

LUCKY CRANE VILLAS • MCGREGOR



COUNTRY ESCAPES

Capetonians hankering for a country escape are spoilt for choice. Recently, I set out to explore three new finds, each just over a two-hour drive from the city or airport, but more importantly, all far enough away from the madding crowd. **BY JARED RUTTENBERG**



McGregor is a village I've returned to repeatedly ... and for good reason. This secluded 19th-century village is one of the country's most peaceful staycations. On several visits, I had walked past the line of newly built Lucky Crane Villas and was now finally here for a stay.

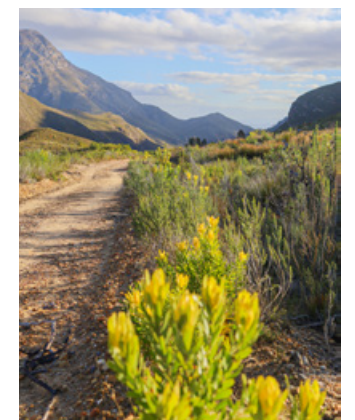
The white-washed villas couldn't be more perfectly located: on the one side, they are flanked by the village, and on the other, the gardens spill out towards the kranz-cliff with Cape Fold mountains towering behind. Glancing back at the villas from the kranz, they resemble a string of glistening pearls adorning the edge of the town.

The villas are designed with connection and relaxation in mind. My friends quickly slotted into go-slow mode, soaking up the poolside sunshine and later shifting to the braai and fire-warmed lounge.

Monika Schmalzl, the gracious owner, has poured years of passion into the villas, carefully crafting a comfy stay with her hospitality experience. They vary in size from cosy two-person accommodations to spacious three-bedroom options, each with its unique atmosphere. All have pools, Rock Martin sports a hot tub, and Little Swift has a sauna. Being adjacent also means they are perfect for larger gatherings of friends or family, ensuring everyone has their own space.

The beauty of McGregor is the ability to walk everywhere. When you do venture out, enjoy a wine tasting at Bemind, coffee from The Blend, and some reflection at the Temenos gardens.

luckycranevillas.co.za



STIL • MONTAGU

Half an hour away lies another exclusive stay that bridges the space between mountains and village. In Montagu, Stil is a one-bedroom designer home perched on a sizeable river-side plot. Owners Hanno Martly and Calitz talked me through their vision and the process of building Stil.

The design process was an intentional and hands-on experience for the couple and the result is a modern, minimalist-styled home that benefits from the expert touches of interior designer Hendre Bloem. An open-plan lounge, kitchen and dining space lead to the bedroom and 'wet room' bathroom.

In an age when bespoke design understands that one size does not fit all, Stil models what 'attention to detail' can look like; the vinophile-pleasing cabinet with seven different types of wine glasses, five gown sizes, three towel options, and a wide selection of napery allows for a different table setting for every meal. While the kitchen is a dream to cook, Stil has a catering service available on WhatsApp where you can order pre-cooked or ready-to-serve meals.

It's not only the expertly designed inside spaces but also the outside ... gardens spill out onto the river, with mountains as the ever-present backdrop. Landscape enthusiasts will be excited to know that Leon Kruger – part of the team that recently brought home awards from Chelsea and Singapore – will soon be making some magic in the gardens.

The pool is heated upon arrival, meaning I could enjoy a dip on a cold winter's day, followed by coffee on the roof terrace. What's more, Stil serves as a gallery for renowned artist Anton Smit, with his masterpieces spread through both home and garden. Many other artists' works are also featured, including James M & Haldane, Sam Reinders and pieces by bespoke furniture producer Haldane.

Stil is an ardent celebration of the best of South African artistry, making it, hands down, one of the most beautifully designed country escapes. If you do have others travelling, the nearby In Abundance is also owned by the Calitzes and sleeps up to 10.

stil.co.za



ABRIKOOS KLOOF POD RESERVE • MONTAGU



My last visit was to be the most remote of all. Driving into the rugged mountainous outskirts of Montagu, Abrikoos Kloof Pod Reserve is the brainchild of Dennis Viet. As a South African residing in England, he remains firmly connected with his place of birth through this love project. Two thousand hectares of pristine wilderness is now home to a growing collection of remote pods or cabins, each allocated 300 hectares of privacy and seclusion. Since the Abrikoos Kloof story is one in the making, a new pod/cabin is revealed every couple of months and the reserve offers the tempting option for multiple visits.

My first two nights were in The Barn House, with its striking architecture, cleverly designed to frame the wild. High-pitched roofs give the building a cathedral-like feel, and half-level floating walls enhance the view of the abundant outdoors.

As with the other cabins on the reserve, a large reservoir-styled pool and separate hot tub were mere steps away, along with an enticing pizza oven (all ingredients can be provided on request). Continuing the nature immersion, hiking trails set out from the house into the Klein Karoo surroundings.

My last two nights were spent at Mountain House, the newest member of the Abrikoos collection. An exhilarating 20-minute climb up a mountain pass and then a drive across an elevated plain takes you to the most remote cabin I have ever stayed in, situated on an elevated cleft between folds of the Langeberg Mountains.

Mountain House has a bedroom with a double-sized tub and bathroom and a separate living area with a kitchen and lounge. A large deck connects both spaces to take in the wilderness and provides access to the hammock, pool and hot tub.

As the sun slowly stretched its rays over the fynbos in the ethereal morning light, I sat with my coffee, watching canaries take to the tops of the fynbos, composing their morning melodies. Striped field mice were scuttling about the undergrowth and a solitary duiker walked by, seemingly oblivious to my presence. With not a single soul for kilometres, I let out a long breath in the panoramic seclusion; for a golden moment, everything was right with the world.

abrikooskloof.co.za

