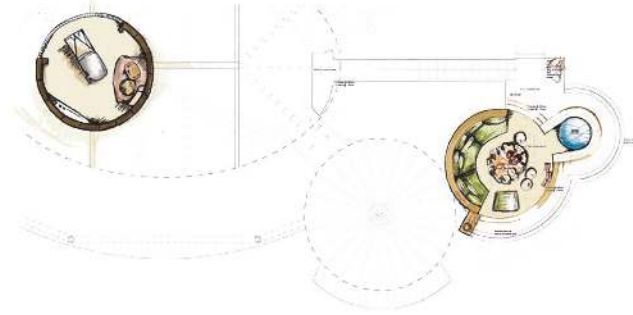
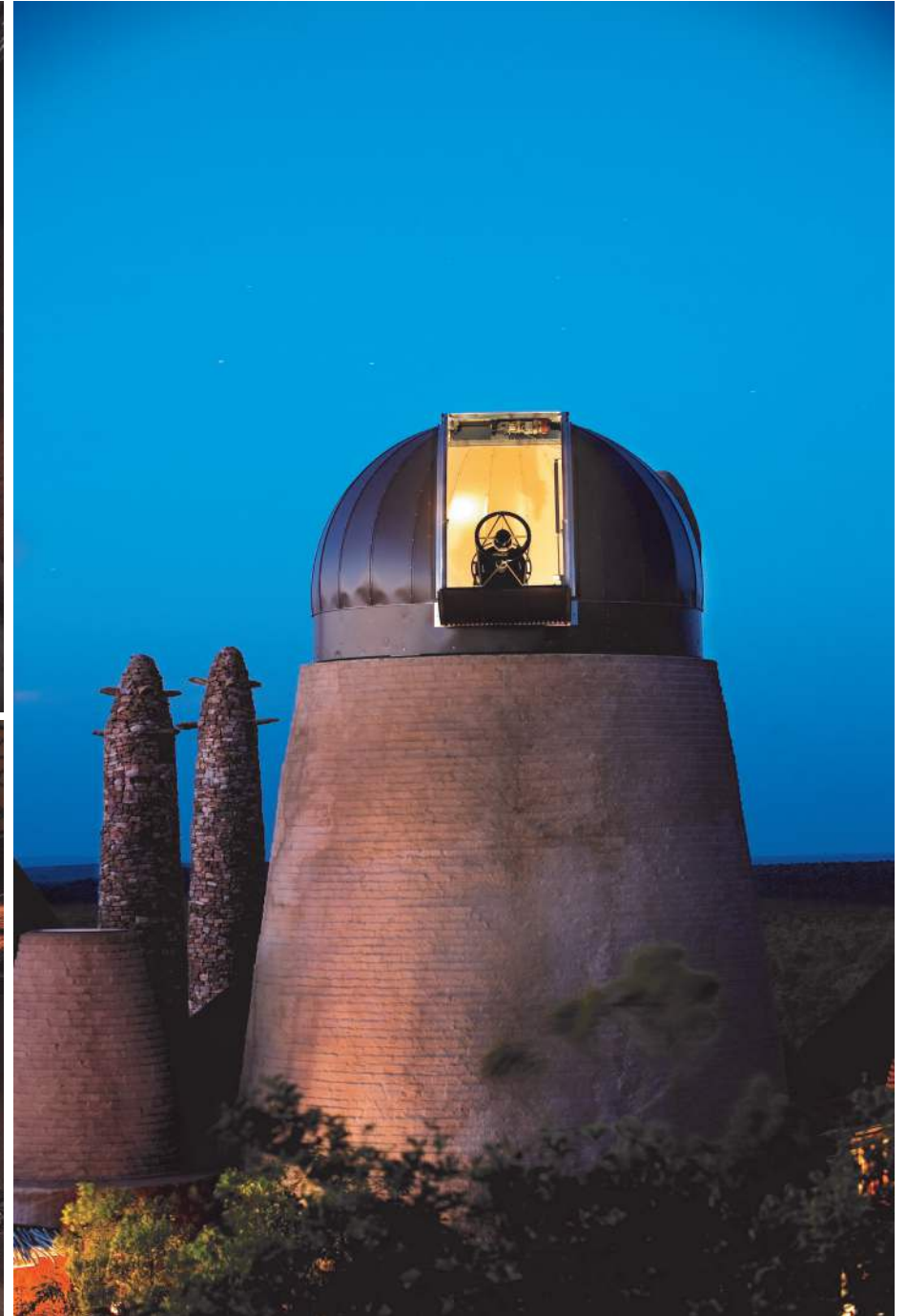


LEOBO OBSERVATORY, A DARK SKY RESERVE NESTLED IN THE WATERBERG BIOSHPERE





Kate Coleridge from Handpicked Africa tells her tale of Leobo through the eyes of a guest in a mesmerizing encounter revealing a truly magical experience where the celestial sky is not the limit..



-"If you can dream it we can arrange it"

WORDS BY: KATE COLERIDGE

WHEN YOU THINK OF AFRICA, YOU THINK OF SAFARIS; CRUISING ACROSS THE PLAINS, ANTELOPE LEAPING AND A HERD OF ELEPHANT CROSSING THE DUSTY RED ROAD IN FRONT OF YOU. HOWEVER THERE IS MORE TO AFRICA THAN SITTING IN A GAME VIEWING VEHICLE SEARCHING OUT THE ANIMALS, UNCOVER A WORLD BEYOND THE HORIZON WHERE THE STARS ARE SO CLOSE YOU CAN ALMOST REACH OUT AND TOUCH THEM...

Rory Sweet is a British entrepreneur who had an idea to re-write the Africa model. Where many African lodges focus on safari and conservation, Rory decided that the backbone of his property should instead be science and, quite simply, good honest fun. What he has created in South Africa is the perfect solution to après-safari. For families or groups of friends who love Africa and the great outdoors, but have been on the world's best safaris already, Leobo is inspired.

A few hours north of Johannesburg, deep in wilderness of the Waterberg biosphere, is The Leobo Private Reserve – home to the magnificent Leobo Observatory. Built as Rory's family escape, this destination caters to the perceptive traveller in search of absolute privacy, relaxation, and a lot of adventurous fun across all generations. It was designed by the award-winning couple Silvio Rech and Lesley Carstens who were responsible for the stunning beach lodge North Island in The Seychelles. The Leobo Observatory is a masterpiece that surpasses any previous project the dynamic duo have undertaken. Combining awe-inspiring science with contemporary African elegance, this family holiday home cannot fail to impress, excite and intrigue anyone fortunate enough to visit.

There are just 4 bedrooms in the Observatory but only a short walk away are 8 guest chalets, ideal for friends or staff to stay in. The architects have developed a signature which enhances the natural forms, shapes, textures and colours of Africa. Leobo highlights the African experience, and the result is almost a sand castle mould that perfectly compliments its undulating and sunburnt surroundings.

The house consists of a cellular conglomerate that is true to African structural design, like huts around a kraal. As each part unfolds, the visitor is filled with a sense of wonder which reflects Rory and Lizzy's vibrant personalities, and love of adventure. All materials are sourced locally from the wild. In the bedrooms, the huge 4 poster beds are hand-made from leadwood trees naturally knocked down by elephant, and the rooms have a reduced colour-palette which again emphasizes the distilled African style of Rech and Carstens. The subdued hues of soft cerulean blues, straw and stone almost lend a sense of humility to the space, not wanting to compete with the strong, harsh colours synonymous with the African bush.

And then there is the Observatory dome. The Waterberg has almost zero light pollution so the night sky view is world class. Never doing anything by halves, Rory has created the ultimate viewing experience from a research grade, fully automated, revolving Observatory dome and 20inch telescope. If that's not exciting enough, he has recently installed a solar scope which, through multiple hydrogen alpha filters, allows high magnification viewing of the surface of the sun. Leobo offers it's guests an unpatrolled opportunity and perspective which would otherwise almost certainly not be possible.

The Observatory is a feast for all the senses and a powerful blow to the mind. All this while achieving it's aim of adding to the natural beauty of The Waterberg rather than interrupting it. Where else do you dine under a hippo skeleton chandelier before marveling at the African night sky through a research grade, 20-inch telescope? Outside the house is equally mesmerizing. The Leobo Private Reserve is essentially a 23,000 acre private playground equipped with all the James Bond toys. Wat could be more fun than that? The reserve itself is dramatically scenic, with open plains, African wildlife, mountains, rivers, gorges, forests, clear water lakes, even a white sand river-beach deep in the ravine accessed spectacularly by helicopter...

Unlike anywhere else you might go on holiday, Leobo doesn't give you daily activities, time constraints, or limits. You and your friends are welcomed in to Rory's home and enthusiastically shown the time of your life. Energetic and charming hosts Taryn and Tom look after you in the house as privileged friends of Rory, while Chris and Quintus – Leobo's field guides – will take you out to join them in their daily wild adventures. Guests find themselves jumping off quad bikes to catching bass in the lake, on to horses to ride alongside giraffe and zebra, or suddenly being whisked away by a helicopter to have sundowners on the mountain top.

The activities roll in to one another seamlessly according to the enthusiasm and particular interests of the guests. They can do whatever they like and as much of it as they can. Leobo encourages it's visitors to get out in to the bush and really experience Africa in a fun, relaxed way, rather than merely looking at it from a vehicle. The motto there is 'If you can dream it, we can arrange it.'

The James Bond toys on the reserve include racing quad bikes, dirt bikes, mountain bikes, a Polaris buggy, horses, thermal imaging equipment for night time game viewing, rifles, crossbows, paintball guns, kayaks, fishing equipment, paddle boards, you name it!

The emphasis here is on a personal experience as opposed to a more commercial one found in any other luxury hotel in the world. The Observatory affords the guest the opportunity to get involved in exciting escapades, like darting a buffalo from a helicopter to treat its injury, fighting a bush fire with the rangers or tracking a leopard without any limits on time. The sheer freedom of exploring this barely touched natural world and doing whatever the spur of the moment offers is exhilarating in itself. This is what sets Leobo aside and how it turns a luxury adventurous holiday into mind-blowing once in a lifetime experience.

But Leobo doesn't have to be the once in a lifetime dream. The modest rate encourages guests to book the villa for a week or 10 days every year, each time bringing more members of the family to experience it with them. Rory has 6 children of his own so the house fully caters for all ages. There is a small team of staff who

can be as hands on or discreet as you like. A private chef is flown in from Cape Town and will cook whatever style of food you choose, and in all sorts of wonderful spots around the reserve. My favorite is the pizza oven built on a deck above the hippo lake. As the sun goes down the hippos come out to graze while you are safely sipping your sundowner above them.

Whether you are a group of young friends celebrating not having children, or two families looking to entertain your many children,

Leobo delivers every time. It is an island of phenomenal natural beauty, completely private, and seemingly cut off from the rest of the country. From the moment you arrive your spirit ignites and two things tend to occur; a yearning to live in Africa, and an intrigue to meet the man responsible for such a creation as Leobo. Little hints to his character, like fancy dress space suits and jumpsuits or North Pole expedition photos, lead you to instantly like him and from then on you feel privileged to share in his world.

And why can you have this opportunity? Because Rory is passionate about the reserve that he owns and loves, and says in his own words "it is my favorite place in the world and I want others to enjoy it too." And he really means it. His enthusiasm for sharing the experience with others resonates around Leobo, its staff and its atmosphere and it is quite clear that this is no commercial enterprise but rather a personal invitation to enjoy something a little different.



From being dropped off by helicopter for sundowners on an impossibly remote kopje, sipping cocktails in the roof-top Jacuzzi, to helicopter paintballing (yes, you heard me correctly) Leobo is certainly unique. There is simply nowhere else like it in the world.

