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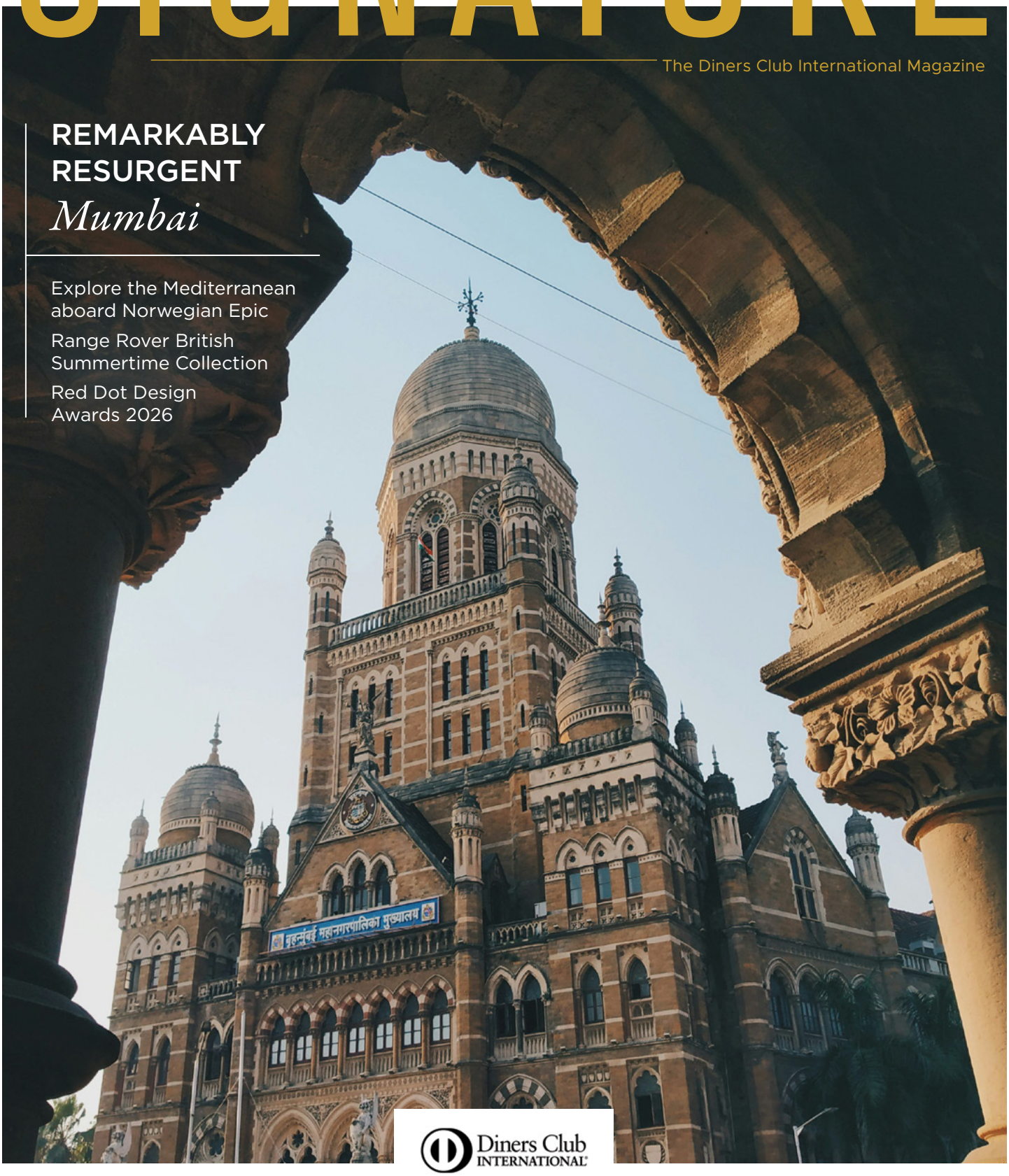
The Diners Club International Magazine

REMARKABLY RESURGENT *Mumbai*

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Welcome

Esh Naidoo
Managing Director

There is something special about belonging to a community that values experiences over status, and discovery over routine. That, to me, has always been the essence of Diners Club. More than a card, it is a passport into a world of shared passions, where travel, exceptional dining, inspired design and meaningful moments bring like-minded people together.

Our *Signature* cover story journeys to Mumbai, a city in the midst of a remarkable renaissance. Long known as India's financial powerhouse, it has evolved into one of the world's most compelling cultural destinations. It rewards curiosity, inviting visitors to look beyond the familiar and embrace something unexpected.

From the streets of India, we set sail across the Mediterranean. Cruising offers a unique perspective on travel, reminding us that sometimes the journey itself becomes as memorable as the places along the way.

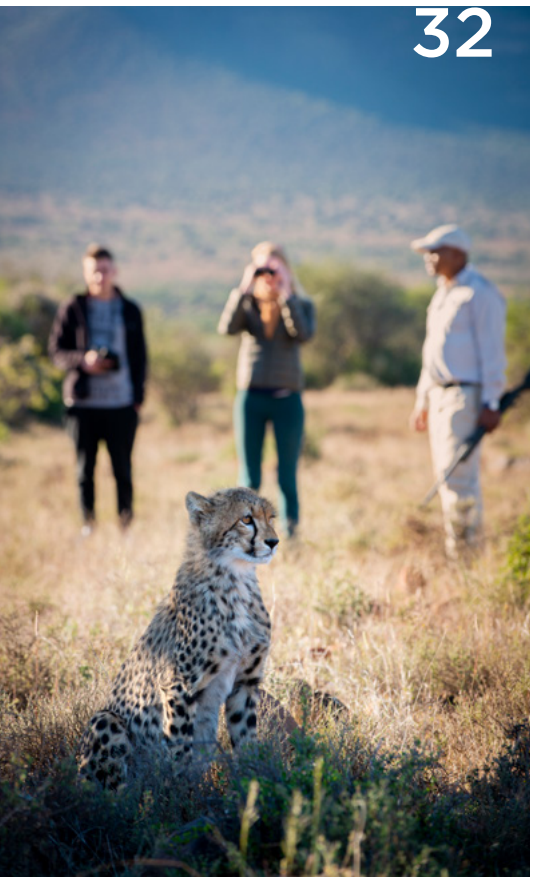
Closer to home, we continue our exploration of South Africa's flourishing fine dining landscape, where talented chefs are redefining local cuisine through creativity, impeccable technique and a deep appreciation for seasonal ingredients. Great food has always been about craftsmanship, conversation and the joy of sharing memorable experiences with those around us.

Throughout these pages, you will discover destinations to inspire your next journey, restaurants worth lingering over, products that showcase exceptional craftsmanship and stories that remind us why living well is ultimately about embracing the richness of every experience.

Thank you for being part of the Diners Club community. We hope this edition encourages you to explore a little further, dine a little longer, and continue seeking the moments that make life truly memorable.

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GO THERE

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Mhondoro Safari Lodge & Villa has claimed four accolades at the 2026 Haute Grandeur Global Excellence Awards, including the global titles of Best Bush Lodge and Best Safari Lodge. The luxury Waterberg retreat also earned Best Destination Wedding Hotel in Africa and Best Family Hotel in South Africa. Located in the malaria-free, Big Five Welgevonden Game Reserve, Mhondoro is renowned for its intimate safari experiences, underground waterhole hide, exceptional guiding, wellness offering and warm hospitality. Significantly, the Haute Grandeur Awards are based on guest feedback rather than judging panels, making the honours a powerful endorsement of the lodge's commitment to creating memorable, deeply personal safari experiences.
www.mhondoro.com





CRUISING CLOSER TO HOME

To mark Heritage Month, Cruise Vacations has unveiled its Close to Home Collection, a curated selection of luxury voyages that places world-class cruising within easier reach of South African travellers. Featuring itineraries from Silversea, Swan Hellenic and Emerald Cruises, the collection includes Cape Town departures to Antarctica, Indian Ocean escapes to the Seychelles, and world cruise segments connecting the Mother City with destinations including Dakar and Mumbai. Designed for travellers seeking immersive, unhurried experiences, the collection highlights South Africa as both a destination and a gateway to extraordinary journeys. It proves that some of the world's most memorable adventures can begin much closer to home.

SEE THE BUSH IN A NEW LIGHT

Tintswalo Collection has unveiled a Thermal Night Safari & Stargazing experience, offering guests a fascinating glimpse into Africa's hidden nocturnal wildlife. Available at Tintswalo Safari and Tintswalo Manor House in the Manyeleti Game Reserve, as well as Tintswalo Scops Rest in the Klaserie Private Nature Reserve, the experience combines expert-guided night drives with advanced thermal imaging binoculars that detect animals by their heat signatures, minimising disturbance to the environment. Guests may encounter elusive species such as civets, genets and porcupines before ending the evening beneath the stars with a guided stargazing session exploring the southern skies, constellations and celestial navigation.
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BIRTHPLACE OF A NATION

Exploring Philadelphia as America Turns 250

Tracing the footsteps of America's founders through the enduring landmarks of Philadelphia during the United States' 250th anniversary celebrations.



As the United States marks 250 years since the signing of the *Declaration of Independence*, no city captures the spirit of the celebrations quite like Philadelphia. While America250 has brought a host of special events and exhibitions to the birthplace of the nation, it is the city's permanent landmarks that remain the true drawcards. From the hallowed halls where independence was debated to cobbled streets that have witnessed centuries of history, Philadelphia offers visitors an opportunity to walk through the pages of America's story. Better still, these remarkable sites will continue welcoming travellers long after the anniversary celebrations have drawn to a close.

WHERE AMERICA FOUND ITS VOICE

Every journey through historic Philadelphia inevitably begins at Independence Hall. Standing in the



Independence Hall Visitor Centre



Philadelphia City Hall

heart of the city's Historic District, this handsome Georgian building is far more than an attractive colonial landmark. It was here, in the Assembly Room, that delegates approved the *Declaration of Independence* on 4 July 1776 before returning eleven years later to draft and sign the U.S. Constitution. Today, visitors can stand in the very room where those debates unfolded, with much of the original interior carefully preserved. It remains one of the few places in the world where history feels almost tangible.

Just across the street sits another enduring symbol of American identity: the Liberty Bell. Cast in 1752, its famous crack has become almost as recognisable as the inscription running around its crown: "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants Thereof." While it originally hung in what is now Independence Hall, the bell has taken on a far greater significance over the centuries, becoming an international symbol of freedom, civil rights and democracy. It remains one of Philadelphia's most visited attractions for good reason.

WALKING THROUGH LIVING HISTORY

One of Philadelphia's greatest strengths is that its history isn't confined to museums. Much of it unfolds simply by wandering the streets.

A short stroll from Independence Hall leads to Elfreth's Alley, widely regarded as America's oldest continuously inhabited residential street. Dating back to 1703, its row

of beautifully preserved brick homes offers a remarkably authentic glimpse into everyday colonial life. Unlike many historic precincts that have become open-air museums, Elfreth's Alley remains a living neighbourhood where residents still call these centuries-old homes their own.

Nearby, the Betsy Ross House continues to draw visitors intrigued by the woman long associated with sewing the first American flag. Historians still debate elements of the famous story, but the restored eighteenth-century home provides fascinating insight into the life of one of Revolutionary America's most enduring figures. Historic interpreters, original artefacts and rotating exhibitions help separate fact from folklore while celebrating the remarkable life of a working woman in colonial Philadelphia.

BEYOND THE FOUNDING FATHERS

Philadelphia's history extends well beyond the signing of a single document, and nowhere illustrates that better than the Museum of the American Revolution.

Opened in 2017 just a few blocks from Independence Hall, the museum provides valuable context to the events that unfolded across the city. Rather than simply displaying artefacts behind glass, immersive exhibits follow the Revolution from the mounting tensions of the 1760s through the war itself and into the uncertain years



Benjamin Franklin's Cane in the Assembly Room of Independence Hall



Elfreth's Alley

that followed independence. Among its most treasured exhibits is George Washington's original field headquarters tent, one of the Revolution's most significant surviving artefacts.

For anyone hoping to understand not just what happened in Philadelphia, but why it mattered, this museum is arguably as essential as Independence Hall itself.

THE BUILDINGS THAT BUILT A NATION

Many visitors focus solely on Independence Hall, but the surrounding Independence National Historical Park rewards slower exploration.

Congress Hall, immediately adjacent to Independence Hall, served as the meeting place of the United States Congress between 1790 and 1800, when Philadelphia briefly functioned as the nation's capital. It was here that George Washington was inaugurated for his second presidential term and John Adams for his first.

Nearby, Carpenters' Hall hosted the First Continental Congress in 1774, effectively laying the political groundwork for independence before a single shot of the Revolutionary War had been fired.

Just a few minutes away, Franklin Court marks the former home of Benjamin Franklin. Although the original house no longer stands, the site combines archaeological remains with exhibits celebrating one of America's greatest inventors, diplomats and founding thinkers. Together, these sites transform a simple city walk into a journey through the formative years of the United States.

A LEGACY THAT ENDURES

America250 may have placed Philadelphia firmly back on travellers' bucket lists, but the celebrations merely provide the excuse. The real attraction is that nowhere else in the United States concentrates so much of the nation's founding story into such a walkable, accessible district.

From the room where independence was declared to the bell that became a universal symbol of liberty, from the cobbled charm of Elfreth's Alley to the immersive storytelling of the Museum of the American Revolution, Philadelphia offers something increasingly rare in modern travel – authenticity.

Long after the anniversary banners come down and the commemorative events are packed away, these streets will continue telling the same stories they have for generations. And for anyone wanting to understand how one city helped shape a nation, there is simply no better place to begin.

*by **bernie hellberg jr***
*/ photography by **unsplash.com***



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REVISITING **MUMBAI**

A City on the Rise

A return to India's financial capital after a decade revealed a city that has quietly transformed itself without losing the energy that makes it unlike anywhere else on Earth.

Some cities make an unforgettable first impression. Others take a little longer to reveal their true character. Mumbai, I have discovered, belongs firmly in the latter camp.

When I first visited India's financial capital around ten years ago, I left with enormous respect for what the city represented. Still, I couldn't pretend it had been an easy place to explore. It was noisy, frenetic, and at times utterly exhausting.



Traffic seemed to move by rules known only to those behind the wheel, pavements overflowed with people, and every outing became an assault on the senses. There was no denying the city's vibrancy, but it demanded your full attention from the moment you arrived.



Returning this year, I expected more of the same. Instead, I found a city that still pulses with the same unmistakable energy, but one that feels noticeably more polished than the Mumbai I remembered. The crowds are still there, the soundtrack of car horns remains ever present, and there is no escaping the fact that this is one of the world's busiest urban centres. Yet beneath the familiar chaos lies something that wasn't nearly as obvious a decade ago: confidence.

Mumbai feels like a city that has grown into itself.





A CITY LOOKING FORWARD

Much of that newfound confidence stems from an extraordinary period of investment. Over the past decade, Mumbai has embarked on one of the most ambitious infrastructure programmes in its history. New Metro lines now reach suburbs once notorious for congestion, the Coastal Road has dramatically improved travel along the western seafront, and new bridges and transport corridors continue to reshape the skyline. The projects remain controversial in some quarters, as developments of this scale often are, but the cumulative effect is impossible to ignore.

The city feels cleaner. Public spaces appear better maintained. Travelling from one side of Mumbai to another no longer seems quite the logistical exercise it once was.

Perhaps more importantly, Mumbai no longer feels like it's simply coping with its phenomenal growth. It is planning for it.

That doesn't mean everything has changed. Spend five minutes at a busy intersection, and you'll quickly realise that organised chaos is still very much the local traffic philosophy. Somehow cars, motorcycles, buses, pedestrians and the occasional cow negotiate their way through seemingly impossible situations with an efficiency that defies logic. For visitors, it remains both mildly terrifying and endlessly entertaining.

Yet that, too, is part of Mumbai's charm. It has never aspired to be orderly in the conventional sense. Instead, it has perfected its own rhythm, and once you stop trying to understand it, you begin to appreciate it.



A FRESH TAKE ON FAMILIAR LANDMARKS

Like millions of visitors before me, I found myself drawn to the Gateway of India. Standing proudly on the waterfront overlooking the Arabian Sea, the imposing basalt arch remains one of India's defining landmarks. Built during the British Raj and completed in 1924, it has witnessed some of the country's most significant historical moments, from royal visits to the departure of the last British troops after independence. Today it serves a rather simpler purpose, welcoming travellers from around the world while providing one of Mumbai's most recognisable postcard views.

Directly opposite stands the magnificent Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, whose distinctive red dome has become almost inseparable from the Gateway itself. Elegant without being ostentatious, it remains one of the world's great heritage hotels and a reminder that Mumbai has long been an international city. From there, Marine Drive beckons.

Curving gracefully around Back Bay, this sweeping boulevard has changed remarkably little over the years, and thankfully so. Known affectionately as the Queen's Necklace because of the string of lights that sparkle after dark, it remains one of the city's great gathering places. At sunrise it belongs to runners and early risers. By late afternoon, families, office workers and tourists settle along the sea wall, sharing conversations while the Arabian Sea provides a welcome escape from the relentless pace of the streets behind them.

What struck me wasn't simply the view, but how much more inviting the entire precinct felt. Cleaner pavements, improved public spaces and an obvious sense of civic pride have elevated an already iconic destination into somewhere you genuinely want to linger.

HISTORY THAT REFUSES TO STAND STILL

If Marine Drive showcases modern Mumbai at its most elegant, Chhatrapati

Shivaji Maharaj Terminus reminds visitors that the city's history remains every bit as compelling.

Still affectionately known by many as Victoria Terminus, the magnificent railway station is one of the finest examples of Victorian Gothic Revival architecture anywhere in the world. Completed in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, its elaborate stone carvings, soaring turrets and stained-glass windows would not look out of place in Europe.

Except this is no museum piece. Every day, millions of commuters stream through its platforms, transforming what could have been a preserved historical monument into one of the busiest railway stations on the planet. It is both a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a vital piece of the city's transport network, a uniquely Mumbai contradiction that somehow works perfectly.

The surrounding Fort district deserves equal attention. Here, beautifully preserved colonial buildings sit comfortably alongside elegant Art Deco apartments, many overlooking the Oval Maidan where impromptu cricket matches unfold beneath the shadow of gleaming office towers. It is an area best explored on foot, giving you time to appreciate architectural details that are easy to miss when navigating the city's busy roads.

Looking up became something of a theme during my visit. Mumbai has an unfortunate habit of overwhelming visitors at street level, yet many of its greatest treasures lie several storeys above eye level. Ornate balconies, decorative facades and intricately carved stonework tell the story of a city whose heritage often competes for attention with its modern ambitions.

THE HEART OF THE CITY

Of course, no amount of impressive architecture defines Mumbai nearly as much as its people.

The city lives and breathes through its markets, cafés and street corners. Wander through Colaba Causeway, and you'll find everything from handcrafted jewellery and colourful textiles to books, antiques and souvenirs. Venture into Crawford Market and the atmosphere changes again, with traders enthusiastically promoting fresh produce, fragrant spices and just about anything else you could imagine.

Food is woven into every aspect of life here. Whether you're enjoying buttery pav bhaji from a bustling street stall, sampling a perfectly crisp dosa, or stopping for a restorative cup of masala chai, eating in Mumbai is less about fine dining and more about joining the city's rhythm. It is impossible not to notice the contrasts.

Luxury cars glide past ageing taxis. Towering skyscrapers cast long shadows over century-old buildings. Five-star hotels stand within sight of crowded railway stations, while



moments of remarkable tranquillity can be found inside ancient temples only a few streets removed from the city's relentless traffic.

Many cities attempt to disguise their contradictions, but Mumbai embraces them. That willingness to wear every facet of its identity proudly is perhaps what makes it so captivating. It never pretends to be perfect, nor does it apologise for its imperfections. Instead, it simply carries on, confident that visitors willing to spend a little time here will eventually understand what makes it special.

By the end of my stay, I realised something else had changed over the past decade. Not just this magnificent city, but also my perspective

The sensory overload that dominated my first visit had faded into the background, letting the city's architecture, culture, and unmistakable spirit come into sharper focus. Perhaps that comes with experience, or perhaps Mumbai itself has matured enough for those qualities to shine more brightly than before.

Either way, I left with a very different impression from the one I carried home ten years ago. Mumbai remains loud, busy and gloriously unpredictable. It still demands patience, rewards curiosity and occasionally tests your resolve. Yet today it also feels cleaner, more connected and more welcoming than ever before. It is a city investing in its future while remaining fiercely proud of its past, and that balance is no easy achievement.

Some places deserve a second chance, but Mumbai, it turns out, deserves a second visit.



*by **bernie hellberg jr***
*/ photography by **unsplash.com***

MEDITERRANEAN MOMENTS **THAT STAY WITH YOU**

The Greatest Luxury is the Freedom to Explore

There are holidays you remember for the places you visited, and then there are journeys you remember for the way they made you feel. Our seven-night Mediterranean voyage aboard the Norwegian Epic® was firmly the latter.



Boarding in the city of Civitavecchia, we knew our cruise itinerary promised some of Europe's most celebrated destinations. What surprised us was how effortlessly the cruise blended iconic landmarks with simple pleasures: exceptional meals, attentive service and the freedom to discover each port on our own terms.

For seasoned travellers, that flexibility proved to be one of the voyage's greatest strengths. Rather than rushing from one organised excursion to another, we used the ship as a luxurious floating base while creating our own adventures ashore.

Before embarking, we spent time in Rome exploring some of the Eternal City's greatest treasures. A private guide led us through Vatican City, the Sistine Chapel and the magnificent Basilica of San Pietro in Vincoli, where Michelangelo's monumental Moses sculpture provided a memorable introduction to the week ahead. By the time we boarded the train to Civitavecchia the following morning, the holiday already felt wonderfully underway.

Once aboard, the Norwegian Epic® immediately impressed with its warm hospitality. From embarkation to disembarkation, every crew member we encountered was friendly, efficient and genuinely invested in ensuring guests enjoyed themselves. Small gestures made a lasting impression, whether it was remembering our favourite drinks or offering helpful advice before we went ashore.

Dining quickly became one of the highlights of every day. Norwegian Cruise Line® has earned an excellent reputation for culinary variety, and the Norwegian Epic® certainly lived up to it. Our first evening was spent at Le Bistro, the ship's elegant French speciality restaurant, where beautifully presented dishes and attentive service set the tone for the voyage.

Later in the week we enjoyed dinner at Cagney's Steakhouse, a meal my husband still talks about months afterwards. His perfectly cooked steak was, in his opinion, one of the finest he has ever eaten. Combined with the impressive selection available across the ship's complimentary restaurants and casual eateries, every



meal became something to anticipate.

Although the ship itself offers entertainment, pools, live performances and countless places to unwind, we spent most days ashore. With several organised excursions already fully booked before departure, we planned our own itineraries, and that decision turned out to be one of the best we made.

Salerno revealed the authentic rhythm of southern Italy through lively piazzas, historic streets and welcoming cafés. In Sicily, we travelled independently from Catania to the spectacular hilltop town of Taormina. Overlooking the sparkling Ionian Sea, its ancient Greek theatre and flower-filled lanes created one of the most picturesque days of the cruise.

Our only full day at sea provided a welcome change of pace. Instead of sightseeing, we settled into loungers beside the adults-only pool, joined onboard quizzes and spent leisurely



hours chatting with fellow travellers. It was the perfect opportunity to appreciate the ship itself, allowing us to recharge before the remaining ports.

The French Riviera produced one of the voyage's most unexpected highlights. After tendering into Villefranche-sur-Mer, we boarded a local train to Menton, a town that instantly captured our hearts. Pastel-coloured buildings tumbled down towards the waterfront, palm-lined promenades overlooked the Mediterranean and the relaxed atmosphere encouraged us to linger far longer than planned. It remains one of those rare destinations that immediately inspires thoughts of returning.

Marseille offered a completely different perspective. From the heights of the Basilique Notre-Dame de la Garde, sweeping views stretched across the harbour to the famous Château d'If, forever immortalised in The Count of Monte Cristo. It was a reminder that the Mediterranean is as rich in stories as it is in scenery.

ENDING ON A HIGH NOTE

The cruise concluded in Barcelona, but not before one final masterpiece. An early guided visit to Antoni Gaudí's extraordinary Sagrada Família provided a fitting finale. Sunlight filtering through towering stained-glass windows transformed the vast interior into a kaleidoscope of colour, creating an atmosphere that was both inspiring and deeply moving.

Looking back, it wasn't simply the destinations that made this voyage memorable. It was the balance between exploration and relaxation, outstanding dining and consistently thoughtful service. Having the confidence to design our own days ashore gave every port a more personal feel, while returning each evening to the comfort of the Norwegian Epic made every destination even more enjoyable.

The Mediterranean never disappoints, but experiencing it this way added another dimension entirely. We returned with thousands of photographs, countless memories and more than a few favourite meals to reminisce about. For travellers seeking the perfect combination of independence, comfort and world-class hospitality, the Norwegian Epic delivers a voyage that lingers long after the final port has disappeared from view.





free at sea adds extra value

For South African travellers, Norwegian Cruise Line's Free at Sea™ package can significantly enhance the overall cruise experience. Depending on the booking, it typically includes unlimited premium beverages, speciality dining, high-speed Wi-Fi and shore-excursion credits, helping to reduce onboard expenses while adding flexibility throughout the voyage.

By including many of the extras that guests would normally purchase separately, the package offers excellent value. It allows travellers to budget more confidently before departure, making it an attractive option for anyone planning a Mediterranean escape.

www.ncl.com/uk/en/travel-blog/everything-to-know-about-free-at-sea



A JOURNEY **WORTH TAKING**

The Splendour of Samara Karoo Reserve

"I dream of our vast deserts, our forests, and all our great wildernesses. We must never forget that it is our duty to protect this environment." – Nelson Mandela

With eagerness and excitement, I arrived at Chief Dawid Stuurman International Airport in Gqeberha earlier this year, in the heart of summer. Armed with a rental car and plenty of enthusiasm, my husband, our two dear friends from Pretoria, Gauteng, and I set off for our destination for the next three nights – Samara Karoo Reserve. That familiar blend of anticipation and excitement, which builds from the moment a reservation is made until the adventure finally begins, was impossible to ignore.

Our journey through the Eastern Cape *platteland* unfolded beneath rolling clouds and the occasional late-afternoon shower. A sudden hailstorm trapped us inside a small roadside shop in Jansenville, where we happily devoured homemade pies while waiting for the skies to clear. As we continued towards Graaff-Reinet, we were greeted by the most magnificent rainbow. It felt like nature's gentle reassurance, sensing the uncertainty in my heart and mind. The skies seemed to whisper, "All is well. Sit back, embrace the beauty of the Karoo, and simply be present."

*by **karin jenkins** / photography by **samara karoo reserve***



On arrival at Samara, we were welcomed with refreshing ginger iced tea and the warm smiles of the staff, who would soon become familiar faces. A cool towel, a friendly handshake and the exchange of names immediately made us feel at home. We were shown to our luxurious rooms, complete with en-suite bathrooms and spacious verandas overlooking the surrounding wilderness – although we were gently warned to keep an eye out for the resident monkeys.

Having left the bustle of city life behind, I was determined not to miss a single game drive. The Great Karoo, once little more than a place on a map to me, revealed an entirely different character. The majestic Sneeuberge framed a landscape transformed by abundant summer rains. Lush vegetation, tiny wildflowers, thorn and shepherd's trees, and shimmering pools of water stretched across the plains in every direction.

Within the first hour of our first game drive, we encountered an extraordinary variety of wildlife. Giraffe, gemsbok, kudu, eland and red hartebeest were just some of the species we spotted. Elephant families, imposing at close range, appeared remarkably relaxed, almost as though they were posing for photographs. Keeping count of the animals we see on every game drive has become a treasured family tradition, and it quickly became clear that Samara would challenge our previous record. Seeing a rhino and her calf grazing peacefully, blissfully unaware of their endangered status, was especially moving. Our young guide and tracker displayed exceptional knowledge of the landscape, its wildlife, vegetation, history and people, making every outing as educational as it was memorable.

A VISION BEYOND THE SAFARI

Yet it was not the luxurious accommodation, exceptional game viewing or outstanding cuisine that made Samara truly unforgettable. For me, its greatest achievement lies in its inspiring vision and unwavering commitment to conservation, community and culture.



Samara's ambition is nothing short of remarkable: to help create the third-largest protected area in South Africa by restoring the Great Karoo to its former glory – a vast semi-arid wilderness of mountains, grasslands and thriving wildlife. Centuries ago, the Karoo would have been quieter in human presence, yet infinitely richer in biodiversity. The movement of animals, the fragrance of flowering shrubs after rain and the calls of birds would have travelled for kilometres across the open plains.

Wildlife here was once spectacular. Vast herds of springbok, known as trekbokken, migrated across the landscape in numbers reaching tens, even hundreds, of thousands. Quagga grazed alongside black wildebeest and red hartebeest, while eland, greater kudu and gemsbok flourished throughout the shrublands. Black rhinoceros browsed among the woody vegetation, while lion, leopard, cheetah, African wild dog, and both brown and spotted hyena roamed freely. Above them, blue cranes, secretary





birds, bustards, korhaans, vultures and countless raptors filled the skies.

What makes Samara so extraordinary is that this vision is steadily becoming reality. The reserve is working towards creating a conservation landscape spanning hundreds of thousands of hectares. Already, 300 kilometres of fencing have been removed across 11 integrated farms, with plans to establish even larger wildlife corridors linking public and private reserves. Such collaboration promises not only stronger conservation outcomes, but also meaningful employment through ecotourism while safeguarding this remarkable landscape for future generations.

The reserve's philosophy is built around four pillars – Conservation, Community, Culture and Commerce – ensuring that its vision remains both practical and sustainable. Initiatives already underway include a fully off-grid solar energy system, soil and water restoration projects, self-sustaining food production, the creation of 100 permanent jobs, and meaningful community upliftment programmes, all while maintaining long-term commercial viability.

I left Samara inspired, humbled and profoundly proud to call South Africa home. Ours is a country with many challenges, but if we occasionally pause to appreciate the remarkable work being done around us, we will also discover stories of hope, resilience and vision.

My journey back from Samara Karoo Reserve to Pretoria, Gauteng, was one of quiet reflection, fulfilment and gratitude. Sometimes the most memorable destinations do more than provide an escape; they remind us why the places we call home are worth protecting in the first place.

For more information, please visit www.samara.co.za.




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FIVE YEARS OF PERFECTION



Five vintages in, the 2026 Durbanville Sauvignon Blanc has become a signature expression of one of the Cape's most distinctive wine regions. Crafted from exceptional fruit across eight acclaimed estates, including Diemersdal, De Grendel, D'Aria and Durbanville Hills, it captures the cool-climate character of Durbanville with remarkable finesse. Defined by precision and restraint, the fifth vintage brings together vibrant acidity, mineral freshness and an alluring saline edge – a reflection of vineyards shaped by their proximity to the Atlantic. That ocean-to-table connection comes beautifully to life in Klipkombers Seesout, an indigenous West Coast seaweed creation by Chef Martin de Kock that echoes the wine's subtle maritime character. The story continues with a Delft-inspired dish towel, mirroring the label's intricate blue detailing and celebrating the enduring connection between Cape heritage, craftsmanship and the rituals of entertaining. From ocean to vineyard to table, this is Durbanville at its most captivating.



SCULPTURE IN SERVICE

Inspired by the grace and talent of South Africa's ballet dancers, Carrol Boyes' new Tippy Toes Drinks Trolley brings a sense of performance to the art of entertaining. Four elongated sculptural figures, poised elegantly on their toes, form the trolley's distinctive silhouette, their delicately crafted hands curling around polished aluminium supports. Two dark tempered-glass trays provide generous space for serving and display: barware and glassware take the upper stage, while favourite bottles find their place below. For all its theatrical presence, Tippy Toes is designed to perform. Lockable wheels allow it to move easily into service before holding its position when the moment calls for it. Part sculpture, part serving companion, Tippy Toes makes an art of keeping the drinks moving. The Tippy Toes Drinks Trolley is available from Carrol Boyes retail stores and online, priced at R39,990.

LEAVE AN UNFORGETTABLE IMPRESSION

Meet the most seductive expression of the Montblanc Legend man yet. Montblanc Legend Elixir intensifies the iconic signature with the Maison's first parfum concentration—rich, magnetic and irresistibly sensual. A vibrant opening of bergamot, lavender and pink peppercorn gives way to elegant Iris Germanic and clary sage, before unfolding into an addictive trail of Madagascar vanilla, Ambrofix™ and warm resins. Deeply masculine yet effortlessly refined, it is a fragrance designed to command attention without ever asking for it. Housed in a striking silver-lacquered interpretation of the iconic Legend bottle, this iconic scent captures Montblanc's signature blend of heritage, craftsmanship and modern luxury. Powerful. Seductive. Impossible to forget. Montblanc Legend Elixir is crafted for the man whose presence leaves a lasting impression. Available in all major retail outlets nationwide.



THE BEACH HOUSE

EST YZERFONTEIN 2024

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SAVOUR THE SOUL OF THE WEST COAST AT THE BEACH HOUSE RESTAURANT

Discover The Beach House at Yzerfontein, where acclaimed chef Darren Badenhorst unites with seasoned chef Jacques Grove to craft exquisite coastal cuisine. Experience rustic elegance, fresh local ingredients, and a commitment to sustainability, all while enjoying breathtaking views of the 16-Mile Beach. Join us for an unforgettable dining journey!

The menu highlights fresh, locally sourced ingredients like foraged herbs, daily-caught seafood, and wood-fired line-caught fish. Each dish is crafted with world-class techniques, capturing the essence of the West Coast in every bite.





Table reservations
web: beachhouserestaurant.co.za
email: reservations@beachhouserestaurant.co.za
Whatsapp: +27 79 125 2448

beachhouserestaurant.co.za

Yzerfontein is a scenic hour's drive from Cape Town along the R27.

A SUMMER **OF BRITISH LUXURY**

Range Rover Introduces the British Summertime Collection

Range Rover has expanded its luxury offering beyond the vehicle itself with the introduction of the new British Summertime Collection, a carefully curated range of lifestyle pieces inspired by the elegance and traditions of the British summer season.

Reflecting the Range Rover brand's "luxury in motion" philosophy, the British Summertime Collection blends contemporary design with timeless craftsmanship, taking its cues from two quintessential British influences, namely the refined world of tennis, and the enduring heritage of artisanal craft. The result is a series of beautifully executed pieces that balance clean geometry and understated sophistication with rich materials and meticulous attention to detail.

CRAFTSMANSHIP AND PROVENANCE

Every item in the collection showcases exceptional craftsmanship. Hand-woven leather panels echo the construction of traditional picnic baskets, while textiles are digitally printed in specialist workshops in Macclesfield. The ceramic pieces are handcrafted in Stoke-on-Trent using locally sourced clay, celebrating Britain's pottery heritage while embracing sustainable production methods through the reuse of materials. Precision metal hardware, finished in signature Range Rover tones, completes each design with a subtle yet


RANGE ROVER

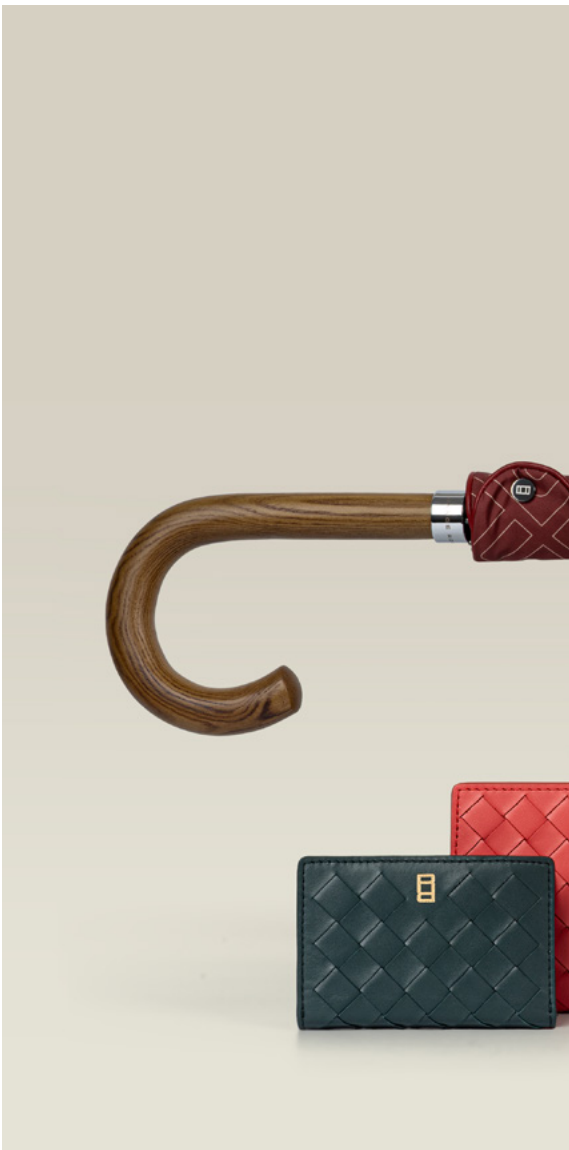
distinctive flourish.

COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

Courtside Blanket

The Courtside Blanket is woven from a luxurious cashmere and wool blend and draws inspiration from an aerial view of Centre Court. Its bold graphic pattern is hand screen-printed in Italy and finished with hand whip-stitched edging, making it an elegant companion for outdoor entertaining and leisurely summer afternoons.





Leather Goods

The leather collection represents another step in Range Rover's evolution as a luxury design brand. Leading the range is the Touring Woven Holdall, crafted from rich tan leather with hand-woven panels inspired by traditional picnic basket construction. Hand-finished edges, meticulous stitching and refined gold hardware underline the exceptional attention to detail.

Complementing the holdall are the Companion Woven Travel Case, City Woven Purse and Woven Card Holder. Each features sculpted forms influenced







by Range Rover's vehicle design language, woven detailing and silk linings adorned with subtle Range Rover motifs.

Umbrellas and Parasols

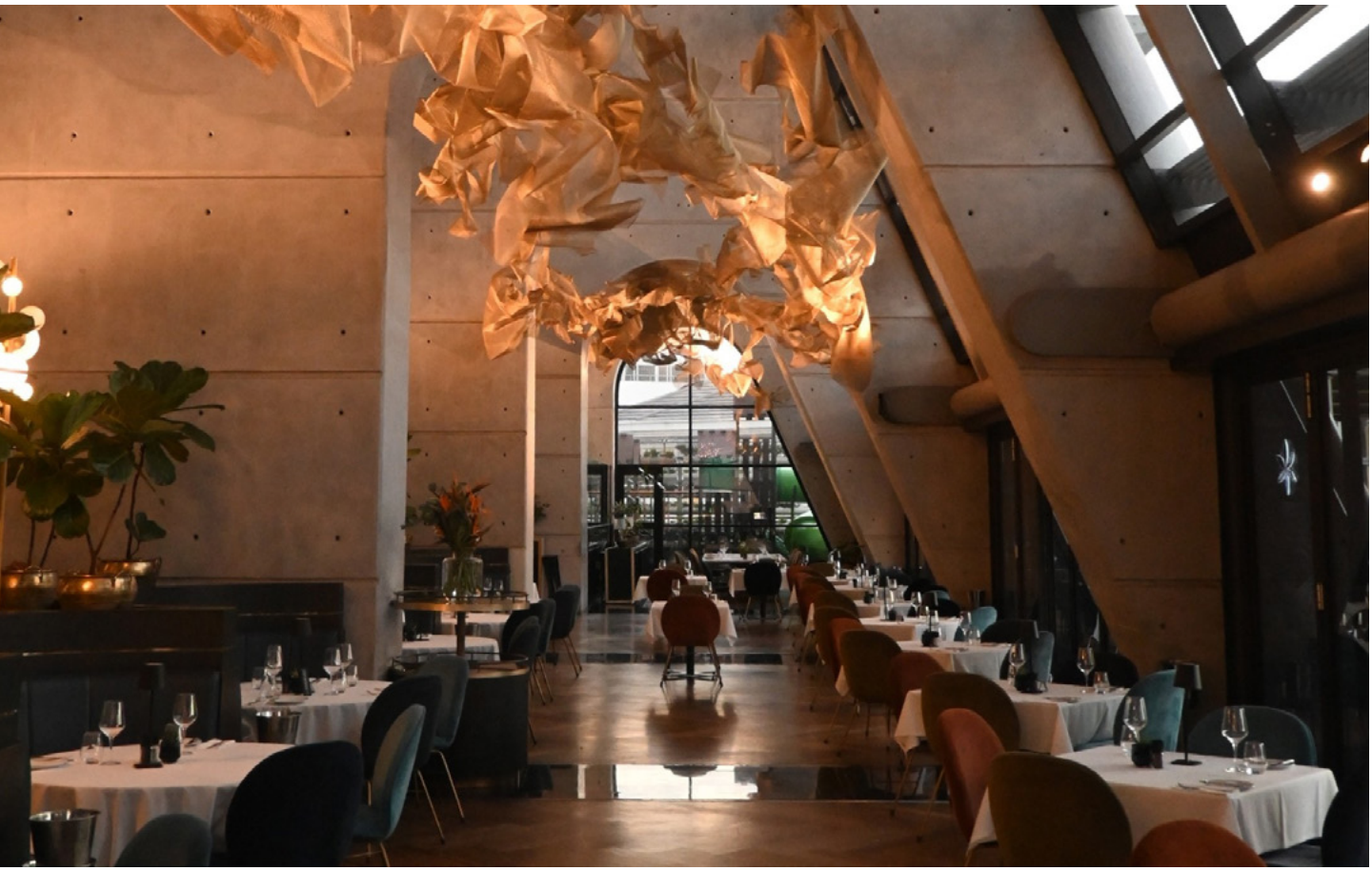
Created in partnership with renowned British umbrella maker Fulton, the umbrella and parasol collection reflects the charm and unpredictability of the British summer. The waterproof Terrace Parasol features soft sky-blue tones with a repeating Range Rover motif across the canopy, while the Signature Umbrella adopts a more classic silhouette that transitions effortlessly from seasonal accessory to timeless essential.

Tea Sets

Handcrafted from UK-sourced clay in Stoke-on-Trent, the ceramic tea sets celebrate Britain's rich pottery heritage. The vibrant Country House Tea Set captures the colour and energy of the summer season, while the more understated Country Garden Tea Set pairs deep green and soft sky-blue tones inspired by Britain's landscapes. Both collections are finished with delicate Sunset Gold detailing for an elegant finishing touch.

With the British Summertime Collection, Range Rover continues to extend its distinctive design language beyond the vehicle itself, creating a lifestyle collection that embodies modern British elegance through exceptional craftsmanship and thoughtful design.

Scan to purchase:



SUMMER DINING **AT ITS BRIGHTEST**

AURUM Restaurant at The Leonardo

High above Africa's richest square mile, on the seventh floor of The Leonardo, AURUM delivers far more than a spectacular address. Thoughtful service, beautifully executed contemporary cuisine and one of the city's most delightful wine selections combine to create a dining experience that lingers long after the final course.

Some restaurants begin the occasion when you take your seat, others start much earlier. At AURUM, it began with the booking. From that first interaction, the service was warm, efficient, and genuinely accommodating, setting an encouraging tone for what would become a thoroughly memorable evening.

The setting, of course, is impossible to ignore. Located within The Leonardo, Africa's tallest building, AURUM enjoys one of Johannesburg's most enviable locations. Yet the restaurant never feels as though it is relying on its address



alone. Even though it was not particularly busy on the evening of my visit, the artfully designed dining room exuded an unmistakable sense of warmth and intimacy. Soft lighting, contemporary décor and attentive service create an atmosphere that feels luxurious and welcoming.

AURUM's culinary philosophy is rooted in contemporary cuisine inspired by French technique and Italian influences, while allowing seasonal ingredients to take centre stage. Complementing the menu is an extensive wine list that showcases some of South Africa's finest estates alongside carefully selected international labels, giving diners plenty of opportunity to discover a new favourite or revisit an old one.

The evening began with sourdough bread accompanied by jalapeño and teriyaki butter. It is an easy detail to overlook, but a good bread service often provides an early glimpse into the kitchen's attention to detail. The earthy



sourdough paired beautifully with the rich umami of the teriyaki butter, while the subtle warmth of jalapeño added just enough intrigue to elevate what could easily have been a simple prelude.

EXQUISITE LINE-UP

For my starter, I selected the Duck Arancini, a dish that showcases the kitchen's ability to balance comfort with refinement. One of several updated dishes on AURUM's new summer menu, it features three perfectly crisp golden arancini concealing a rich duck filling, complemented by a vibrant pea purée and pickled watermelon that introduce a welcome burst of freshness and acidity. Every bite offered contrast, from the crunchy exterior to the indulgent centre, making it a wonderfully satisfying opening to the meal. A glass of Graham Beck Brut proved an inspired pairing, its lively bubbles and crisp citrus character effortlessly cutting through the richness of the duck.



The new summer menu offers no shortage of temptation elsewhere. The Lamb Ragù, featuring Spanish-spiced lamb, pappardelle, exotic mushrooms, Fior di Latte mozzarella, and pancetta, sounds like the sort of dish one orders on a crisp Joburg evening, while the signature Duck, served with barley, pistachio dukkah and apricot mostarda, promises an elegant interplay of savoury and sweet. This variety is what makes AURUM feel like a restaurant worth repeat visits, not a once-off special occasion.

For the main course, I chose AURUM's Beef Fillet, served with oxtail ragù, exotic



mushrooms, potato, and Madagascan pepper jus. This is contemporary fine dining at its most confident. Rather than overwhelming an excellent cut of beef with unnecessary flourishes, every accompaniment has a clear purpose. The slow-cooked oxtail ragù contributes depth, the mushrooms lend an earthy richness, and the pepper jus ties everything together with precision. Paired with Springfield Whole Berry, whose vibrant fruit profile and elegant structure complemented rather than competed with the beef, it became one of those combinations where food and wine blended in delicious harmony.

Dessert arrived as The Chocolate Proposal, a fittingly theatrical finale to an evening defined by thoughtful presentation. Layers of chocolate in varying textures and intensities were combined with fresh fruit and crisp elements to create an indulgent dessert. Beautifully plated, it created a sophisticated conclusion rather than simply a sweet ending.

What impressed me most about AURUM, however, was not any individual dish. It was the consistency of the experience. From the professionalism shown before I even arrived to the seamless service, carefully considered wine pairings, and beautifully executed cuisine, every aspect of the evening reflected attention to detail.

In a city increasingly blessed with excellent restaurants, AURUM distinguishes itself by understanding that memorable dining is never about a single spectacular plate or an impressive view. It is about how every element comes together to make guests feel looked after. On that score, AURUM shines every bit as brightly as the building it calls home.

*by **bernie hellberg jr** /*
*photography by **aurum restaurant***



DESIGNING **TOMORROW**

Three Red Dot Winners That Define Great Design in 2026

From a minimalist camera carved from a single block of aluminium to a motorcycle that quietly rewrites the rules of electric mobility, this year's Red Dot Award winners prove that the best design is no longer about making the biggest statement. Instead, it is about making the smartest one.

For decades, the prestigious Red Dot Design Awards has celebrated products that combine innovation with exceptional aesthetics. Winning a Red Dot is an achievement in itself, but receiving the coveted Best of the Best distinction places a product among the finest examples of industrial design anywhere in the world.

What makes the 2026 winners particularly fascinating is that they are not united by a single trend. Instead, they reveal a common philosophy. Designers are moving away from unnecessary complexity and visual theatrics in favour of products that feel intuitive, purposeful and beautifully resolved. Whether destined for a lounge, a camera bag or the open road, the best designs are becoming quieter, more confident and, ultimately, more human.

Three products illustrate this shift better than most.

SIGMA BF

The Beauty of Simplicity

There is something wonderfully refreshing about a product that knows exactly what it wants to be.

The Sigma BF camera has become one of this year's most talked-about industrial designs, not because it is packed with gimmicks, but because it strips away almost everything that photographers have come to expect. Machined from a single block of aluminium, the body is astonishingly clean, with almost no unnecessary buttons, dials or visual clutter. It feels less like a traditional camera and more like a precision-crafted object that happens to take photographs.

Minimalism is notoriously difficult to execute well. Remove too much and a product becomes frustrating. Leave too much and the design loses its



purity. Sigma appears to have found an impressive balance, creating a camera that is both striking to look at and intuitive to use.

It is also a reminder that premium design is not always about adding features. Sometimes it is about having the confidence to remove them.

In an age where almost every consumer product seems determined to demand our attention, the Sigma BF quietly invites us to slow down and appreciate thoughtful craftsmanship.



HONDA WN7

Electric Without the Drama

Electric motorcycles often fall into one of two camps. Some try so hard to look futuristic that they resemble props from a science fiction film. Others simply disguise the battery beneath conventional styling. Honda has taken a far more sophisticated approach.

The WN7 embraces electric propulsion without allowing the technology to dominate the design. Its proportions remain clean and balanced, while every surface serves a practical purpose. Nothing feels decorative for the sake of decoration.

That restraint is precisely what makes the motorcycle so appealing. Honda's designers have clearly focused on the rider's relationship with the machine, rather than trying to advertise the fact that it is electric. The result is a motorcycle that feels welcoming instead of intimidating, modern without appearing fashionable, and innovative without shouting about it.

It reflects an important shift within the automotive industry. As electric mobility matures, consumers are becoming less interested in novelty and more interested in products that simply integrate seamlessly into everyday life.

The WN7 suggests that the future of transport may not look radically different after all. It may simply be better designed.

SAMSUNG OLED S95H

Technology Becomes Furniture

Televisions have become remarkably similar over the past decade. Screens have grown larger, bezels have become thinner and picture quality has improved dramatically, but the objects themselves have remained surprisingly anonymous.

Samsung decided to challenge that assumption with the OLED S95H that introduces what the company calls its "FloatLayer" design, creating the illusion that the display is suspended in front of its supporting structure. Instead of attempting to disappear into the room, the television embraces its presence as an elegant piece of interior design.

It is an approach that acknowledges a simple reality. For many households, the television is the largest single object in the living room. Pretending it does not exist has become an increasingly difficult proposition.

Rather than hiding the technology, Samsung has elevated it into something worth displaying. It is a subtle but significant change in thinking, one that reflects a broader movement across consumer electronics. Products are no longer judged solely by their performance. Increasingly, they are expected to complement the spaces in which we live, work and entertain.

DESIGN WITH PURPOSE

Although these three products belong to completely different industries, they share remarkably similar values.

Each places the user experience ahead of visual spectacle. Each removes unnecessary complexity rather than adding it. Most importantly, each demonstrates that great design is not simply about creating something beautiful. It is about creating something that feels natural from the very first interaction.

That philosophy extends well beyond these individual products. Across automotive design, consumer electronics and luxury goods, manufacturers are recognising that customers increasingly



value authenticity over extravagance. Materials are chosen because they feel right. Interfaces are simplified because they improve usability. Shapes become cleaner because they age more gracefully.

In many respects, the best industrial design has become almost invisible. The less you notice the design itself, the more you appreciate how effortlessly the product fits into your life.

Awards inevitably celebrate individual products, but they also capture the mood of an era. This year's Red Dot winners suggest that we are entering a welcome new chapter in design, one where intelligence matters more than excess and confidence replaces complexity. The products that stand out are not those trying hardest to impress us. They are the ones quietly solving problems with elegance and restraint.

Whether it is a beautifully machined camera, a thoughtfully conceived electric motorcycle or a television that earns its place in the living room as an object of design, the message is unmistakable. The future belongs to products that work beautifully, look timeless and remind us that true luxury often lies in simplicity.



TIMELESS ELEGANCE **ON PAJE'S SHORES**

Vela Zanzibar Welcomes You

On Zanzibar's idyllic southeast coast, Vela Breeze and Vela Blu redefine contemporary island living with thoughtfully designed residences, world-class amenities, and a lifestyle inspired by Paje's natural beauty.



Nestled along the southeast coast of Zanzibar, the village of Paje has evolved into a captivating destination where traditional fishing life meets sophisticated international appeal. Here, Vela Zanzibar presents two exceptional residential developments – Vela Breeze and Vela Blu – that set a new benchmark for refined tropical living. Positioned just 700 metres apart on the same pristine stretch of coastline, these complexes offer a harmonious blend of contemporary design, sustainable luxury, and effortless connection to the Indian Ocean.

ISLAND LIVING, BEAUTIFULLY DESIGNED

Vela Breeze, the original development, lies just 300 metres from the shoreline. Spanning around 8,200 square metres, it features 108 residences ranging from intimate ocean-inspired studios to spacious two-bedroom homes with private plunge pools and elegant duplex penthouses crowned with rooftop terraces overlooking the sea. Vela Blu, situated 480 metres from the beach, comprises 97 residences arranged around a serene central courtyard. Its sculptural lagoon-style pool, with organic curves and lush planted islands, forms the heart of the complex, complemented by whitewashed façades, warm timber screens, and natural stone details that echo the island's architectural heritage.

Every residence is delivered fully furnished and finished to the highest standards. Interiors prioritise natural light, ventilation, and seamless indoor-outdoor living, with generous terraces and carefully framed views of the ocean or tropical gardens. Materials are chosen for both beauty and resilience in the maritime climate, featuring locally sourced coral stone and sustainably harvested hardwoods that develop character over time.

Life at Vela revolves around resort-style amenities that feel like natural extensions of home. Each complex boasts its own signature swimming pool: Vela Breeze's is framed by vibrant greenery, while Vela Blu's lagoon pool invites leisurely days of sunbathing on hardwood decks. On-site restaurants and bars showcase Zanzibari and international cuisine, with menus highlighting fresh local produce, from morning espresso to evening sundowners. A well-equipped gym offers functional training with garden views, while shaded outdoor co-working spaces provide reliable connectivity for those balancing productivity with paradise.

Lush tropical gardens weave through both developments, filled with heliconias, bromeliads, and mature palms. Winding stone pathways create peaceful walking routes and intimate seating areas. Professional concierge services attend to daily needs, while 24-hour security ensures peace of mind. Sustainability underpins every aspect of the development, with rooftop solar arrays harnessing abundant sunshine, water-efficient systems conserving resources, and thoughtful design minimising environmental impact while supporting local craftsmanship and labour.

A LIFESTYLE SHAPED BY ZANZIBAR

Paje itself enhances Vela's allure. The wide, shallow beach, with its turquoise







waters and steady trade winds, draws kitesurfers from around the world, yet retains an authentic village rhythm. Residents enjoy easy walks to Maalum Cave, local markets, and boutique cafés. Iconic experiences such as dining at The Rock Restaurant or exploring Stone Town are within easy reach, while Zanzibar International Airport provides seamless connections to destinations around the world.

The developments are the realisation of a passionate team with deep roots on the island. Drawing on experience gained from a previous successful project, they have refined every detail – from engineering excellence to architectural harmony – to create spaces that honour Zanzibar's spirit.

While Vela represents an attractive ownership opportunity in one of the island's most desirable locations, its true essence lies in the lifestyle it cultivates: one of serenity, connection to nature, and understated luxury.

Vela Zanzibar captures the very best of Paje – a place where barefoot elegance meets thoughtful design. For those seeking a sophisticated sanctuary on the Indian Ocean, these residences invite you to embrace island living at its most refined.

For more information, visit www.vela-zanzibar.com. For sales queries, contact Roelene Nell, Sales Manager and Dedicated Vela Agent at roelene@vela-zanzibar.com or +255 65 283 2881.



A POETIC **SANCTUARY**

Villa Lyla: Where Architecture Meets the Bahamian Soul

Nestled along a tranquil canal on the island of Nassau in The Bahamas, Villa Lyla emerges as far more than a private residence. It is a deeply considered architectural poem that celebrates proportion, layered forms, and an intimate, grounded dialogue with its tropical landscape.

Here, at the water's edge, Villa Lyla offers a peaceful retreat that masterfully balances formal rigour with an easy, climate-responsive way of life. Surrounded by lush, verdant gardens and granting direct access to private docks, the villa feels profoundly attuned to both its natural setting and its nautical surroundings, inviting the gentle rhythms of the Caribbean to shape everyday living.



Named in loving memory of the homeowner's late daughter, Villa Lyla carries a quiet yet palpable sense of reverence. This emotional foundation infuses the entire project with warmth and meaning. Designed by the acclaimed South African studio SAOTA, the house engages its environment with remarkable sensitivity. Expansive glazed apertures and generous overhangs dissolve the barriers between inside and out, allowing light, air, and tropical vegetation to flow freely through the spaces. In the balmy Bahamian climate, this openness encourages a seamless indoor-outdoor lifestyle, where the scent of salt air, the sound of lapping water, and the play of sunlight become integral to daily experience.

The villa is firmly embedded within its site. Courtyards, broad terraces, and thoughtfully planted edges blur the boundaries between built form and garden, creating a sense of continuity rather than separation. The architectural plan unfolds around a series of carefully composed axial relationships that draw the eye through the house and beyond – framing captivating sightlines towards the canal, the rich greenery, and the distant horizon. These deliberate vistas foster a feeling of expansiveness and calm, connecting inhabitants visually and emotionally to the landscape at every turn.

A defining element of the building's visual language is the use of oversized coral stone fins. Sculptural yet highly functional, these striking features modulate intense sunlight, frame views, and delineate thresholds between spaces. Their robust, textural presence adds depth and character to the façades while rooting the villa firmly in its coastal context. Complementing them is locally quarried coral stone, deployed in contrasting tones and finishes, which lends a tactile, almost geological connection to the island itself. The material palette feels both ancient and contemporary, honouring the Bahamas' natural heritage.

Beyond the main dwelling, the spatial composition extends gracefully. A separate pavilion provides a private guest suite and office, preserving seclusion for all while maintaining a consistent architectural language. Throughout the volumes, generous ceiling heights and a unified material palette create a cohesive, airy atmosphere. Natural light is abundant yet artfully controlled, shifting gently throughout the day to animate the interiors with subtle drama.

The interiors, masterfully realised by ARRCC, embody a restrained yet expressive elegance. Warm timber and stone finishes bring a sense of







tactile comfort, while large-format glazing continuously draws the outside landscape inward. A thoughtfully curated collection of works by Bahamian artists, including pieces by the late John Beadle, infuses the home with a vivid sense of place and cultural identity. These artworks converse beautifully with bespoke furnishings, such as a sculptural dining table by Nada Debs and a delicate pendant light by Martin Doller. Together, they craft a layered, textural environment that enhances the architecture without competing with it.

The landscape design by Raymond Jungles plays an equally vital role, transforming gardens and courtyards into true outdoor rooms. Planted with resilient native species and enriched with water features and artworks – including a prominent sculpture by Lionel Smit – these spaces are integral to the architecture. They provide moments of retreat, transition, and quiet reflection. Far from mere decoration, the planting strategy is ecologically responsive, supporting year-round growth in the humid, coastal conditions and reinforcing the villa's sustainable ethos.

Conceived as both a cherished family home and a personal haven, Villa Lyla achieves a rare harmony of architectural clarity and material sensitivity. It thoughtfully navigates the interplay between shelter and openness, permanence and lightness. In doing so, it presents a quietly confident vision for tropical living – one that feels enduring, contextually rooted, and profoundly connected to both place and memory. In the gentle embrace of the Bahamian landscape, Villa Lyla stands as an inspiring example of how thoughtful design can elevate daily life into something timeless and restorative.

*by **saota***



A NEW CHAPTER **FOR AN OLD FAVOURITE**

Volkswagen Caravelle eHybrid



The latest Volkswagen Caravelle is larger, quieter and considerably more sophisticated than any of its predecessors and, for the first time in South Africa, electrified. At R1,794,000, it also sits a long way from the utilitarian roots of the original Bus. Yet perhaps its greatest strength is that it doesn't try to emulate an SUV. In a market increasingly dominated by large premium SUVs, the Caravelle offers something refreshingly different.

Volkswagen's Bus has an especially deep connection with South Africa. More than seven decades ago, the first locally produced Volksie Bus rolled out of what is now Volkswagen Group Africa's Kariega plant, beginning a relationship that would see generations of the Transporter become woven into the country's automotive landscape. The much-loved T3 remained in local production until 2002, while successive generations steadily evolved from practical people-movers into increasingly refined passenger vehicles.

The Caravelle name itself first appeared in 1983, when Volkswagen introduced a more passenger-focused and better-equipped derivative of the Transporter. It marked the beginning of the Caravelle as a premium family and leisure vehicle.

That evolution continued through the T4, T5 and T6 generations, with the T6.1 becoming a familiar sight on South African roads. By 2020, more than 10,000 examples had been sold locally since its 2015 introduction, underlining just how firmly established the Caravelle had become. Now comes the T7, and it feels as though the Caravelle has finally reached maturity.

PREMIUM WITHOUT THE BADGE TAX

At almost R1.8 million, the new Caravelle occupies rarefied territory. However, context is everything.

This isn't simply a Kombi with a few luxury touches. South Africa receives the Caravelle exclusively with Volkswagen's new plug-in hybrid drivetrain and 4MOTION all-wheel drive, while the standard specification reads more like that of a premium luxury vehicle.

Inside are seven individually adjustable seats mounted on rails, with the three rear

by ***bernie hellberg jr*** */ photography by* ***volkswagen group africa***



seats removable when additional luggage space is required. A multifunction table provides a genuinely practical focal point for the cabin, while electric sliding doors and a powered tailgate make everyday use remarkably convenient.

Technology is equally comprehensive. A 10-inch infotainment system and Digital Cockpit Pro come as standard, alongside three-zone climate control, 30-colour ambient lighting, IQ.Light LED Matrix headlights, adaptive cruise control, Park Assist, a rear-view camera and an extensive suite of driver assistance systems. The 13-speaker Harman Kardon audio system is another welcome inclusion.

The result is a cabin that feels far removed from the Caravelle's commercial-vehicle origins, offering an ambience that comfortably rivals many premium SUVs.

CLEVER ELECTRIFICATION

The drivetrain is arguably the Caravelle's most fascinating feature. A



passengers on relatively short journeys. Plug it in overnight and many daily commutes can be completed without the petrol engine ever starting. Longer journeys remain effortless, with the combustion engine eliminating the range concerns associated with a fully electric vehicle.

It is an impressively well-executed application of plug-in hybrid technology, with the transition between electric and petrol propulsion occurring almost imperceptibly. The additional electric assistance also gives the Caravelle unexpectedly effortless overtaking performance for a vehicle weighing well over two tonnes.

Charging is supported at up to 11 kW on AC, while DC fast charging is also available to make longer journeys more convenient. Maximum towing capacity is rated at 1,570 kg.

COMFORT COMES NATURALLY

For me, though, the Caravelle's biggest surprise isn't its technology but the way it rides.

There remains something wonderfully familiar about sitting high behind the wheel of a Volkswagen Bus, yet the refinement delivered by the new Caravelle would have seemed unimaginable in the Volksie Buses of my childhood. The ride is supple without becoming floaty, and the suspension deals exceptionally well with the imperfect surfaces that characterise so many South African roads.

A particular test came during our drive to Palala Hotel and Spa in Limpopo, where severely rutted gravel roads provided the only access to our overnight destination. Some sections were rough enough to make me wonder whether the Caravelle would emerge with every nut and bolt still in place. Unsurprisingly, it did.

Despite its generous dimensions, the Caravelle feels remarkably easy to drive.





The steering is light, visibility excellent and body control impressive for such a tall vehicle. At highway speeds, wind and tyre noise are exceptionally well suppressed, reinforcing its credentials as a refined long-distance tourer.

There was, however, one notable blemish during the launch drive. The brake pedal feels softer than it should and, at times, its response lacks consistency. In a vehicle of this size and weight, particularly one capable of carrying seven occupants, I would have preferred a firmer, more predictable relationship between pedal input and braking performance. It never detracts significantly from the overall experience, but it does feel slightly at odds with the Caravelle's otherwise polished character.

VERDICT

So, who buys a Caravelle at R1,794,000? Most likely someone who has deliberately decided they don't want another premium SUV.

That is perhaps the Caravelle's greatest appeal. It offers the space and versatility of a dedicated people-carrier, the refinement expected of a luxury vehicle, and the quiet satisfaction of arriving in something rather more distinctive than yet another BMW X7, Mercedes-Benz GLS or Land Rover Defender 130 waiting outside the school gates.

It also occupies an interesting niche beneath the Mercedes-Benz V-Class and EQV, with recent local comparisons placing the Volkswagen roughly R500,000 below its Mercedes-Benz rivals.

Viewed in that context, the Caravelle presents a compelling proposition. It combines generous standard equipment, genuine versatility, premium refinement and an impressively sophisticated plug-in hybrid drivetrain, all while preserving the unmistakable character that has defined Volkswagen's Bus for generations.

The Caravelle may have grown up, but it hasn't forgotten where it came from. For those of us who remember the old Volksie Bus with affection, there is something deeply satisfying in discovering that the magic has endured. It simply arrives these days with a Harman Kardon sound system, Matrix headlights and, fittingly, a charging cable.


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HEART OF THE BEAST

Cast: Brad Pitt, JK Simmons & Anna Lambe
Director: David Ayer

After a harrowing plane crash, Special Forces officer James Belmont and his combat dog, Odin, find themselves stranded deep in the Alaskan wilderness. Together, they are forced into a brutal fight for survival against the elements.



GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER

Jill and Ted adore their New York brownstone the way others adore their children. They have carefully, expensively, made every inch of it their own. It reflects who they are, their status and tastes. With the grand mahogany staircase and state-of-the-art kitchen, it is the stuff of glossy magazines and real-estate dreams. It is their sanctuary. So, when Ted's inheritance runs out and he makes a bad investment, they panic. How can they protect their beloved home and enviable lifestyle? The answer is obvious. Or at least, it is obvious to Jill and Ted. The death of one wealthy family member could solve all their problems. Together, they will get away with murder as long as they trust each other. And as long as there are no surprises.



SACRIFICE

Cast: Anya Taylor-Joy, Chris Evans & Salma Hayek
Director: Romain Gavras

During a star-studded charity gala brimming with celebrities and billionaires, a movie star in the midst of an existential crisis is taken hostage by a radical warrior and her devoted followers. As the night descends into chaos, both an inward journey and an outward adventure ensue, where the line between performance and belief, salvation and sacrifice, begins to blur.



Yama
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Yama Asian Eatery is Franschhoek's premier sushi restaurant situated on Franschhoek's main road. The team, guided by Ryan Shell, aims to create a calm space where locals can fully relax and enjoy themselves with anything from a quick lunch to a full dinner spread. The eatery offers a high-quality sushi menu accompanied by an Asian-themed à la carte menu using fresh seasonal ingredients.

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Photo © Mia van Heerden

YOUR AI **WELLNESS COACH**

AI is Transforming Wellness from Generic Advice Into Personal Guidance

There was a time when wellness came neatly packaged. Drink eight glasses of water a day, aim for 10,000 steps and remember to eat your vegetables. It was sensible advice, but it was also designed for everyone, which meant it was rarely perfect for anyone.

In our increasingly tech-driven world, wellness is becoming deeply personal, and artificial intelligence is accelerating that transformation.

Rather than relying on broad recommendations, a new generation of wellness platforms analyses information gathered from smartwatches, fitness trackers, sleep monitors and even blood tests to create health insights tailored to the individual. Instead of simply telling you to exercise more, these systems can identify that your sleep quality has declined over the past fortnight, suggest that elevated stress may be affecting your recovery, and recommend a lighter training day or an earlier bedtime.

The result is wellness advice that feels less like guesswork and more like having a knowledgeable coach who understands your body.

BEYOND COUNTING STEPS

Wearable technology has evolved dramatically in recent years. Modern devices monitor everything from heart rate variability and blood oxygen levels to sleep cycles, stress and recovery, generating an extraordinary amount of personal health data. The challenge has never been collecting that information, it's knowing what to do with it.

This is where AI is making the biggest difference. Rather than presenting endless charts and graphs, intelligent software identifies patterns most users would never notice. It translates complex data into practical suggestions, helping people make informed lifestyle decisions instead of simply chasing numbers. Industry analysts expect this combination of AI, wearables and voluntary health testing to play an increasingly important role in preventive healthcare over the coming decade.

PREVENTION, NOT PERFECTION

Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of this trend is its shift in philosophy. Wellness is gradually moving away from the pursuit of perfection and towards prevention.

The emphasis is no longer on achieving impossible fitness goals or maintaining an unbroken streak of healthy habits. Instead, personalised AI helps users identify subtle changes before they become larger problems, encouraging sustainable improvements rather than dramatic overhauls.

That could mean recognising the early signs of burnout, detecting declining sleep quality during periods of stress, or highlighting recovery patterns after illness or intensive travel. The technology does not replace healthcare professionals, but it can provide valuable context that supports better day-to-day decisions.

THE HUMAN TOUCH STILL MATTERS

For all its sophistication, artificial intelligence remains exactly that, a tool. No algorithm can replace a doctor's intuition, a qualified nutritionist's guidance, or a trusted fitness coach's encouragement.

Its real value lies in making wellness feel more personal than ever before. By filtering vast amounts of data into meaningful, individual insights, AI is helping people understand not only how healthy they are today, but how they can stay healthier tomorrow.

Perhaps that is the greatest wellness trend of all. Moving beyond generic advice and towards a future where good health is as individual as the people pursuing it.

*by **bernie hellberg jr** / photography by **unsplash.com***



A FEAST FOR THE LENS

Serving up the World's Best Food Photographs

A striking image captured in a Soviet-era sanatorium in Tajikistan claimed top honours at the 2026 World Food Photography Awards earlier this year, while South Africa also had reason to celebrate with a standout result on the global stage.

British photographer Jo Kearney was named the Overall Winner and received the £5,000 prize for A Woman Eats in the Canteen of the Soviet-era Sanatorium. The photograph, which also won the Fortnum & Mason Food at the Table category, depicts a solitary woman enjoying a simple breakfast in the historic Khoja Obi Garm sanatorium, where guests still follow traditional wellness treatments and are served wholesome Tajik meals.

Judges praised the image for its emotional depth and quiet dignity. Caroline Kenyon, Founder of the World Food Photography Awards, described it as a photograph that tells a deeply human story through subtle details, from the woman's expression to the carefully balanced composition.

South Africa was represented with distinction by photographer Louhani Els, who was Highly Commended in the Cake Award category for Food Altar - Sardines and my Dad. Inspired by Tori Derricotte's poem My Dad and Sardines, the evocative image uses a damaged cake alongside sardines, crackers and onions to explore grief, remembrance and reconciliation between a daughter and her late father.

The awards attracted nearly 9,000 entries from more than 50 countries, with winners across 27 categories announced at London's Mall Galleries by acclaimed Italian chef Gennaro Contaldo. The judging panel included celebrated food photographer David Loftus, South African Michelin-starred chef Jan Hendrik van der Westhuizen, Jamie Oliver, Fortnum & Mason CEO Tom Athron and Rein Skullerud of the World Food Programme.

Entries for the 2027 competition open in September 2026, continuing to celebrate photography's ability to tell powerful stories through food. *For more info, visit www.worldfoodphotographyawards.com.*



A Woman Eats in the Canteen of the Soviet-era Sanatorium
Jo Kearney/World Food Photography Awards sponsored by Tenderstem®





Food Altar - Sardines and my Dad
Louhani Els/World Food Photography Awards
sponsored by Tenderstem®



Chhath Puja Offerings
Indigo Larmour/World Food Photography Awards
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In the Eye of the Kvevri
Luke Carver/World Food Photography Awards
sponsored by Tenderstem®





Raw Pairing No.1
Styling: Sarah Ghijselinck | Photo: Sandra
Declercq/World Food Photography Awards
sponsored by Tenderstem®



Stacked Morning
Styling: Sarah Ghijselinck | Photo: Sandra Declercq/
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The Final Touch
Michela Balboni and Federico Borella/
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