

Angus Begg and Alison Hofer

AFRICAN STORYBOOK

AFRICAN STORYBOOK
Cape Town
South Africa

TELEPHONE
(021) 465-5030
MOBILE
082 451 3828

Issue No: Nine

www.africanstorybook.com

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A Winter's Tale: Curry & Sun



No prima donna. Kevin Joseph. He's very good.



*Don't wear red at the pool-unless you're hiding
Which Musa Manukuza isn't doing*

And so it's over. I woke last Monday feeling quite bereft. For the first time in a month, from our house on the slopes of Table Mountain, I could hear a certain silence. The buzz was gone.

No longer was there the distant, almost comforting drone of a vuvuzela from the night's last reveler in the city down below. Six years of waiting, getting older and predictions, and a month of anticipation, buzz, Blatter and party...gone. The football World Cup, stamped, sealed and so thoroughly patented by FIFA, had come to an end.

Cape Town's got a rough reputation when it comes to winter, and my mother never fails to tell me of the foul winters of the mid sixties, around the time I was born. Yet the current winter truth is usually one of a few days of rain followed by lengthy stretches of windless, 20 degrees Celsius days of shorts and T-shirts.

The only other places I'd choose to be at this time of year are the Kruger Park and Durban, the latter being where the Australian fans camped in tents in a field until their team's inevitable early exit from the competition.

It was probably budget, age and an Aussie sense of community party that found them there, but as many of them said at the airport on leaving, they would be back. Although they may be quite done with Durban next time, for those who do happen to pop into the city again – with a bit more cash – I would suggest they may wish to try a couple of diverse options.

The first is the revamped Oysterbox hotel in the outlying suburb / satellite city of Umhlanga Rocks. Yes, it's a five star carrying a price tag, but it's South Africa's latest, and it has everyone excited.

This iconic property is the latest investment by the Tollman family, who started out with a Johannesburg hotel in the sixties. After expanding to the USA, Europe (and the Western Cape), the Tollmans recently returned to renovate The Oysterbox, best known to many as 'the one behind the lighthouse'.

Umhlanga is the quintessential 'new' Durban, a satellite city about 20 minute drive from the city centre. Generally light years removed from the lush suburbs and Victorian colonial houses that line the Berea ridge above Durban itself, with age and character behind it the Oysterbox is the exception to Umhlanga's rule.

I like the fact that the previous owners were a family operation too, who insisted that they would only sell to another family business. This is possibly why the Tollmans have renovated this historic landmark with sensitivity. They have even kept the General Manager from the days when tea on the verandah at the Oysterbox was more homely traditional Sunday occasion than grand experience.

And they've added their own touches. The Tollmans are serious art collectors, with the hotel serving as an exhibition of their visits to auctions around the world. A chandelier from the Savoy in London, a wall-hanging from India and the unique ceiling fans from the Long Bar in Singapore's Raffles Hotel bear testament to the family hobby.

Whether the eclectic art, the library or the

sweeping staircase leading up to the cinema, this hotel oozes panache.

And while discussing menus in five star hotels is a bit superfluous these days (with so many good chefs around), I look forward to trying executive chef Kevin Joseph's curry. One of the two restaurants is dedicated to curry - which happens to be a Durban specialty - and with Joseph being a local, I imagine it should be a little special.

For the real *Durban* feel, however, one has to be in Durban proper. I would usually send visitors to one of the beautiful old guesthouses on the Berea Ridge. But for the younger set still looking to party, there is a contemporary establishment adding new flavour to the city's suburban accommodation offering.

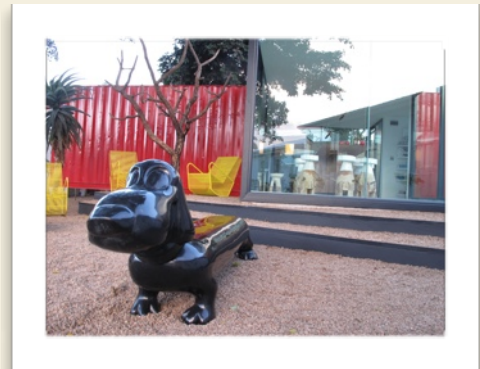
Just off the cafe and restaurant strip of Florida Road, it's called The Concierge Boutique Bungalows. A seriously individual hotel (with a brilliant shower), it's distinctly urban-stylish yet radically different... and far enough removed from the road to guarantee silence.

The vast bed, designer bathroom and small-verandah-with-sub-tropical vegetation are the standout features of

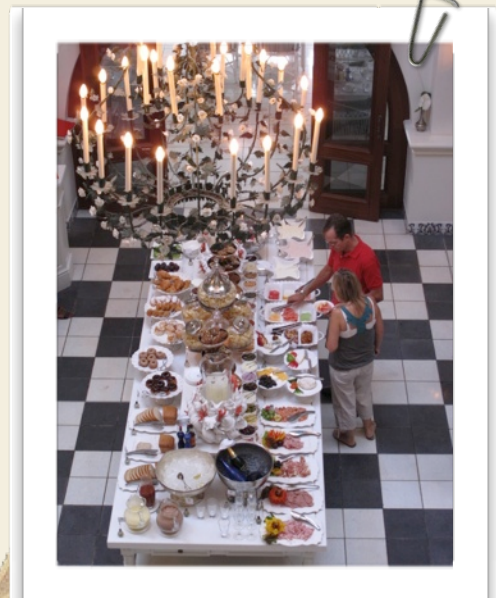
what is a small room. Yet it's the breakfast room outside - half container, half glass - that really catches the eye. The Concierge is well-positioned, with North beach a R50 cab ride away.

Unless those Aussie football supporters head straight for The Oysterbox when they do return to South Africa (yes they will), The Concierge is possibly a more natural progression from the pitched tents of the World Cup.

But wherever they stay, be it backpacker or three stars on the beachfront - they will know that winter in Durban is sublime. Football and vuvuzelas or not.



Design & Colour. Breakfast is served behind the glass at The Concierge.



The Oysterbox breakfast layout beneath the chandelier that once hung in The Savoy.



Skabenga the Oysterbox cat. Chaser of the nap.

www.oysterboxhotel.com / info@theconciierge.co.za