

Paarl's secret paradise: Brookdale Estate's transformation from overgrown farm to wine wonderland

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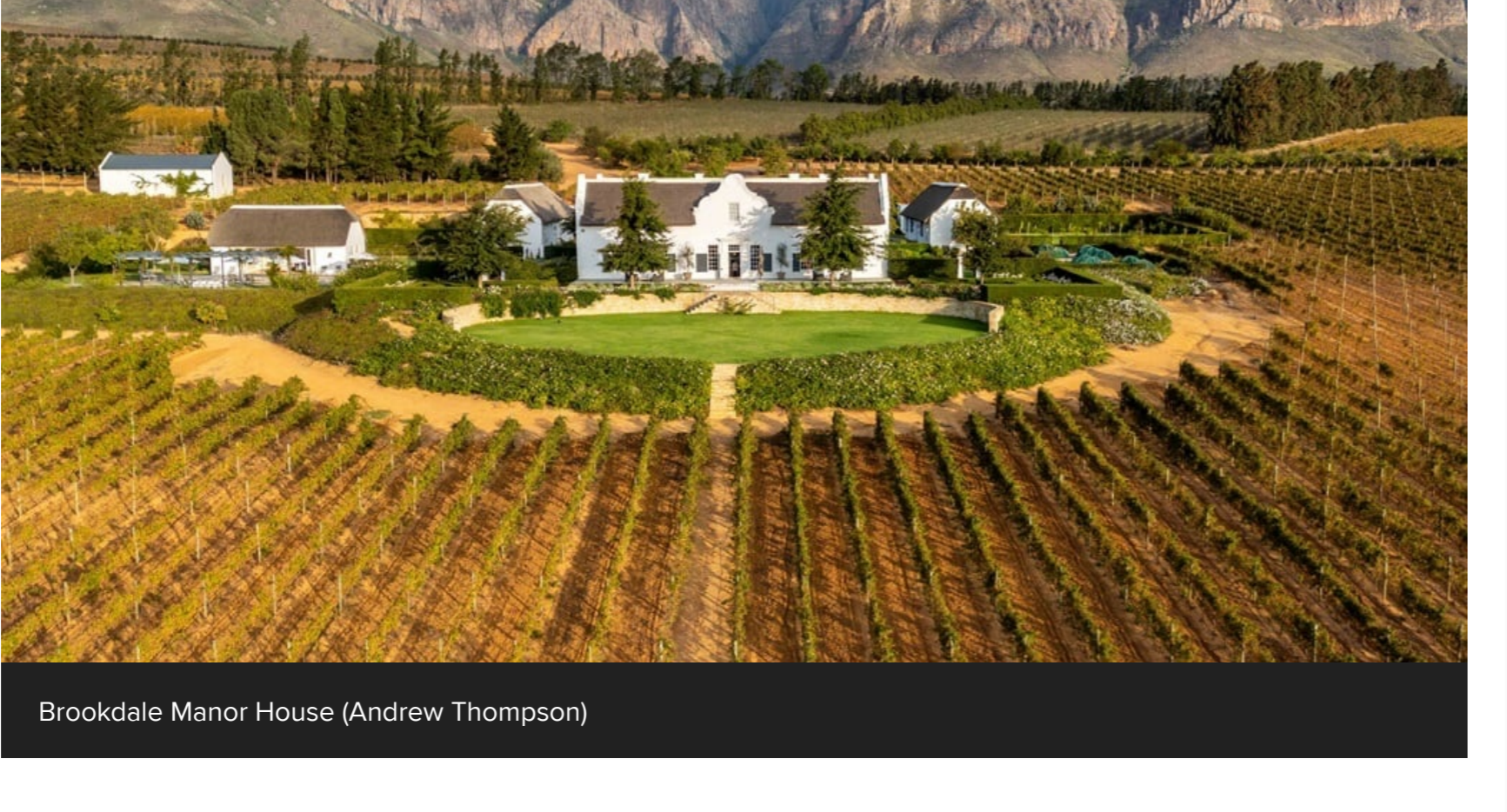
Aerial view of Brookdale Estate Manor House (Andrew Thompson)

- Brookdale Estate, on the outskirts of Paarl, is one of the newer estates on the Cape Wine lands map.
- It recently underwent a major transformation from an overgrown private property to produce celebrated wines.
- A new bistro and tasting room means it's now open to day visitors.
- But true magic lies in wait for those who overnight in its lavish Manor House.

Paarl. It may not have the exotic ring of Franschhoek. Or the trendy, youthful community of Stellenbosch. And it doesn't, yet seem to have the tourism marketing juggernauts of either inserting its name into superlative headlines of global travel publications.

But that's just fine for those in the know.

Because when you glide through the grand gates of Brookdale Estate, an easy hour's drive from Cape Town, dip down over the gurgling stream, and round the protea-lined paved corner leading up to its Manor House - with the almost-mystical backdrop of the Du Toitskloof mountains - you may well find yourself smugly grateful for its present, but likely short-lived, off the radar credentials.



Brookdale Manor House (Andrew Thompson)

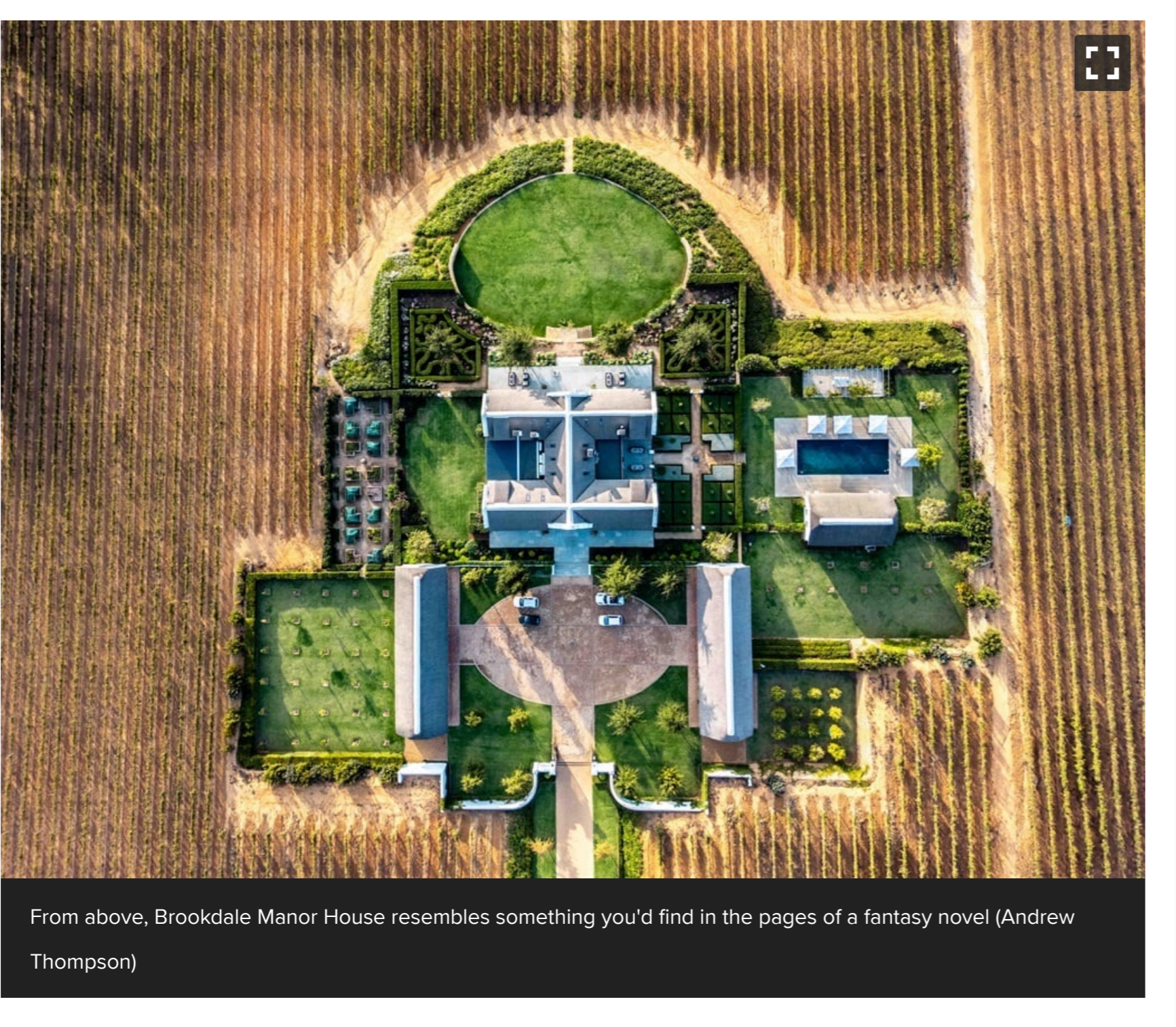
Something old

Paarl, of course, is anything but new. A strong contingent of Khoikhoi people lived and flourished in the area for centuries - some of their rock art is still visible in the caves around the valley - long before settlers arrived in the Cape.

It didn't take those colonisers long to discover and fall for the picturesque valley and push many of its original people further inland. Soon, two dozen families from Stellenbosch were allocated land there, and they began planting the early seeds of modern-day Paarl.

The growing settlement, initially called Drakenstein but later changed to Paarl (for its pearl-like rock, particularly after rains), is the third oldest European settlement in South Africa after Cape Town and Stellenbosch and is now the largest in the Cape Wine lands.

But sitting on the steep of Brookdale's Manor House, peering over the illustrated map of the estate while cradling a glass of wine made from the very vineyards before you, its size is irrelevant. You may as well be somewhere deep in the south of France or, with only a little more imagination, in the opening pages of a classic fantasy novel—possibly something by Jane Austen or Enid Blyton.



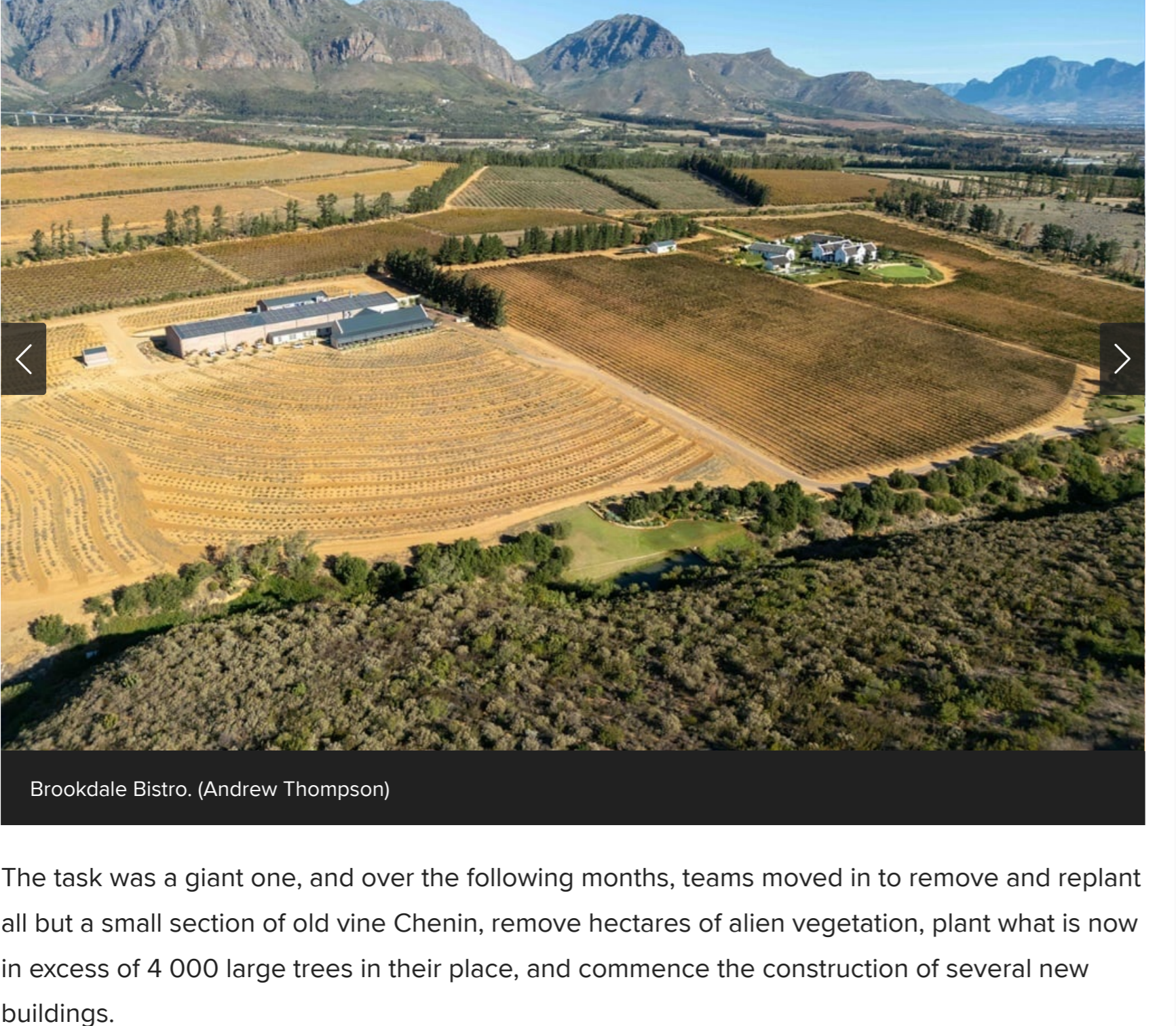
From above, Brookdale Manor House resembles something you'd find in the pages of a fantasy novel (Andrew Thompson)

Something new

Despite the town's long history and Brookdale's strong sense of place on the large property, the estate's current iteration is surprisingly new.

Until recently, it was a neglected property on the town's outskirts - its vines were overgrown and battling leafroll virus, alien vegetation was settling in, and what was harvestable and explorable formed part of a private working farm with off limits to the public.

Despite its state, when Englishman Tim Rudd first visited the property in the mid-2010s, he saw its potential. The Rudd family purchased the land in 2015 with the idea of using this idyllic location to spin it into a flourishing tourist destination.

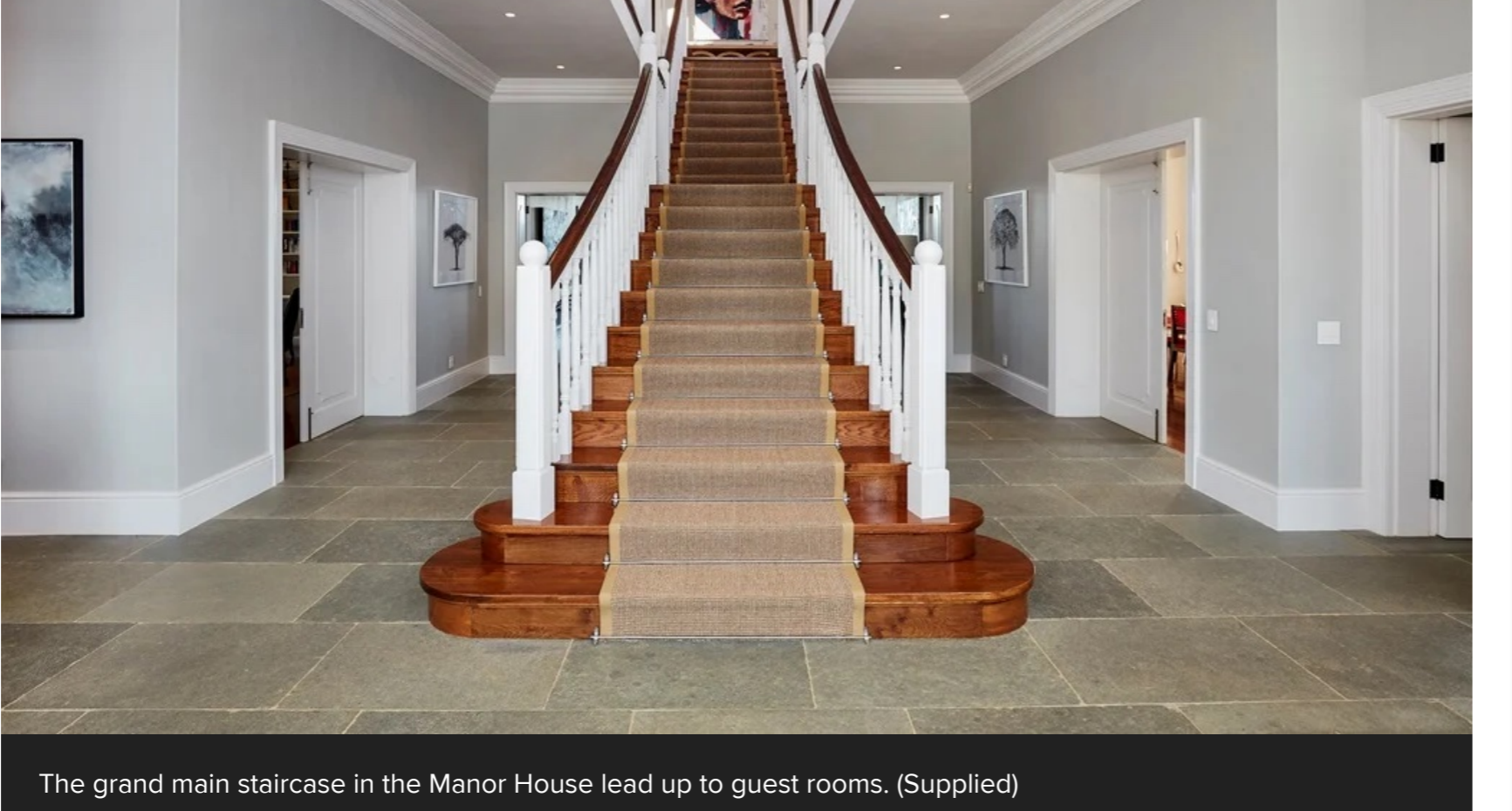


Brookdale Bistro (Andrew Thompson)

All that was a giant one, and over the following months, teams moved in, remove and replant all but a small section of old vine Chenin, remove hectares of alien vegetation, plant what is now in excess of 4 000 large trees in their place, and commence the construction of several new buildings.

Rudd then assigned the winemaking responsibilities to Kiara Scott, one of the country's most exciting young winemakers, and the managerial and chef duties to husband and wife team Yvonne and Gary Coetzee, who count luxury lodge company Singita and hotel giant Sol Kerzner as previous clients.

Today, a small but palpably passionate team runs what is still a working wine and olive farm but now has a bookable manor house and a brand new modern bistro open to day visitors.

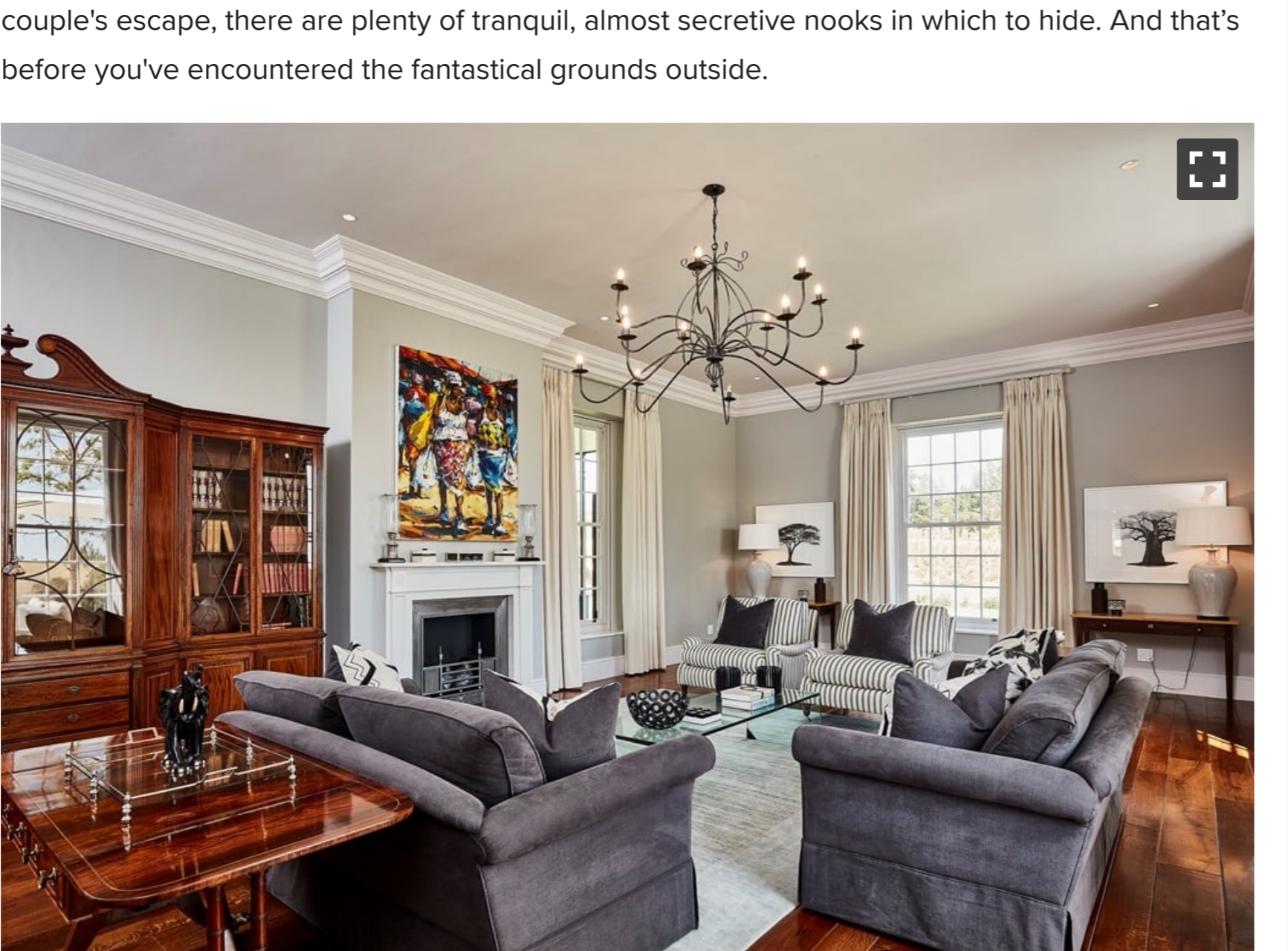


The grand main staircase in the Manor House lead up to guest rooms. (Supplied)

A classically modern Manor House

The Manor House opened in 2021, and its six en-suite rooms walk a fine line between classical, elegant, comfortable, and modern. This means thick pile carpets, sash windows, vintage makeup tables, and voluptuous king-size beds—but also pop-up plug points with USB-C chargers, ultrafast WiFi throughout, and concealed televisions that rise out of bed footboards at the touch of a button.

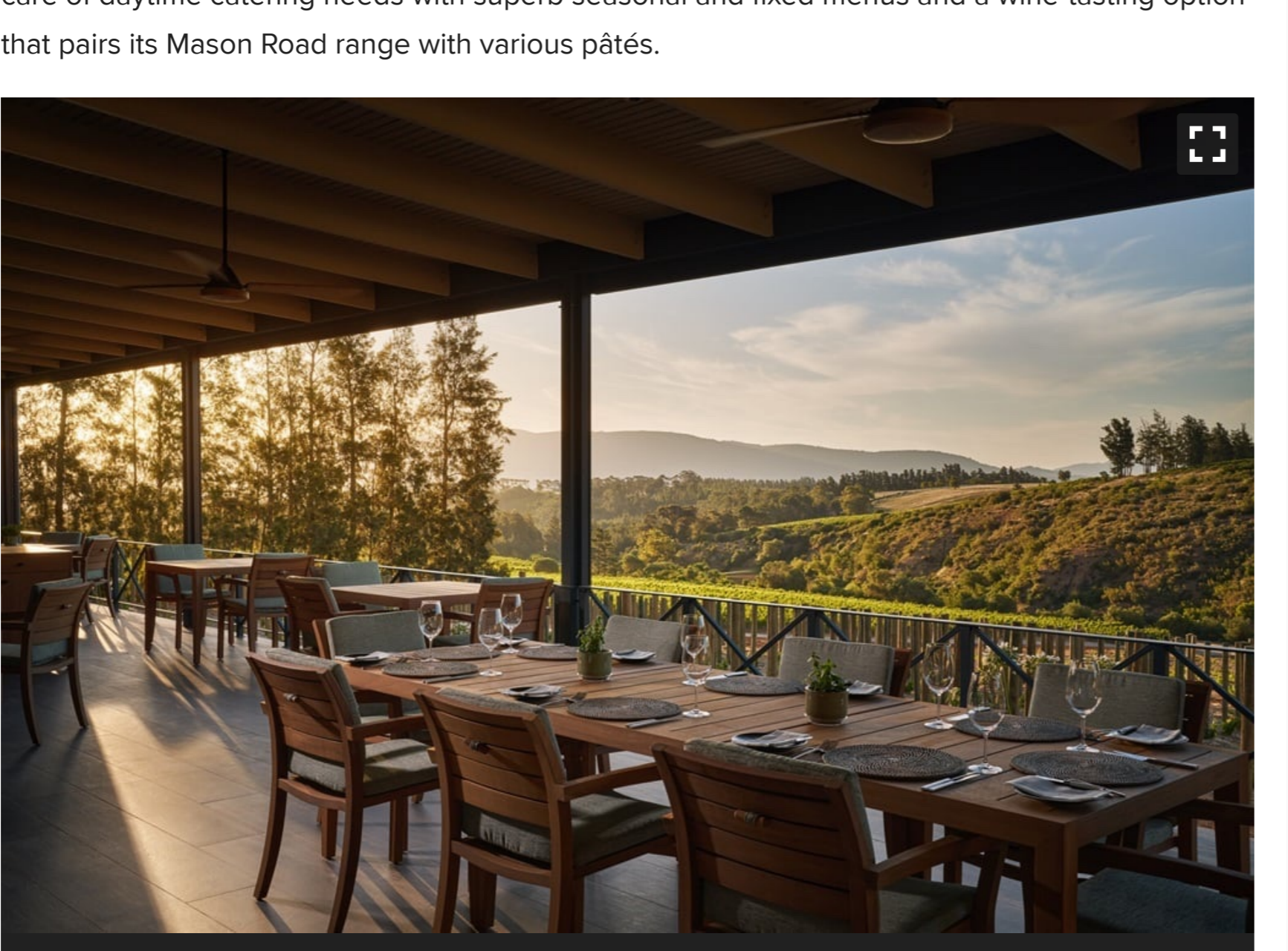
Downstairs is a vast common area you'll share with other guests unless you've booked the property for exclusive use. But whether you're there for a wedding, a family reunion, or a couple's escape, there are plenty of tranquil, almost secretive nooks in which to hide. And that's before you've encountered the fantastical grounds outside.



Downstairs houses common areas like libraries and studies, with dinners and breakfasts moved into different rooms depending on the occasion. (Supplied)

The Manor House has a large, open-plan kitchen that operates in chef style. You can work as the in-house chef preparing multi-course meals, including breakfasts and optional tasting menu dinners paired with wines from the estate.

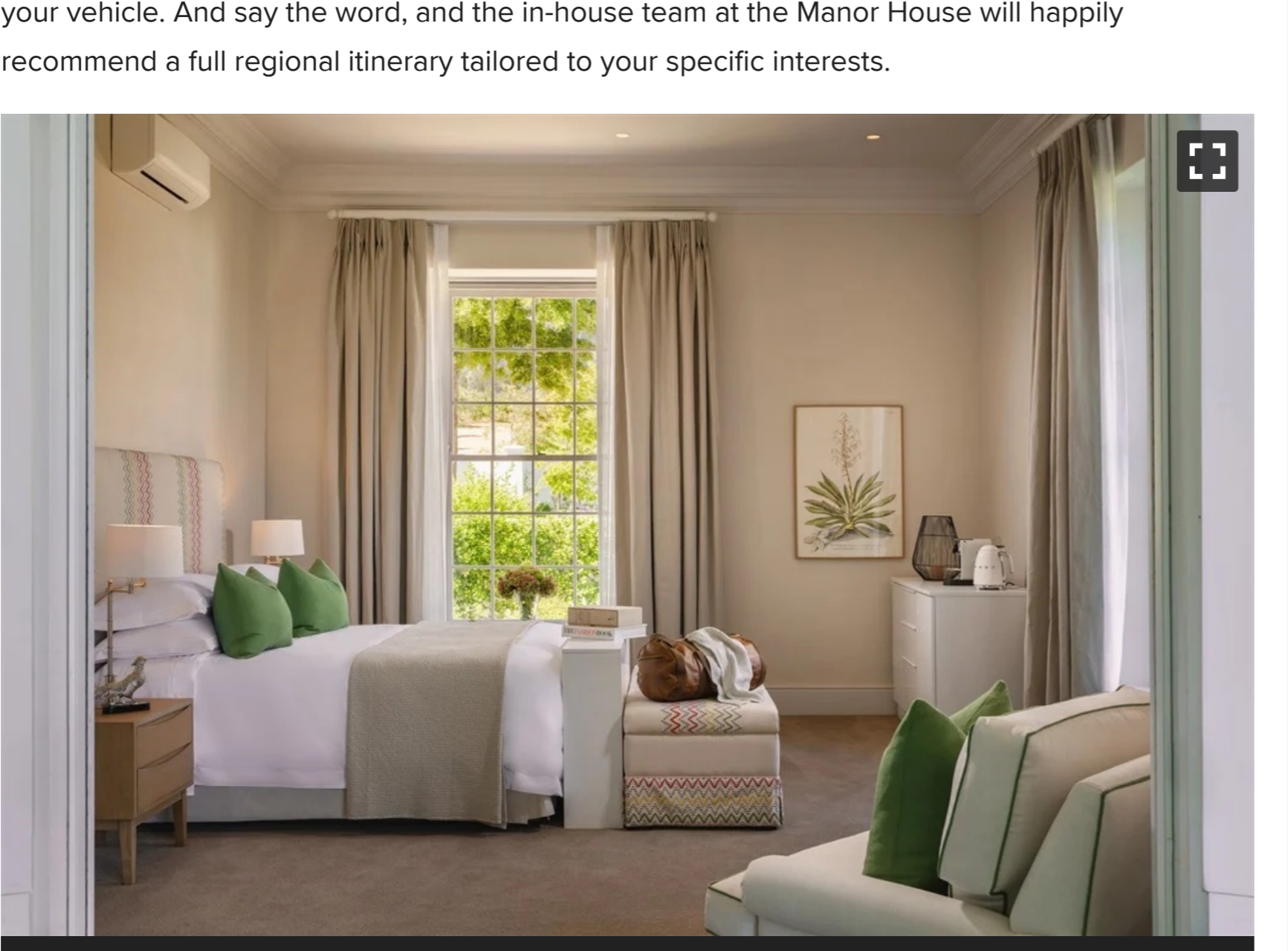
The newly completed restaurant and tasting room, a pleasant walk from the Manor House, takes care of daily catering needs with superb seasonal and fixed menus and a wine-tasting option that pairs its Mason Road range with various pâtés.



The new bistro and tasting room at Brookdale overlook young vineyards. (Supplied)

Grounds out of a fantasy novel

On arrival, you may have grand intentions of exploring the region. Paarl feels like it's on the cusp of something fresh and exciting, and views from the mighty Du Toitskloof Pass, or down towards the glistening lights of Paarl itself, both just visible from the property, may tempt you back into your vehicle. And say the word, and the in-house team at the Manor House will happily recommend a full regional itinerary tailored to your specific interests.



Rooms in the Manor House are classic but modern. (Supplied)

But don't venture out at the expense of the estate and its surroundings. The Manor House is set in a manicured, sculptured garden ripe for exploration—verdant, raised vegetable boxes sit to its west, a rose garden and vast grass helipad and function lawn to its front, and maze-like hedges to its east. Walk through these, and you'll arrive at a sparkling pool with deckchairs and umbrellas and a comfortable indoor pool room.

"Brookdale is a special property that we've built to allow you to escape, pause, and unwind," says general manager Yvonne Coetzee.

"We realise spending these days is a privilege, and we believe it must produce memories in return. Whether that's from an interaction with our staff, a quiet walk among the vineyards, or a specific glass of wine we've perfectly paired with your dinner, it's all part of the puzzle that has to fit in perfectly."

And when these custom puzzle pieces come together - built from whiling away a day on the giant sofas reading a novel pulled from the library shelves, splashing about in the pool, or wandering, running, or biking among the paths and vineyards of Brookdale's near 80 hectares of land, before returning for another glass of wine - that Rudd's innovation, and his team's implementation, make perfect sense.

And it's with this slow down and appreciate your surroundings approach that, for a blissful few moments, will leave you feeling as if you've been transported into that period novel, where all your luxury farmstead-living fantasies have actually come true.

If you go

Brookdale Estate is currently offering 20% off for reservations of two nights or more, which includes breakfast daily and a Mason Road wine tasting for two. The Manor House also offers **stay for four, pay for three** night specials available at select times of the year.

The estate is located 65km, or roughly one hour's drive, from the Cape Town City Bowl.

The Bistro at Brookdale is open to guests and day visitors for lunch from Tuesday to Sunday, and dinner on Friday and Saturday. Wine tastings are available Tuesday to Sunday, from 11:00 – 17:00.

Andrew Thompson was a guest of Brookdale Estate

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