



A herd of elephant makes its way past Khwai Leadwood in Botswana.

PHOTOS | DOOK

WORDS | MARY HOLLAND

An intimate new lodge in B O T S W A N A ,
K H W A I L E A D W O O D may have been built with the core
aim of CONSERVING THE LANDSCAPE,
but there is a strong design eye in this carefully crafted safari camp.

T R E A D I N G L I G H T L Y

"I ALWAYS

D R E A M E D

OF HAVING A SITE ON THE

RIVER," SAYS BEKS NDLOVU, FOUNDER AND CEO OF AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS, as the aluminium boat glides through the reeds and launches onto the bank, the motor now killed. It's night-time and Khwai Leadwood, African Bush Camps' new lodge on the Khwai River in the Khwai Concession, is aglow with lanterns, the bush alive with the croaking of frogs. "People said it would never happen – but sometimes it just takes a little bit of time."

For Beks, patience (five years of it) was a worthy exchange for the perfect riverside site, which isn't easy to come by. "You see how the river bends," he says standing by the firepit on a sunken deck shaded by a leadwood tree, pointing to the U-shaped curve in the waterway. From this spot, the hook in the river guides your eye through the grassland and onto the neighbouring Moremi Game Reserve – and you can see why he held out for this precise location.

Beks is a stickler for details, but it was with the help of design duo Debra Fox and Chris Browne of Fox Browne Creative that the lodge became a reality. Turned around in six months, it was a project only experts could pull off. Not only did the team need to bring their sharp design skills, they also had to ensure they were gentle on the fragile landscape. At African Bush Camps, design is important – but conserving the landscape is critical.

"The tents had to have as little impact as possible, and because of the solar farm, we had to choose electrical appliances very carefully," says Debra, adding that there were many elements to consider – such as the wooden



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decking for which the material had to be sustainably grown and certified. "Wherever possible, natural materials were used and Botswana crafts were celebrated."

The six-room tented camp is loaded with eye-catching pieces such as woven baskets, sly wooden crocodiles pinned to the pool deck, a custom beaded chandelier by Mud Studio that dangles in the entrance, and steel cabinets created from small Kavango baskets in collaboration with Design Afrika. The honey-coloured palette, inspired by the Okavango Delta's wintertime hues, is seamlessly licked throughout the property. "The grass was the base colour, which morphed into a mustard, outlined with black and white," says Debra. In the river-facing tented suites, headboards are made from flat baskets, providing a fresh take on basket-ware from northern Botswana, and the steel beds feature draped mosquito nets, mustard linen pillows and earthy throws by African Jacquard. There are also less obvious design elements that serve as proof of Beks's attention to detail, like the shape of the camp, which is designed to resemble a bird in flight – something that can only be seen from above.

But perhaps the most captivating design element is nature's doing: the twisting river that leads the eye through a grassy landscape, and onto hippos, elephants and golden sunsets. africanbushcamps.com | foxbrowne.com

THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT Beks Ndlovu, founder and CEO of African Bush Camps; the lodge's entrance area features a standout chandelier by Mud Studio; guests have the option of enjoying breakfast alfresco. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP** The lodge spills out onto the Khwai River; a mid-morning mokoro ride.





visi | Botswana Lodge



ABOVE The decked lounge area looks out onto the Khwai River and the surrounding grasslands. **BELOW** Fox Browne Creative incorporated the warm winter hues prevalent in the Okavango Delta into the lodge's colour palette. **OPPOSITE** In the bar area, hard steel pieces are offset by a mixture of textured rattan and plush furnishings.





ABOVE Raised on a timber deck, the firepit provides a great view of the river bend. **BELOW** Around the pool, crocodile sculptures are cleverly pinned to the deck. **OPPOSITE** At check-in, guests are welcomed in the reception area, which is dominated by a basket chandelier - an example of craftsmanship typical of northern Botswana.





ABOVE In the evenings, Khwai Leadwood turns into a fairyland illuminated by lanterns.
BELOW Meals are cooked on the open fire in the boma, and shared by guests under the night skies.



ABOVE Reminiscent of a campfire, the firepit area provides a space for guests to share their stories from the day.
BELOW The river wetlands are a unique sundowner spot.





ABOVE All tented suites offer expansive river and grassland vistas. **BELOW** The en suite bathrooms have been designed to provide indoor and outdoor shower options, as well as plentiful closet space.



ABOVE The outdoor bathtub offers a chance to unwind in nature. **BELOW** In each suite, the steel bed features a draped mosquito net, and an earth-toned throw by African Jacquard. All headboards are made from flat woven baskets.

