

HISTORY OF TEREMOK

When Constantine Vladykin built a two-bedroom holiday home in 1968 he named it in his native Russian tongue. Teremok, built in the then remote area of Umhlanga, means little hideaway – a name that was still applicable upon its conversion into a boutique hotel for business executives and the well-heeled.

Constantine, known as Kotchka, escaped during the Russian revolution as a young boy with the aid of the Red Cross. He was taken to England to join his mother who had also escaped, but his father was less fortunate and did not survive. Kotchka's mother later married an English gentleman Lord Childe Pemberton but died soon afterwards.

Lord Childe had Kotchka educated at Cambourne School of Mines where he qualified as a mining surveyor. This brought him to South Africa where he married Louiza van Zwam, the 17-year-old daughter of a Belgian diamond cutter, and in time joined the family business. The Vladykins had two children, Nadya (born in 1937) and Yvan who was tragically killed in a motor accident at the age of 19.

Nadya married Harvey Douglas in 1959 and while on honeymoon was asked by Kotchka to select a piece of land that would be suitable for a seaside retreat. This was done and the house completed for Christmas 1959. This property is at 51 Marine Drive (on the right of Teremok as you face the sea) and at that time was the last house on the road. Although Marine Drive is now a much sought after residential area which is also home to the Oppenheims' Durban residence, at that point the Vladykins' land was flanked by solid bush and a marsh on the Durban side. The route from Durban central was a narrow twisty road that translated into an hour-long drive, and the Douglasses eventually bought 50 Marine Drive where the old road emerged from the sugar cane fields.

In 1965 the land at number 49 became available and was snapped up by Kotchka. A year later he decided to retire to the coast and build Teremok. His great friend the late Steffan Ahrends who had designed his houses in Johannesburg was the architect and later also designed Milkwood, a little further down the road, for Harry and Bridget Oppenheimer.

An enormous amount of time and effort went into the planning of Teremok. It took one year to finalise the plans and the contract was awarded to Reardon Construction. Kotchka loved trees, particularly milkwoods, and the big one at what was to be the front door was very close to his heart. He was insistent that it not be damaged during building operations and inserted a penalty clause of R1 000 (a large sum of money in 1967) if the tree came to any harm. Geoffrey carefully surrounded it with a three metre solid wooden structure and all went well.

Upon completion in June 1968 Teremok was occupied by Kotchka and Louiza. Sadly, while in Hong Kong in February the following year Kotcha was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour and died in July 1969 at the age of 57. Louiza remained at the house and Nadya and Harvey Douglas bought two more plots of land surrounding Teremok.

The Douglasses ultimately inherited the Teremok, but in 2000 it became apparent that the house had become too big for them and they wanted to be closer to their children and grandchildren. They started by selling 47 and 51 Marine Drive but dreaded relinquishing Teremok. The house was eventually put onto the market in June 2002 and only three weeks later was viewed by Debbie Davidson who immediately fell in love with it.

Debbie also owned The Barnyard Theatre at Gateway at the time, and was not looking for another business venture, rather for accommodation for the large casts which the theatre is home to for months at a time. Luckily the magic of Teremok was instantly recognised and it was decided instead to cater for the much-neglected travelling business executive. The Teremok philosophies and brand were developed by Debbie and her two daughters, Kim Davidson and Tracy Gielink who continue to run the business.

Teremok was originally purchased as a three-bedroom house - although the spacious interior was also home to a study, billiard room, large diningroom and a separate dressing room off the main bedroom - and while little was done to the exterior, the inside was given a complete overhaul.

The house is steeped in such a rich history that it was decided to recreate a new space that was still true to the essence of what was designed, built and joyously lived in for so many years. Original doors, sash windows and wooden flooring were left in place or reused elsewhere and the photos found in the stairwell pay tribute to the Vladykin family.

Teremok Lodge opened its doors in December 2003, but regular décor refreshes and light refurbishment are done regularly to keep abreast of current trends and technology, and to ensure that regular guests continue to be titillated. Teremok undertook another development in 2010 when the Spa and gym facility were completely renovated and re-opened as a sumptuous refuge.

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