



The Home THAT BECAME A HOTEL

CHRISTINE CUNANAN recalls the charm
of South Africa's Majeka House

PHOTOGRAPH BY

The first of many intriguing details that caught my attention upon entering the lobby of Majeka House, a luxurious boutique hotel in the most desirable of neighborhoods in the historic food and wine town of Stellenbosch, was the abundance of pigs in all shapes, colors and sizes.

These pigs were everywhere in a wondrous sort of way, making them impossible to miss. There was a huge black statue of one right in the middle of the lobby, that served as a display stand for coffee table books; and a gaunt-looking gold pig in the bar lounge, which is incidentally decorated rather incongruously, and yet ever so beautifully, with gold pendant lamps, porcelain objets d'art, Oriental carpets and a trompe l'oeil of books.

There was also a colorful, round papier mache pig on a counter. And when I closed a door for a moment, I even spotted a wooden one lying teasingly behind it. There was truly no escaping these pigs.



THE MAJEKA SPA

This small but well-appointed spa offers South Africa's first Himalayan Crystal Salt bed experience, a 45-minute session that involves lying on a specially-made bed of crystal salt, with deep relaxation further induced by light therapy and mood music.

“Karine has been collecting pigs since she was eight years old,” explained the lady who showed us around at check-in, observing my amusement. Karine is the owner of Majeka House, and today, these pigs have found the perfect home in the hotel their mistress has lovingly built.

THE PERFECT COMBINATION

South Africa overflows with beautiful destination hotels, but few have the style, elegance and fun – all three exist in equal parts here – of Majeka House. It was once the family home of Karine and her husband Lloyd, who decided to open a hotel and to move next door to make way for guests.

Today they run the family business together, and apparently very happily so.

Both are warm and friendly, with that unmistakable twinkle in the eye – and these traits have also found their way to their hotel, as Majeka House is exactly that.





I spoke with Karine and Lloyd only briefly during our stay; Karine had introduced herself when we arrived, and Lloyd had come over to say hello at dinner one night. However, the moment I met them, I couldn't help thinking that we might have been real friends, if only several oceans and so many countries did not come between. Perhaps they unwittingly make all their guests feel this same way, and this in turn may explain the allure of Majeka House.

In fact, if I had just stayed one more night, I would probably have invited myself to dine with them at Makaron, which is the hotel's award-winning fine dining restaurant, considered one of the top foodie destinations in the country.

We were seated a few tables away from them at Makaron one evening, you see, as we sampled their four-course tasting menu that included foie gras and delicious Karoo lamb; and meanwhile they entertained some friends. And from across the room I overheard lots of laughter, and even a few giggles, that made me remember one or two very enjoyable dinner parties I'd attended in the last few months.



Breakfast at Majeka House starts with a smile. Each plate comes with a whimsical drawing and a pick-me-upper that either makes you think or laugh. It doesn't hurt either that the hotel buffet is laden with excellent Spanish ham, smoked salmon and the best canele I have ever tasted.





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IT'S A GREAT LIFE

Yes, Karine and Lloyd probably have much to smile about. For one thing, their life sounds like a dream. They live next door to their beautiful hotel in a most picturesque part of South Africa, famous for food and wine, and they own a restaurant everyone wants to eat in. To top these off, they're surrounded by friends who own vineyards. This is certainly a tough equation to beat.

However, make no mistake about it.

Majeka House is a seriously good hotel and no detail is left to chance – even if Lloyd and Karine do make running a hotel seem like so much fun that even you will start fancying the idea of becoming a hotel owner as well, after downing one too many glasses of Stellenbosch wine.



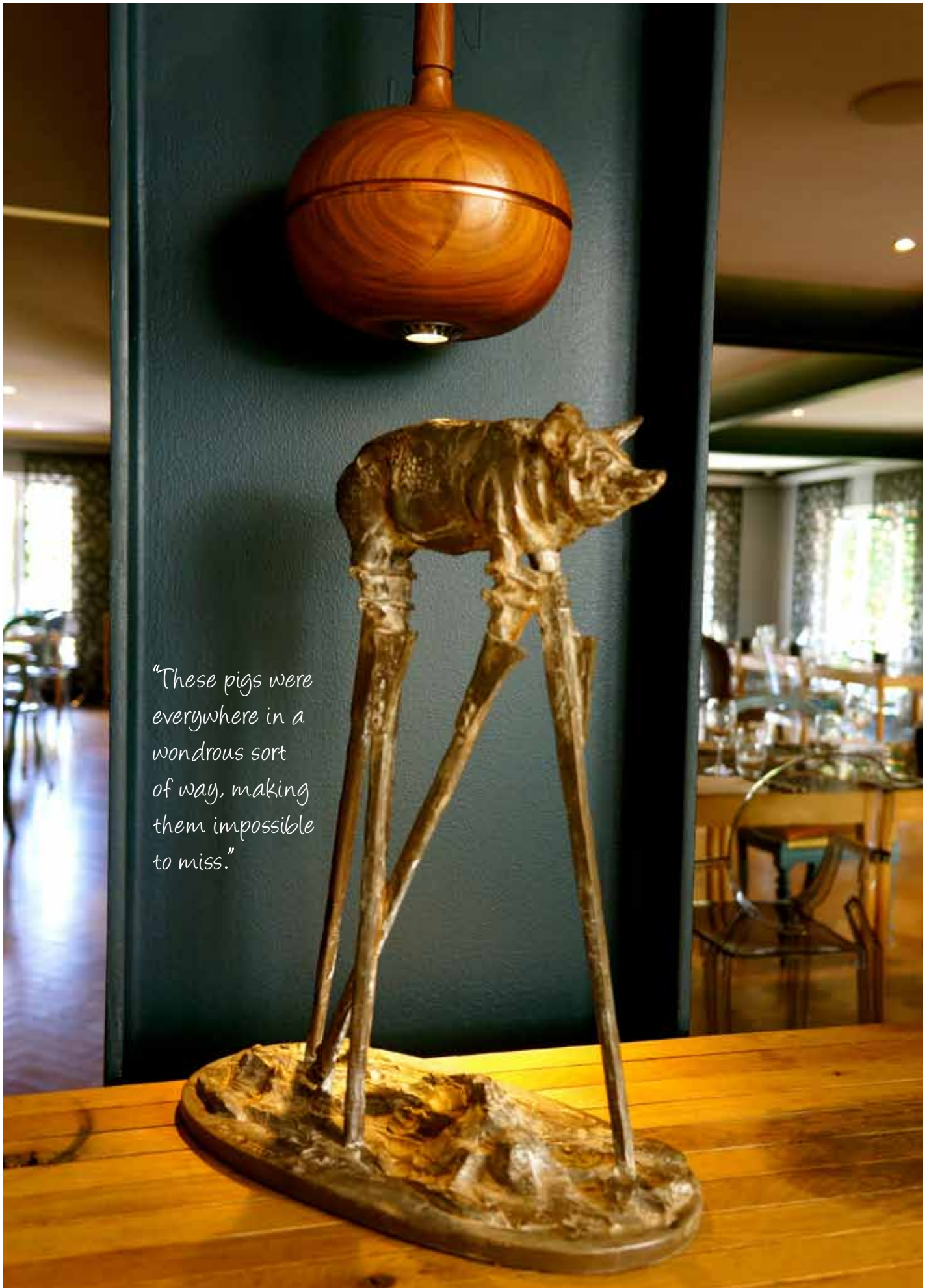
If it's that fun and that easy, why not? This was what I found myself saying, as I sat there in the glorious outdoors after a very good meal, taking in the smells and sounds of a summer evening in the wine country while observing the general happiness all around.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE DETAILS

The rooms have been meticulously put together by a local designer with lots of input from the owners – and the result is just the right amount of comfort and luxury, in a contemporary and yet quirky way.

My suite, #501, was probably among the nicest on the property. Decorated primarily in blue, it was wide and spacious, and it shared a 10-meter private lap pool with the adjoining suite. It also had several seating areas, the kind of art that makes you happy, and a full bar





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that operated on an honor system. Against the odds, too, this suite even managed to have a relaxing view of greenery – in spite of the fact that next door neighbors and a street of parked cars were just meters away.

I honestly didn't want to leave Majeka House because our stay had been so uncomplicatedly nice.

However, at just past 1 PM on the day we were supposed to check out, Karine's assistant came to look for me by the swimming pool, to politely inquire as to what time we were planning to depart. Everyone else leaving on that day had observed the noontime checkout, and staying on was not a simple matter of options and convenience, as Majeka House was full that night.

So we reluctantly checked out at the very last possible minute, and slowly made our way to our next destination.

And all the way, on the long drive to another postcard-pretty hotel, all I could think of was those lovely figurines of pigs, and how they had so charmed me during an all too short stay at lovely Majeka House. ■

MAJEKA HOUSE
www.majekahouse.co.za

