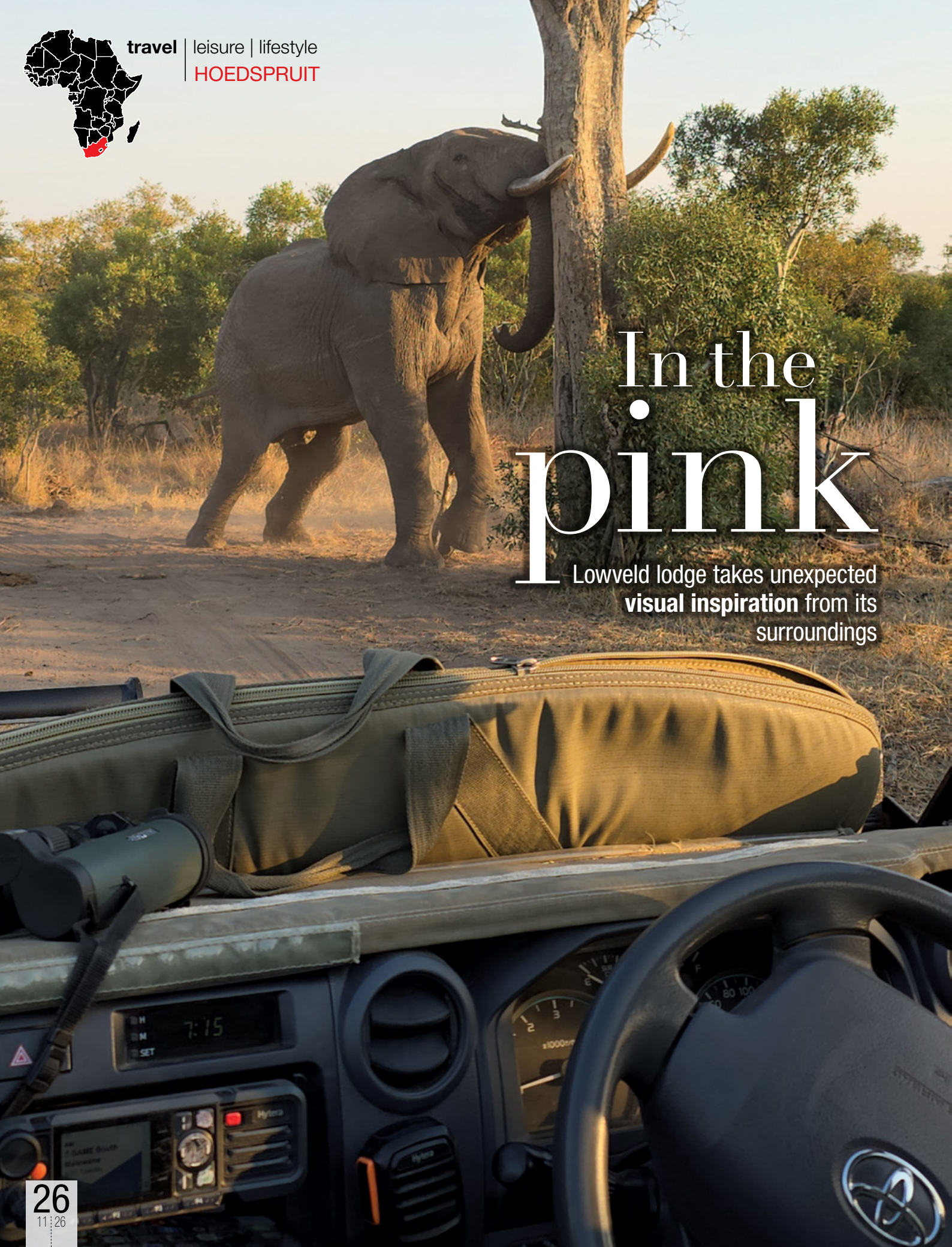

In the pink

Lowveld lodge takes unexpected **visual inspiration** from its surroundings

Up ahead, in the middle of the dirt road, a huge elephant bull swaggers straight towards the vehicle. His temporal gland is streaming and urine is dribbling down his back leg. This is a bull elephant in musth, a hormonal condition known to cause highly increased levels of aggression and unpredictability.

Ranger Ryan Jack has been a guide at Royal Malewane for 25 years, so his reassurance is something to be implicitly trusted. "We're fine as long as we give him his space," Jack explains as the elephant turns to face us. "If we were now to start making a lot of noise by shouting, clapping our hands and revving the engine, we would make him excited and that is something we don't want to do."

Jack and Mumps Mathonsi, who has been tracking wild animals for over 30 years, exchange a few words. "I think he is heading to that large torchwood tree." Jack gestures to a tall tree just up ahead of us. "There might be some fruit lying on the ground that he is after."

Sure enough, the bull makes a beeline for the burly base of the torchwood and gently moves the tip of his trunk over the soil. Not finding any titbits, he rests his forehead against the bark and starts pushing hard. His efforts pay off. After three or four attempts, the tree relents and, with the canopy shaking, a brief shower of fruit rains down on the ground.

It is the first morning at Masiya's Camp, a tented camp located in the Greater Kruger National Park. This, though, is unlike most tented camps.

Bold colours, daring decor and an eclectic creative mix of African-European style constitute the immaculate tapestry of the extraordinary space with its bespoke vintage furniture, contemporary art, Persian rugs and sassy decor.

The camp is named after the legendary Wilson Masiya, who, with his family, fled his home in war-torn Mozambique on foot through the Kruger Park. He subsequently returned to his home to escort other members of his community to safety. Masiya found employment as a tracker and became the first ever Master Tracker in the Greater Kruger National Park until his untimely passing in 2015.

Sky-high expectations

Masiya's Camp comprises six ultra-luxury, vastly spacious, bright pink canvas-draped suites. A beautiful pair of Indian handcrafted wooden doors open up into the living area, where bold colours and tailored furniture mix with a sophisticated eye for detail. The bathroom and bedroom are on opposite ends, while the huge deck outside looks out over the bush and offers a heated plunge pool, soft cushioned sofa and romantic sala.









The colour scheme alone makes staying here a memorable experience.



Getting there

Airlink connects Johannesburg and Cape Town with Hoedspruit. For flight schedules, go to page 129.

www.flyairlink.com/flightschedule

Upon first blush, the bright pink-coloured canvas walls appear almost brazenly out of place. However, when waking the following morning, it suddenly all makes sense. It is still semi-dark. The sky overhead is a muted lavender in colour, but, in the distance, a narrow band of shockingly bright fuchsia-pink stretches across the horizon. The Belt of Venus. And with a jolt, it becomes clear that is the theme of the camp – a glimpse of the intangible eternity of life.

Later that afternoon, there is another example of nature's eternal cycle. That of life and death. A large herd of buffalo is traversing the sandy road, kicking up dust. Unbeknownst to them, they are moving in the direction where a number of lionesses have been seen earlier that day. Mathonsi uses hand signals to steer Jack offroad in a bid to go around the herd and track the pride, which, luckily, is quite nearby.

The lionesses have heard the bellowing of the herd and are up and alert. After about 20 minutes, the first buffalo appear. The lionesses have slunk away in different directions and are lying low.

Carnivore crescendo

As the minutes go by, more and more buffalo appear. Half an hour later, the car is surrounded by hundreds of the huge animals as they slowly move along.

Just visible is the tawny fur of one lioness behind a thick shrub some 30m ahead. Jack points to a cute calf with a light-coloured coat staying close to its mother. "The best chance for these lions to successfully hunt is if they somehow manage to separate that young calf from its mother and the rest of the herd," he says.

But the herd sticks together and it is now almost dark. The opportunity is seemingly lost.

Then, a short time later, while the vehicle is following a beautiful female leopard through some tall grass, there is a huge commotion to the east, where the lions were. A stampede of hooves, deep powerful grunts, snorts and terrified bellows pierce the clear, starry night sky.

By the time it is morning, we come across a few hooded vultures picking at a few scant remains, including a scrap of light fuzzy hide that used to coat a young buffalo calf. There is sadness for a creature seen alive only yesterday, but these are the ways of the wild.

We leave Masiya's Camp with a heavy heart the following day, closing the magnificent hand-carved doors to the suite and walking back along the boardwalk to the lounge.

Text and photography | **Fransje van Riel**

For more information or to book a stay, go to theroyalportfolio.com.