

The Biden Touch

Some people have a certain air about them that's just too difficult to label – an assured sense of who they are, a poised way of carrying themselves, a *je ne sais quoi* that sends a very clear message. Mostly, we see this from uber-successful people, the kind of people that run in the same circles as Sir Elton John and are well-known the world over for what they do. One such person is the owner and founder of The Royal Portfolio, Liz Biden.

Sitting in the penthouse at the iconic Silo Hotel, only a stone's throw from the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront mall in Cape Town, I was struck by the intricate details that all come together to make the space – in one word – perfection. On closer inspection the room comes alive – every surface is polished to perfection, with not a single speck of dust in sight, the cushions are fluffed to look their best, and the windows are so clean there barely seems to be glass in the frames. The room is decorated beautifully with an eclectic mix of new and old, antique and modern, shiny and tarnished, bright and muted, and the creamy yellow walls are adorned with striking locally sourced artworks.

It's no secret that Biden is the powerhouse behind the brand, and I am unashamed to admit that the prospect of meeting this business aficionado was mildly intimidating. My worries were soon laid to rest when a stylish, petite woman entered the room, dressed immaculately in black trousers and an exquisite, multi-coloured jacket. Having exchanged pleasantries, I launched straight into finding out more about the history of the brand, and how Biden had managed to create such a famed collection of establishments.

Few may know this, but the first three sites of The Royal Portfolio – Royal Malewane in the



La Residence



Greater Kruger National Park, Birkenhead House in Hermanus, and La Residence in Franschoek – started off as personal holdings of the Biden family, which Liz then decided to convert into luxury accommodation, open to the public. “They are all so different, but they fit where they are located,” Biden says.

The holdings of The Royal Portfolio are built on a kind of circuit, allowing international guests to visit South Africa and experience every major type of holiday experience that the country offers. “We had the circuit of ‘bush’, ‘sea’, and ‘gourmet’ with Royal Malewane, Birkenhead House and La Residence. The Silo was added as ‘city’ and ‘art’. So our clients can do a whole circuit and they won’t feel like they are in a chain because they are all completely different, but they do have the same thread of dedicated staff running through.”

Biden has what can be considered the modern, hotelier version of a Midas touch. All of the projects currently under The Royal Portfolio were born of her vision – everything from the initial concept to the type of glassware placed in each room. When I asked about the use of modern African art in The Silo, Biden replied that “at the other three properties [Royal Malewane, Birkenhead House and La Residence] I collected things that I loved from all over the world. With The Silo being located above the modern art museum [Zeitz MOCAA], I decided that we must only have African contemporary art, so it’s all post-2000. My son, who is becoming very interested in art, and I bought every piece. We have over 300

pieces and a lot of it is representative of what you see in the museum.”

Having gained international recognition, the global media took note and Biden has been interviewed by the likes of *Forbes Magazine* and *Marie Claire*. She has also seen two of her hotels – The Silo and La Residence – featured in the BBC 2 series *Amazing Hotels: Life Beyond the Lobby*, in which two presenters visit their picks of the best hotels in the world.

Global recognition also comes with a whole host of celebrity guests, including Sir Elton John, Michael Jordan, Lilly Allen and Lionel Richie – to name just a few. When speaking about Birkenhead House and the unparalleled views that the Hermanus property offers, Biden tells us that Hollywood star Richard Gere walked the trails around the property and was completely awestruck. “He said that he had never had such beautiful walks in his entire life, because the whales were on his left and on his right was all the fynbos,” she explains. “He just couldn’t get over it actually.”

Lovers of The Royal Portfolio will be overjoyed to hear of their latest development, The Farmstead at Royal Malewane. A mere 12-minute drive from the main lodge, The Farmstead will appeal to those guests that prefer their holidays intimate, without sacrificing the quality of service that has given the portfolio its esteemed reputation. Opening from June 2019, bookings for the new property are already flooding in.

“I didn’t want to make Royal Malewane any bigger because it would lose its cosiness

and warmth. So instead, we are doing a collaboration with the local tribe who own that piece of land at the end of our reserve,” she explains. “We now have a 45-year lease and we are taking some of the tribe members and training them – some have already started at Royal Malewane and we will move them to the The Farmstead as soon as it opens. We promised that we would train others to enable them to move onto other hospitality establishments.” The game experience at The Farmstead will be just as spectacular as it is at Royal Malewane, she says. “We have one of the most qualified teams of trackers and rangers in the country.”

Being successful in business is impressive, but the Biden family imbue their success with a sense of humble gratitude and respect for the environment. Their properties may differ wildly from one another, but underneath it all, each and every one carries a deep feeling of quality and excitement. The properties owned and operated by The Royal Portfolio are unlike any in the rest of the world.

For more information, please visit www.theroyalportfolio.com.

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