



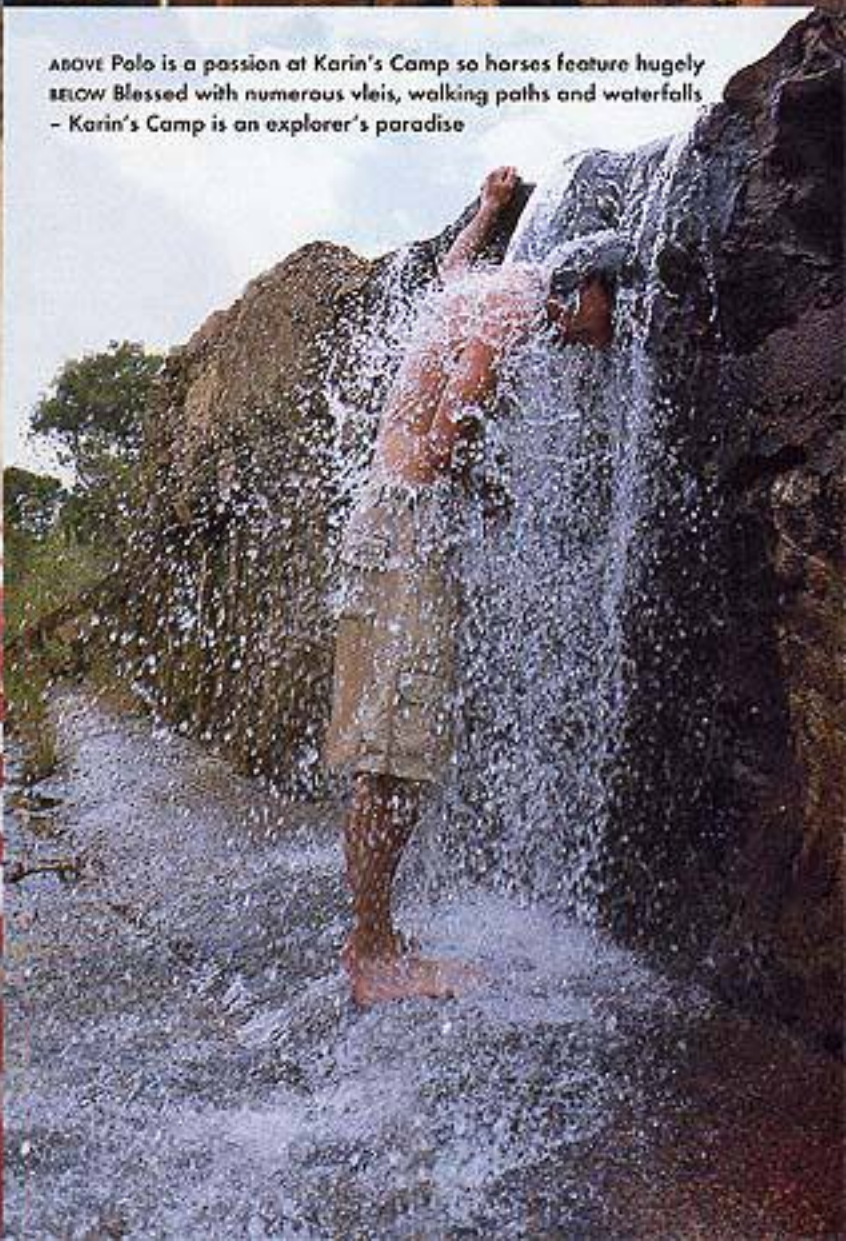
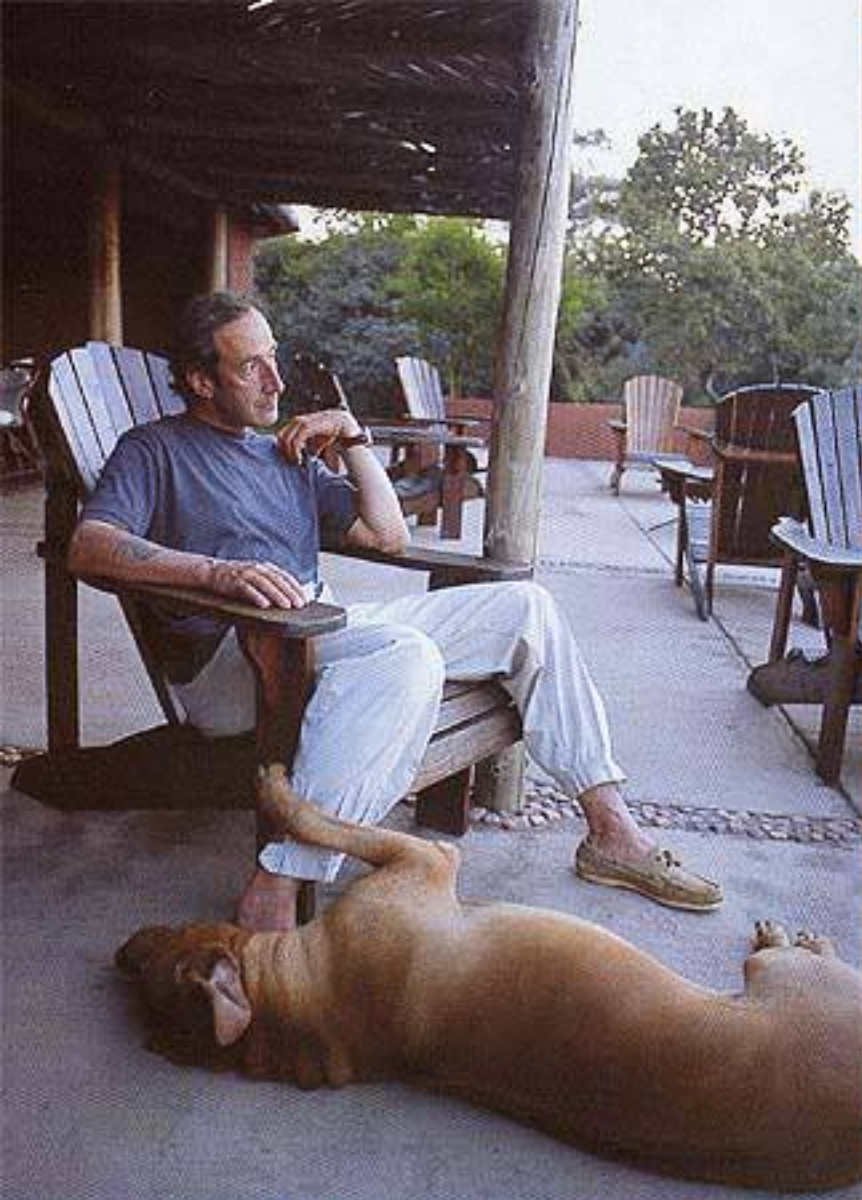
THIS PAGE Wrapped in traditional Moroccan throws, Karin, right, and a friend admire the views on an early-morning game drive
OPPOSITE The main lodge consists of different living and eating areas on varying levels. Karin filled this space with West African bamiloke stools



KARIN'S CAMP

MOVING FROM FRENETIC LONDON TO THE LAID-BACK BUSHVELD ISN'T EASY, BUT INTERNATIONAL MODEL KARIN HAMILTON-BROWN AND HER HUSBAND ALESSANDRO BALESTRI HAVEN'T LOOKED BACK

TEXT KERRY DU PREEZ PRODUCTION GENNETH LYN PHOTOGRAPHS DARON CHATZ, ALESSANDRO BALESTRI



ABOVE Polo is a passion at Karin's Camp so horses feature hugely
BELOW Blessed with numerous vleis, walking paths and waterfalls
- Karin's Camp is an explorer's paradise

ABOVE Alessandro and the loveable Bafana take in the views on the terrace
BELOW Karin's love of texture and earthy, muted colours is evident throughout the lodge



NOT MANY PEOPLE WOULD SWOP A COSMOPOLITAN LIFESTYLE IN LONDON FOR AN isolated farm three hours outside of Johannesburg, in the middle of nowhere. Not when you're an international model who has spent nearly two decades travelling the world and living in cities as diverse as London, Milan and New York. But then Karin Hamilton-Brown is no ordinary city-slicker and her home at Karin's Camp in the Waterberg, no ordinary place.

'As you get older you realise that you're more at peace with the rhythms you grew up with,' explains Karin. 'I grew up on a farm in the Natal Midlands so it was a perfectly natural decision to settle here.' It's also no coincidence that Karin and her Italian husband Alessandro Balestri chose an area that draws significant parallels with the place in which they met, Careyes in Mexico.

'Careyes is one of the most beautiful spots in the world,' recalls Karin. 'It was the first place I'd been to since leaving home that had the wildness of Africa about it. At night you'd see wild cats crossing the road and I remember closing my eyes and imagining that I was at home.' It was also where she met Alessandro. He was working in Milan in financial communications and ironically Karin had just moved her base from Milan to London. 'It was funny as we'd had mutual friends for years before we met.' Nevertheless they spent the next three years commuting, spending holidays and weekends together, until Alessandro opened an office in London.



Karin was catapulted into the international modelling scene at 19 when she won *The Face of the 80s* modelling competition. The next 15 years were spent traversing the globe and gracing the pages of magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harpers & Queen*. Her Bushveld life now is a far cry from those days but she wouldn't change it for the world. 'We have no regrets about leaving London. By the time we found this place, Alessandro and I were both fed up with city life and ready for a change. I was also pregnant with our daughter Elena.'

They first heard about the lodge when it was mentioned at a dinner party in London as part of a divorce settlement. Karin's curiosity was piqued and she came out to South Africa to have a look at it. 'We were blown away. The positioning was perfect and although it had been left derelict for six years, we could see its enormous potential.' It took another two years of legal wrangling before they could finally buy it, but by then they had looked at countless other properties and knew this one was special.

Situated on the top of a precipice overlooking the bush, Karin's Camp is surrounded by the sandstone ridges that are one of the area's oldest geological formations. It is here that clues to the spiritual nature of the place lie, for Bushman trance paintings are found in the rocks that surround the pool.

'We can't take the credit for the lodge, it was built by the previous owner Giorgio Zucchi. And he couldn't have done it better.' Karin had very definite ideas for the lodge. 'My main inspiration was from a place I had stayed in called *Monastero* on the island of Pantelleria, an Italian island with a very North African feel. Basically it's all about simple, spare interiors that are comfortable yet contemporary.' And with the help of an architect friend in Milan they've achieved just that at Karin's Camp.

Entering the lodge is a journey in itself. Leaving the stifling heat of a Bushveld afternoon behind, you step into the coolness of the large, low-slung verandah with its fragrant thatch, shiny concrete floors and simple pebble inlay. Onwards through a set of oversized double doors and you're enveloped, quite literally, in darkness. It takes confidence to decorate with dark colours, particularly in South Africa where most of us feel compelled to open our living spaces to light, but Karin's instinct to keep her palette dark has paid off handsomely. The effect is soothing and appropriate, considering the lodge's colours are echoed across the farm.

While there are definite Moroccan and Mexican influences in both colour and texture, the overall effect is a play on light and texture, creating an incredible sense of mood. If Karin had her way there would be no electricity – 'I love the mood of candlelight at night.' But everything else is exactly as she wanted it. 'I sourced for the lodge as I would for my own home.' And as they had a tight budget more was spent on the things that count, like a good coffee machine, down pillows, pure cotton linen and lighting.

It's no stereotyped, standard product either. 'We definitely didn't want that colonial safari feel,' agrees Karin. 'It had to speak of the year 2002 in Africa.' And that it does. Karin's Camp is about relaxing and being in the bush, not donning your khakis and seeing the Big Five in quick succession. 'It's really about lifestyle, we want people to feel like they're staying in their own home for the time that they are here.' So if you're mad about cooking and feel like getting into the kitchen, you're encouraged to do so. Although with an Italian menu boasting home-made risotto, polenta, fresh pasta and zucchini dishes, there really is no need. The Camp has also allowed Alessandro to pursue his passion for polo so there's horseriding for the more energetic. Those less inclined are under no pressure to do anything other than sit and stare at the views – the lodge's positioning gives it the feel of a lookout and precludes the need to go anywhere. 'Some people go away and expect to be taken away from their life. We're not that kind of place.' □



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THIS PAGE The simple, spare interiors that Karin loves are most evident in the bedrooms that look out onto the bush