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RIGHT: The spacious new addition to the hot spa features Western red cedar wood and two contrasting Bisazza mosaic tile alcoves. The glass roof tiles let in an abundance of light during the day, and a view of spectacular sunsets and starry skies at night.
BELOW: The beach situated between the garden spa and new hot spa is a secluded alcove, surrounded by a maze-like hedge of bamboo.



ELEMENTAL DESIGN

At Babylonstoren farm in the Franschhoek Valley, BIANCA DU PLESSIS finds everything inspired by its prolific garden. With the recent spa refurbishments by TV3 Architects, the focus is on water from the land, as it flows, steams and splashes in perpetual regeneration.



ON A BRIGHT summer's day, the garden at Babylonstoren embraces you with the intoxicating scent of rambling rose and citrus blossoms, leading you down the path towards a small wooden door in a hedge – the entrance to the enhanced garden spa and new hot spa.

In a time when spa design tends to lend itself to imposing, clinical vastness, the garden spa at Babylonstoren is delightfully deconstructed and approachable.

Word has already been out of the superb work done by leading architectural firm TV3 in refurbishing the spa and creating extensions

in a reimagined setting. This is strikingly noticeable when spa manager Tania Odendaal welcomes me at the reception desk in a semi-enclosed boma structure.

Tania leads me to the recently enhanced but hidden from view hot spa down a wooden walkway into the bamboo forest. Slatted glimpses of private spaces reveal themselves as we walk through the bamboo reeds. The secluded 'beach' – an irregular oval of sand – resembles a Zen garden. The tips of two treatment rooms, the Bamboo Pods, protrude above the bamboo forest.

BY SUPPLIED

The effect of the tall bamboo and winding wooden walkways is one of playful mystery and unexpected revelation. “The owners wanted to create an environment that conceals and reveals hidden gems as you move along,” Tania explains.

The hot spa stands in crisp contrast to the Zen-like forest, its two buildings – each with an indoor heated pool – connected by an outdoor waterway. The new extension has a glass roof and large glass walls on the northwestern side, with unlimited views of the magnificent surroundings. In keeping with the farm vernacular, the exterior design reflects the same pared-down Cape Dutch aesthetic.

“The client had very specific ideas and we followed the brief closely to make their vision a reality, with a few suggestions to enhance it,” says Ané Gouws, architect at TV3, of the spa refurbishment and extensions which were completed in June 2022.

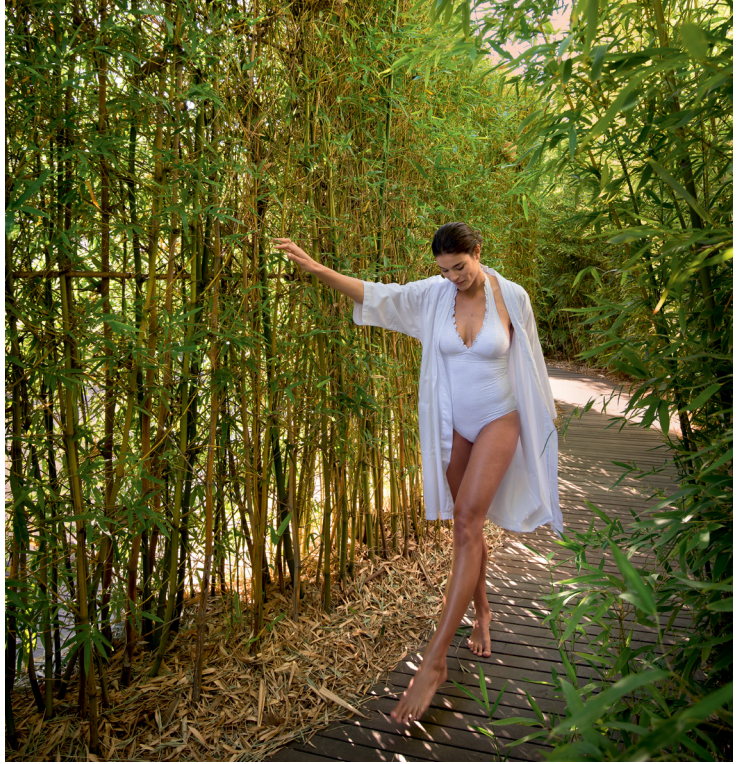


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The outdoor patio area between the two pool houses is where guests relax before, after or between treatments. Garden-fresh meals and beverages from the nearby Greenhouse restaurant is a phone call away. All the spa amenities are available exclusively to hotel guests and day visitors at the spa.

The quality of the finishes used throughout lends an air of cool refinement. “The materials used in the construction are in themselves standout features, like the Western red cedar cladding used in the pool house. Bisazza mosaic tiles were used in the two alcoves in the pool house, the vitality pools, the hammam and the rasul,” continues Ané. Tilers were flown in from Italy to ensure seamless craftsmanship. Nowhere is their work more impressive than in the new rasul (or mud chamber) and double hammam, situated among the vineyards a short walk from the pools.

The hammam is a luxurious, double-volume treatment room constructed entirely from heated white Carrara marble slabs, with a glittering, domed

ceiling clad in a mosaic of Aegean blue tiles. Steam-heated to a pleasant, muscle-softening temperature, here couples can enjoy traditional Turkish bath rituals that involve a water treatment, scrub, dynamic stretching and soap sponge. Adjacent to the hammam is the rasul. Its undulating walls – not a corner in sight – are covered with mosaic tiles in iridescent shades of green and aquamarine. Designed to accommodate two guests, the rasul’s signature treatment includes a skin exfoliation, full-body clay wrap, steam room and cleansing finish. Each is an enclave of otherworldly calm, quiet and exotic ritual.

Stepping out into the bright Boland sunlight only serves to underscore the otherness of the hammam and rasul; except for the echoes of blue, green and white in plants, plastered walls and the blue sky above.

The new hot spa, like everything on this working farm, is characterised by an elegance born of simplicity and functionality. Make no mistake, it is every inch as impressive as it appears in print and pictures, yet despite the illustrious materials employed, the overall physical effect is disarmingly earthy and inviting. Therein lies its appeal – the balance between honest farm hospitality and haute pampering. **V**

“THE OWNERS WANTED TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT CONCEALS AND REVEALS HIDDEN GEMS AS YOU MOVE ALONG.”



TOP RIGHT: All the hidden gems and amenities of the garden and hot spas are open to both hotel guests and day spa visitors. CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: One of two indoor heated vitality pools has an outdoor waterway. The undulating walls of the rasul, covered in mosaic tiles in shades of iridescent green and aquamarine, set the scene for an experience that draws on ancient purification rituals. The double hammam, constructed entirely from white Carrara marble under a domed ceiling of Bisazza mosaic tiles, offers a private water ritual for couples. OPPOSITE: The finishes of the new hot spa are standout features and serve to frame and enhance the splendour of the gardens rather than obscure it.

