

WHERE TO STAY

THE SMARTEST HOTEL UPDATES AND THE FRESHEST REVIEWS

EDITED BY PETER BROWNE

EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

CURVE BALL

THE MOST HOTLY ANTICIPATED MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART IS COMING SOON TO CAPE TOWN. AND RIGHT ON TOP OF IT SITS THIS SHAPE-SHIFTING HOTEL

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CROOKES & JACKSON



THOSE FAMILIAR WITH THE GROUP'S OTHER PROPERTIES WILL HAVE A FAIR IDEA

FOR A SMALL, FAMILY-OWNED HOTEL, Cape Town's new Silo has certainly made a big impact. It was the talk of the town for years before it opened on 1 March, defying any need for a hotshot global brand name, or endorsement by a celebrity chef.

Of course, the novelty of the building helped stir up interest. A concrete grain silo constructed in 1921 in a hard-working port, it was never going to be an obvious choice for the city's most glamorous new hotel. And then London-based Thomas Heatherwick, described by his mentor Sir Terence Conran as 'the Leonardo da Vinci of our times', got involved.

The brief given to Heatherwick Studio was to reimagine the reticent, brooding building as a not-for-profit museum, Zeitz MOCAA, to house the continent's largest collection of contemporary African art. It is named after Jochen Zeitz, the former CEO of Puma whose collection will form the basis of a permanent exhibition.

Eighty exhibition spaces have been carved out of the 42 cylindrical silos, anchored by a cathedral-like central atrium,

floodlit from above by a glass roof, itself the setting for an open-air sculpture garden. It's the sort of wonderfully mad and wildly ambitious project we have come to expect from Heatherwick, who gave us the London Olympics' opening ceremony Cauldron, made up of 204 copper petals, and fanciful plans for the Garden Bridge, a park on a bridge across the Thames.

When the museum opens on 22 September, it will transform the cultural landscape, not just of Cape Town – where challenging, contemporary African art tends to be limited to small, private galleries – but the continent. With its industrial edge and extravagant scale, it has the potential to become South Africa's Tate Modern.

The 28-bedroom hotel inhabits the upper floors of the silos' former elevator house, the work-horse of the original complex. It is now distinguished by remarkable, 5.5-metre windows, described as 'pillowed glazing panels', which gently balloon out, saturating the hotel in sparkling light, and providing expansive

views of Table Mountain, the always-busy port, and the shops and restaurants of the Victoria & Albert Waterfront below.

Mark Noble, development manager for the V&A Waterfront, which owns the building and surrounding land, describes The Silo as the hero of a new precinct currently being developed around it. Soon there will be design-led shops, another hotel and a health club.

Heatherwick Studio may have designed the shell of The Silo hotel, but everything inside it was created by the Biden family, owners of South Africa's Royal Portfolio hotel group, which includes the smart safari lodge Royal Malewane, adjacent to Kruger National Park; Birkenhead House in the whale-watching coastal town of Hermanus; La Residence, outside the winelands village of Franschhoek; and The One Above, a super-smart private penthouse at the One&Only Cape Town hotel, just across from The Silo.

Phil and Liz Biden – childhood sweethearts who met almost 50 years ago – and their 34-year-old son Matt, managing



From far left: the pillowed glazing panels by Heatherwick Studio; a remnant of the building's industrial past; a Deluxe Superior Suite; a marble-floored bathroom. Previous page, the hotel's Willaston Bar



ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT HERE: IN TWO WORDS, UNBRIDLED EXUBERANCE

director of the company, make a formidable team. 'Everyone has a role to play,' says Phil, who has run some of South Africa's biggest businesses.

But if Phil supplies the wisdom of accumulated commercial acumen, and Matt the assurance of the company's future, Liz is The Royal Portfolio's remarkable creative force, or as her husband fondly puts it, 'our number-one shopper'.

Those who are familiar with her extravagant interiors at The Royal Portfolio's other hotels will have a fair idea about what to expect at The Silo: in two words, unbridled exuberance. Each of the bedrooms – which includes a razzmatazz penthouse and six suites – is a happy marriage of vibrant silks and velvets in deep purple and bottle green, ice blues, hot mustard, sunshine yellow and mandarin orange; the ballroom-worthy bathrooms are lit by Egyptian-crystal chandeliers.

Because the width of the rooms is limited by two lift shafts at the core of the building (and Heatherwick's handsome statement windows do not open), the

Bidens insisted that every bedroom should have a balcony on which to suck up the sea air. The walls are hung with bold works by local artist Sibley McAdam, supplemented with more serious-minded prints from Zeitz MOCAA's Editions Programme, the originals of which will be seen in the museum downstairs. Liz has also been building her own collection of contemporary African art, featuring young artists such as Cyrus Kabiru and Frances Goodman.

The splendid Granary Café and Willaston Bar take up the entire sixth floor with banquettes in a stampede of contrasting colours and leopard print, and bar stools in butter-soft, blue leather. Just above this busy space is a quiet mezzanine library furnished with beautiful sofas and chairs covered in a richly patterned fabric by Ardmore, the KwaZulu-Natal company which recently caught the attention of Hermès. A glorious rooftop pool and sun terrace wraps around the open-air 11th floor, protected from the Cape's famous South-Easter by glass panels.

Chef Veronica Canha-Hibbert wants to make the café's afternoon teas and Sunday roasts a Cape Town institution, and oysters and tempura will be served on the pool terrace. 'I get my lunch fish from a lovely local lady, Irene, in the morning,' she says, 'and then another brilliant fishmonger texts me at about 3pm with what the boats are bringing in for supper. We are spoilt for choice in this city.'

The Bidens have pulled out all the stops to tap into those seemingly infinite resources and to provide a dazzling showcase for the best South Africa can muster. There is no other hotel like this in Cape Town right now, certainly nowhere approaching its punchy price tag, bravado and confidence. Into this still-gritty historic district, it has also introduced an enormous sense of fun. PETER BROWNE

Africa Travel can arrange a five-night stay at The Silo, including breakfast, British Airways flights and transfers, and entrance to the Zeitz MOCAA, from £2,795 per person. +44 845 450 1535; africatravel.co.uk