

Spearheading a new Spier experience

 By [Brian Berkman](#)

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With 153 keys, The hotel at Spier Wine Estate, Stellenbosch, must be among the larger winelands properties. Spier, committed to biodynamic farming and socially responsible practices in everything it does, is, perhaps, best represented by its excellent Eight restaurant that shines brightly with its farm-to-table ethos.



The Spier Hotel village is graded four stars but I suspect this is a strategic choice to better attract corporate and parastatal business in these times where conspicuous consumption may leave a bitter taste with stakeholders.

To my eye, albeit assessing one of the recently refurbished signature-category rooms, I witnessed nothing less than five-star facilities. Certainly, the service and cuisine we experienced at the hotel restaurant and, in fact, at most of Spier's outlets, fit five-star expectations.

A safe haven for rescued predator birds

There are two things you must do when visiting - whether overnight or not - The Eagle Encounter at Spier's Wildlife Outreach programme that provides a safe haven for rescued predator birds and, wherever possible, prepares them for re-release into the wild. Those birds that have been maimed and those hand-reared can never be released and they form part of the "edutainment" experience. Having eagle owls land on my glove and provide a "head massage" is a highlight as is watching handler Colin exercise the birds in a flying and hunting demonstration.



Thrilling adventures

The other experience, no less educational but even more thrilling, is the Segway tour of the estate that takes participants in the 90-minute tour into exploring the estate on Segways - the two-wheeled motorised gizmos. After a short training (these amazing, self-levelling machines, seem to intuit where we want to go and at what speed) we were off.

If, like me, you are anxious that your ability to balance will make such an experience tricky, allow yourself to be delighted rather than put off from participating. We visit Spier's water purification farm that not only uses bacteria and plants to purify water but also "good-energy" words. Next we visit their organic and biodynamic vineyards and see Farmer Angus' mobile chicken caravans that produce about 3000 eggs a day and fertilise the land while doing so. These are proper free-ranging chickens. Farmer Angus also raises beef on Spier to produce magnificent grass-fed beef that is devoid from the toxins such as antibiotics and others associated with grain and corn-fed livestock.

Not just a picnic destination

Conferencing forms a big part of the business at Spier as does the wine production but two new things will again put Spier on the go-to list for locals and overnight guests. A new restaurant, The Hog House by chef PJ Vadas is set to open soon at the site of the Jonkershuis, adjacent to the Manor House as well as a new weekend market. Spier is justifiably well loved as a picnic destination by Eight to Go - either book online 24-hours in advance and collect your completed basket or purchase what you'd like from the deli and head under the oak trees. The green square area, once housing Moyo, is now open again for all Spier visitors to enjoy and the giant oak at its centre will, come summer, be tops of the what's hot and coolest places

to be.

Hotel rooms are superbly spacious. Ours with opening French doors onto a screened terrace with views on to the courtyard protected pool was lovely, especially the new beds which are dreamily comfortable. Curtains have been added to the rooms which only had shutters previously and having an easy-to-use gas fireplace is a real treat if you feel like being cosy.

The Signature Terrace River rooms overlook the Eerste River which runs through the estate.



The reception, lounge and restaurant areas of hotel have generous double fireplaces that burn the alien wood cleared from the estate while the space is a showcase for South African art and design - I especially liked the Haldane Martin Zulu Mama chairs and the recycled plastic light fittings by Heath Nash.

It was wonderful to see Tony Romer-Lee again - this time in his new role at PMR Hospitality, a partnership with US-based Euan McGlashan, providing hospitality businesses with their combined insights of having run top hotels around the world. Romer-Lee, most recently CEO of the Collection of Liz McGrath Hotels and before that as GM at One&Only, Cape Grace and Singita Ebony and Boulders, is on a five-year contract with Spier which, I have no doubt, will reassert and cement the estate's position as a world-class destination.

Be sure to connect with Guest Relations' Wiseman when you visit. He is a product of Spier's grow-and-promote-from-within programme under the auspices of the USB, Stellenbosch's Business School. Hearing him speak about the farm's history - among the oldest in the land since 1692 - and about the many successful community development art and crafts projects spearheaded by the owing Enthoven family, and hearing his pride in the estate's Fairtrade accreditation is a particular pleasure.

For more, go to www.Spier.co.za

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