

TRAVEL FOR ALL: THE ACCESS ISSUE

# TRAVEL + LEISURE

*Selma Blair*

ON  
HER JOURNEY  
WITH MS

"I really believe  
that we need to  
focus on  
accessibility"

MARCH 2025

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By 1994, the  
table mountain  
became the Cape  
Town Green Flag  
and the 2010  
World Cup

# SOUTHERN STAR

*From Cape Town's cosmopolitan hotels and the culinary pleasures of the  
Wine Route to dramatic wildlife sightings at Sabi Sand, a classic  
South African itinerary reveals a nation prepared for transformation.*

Text and photographs by Chris Wallace

Wandering out of the hotel toward the harbor, past the trendy scullies that border the sidewalk, I found shops and restaurants that wouldn't be out of place in Miami or Melbourne, with genetically hip names (Gipsy Rabbit, Black Berry). Not that anyone would ever confuse Cape Town for anywhere else. In front of the red-and-white-brick Victoria Athletic Club restaurant I saw a souped-up old Land Cruiser, driven from a drive through the bush, killing beside a gold Lamborghini. Every noontime, a mission also rings out from Signal Hill, above the Capisco-colored buildings of Bo-Kaap, the neighborhood settled by slaves, exiles, and refugees from Malawi and Indonesia that is home to the oldest mosque in the country. In this, the Mother City—so called because it was the first South African settlement of the Dutch East India Trading Company—the maritime and colonial history is evident everywhere.

**WINE, PAGE LEFT**  
A Cape Dutch-style cottage in Babylonstoren, a hotel in the Franschhoek valley; sunset over a vineyard near the village of Paarl.

**AS I DROVE** east from the city, toward the wine country of Stellenbosch—in part on a highway called Serfers Way—a long parade of pine trees was soon joined by dense thickets of eucalyptus. Olive trees gathered in groves, and distant, lone World-looking mountains came into focus. I was impressed by their gentle, business smile. From the road, they looked slouching, shooting straight up like something out of science fiction, but they also gave me an incredible sense of comfort, of grounding and celebration. I drove up a steep sandstone escarpment, along which the spiky, mollusk-like poma flower was blooming in lavender and yellow. Then, suddenly, I was surrounded by vineyards.

The main street of Stellenbosch is a bit like Napa Valley—if Napa Valley were set in the same world as *The Lord of the Rings*—and lined with quaint, cottage-like structures selling luxury goods. The churches of Stellenbosch are blending white affairs in the colonial Cape Dutch style. So too are the buildings at Babylonstoren. The hotel's chief of businessmen Kees Bekker and former magazine editor Karen Ross—who also created the New



**BUSINESS FROM ABOVE LEFT**  
An interior at Babylonstoren; in center (19th-century village) the museum at Paarl; at bottom, a wellness center in Paarl; and, just above it, the Babylonstoren greenhouse.



resort in Somerset, England—Babylonstoren is a wildly beloved hotel, farm stand, and winery in the Franschhoek wine valley. (It's named after a hill on the property that was thought to look like the tower of Babel.)

I'm not sure where my obsession with lifelong—or, indeed, with Cape wines—started, but it certainly reached its apogee at Babylonstoren. The resort's three restaurants are rightly proud of their beef, which is sourced from its small herd of Chianina cattle—a giant, muscular Italian breed that looked like bodybuilders compared with the other cows on the farm. There is even, two nights a week, a communal feast called Carnivore, aimed at showcasing the endless ways the beef might best be brought to table, from zesty tartare and succulent aglote to the best lifelong I've ever eaten. And if that is never such a thing as too much meat on the menu here, I did learn a new tactic for managing my way through a magnificent parcel of local wines: saba-criping, which means alternating a glass of wine with a glass of water.

So may be approaching the worldwide peak of farm-stand branding and aesthetics, but no one does it better than Babylonstoren. I was given a tour of a recently opened project in an adjacent valley, for which they reconstructed an entire Cape Dutch 19th-century village around a home museum, where kids can watch costumed woodworkers and leatherworkers while their parents partake of the preindustrial-style distillery and purchase handcrafted leather goods at the gift shop.