

GRAPEVINE

Grande Designs. Eat, drink and be merry at this stylish South African retreat

IF YOU'RE BOOKING THE Owner's Cottage at South African winery Grande Provence Estate, www.grandeprovence.co.za, do note that it sometimes comes with the owner. Not that you'll mind the company of Dutch entrepreneur Alex van Heeren. He knows how to charm and, after all, is providing the eminently drinkable Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz that graces the table come evening.

A 45-minute drive from Cape Town, Grand Provence is in the heart of South African wine country and besides its vineyards boasts a first-class restaurant and an ambitious art gallery and sculpture garden of contemporary South African work. The aforementioned cottage, which is really more of a opulent house, rents for a cool \$3,000 a night. If that would break the bank, you

can also book an individual room—there are five in total—starting from just over \$1,600 a night. That's hardly cheap, but generous inclusions—such as breakfasts, three-course dinners, return transfers from Cape Town airport, wine tastings and cellar tours—soften the blow somewhat. Interior designer Virginia Fisher—who worked on another of van Heeren's getaways, the award-winning Huka Lodge in New Zealand—has done an excellent job with the décor, giving subtle African and Cape Dutch accents to the cottage's mostly

A 45-minute drive from Cape Town, Grande Provence is in the heart of South African wine country

contemporary furnishings and muted hues. Celebrity guests seem at home there—Jude Law's name is in the visitors' book, while other VIPs stare down from framed photos on the hallway wall.

Grande Provence's restaurant, known simply as the Restaurant, looks rather stylish with its high-backed white-leather seating and blue-gray walls. It's also home to the South African *Sunday Times* 2007 chef of the year, Peter Tempelhoff. His menus change regularly, but the approach—injecting a soupçon of big-city dining into rustic fare—is consistent across dishes like medallions of springbok loin, the pressed ham hock and crispy pork belly, and the hazelnut brûlée with Calvados sorbet.

Guests at the Owner's Cottage can choose to dine at the restaurant or in the cottage itself, but chances are you won't be running into your host for too much longer. Van Heeren is overseeing the top-toe renovation of Grand Provence's 300-year-old Manor House, which will become his personal accommodation when the dust settles. —BY RACHAEL OAKES-ASH

CHECK IN

Golden Slumber

IT'S BEEN A LONG AND WINDING road to completion but a new \$40 million Beatles-themed hotel in the heart of Liverpool, England—the birthplace of all four members of the seminal group—finally welcomed its first guests on Feb. 1.

The Hard Days Night Hotel, www.harddaysnighthotel.com, is just yards from the site of the original Cavern Club, where the Beatles played many times during their early years. There are 110 fashionably appointed bedrooms and two suites. A suit of armor stands in the McCartney Suite—a none-too-subtle reminder of Sir Paul's 1997 knighthood—while the Lennon Suite features a white piano, reminiscent of the grand featured in the famous film of John Lennon singing *Imagine*.



Aspects of the band's career are incorporated throughout the four-star property, which is housed in the former Central Buildings—a handsome Victorian edifice dating back to 1884. The tablature of the opening chord of the 1964 hit *A Hard Day's Night* forms the hotel's logo. Every room features an artwork by Shannon—the U.S. artist famed among Beatles fans for her prolific depictions of the Fab Four—and every Beatles movie is available for viewing in the bedrooms at any time of day or night. The Beatles' history is told in images set around a magnificent 19th century granite-pillared staircase.

The hotel offers two bars—Bar Four and the Indian-themed Hari's Bar—as well as a brasserie and a restaurant serving modern British cuisine. Known as Blakes, it is named in honor of the pop artist Sir Peter Blake, who designed the iconic *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album sleeve. And while your money can't buy you love, it can buy you a wedding in the hotel's Two of Us chapel, which gets its name—as any Beatles fan can tell you—from the opening track on the album *Let It Be*. —BY MAX WOOLDRIDGE



Vintage stuff
Guests at Grande Provence can relax poolside, sample the wine or sit back and take in the view

FROM TOP: ELLIE LANGCOCK; GRANDE PROVENCE (3)