

LUXURY LIFESTYLE LOCAL

BLUE

Seeff

ATLANTIC SEABOARD & CITY BOWL

WINTER 2025

HOT PROPERTY

IT MAY BE COLD OUTSIDE, BUT CAPE TOWN'S
PROPERTY MARKET REMAINS ON FIRE



EAT

The Mother
City's best new
culinary address



MEET

Visionary
extraordinaire,
Karen Roos



TRAVEL

Explore an
exclusive paradise
in the Indian Ocean

THE VISIONARY BEHIND SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST ENCHANTING ESCAPES

From magazine editor to master of modern heritage hospitality, Karen Roos continues to shape a new global language for design-led travel



Karen Roos doesn't make grand overtures. Her work, though, speaks volumes – quietly, elegantly, and with astonishing attention to detail. For anyone even vaguely familiar with the world of design-formed destinations, her name is synonymous with places that evoke a sense of wonder. First *Babylontown* in South Africa's Franschhoek Valley, then *The Nest* in Somerset, and most recently *BLU* in KwaZulu – each of these properties carries the signature of someone who sees more than just land, buildings or locations. Karen sees potential – and then she turns it into poetry.

Before she even put her mark on the hospitality landscape, Karen had already made her name as a design tastemaker. As editor of *ELLE Decoration South Africa*, she helped shape the national design conversation, marrying European aesthetics with African authenticity. Her pages celebrated texture, craft, colour, and soul, long before 'rustic' became a buzzword. That same instinct for balance and mood would later manifest in three very different yet equally transcendent properties. None feel formulaic; each feels like stepping into a well-composed dream.

Babylontown, which she and her husband, Ross Biddle, purchased in 2007, was the beginning. At the time, the historic Cape Dutch farm was in disrepair – a sleeping beauty. Under Karen's hand it was gently, creatively awakened. The transformation was more than just architectural – it was conceptual. Inspired by the farm's 17th-century roots, she created a formal garden that now spirals over eight acres, abundant with fruit, vegetables, indigenous plants and winding pathways. The interior honours the past with handcrafted walls and antique fittings, but always with modern functionality. Nothing feels staged. Everything feels lived-in. And that's the magic: *Babylontown* doesn't just show off the good life, it lets you live it, slowly and intentionally. ☺



THE NEWT IN SOMERSET



This rhythm of restoration and reinvention found new expression in England's Somerset countryside with The Newt. There, Karen fell in love with Hadspen House, an old Georgian manor steeped in history. What was meant to be a private countryside escape soon blossomed into a multi-faceted estate and hotel, reimagined with the same sensitivity and design ethos that defined Babylonstoren. Again, she leaned on the land, restoring the formal gardens with the help of celebrated French landscape architect Pierre Tancrède, and infusing the interiors with an understated luxury that nodded to heritage while embracing modern comforts. At The Newt, there are no gimmicks, just well-considered beauty – whether it's in the apple press, the farm-to-table bakery, or the hand-stitched linen on your bed. It's thoughtful without being precious, grand, but never ostentatious.

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And then came BLOU – Karen's latest, and in many ways, most personal project. Tucked into the dunes of Knokkestrand on South Africa's Garden Route, BLOU is a paid-back seaside haven, made up of a handful of refurbished fishermen's cottages (read more on page 14). It's the kind of place where you make up to the sound of waves, cook barefoot, and collect shells with your children before breakfast. There's a sauna, a rooftop pool, and rooms that smell faintly of salt and sun-dried linen.

What sets Karen and her vision apart from the many others in

the luxury travel space is that she doesn't simply design spaces, she choreographs entire experiences. Her work is not about surface-level beauty but about creating an emotional resonance. There is always a story – often rooted in place, sometimes in memory, and always in meaning. Her approach is tactile and intuitive. She once told she doesn't ask what a guest might want from a room, but rather whether she would want to live there. That instinct – to build as though for oneself – has created destinations that feel both deeply personal and universally captivating.

Sustainability, too, is seamlessly woven into every aspect of her work. The farms at Babylonstoren and The Newt are fully functioning, the produce grown on-site feeding the kitchens, animals are cared for, heritage crops revived. Even the soil feels like it's been considered. But again, it's never self-congratulatory – Karen and her team just do the work, quietly and beautifully.

Collaborations are equally thoughtful – working with people who share the same values: artisans, gardeners, restaurateurs, perfumers. And there's a palpable sense of generosity to each project too – not just in scale or offering, but in spirit. Guests aren't divided into accommodation,

they're gently drawn in – through sensory, through story, through a perfectly placed chair in a sunny spot. In many ways, her spaces create something that modern life so often strips away: the sense that time can slow, that detail matters, that beauty has value.

Karen's story may not seek the spotlight, but it's undeniably reshaping the way we travel – and the way we experience space. Her properties aren't just places to stay; they're places to feel. To pause. To remember the senses. And in a world that moves faster than ever, that might just be the greatest luxury of all. ■

