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travel

magazine

Issue 7

Eat:

From 'Farm to Fork'
at Babylonstoren Wine Estate

Sleep under canvas

at Capella Ubud, *Bali*

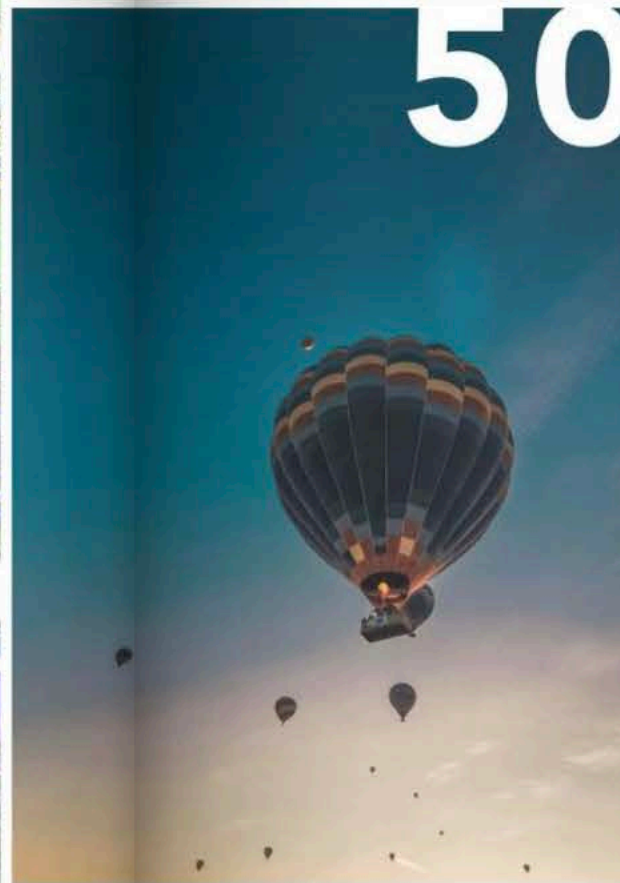
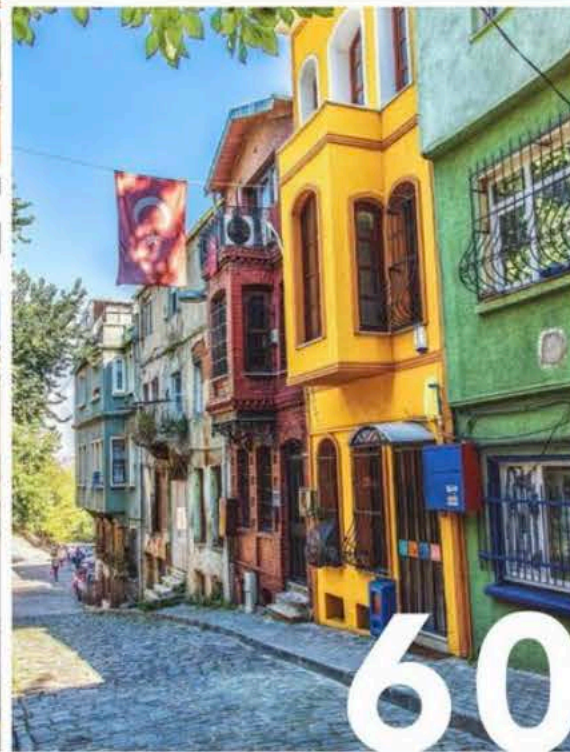
Cruise

our new Greek ship,
the *Elysium*

Take to the skies in
Cappadocia, Turkey

Explore

Japan's cultural capital, *Kyoto*



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Front cover image: Cappadocia, Turkey



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7

EAT

Babylonstoren, South Africa

Words by Gemma D'Souza, Editor & Africa Specialist

Farm to Fork

The culinary experience at Babylonstoren in the Cape Winelands, South Africa

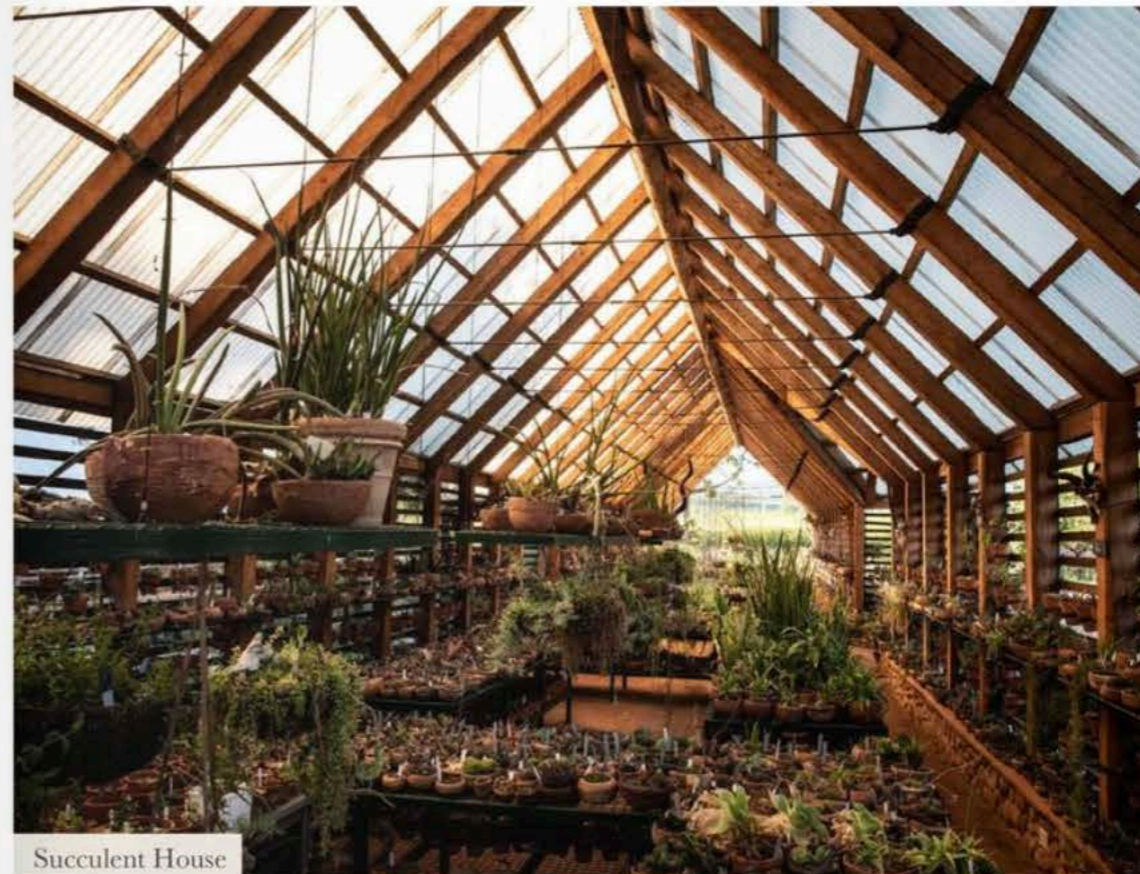
Few feelings beat the thrill of slinging your bags in the boot and hitting the open road, and South Africa's wine region is one of the most beautiful spots in the world.

My trip to South Africa was something I'd been looking forward to for a while. While most of my time is usually spent in cities, my heart lies with more remote destinations. South Africa is the perfect blend of both. For most, the winelands is combined with the city of Cape Town. This city has a great atmosphere; The minute laptops are closed after the work day, friends and colleagues take to the mountains to hike, enjoy the sunset and just appreciate being out in nature. As night draws in, the inviting café culture, restaurants and bars open their doors.

But I'm not here to write about that. While these jewel-box cities like Cape Town are certainly worth visiting, I write this from

Babylonstoren – the perfect retreat in the wine-growing region of the Cape winelands, only a 40-minute drive from the city. What was originally a fruit and wine farm dating back to 1692, has today been transformed into a collection of inviting facilities including a contemporary farm hotel, a spa, winery, bakery, farm shop and several simply divine restaurants.

Like me, most people here are tourists – both local and international. But, as a working farm, spending time here gives you an insight into the daily life at Babylonstoren; The gardeners are gardening. The bakers are baking. The chefs are cooking. The sommeliers are discussing. And behind closed doors, there are workshops, garden tours, cellar tours and cooking classes going on every day. Everyone here knows what their job is and, with friendly and approachable smiles, it's pretty clear that everyone here loves their job too.



Succulent House



Cellar tour



There is something special about sitting still, slowly enjoying a glass of wine with the smell of fresh herbs, plants and flowers around you. The creative spurs and the freedom of being forced to slow down, immersed in these tropical gardens. And to enhance the experience, no matter where you are on the Babylonstoren farm, you're surrounded by gardens and vineyards, with the Simonsberg, Du Toitskloof and Franschhoek mountains providing a dramatic backdrop.





Babel Restaurant

While there is so much to rave about Babylonstoren, I want to focus on its culinary scene. Housed in the old cowshed is the Babel Restaurant. The building itself retains its historic Cape Dutch architecture yet its contemporary glass walls make it bright, modern and inviting. I found their farm-to-fork philosophy particularly unique and special. This is a concept that is essentially building the menu around what comes from the garden and what is available at that time of year.

To find out more, I spoke with head chef, Schalk Vlok, to find out more about this philosophy at Babel.

In the simplest sense, what is the farm-to-fork philosophy here at Babylonstoren?

The farm-to-fork philosophy incorporates as many of our own ingredients and products as possible. We build our menu around what comes from the farm and gardens of Babylonstoren, which in turn dictates what we cook and reflects what season we are currently in. The entire concept of Babel is build around showcasing the amazing ingredients we have to offer, but in a simple way. We pay respect to the artisanal craft of each ingredient and the people that work extremely hard throughout the year to produce them. Simplicity and seasonality are the two main parts of the farm-to-fork philosophy.

With that in mind, do you have a particular favourite season to cook in?

Spring (September – November in South Africa). I believe that there is something special about the products time of the year. There are so many new things blossoming which inspires many new ideas.

Is everything you cook with grown from the gardens of Babylonstoren?

The bulk of what we have on the menu is from our gardens and farms, yes. Some of our products we have in either very large or very small amounts, like prickly pears or Persimmons. That said, we just let the availability of each product guide us to create our menu. We don't put pressure on the growth of particular type or quantity of ingredients. Instead, if we require something that we don't have available on the farm at Babylonstoren, we will get it from a trusted local producer, farmer or artisan nearby.

What is working as a chef at Babylonstoren like? It seems like a pretty idyllic place to work.

The inspiration you get from the gardens alone is something I think every chef dreams about! It is not only the produce that is grown here at Babylonstoren that is inspiring, but also the dedicated team of people behind the scene: the people who look after the gardens so well. Everyone at Babylonstoren shares the passion for the locally-grown ingredients and sustainability, and this is what inspires me in the Babel kitchen every day.



Because the food at Babel is so reliant on the success of the growing produce at Babylonstoren, you must work closely with those who look after the gardens?

Although I balance my work between a few things, such as the bakery evenings and private functions we have, the majority of my time is spent cooking at the Babel Restaurant. I work very closely with our garden team, the butchery, the bakery team, and any other people that have to do with the ingredients we use in Babel. I have both a strong team behind me, and some great mentors in front of me so there is always room for growth and improvement. I am in a privileged position to have freedom to achieve great things with people that have immense knowledge in their fields.

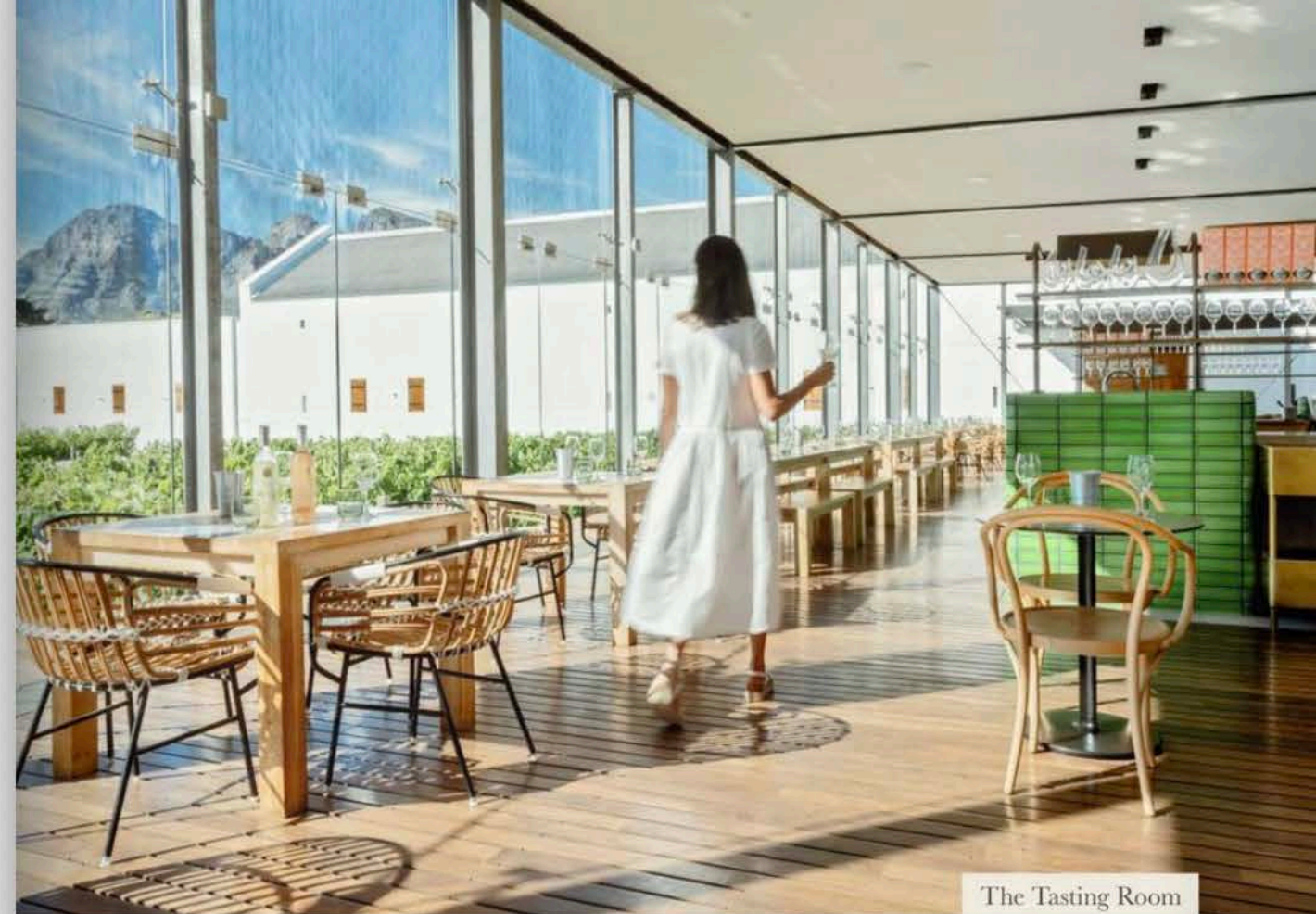


Where did you work prior to Babylonstoren, and how would you name your gastronomy philosophy?

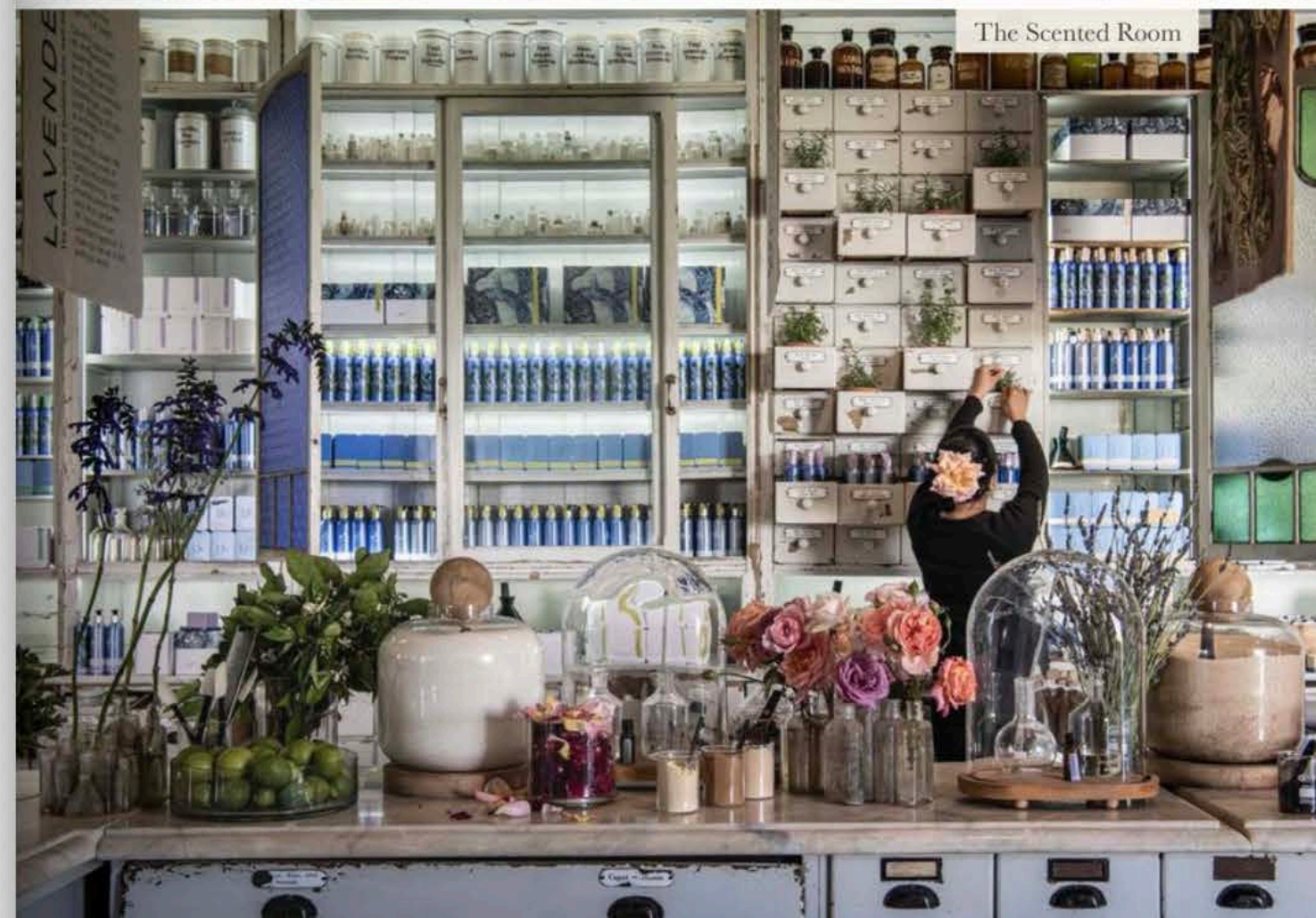
I started my career at Fancourt in George as a commis chef and then progressed to a Chef de Partie which was definitely a huge part of my career and a great foundation. I worked with some truly inspiring people, who shaped me into who I am today. I have worked in many top restaurants across the winelands and Cape Town area including Le Quartier Francais, Maison, and Leeu Collection. Throughout my career, I've always maintained a similar gastronomy philosophy which is to keep things simple and let the food tell the story. And – I think this is especially true of Babylonstoren – I remember that so many people have been involved in the making of each dish. Not just the chefs, but everyone involved in the maintenance and upkeep of our beautiful gardens and farm. It's important to stay humble.

That's lovely. And finally, what is your motto in life?

Focus on what you want, stay disciplined and never forget who helped you get to where you are. And of course, enjoy good food!

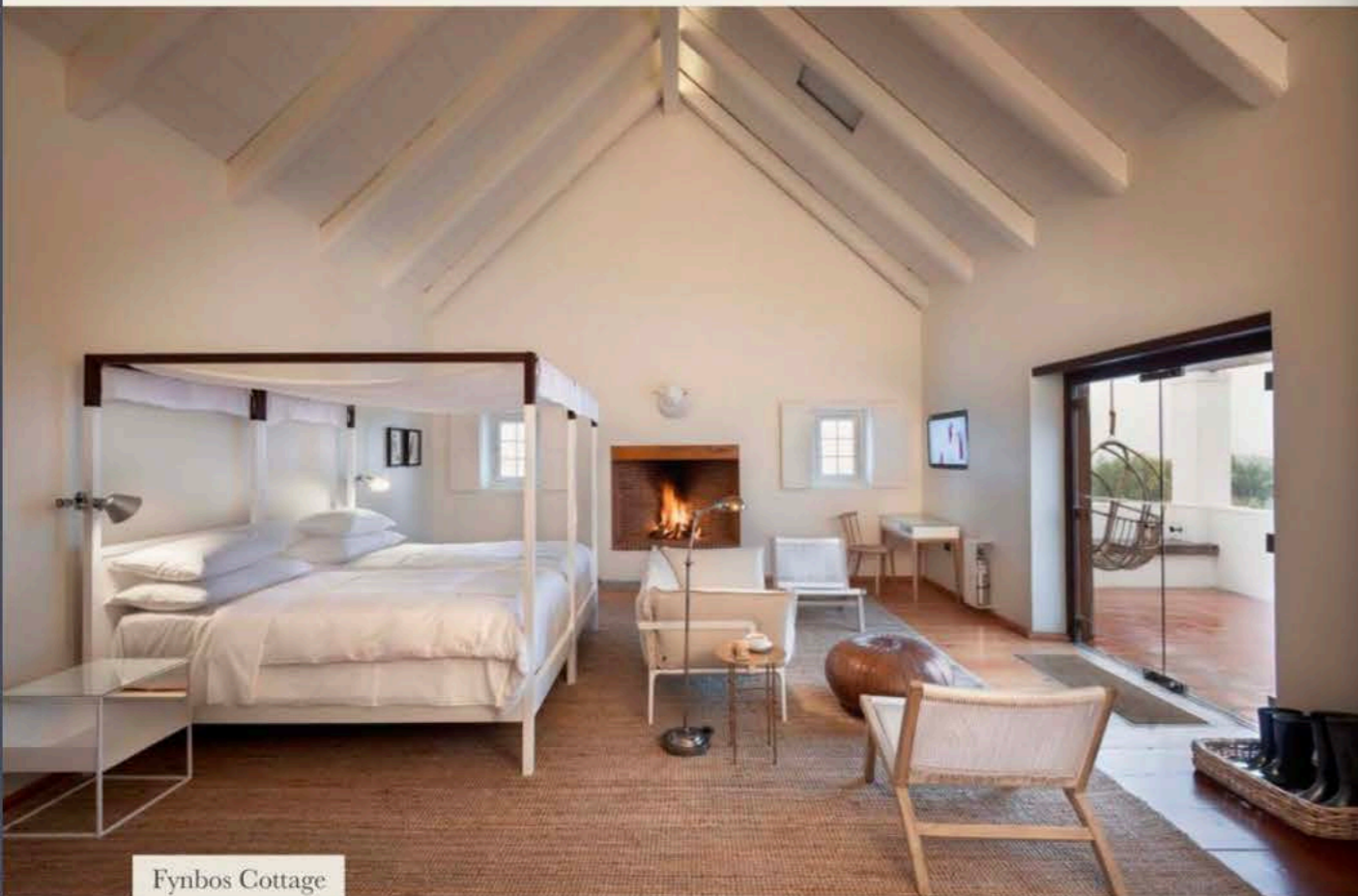


The Tasting Room



The Scented Room

STAY AT *Babylonstoren*



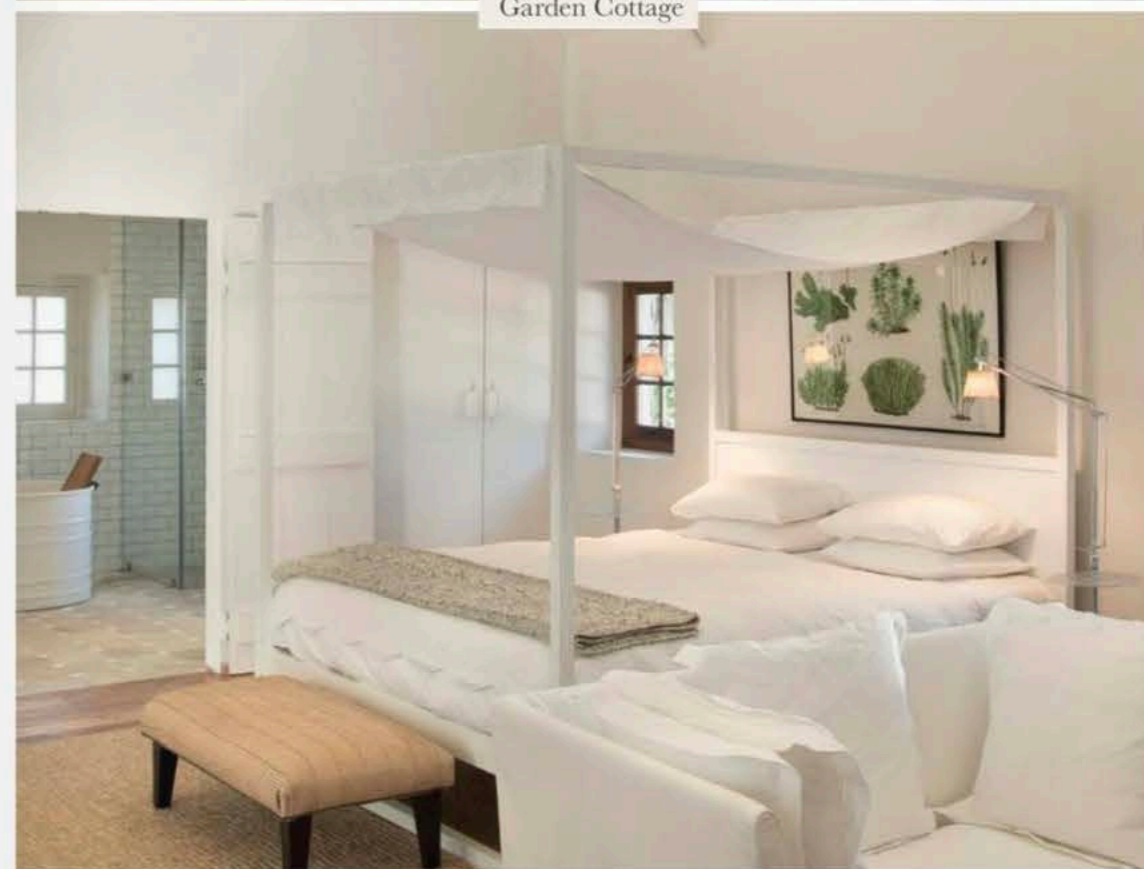
Fynbos Cottage

The grounds of Babylonstoren is everything that a garden represents: freedom, growth, diversity and tranquillity. As one of the oldest Cape Dutch farms, Babylonstoren is a stunning property, and a truly unforgettable getaway. There are garden cottages, farmhouse suites, fynbos cottages and two family houses which provide traditional, authentic, and luxury farm-stay experiences.

Make sure Babylonstoren is in your South Africa itinerary! We'd recommend spending two or three nights here, combined with some time in Cape Town and a South Africa safari... Get in touch to speak to our Africa specialists and curate your unforgettable trip.



Garden Cottage





WHY DO ORDINARY

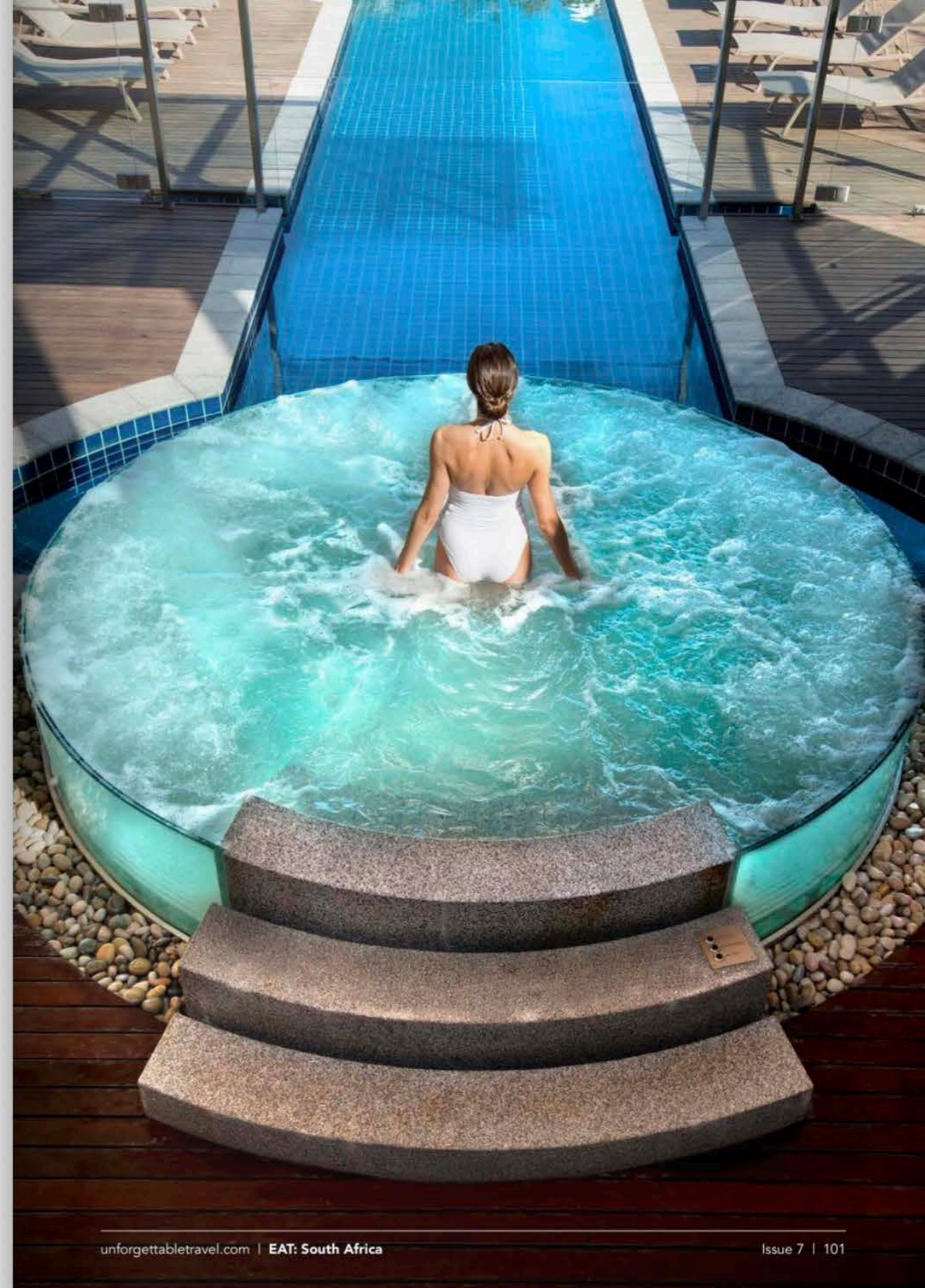
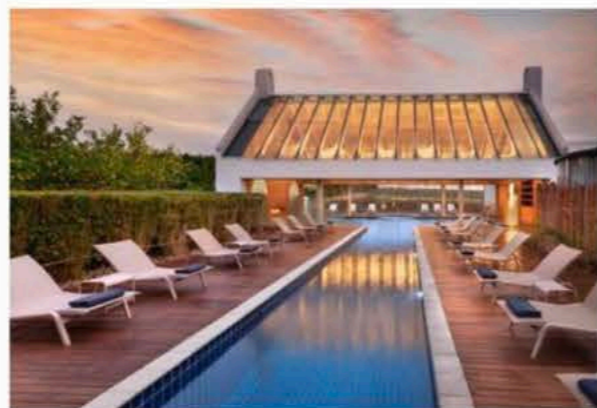
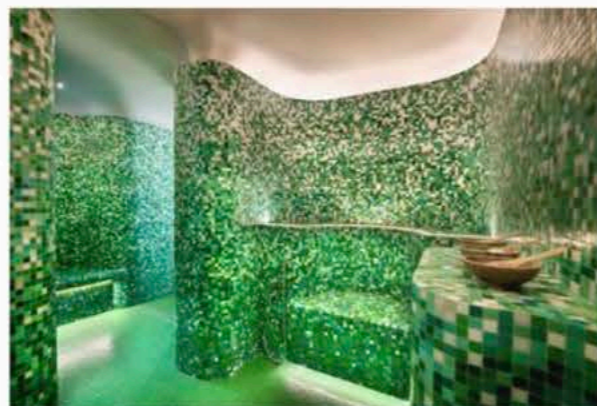
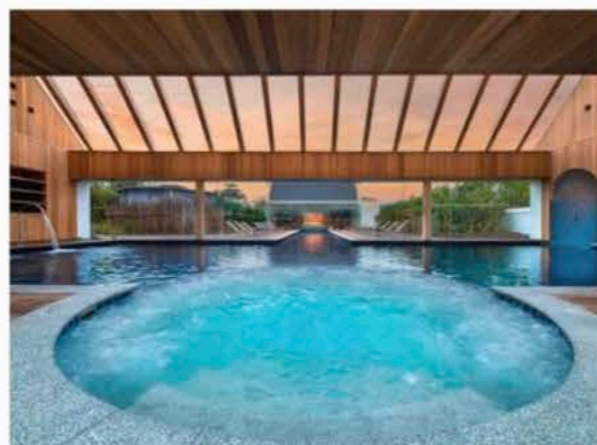
To find out more about South Africa as a destination, get in touch with our Africa specialists or visit unforgettabletravel.com/south-africa

New spa

Babylonstoren expands wellness experience with new hot spa

Babylonstoren's new hot spa is all about a connection to nature and the farm surrounds, throughout the seasons. A glorious water-inspired mural greets you upon entering the new area. Inside, an authentic hammam with floor-to-ceiling marble sits to one side. On the other, a moody Rasul chamber in tones of botanical green offers decadent mud scrubs and deep soaks. It includes a deep exfoliation and detoxing body wrap from locally sourced clay.

Even on dreary days, you can float in the heated pool while admiring the sky through a glass-panelled pitched roof. The sprawling swimming pool is an indoor-outdoor experience to enjoy in all weather conditions, with a narrow water strip connecting two ambient indoor pools. The pool sports two mosaic alcoves recessed into the back wall, with running waterfalls to allow for a moment of refreshment. A sauna, salt room and two heated vitality pools complete this new holistic spa experience.





New Hot Spa