



Rest and relaxation: The lodge (left) and veranda is marked by a furniture style described as colonial luxury blended with the natural splendour of the African bush

GERRY MALFORD

Roughing it out the designer way

Interior designer Trisha Wilson's retreat in the South African bushland is the epitome of style, writes **ARTHUR SIM**

TO RELAX, most women would be quite happy with a weekend retreat at the spa.

The more intrepid, like interior designer Trisha Wilson, think nothing of retreating to a South African game reserve instead.

Trisha Wilson is the founder and CEO of award-winning interior architectural design firm Wilson Associates, which is responsible for the glamorous décor at the St Regis in Singapore, Four Seasons Hotel in Hong Kong and the Armani Hotel at Burj Tower in Dubai, to name just a few.

So while she does like to rough it out in the South African bush, photo-hunting lions, rhinos and elephants, Ms Wilson is not, however, likely to be sleeping in a tent.

No, her digs – called Izingwe, the Zulu word for leopard – have a bit more style.

Izingwe is spread out over 5,000 acres of bushland that is part of the 85,000 acre Welgevonden Game Reserve in the Waterburg mountain region of South Africa, just three hours north of Johannesburg.

It consists of five main parts: the lodge – with a large living and dining area, a veranda and a bar – three guest villas, personal living quarters, a gym and an office.

US-based Wilson Associates is headquartered in Dallas, with offices in New York, Los Angeles, Singapore, Shanghai and Cochín, with the Singapore office being the largest.

It was on a recent trip to South Africa to set up the Johannesburg office that Ms Wilson found herself so moved by the sight of a family of baboons passing closely by in front of her car, that she decided she wanted an abode in the bush. "When I first laid eyes on the wild animals of the area, it touched my soul," she recalls.

As it turns out, the design of her lodge is quite special too.

Describing the design direction for her South African lodge, Ms Wilson said: "I want-



Wild life: The lodge (above) has a thatched roof in the traditional style of the South African bush camp, where Ms Wilson shoots elephants with her camera

ed my private home to be a celebration of the African bush." For Izingwe, Ms Wilson got the help of her associates, architects Jim Rimpel-spach and Jacques Coetzee.

The design philosophy of the firm is simple – that it should not impose a signature style but rather, create unique places customised for each client.

In the same spirit, Ms Wilson wanted all the buildings at Izingwe to blend in with the unique topography of the land.

The buildings conform to a simple set of rules: native stone plinths and retaining walls, sand coloured hand-plastered walls, natural gumpoles and thatched roofs in the traditional African bush camp tradition.

The simplicity of the structure is juxtaposed against a furniture style that Ms Wilson describes as "colonial luxury blended with the natural splendour of the African bush".

This includes overstuffed sofas piled high with zebra-skin pillows, ostrich-egg lamps, hand-carved timber and contemporary African art.

To make spaces uniquely her own, Ms Wilson also added her own flourishes. "I personally designed the monkey chandelier in the centre of the living room and had it crafted by local African artisans," she reveals of the curiously fascinating *objet* composed of monkeys bearing bowls of light.

One is never far away from the open bush either.

Each bedroom has its own balcony that extends into a *sala* – a thatched roof, open-sided lounge pavilion designed for afternoon naps or communing with the landscape.

The living and dining areas of the lodge also open out on to a veranda which is an integral part of the experience of the place.

Indeed, so much of the colour of the land is brought into this home, from the recurring African motifs in the carved furniture to the textures of the stone and timbers, that one almost feels partially submerged in the bush. But that, of course, is the point.

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10 things Trisha Wilson cannot live without

1. Overstuffed sofas – these characterise indulgent comfort.
2. Luxurious bed linens and towels for guest rooms – Ms Wilson likes to treat her friends to a five-star weekend.
3. Locally crafted table linen and flatware – you never know who's coming to dinner.
4. A good camera and binoculars – no safari is complete without them.
5. A hot water bottle – for chilly nights in the open.
6. Snacking on *biltong*, a South African-style dried meat.
7. Angus and Marion Frew – the couple who not only manage Ms Wilson's home but are also her friends and South Africa representatives for her non-profit charitable organisation The Wilson Foundation.
8. The tracking skills of Angus Frew – lions' activities are brought into view from the verandah.
9. Memorabilia – this always invites conversation.
10. A sundowner – gives sunsets a special glow.