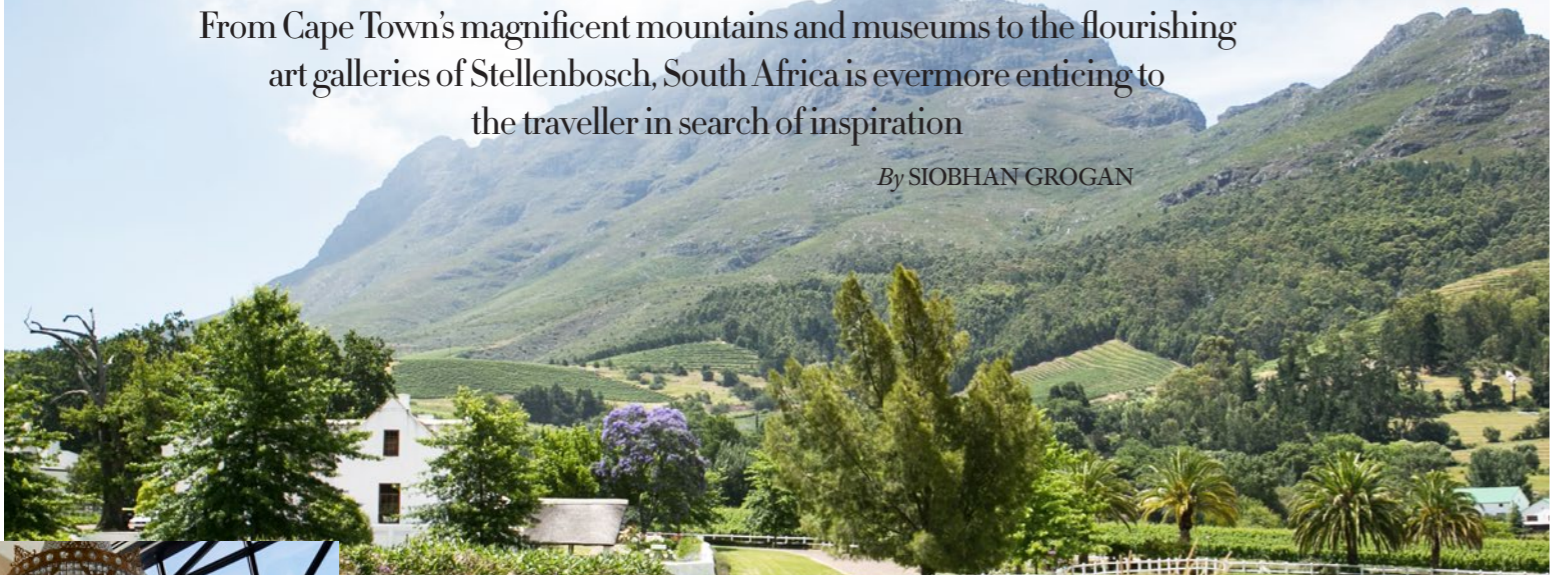


HIGHER PURSUITS

From Cape Town's magnificent mountains and museums to the flourishing art galleries of Stellenbosch, South Africa is evermore enticing to the traveller in search of inspiration

By SIOBHAN GROGAN



Top: a view of Stellenbosch. Above and below: the Silo Hotel in Cape Town. Right: one of the property's Royal Suites



See how small you are next to the mountains. Accept what is bigger than you and you do not understand... Our lives are not the measure of all things: consider sublime places for a reminder of human insignificance and frailty.' These words, written by Alain de Botton in his book, *The Art of Travel*, were running through my mind as I lay soaking in a roll-top bath tub – to my left an enormous window framing the panoramic view across Cape Town to Table Mountain and the endless ocean – at the Silo, South Africa's latest luxury lair.

Housed in a former grain silo that towers over the famous V&A Waterfront, the hotel is something of a work of art in itself. Not only does it contain 28 splendid rooms decorated with huge handmade chandeliers, vibrantly coloured silks and velvet, and unique artwork by young South African artists, but the building is also home to the much-anticipated Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, which finally opens this month and is already tipped as the nation's equivalent of Tate Modern.

While you don't have to travel far to see African art – in the past year alone, it has featured prominently in exhibitions at the British Museum, the Royal Academy and the Whitechapel Gallery – the Zeitz MOCAA promises something special. It will contain 21st-century art from all over the continent, as well as hosting international exhibitions; so however tempting it might be to stay put, just floors away from such masterpieces, that would be to miss out on another unexpected art-lover's paradise, an hour away in Stellenbosch.

This pretty university town is renowned for its wine, but its oak-lined streets are also brimming with tiny galleries, a flourishing art institute and beautiful artwork on every corner, thanks to the Stellenbosch Outdoor Sculpture Trust. A non-profit organisation



Below: Stellenbosch's Oude Werf hotel. Right: a Frans Smit work. Far right: the Silo Hotel



that aims to bring art out of the galleries and into public areas, the Trust unveils special year-long exhibitions each summer alongside permanent public art donated by artists to the town.

A guided walk is essential if you want to be sure of spotting every piece, and to hear the stories behind them, including metalwork from Jaco Sieberhagen that gives a satirical comment on South African politics and an astonishing laser-cut steel silhouette of Nelson Mandela by Stridjom van der Merwe, which only truly reveals itself through the screen of a mobile phone. Be sure to make time for a traditional lunch of *bobotie* – spicy aromatic beef with turmeric rice – at the stylish Oude Werf, a hotel on the site of the country's first church.

Suitably restored, I stopped off at the Dylan Lewis Sculpture Garden outside the town. One of the foremost figures in contemporary sculpture, Lewis was the first artist to exhibit on the streets of Stellenbosch and has now opened up the enchanting gardens of his home for small pre-booked tours that offer a magical insight into his world. More than 60 sculptures are hidden within nearly 20 acres of specially designed gardens, resplendent with shady groves, hidden paths, streams and waterfalls, all in the shadow of a magnificent mountain range where the leopard – famously one of Lewis' chief inspirations – roams free.

Just minutes away is Majeka House, the boutique hotel that was my base for the trip. Built in the owners' former family home after they moved next-door, it is as quirky as it is luxurious, with vivid wallpaper, bold artwork and a cosy library piled high with board games. It also houses an award-winning restaurant, Makaron, where the tasting menu, paired with outstanding local wines, was easily one of the best meals I've ever eaten, and included baby marrow risotto with cured egg-yolk shavings, a butter-poached kingklip with black garlic and an ice-cream sandwich to finish.



Camps Bay and the Twelve Apostles mountain range in Cape Town. Right: Vladimir Tretchikoff's 'Chinese Girl' (1952)

The hotel is brilliantly placed to explore the surrounding wine estates, where the tasting-rooms, restaurants, delis and vineyards themselves frequently also function as unofficial art galleries. Spier Wine Farm even offers an arts academy providing emerging artists with training, and runs a patronage programme and guided walks to view one of the country's largest collections of contemporary South African art.

Meanwhile, in the picturesque olive orchards of Tokara, peacocks wander among sculptures by makers including Wilma Cruise and Guy du Toit, while the release of new-vintage wines each year is celebrated with paintings created by up-and-coming talent using the estate's red wine itself.

And no trip to Stellenbosch would be complete without lunch on the terrace at the exclusive Delaire Graff, owned by the diamond king and renowned art collector Laurence Graff. The view is one of the most spectacular in Africa, across rolling vineyards to a range of majestic mountains, but it must vie for attention with the works on display by William Kentridge, Dylan Lewis, Lionel Smit and the original *Chinese Girl* painting by Vladimir Tretchikoff. Hanging unassumingly in the reception, it is just one more surprising delight in this charming corner of South Africa that is the art world's best-kept secret.

The Silo (www.theroyalportfolio.com/thesilo), from about £680 a room a night B&B, including entry to the museum. *Majeka House* (www.majekahouse.co.za), from about £135 a room a night B&B. *First Car Rental* (www.firstcarrental.co.za) runs a wine-country chauffeur service in Stellenbosch. *Air France* and its sister company *KLM* (www.airfrance.co.uk; www.klm.com) fly to Cape Town from various locations across the UK and Ireland; prices start from £562 return.



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