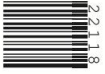
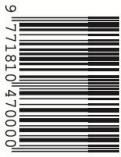


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F O R G E M R E S T

A fortuitous meeting of

LIKE-MINDED CREATIVES

led to the development of a **TRANQUIL,**
village-like retreat in

INDIA'S GIR NATIONAL PARK.

PHOTOS
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THIS PAGE The luck-bringing elephant-headed god Ganesh welcomes guests at the majestic antique gates of Aramness. **OPPOSITE** Sunrise over the Gir National Park in the Indian state of Gujarat lights up the tranquil lodge, set in a teak forest.



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A FRENETIC, BUSTLING STREET IN RURAL INDIA, a turn down a winding wooded dirt road leads to a plain gate with a sandstone sign simply stating, “Aramness Gir National Park”. Past the gate, on either side of the driveway that leads to a hamlet, is an edible garden, fruit orchards and re-wilded meadows, where water buffalo and spotted deer (chital) wander through to a communal watering hole.

The concept came about five years ago, when Gujarati businessman and conservation-conscious wildlife photographer Jimmy Patel connected with Debra Fox and Chris Browne of Fox Browne Creative, and architect Nick Plewman. Standing on what was then an open piece of land, surrounded by natural teak forest full of birds and game, the newly assembled team came up with the name: *aram*, meaning peace/rest; and *ness*, the name for local villages.

The imposing antique wooden doors of a *haveli* (a traditional Indian manor house) reveal themselves amid the vegetation, the elephant-headed god Ganesha standing guard in a niche above them. Stepping through these ancient doors reveals the best of Indian hospitality – a joyful yet tranquil atmosphere, with sounds of water running along furrows and pooling intermittently into formal features brimming with waterlilies. Festive overhead canopies punctuate quiet seating areas, where your journey is rewarded with aromatic Indian chai.

Nick was inspired by the meandering alleys of the nearby hamlet of Haripur, its natural, organic arrangement layered over hundreds of years. And so the 18 *kothi*-style (bungalow) rooms at Aramness are designed to bring guests closer to nature and to the authentic rhythm of Indian life. Each has a shaded courtyard and a veranda overlooking the teak forest, as well as a private pool inspired by the region’s characteristic Indian stepwells.

Fox Browne Creative filled the interiors with a mix of contemporary, classic and antique furniture, focusing on textures, materials and craft techniques native to the region. The soft bone palette is sharpened with brass detailing and Gujarati textiles, while ornamental *jali* (lattice) screens cast dappled light into the rooms. The effect is simple, elegant and understated. Impressive square sandstone towers above the *haveli*’s courtyard combine modern architectural design with Gujarati motifs – their *jali* pattern, for example, comes

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Guests can relax over pre-dinner drinks around one of the many firepits; cobbled streets meander past the guest suites, with housekeeping staff transporting laundry and fresh towels in antique goods carts; intimate poolside meals can be enjoyed in the suites’ private courtyard.

from the organic “lace” pattern left on teak leaves after drying. The colonnaded main building is guarded by two bronze lions, which flank the heavy, ornate wooden doors; a gleaming white terrazzo floor leads into a cool, triple-volume interior courtyard.

From this central area, which is bookended by the dining room and the guest lounge, you’re drawn up an elegant, sweeping staircase to the open-plan map room and library, stocked with reading material about the area, its animals and its topography. The key feature in the library is an original wooden *jali* lattice screen, creating a perfect frame for the garden view.

To the right of the entrance is the swimming pool, spa, craft gallery, and yoga and meditation pavilion. In contrast to the stone facades, the pool room’s modern perforated *jali* is constructed from metal-lattice screens, which let through light and minimise glare without affecting the view. This provides a welcome reprieve from the heat and humidity, allowing for cross breezes and ventilation.

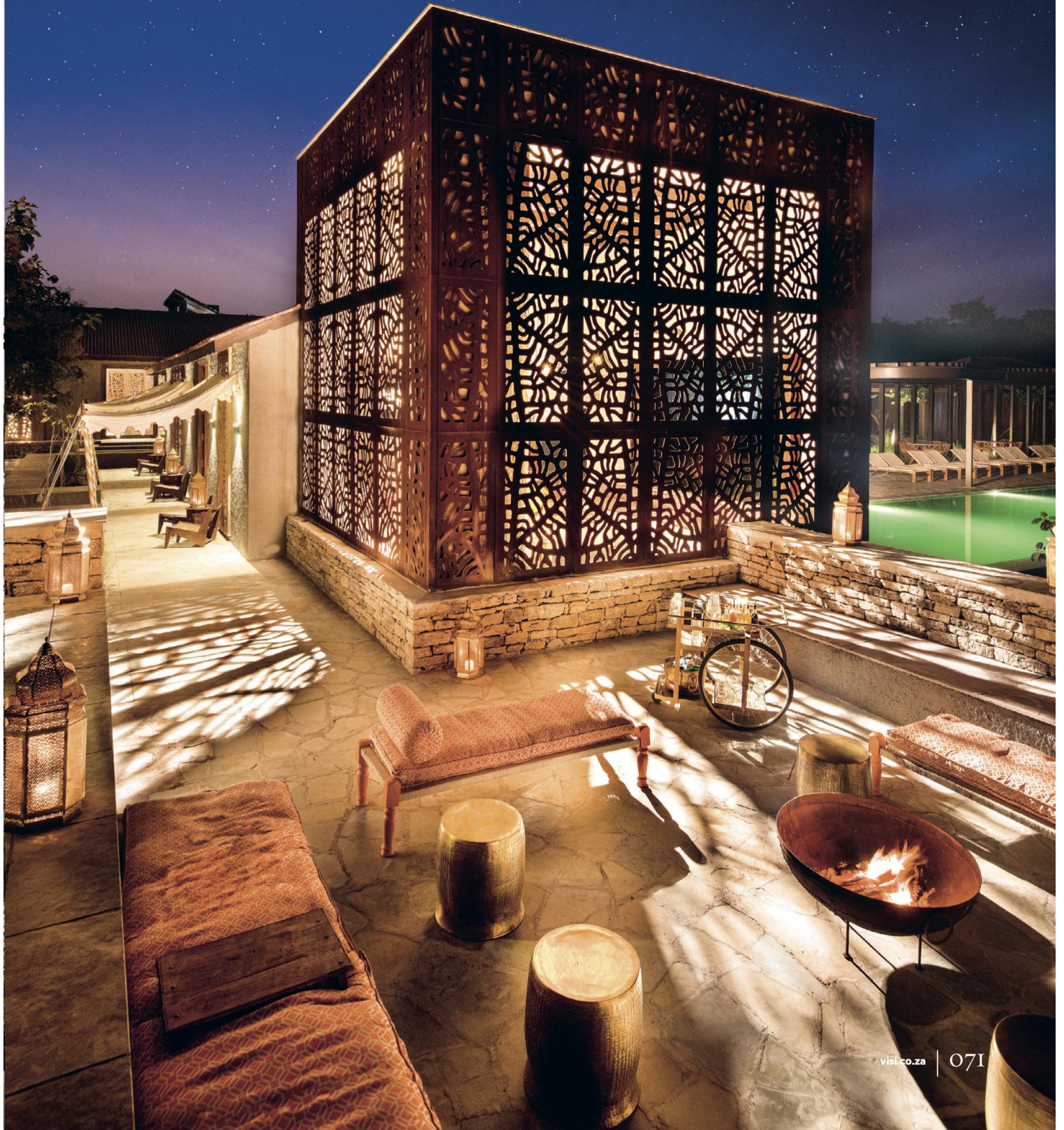
Aramness was never meant to be a gleaming diamond, standing conspicuous in the lush countryside, but rather a naturally polished gem of the sort found in a rural stream. It’s a beautifully designed space that harmoniously and respectfully blends into its surroundings – a luxurious and peaceful retreat in a very special part of the world.

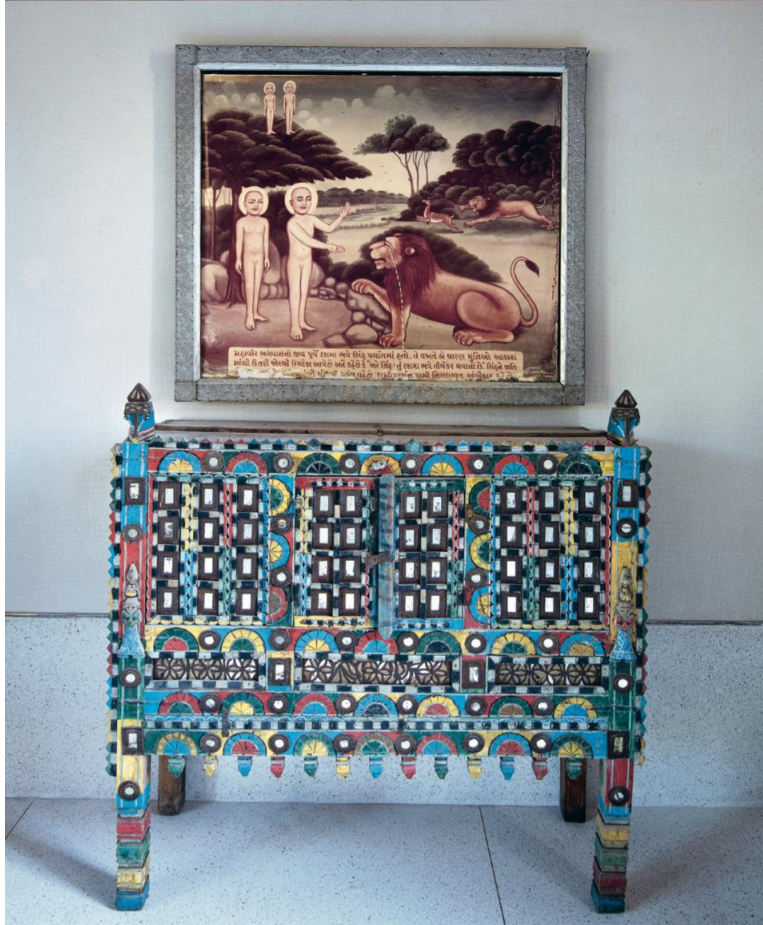
IMPRESSIVE SQUARE SANDSTONE TOWERS ABOVE THE HAVELI’S COURTYARD COMBINE MODERN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN WITH GUJARATI MOTIFS.



THIS PAGE A canopied area just outside the main pool room provides a quiet spot for a cup of chai.
OPPOSITE At night, the pool room's modern, metal-lattice take on the *jali* screen casts ornate shadows on the surroundings.







THIS PAGE The traditional Tikri art in the spa's changing room was created using plaster and a multitude of tiny mirrors, imbuing the space with a delightful luminosity. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** The sweeping staircase in the main building looks even more elegant in the dappled light; each *kothi*-style guest suite has a unique antique front door; Aramness guests enjoy the services of a dedicated butler; the suites are individually decorated, so no two are the same.





THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE The lodge's main building is inspired by the Gujarat's historic manor houses, or *haveli*. The triple-volume space, tiled with gleaming white terrazzo, stays naturally cool in the humid conditions, while clouds of amber pendant lights keep things cosy. A large central courtyard can be accessed from the long lounge and the dining area.



**THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE
BOTTOM** The private lounge
space in each guest room
features a mix of traditional,
modern and antique pieces,
enhanced by the classic
Tikri plasterwork. **OPPOSITE
TOP** The pool room provides
space to relax away from
direct sunlight.







THIS PAGE High ceilings and timber beams contribute to the generous feeling of space above the solid built-in bed. **OPPOSITE** Enormous hand-carved marble bathtubs are the epitome of luxury.