Bloukrans − simplicity as a different kind of luxury

There's an inherent panacea in the Karoo that allows one's soul to settle like dust. We undertake annual sojourns to this vast landscape, constantly in search of dwellings aligned with stellar nights. When we discovered Bloukrans three years ago, we knew we hit the Jurassic jackpot.

Nestled in the southern part of the Moordenaarskaroo, Bloukrans Klein-Bewarea lies concealed just thirty kilometres north of Laingsburg in a region known for its remoteness and rugged beauty. The Buffels River, with its episodic floods, continues to shape the terrain, carving out a canyon and revealing a colossal rock face – a testament to millions of years of natural forces at work.

The 1000-hectare farm, owned by the Vosloo family, offers accommodation in three distinct Karoo-huisies. Each one has been sensitively restored, unassuming in style and character, and attuned to the essence of its surroundings.

Franci Vosloo explains: "When we first came here fifteen years ago, the farm bore the scars of a disconnect between the landscape and man's existence in it. Its rhythms, its energy, and its voice were lost in wires, fences, rubbish heaps, concrete, plastic, and overgrazing. For a number of years it was a weekend retreat to a run-down typical Karoo flat-roofed farmhouse. The baboons ruled, and it usually took a few days before we could relax and enjoy the beauty and the silence. It was time to look at what the farm provided and what it needed."

With conservation in mind, the owners 'listened to what each ruin had to tell them about its past and its possible future' – and then they collected the fallen pieces and put them back – not perfect, but healed. So that some of its history remains.

They started with the Kliphuis, an old shepherd's dwelling, followed by a worker's cottage which became the Modderhuis. The Sinkhuis, at this stage, lay scattered across the farm. According to Franci it was a long process from conception to completion: "And yet, when one works closely with elements of the earth, you realise nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect."

Kliphuis – of earth and everything

Once a crumbling ruin, Kliphuis stood silently – a forsaken space with a "voorvertrek" (front room) and a back room; its roof was long gone. Rags lay on the earthen floor, and over

time, geckoes and mice had claimed it as their sanctuary. Now guests sometimes share this abode with these special creatures. The walls, once derelict and fractured, held secrets of bygone days. “We thought: Why let this history vanish? Our journey began with Jan Willemse from Sutherland. His meticulous eye scoured the landscape for the perfect stone, each one carefully chosen. With unwavering dedication, he repaired and reconstructed the existing stonework, breathing life back into Kliphuis.” The original earthen floor, though cherished, yielded to a pragmatic mix of sand, lime, and earth. The ceiling was woven of matjies reeds and poplar beams, completing Kliphuis’s transformation. Outside, a shower, a “kraaltjie,” and a braai area emerged – a harmonious blend of practicality and aesthetics.

This once-ruined shelter now transports guests to a different era – a living testament to time’s passage. Comfort and authenticity fuse in delicate balance within its walls. “Our journey was not without its quirks. The wind, insistent and curious, found its way through the dry-packed walls. Instead of resorting to conventional solutions like expanding foam, we devised an unconventional remedy: a cotton bag filled with sheep’s wool offcuts and a toolkit for guests to seal the myriad holes and crevices.”

Step inside Kliphuis, and you’ll discover a world of salvaged and handcrafted treasures. The bed and rustic bench, crafted from reclaimed scaffolding planks, exude character. The kitchen sink, entirely wooden, owes its existence to repurposed railway sleepers. Franci’s father stitched the sheep karos from sheepskins. And the bedsheets, woven from old raw linen, bear the marks of imperfection – a testament to their authenticity.

As you pass through the original front door, notice the small window it now frames – a glimpse into the world beyond. Kliphuis stands as a tribute to resilience, creativity, and the beauty found in life’s irregularities.

Modderhuis mojo

The Modderhuis speaks and breathes for itself, allowing one to feel sheltered yet part of the landscape outside.

The walls are thick to keep the heat out and maintain a comfortable temperature inside. However, the significant decision was to avoid installing large windows. The position and size of the windows were crucial – they offer a small but concentrated view of the outside. “As for the plaster on the exterior and interior, we sourced a load of mud (that was supposed to be clay!) from a nearby farmer and mixed it with sand and lime, but after a few hailstorms, we had to scrape it all off! We added white cement to the mixture, and now it can withstand the elements…”

Interior walls still retain the original mixture – it has a wonderful earthy colour. “The light against these walls is ever-changing, never static.”

The kitchen surface is made from reclaimed Oregon wood and the Dover stove occupies the same spot where the original open hearth once stood. The iron bed in the bedroom was discovered at an antique shop, while most of the old furniture were cleaned and sanded to blend seamlessly with the subtle colours and textures inside.

Outside, a dry-packed stone braai and low kraal wall make for a gentle transition from the house to the veld – this is where fire and stars collaborate. More recently, Franci and a farm worker Alfonso Theka, have re-plastered an old small water reservoir behind the house, which now serves as a ‘tiny Karoo cool tub’ with fresh borehole water! And on the front stoep, an old “trekbed” with original riempies offers yet another place to sink into this quiet and breathtaking landscape.

Sinkhuis sustained

The only newly built house, Sinkhuis, emerged from a unique process of gathering materials found on the farm. Everything was repurposed: old corrugated sheets, steel windows, telephone poles, and wood. Its exceptional location along a tributary to the Buffels River contributes to its sense of seclusion – a space from which to watch the abundant birdlife and perhaps spot an elusive sengi.

Collected over time from all over the farm, the old rusted and discarded corrugated iron and somewhat askew windowframes found a new purpose. Put together, its corners and walls are not square everywhere, and some even had to be patched, but now it can call itself a 'home'.

The inside has an eclectic, distinctive atmosphere: a kitchen counter of reclaimed wood and an antique enamel sink, an imbuia table and chairs, a cast iron bed, and even an abandoned cast iron bath discovered on a nearby farm. These elements, together with the use of steel, wood, glass and colour, celebrate the beauty of imperfections, patina, and stories embedded in reclaimed elements.

The Sinkhuis embraces a sustainable ethos. It’s a nod to responsible living and a commitment to preserving our environment.

Be mesmerized

Follow your sense of wonder to the unsurpassed experience that Bloukrans has to offer. Track the spoor of aardvark, caracal and kudu and listen to the dusk calls of jackal. Perhaps you

would like to dine in after ogling the pre-order dinner menu of hearty country cooking such as bobotie with rice and stewed peaches, lamb shanks, or lentil and butternut vegetable curry – to mention a few.

Rise early to explore the fractal-like patterns of lichens in all the luminous colours of the spectrum, and marvel at flora such as Bushman's candle, Karoo gold and Star-apple – bearing witness to the extraordinary abundance keyed between rock and sand.

But, before you leave… trail along the dry riverbed to shake the ochre hands – residue of San, who once wandered these plains. In a good year, you may even see the Buffels River in flood.

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