

Cape Cadogan. The Cellars-Hohenort. Ellerman House Champagne cellar

BUSINESS



As to why boutique hotels are the preferred option for a type of guest in a specific income bracket, she says: “The entire guest experience is tailor-made from the moment a guest steps onto the property. The guest is given a true sense of place at a boutique hotel. Guests are given complete personal attention and the attention to detail is most important... The size of hotel also provides guests with the individual experiences they are wanting and the hotel can manage their preferences from food, to room type, to the recommended activities.”

Rob More, CEO of More Hotels which owns and manages nine hotels in sought-after bush and city locations, says boutique is not determined by room quantity nor price point but by guest experience and a distinct identity. He explains that demand by international travellers for experience or boutique hotels is growing as leisure travellers seek to engage with their trip in a more personal way, providing them with an experience that is deeper than the majority of larger luxury hotels can deliver on.

“The boutique space is also less competitive as it does not fit the same investment model as so many national and international hotel companies which require the scale. The model objective of many large luxury hotels is to deliver a consistent signature experience at every hotel within a group

or collection, regardless of where the guest is in the world.

“In contrast, the objective of a successful boutique hotel model is to pay homage to the hotel’s location, style and reason for being... This requires a far more flexible approach with a common thread to deliver to a guest an experience which is personal and of a high quality, yet unique and speaks to the personality of the hotel and its surrounds.”

More believes his success is linked to staying intimately involved in the guest experience. “Operating a boutique hotel is like running a private home and is a feeling you wish every guest to take away with them. You would not have people staying at your home while you were not there, so the same principle applies, stay involved as much as you practically can. Instill a sense of ownership among the teams of people who run your hotel or lodge as this then allows for an ability to scale as this culture of ownership gets established through all team members.”

Ellerman House with its two Villas is an exceptional example of a boutique residence. “Villa Two has been a huge success,” says GM Ella Cuyler. “It has brought a new contemporary element to Ellerman House in terms of our Villa offering... Villa Two is brand new and completely contemporary in style and design; it’s the sexy new addition.”

Separate to Ellerman House yet on the same property, Villa Two offers all the benefits of being attached to one of the most exclusive small hotels in the world coupled with life’s ultimate luxuries — complete privacy and discreet personal service tailor-made to the guest.

More a work of art than merely a cellar, the hotel’s wine gallery provides sophisticated storage in state-of-the-art wine racks and temperature-controlled subterranean cellars for a 7 500-strong collection of vintage and rare wines. “The new wine gallery has really taken our guests’ wine experience to the next level and is an interactive showcase of the South African wine industry, positioning wine as art.”

Besides being an inspiring, experiential space in which to taste wine, the gallery also includes an interactive multimedia wine library, maturation cellars, a brandy tasting lounge and a special Champagne cellar, stocked with rare vintages of Dom Pérignon.

What makes Ellerman House remarkable is undoubtedly the size and location of the property and the level of service it provides. “We are small, exclusive and intimate, but provide

a full offering in terms of cuisine, wine, art, spa, and all these experiences are on site for our guests to immerse themselves in. Our ambition is to showcase the very best of SA right here at Ellerman House, in a truly authentic, homelike environment.” Cuyler also subscribes to the view that being boutique is not a category as such, but rather an approach, “and it takes time to get it right”.

Located in the tranquil, tree-lined suburb of Sandhurst, Johannesburg, The Saxon Hotel, Villas and Spa prides itself on being voted the World’s Leading Boutique Hotel since 2001. GM George Cohen says that by definition, boutique hotels have a maximum of 29 rooms. “When we upgraded the hotel with the three villa additions and entered these rooms into our hotel inventory, a decision was taken in September last year to change to the Saxon Hotel, Villas and Spa, with a unique offering of 53 rooms and executive suites to cater to all levels of luxury. We take the boutique offering one step further with 24-hour personal butler service in each room.”

Cohen adds that in a world where luxury has become a crucial requirement to the distinguished traveller, it’s important that luxury hotels maintain a certain mystique that invites guests to return, no matter the cost. The Saxon’s mystique is an intrinsic part of the history of SA. The hotel was originally a private home and hosted many esteemed and honoured guests.

“This is truly the place you can call home,” Cohen says. “Today’s traveller is looking for more out of their experience, and that is what we provide here at the Saxon. It is ultimately about the guest experience with signature journeys that we customise to each individual guest. The guest experience has to be paramount and you need to remember that they are here to create memories, and that the hotel and the staff are a part of those memories. You are part of their journey, their experience, and the story that they will go home to tell. If you have this mindset, your guests will always leave with treasured memories.”

Increasingly, we are seeing the boutique phenomenon translating across our borders. White Pearl Resort on Mozambique’s south coast is a singular boutique destination. With 21 private pool suites on the beach at Ponta Mamoli, it has developed a reputation for its modern beach décor and unassuming, unpretentious experience. The destination itself