

F A T I E R



TRAVEL GUIDE 2024

ALL WE WANTED FROM THIS trip was to experience the calm, comfort and chilled Chablis of the Western Cape, and the auspices were good. When my husband and I arrived after a good rainy season, the manicured winelands seemed incredibly green, bathed in the African sun. The dramatic landscape was more than matched by Babylonstoren, owned by South Africa's telecoms king Koos Bekker and his wife Karen Roos.

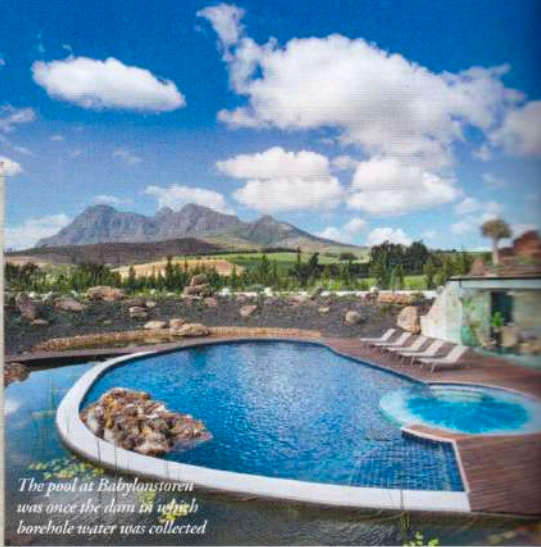
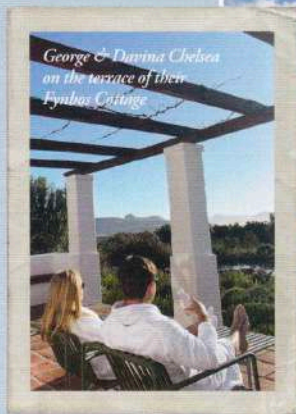
At the foot of the Simonsberg mountain, on a 400-acre estate, this five-star hotel was previously one of the oldest working farms in the area. Now the 17th-century Cape Dutch homestead has been transformed into a rustic haven; and like its British sister hotel, The Newt in Somerset, it has a traditional, laid-back feel – with a modern spin. Golf carts are the preferred form of transport here; so boarding one, we darted through citrus groves to the row of Fynbos Cottages where we were to stay. Ours had a sumptuous bedroom with a grand marble bathroom, and a terrace for admiring views across the winelands.

There were many (gentle) adventures to be had: strolling through the gardens to feed the chickens and donkeys; or sampling the vineyard spa. But my favourite had to be visiting the farm shop, where the afternoon wine tastings were a must.

Eventually, the nearby historic town of Franschhoek called – as did the romantic La Residence, buried deep in its valley. (Owned by glittering hoteliers Liz and Phil Biden, it has seen Robert Redford and Elton John frolicking in its infinity pool.) And arriving at our terracotta Vineyard suite, we weren't disappointed. Greeted by effervescent deputy general manager Hoon Kim – who is as warm and colourful as the interiors – we were led to a private candlelit dinner, overlooking a fiery sunset, where we feasted on a platter of fillet steak and fresh vegetables from the hotel's garden.

We took a tour of the Motor Museum owned by Johann Rupert, the chairman of luxury-goods group Richemont. With the Western Cape being made for road trips, I had my eye on a 1987 red Ferrari I would love to have driven through the winelands. But maybe that's for next time. Because we'll definitely be back.

Elegant Resorts (elegantresorts.co.uk) offers four nights at Babylonstoren and three nights at La Residence from £3,645, including breakfast, flights and transfers. □



Wine & dine

In South Africa's Franschhoek Valley, majestic mountains give way to endless rows of grapevines. Davina Chelsea drinks in the magic of these world-renowned winelands

