

Some interesting facts of Phantom Forest.

The Phantom Forest project was started in 1997, with the concept of conservation funded by limited sympathetic development. Set within a private nature reserve of 147 ha., consisting of three biospheres of Afriomontane Forest, Cape Coastal Fynbos and Estuarine wetland with continuing conservation run and funded through a Trust, which is a model of preservation of an area of natural beauty, with trustees including Phantom Forest and a professional member of Cape Nature Conservation, thus guaranteeing the future of this reserve.

Alien vegetation was cleared by hand, and large Australian gum, blackwood and wattle felled, planked and kiln dried to create beautiful flooring, chairs, tables, doors etc. in the lodge. Strong eco-friendly methods were used to construct the "tree-suites". All small plants were removed from under the decks for later re-planting. Pine and poplar were utilised for roofs, decks and supports. End-cut 'wavy' pine planks found a new use turned into roof shingles. At the time of building these planks were 'throw away' and now have new value! Poplar trees demand huge water intake to survive, and have little commercial value. Farmers in our neighbouring Little Karoo were quite willing to sell us the live trees, thus removing these water wasting aliens. These were, after debarking and cleaning turned into roof beams for thatch and shingle. This timber seems to be unpalatable to bugs, can be used 'green', getting harder and stronger each year, and creates a beautiful 'hat' for our tree-suites, a win-win situation!

As water is fast becoming a very precious necessity, our own water supply is treated with respect. Recycled through our own sewage plant, pumped back up to reed beds and finally filtered naturally back into the ground as clean re-usable water for all, flora and fauna included, this is indeed a model of recycling. Only bio-degradable cleaning products are used at Phantom, to keep this process pure. Water quality is regularly checked and tested and could be sold as bottled water!

All electrical cables, water pipes etc. run under the boardwalks. Sewage pipes lie on top of the forest floor, painted black to minimise visual impact. Our policy of 'touch the earth lightly' is taken literally here! Over one kilometre of boardwalks minimises any impact on the ecology of the forest, in fact we often see wildlife using the boardwalks to move easily around their habitat!

No trees were removed to make way for the tree-suites, the design being constantly adapted, creating a feeling of one-ness with nature. Pre-made concrete and steel reinforced 'pads' were placed at the bottom of hand dug holes, footing the large pine poles supporting our tree-suites, thus excluding pollution by wet cement. Each suite has its own character, sense of place and privacy.

Conventional construction methods were used outside of the fragile area, for the swimming pools, part of the Eyrie and Chutzpah. Trusty old Landrover pick-ups were used to carry all of these components up to the lodge on our simple grass-block track, again minimising impact. The construction team were trained in new innovative methods, over a number of years, sending new skills out into the community. This is a on-going process as we are constantly maintaining or clearing other areas of alien vegetation by buying in baby Wattle and Blackwood to replace our natural untreated 'cladding', which placed upright on the outside of the suites, create a visual 'disappearance' of the building!

The principle of sustainable development is a constant ongoing process through community involvement, with training throughout the lodge, sending newly acquired skills into the marketplace. The buying of organically grown produce from small growers is another important aspect of empowerment we employ.

Phantom Forest does whisper a special magic, with wonderful staff who hold Phantom close to their hearts, where our guests can expect an experience touching the senses and restoring the spirit in a wonderland of Nature.

A thought to ponder.....Green principles and sustainability are becoming essential elements in our polluted world. One tree must be planted somewhere in exchange of CFC's for each traveller on an aircraft.