to as “rock scrambling”. We opt to be driven, though – but one cannot take on a game drive on an empty tummy now, so lunch is served... in true summer fashion, on the deck overlooking the inviting water





LEFT GENERAL LODGE MANAGERS, FRITZ AND RONEL BREYTENBACH
RIGHT ROCKY DRINKS FROM A SALINATED SWIMMING POOL
BELOW RIGHT OWNERS, FRANK AND MYRIAM VOGEL



of one of the salinated swimming pools (where we would soon learn that bull elephants, Mr T and Rocky don't mind taking a sip from every now and again – to the great delight of the guests, of course) and the all-encompassing allure of the Waterberg range surrounding us. Enter, a sharing platter of sheer seasonal delight: watermelon, walnut, nectarine and coriander salad, arancini risotto balls, haloumi, and a niçoise salad – fresh, earthy, vibrant and out of the ordinary!

Every element on the menu is home-made and, where possible, home-grown in the kitchen's very own veggie garden, the vibrant harvest including anything from baby carrots and yellow beetroot to purple basil and purple broccoli. Cooking with seasonality and whole foods in mind means bringing the best out in the indigenous offering. Don't be surprised, then, to find glossy currants and waterberries in the dishes. "We love cooking from our garden and we make use of what we have. We don't see isolation as a challenge – we have embraced it. Our food is fresh and interesting, and has depth of flavour and fine dining presentation," says head chef of Spirit Restaurant, Alden Boerefijn.

Mhondoro's food philosophy entails creating light, yet exotic dishes; not the usual lodge buffet-type offerings, but aesthetically pleasing, seasonal fine cuisine with an organic edge and a contemporary twist; Europe-meets-Africa, healthy, wholesome fare. "We could call our cuisine modern bush fine dining and we push the boundaries in what we do," Alden explains.

Alden is a young, passionate chef who did his training in Phalaborwa at St Maarten Hospitality and Trade Association (SHTA) – and that's where his culinary journey began. He has 10 years' experience of honing his craft in some tough kitchens. His two big mentors were GT Lundie from Zest Restaurant in Nelspuit and Justin Saunders at High Timber in London.

"Our food has local as well as global influences. It's ever-changing. I like to keep my diners fascinated and I'm always looking for new combinations and flavour profiles. Food is not just about ingredients on a plate, but hours of labour and, in many ways, art – or even as dramatic as theatre," Alden muses.

After a sunset game drive on trusty Toyota back, we return to our base and the aromas from the villa's kitchen beckon to us from afar. Our two private chefs for the night are cooking up a storm; the menu: soft shell crab on coconut soil, coconut panna cotta and saffron ice cream; or scallop soup with cucumber granita – what an opening!



Moving on to the main act, we choose ostrich atop cauliflower purée with fondant potato and jus; or seabass alongside risotto and Rooibos foam. A smorgasbord of cheeses, preserves, chutney and Melba toast or the mint macaron with mint panna cotta provide the grand finale. The culinary concerto leaves us euphoric.

Dutch owners Frank and Myriam Vogel decided to call Mhondoro their second home in 2008: "Our hearts were sold the first time we came to this incredible place. After many visits we have succeeded in making Mhondoro home – to us, our family and friends, but also our visitors. We are confident that