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Photographs **Micky Hoyle**

# MAKING WAVES

A new luxury boutique hotel on the glorious Garden Route is setting new style standards and ensuring that even confirmed city-slickers no longer bypass the bucolic charms of Wilderness in favour of its more style-conscious neighbours.

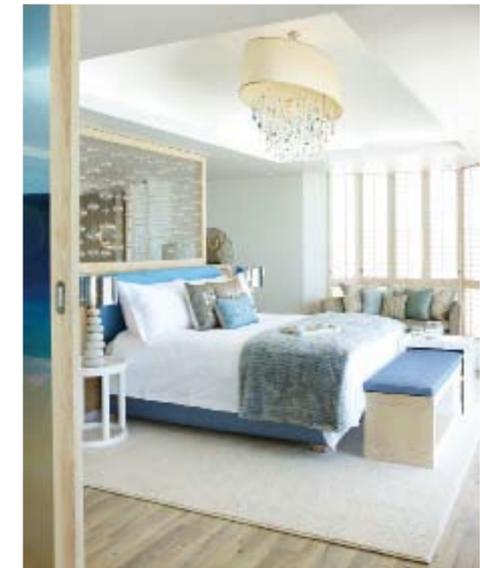
**A**s you round the final twist in the Kaaiman's Pass on the road towards Wilderness you encounter a view not easily dismissed – a sky dotted with paragliders, a staggeringly beautiful stretch of coastline reaching to the mouth of the Touw River and then beyond, backed by northward cliffs over which the fringe of dense forest reaches. To the left, one first glimpses the lagoon, or Touw River estuary, as well as the Serpentine River meandering its way to the distant lakes of Wilderness National

Park. It's the pristine stretch of endless sand that first draws your eye, though. Cantilevered above this very expanse of unspoilt beach sits the remarkable result of an intensive seven-year project – Views Boutique Hotel & Spa.

Constructed by developer Theo du Toit in collaboration with George architect Harry Burger and a team of other local professionals, on a vertiginous site that was once a wasteland most likely to be roared past on your way out of town, Views' angular glass façade perched

**ABOVE** Sky-like ceilings, soaring glass seagulls, and coffee-trees from India bring together the natural elements of the outdoors to create a mesmerising fantasy-scape. Glass-lined interiors create the feeling of an airy, light-filled space.

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OPPOSITE In the ‘sea lounge’, ocean-inspired colours and sinuous organic shapes, utilised floor to ceiling, reflect the undulating movement of water, while ‘dotty’ Gershwin fabric from The Fabric Library adds a playful touch. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The rugged simplicity of Wilderness Beach is the perfect foil for this sophisticated getaway; the reception area with its glass-topped carved wooden fish desk and contemporary minimalist décor immediately sets the scene; the penthouse suite offers every imaginable comfort in the most sumptuous of surrounds; bathrooms are splendid places of repose; the beautiful bedrooms feature bowl-like chandeliers with hanging glass beads, custom designed and made by L’unique in collaboration with local chandelier artist Donatella Pontesilli.

atop the dunes is but one surprise. The impact created on entrance is, frankly, even more so. A double-volume atrium of sunlight greets you, a space where life-size gulls soar in a cerulean sky, driftwood trees reach roof-ward and bubble-lights float as if on a breeze. This is a world removed. For all of this though, the foyer of Views and its adjoining ‘sea lounge’ achieve a look that’s suitably relaxed and low-key, helped in no small part by a predominance of neutral colours and the abundance of natural light. By rights, however, it’s the view that ultimately enthralls. Delivered in luxury cruise-liner style, it comprises mostly successive sea, sky, and horizon beyond...

Views’ artfully constructed interiors owe their striking looks to Lulu Ridgway of L’unique Interior & Design, who furnished the hotel’s 18 suites, public areas, spa and fitness centre. A design prodigy,

she recently started specialising in interior design at Inscape Design College. Lulu has been working on interiors for the last five years (commercially for two) and Views is her first hotel project.

Lulu’s taken Theo’s straightforward brief, ‘complement the views and use no dark wood’, and exploded it – and all with a torrent of imagination and a meticulous attention to detail.

The resultant spaces are ones where light, space and perspective play pivotal roles and the raw, primal qualities of weathered wood, bleached coral, stone and sand combine a sculptural, organic look with contemporary elements – glass, steel and modern accessories – to astounding effect. Differing levels throughout the building create spatial drama and serve to demarcate spaces in what is otherwise a free-flowing, open-plan design where iridescent fabrics and textures

are part of the striking overall style. In places the décor treads the line between enthralling and downright daring.

The most striking design aspect: an eye-catching installation of more than a thousand delicately handcrafted glass fish suspended in sweeping circular layers and spanning no less than three storeys. The shimmering showpiece casts a slightly space-age spin on the hotel’s library/lounge area, a place that allows contemplation in comfort.

Décor and design aside, as a hotel, Views, one of the latest additions to the exclusive Mantis Collection portfolio, unquestionably delivers the goods. The guest suites (high rollers have the option of residing in the lavish penthouse suite) are of the highest spec and rooms play far more than just a functional role. More loft apartment than hotel room in both style and

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OPPOSITE Views' *pièce de résistance* is a triple-storey rotating 'aquarium' conceptualised and designed by Lulu. She commissioned the Cape Glass Studio to craft the fish, glass coral and life-sized seagulls in the 'sea lounge'; in the mezzanine lounge, Lulu used warmer, African sunset tones, in a fun, abstract way; wraparound windows in many of the bedrooms invite nature in; the ocean-inspired theme is extended to the spa with its striking mosaic mural handmade by Karin Wainright; the view from the Cocktail Deck at sunset.

layout, they're well suited to longer stays. Each is an exercise in sheer luxury, which extends right down to the very last detail, and every conceivable convenience is within arm's reach.

When not sprawled on your bed enjoying the delights of the mini-bar or the in-room Italian capsule coffee machine, there's a cosy mini-lounge to which you may retire, whose most inviting features include a multimedia system packed with pre-loaded movies and a comfy couch on which to slump. Customised mood-control lighting systems and a pillow library (they do exist) whisper promises of the very best in bedtime bliss. From pebble-like lamp bases and the imported pearlescent fabric of the bed cases to the exquisitely detailed shell-like accessories, each aspect is customised and unique. Subtle shades of ocean, sand, coral and stone make for a blissful combination and pay homage to the sea views. Here and there, ocean-inspired fabrics ingeniously alter appearance and shimmer softly in the changing light from the windows, subtly warmed or cooled as day turns to night. Bathrooms are equally sumptuous, decorated with sand-like quartz flooring that's softened here and there by seaweed-like rugs. Decadent deep-soak tubs, ample wet room-style showers, underfloor heating, heated towel rails and covetable indigenous fynbos-based Moyo products continue the indulgent theme.

Guests awoken to a whole new sense of well-being at Views Spa, situated on the lower level of the hotel. No expense has been spared in kitting out this refuge. You can wallow in the heated vitality pool or enjoy all the health benefits of the Tylarium (a sauna and steam room in one), Rasul steam chamber and flotation pool. The views from the hydrotherapy lounge and the heated pool are remarkable. For the more energetic, there's circuit training available at the gym, personal trainers on request, and a myriad of unidentifiable fitness equipment that's begging to be put to good use.

The design and consideration of the hotel is altogether more green than appearances would suggest. Historically the site could best be described as an environmental disaster zone, says Theo. As part of the extensive rehabilitation and approval process, the project became subject to the new NEMA Coastal Development Regulations, which called for an Environmental Impact Assessment

(EIA). This included looking at fundamentals, from dune stability – no disturbance of the indigenous dune face through human activity was allowed during construction – and possible erosion, to the visual impact of the hotel upon its natural surroundings. Part of the project scope was to integrate the entire development with the dune and beach. To this end the dilapidated boardwalk was rebuilt, and the effects of careless human activity that resulted in dune-face erosion are in the process of being reversed as the dunes are rehabilitated and planted with indigenous vegetation. Further eco-savvy measures extend to an elaborate storm-water management system and the use of a heat pump to heat the spa's vitality pool. On the hotel's private rooftop deck a solar-heated swimming pool is positioned to maximise views of the distant Outeniqua Mountains.

Towards evening you can gravitate to the Cocktail Deck's stylish sea-side bar and watch the sunset. An exceptional panorama makes this arguably the best venue in Wilderness for snacks or sundowners and time spent here rates as the perfect way to end a lazy summer's day. Add to all this a 12-seat movie theatre, wi-fi Internet access throughout the building, a conference facility, and a well-equipped games room to keep children entertained for hours on end, and you realise Views has all the bases covered. On the gastronomic front, Foam restaurant offers fine dining in intimate surrounds and pushes the boundaries of South African cuisine with its bold and varied menu. Sails restaurant offers family-orientated dining in a fun café-style setting with wraparound vistas and an expansive deck under its signature 'sails', and is fast becoming a 'must-visit' destination for locals as well as visitors to the Garden Route.

Views is undoubtedly a getaway on the slick side, but with its perfect positioning, wondrous attention to detail and hi-tech comforts, it's a great base from which to explore the more rustic elements of its unspoilt natural backdrop. Step out the door, if you must, to the captivating world of lakes, rivers, estuaries, forests and beaches that await you. 📍

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