

The new Four Seasons is a Joburg hotel for all seasons

By  Brian Berkman

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The Westcliff under Orient-Express Hotels, later rebranded as Belmond, has long been a favourite place to stay in Johannesburg, so I was especially keen to experience it in its third iteration as a [Four Seasons' hotel](#).



Orient-Express saved the doomed luxury 1997 property development and opened their first Johannesburg hotel to join their Safari camps in Botswana and Cape Town's iconic The Mount Nelson Hotel. The hilltop development had a number of logistical challenges which were well dealt with by a permanent convoy of golf carts whizzing guests around the hotel and up and down the steep incline.

Four Seasons has made a dramatic new solution which is wonderfully functional and takes the pressure off the fleet of carts. The black-glass lift shaft now more easily takes guests to and from the main restaurant deck, some meters elevated from the hotel's reception.

Pooling resources

The other iconic feature was a rim-flow pool that gave one the sensation of being able to float out of the pool into the lush green Johannesburg Zoo gardens, at the base of the hill. That pool has been replaced by two others, a brilliant lap pool as part of the spa and fitness complex and another, family-focussed pool, under the Jacaranda Hill events space.



The most obvious and welcome change is the vibe or, more accurately described, "energy" that has Joburg's young and upwardly mobile set, making the Four Seasons Westcliff a destination for conspicuous consumption. This palpable feeling makes for a more pleasing guest experience too. There is something seductive about being part of a collective where people are there to not only have a good time but also want to be seen doing so, a bit like Paris' Hotel Costes in the good days.

Another new addition is a private wining and dining space called The Cellar Door under what was previously the swimming



pool. This 18-seater, exclusive use facility, has a table created from a single spectacular piece of timber. It must have been some tree.

Decoration in the suites is kept to an unfussy minimum with just two show cushions on the bed. These were hand-embroidered and made by local artisans. I really like not having to wait for evening turn-down if I feel like a snooze or to take time removing multiple scatter cushions and throws from a bed before using it. This pared-down style is more in line with what contemporary travellers want.

There are 375 pieces of original art around the hotel and lengths of African fabrics in the stairwells juxtapose perfectly with the wide striped carpets.

Weighty water

Under the "porte cochère" there is a water feature with a mesmerising sculpture of faces, best seen once photographed. It was made from concrete and mining drill waste (perfectly Johannesburg, in my view). The mining core was extracted from local platinum and gold mines. The "faces" (excluding the bases they stand on) weigh in at one ton each and were so heavy they had to be installed with a pulley and scaffolding system.



The restaurant offering has been thoroughly remodeled and design consultancy Blacksheep, who have a celebrity client roster that includes Jamie Oliver, led the design of the new Views and Flames restaurants. Most notable are the radial stone flooring in the bar at Views which consists of more than 3,000 individually cut and hand-laid pieces that were specially brought in by an Italian marble specialist while the geometric floor tiles in Flames restaurant were inspired by traditional local basket weaving patterns.

Fair-trade bathroom amenities

In our suite, we had a selection of Terres D'Afrique bathroom amenities which I have not seen before. I like that they are local, fair-trade rated products with African botanicals. I also found some delicious Italian Etro soaps which are used in a number of other Four Seasons Hotels too.

Orient-Express Hotels pioneered brilliant open wardrobes which have plenty place to store opened suitcases as well as loads of hanging space available which is a real boon for those of us on short stays who don't want to unpack an entire case of luggage - I am thrilled that Four Seasons Westcliff has kept these.

It is a little difficult to admit that I actually prefer Four Seasons Westcliff despite having really loved it under Belmond. The street-level Westcliff Deli is a winner and succeeds in turning the hotel into an accessible and pop-in destination. The spa, gym, and pool (near the Deli) have the kind of amenities expected from a Four Seasons property and digital lockers ready with plush robes and non-slip sandals for use in the wet areas. I also liked the ice-shaving machine which turns a standard sauna and steam into something quite special.



Rooms are geared to enjoying one's own media as much as hotel provided options with desk-height charging points and connections via HDMI and other media inputs to the wide-screen TV and surround-sound system. We especially enjoyed viewing the photos from our recent bush safari on the big screen.

The hotel is offering two pop-up experiences this festive season with Chef Jan Hendrik, South Africa's first Michelin-starred chef for his Jan Restaurant in France, who will cook with Westcliff executive chef Dirk Gieselmann in the Cellar Door space.

I look forward to Four Seasons opening other hotels in South Africa.

ABOUT BRIAN BERKMAN

Brian Berkman can be contacted on 083-441-8765 or email Brian@BrianBerkman.com.

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