

WHERE TO STAY

THE BIG BOYS' CLUB

When billionaires want to build their dream grand projects, a curious number of them head to the Cape Winelands of South Africa. Now a thunderingly ambitious arrival is shaking up the scene again

BY PETER BROWNE. PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHARLES RUSSELL



The Leuu Estates manor house, set against the backdrop of the Dassenberg mountains

WHERE TO STAY

THE PRETTY VILLAGE OF FRANSCHHOEK is just an hour's drive from Cape Town but has a detached, other-worldliness to it, snuggled as it is in a narrow valley surrounded by craggy mountains. In the early mornings, the surrounding vineyards and proud-gabled Cape Dutch homesteads are shrouded in a soft mizzle, until the sun burns through and casts everything in a crisp, diamond-cut light.

The first white settlers to arrive in the late 17th century were French Huguenot refugees, which explains all the names – La Provence, Cabriere, Champagne – held by Franschhoek's many restaurants and wine farms, of which Leeu Estates is its latest and most ambitious to date. It is owned by 62-year-old Analjit Singh, ranked by Forbes as one of India's richest men. He only came to South Africa half-a-dozen years ago for the World Cup, liked what he saw, and decided to buy a home in Franschhoek as a retreat from the stifling heat of his hometown of Delhi.

Within a year of purchasing what was then known as Klein Dassenberg farm, Singh had snapped up properties on either side, and the wheels had been set in motion to turn what should have been a private home into a wine estate and hotel.

Singh didn't stop there: he acquired a tired guesthouse in the village and transformed it into Leeu House, by far the smartest place to stay in town, a title once held by neighbouring Le Quartier Francais, owned by the inimitable Susan

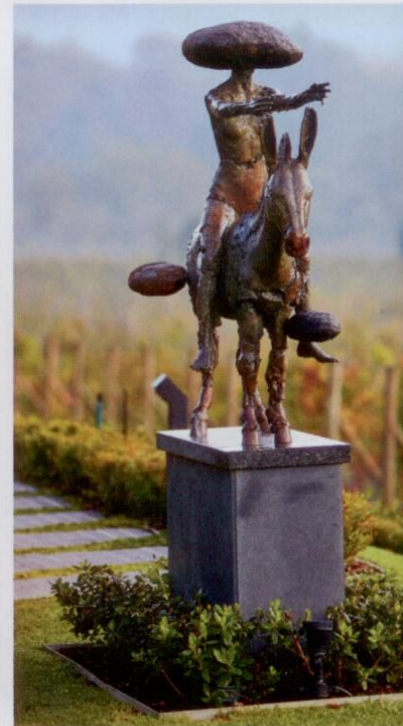
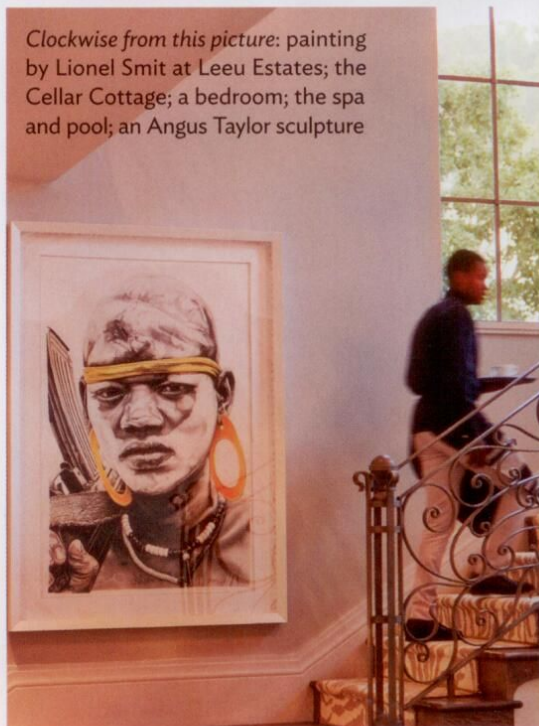
THIS IS UNQUESTIONABLY SOUTH AFRICA'S MOST NOTEWORTHY NEW HOTEL, AND THERE ARE PLANS TO GO INTERNATIONAL

Huxter, unofficial mayor of Franschhoek. Soon enough, it was announced that Huxter had sold Le Quartier to Singh and before long Singh had joined forces with the Cape Brewing Company to create Tuk Tuk, a metropolitan microbrewery. A restaurant, Marigold Indian, is set to open opposite later this year. It's quite a portfolio in such a tiny village.

Leeu Estates enjoys one of the best positions in the valley. Just a 20-minute walk from the village, it is bordered by the Franschhoek River and backed by the Dassenberg mountains. The new manor house was built in the Cape Dutch vernacular on the footprint (and then



Clockwise from this picture: painting by Lionel Smit at Leeu Estates; the Cellar Cottage; a bedroom; the spa and pool; an Angus Taylor sculpture



some) of the original. Singh, who is Sikh, ensured its construction adhered to Vastu Shastra principles of layout and design, so all doors face east, for example, and the kitchen lies in the south-east of the building.

Such discreet multiculturalism continues inside with interiors by the South African-born, London-based designer Beverley Boswell. Against a restrained palette of grey, cream and lavender, there are smoked French oak floors and expensive bespoke pieces such as shagreen cabinets lined with birdseye maple by Studio Indigo in Chelsea, and hand-woven rugs from Tibet.

All of which serves as a quiet backdrop to Analjit Singh's outstanding collection of

contemporary South African art, including big-cat bronzes by Dylan Lewis, large portraits by Lionel Smit, and township scenes by Vusi Khumalo. Outside, Deborah Bell's outside bronze of Artemis strides across the front lawn and a powerful reclining nude by Angus Taylor, *Reflective Resonance*, lies floodlit in the Bokkie Garden, which is landscaped with roses and proteas and is home to a herd of small, doe-eyed antelope.

Adjoining the manor house is the sleek spa, built of stone and timber and fronted by floor-to-ceiling glass and an infinity-edged pool. It was created by the Spanish architect Tomeu Esteva, who also designed



Vana wellness retreat in northern India, owned by Singh's son Veer. The spa here is a very serious proposition, and there is nothing remotely like it for miles around.

The element of wellbeing extends to the kitchen, where chef Oliver Cattermole deploys farm-fresh ingredients to prodigious effect. Everything is grown in the estate's kitchen garden and extensive orchards, or sourced from local producers: pasture-reared beef from Stellenbosch, free-range chickens from Elgin, fish from Muizenberg. For lunch there are tapas-style plates of smoked snoek crouquettes, tangy Madras-cured salmon or delicate rice-paper rolls; the more substantial suppers include lamb

breast with cracked wheat and Merguez sausage and butter-poached langoustines with smoked leeks, wild garlic and parsley sauce, and a heart-breakingly-good pudding of slow-roasted apple terrine.

The estate does not, as yet, produce its own wine, but Singh is a partner in Mullineux & Leeu Family Wines, a phenomenally successful small-scale outfit owned by a young couple, Chris and Andrea Mullineux. Together they produce award-winning blends of Syrah and Chenin Blanc from vineyards in the dry, maritime Swartland, about 80km north of Cape Town. The best are showcased at the smart wine-tasting studio at Leeu Estates.

RICH PICKINGS

Forget big game: the Cape Winelands' super-estates are more interested in bagging the best art, wines and chefs

DELAIRE GRAFF ESTATE

This impressive winery outside Stellenbosch has a famously good restaurant and spa. It's the lovechild of jeweller Laurence Graff – worth about US\$5 billion – and the late designer David Collins. Graff has amassed a superb collection of South African art (and the original *Chinese Girl* by Vladimir Tretchikoff, who lived and died in Cape Town).

BABYLONSTOREN


Homegrown multi-billionaire Koos Bekker, who founded South African pay-television service M-Net, is the driving force behind this dreamy working farm a short drive from Franschhoek. Famous for its voluptuous kitchen gardens, it has just unveiled stylish bedrooms designed by his wife Karen Roos, former editor of South African *Elle Decoration*.

LA MOTTE

The late South African billionaire Anton Rupert, who made his fortune in tobacco, bought this superb little Franschhoek property nearly 50 years ago. It's now owned by his opera-singer daughter Hannali, whose brother Johann, chairman of luxury-goods company Richemont (which includes Cartier and Dunhill), owns nearby L'Ormarins winery and breeds Cape buffalo.

GRANDE PROVENCE

This classic corker, next door to Leeu Estates, is part of Dutch-born financial investor Alex van Heeren's Huka Retreats portfolio, which includes Huka Lodge in New Zealand and Dolphin Island in Fiji. Van Heeren is currently being sued for millions by his former business partner, Michael Kidd, through the New Zealand courts.

This is unquestionably the most noteworthy new hotel in South Africa. But even before it officially opened, there came news that Singh had bought Linthwaite House on Lake Windermere. Clearly there are plans to go international. There can be little doubt that Aniljit Singh, an elegant man with enviable clarity of mind, has the energy and commitment to make it happen. 

Africa Travel (+44 20 7843 3591; africa.travel.co.uk) can arrange a four-night break to Franschhoek, with two nights at Leeu House and two at Leeu Estates, from £1,855 per person sharing, including British Airways flights to Cape Town and hire car