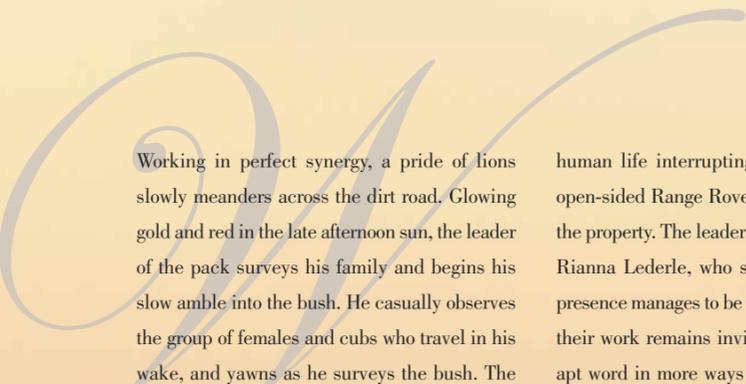


WHAT  
DREAMS  
MAY  
COME



Working in perfect synergy, a pride of lions slowly meanders across the dirt road. Glowing gold and red in the late afternoon sun, the leader of the pack surveys his family and begins his slow amble into the bush. He casually observes the group of females and cubs who travel in his wake, and yawns as he surveys the bush. The kings of the jungle are thrillingly present here, almost too perfect in their grace and power to be real, and yet there they are, napping in the shade, pouncing on their elders, coolly surveying their surroundings. And then, at the approach of a jeep, the lion roars. It echoes, reverberating on a deep, primal frequency that triggers something ancient in everyone who hears it – that abiding awe of nature.

Working in perfect synergy the staff at Molori, one of the most luxurious resorts in South Africa's Madikwe Game Reserve, create a world for their guests that is truly magical. As your plane lands on the runway, the only sign of

human life interrupting the landscape is the open-sided Range Rover waiting to take you to the property. The leaders of this pride, Greg and Rianna Lederle, who supervise a staff whose presence manages to be warm and friendly while their work remains invisible – and pride is an apt word in more ways than one. Several staff members tell the story of accompanying Kirk to meet with the village chief to get his recommendations as to whom he should hire for his staff. The stack of resumes produced by the chief yielded a group of hospitality novices that were trained impeccably, with deference to their needs and that of their community. Since the property first broke ground 2 and a half years ago, not a single staff member has left, and their devotion to the place shows in every imaginable dimension. The entire staff greets you upon your arrival with a welcome song and a round of cold drinks, but it is the pair who rises every morning to greet your return from a predawn game drive

with fresh juice and hot towels who reinforce the feeling of care and attention. While the meal service is impeccable, the room maintenance is truly uncanny. It was almost comical to leave the villa for the main pool at the central lodge, turn back for more sunscreen five minutes later, and find your discarded clothes folded on an armchair and the neatly rolled towel you had plucked off a fluffy stack replaced, and no staff member in sight.

You hear him before you see him. A rustle in the grass, the tips wave softly and suddenly the large, dark shape is visible. The sun is setting, glasses are clinking, but all conversation falls silent, studying the spaces in between the trees. Too small for an elephant, too far from water for a hippo – could it be? Your guide waits for a little more of the animal to emerge, and once the face is clearly visible, with two horns, a square lip, he points – there it is! The most rare of all wonderful things in South Africa: the black rhino.

You hear him before you see him. It starts as a whisper, then a whirl, and then suddenly the helicopter appears overhead, headed for the landing pad just inside the gate. The black four-seater is just one of a fleet of aircraft that owner Kirk Lazarus uses to travel between his homes and properties in Russia, South Africa, and Australia, making sure that everything is on track for all of his friends, employees, and visitors. Kirk's property portfolio did not stem from a desire to be in the hospitality industry. Rather, his properties are a collection of private homes: specifically, his homes. His attention to detail is superb, honed over years of appreciating natural and man-made beauty all over the world, and of experiencing the best and worst of high-end resorts from the other side. "Some properties out here will have black water coming out of the taps or things like that, and their excuse is well, it's the bush. I don't think that's any excuse," he says over a cigar on the hardwood deck over-

looking the landscape, casually understating his dogged perseverance and high standards that make the property everything it is.

"Molori means 'my dream' because when I was a little boy, my teachers always used to write on my report card that I was a dreamer. I'm thinking of buying a yacht called 'I Told You So,'" says the native South African, half-joking. His roots in the country gave him an innate understanding of how to do business in the bush. From the very first stage, when he bought the land from a local chief and worked with local builders and artisans to create the look of Molori, he demonstrated that his property would be of the community, not apart from him, and he has naturally developed a new community within the staff village that is just over the hill from Molori. He talks excitedly of plans to build a school within the village, as more of his staff get married and have children, and of staff days and pranks that makes Molori feel like a home with a fam-

ily rather than a resort. "I want people to walk into this place as if they were walking into their own home. There's nothing they can't touch, everything makes sense, and everything they could ever think to want, we've already thought of it for them." From the signature Molori hang-over cure in the bathroom drawer (which actually works – we tested it on several occasions) and the preprogrammed iPods waiting in Bose sound systems to spill sound all the way out to your private pool, to the fully stocked wine cellar and humidior, his plan has succeeded on a grand scale; your every need and want is given equal care and attention.

Kirk's business interests are deep and broad around the world, but include many investments in the Russian oil industry. He is a fluent Russian speaker and has done business there for many years, also putting down roots in his community in St. Petersburg, where he is currently building a synagogue and a kindergarten in his



neighborhood. Having lived among Russians and traveled with them for many years, it is no surprise that word of Molori has traveled fast through his social circle, and many of his guests since opening have been Russian. “Russians like the resort because I really understand what they want in terms of service,” he says, explaining that discerning and wealthy consumers the world over have been impressed with Molori, but that Russians tend to be particularly discerning about their treatment and are great communicators of their experiences – if their standards slacken, their core of Russian customers won’t be shy about letting him know, he says.

He is currently developing a property on the beach in Capetown, the first of its kind in scale, as well as properties in Port Douglas, Australia, and New Zealand. To keep his edge sharp, he often visits and stays at other resorts in the area, and has taken the best idea from all of them, as well as applying his own intuition, for his property. These are all his houses, and they are full of the objects, furniture, and décor that he has picked up in his travels, contributing to the feel that you are merely in a friend’s incredibly chic home, instead of a hotel. Many guests prefer to rent the entire property at a time, allowing them total privacy to enjoy the comforts of their adopted residence.

The vivid, graphic stripes and rounded shape of the zebra, rolling in herds down the hill towards the watering hole, is as whimsical and comical a sight as exists in the harsh landscape of the bush. Unexpectedly stocky and sturdy close up, they move silently through trees and brush, until they are close enough that you can see the brown shadow that traces their black stripes down over their rounded bellies. Their big dark eyes and open faces study you quietly, ears flicking, until the scent of water becomes too much to resist, and their little hooves stir up a cloud of dust as they canter towards refreshment. Huddled together, their stripes blend into a single mass of stripes and curves, running into each other in their collective reflection.



and the library, housing the property's only television, an expansive collection of National Geographic back issues, and a well stocked humidor. The airy white daybeds that appear in each suite also make many appearances elsewhere around the property, including next to the main lodge's two pools and a hot tub, and on several secluded sky decks farther up the hill above the villas. Speaking of the sky—one of the gems of the property is the planetarium, a stone outbuilding with a retractable roof, housing four of the largest beanbag chairs imaginable and one of the largest privately owned telescopes in the country. Greg is as familiar with the stars as he is with the land, and on a clear night before dinner, it is a pleasure to get up close and personal with a glass of wine and Mars, Venus and the man in the moon.

No matter how lovely, how charming, how perfectly formed the smaller creatures of the

bush are, the fact is inescapable: nothing is too beautiful to eat. The little springboks stand poised, nibbling on small shoots of grass, traveling in a vigilant pair up to an invisible territorial line, where an identical pair eyes them carefully. They traverse the boundary, marking as they go, until they catch on the wind the scent of something dangerous. Off they go, in leaps and bounds, muscles bunching and nostrils flared, the natural state for South Africa's national animal – who can still be, at the end of the day, just someone's dinner.

No matter how lovely, how charming, how perfectly formed the presentation on your plate, the fact is inescapable: when it tastes this good, nothing is too beautiful to eat. Chef Willie Malherbe is one of the many hidden treasures at Molori. His versatile, French-trained style makes incredible use of local ingredients and

flavors, including the best renditions of colonial-era dishes (often unpalatable to foreigners who lack the seasoning of nostalgia) that one could ever hope for. In the early days of the resort, when it became apparent that fresh produce would be hard to come by without involving multiple airplanes and vehicles, Molori's dedicated management set out and discovered an elderly couple in the area who had turned their slice of desert into an Edenic paradise—and after the application of a small amount of charm, the couple agreed to show them how it was done. Now fruits and vegetables are a central part of the healthy yet luxurious cuisine here, creating five-star fare that is resort-worthy without being cripplingly rich.

The freshness of all the ingredients is a testament to the chef's stringent standards—prawn curries and spiced grilled squid are as delicious

The vivid, graphic stripes and rounded shape of the zebra-hide desk chair is the perfect example of the perfection of Molori's décor. A simple, classic shape is transformed by the contrasting stripes and the unexpected, humorous inclusion of the zebra's own mane, projecting perkily from the seat back. Innovative without being precious, the design scheme is the bass line to the visual symphony of Molori, always reinforcing the harmony of the larger idea. There is not a corner of any room that has not been touched, decorated, and designed to please the eye, and yet there is never a feeling that any old thing had been brought in just to fill up a corner. The design is deliberate, and effective.

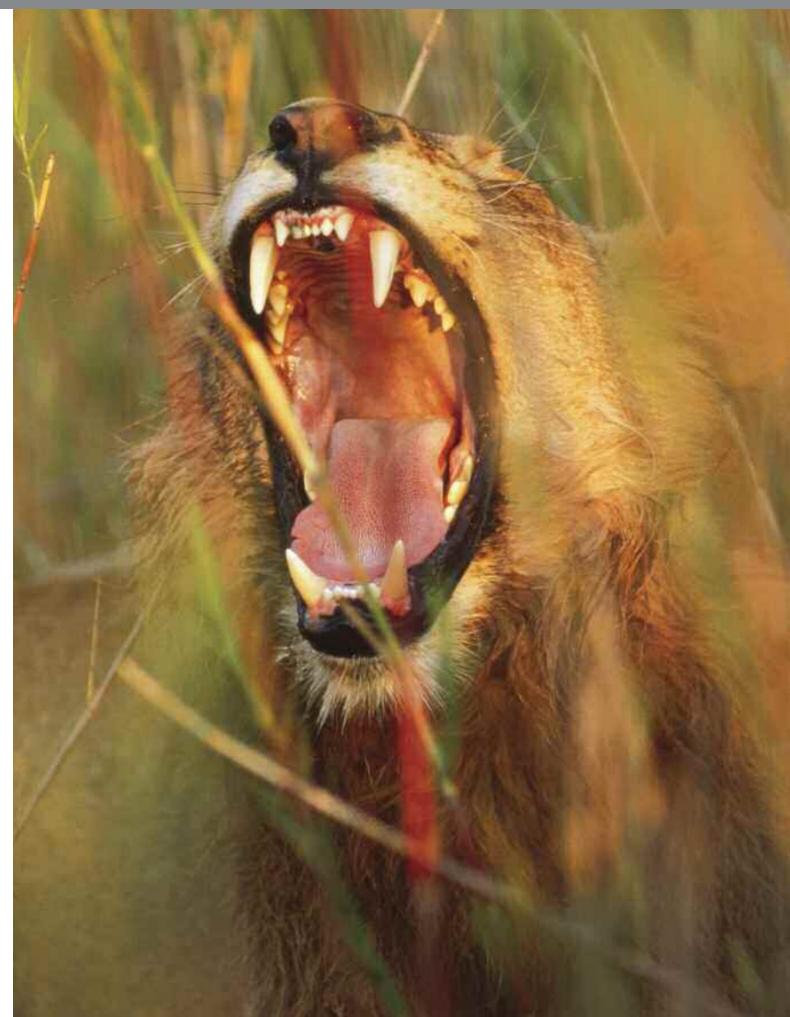
When the interiors were first being designed, Kirk expressed a desire for a new kind of hunting lodge. The traditional image conjured by those words is one of dark wood and leather and mounted heads, a masculine but not necessarily inviting space. Molori takes the best aspects of this look and combines them with a lighter touch, mixing in elements of the classic

Caribbean resort style: walls and French doors that open out onto the view, spacious bathrooms unique to every suite, outdoor showers and white-upholstered daybeds turning the hardwood decks into outdoors rooms. Every surface, every piece, is finished, but not necessarily smooth and sterilized: rather than going to full-on modern, the walls are roughly textured and the concrete floor is inlaid with patterned rocks, in a light neutral palette that mixes easily with a white leather Fendi lounge and clear Lucite lamps from Kartell. Their aesthetic has proved so popular with guests that it is now possible to order, through the property, any of the pieces seen in the rooms or common spaces.

There are two presidential suites, Metsi and Molelo, two superior suites, Ngwedi and Lesedi, and one superior family suite, Sephiri, all in separate villas ranged side by side that share a panoramic view of the game reserve, and exterior colors and hand-thatched roofs to blend them seamlessly into the hills beyond. The presidential suites, both around 600 square meters, are

genuinely impressive, bringing a level of taste and sophistication rarely seen outside of design magazines to every corner of the space, from a formal living and dining room to the bathroom to the office, sleek Mac laptop already included. More cutting edge in its décor, crystal chandeliers and velvet-upholstered armchairs sit comfortably side-by-side with a metal-framed outdoors bed and a bright red airy circular chair made of knotted high-tension elastics.

Aside from the suites themselves, there are numerous common areas that are secluded yet functional. While many guests choose to rent the entire property for the duration of their stay, as Molori will only accommodate up to 10 guests at a time, those who find themselves sharing the property have ample opportunities to enjoy carefully engineered solitude, something the staff easily facilitates. The main lodge is, of course, accessible to all, and the spacious facility encompasses an open living room and bar, two formal dining rooms, an elevated covered deck just a short flight up, on a level with the main office





here as they are on the coast, and a talented use of light sauces and seasonings keep the dishes from being overwhelming. Selection is key—a filet of organic Chalmar beef is a superlative piece of meat, as were the salmon and tuna steaks. As ever, at Molori, ambiance and customization is key in creating a memorable experience; the resort often engineers it so guests never dine in the same space twice, and Willie checks in with his guests at breakfast to see what they might be in the mood for at dinner. Make sure to go beyond the formal sit-down meals – the staff barbecue meal became such an underground hit with guests that they now offer their taste of springbok loin and slow-roasted chicken on an elegant, white-cloth setting in the barbecue pit, and the feast of barbecue served in the boma, a traditional gathering space, is a triumph of local ingredients and cuisine, including more and better sausage than is necessary or healthy, and an oxtail stew that will make you wonder why you ever bothered with oxtail before this one.

The food is of course complemented by beverage, provided with a smile and an infectious laugh by Isaac, the bartender who had never tasted a beer before assuming his position at Molori, but is now a talented and original mixologist, creating his own cocktails as well as all the old standards. Chef Willie is also experienced with selecting wine pairings, and the cellar from which he draws is both deep and broad, representing the absolute best of South African wines as well as some of the finest vintages from around the world – we enjoyed a particularly wonderful 2002 Chateau d’Yquem Sauternes with his homemade orange and Campari berry sorbet.

What a baby elephant lacks in size, it makes up for in charm and serious personality. These ghosts of the bush appear suddenly, silently, and then surround you, stripping bushes from the ground, nonchalantly chewing a tree branch, and trumpeting and blowing at each other in a casual whirl of activity, until the reason for all the noise

peeks his soft trunk out from behind his mother's leg. Still the size of a St. Bernard, still ears the size of dinner plates, but still a baby, to be pampered. Long trunks shoo him out of the road, under a shady tree and then finally, under his mother's belly, where he relaxes, leaning against her leg, at perfect ease.

What the spa at Molori lacks in size, it makes up for in charm and serious expertise. The small but fantastic facility is a full-scale representation of Molori's focus on customization, privacy, and luxury. A workout area, filled with all the necessary equipment, adjoins the hardwood deck that hosts an outdoor area for private yoga and pilates sessions and a white-cotton-swathed daybed. Before or after your scheduled treatments, or anytime during your stay, the steam room and plunge pool are available, calibrated to the owner's specifications – and as this is a man who does much of his business with

Russians, rest assured that you will receive the effect you are looking for. Treatments are available in one of two treatment rooms, your room or on your private deck, but we suggest the outdoor massage table, draped in flowers and mosquito netting and surrounded by miles of grassland and birdsong for a truly absorbing experience. All products are Dermalogica, and the name of the game here is service – personalized treatments, performed with dedication and great energy. While you can book one of the specific treatments on the menu, a better bet is to simply show up and let the technician guide you, as they specialize in blending products and tailoring treatments to suit each individual. The landscape suffuses the entire spa with a sense of peace and timelessness – so much so that you shouldn't be surprised if your masseuse adds an extra half-hour just to make she's worked out every last knot.

To experience Molori in the Madikwe Game Reserve is to immerse yourself in a culture that still values many of the things modern civilization has chosen to disregard: patience, quiet observation, and the meditative stillness of simply existing in the morning sun. The game drives are an exercise in appreciation – visitors may expect to be disappointed if they don't spot their Big Five, but in the bush, there is no such thing as nothing. The small birds, the trees, the soil, the mountains, are all there waiting to be explored and appreciated. The wise traveler will simply let the experience wash over him, appreciating the talent of the trackers and guides leading the way and the sheer thrilling amount of life everywhere. Visiting the bush is the experience of feeling totally vulnerable and yet completely safe – as visiting Molori allows you to experience the world at its most natural without sacrificing any creature comforts. ■



*“Visiting Molori allows you to experience the world at its most natural without sacrificing any creature comforts”*