

Why Now Is the Time for a Design-Minded Safari

Excerpted from an article by Andrew Sessa

After apartheid ended, the travel company Singita reimaged what a luxury safari could be in the new South Africa. Singita founder Luke Bailes launched his first lodges in the mid-1990s on family-owned concessions once used for hunting, creating properties that spared no comforts, even as they brought guests up close and personal with wildlife and used profits to fund conservation and community initiatives.

Now, nearly 25 years later, Singita is undergoing updates. Working with his longtime designer Boyd Ferguson—who masterminded the aesthetic of every Singita since day one—Bailes overhauled his original two lodges, Ebony and Boulders, in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve, in 2014 and 2015, and tackled Lebombo, within the Kruger National Park, in 2016.

I recently visited all three, on a trip arranged by the Africa specialists at Micato Safaris. My trip began at Ebony, a 12-bungalow lodge whose atmosphere blends fantasies of the Swiss Family Robinson tree house with the campaign-style trappings of classic safari lodges. The redo here involved removing walls to create open-plan suites with expanses of floor-to-ceiling, corner-to-corner glass overlooking private decks, heated plunge pools and the Sand River. Thatched roofs cover the elevated bungalows and open-air public spaces, with interiors full of animal and tribal prints, canvas, rattan and antiques from Bailes's collection.

