



Location, location Top and right, the Cape Grace occupies an enviable position on Cape Town's Victoria & Alfred Waterfront

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# Grace darling

Some trips offers the added bonus of staying in the world's best hotels. Cape Town's revamped Cape Grace is one of them, reports **Caragh McKay**

**Y**ou really owe it to yourself to travel in style - precious holiday time should never be squandered. And that is exactly what being part of a select group tour offers: the best of everything, from flight options and internal transfers, to expert guides and, most important of all, the most fabulous places to stay. And so it is for anyone considering travel to South Africa this year (currently a prime destination for those seeking out sunnier climes and a heartily cheering exchange rate) for they will be among the first to stay at the newly fashioned Cape Grace, one of Cape Town's grandest addresses.

Everyone in Cape Town is talking about Cape Grace, which has held a prime position on the city's Victoria & Alfred Waterfront for the past 13 years. Already a firm favourite with British travellers, the hotel has recently been extensively

refashioned by the esteemed Cape Town interior designer Kathi Weixelbaumer.

The absolute antithesis of the "neutrals are best" brigade, Weixelbaumer's "more is more" approach has resulted in one of the most distinctive and individual looking hotels you are ever likely to stay in. It's not often that an interior designer is given a free hand but that is exactly what the directors of the hotel offered a gleeful Weixelbaumer. Everyone wants to come in and have a peek, if just to judge for themselves whether their gamble has paid off.

Rather than go down the minimalist route that many hotels feel they need to take when revamping today, Weixelbaumer has conjured up a walk-in story book, creating a warm, inviting and intriguing space that tells tales of Cape Town's maritime past but which also celebrates its position as a must-see destination.



Chic retreat The fourth floor lobby

Cargos of silver, copper, silk, porcelain and textiles were brought to the city by trade ships during its time as a key supply station for the Dutch East India Company in the 17th century. Today, Weixelhaumer has followed suit, smattering the hotel's restaurants and public rooms with luxurious antiques and *objets d'art*. "We cleared out the Cape Town auction rooms," admits the designer.

However, mining the past was never going to be the full story. Weixelhaumer knew that for her vision to be a success she needed to imbue a sense of Cape Town as it is today – a rapidly developing city embracing modernity at every turn. "Reflecting that freshness was key," she says. "Cape Town has always had a vibrant crafts community: it's a creative hub for those working in the applied arts."

It was a natural step, then, for the designer to employ a team of local artworkers – metalsmiths, painters, ceramicists and glass designers – and to boost her vision with their skills and ideas as a way of bringing her tale into the here and now.

The result is a "through the looking glass" experience where nothing is quite as it seems. On closer inspection, for instance, opulent glass chandeliers are stuffed with old china cups, birds' nests and other curios: "People either love them or hate them," offers one of the hotel staff (the most attentive and happy I have ever, ever experienced) as he catches me staring, a somewhat puzzled look on my face.

Beautiful African beaded baskets line corridor walls, while all the textiles in the rooms – whether wall hangings, bedspreads or curtains – show hand-painted stories of their own. Floral influences also abound, and there are many graphic references to the city's botanical heritage (a visit



to the city's Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden is a must).

The inspired blend of marble, metal and antique wood that make up the bathrooms, meanwhile, is the epitome of modern luxe. And, in Signal, the hotel's flagship restaurant (the hotel has open views of Signal Hill), the designer has added a humorous touch with

some highly contemporary Philippe Starck "Louis Ghost" dining chairs.

Such is the hotel's dedication to giving visitors a unique experience and a real sense of place that not one of Cape Grace's 121 rooms is the same – although opening your room's French doors out on to Signal Hill on a February morning, sunbeams dancing around the glossy water in the marina below, lets you know, pretty pronto, that the grey skies of home are a world away. The further benefit of the hotel's position on the waterfront makes it a suitably stylish base from which to explore the city.

Next year South Africa hosts the World Cup, and Cape Town, with its buzzing restaurants, natural wonders, winelands, beaches and smart shops is bound to attract the crowds.

Right now, though, with temperatures in the high twenties and an exchange rate that will make you jump for joy, can you really afford to wait?

[www.capegrace.com](http://www.capegrace.com)



**National heritage** Clockwise from left, design in the hotel's bathrooms, bedrooms and public spaces celebrates South Africa's history, natural world and exquisite craftwork

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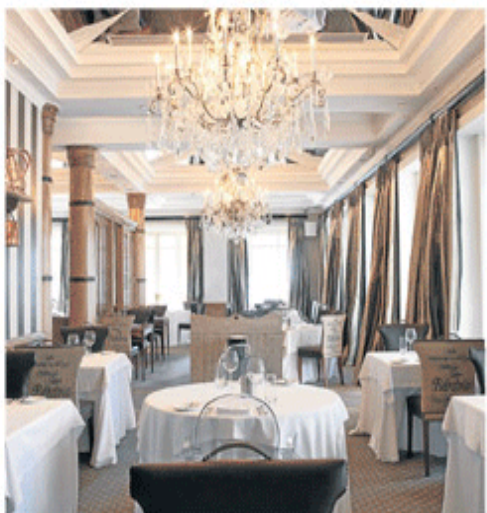
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**Top Table** The hotel's elegant Signal Restaurant