

Akademie Street Boutique Hotel is a tranquil paradise tucked away in the heart of the Cape winelands, writes Megan Baadjes

FRANSCHHOEK is one of the most beautiful towns in the Cape. Known for its tranquillity, culinary hotspots and wine farms – oh yes, the wine – this gem is the perfect destination for a breakaway from the city.

Not only is the tourist town home to some of the country's best restaurants, it is also where you will find the best boutique hotel in the world.

Located in the heart of the beautiful wine valley, Akademie Street Boutique Hotel has been acclaimed the top small hotel in the world, the top luxury hotel in the world, the most romantic hotel in Africa and the number one hotel in Franschhoek by TripAdvisor, which is the number one travel site in the world.

Named after the street, it's located in, this award-winning five-star hotel is every bit as luxurious and beautiful as the town and perfect for a romantic getaway.

The Cape Dutch-style house was built in 1973 and was originally named Les Chênes but later changed to Twyfelung by the hotel's founder, Arthur, who was uncertain about his future and whether to stay in Franschhoek or return to Johannesburg after his wife's death.

The Afrikaans theme is carried throughout the hotel, with each of its rooms named in the language.

We were welcomed by Declan Mackle, a friendly and very entertaining Irishman who took us on a tour of the spectacular building and tried his best to pronounce the Afrikaans cottage names, quite entertaining actually.

One of the first cottages Mackle showed us was *Uitsig* (view), named after the picturesque view of the mountains and trees that guests can enjoy from their room.

Then there's *Vreugde* (joy), this exclusive garden cottage was once a storeroom which has been



The Gelatenheid Cottage, a spacious two-storey country chic cottage, separated into A and B, offers privacy away from the main house.

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romantic space, the honeymoon suite.

Oortuiging (conviction) is a two-bedroom cottage with a campaign-style which reflects its heritage.

This is one of the oldest buildings in Akademie Street. Built in the 1900s, the building was used as a recruiting office during the Anglo-Boer War.

The last set of cottages is *Gelatenheid* (acquiescence).

This spacious two-storey country chic cottage, separated into A and B, offers privacy away from the main house.

In addition to the communal pool outside the main house, each cottage has a private plunge pool and wood-burning hot tubs on their doorsteps.

Gelatenheid A was my luxury home away from home for my overnight stay. This cottage was

completed in October and said to be the most popular room at Akademie.

As we entered the room I could see why anyone would want to call this space home, even if just for one night.

The dark-wood floors add a touch of colour which complements the white walls and nude home decor.

There's an elegant rustic desk with beautiful white orchids, four green apples on a clear glass plate adding a soft touch of colour; a mini-notebook and even a box of dominoes with playing instructions.

For those who wish to catch up on some reading while relaxing by the pool, every cottage and the main house has a large bookshelf with hundreds of books to choose from.

Each room has an extra-length king-size bed, ideal for a blissful night's sleep. My cottage boasted two fireplaces, one inside and a larger one outside on the patio where I spent the bulk of my time taking in the spectacular view of the trees and mountain.

The patio has shutter doors so guests can enjoy their privacy even though they are outside their rooms.

The cottage is also fitted with two Victorian-style bathtubs, one in the bathroom and a smaller one on the private patio, ideal for a cool bath on a warm night.

Unfortunately, the water restrictions means no bathing allowed but the shower is as comfortable and spacious as the rest of the place.

For hotel owner Paul Kinney attention to detail is everything and

this is something Akademie gets right.

Other fascinating features in the room include underfloor heating, floor-sensor lights for those late-night bathroom trips and an automated TV cabinet at the end of the bed.

Each room has a gramophone which allows guests to play their choice of music from their phone or iPods as well as a preloaded mobile phone which guests can use to make calls, restaurant reservations and download applications free of charge.

Akademie is right in the centre of a culinary haven so lunch and dinner is not served at the hotel but guests are encouraged to visit one of the many top rated restaurants that Franschhoek has to offer, which is within walking distance of the hotel.

The Huguenot Monument, a very popular tourist attraction, is also a stone's throw from the hotel.

Before leaving the comfort of my room, I went to the function room where aperitifs are served at sundown every evening.

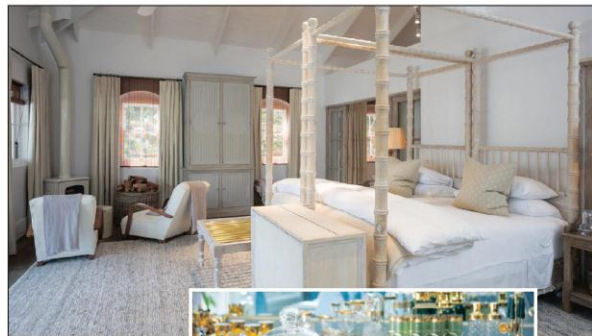
A pianist comes three times a week to serenade guests while they're enjoying a glass of wine, or in my case a mojito.

When I returned from supper, I stopped by the function room again, this time for a night cap.

The wine was now replaced by a selection of whiskies which I enjoyed in front of the fireplace while listening to the sounds of Norah Jones playing softly in the background.

After a blissful night's sleep, my stay came to an end with a delicious Sunday breakfast, which included a fresh fruit salad followed by a full Akademie breakfast, with eggs, bacon, sausage, tomato and herbs.

● For more information on Akademie Street Boutique Hotel visit their website at www.aka.co.za.



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Right: Sundowners can be a real treat.

