



# JOURNEY BY DESIGN

BY KATY DONOGHUE

We had been traveling for close to 20 hours when we finally arrived in Stellenbosch, South Africa. Our South African Airways flight had taken us from JFK to Johannesburg (for just a quick layover) and then to Cape Town. The drive from the airport to Stellenbosch took us past ostrich farms and townships, and the land and views slowly transformed from coastal to mountainous. We wound our way up the Helshoogte Mountain Pass, pulled into the grand gates of the Graff Delaire Estate flanked by Dylan Lewis sculptures, handed our luggage off to the concierge, and got ready for a long afternoon nap.

But we couldn't fall asleep — not with that view. Despite our exhaustion we spent quite a bit of time just taking in the rolling hills, jagged mountains, and sprawling vineyards that could be seen from our private pool deck. We wondered out loud, “How did we get here?”

The answer is Journeys by Design, a travel company focused on tailor-made, luxury African excursions (its clients include the likes of Ralph Lauren). A few months earlier we had gone to the founder, Will Jones, with a challenge. After personally spending some months in West Africa and two weeks in Zambia and Botswana on safari, we wanted to take a different kind of trip, one focused on contemporary art. What we got was an unrivaled, unreal bespoke vacation that offered amazing food and wine, incredible views, and art we'd never seen before.

So there we were at Delaire Graff Estate, a property owned by Laurence Graff of the diamond house. Graff purchased the land in 2003 and transformed it into an estate combining exclusive lodges, a contemporary winery, and a spa. The lodge we stayed in was divine. We wanted to stay

forever, on this honeymoon for one.

Also on location is one of the top South African art collections (we interviewed Graff about this collection for our spring 2011 issue). We found William Kentridge works above the fireplace at the restaurant (delicious) and in the tasting room (delightful). During our stay we were lucky enough to have lunch with the young artist Lionel Smit, who was hanging a recently completed portrait of Graff in the entrance to the winery. There were also sculptures by Deborah Bell, Anton Smit, and Dylan Lewis, whose studio we had the pleasure of visiting.

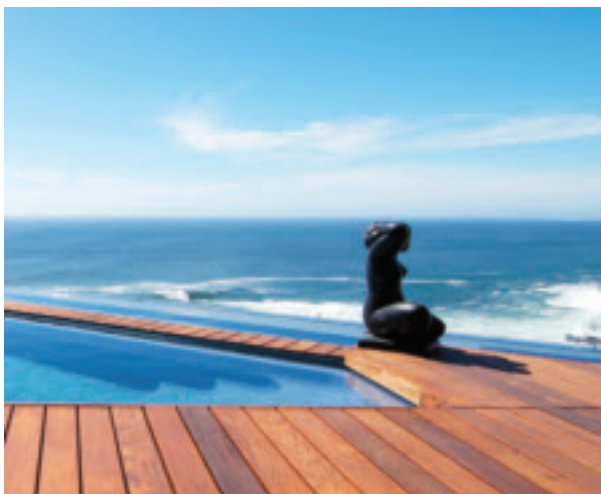
Close to Delaire is the town of Stellenbosch, which has its own burgeoning art scene. One of our favorite galleries that we visited while in town was SMAC gallery. On view was the aptly named exhibition “My Show” by the artist Georgina Gratrix. Her paintings were mostly portraits that winked at celebrities and pop culture. They had an energy that excited us beyond the fact that they were funny, too.

Our stay in Stellenbosch included a privately led wine tour around Franschhoek, making stops at La Motte, L'Omarins, and Waterford Wine Estate. There was supposed to be a fourth but at 3:00 p.m., after a day of tasting (and mostly sipping, not spitting), we thought it would be best to turn in early. L'Omarins is owned by the Rupert family, a prominent South African family that also collected quite a bit of art. We took a tour of their private museum in Stellenbosch, which held an incredible collection of the nationally iconic Jacob Pierneef panels (commissioned in 1929 by South African Railways) and incredibly intricate sculptures and etchings by Willem Strydom.

Before we knew it, we were traveling

back into Cape Town to stay at Ellerman House. We had been told just how fantastic a place it was by our lovely hosts at Delaire. It certainly lived up to the hype. Ellerman House sits on a dramatic mountainside with panoramic views of the ocean. It has more of a family-style hospitality approach. The kitchen was open to make you a meal whenever needed. Special requests were encouraged, and there were just eleven rooms and private villas. Within minutes I felt like I was home.

It was rainy for our few days there, which was perfect for cozying up in one of the many salons near a fireplace to read or peruse the impressive classic South African art collection, which boasted paintings by artists such as Thomas Bowler, Pierneef, Irma Stern, and John Meyer. In the back of the property, down a few stairs overlooking the ocean, is a working gallery. We were told it is always open to guests of the house. What they offer is a selection of the current South African art scene, including works by Kentridge, Gratrix, Cameron Platter, Mary Sibande, and Colin Richards. Our stay in Cape Town fell on a holiday, so most of the galleries in the city we had planned on visiting were closed, but Everard Read Gallery, one of the top in the country, opened their doors to us. A show of work by David Bromley was up, paintings that reminded us of a less political Shepard Fairey. We were sad to leave Cape Town when our very own contemporary art journey by design finally ended (checking out of Ellerman House, by design, included simply a wave goodbye and a thank you). As our South African Airways flight took off out of Johannesburg, we were already dreaming up ways to make our way back to enjoy more wine, landscapes, and of course, art.



Opposite page, left:  
View from our private balcony at  
Delaire Graff Estate in Stellenbosch,  
photo by Katy Donoghue.

This page, clockwise from top:  
Anton Smit's *Faith* on the  
grounds of Graff Delaire Estate.  
Ellerman House in Cape Town.  
Ellerman Contemporary gallery.  
Entrance to the Ellerman  
Contemporary gallery.  
Deck of the Ellerman Villa.

