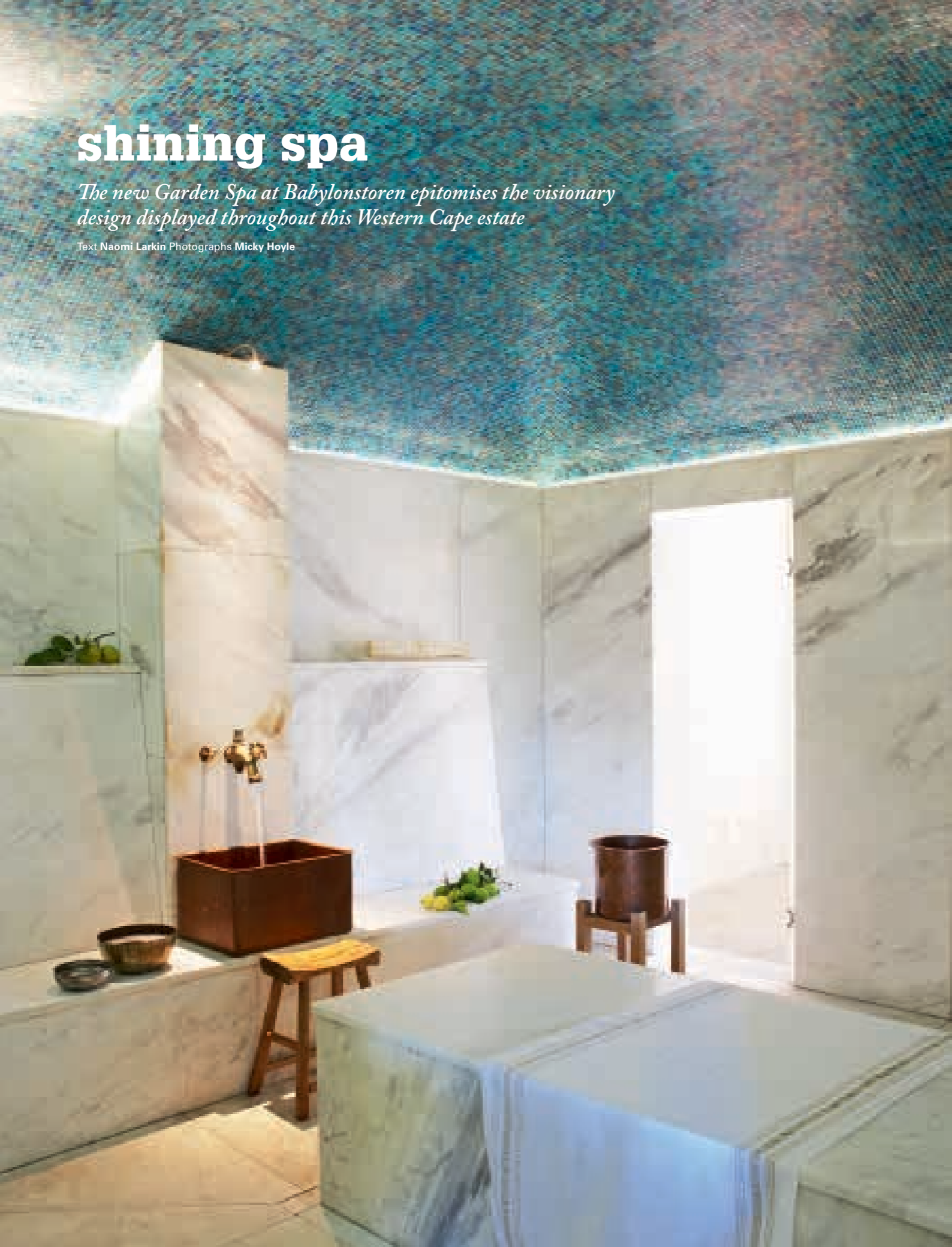


shining spa

The new Garden Spa at Babylonstoren epitomises the visionary design displayed throughout this Western Cape estate

Text Naomi Larkin Photographs Micky Hoyle



Running water is one of the most soothing, relaxing sounds in the world. Perhaps it's because it taps into early childhood water play or the security of your mother holding you as she washed your hair or rain on a tin roof as you cocooned, warm, in bed. Whatever the reason, both the sound and the use of water in spas is an integral part of their de-stressing properties. The traditional Turkish hammam experience (see also *Sultans of Swing*, page 134) with its pouring, scrubbing, washing and sluicing activity is based on the continual flow of water, which leaves you feeling calm. Healed.

Karen Roos and Koos Bekker, owners of Babylonstoren outside Franschoek in the Western Cape, visited a number of hammams overseas before having one built as part of the estate's newly launched Garden Spa. They decided to offer a treatment that combines the traditional Turkish with a more modern incarnation, as practised at Amsterdam's Conservatorium Hotel spa. The Babylonstoren hammam, and the spa as a whole, is – like the rest of this magical farm/boutique hotel/restaurant/garden/tea house – thoughtfully and beautifully designed. It has a domed roof of luminous tiles from the Italian Bisazza brand; walls, floors and a slab of deliciously veined marble, and a deep, handcrafted wooden basin into which the water never stops running.

The Private Hammam Water Ritual begins with a foot wash before you douse yourself with water and then lie, full length, on the marble slab and surrender to the specially trained therapist. 'Some people, when they see the slab, think it will be cold but it's heated marble and that's the beauty of it. It's also so nice in winter,' Karen says.

The treatment concludes with a bowl of healthy food and freshly squeezed juice, all made from produce grown in the garden. The purity of it is part of Babylonstoren's 'farm to table' philosophy, Karen says. 'It's important that you feel good when you walk out of there.'

The spa comprises a circular reception space made of bamboo, a spacious indoor area comprising a heated jet pool, cold plunge pool, sauna, steam room and showers. With an impressive glass extension and cedar wood (chosen for its lovely smell) fitted throughout, it's a wonderful space in which to unwind and play. There are two glass-fronted treatment rooms with garden views, a change area and a separate chill-out zone. Come summer, there will be an additional canopied treatment space outdoors, surrounded by greenery.

All of the structures possess a lightness devoid of any resemblance to a medi-spa complex. 'The handwriting is simple. The proportions are generous,' Karen says.

The overall design and emphasis is on stillness, quiet and feeling at one with nature while receiving the personalised attention and pampering you want from a spa. It's a big ask but, as visitors have come to expect, Babylonstoren gets it right. □ **Babylonstoren, R45, Simondium, Western Cape, babylonstoren.com**



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT Pure goodness is on the menu; natural materials, such as bamboo and wood, are central to the design of the spa; one of the treatment rooms with garden views; the *pièce de résistance*, the hammam.





The indoor water area with a glass extension that brings the outdoors in.