

VIRTUOSO

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YEARS

TRIPS OF
A LIFETIME



Style

INSPIRED BY JOHANNESBURG

TAPPING INTO THE CITY'S CREATIVE SPIRIT WITH ARTIST BOEMO DIALE.

BY SARAH KHAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELSA YOUNG





Rosebank's Circa building and (opposite) Everard Read.

SOUTH AFRICA'S largest city is also its cultural hub: Johannesburg has long drawn artists, musicians, and fashion designers from across the African continent. "Joburg has an incredible history as the City of Gold – it's always been a hustler headquarters," says artist Boemo Diale. After studying film at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, she decided the urban backdrop of the kinetic city would best fuel her creativity. "Everyone's grinding, everyone's trying to get something or go somewhere, and that kind of energy makes everything really vibrant."

When she's not exhibiting at the Cape Town Art Fair or showcasing her work around the globe (including at this year's Virtuoso Travel Week – the annual Las Vegas meet-up of the luxury travel industry's 4,500-plus top players – where she was the artist-in-residence), Diale gets inspiration for her bold pieces in her chosen city. And while Johannesburg is a pre- or post-safari fixture on many travelers' South African itineraries, finding its soul in just a few days can be a challenge without insider help. Diale knows how to access the sprawling city's singular energy – here, a few of her favorite spots.

CULTURE FIX

When she has friends in town, Diale likes to take them to the Keyes Art Mile for First Thursdays, when gallery openings and parties take over a lively stretch in Rosebank. "As an artist you sit in your studio alone most of the time, so it's great to meet peers that you look up to and talk about what you're working on," she says. But the buzzing district is a draw any time of the month, thanks to an assortment of high-profile art galleries such as BKHz and Everard Read and its Circa building, along with restaurants that include Marble, Momo Kuro, and Kanpai.

From a production of *Swan Lake* by the Joburg Ballet to concerts by Grammy Award-winning local legends Ladysmith Black Mambazo, there's



always something on the calendar at the Joburg Theatre, which has crowned Constitution Hill in the central Braamfontein district since 1962. About a ten-minute drive north in Forest Town, philanthropists and art collectors Adrian Enthoven, Phuthuma Nhleko, and Gordon Schachat transformed a former tram shed into the Joburg Contemporary Art Foundation, a nonprofit that bridges art and technology. The center's distinctive installations convene international and South African talents under one roof – Ximena Garrido-Lecca from Peru, Indian artist Rithika Merchant, Nigeria's Zina Saro-Wiwa, and South Africans Zizipho Poswa and Wim Botha among them.

"I don't often get to watch live performances," Diale says, which is why she loves any chance to visit Braamfontein's Untitled Basement on the weekends. "They host jazz nights and shows, and takeovers by DJs playing *amapiano* house music." Founded by



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Gold City Rush

GO The best and safest way to navigate Johannesburg's sprawl, from its tony suburbs to the more packed urban centers, is with a guide. Virtuoso travel advisors can work with **Triumph Travel**, an on-site tour connection in South Africa, to customize Joburg tours and experiences that can include some of the places mentioned in this story. *Departures: Any day through 2025.*

STAY Johannesburg might be famously frenetic, but checking into the **Fairlawns Boutique Hotel & Spa**, in the posh Sandton suburb, is anything but. The hotel's 41 suites are set amid a series of lush gardens, and its Balinese-inspired spa is a popular escape for guests and well-heeled locals alike. *Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily, two 30-minute massages, and a \$55 dining credit.*

Those settling in at the recently renovated **Saxon Hotel, Villas & Spa** join some illustrious guests: Everyone from Oprah Winfrey to Nelson Mandela – who wrote parts of his memoir at the storied, 53-room Sandhurst estate – has stayed here. *Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily and a 50-minute massage for two.*

hip-hop DJs Kenny Nzama (DJ Kenzhe-ro) and Bradley Williams (The Global-ist) in 2017, the venue quickly became a popular spot for underground talent.

DINNER PARTIES

Johannesburg's 44 Stanley precinct, an open-air shopping enclave in the Milpark district, brims with local designer boutiques, artist hubs, and great restaurants, including Little Addis Cafe, Diale's favorite for Ethiopian fare. "Not often enough do you eat with your hands," she says. "I usually get the standard Beyaynetu spread; it's really flavorful and quite similar to our traditional food – 'seven colors,' with all kinds of different ingredients."

A set of intricate Chinese arches leads the way to Cyrildene, a thriving Chinatown just east of Johannesburg's Central Business District. "Cyrildene is chilled; there are some good restaurants there," Diale says. Her go-to is Chong Qing Hotpot, where she heads with a big group for soul-warming bowls filled with beef, cabbage, mushrooms, bok choy, and more.

FASHION AS ART

Founded in 2018 by mother-daughter duo Betina Swart and Kelly Gibberd, Me&B embraces inclusivity with designs in playful patterns and colorways. The pair's bright boutique in 44 Stanley is one of Diale's favorite shopping stops. "They have super-vibrant clothing catering to all body types," she says. "It's a great place to find jeans."

Johannesburg's quirky Melville suburb is known for its restaurants, coffeehouses, and indie shops, including South African designer Ella Buter's Superella. Inspired by the clothing her mother made for her and her siblings, Buter started crafting her own designs after receiving a sewing machine as a child. Today, she specializes in voluminous, airy silhouettes in cotton and linen. "She makes these cool frocks that you can layer," Diale says. "They're all handmade, and they've got a nice rustic feel." ♡