

Out of this world at The Last Word

By  Brian Berkman

29 Oct 2013

"That's the biggest piece of pink quartz I've ever seen," said Trisha Bam, my former editor and now head of communications at a Cape university.

I'd noticed the rock that acts as a centrepiece for the sunken pool and fabulous lawns and garden at The Last Word, Constantia but never paid attention to it. Now, the others who were joining us for drinks in the sunny lounge chimed in: "Look at it - that must bring lots of luck" while another, slightly less esoterically-minded friend remarked: "And cost a fortune."



Nice quartz, nice setting.

There is no shortage of talking points at The Last Word, a collection of three properties in Constantia, Kommetjie and Franschhoek that have been converted into intimate guest suites. Like the massive quartz, The Last Word believes in the grand gesture.

A risky proposition

We have happily stayed at all of The Last Word properties over the years. From the first moment that I mentioned to them that in today's multi-cultural world having His and Hers-branded items was a risky proposition, they have since always had His and His headrests for the bath when we visit. It is a tiny detail but you wouldn't believe how many hotels still have a welcome note addressed to Mr and Mrs Berkman.

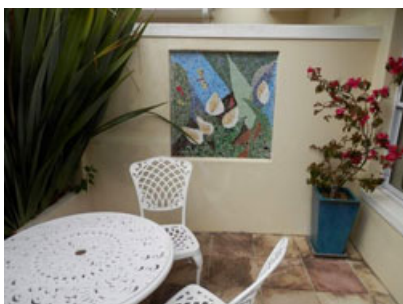
Although priced at a premium, there is a lot of added value that you pay extra for at other hotels. The mini bar, for example, is with their compliments and they ask ahead of your stay what you'd like in it. They also want you to treat their property as if it were your own which is why we always invite friends to join us for drinks when we stay with them.

Marvellous mosaics

Like the big quartz they're big on personal space and spa-sized bathrooms. There is a huge ball-and-claw Victorian-style bath and the travertine tiles and cream-coloured carpets are heated. Decorative mosaics are a trademark of most of these properties and at The Last Word, Constantia they form the backdrop of the family-sized shower in a local version of Van Gogh's *Starry, Starry Night*. There are also mosaics of an arum lily and of a sun bird in the private garden directly outside the suite's sitting room.



Time to luxuriate for a while.



An example of the mosaics for which The Last Word is well known.

While it is all about understated luxury with comfortable but quality furnishings (and an amazing bed) this is sort of place where you feel welcome to put your feet up on the couch in front of the big-screen TV. Equally understated is the superb service for which The Last Word Constantia was recently awarded. In September this year they received the Lilizela Tourism Award.

Exceptional performance

According to their press statement, the judges were looking for - and found - exceptional performance and delivery that sets global standards, and contributes to

international-destination competitiveness in the accommodation service division. "Like many establishments in the country, all three The Last Word Intimate Hotels are in picturesque locations and all are draped in understated elegance; so what sets us apart?" asks Nicky Coenen, group general manager. "We focus on irresistible, charming, - yet discreet - hospitality," she says. "It's thrilling to know that we've been recognised for what we believe in most."

I must agree with their commendations. Manager Sam who welcomed us referred to our tennis game when we stayed at another of their properties more than a year and a half earlier. Whether Sam has an excellent memory or, more likely, an excellent CRM programme to record guest interactions for future recall, is irrelevant as I still felt as if I was someone that mattered to them and not simply a customer.

And manager Tessa, who is serenely attentive and charming, strikes the perfect balance between being sufficiently interested in your activities to see if she can recommend what to do, or where to eat, but not so much to find her nosy or interfering. We booked a table at the neighbouring Peddlers on the Bend ourselves but as I mentioned this to Tessa she offered to reconfirm our booking for us and, the next day at breakfast, enquired if we had had a good meal. All of this contributes to feeling like a Last Word property is your own home (or at least that of a favourite and very wealthy uncle).



Room for two - and more mosaics.

The low-down on High Tea



Pillow talk.

High Tea as they incorrectly call it is offered to all guests in a morning and afternoon sitting but is also available, with advanced notice, to non-resident guests.

What makes staying at The Last Word an absolute no-brainer is that it will cost the same, or less depending on their many special offers which includes up to 50% discount for last-minute bookings, than staying at a four-star chain hotel. Not only is a sensational breakfast and free internet included in the rate but, and this I guarantee, you will become a fan for life and return at the earliest next opportunity.

Visit: www.thelastword.co.za

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