

South Africa

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OLD SCHOOL *escapes*

Two elegant boutique hotels in South Africa offer guests a uniquely refined experience

Perched high on Cape Town's Schotsche Kloof, a historic, vibrant neighbourhood once known as the Malay Quarter, The Dorp Hotel was designed by the late South African businesswoman Gail Behr – lauded for her ability to create unique, extravagant and somewhat eccentric interiors.

Dorp, which means village in Afrikaans, is positioned on Signal Hill at the top of the Bo-Kaap neighbourhood. One of Cape Town's oldest residential areas, it dates from the 1760s and is known for its brightly painted houses.

The boutique hotel of 42 rooms has a casual vibe, with each room designed in a bespoke manner. There are floral wallpapers and bedspreads, masses of plush white towels, stacks of books and large leafy plants. The salon walls are adorned with interesting photography and artworks, including scores of 1950s-style black and white photos of partying Tunisians.

Large glass jars in each room of the Palladian-style hotel feature a stack of delights. There's a sewing kit, and a tiny child's bracelet made of coloured lollies and a nail file. One of the hotel's mottoes is "Cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education".

Despite its eccentricities, Dorp Hotel is a wonderful place to stay and the meals, including Dorp's world-famous half rotisserie chicken, with a side of either turmeric rice, salad, roasted vegetables, chips or mash, costing R295 (\$25), are generous. South Africa's famous milk tart is just \$9.95.

Meals are served in the large salon, which is filled with books, potted palms and bowls of stacked lemons, just off the hotel's intimate reception area. Breakfast can be taken outside on the deck under umbrellas with stunning views across Cape Town.

Given the neighbourhood is predominantly Muslim, the hotel doesn't have a liquor licence, but you can BYO or help yourself to a gin and

tonic, which appears to be available alongside silver buckets of ice in some areas of the hotel.

There are enchanting bushy gardens, two pools, a games room, a pink golf cart to ferry guests up the steep hill, and a couple of boutiques laden with candles, linen dresses and pants, lotions and bags.

Mrs Behr, who was renowned for her talent in decor and interior design, passed away just before the Dorp opened in 2022.

Cape Town has brilliant hotels such as One&Only and Ellerman House, which is just up from the ritzy residential district of Camps Bay – although none has the particular style of The Dorp. Some of the city's hotels are decades old, some are new and there are more planned.

Johannesburg, a short flight from the animal-rich Kruger National Park, has several luxury international five-star hotels, including the Fairlawns Boutique Hotel & Spa, which was originally on the Oppenheimer Estate.

Fairlawns' European stables and multi-storey stone mansion were converted into a luxury hotel back in 1997 with the 2ha property now featuring 41 rooms surrounded by gardens. It is like a sprawling resort positioned in the middle of a bustling city.

Although upmarket American tour groups stay in the hotel, which is lavishly decorated in a theatrical style – think Louis XIV-style gilt chairs with Italian-style tiled floors and large pieces of African art – there is plenty of space. And it too has a fabulous restaurant and a lush boutique shop filled with ostrich leather handbags, jewellery and clothes.

A Balinese-style spa is nestled near the large swimming pool, with the hotel a favourite for international executives given its proximity to the business district of Sandton.

Fairlawns is around 30 minutes from the OR Tambo international airport.
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Fairlawns Boutique Hotel & Spa, main and insets right, is a quiet oasis of calm and luxury in the bustling city of Johannesburg. Below left: Two interiors of the delightfully quirky Dorp Hotel, high above Cape Town.

