

Fabulous has a new home

 By [Brian Berkman: contributing editor, travel](#) ^{25 May 2012}

When The Alphen, Constantia was built in 1772 the owners had no idea that, over three hundred years later, sophisticates would be sipping cocktails in the garden's Rose Bar or that the sweeping lawns would be festooned in jaunty red, blue and white striped couches.



Just the place to relax.

This newest revamp of The Alphen Hotel is, to my eye, the best. Where previous attempts to enliven and refurbish the historic property left a discordant air, this incarnation seems so right that even the estate ghosts will drink a toast to its prosperity. Seasoned restaurateur Paul Kovensky has always had a gimlet eye for décor and design. Here he has brought in the design nous of Stefan Antoni & Associates and together they have created a hotel that is entirely respectful of its heritage yet fabulously plush and elegantly smart.

Free Wi-Fi? Wi-Not!

As much as I liked The Boer and Brit, the English-pub style bar, The Le Belle Café with its light timber look, blonde leather and deli feel that replaces it is much more user friendly. The giant hearth is still there and on a chilly morning, the best spot to breakfast in Constantia is at the long table near the fire. The operators also know that having Wi-Fi everywhere is now a necessity. The idea that Wi-Fi is an optional extra today is as ludicrous as asking people to pay for hot water or air-conditioning.

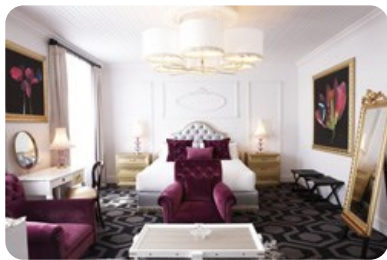


The best spot to breakfast.

What Kovensky did so successfully with Pepenero, his Mouille Point Italian restaurant, was to pitch the menu at an affordable, value-for-money level and pepper it with low-priced specials. At Five Rooms, The Alphen restaurant, so named for its five discrete venues, the menu is well-priced for a five-star Constantia property with mains ranging in price between R95 for pasta and R170 for venison with desserts priced from R40. I love the long table dining room with its tasselled chandeliers that invokes a gold-rush bordellos in a room

with some of the finest antique furniture and art collected.

The only thing missing is Sophia



Comfort of the highest standard - without sacrificing its heritage.

The Alphen has been prized for its hospitality since it was first built with a separate building intended just for guests. Knowing what guests want may be in its DNA but it is a pity that more hotels don't routinely build two bathrooms, or at the very least, two toilets in every suite. Our suite also had the luxury of an entrance hall along with a dressing table and gold-leafed mirror that would be right at home in front of Sophia Loren. Blue-bloods will be comforted by the Royal Blue bathroom tiles and elaborate gilded mirrors while those of us who like to languish in a bathroom will enjoy the towel-covered comfy chair and scented candles.



When the original owners built The Alphen three centuries ago, little did they know that today it would be a top hotel.

As thickly applied as the luxe is, nothing is superfluous - this is not some gilded glamour puss way past her sell-by date but a smart, Constantia lady where breeding and good taste have defined the new normal.

Not surprising that *Conde Nast Traveler* has The Alphen on its 2012 Hotlist.

(Images: JP Fluckiger and supplied by Alphen)

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