



AFRICAN AWAKENING

World-class galleries are a classic tourist lure. Now Cape Town wants in on the action.

Words JAMES BAINBRIDGE





T **LAST SEPTEMBER'S** opening of Cape Town's Zeitz MOCAA (Museum of Contemporary Art Africa), the international bevy of journalists, sleep-deprived curators and pan-African artists in attendance were left in no doubt the US\$40 million (\$51.6 million) institution was a historic turning point for African art.

Sitting just off the converted grain depot's 33-metre-high atrium — impressively occupied by South African artist Nicholas Hobo's stunning rubber-and-ribbon rendition of the lightning bird from Xhosa mythology — the assembled company heard how the museum would stand as a world-class platform for showcasing contemporary African artworks. "We're securing seminal objects from the African continent and making sure they remain here," said Mark Coetzee, executive director and chief curator of the Zeitz MOCAA. "Objects reflecting society often leave the continent never to be seen again, but we're empowering our audience, especially the youth, to see the art and voices coming out of their own community."

The core of the museum's collection, artfully displayed across 80 white-cube galleries and site-specific spaces within the tubular concrete silos and grain elevator, has been loaned by sustainable business guru Jochen Zeitz. Credited with turning around Puma's fortunes in the '90s, the German mogul owns the Segera Retreat, an upscale safari lodge on Kenya's Laikipia Plateau, where a gallery and sculpture garden displays works from his collection — a representation of his love of Africa and a prototype for South Africa's new museum.

When Zeitz partnered with Cape Town's Victoria & Alfred (V&A) Waterfront, a tourist complex of marinas, museums and markets in the redeveloped dockland of the new Silo District, local residents were excited by the idea of converting the derelict depot near the Nelson Mandela Gateway (the departure point for tours of Robben Island, where Mandela was imprisoned). Stepping in to transform the site was the visionary British architect Thomas Heatherwick — whose past projects include Google's California headquarters and New York's Vessel sculpture — and his team of 20 local and London-based architects and designers. "It was the tallest building in sub-Saharan Africa for half a century, but it was hiding in plain sight," Heatherwick said at the museum's opening.

The budget for the redevelopment might have been small, but the team from Heatherwick Studio relished the challenge (which involved equal parts architecture and archaeology) of resuscitating the heritage structure. Stripping away paint that was 'the colour of granny's tights' from the exterior of the depot, they discovered the concrete beneath, incorporating blue-tinted stone that came from a Table Mountain quarry. Inside, it proved challenging to work within the honeycomb structure, where a steel spiral staircase shoots up one cylinder like a drill bit, and glass lifts purr up others. The cathedral-like atrium cuts diagonally through a dozen of the silos, its irregular shape cleverly achieved by digitally scanning a corn kernel and then enlarging it to become 10 storeys high.

DETAILS

Cape Grace West Quay Rd, V&A Waterfront; www.capegrace.com. **Cape Town Art Fair** Cape Town International Convention Centre, Walter Sisulu Ave; www.investeccape-townartfair.co.za. **Coffeebeans Routes** www.coffeebeansroutes.com. **Everard Read** 3 Portwood Rd, V&A Waterfront; www.everard-read-capetown.co.za. **First Thursdays** www.first-thursdays.co.za. **Grand Africa Café and Beach** Haul Rd; www.grandafrika.com. **Harbour House** Quay 4, V&A Waterfront; www.harbourhouse.co.za. **Juma Art Tours** +27 73 400 4064. **Maboneng Township Arts Experience** www.maboneng.com. **Mitchell's Scottish Ale House** Dock Rd; www.mitchells-ale-house.com. **Oranjezicht City Farm** Granger Bay; www.ozcf.co.za. **Radisson Red** Silo District, V&A Waterfront; www.radissonred.com/capetown. **Robben Island tours** www.robben-island.org.za.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Confit pork belly with steak frites and sweet potato fries from The Silo Hotel; Shimmy Beach Club; The Granary Cafe is another Silo dining option; wander off to The Willaston Bar if you need a drink; the Segera Retreat's Sculpture Garden. **OPENER, FROM LEFT** Zeitz MOCAA's atrium; the bubble windows of the hotel suites.

The building's 'found spaces' include the adjoining Dusthouse, which was effectively a giant vacuum to remove the depot's potentially explosive grain dust. Basement tunnels are intriguingly put to good use by creatives from around the globe, from Zimbabwean artist Kudzanai Chiurai and Kenyan 'Afrofuturist' Cyrus Kabiru to the Beninese photographer Leonce Agbodjelou and Angolan artist and photographer Edson Chagas for his installation *Found Not Taken*.

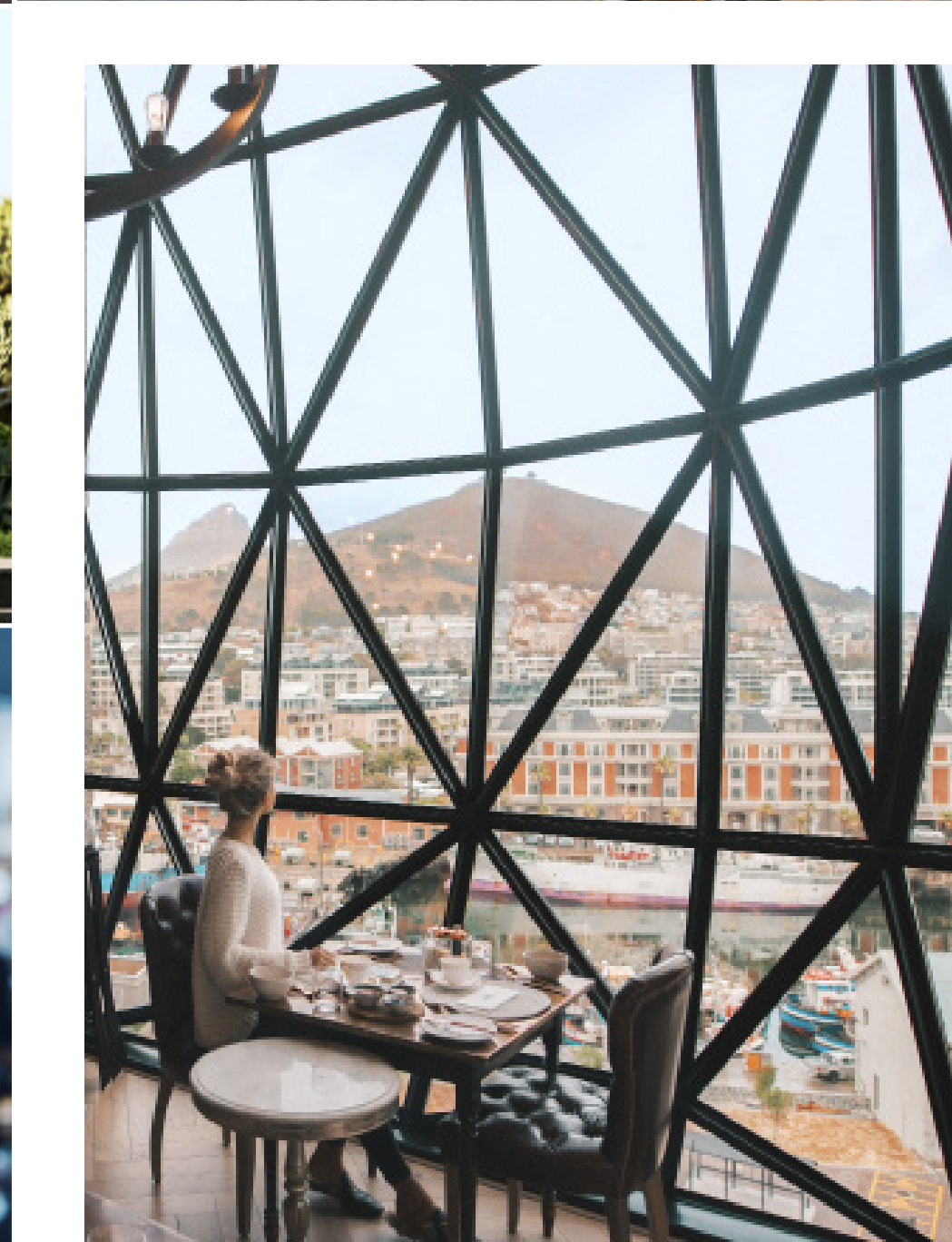
Yet, as the concrete dust settles on the opening of the largest museum in the world that's dedicated to contemporary art from Africa and its diaspora, does the museum justify the hype? Although it is hard to quantify, there are signs it has had an immediate impact, at the very least. Where once there was nothing, now queues of patrons regularly stretch out from the museum's door.

The Zeitz MOCAA opening coincided with the city's worst drought in four centuries, which impacted tourism with tales of Capetonians stockpiling bottled water and water restrictions. However, Cape Town's citizens pulled together to drastically cut their water consumption resulting in the cancellation of 'Day Zero' — the date when the city would cut the ordinary water supply.

Nonetheless, conservation efforts continue, and Cape Town still managed to attract 10 million tourists during 2017, ready to 'save like a local' and 'let it mellow'. The arrival of overseas visitors is unlikely to slow down now that Zeitz MOCAA has added even more appeal to a destination known as the 'Mother City'.

ARTISTIC APPEAL

While Cape Town could not be labelled yet as a cultural destination on par with leading lights such as New York or Paris, it is adding artistic appeal to its long-standing scenic and culinary charms. Urban regeneration has created cultural districts such as the Woodstock neighbourhood, and its monthly late-night First Thursdays events promote city centre galleries. The international art market is also showing an interest in African art and photography, which is exemplified by fairs that are dedicated to the continent's creativity, including the annual Cape Town Art Fair. ➤





PHOTOGRAPHY COFFEEBEANS ROUTES, GETTY IMAGES, IWAN BAAH

Along with the independent galleries and studios at Church Street, The Woodstock Exchange and The Old Biscuit Mill, the city plays host to a variety of excellent private galleries, such as Everard Read, Stevenson and Southern Guild. The South African National Gallery has a broad collection of both local and international work, while operators Coffeebeans Routes, Maboneng Township Arts Experience and Juma Art Tours also offer art-themed township tours for visitors to enjoy.

If you want to spend more than a day exploring the Zeitz MOCAA, there's no better place to stay than on top of the museum itself, in The Silo Hotel. The 28-room, five-star hotel balances the original building's exposed beams and industrial artefacts with colourful decor and contemporary artwork, and luxuries including complimentary minibars and bathrooms with Egyptian chandeliers. Bubble windows created by Heatherwick ensure the suites enjoy spectacular views, but the roof — with its desalinated seawater pool — is the best vantage point of all, offering a panorama of Table Mountain, Signal Hill, Green Point Stadium and the V&A Waterfront.

The Silo District also boasts the world's third Radisson Red hotel, which has a millennial vibe with its games rooms, kitchen-style cafe and red food truck on the rooftop serving smoothies and cocktails. The 252 studios continue the fun with two-tone graffiti decor and showers with intricately designed tile patterns. Just across the Alfred Basin is the statelier Cape Grace, a luxury five-star hotel with old-world charm.

Dining options include the daytime eatery Zeitz MOCAA Food and The Silo Rooftop, or take a stroll over the swing bridge to the V&A Waterfront, which offers several pleasant choices for a seafood lunch with views of the boats and buskers.

Here you'll find a branch of the upmarket Harbour House fish-restaurant chain — choose between grilled Cape crayfish, paprika-smoked calamari and Karoo lamb — and Sevruga, with its sushi platters, dim sum and seafood mains. There is also the thriving Oranjezicht City Farm Market Day, which is held near the V&A Waterfront on Saturday, featuring a glut of fresh organic produce and hot meals from kebabs to curries.

Just down from the market you'll discover the Grand Africa Café & Beach, where you can sip indulgent cocktails on the sands of Granger Bay. Mitchell's Scottish Ale House serves a top-shelf selection of beers, wines and cognacs, The Silo Rooftop's cocktails are entirely as memorable as the view, and Cape Grace's marina-side Bascule Bar offers one of the southern hemisphere's largest whisky collections. To continue the party, Shimmy Beach Club is like Cape Town's version of Ibiza, with homegrown artists such as Black Coffee and Goldfish playing tunes by the pool.

It's through these clubs and bars, and ever-evolving artistic and hospitality scene, that Cape Town's gradual evolution into a lively, modern city becomes clearer. And in the shape of the Zeitz MOCAA, it has taken another leap forward. 📍

GETTING THERE VIRGIN AUSTRALIA OFFERS FLIGHTS TO CAPE TOWN WITH ITS CODESHARE PARTNERS SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS AND SINGAPORE AIRLINES/SILKAIR. TO BOOK, VISIT WWW.VIRGINAUSTRALIA.COM OR CALL 13 67 89 (IN AUSTRALIA).

DETAILS

Segera Retreat
Laikipia Plateau, Kenya; www.segera.com. **Sevruga** Quay 5, V&A Waterfront; www.sevruga.restaurant.co.za. **Shimmy Beach Club** 12 South Arm Rd; www.shimmybeachclub.com. **South African National Gallery** Government Ave, Company's Garden; www.iziko.org.za. **Southern Guild** Silo District, V&A Waterfront; www.southernguild.co.za. **Stevenson** 160 Sir Lowry Road, Woodstock; www.stevenson.info. **The Old Biscuit Mill** 373–375 Albert Rd; www.theoldbiscuitmill.co.za. **The Silo Hotel** Silo District, V&A Waterfront; www.theroyalportfolio.com. **The Woodstock Exchange** 66–68 Albert Rd; www.woodstockexchange.co.za. **Zeitz MOCAA** Silo District, V&A Waterfront; www.zeitzmocaa.museum.



FROM TOP The Old Biscuit Mill; creating street art on a Coffeebeans Routes' tour; the Cape Town Art Fair. **OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP** Victoria & Alfred Waterfront is a major tourist attraction in Cape Town; pick up some fresh produce at Oranjezicht City Farm Market Day.