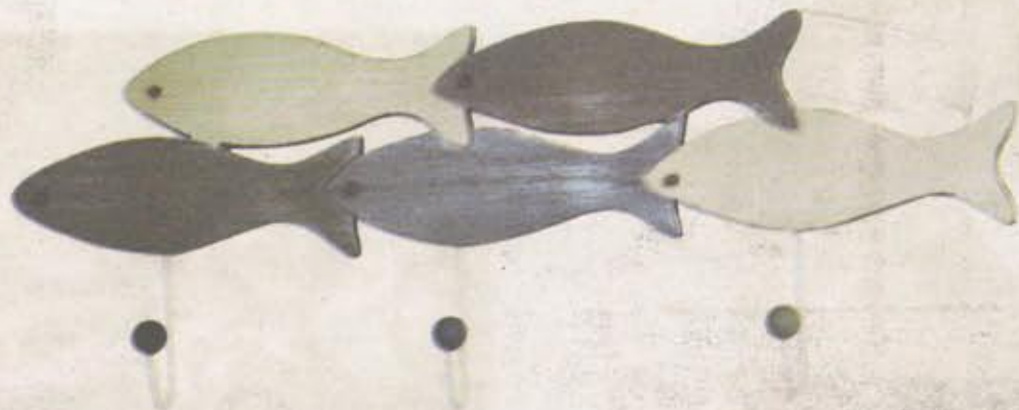


OUT IN THE WILDERNESS

Those born under the sign of Pisces will feel most at home in this boutique hotel, writes **Craig Jacobs**



STICKS AND STONES: Coffee trees from India and floating glass birds create an intriguing installation in the hotel foyer

A FLIGHT of birds wafting under a cerulean sky. A shoal of brightly coloured fish floating through a mobile chandelier spanning three storeys. Fish swimming across walls. Bleached trees rising to the ceiling — there are so many eye-catching details that make The Views Hotel in the Wilderness, outside George, one of the most enthralling design finds to come under our radar.

And it's all thanks to interior designer Lulu Ridgeway of Lu'nique Interior and Design, who has blended creative flair with a keen eye for sourcing items — from bespoke pieces to chain-store finds — to furnish the hotel's 18 rooms, as well as its state of the art fitness centre, spa and two restaurants, including the fine dining Foam Restaurant.

Lulu, who lists Dutch designer Tord Boontjie as a favourite, says of her approach: "I let the environment speak to me, to tell me what it needs."

A plus for Lulu was that developer Theo Du Toit had few rules — she had to work within an already created building and draw from a sea theme. She was, however, banned from using dark wood.

The open-plan hotel foyer is light and relaxed. It becomes the Sea Lounge, where coffee trees imported from India rise up from the quartz carpet and glass birds are suspended by cables from the ceiling. Bubbles, reworked into light fittings and chandeliers and reflected in the lounge's bubble chair, are another playful approach to the sea theme.

There are so many flourishes you almost forget the view of the coastline spread out behind the double-volume glass windows enveloping the room.

"This is my favourite part of the hotel," says Lulu, who highlights the tamarind tree stumps, which serve as coffee tables, and the multicoloured wingback armchairs, which add a dash of colour to the muted sea palate.

"The room uses fantasy and nature to create harmony. Some of the natural elements, like the trees, glass birds and fish, were created as abstract sculptures inspired by nature to bring the natural surroundings of the Wilderness inside."

Lulu, 29, who is passionate about "natural earthy elements, organic shapes and the iridescent play of light", took a year to manage the project from inception until opening.

A design prodigy (she started a business making eco-friendly décor items at the age of 18), she recently specialised in interior design at Inscape Design College.

While the hotel's upper deck has a modern feel, there is a more rustic feeling to its *pièce de résistance*, the Penthouse suite, which combines "opulent luxury with very natural and rustic accents". "This suite is about bringing the views inside and connecting the guests who stay there with nature," says Lulu.

Limewash wood joinery creates a personal feel, while pieces like the Till chair add texture and interest. Then there are the bowl-shaped chandeliers featuring strings of beads, designed by Lulu and made by a local craftswoman.

"There's a great sense of luxury and elegance, but it is the tranquillity of the room that whisks you away from the hectic pace of nine to five. In this room you could be anywhere in the world, relaxed and in touch with nature."

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DECOR: THE VIEWS

OCEAN'S HARVEST: Interior designer Lulu Ridgeway's favourite space is the Sea Lounge, which draws inspiration from the Wilderness coastline with flourishes designed to bring nature inside; below right: a playful take on a coat hanger in one of the hotel's 18 rooms continues the piscatorial theme

