

At the very top of the top

 By [Brian Berkman](#)

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People select hotels for all sorts of reasons, location, amenities and, of course, cost. When cost is not part of the equation there is a narrow slice of properties that stand head and shoulders above the rest: these are the ones selected because a friend told you it was the best place to be, you are after something unique, only available at that property, or you simply demand the very best of the best.



If your friends include Sir Elton John and his entourage of A-listers then his recommendation to stay at La Residence when visiting Franschhoek in the Western Cape Winelands is all you will need. If you are after the very best views of the rolling mountains that lead to Worcester and the privacy of being billeted in a private 30-acre estate with vineyards and plum tree groves and you want to experience the one-of-a-kind decor that founder and owner Liz Biden has curated, La Res is your only option.

There is nothing mini about it

The spaces at La Residence are all oversized and expansive, and the way they are decorated invites one, as a guest, to be more playful and whimsical than usual. Biden has ignored many of the so-called design rules and you must expect to find vast chandeliers, Iranian rugs and French antique armoire and a Louis XV writing desk in your bathroom, for example. And, speaking of spaces, the bathroom is almost the size of vast bedroom and sitting area.

In our Superior category suite 8, The Chambre Bleu, there is a magnificent carved timber four-poster bed that is so high there is no risk of the Tokoloshe reaching you. I, in fact, had to use the tapestried footstool to hop onto the bed.

As this suite is at the end of the left wing, it provides for two deep verandas with views over the lawns and dams - the black swan is being kept busy shepherding the ducks in the pond while beyond there are Springbok in the enclosure. The other verandah looks towards the pool and the olive trees and mountains beyond. There is a majestic peacock that seems especially fond of suite 8. I suppose it would be unfair for such a beautiful creature to also have a lovely voice.



The maxi bar - there is nothing mini about anything at a Royal Portfolio property - is set into a French antique dresser with sink, kettle, Nespresso maker, full bar and a selection of hot chocolates and teas that would be sufficient to stock a teashop.

The Maharani Suite at the end of the other wing is where we stayed previously and that bed, raised on a three-tiered marble plinth, still remains as the most extraordinary one I've yet spent the night in.

It goes without saying that every aspect of the experience at a Royal Portfolio property is exquisite - from the linens to the Asprey bathroom amenities not to mention to the vast treasure of an art collection that Biden is generous enough to share with guests. It boggles the mind how much an endeavor can ever be profitable when simply the five-centimetre-thick marble on the bathroom splash back costs many, many multiples of the room rate.



New to La Residence since we last visited in 2010 are the Vineyard Suites and now the property is better able to manage the demand for friends and family travelling together. There is also a second pool and bar and dining area which is open to all guests but especially convenient to families staying in the five vineyard suites.

A passion for food and wine pairing

I was especially impressed by the cuisine on offer: Although a menu is provided, the chef is open to preparing whatever it is you'd like to eat and is adept at taking into consideration the many dietary proclivities that today's travellers demand - myself included. Pastry chef Amy not only provided a delicious sugar-free, low carbohydrate Afternoon Tea but even made a selection of vegan and raw sweetmeats while chef Lennard demonstrated his classic training with a perfect demi-glace to accompany the roasted quail as well as a deft hand at a prawn and fish curry.

Food and wine pairing is a passion of the staff here and they offer an enviable local Franschhoek selection of wines and other artisan products. While preference is always given to residential guests, non-residents are welcome to enquire about a reservation for meals. It is hard to find a better offering in the Winelands.

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