

OASIS OF DREAMS



CHRIS BUCHANAN SPENT A NIGHT AT
THE ORIENT BOUTIQUE HOTEL NEAR
HARTBESPOORT WHERE ANOTHER WORLD
OF SERENITY AND ANCIENT CULTURE
COMBINE IN A BUSHVELD OASIS.

There are few scenic drives leaving the urban sprawl of Johannesburg but one worth taking, heads north-north-west toward the Magaliesberg mountains and Hartbeespoort Dam. The savannah gives way to mountainous bushveld that forms a barrier to the north and provides articulation to the flat landscape before it.

The Orient appears like an oasis out of the African terrain reminiscent of Roald Dahl's Uncle Oswald's jaunt into the Egyptian desert when his car broke down and he spent the night in the hospitality of Abdul Aziz who built his luxury, walled oasis in the desert in order to live isolated with a family secret – you can read the exploits in *The Visitor* published in Roald Dahl's *Switch Bitch*.

Driving into the gates is a trip into a Moorish palace grounds dominated by prayer turrets and an intricate network of narrow passages that lead, like warrens, to the rooms and other areas of the hotel. Rooms are all themed around the Orient including the medieval Byzantine aesthetic of ancient Constantinople, India's Rajasthan and the Sahara Desert cities of Marrakesh and Mogador.





Staircases creek and work their way along the walls to rooms decorated with detailed wooden furnishings and fittings all sourced by the owners from India, North Africa and the Middle East to replicate the aesthetic of the region. Ormate Mashrabiya or Shanashels protrude into the courtyards and a feeling of serenity has a lasting effect as you work your way through the public areas and admire an art collection considered one of the finest of original South African art.



One narrow staircase leads up to the jewel in The Orient's crown, Restaurant Mosaic. Chantel Dartnall has been SA Chef of the Year and put Mosaic in the top ten SA restaurants but that's not why she does what she does. Her belief in her craft and the creation of food that is simple in its complexity makes this chef a champion of fine dining in our country. Chantel introduces herself to each table and takes you through her menu in a detail that immediately puts you in the market for the full ten courses although we chose restraint and went for the five.



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I can in no way do her justice by telling you here what to expect, it's something you have to experience and menu changes are seasonal. Just hope that Dancing Veils and Simply Shoots are on the menu for a sensation of garden veloute, fava bean mousse and pea shoots, and the experience of watching the maritime broth percolate into the horseradish root and send a tart note to the sweet Irish scallop.

Courses are paired in connoisseur, enthusiast or non-alcoholic pairings by sommelier Germain Lehodey who

comes with a wealth of knowledge and experience in the food and beverage department, having started his career as a sommelier at the world renowned restaurant Tour d'Argent in Paris. He was also a finalist in the Best Sommelier of the World competition. Germain lectured at the Wits Hotel School as well as the Cape Wine Academy. He worked in a number of top South African establishments, of which one was Lindton Hall with Richard Carstens. This guy has the most diverse private collection of wines to look after in a

labyrinth of cellars and we'll be looking at this collection and more about Germain in detail in a future issue of Prestige.

A weekend at The Orient is intended to be a quiet time away so you won't get rugby on TV in the lobby or TV in your room for that matter, just the silence of the bush and the occasional voice or footsteps that are magnified through passages.

If you're up for it after an innovative and daring approach to breakfast, a morning stroll or brisk walk can be had through the Francolin Conservancy within where the Orient is situated or a quiet meander through the gardens to sit

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on a bench or maybe admire the vintage Rolls-Royce motor cars or visit sculptor Tienie Prichard's Museum and Gallery.

The original dwelling was a meandering Mediterranean homestead which is now Restaurant Mosaic and off which the palace was built. It's difficult to imagine a Moorish theme in a wildlife area but someone had a vision to put a little bit of an unfamiliar culture on our doorstep. The definition of an oasis is "something serving as a refuge, relief, or pleasant change from what is usual" and that's what you will get at The Orient with its people, food, ambience and sheer audacity of scale and concept. 🕌

www.the-orient.net

