



Didimala: A Palace Made of Straw

By Jacqui Tsimboulis

The first registered straw bale structure in Africa, Didimala Game Lodge adds a unique touch to the game lodge experience through its eco-friendly building methods. Situated on the Pride of Africa Nature Reserve, the five-star Didimala Game Lodge promises to bring the bush to your conference with seamless organic architecture and multimedia technology.

Didimala was designed for the executive, providing luxury, comfort and sophistication. The lodge is situated 50km north of Pretoria and was created from 10 000 wheat straw bales. The use of modern, contemporary decor and furniture creates a unique contrast with the backdrop of these rugged buttresses.

The construction employed a system of post-beam thatch roof structures with straw bale walls which were covered with chicken wire and then a layer of gunnite. Although the gunnite is costly and not environmentally preferred, it was chosen for its durability and suitability for large scale project application. "We believe that by constructing Didimala from straw bales as practical alternative to

current high-imbedded energy building materials we will have provided high exposure to green building methods and encourage the much needed dialogue and debate concerning sustainable development and of the environment" says Colin & Allison Marincowitz, owners of Didimala.

Chief research architect at the CSIR, Chrisna du Plessis, and Don Mcleod of Agreement SA, assessed the planned construction. Both agreed that straw bale is a building material and not a building method, as a result, there were no special building codes required for council approval. Wheat straw is cellulose based, and therefore, has no feeding properties; it does not attract rodents and poses no fire risk once sealed with plaster. The design was done by Allison Marincowitz



in consultation with Edwin Anderssen of Dumani Architects and took three years to complete.

With only 20 rooms, Didimala offers elite accommodation to the discerning guest. Each luxury en-suite room is individually designed and decorated, creating a unique atmosphere. The guest can choose from a standard, luxury or executive suite, each featuring its own unique bathroom. The interior design of the lodge is simple, sleek and minimalist but exudes a truly organic ambience through its choice of materials, such as the polished screed floors with inlaid pebble borders.

Didimala also offers a state-of-the-art conferencing facility. Equipped with a multi-media cinema and boardroom, Didimala is ideal for a business get-away or a team building event. The 50 seat cinema was constructed underground with a 4x5m high gain silver screen and designed to offer perfect THX acoustic resonance and yet remains soundproof, allowing no noise within the theatre to disturb the surrounding areas. The boardroom seats 30 people and offers the latest conferencing equipment.

For the weekend guest, Didimala offers game-

drives, elephant-back safaris, hot-air balloon trips and stargazing. Didimala has partnered with Astronomy Africa and often has stargazing-themed evenings. One of the most striking features of Didimala is the Zila-Zila cocktail loft bar. Sitting at the loft bar, the eye meets a canopy of Silver Leaf trees that glimmer in the sunset, allowing one to enjoy the serenity of the surrounding.

The uniqueness of Didimala was recognised when it was selected to host the World Summit on Progressive Governance in February 2006. Several heads-of-state attended the conference, including President Thabo Mbeki, Prime Minister Tony Blair and Nelson Mandela. This lodge has proven itself to be either the perfect weekend retreat or an executive business conference centre, which offers the guest a distinctive experience by its combination of the tranquillity of nature and the comfort of modern technology.

Situated in a pristine natural environment, this organically built lodge is the perfect venue for a weekend away or an executive function. For more information, contact Didimala on (012) 711 8500 or at www.didimala.co.za