

| BY HELÉNE RAMACKERS

In a quiet corner of South Africa's world famous Kruger National Park sits a brand new contemporary property. The ultra luxurious [Shiviko Kruger](#) is situated overlooking the southwestern part of Kruger, with sweeping views over the surrounding bushveld and the perennial Sabie River.

With the owner's adoration for the bush, the decision to fashion a dwelling which resonated with his vision for building something extraordinary was not taken lightly – it had to be a different offering from your normal safari lodge, and a place that would make a difference in the community. He enlisted the expertise of [Bloc Architects](#) for the architecture, and the proficiency of [Akara Design Studio](#) for the interior design, which culminated in luxury meets nature, with an African twist.

The specific site where Shiviko Kruger is positioned is a rare gem – Elephant Point is located near Kruger National Park, which has unparalleled access to wildlife and natural beauty. Guests will truly feel the raw pulse of nature, and that energy shaped the entire approach for Bloc Architects. “The client wanted to create an ultra-luxury game lodge that offered an immersive, soul-stirring experience in the African bush,” Ryan Harborth from Bloc Architects tells me. “A retreat that feels both intimate and expansive. The emphasis was on seamless integration with the surrounding wilderness, with cutting-edge comfort, and a design narrative that celebrates African textures and tones while providing modern sophistication.”

“When we first visited the site in July 2022,” says Chayneeka Jayawardena, Creative Director and Founder of Akara Design Studio, “the client was clear about wanting something different. They didn't want a typical lodge interior – no animal prints, no wildlife photography. The lodge already sits in the bush overlooking the park, so nature and animals are inherently part of the experience. From an interior perspective, the brief was to create unique,

fresh and timeless spaces. The client had a brilliant idea of showcasing South Africa's cultural groups and celebrating them in their individuality.”

Each villa tells its own story - [Ekasi Villa](#) pays homage to Soweto, a township located in Johannesburg, South Africa; [Shaka Villa](#) is inspired by the Nguni tribes (Zulu, Xhosa, Swati & Ndebele); [Pula Villa](#) celebrates the Sotho and Tswana tribes, and [Thobela Villa](#) draws from Tsonga, Pedi and Venda influences. For Chayneeka, each space needed to be rooted in identity while keeping the interiors calm, which was a challenge at first – wanting to tell these cultural stories in a way that felt authentic but still current. The results speak for themselves – the interiors turned out calm and inviting, without being overly themed or busy.

My daughter and I are staying in the homey Ekasi Villa, and following a road transfer from Skukuza Airport by field guide Piet in the Shiviko Kruger branded Toyota 4x4 game viewer, we arrive at the [clubhouse](#). We are warmly received by the hospitable staff – General managers Michael and Anica, host Phindi, butler Silence and private chef Jessica. Before taking a walk through the homestead, we are treated to a hand-washing ceremony, where Phindi pours warm water onto my hands from a jug over a golden basin. Silence is waiting at the next basin with a towlette for me to dry my hands, and barman Skhumbuso is ready with our granadilla iced tea welcome drinks.

Making our way down the sloping walkway towards the entrance of the clubhouse, a striking sculpture comes into view. Sized at a height of 13ft, 6ft in width, and 8ft in depth and crafted out of steel, ‘Twigs’ towers above the pool and the adjacent

landscape. Speaking directly to the family's legacy, it was commissioned by the owner and created by South African artist [Regardt van der Meulen](#). Carrying deep meaning about legacy, heritage, identity and continuity, the figure is depicted in motion, walking purposefully forward into the future.

Emerging from its back are branches and tree roots – a powerful reminder of the people and histories that have shaped us. These roots symbolize the past – the ancestors, mentors and loved ones who once walked with us and whose influence is till part of who we are. As the figure steps forward, it suggests progress and growth, but always with an awareness of what grounds us. Each step plants new roots – foundations for a living, evolving legacy that honors tradition while shaping the future. ‘Twigs’ embodies the essence of Shiviko Kruger – through the balance of forward movement and rootedness – a place that treasures heritage and culture while creating a powerful story for generations to come.

Connected to nature via its natural surroundings, the clubhouse is a great space where guests can relax in its comfortable, warm, and inviting indoor and outdoor spaces. Tying it back to the landscape, the interior team brought in hints of olive green, a tone straight from the immediate vegetation. Focusing on entertainment and recreation - there is a soundproof cinema, a gym & sauna, a pool and an upstairs bar. The pool area has different zones for guests to soak up the sun on a lounger, or recline in the shade under the canopy, where your butler will serve your drink of choice. In the evening, the sunken boma is the perfect place to take in the sunset, while regaling





the day's happenings with family or friends.

Large concrete pavers lead up to the rooftop bar, where the barman will present you with your preferred tippie, or mix the perfect cocktail for you. It's a gathering place for sport enthusiasts who can watch the game on the big screen while seated in the lounge area, vying for their team to score. The simplicity of the bar doesn't detract from the natural beauty of the surroundings, it was intentionally designed with clean lines to let the views be the focus.

While constructing the Villas at Shiviko Kruger, environmental sensitivity was at the core of Bloc Architect's approach from the outset. Prior to any design work, they conducted a thorough mapping of the site's natural contours and vegetation to ensure minimal disruption. The team prioritized

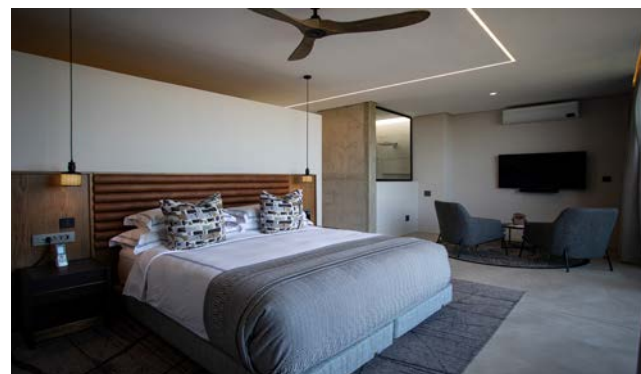
locally sourced materials and worked to integrate the architecture into the landscape rather than imposing upon it. "One of the key strategies was the use of planted roofs," Ryan says, "which allowed the buildings to visually merge with the surrounding grasslands. This not only softened the scale of the double-story structures, but also helped regulate internal temperatures thanks to the natural insulation provided by the vegetation. Additionally, large doors slide away into wall cavities, allowing the interiors to breathe with the bush, resulting in architecture that lives in harmony with its environment, rather than competing with it."

Keeping the interior canvas clean and in line with the architecture, light grey tones were chosen by Akara Design Studio to tie in with the concrete feature walls that run through-

out the lodge. Using a pandomo effect in the en-suite bathrooms, it added a beautiful sense of movement and consistency, while certain feature walls were finished with textured paint to bring in extra depth. Striking tiles with natural patterns were placed in the bathrooms, and engineered quartz stone finishes were used for the vanities to add a sense of class and tranquility.

Being accommodated in Ekasi Villa, it feels like stepping back into the culture, with the first sight being that of the Orlando Towers, an iconic Soweto landmark, as a hanging custom chain piece in the front entrance. There are many references to Sowetan characteristics, with my daughter staying in the 'soccer room' and my room named 'music room'. Specially commissioned artworks adorn the walls – vinyl records and their covers from the music





that was born out of Soweto, adding a historic feel to the space.

The subtle use of technology is an advantage to guests staying at Shiviko Kruger – open the curtains with a touch of a button, or when you need to navigate how to switch off the bathroom light when you're already snug in your bed, the 'All Off' switch is in the panel of your nightstand. It's so understated that it doesn't disrupt the serenity of the surroundings. Smart systems manage energy and water usage, and the integration of home automation responds to the time of day for lighting, temperature and shading. All of this is tucked behind a very natural aesthetic — it's luxury you feel, not see.

The wonderful fragrance of freshly baked goodies fill the Villa, coupled with the rich aroma of coffee. Chef Jessica has started

cooking our breakfast, and butler Silence is at hand to serve it to us in the downstairs dining room. With Shiviko Kruger's ethos that each guest crafts their own itinerary, the freedom of doing things at your own pace is priceless. My daughter and I are distracted by the sound of a bird serenading at the side of our Villa. Upon closer inspection, it's a female scarlet-chested sunbird. She is drinking the nectar from a Paintbrush Lily, clearly enjoying the sweet taste.

"We also encourage guests to explore the magic beyond Kruger National Park," Michael and Anica disclose. "The wildlife is magnificent in the park, coupled with the magic of misty sunrises. Going beyond the norm, Shiviko Kruger transports guests in the comfort of our very own air conditioned Mercedes V-Class to someplace different. The Panora-

ma Route is a unique offering with dramatic landscapes, waterfalls, and a varied take on the usual safari. Safaris in Kruger are iconic, but to be able to experience this incredible area outside of the park will never disappoint."

Sitting out on our veranda, I realize one hardly has to leave the luxury of the lodge – to my right, a waterbuck is grazing, and to my left, a male scarlet-chested sunbird is perched on a flower. Not too far in the distance, a kudu is walking in the grass, feeding on the foliage. Which goes to show, Shiviko Kruger is the perfect place to savor all the luxuries nature has to offer. ❖