

AtholPlace is sensually stylish

 By [Brian Berkman](#)

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When your chef has 'live to cook' tattooed down his forearm, the expectation of something delicious to eat is already set. Add to that reports that he worked in starred restaurants in Europe and at Ellerman House in Cape Town, Omar Koenen - the recently appointed head chef at AtholPlace Hotel & Villa in Johannesburg - has a pretty high bar to clear.

Only Relais & Châteaux in Jozi

AtholPlace Hotel & Villa is a stylish nine-suite hotel set in an elegant garden in Sandton's leafy Athol, just five minutes from the Sandton City shopping hub and 40 minutes from Johannesburg's OR Tambo Airport. It is the only Johannesburg member of the prestigious Relais & Châteaux hotel organisation.



Included in the Morukuru Family are bush villas in Madikwe Reserve and villas in the De Hoop Nature Reserve near the most southern tip of the continent. There is a four-bedroomed, exclusive-use villa in the precinct which is perfect for family or friends travelling together who want additional privacy.



Wild luxury at Madikwe Private Game Reserve

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We loved the spacious upstairs suite in the main building with its large double-vanity bathroom with separate loo, tub, and stand-alone shower and the lookout over the gardens and pool from our balcony. Bathroom amenities are from the top local brand Africology but dispensed in AtholPlace branded bottles.

The La Grange look rich in texture and scale

The interiors are really interesting and something which sets this property apart. Originally owned by Sumari Krige of the famed La Grange interior design business in the Western Cape's Franschhoek, the current owners, Dutch nationals with a number of other hospitality products in South Africa, commissioned her to refurbish and upgrade the property. I loved the playful scale of things like the narrow almost floor-to-ceiling framed mirror leaning against the wall or the chrome luggage

trunks piled on top of one another as if ready to board the Titanic but used here as a bed-side table.



We also enjoyed the textures and we found ourselves wanting to spend an inordinate amount of time in the room because of its sensual and luxuriant comfort.

The outdoor pool is temperature controlled and there is a small but well-equipped gym in what was the pool house. There is also a basket of the pool and other toys which speaks to the Morukuru Family ethos - the guest experience is designed to make you and your 'family' feel entirely at home. Inter-generations travelling together, a couple with children and even people travelling alone are all treated to the Morukuru experience which includes having your visit and experiences tailored just for you.

Dutch roots with a strong focus on special local produce

This translates into the cuisine too. Chef Koenen is quoted as asking "What's more beautiful than making people happy with food?" I have to agree. During our dinner, two amuse bouche were served before our starter: the first, a dream of smoked tomato with a parmesan foam and the second perhaps a nod to the chef's Dutch roots, a perfect sip of pea soup. Items ordered from the small menu were equally delicious but it was the cheese, a new focus for Chef Koenen and at an R150 supplement, that really stood out as exceptional.



Not only does he cut the cheeses himself ahead of presenting your order but then details the selection at the table. As a cheese lover myself, I was thrilled to experience so many new South African cheeses. Most restaurants, even the top ones, are a source from similar suppliers so it is rare to eat in a restaurant and taste different products. I'm certain this chef will continue to source special ingredients and it won't be too long before the dining-out literati are complaining about the fully-booked restaurant. Best you book now.

AtholPlace Restaurant is open to the public daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

morukuru.com/places/atholplacehotel

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