

Tribal Magic

Observe the beauty of Singita Pamushana, a lodge and game reserve in Zimbabwe, where tradition, culture and aesthetics work towards a single philanthropic goal.

Text: Cheryl Robertson, Freelance Writer

70

Singita Pamushana is one of Africa's most strategically placed safari lodges. Sitting high atop a rocky outcrop in the middle of the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve in Zimbabwe, this lodge allows optimum wildlife views. Surrounded by 130,000-acres of sandstone rocks, baobab trees and rock fig groves, the resort design blends in perfectly, thus remaining completely unobtrusive.

In 1997, South African architect Bruce Stafford was instructed by the Malilangwe Trust, a non-profit organisation which also owns the reserve, to design a tourism lodge there with the aim of channelling revenue generated by tourism back into the reserve and the surrounding communities. Stafford was extremely inspired by the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, an ancient stone settlement to the north built by local tribes between the 11th and 15th centuries (now ruins and a Unesco World Heritage site). And so Pamushana was born, meaning "place of sunshine" in the local Shangaan language.

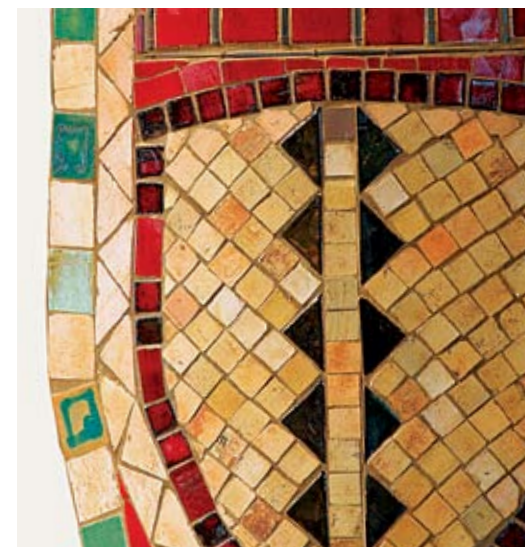
The walls of the lodge are made of hand-hewn stone placed in layers, similar to the ones of the famous ruins, with African symbols periodically added into these layers. As one approaches the main lodge, the first sight is

a conical tower mimicking that of the famous ruins, and flanked by buildings resembling upmarket village huts. The entrance, covered in intricate mosaic and with four supporting pillars, offers a taste of things to come.

Sandstone boulders are an integral part of the open-air bar and lounge, and are protected by a high roof of cooling elephant grass thatch and leadwood poles. Just beyond is a clear infinity pool which seems to cascade into the Malilangwe Dam 200 metres below. A precarious looking Jacuzzi also teeters on the same cliff edge.

In 1998, interior designers Cécile & Boyd's of Cape Town were summoned to design Pamushana's interiors, which tastefully imbued a typical safari ambience in shades of beige, brown and khaki. Ten years later, when the lodge became Singita Pamushana, Cécile & Boyd's were again the designers of choice for a complete revamp of the lodge. However, this time the brief was different.

"We told the designers that we wanted Pamushana to stand apart from any other resort in Africa - it needed to be truly recognisable," says Jason Turner, general manager of tourism, who joined this property in 2007. "It had to be unique and portray



This page: Nestled on top of a rocky hill, the Singita Pamushana lodge in Zimbabwe has been designed to completely blend in with its surroundings

Shangaan patterns, originally seen in details, are magnified on the fabrics and walls at the Pamushana.



At Pamushana, our design inspiration came from the Shangaan culture

Zimbabwean culture.” Turner explains how the local Shangaan people once ruled the Gaza Empire, which comprised parts of what is now south-eastern Zimbabwe, extending to southern Mozambique and South Africa. So out went the African safari look and in came a palette of burnt orange and rust that complemented the Malilangwe landscape, along with bold primary colours that might be considered garish anywhere else but here. The curved walls, reminiscent of the famous ruins, were hand painted using contemporary as well as polished mud paints. Large hand-sponged dots, diamonds, zigzag patterns and huge chevrons, usually seen in small details on traditional Shangaan tribal headdresses or adorning village huts, have been incorporated into the walls and fabrics.

Boyd Ferguson, principal of the design firm, and his partners Paul van den Berg and Geordi de Sousa Costa have been involved in the designs of all the Singita lodges in South Africa and Tanzania. “In the past, we have taken great inspiration from nature, interpreting it in various ways from the literal to the abstract. However, at Pamushana, our design inspiration came from the Shangaan culture,” says Boyd.

Boyd and his team spent considerable time researching the traditions of the Shangaan people, some of whom are currently part of the lodge staff. And the inspiration is evident in vivid geometric design cushions scattered in the lounges, or on the king-sized four-poster beds cocooned by swathes of mosquito netting. Local pots, swords, headrests, shields,

baskets, richly embroidered tapestries and glass beads in colourful collections enhance the tribal impact. “The mosaic columns at the entrance create harmony with the oversized bold pattern,” says Boyd of his favourite part of the design.

Another appealing feature in one of the lounges is a wide horizontal chandelier made of wrought iron and ostrich eggs. Simulated antelope horn handles open the doors of the suites to reveals more wonders – all have sliding glass walls that open onto a private wooden deck housing a private infinity pool, outdoor shower, telescope and a panoramic view of the dam and surrounding hills. Inside are log-burning fireplaces and large mosaic-walled bathrooms with wall patterns inspired by bright Shangaan jewellery. Shangaan motifs and Shona (another Zimbabwean tribe) symbols are carved into furniture and lamps, some of which have the added attraction of hand-worked bronze. The dining rooms and the lodge’s bush spa were also redesigned.

The lodge and reserve provide a means of livelihood for the locals, and the trust has built schools and clinics, also supporting agricultural initiatives, and training staff in the conservation and hospitality sectors. It is also supporting a feeding programme for 23,000 children. “Our donors believe that in order to achieve total conservation, you have to also help the community survive,” says Turner. “You cannot preserve the wilderness if you haven’t looked after the people too. And the way to achieve that sustainably is through tourism.” ■

Right: Swathes of mosquito netting drape beautiful four poster beds in the bedrooms

