



Reconnecting humanity

Realising that to be truly inclusive, you have to create belonging, this new breed of experiences – by people of colour, for people of colour and their friends – seeks to reconnect individuals with and reimagine what black spaces in Cape Town should really be.

I'm blindfolded, sitting at a long table and moulding a shapeless form of clay with a group of vibrant women (and a few men). Every few minutes, the sound of giggling erupts from a fellow dinner guest, as we all surrender to the sensation of sound without sight. Attempting to sip red wine while blindfolded does not bode well, so I continue to knead the grey, damp clay with my hands in hope that it begins to resemble the mini vase that I sketched beforehand.

I'm at a 'Sip & Sculpt' evening at CURIOCITY, Cape Town, a design-led hybrid hotel – one of the first of its kind on the African continent – and eagerly awaiting the main course of a gourmet meal to be served by Chef John Briggs from Ethiopia. First launched by Bheki Dube at the tender age of 21 in Johannesburg, CURIOCITY Africa has found its way to South Africa's coastal city and its properties are all spearheaded by women of colour and youth.

When it comes to design, the art and interiors tell an African story, one often untold in the very 'European' city of Cape Town. I find rooms painted the colours of a Cape sunset, a facade by local, multi-disciplinary artist, Atang Tshikare and headboards alluding to traditional Cape Dutch architecture, adorned with vibrant African fabrics in an effort to decolonise these elements.

"I think we are all descendants of African griots," says 29-year-old Bheki. "Storytellers, writers, and poets. As far as I can stretch my memory, my grandma would narrate these stories of Africa. It's also worth mentioning that it took us six years to get into Cape Town, given its history and its disparities. It's got such a high barrier to entry, especially for a black operator trying to break ground here, it was quite a challenging endeavour."

Aside from bringing an African language into the design and intentionally curating in-house experi-



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ences, Bheki believes that it's all about reimagining what a black space in the city should be.

"We are getting to a point of black consciousness, in a quest for true humanity. And if we are able to contribute towards that, then I feel that we've achieved something," he adds.

I play back his words in my mind like a mantra, as I put one foot in front of the other... scrambling up a cliffside of Table Mountain, pre-7am, is not the way I envisioned starting my day. Not being incline-strong, I would rather walk steadily at pace for hours than clamber up a fierce slope. But here I am, both

CURIOCIETY's sunrise power hike kicks off the day right.



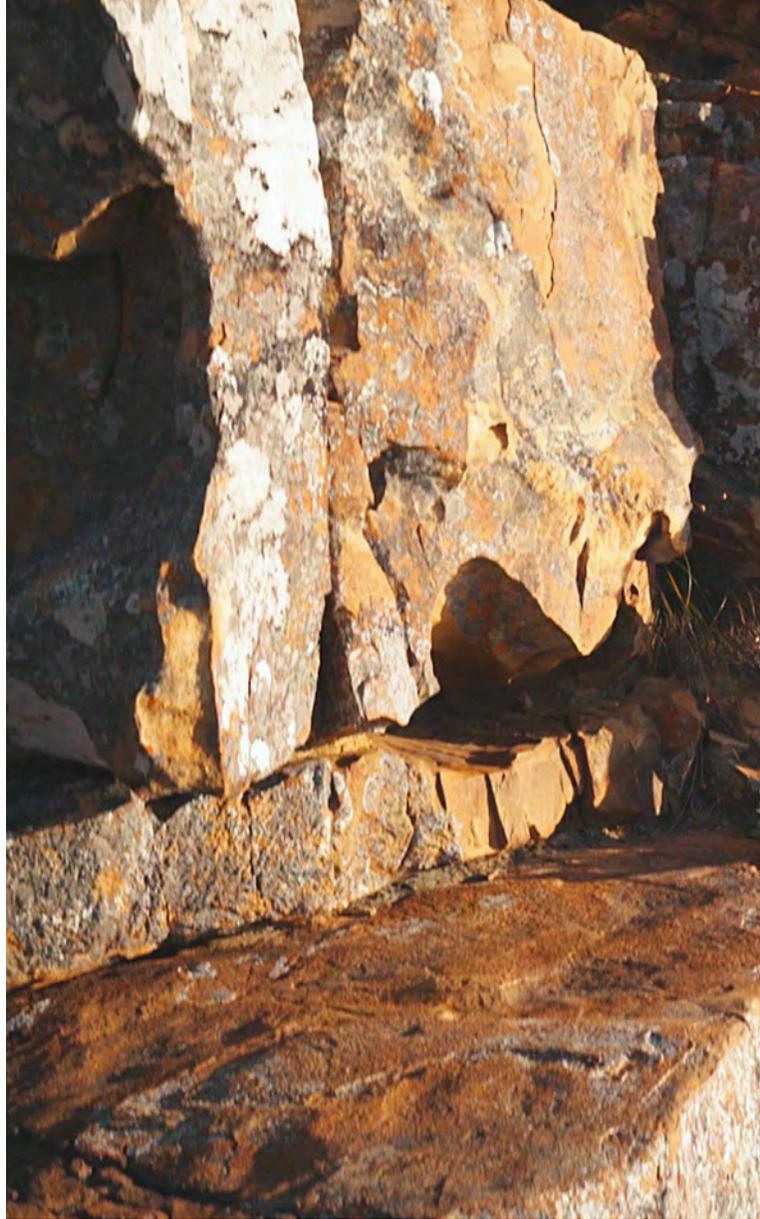
“This power hike and meditation is one of the curated experiences that they offer in collaboration with black wellness operators.”

my calves and lungs still alive to tell the tale and being led in meditation by our yoga instructor Lucy, the cadence of my breath ascending with the young sun. This power hike and meditation is one of the curated experiences that they offer in collaboration with black wellness operators in the tourism space.

“Throughout the Covid pandemic, we’ve observed that even during this time when people are far from South Africa and the privilege of travel is stripped away, everyone longs to go in-depth and to connect with things at a real level and towards real stories. And I think that will be the new shift and awakening within travel and tourism,” says Bheki.

On the other side of the peninsula, along False Bay’s coastline, I’m wielding a bag for picking up litter from the rock pools on Muizenberg Beach. Come Saturday morning, I’m usually found on a surfboard at this very beach, but definitely not picking up rubbish. This morning I’m joining one of the Beach Co-op’s monthly ‘beach cleanups’. Founded by Aaniyah Omardien in 2016, it is a not-for-profit aiming to build and share the story of communities that care and protect our oceans.

“I think in the past we’ve been very focused on single-use plastic; how we need to change people’s behaviour, how this is the cause of all our problems and the bad health of the ocean, but of course it’s



Photography courtesy of CURIOCIETY



not. It's a systemic issue that's actually related to justice, power and capitalism. Even though the Group Areas Act happened back in the 1950s, we still live with that past today. Many people of colour don't actually feel welcome or that they belong on certain beaches here in Cape Town because of this. So we've realised that it matters exactly which beaches we go ahead and clean. It matters who is cleaning the beach, particularly as the most neglected beaches were designated for people of colour. And it matters significantly how people engage with us in these different places," says Aaniyah.

Prior to the cleanup commencing, the morning starts with mindful movement, led on the sand. With eyes closed and waves crashing to our left and the Mother mountain behind us, we all take a moment to be still, to breathe, to be thankful for this time

where we get to connect to the ocean and play a small role in protecting it. Aaniyah's own relationship with the land and sea has helped her navigate where she wants to be in the world and why she wants to protect those places.

"And it's not only why I want to safeguard them," adds Aaniyah, "or only see people and nature as separate, I see them as together. There's a separation between nature and culture... a binary that I want to contest and disrupt. They belong together and they are in a relationship with each other. It's one of the big ideas I bring to the conservation conversation and the work that we do. How can we take our cultural heritage and combine that with our natural heritage? How can we look at the past? How can people, who once had a relationship with the land reconnect to this relationship?"



EXPERIENCES



Past events have had members of the indigenous Khoisan tribes (once the largest group of humans on the planet) join in, to bless their cleanups. Others have included dance, art and other cultural elements. According to Annyah, “it’s not only about physically cleaning the beach but understanding who it is that lives there: the people, plants and animals. We must make it accessible to everyone, because ultimately, we all are responsible for the beach and we all rely on a clean environment. It’s going to take all of us to save the planet. Not only a select few.”

Murals of sea creatures such as nudibranchs, oc-

topuses, cuttlefish, sea anemones and pipefish adorn the walls of the boardwalk from Muizenberg to St James Tidal Pool, bringing the wonders of the underwater world to the surface for those without access to masks and snorkels. For the few privileged people of colour, like myself and Annyah, we haven’t been separated from the ocean and therefore don’t harbour any fear in it or of it. How blessed are those who get to immerse themselves in the stories of this magical world, lying just beneath the surface? May we all strive to protect these natural places and bring others back into communion with them. ☺

To join a CURIOCITY experience in Cape Town, visit www.curiosity.africa. If you can’t get to South Africa, sign yourself or your company up for one of their virtual immersions. To join or sponsor a Beach Co-op clean-up in South Africa, contribute to their data on the international marine debris tracker app, or to contribute towards their ongoing programmes, visit www.thebeachcoop.org

Photography by Lauren Manuel McShane and Megan Rose Francis