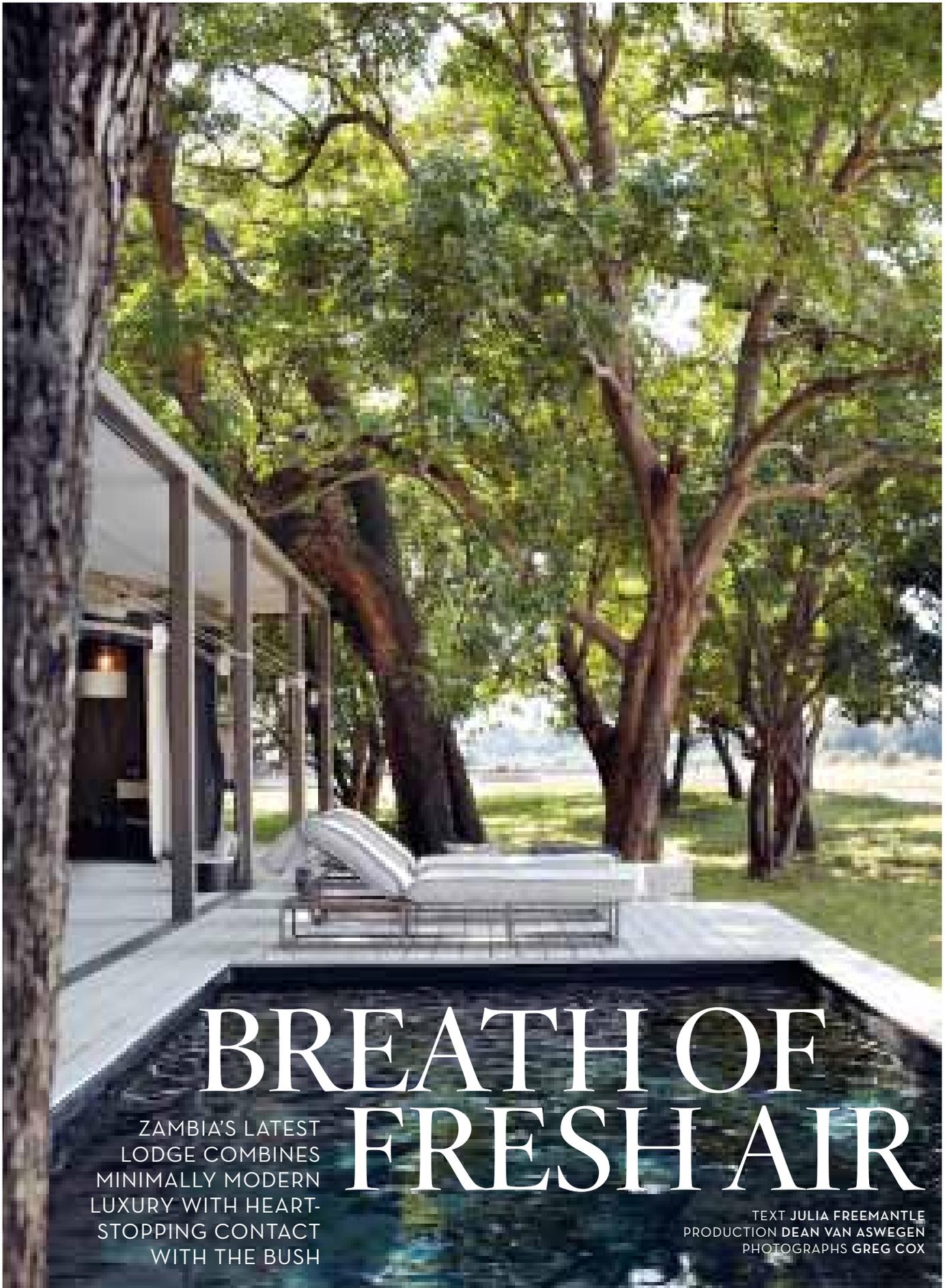


Chinzombo's interiors feature a mix of simple contemporary and rustic organic pieces  
OPPOSITE PAGE Each of the six river-facing villas has a swimming pool





# BREATH OF FRESH AIR

ZAMBIA'S LATEST LODGE COMBINES MINIMALLY MODERN LUXURY WITH HEART-STOPPING CONTACT WITH THE BUSH

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PRODUCTION DEAN VAN ASWEGEN  
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**S**ilvio Rech and Lesley Carstens are no strangers to the great outdoors. Having spent the bulk of their careers living, eating and breathing bush lodges – they were responsible for the unique look of the award-winning North Island in the Seychelles, among others – the pair really understands their anatomy. The natural choice to mastermind the design language for Norman Carr Safaris' latest wildlife destination in Zambia, they've injected new life into the safari aesthetic through the melding of modern architecture and earthy and recycled

materials, within a frame that celebrates the picture-perfect surroundings.

Made up of six – very different – thatched and tented camps, Norman Carr Safaris is named for its Malawian-born conservationist founder who established the company 62 years ago, making it the oldest travel company in Zambia and him something of a legend. He pioneered the walking safari in Zambia's South Luangwa National Park, whose concentrations of game and vast tracts of unspoilt wilderness make it one of the continent's untapped treasures.

Chinzombo, the newest in the stable, is a departure and comprises six luxury villas

(one a family-sized house) and a communal dining-and-living space. All face across the Luangwa River towards the National Park, the camp's waterside orientation giving this lush piece of land heart-stopping proximity to floating hippo pods, drifting crocodiles and abundant bird life. With all this teeming, thriving life as the focus, the team wanted to come up with a concept which would serve as a suitably discreet supporting role while pushing the envelope in terms of design.

The first step was unpacking the concept of luxury – what it means now, and in the context of travel. The defining factors were space, time and contact with nature. This



THE DAYS BEGIN  
AND END BY  
THE FIRE, FIRST  
WITH COFFEE TO  
WATCH THE SUN  
RISE AND BEFORE  
GAME DRIVES  
AND LAST THING  
BEFORE BED,  
POST DINNER  
AND DRINKS



all filtered through into the look and feel of the lodge, the starting point of which was a structure that all but melts into the leafy trees surrounding it. 'We wanted to try something new. And because we'd used wood so many times before, we took a more architectural direction and used steel,' says Rech. A surprising choice for such a setting but, painted taupe and framed by leaves, it makes sense, forming an elegant but low-maintenance grid that offers shade. And, once inside, the minimal frame evaporates, the textures of the interior coming to the fore and balancing out its severity.

The team's experience and expertise is what allowed them the leeway to push the

envelope, the result of which is a fresh but recognisable look – clean and modern, yet undeniably location appropriate.

But for all the looking forward, there is also an acknowledgment of the past – both of Carr and his legacy (he is present through photographs in the communal space and they form part of its design language) and further back to a more primal time where the elements were everything, and time was measured by the passing of day into night.

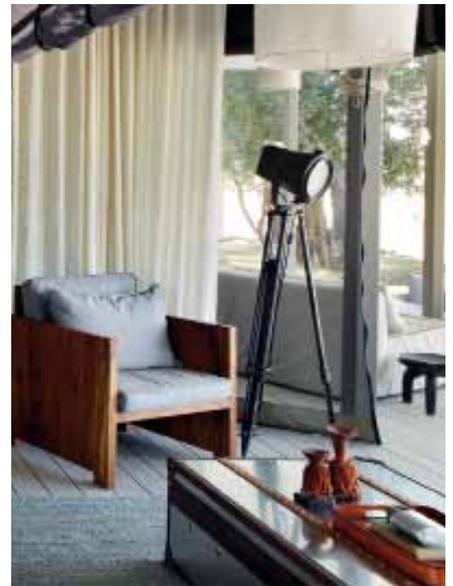
Rech and Carstens looked to this as inspiration. 'We distilled the choreography of a day in a bush camp,' explains Rech. The days begin and end by the fire, first with coffee to watch the sun rise and ▶

OPPOSITE PAGE  
CLOCKWISE  
FROM FAR LEFT  
Grass woven into  
the steel structure  
of the villas helps  
them blend into  
the setting; the  
fire pit is the  
heart of the camp;  
relics from the  
company's heritage  
keep the sense of  
tradition alive –  
a crocodile skull is  
displayed next to a  
portrait of Norman

Carr's scout,  
Rice Time, who  
worked with him  
for decades and  
whose grandson  
now works at  
Chinzombo FROM  
ABOVE LEFT  
Copper hurricane  
lanterns are a nod  
to a traditional  
safari aesthetic; a  
variety of custom  
lighting by the  
design team adds  
to the bespoke  
feel of the camp



A freestanding bathtub, separated from the living space by canvas sheets, looks out through ombré curtains TOP RIGHT The interior features a mix of contemporary and traditional furniture RIGHT Leatherwork is a nostalgic nod to the safari aesthetic OPPOSITE PAGE Rech and Carstens have achieved a fresh balance of minimalism and comfort



before game drives and last thing before bed, post dinner and drinks. As a result, the curved, sunken fire pit, poised to look both ways down the river, is the heart of the camp. ‘We designed it to have maximum contact with the elements,’ says Rech. Sleekly minimal, it finds its counterpoint in the rustic African stools and salvaged wooden drums.

Inside the communal space, where a bar and dining area serve the six villas, a similar mix of contemporary and rougher organic pieces sets the tone. Many were custom designed by Rech and Carstens for the lodge, including the wide variety of pendant lights in different materials – copper, paper,

steel. ‘I wanted to evoke the sense of safari without resorting to colonial clichés,’ explains Rech of the design which took local materials and incorporated them into the contemporary shell. Grass and canvas are a nod to the traditional bush look but the sleekness of the execution sets it apart.

The element of luxury has been subtly introduced by way of exquisite detailing rather than over-the-top amenities—ombré curtain drops and leather straps with buckles. ‘Certain details were inspired by “glamping”, as pioneered by Louis Vuitton when travel was synonymous with occasion and adventure,’ says Rech. Not to be confused with roughing it...

Rech and Carstens have walked this fine line between luxury and adventure with style through their signature aesthetic of African minimalism – raw natural beauty made livably modern.

■ *Silvio Rech & Lesley Carstens* ☎ 082 900 9935

## BOOKING INFO

*The Chinzombo villas are open to visitors throughout the year.*

**Peak season rates:** R8 900 per person per night, which includes full board, game-viewing activities and airport transfers.

■ *Norman Carr Safaris*

📞 [www.normancarrsafaris.com](http://www.normancarrsafaris.com)



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TO THE TRADITIONAL BUSH  
LOOK BUT THE SLEEKNESS OF  
THE EXECUTION SETS IT APART