



C A S I N O

# La Dolce Vita

**Montecasino, Fourways, Gauteng**

INTERIOR DESIGN

Blacksmith Interior Design in association with Dougall Associates

PHOTOGRAPHS

Janyon and Camera

**With phenomenal attention to detail, an ancient Tuscan village has transformed the skyline north of Johannesburg**

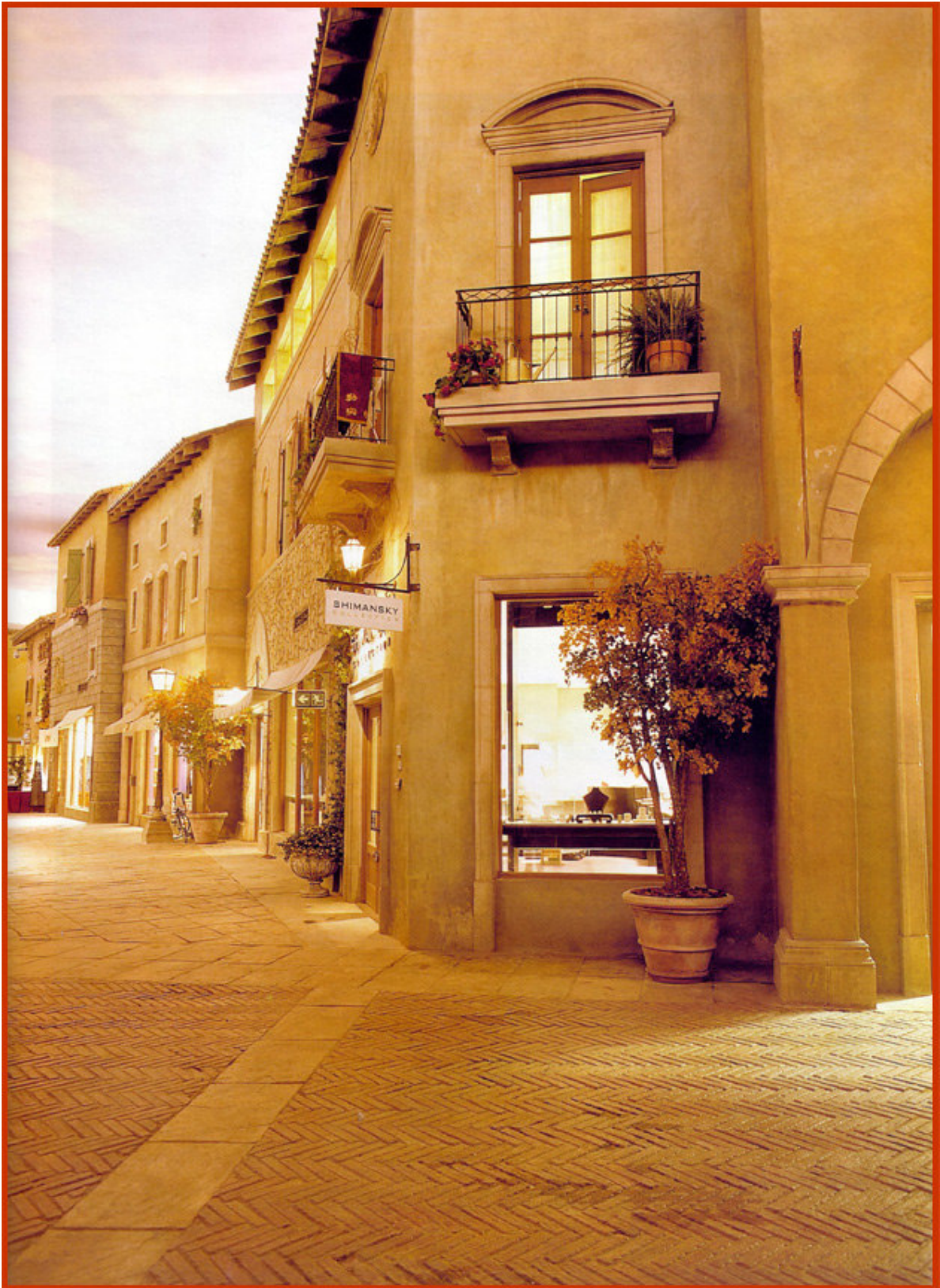
ABOVE: The imposing façade.

RIGHT: Herringbone paving is alternated with cobblestones in the midtown section.

Two years, three months and R1.4 billion in the making, Montecasino opened to the public with unprecedented fanfare last December. It was an opening night to remember, as over 8000 guests clad in black tie and traditional attire thronged through the cobbled streets to the strains of Bocelli,

Carreras and Pavarotti. A who's who that only Joburg could muster, saw muscular rugby players, svelte Gladiators, soaps stars, fashion designers and talk-show hosts rubbing shoulders and queuing for bucket-sized margaritas. "On time and on budget" is how Simon Black of Blacksmith Interior Design ultimately describes









**ABOVE: A naturally lit plaza is surrounded by numerous fast-food outlets.**

the project. Presented with an initial concept design from Dougall Associates, the two teams worked closely to develop the theme of a Tuscan village into a series of highly detailed working drawings - 3000 CAD drawings to be precise. Such intensive research and detailing meant that nothing was left to chance, from the exterior and interior architecture, right down to the shopfitting, style of furniture and fabric choice. According to Dene Murphy, MD of Mirage Leisure & Development who project managed Montecasino, it is one of the most authentically themed developments in the world.

"Traditionally casinos have always had a European influence, with the Americans adding that highly themed glitzy edge," comments Simon. "We settled on the Tuscan village theme as it adds an air of friendliness, of romance and relaxation." A mixture of local and imported supplies contributed to the authenticity, with the all-important joinery and shopfitting undertaken principally by a number of South African companies. "Ultimately we were given an enormous choice by looking to the overseas market," says Simon, with imported items such as fabric

giving us that extra edge." Custom designed and locally manufactured carpets range from the autumn leaf motifs in the main casino, to understated self-patterned varieties in the Salon Privé.

Descending from a grand double staircase, visitors have immediate access to the main casino, behind which is the Salon Privé, housed in the Medici Mansion. Here a tables privé and a slots privé are separated by a central seating area with a dedicated cashier and cocktail bar. For those heavyweights who like to gamble incognito, a luxurious private gaming room is available by invitation only, the adjacent private dining room delivering nothing less than silver service.

Emulating a village square, the casino is bordered by a flowing stream (bobbing ducks and chicks perpetuate the illusion) and the water meanders lazily through the village, crossed here and there by bridges. Carefully crafted façades become neighbourhoods - creating a variety of moods, from the casual brightly-coloured fishing village, to the more refined midtown area where subtle colours predominate. Keep your eyes peeled for easily missed gems - a duvet billowing from an open window,





washing string between rooftops, or a rooster strutting on terracotta roof tiles.

In terms of creating the façades, gypsum reinforced concrete was used to make all the moulds, columns, pediments, sills etc, and was topped with plaster that was carefully carved to emulate dressed or natural stone work. Shopfitting items such as windows, doors, shutters and trusses were then incorporated into the scheme. The next step was to 'age' the entire village, and to simulate natural weathering, the bases of the buildings were made darker and dirtier, becoming lighter and bleached towards the top. Each and every stone was first carved, then painted and aged, with two art studios and 75 artists working full time at the height of the development.

For those born to shop, Montecasino has an extensive range of retail stores, from high fashion to wine bars, jewellers, intimate coffee shops and 600 seater restaurants. The numerous South African designers involved in this arena include Manas Design and Detail, Millennium Design contracts and Bel Geddes Design. The Pieter Toerien theatre offers live

**LEFT AND BELOW: The main casino area forms the village square, and is bordered by a flowing stream.**





performances, while The Magic Company keeps children of all ages happily distracted by 4500m<sup>2</sup> of fun and games.

Delighted with the final results, Blacksmith is quick to credit not only its own team, but all the colleagues that were involved on the project. "We learnt an enormous amount from Terry Dougall," says Simon, "as well as from Ken Rosevear, president of development for MGM Mirage." Commending his own team, including

Nikki McCarthy, Vernon Windell, Helen Farish, Sean Dowdeswell, Ryan Iligner, Vivienne Reece-Poole, Kerin Hinckley, Joanne Tun, Jabu Sithole, Nicole Pfoser, Colette van Jaarsveld and Lucinda Vermeulen, Simon thanked them for two years of consistent and passionate dedication to Montecasino. With the new interior design of the SAB Head Office in London now well underway, for Blacksmith, life is beautiful.

TESS PATERSON

**Blacksmith Interior Design**

(011) 789-1025

Carpeting: Ulster

Carpets

(031) 912-1310

Restroom flooring:

**On the Tiles**

(011) 887-8630

Murals and paint

finishes:

**Wallscapes Painting**

**Studio**

(011) 786-8946

All office deskings:

**Grant Andrews Office**

**Furniture**

(011) 494-4200

Cinema foyer seating:

**Pago Designs**

(011) 837-8941

Casino lounge

armchairs: **Pellerade**

**Design House**

(011) 788-7008

Street barrows and

various restaurant

seating: **Woodbender**

(021) 854-6034

Potted orchids,

lavender and palm

trees:

**Distinctive Designs**

(011) 465-9560

Lighting in theatre and

some retail areas:

**Diva luce**

(011) 880-0288



TOP: View from one of the bridges along the river. Each stone was individually carved, painted and aged.

RIGHT: Village life - Tuscan style.

OPPOSITE: TOP: A coffee shop overlooks a flower stall near the dramatic entrance staircase.

LEFT: The private dining room in the Salon Privé.

RIGHT: The private tables' privé



