



Fire starter

A newcomer to Joburg's culinary scene, Marble is a story of collaboration and unapologetic allegiance to SA's design and dining culture

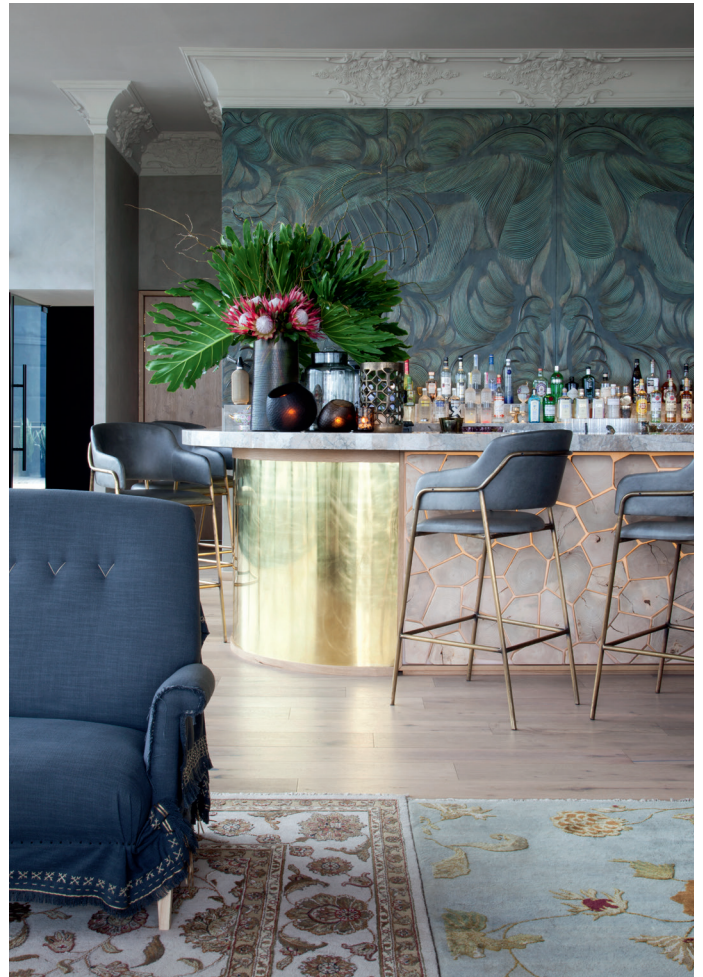
TEXT MILA CREWE-BROWN
STYLING NICOLA STEVENSON
PHOTOGRAPHS SARAH DE PINA

It's just gone past 10am; chef and Marble co-owner David Higgs is bellowing to his team to start up the fires on the grillworks. It's the fulcrum of Marble's very being and the means to nearly every dish. Monday to Sunday, the fire is fed with either *sekelbos* or wattle wood and it burns until Marble closes at 10pm. 'Restaurants have become so much about the experience,' David explains. He goes on to say that the fire, its dancing flames and its crackle are all part of delighting the senses at Marble.

Cooking on an open flame goes back millennia and David is quick to point out that what he's doing is no different from braaiing. But there's a level of refinement that he brings to the table, whether from his fire-baked bread or his 70-day matured sirloin with roasted cauliflower and fries. While meat is the star player at Marble, it is vegetable dishes, like the wood-fired beets or harissa pumpkin drizzled with buttermilk dressing, that have surprised guests the most.

Meat and fire run a subtle thread throughout the space, from Krisjan Rossouw's carefully conceptualised, colour-rich photographs to the incognito cattle graphics evident to observant onlookers in the bar area's wall panel and elaborate cornicing. But it's no roadside grill house. Decorator and wife to co-owner Gary, Irene Kyriacou went to great lengths to ensure that sophistication, glamour and comfort were all part of the aesthetic.

Local artisans have been afforded the opportunity to make their mark in a space that sings the praises of South African design. The interior pulls from international styles but Irene notes, 'It was very much about celebrating local design'. A talented cast of artisans works its magic here. The wall of handmade azure tiles by ceramicist Mervyn Gers is a showstopper, while Peter Mthombeni's Dolos installation covers the passage wall outside the restrooms. Damien Grivas was responsible for the dramatic macramé screen that beautifully divides the private dining area from the public, as well as the enormous bronze verdigris back panel in the bar area. The bar counter itself is marble topped with a facade of brass and oak-end grains. Large Persian rugs give an air of grandeur, while Casamento's elegantly unravelled sofas provide a comfortable perch in which to get stuck. Sunset over the



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT
The bar lounge straddles the divide between plush and elegant with an eclectic design mix; the bar is a glamorous affair; the dining area; chicken with confit lemon aubergine, asparagus and harissa.

OPPOSITE
Chef and co-owner, David Higgs.



Magaliesberg mountains can be observed from the long, west-facing terrace with any of the 100 listed wines in hand, many of them boutique and all carefully selected by the restaurant's skilled beverage manager, Wikus Human.

The standard of quality at Marble operates on an underground level too. Acoustic boards ensure that the 200-plus guests can hear each other with ease. Linen napkins are thoughtfully stitched with a buttonhole to guard against errant sauces. Even the scrupulously selected cutlery has undergone an ageing process to shed its shiny new glare.

Marble's primary triumph is the fact that it has created an exceptional menu around a South African ritual – the braai. Its second feat has been its dedication to local design with just the right amount of glamour, and already it has proven to be a winning combination. With Marble's devotion to detail and aesthetics, it's not surprising that the restaurant is a nominee for the 2016 Boschendal Style Awards. □
marble.restaurant

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