

Minimal light for maximum effect



Deborah Bell's The Crossing II, illuminated from the water and the adjacent buildings. Photograph: David Crookes

Imagine you get offered the opportunity to do work you love on a magnificent game lodge in Kenya that has on display some of the best art in Africa and an enviable wine collection. Imagine that you get to view game on camelback and choose where you would care to enjoy a meal made from ingredients grown on the property. Imagine dark skies and majestic views. João Viegas of Paul Pamboukian lightdesign did not have to imagine any of this, he got to live the dream. *Lighting in Design* spoke to him about an 'out of Africa' lighting installation.

Segera Retreat is an exclusive wildlife sanctuary situated at the heart of the Laikipia Plateau, overlooking Mount Kenya on the east, with the Great Rift Valley to its west. Six luxurious villas on raised wooden platforms look out over the surrounding savannah while Segera House and the Villa Segera offer similar views, greater privacy and even more gracious environs. Renovated stables, which feature regular exhibitions of the art of locally and internationally acclaimed African artists, form the core of the main area and striking sculptures dot the botanical garden.

Home of the Zetzi Foundation headquarters, Segera focuses on conservation, community, culture and commerce, or the 4Cs. The Retreat spearheads conservation while enhancing the livelihoods of its community through sustainable commercial ventures, education and the support of cultural activities. A solar farm supplies electricity, a waste water recycling process meets all water requirements, and waste and recycling programmes are in progress.

Life Interior was responsible for the interior design throughout the Retreat and Pamboukian lightdesign was contracted to illuminate the renovated stables, Segera House, the Wellness Centre and the Explorer lounge, pathways and wine cellar. The team also offered advice on the villas.

There was no clear brief for lighting Segera, other than a stipulated budget and the request that the impact of light on the environment be minimal, in line with the 4Cs and to limit

The Stables house much of the artwork. Column lighting is used for effect and light onto the shards of glass on the ceiling make a striking 'chandelier'.



any negative effects of artificial light on the surrounding wildlife, insects and plants.

Light is a distinct area of design that can make a significant contribution to a project, and the challenge for lighting designers, as Viegas outlined, is that lighting has no set of rules. Every project is different, every problem is different. The designers find a custom solution for each job.

To underscore the luxury of this venue and in keeping with the overall environment, Viegas decided not to use blanket illumination, but chose instead to play with light and shadow and create a warm darkness that encourages guests to relax and enjoy themselves. Candles and lamps with low light levels ensure a welcoming ambience that is punctuated by spotlights on notable works of art. Warm white light is used in most of the space, with occasional flashes of cool white to accent the artworks and sculptures.

Downlights against the walls and columns highlight the textures and place pools of light onto the floor. There are lovely touches throughout, like light directed through shards of glass that serve as striking ornaments and create beautiful shadows – rather than chandeliers, which would have seemed out of place in the Stables or the wine cellar.

The idea being to create contrast and not to over-light any part of the installation, most of the sources are unobtrusive and strip lighting in the eaves has been used for an airy, spacious feel and to uplight the trusses of the rooves.

Since the venue is an art destination, each piece of artwork has been separately illuminated, which required an enormous amount of time and consideration. Viegas explains, "We installed 'Sunny' lights on tracks so the spotlights can be moved as required. Sunny lamps are fabulous because you can louvre them, frost them, snoot them and mask them – we used a lot!"

Moving to the wine tower, which is a silo shaped



All works of art are illuminated separately and warm light onto the basin and the saddles picks up the different textures to create an additional layer.

building that is kept cool by a rainwater collection cistern and a solar-powered air-conditioning unit: the floor is made of champagne bottle tops and the cellar houses an extensive collection of quality African wines. "Here," says Viegas, "we used warm light to create the appealing ambience, but we gave the 'chandelier' a touch of 'glitz' from the applied light and the overall effect is exceptionally pleasing."

All the external lighting makes use of low intensity sources and most of the vegetation is illuminated by 1.2 W LEDs. The pathway linking the buildings is particularly appealing. "A number of people live at Segera permanently," says Viegas, "and we wanted an installation that would serve their needs even when there are no guests around. We designed a bollard that uses a 4 W LED to create a small pool of warm white light, just enough to see by, onto the pathway – these in combination with the lanterns that hang from shepherds' crooks, out of the line of the eye, illuminate the pathways, are in tune with the overall ambience and are Dark Sky friendly."

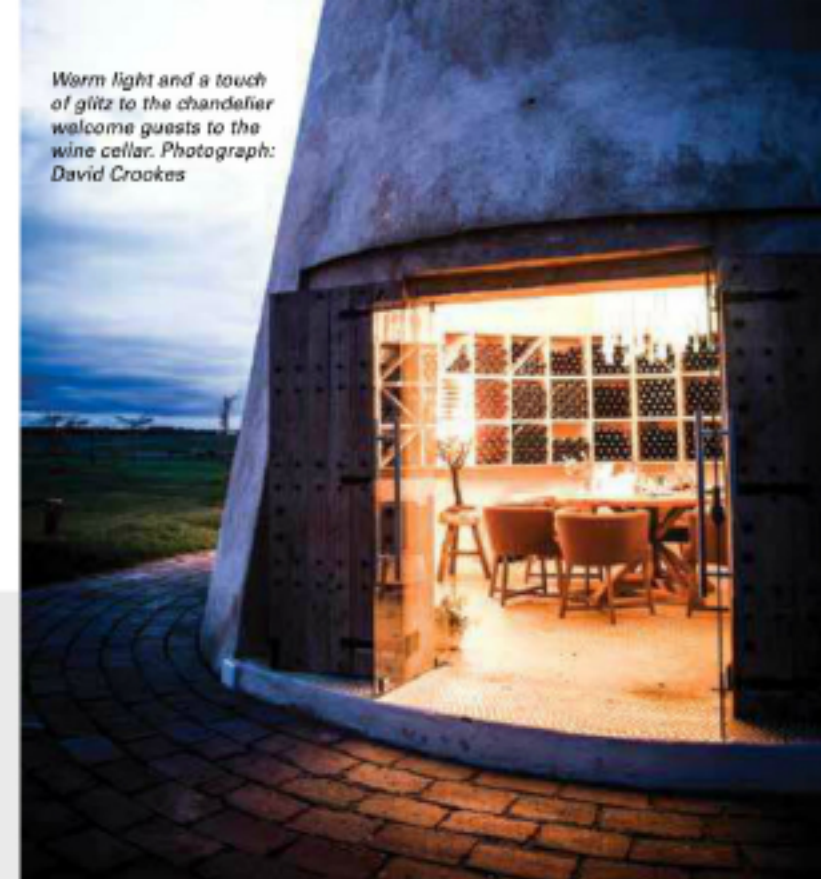
Of the most striking illuminations is that of Deborah Bell's *The Crossing II* placed just in front of the Centre for the 4Cs and alongside the Spa. From the water, the spotlights create a double silhouette of the imposing sculpture on the building. Added to this, thatch illuminated from the buildings alongside throw a shadow of what looks like foliage onto the top of the gallery building. Viegas believes that the beautiful part of light is shadow and this installation, which is quite lovely, proves his point.

Surrounds aside, lighting Segera was challenging. Kenya, no different from anywhere else in Africa, has a shortage of skilled electricians, and all equipment used was sourced and delivered from South Africa. For two weeks most daylight hours were spent overseeing the installations and at night Viegas, his team and the curator of the Retreat tested and viewed what had been installed during the day.

Each artwork was illuminated separately to best effect, often with profiles. LEDs were used throughout and most sources were less than 4 W. Dimming proved to be a huge challenge because of the lack of available skill. The result of the installation gives no hint of this and is a successful combination of light, darkness and contrast designed to enhance the experience of luxury on the Kenyan savannah. **LID**

Unless otherwise mentioned, all photographs by João Viegas.

Warm light and a touch of glitz to the chandelier welcome guests to the wine cellar. Photograph: David Crookes



Warm white 5 W LED downlights illuminate the columns to create bounce light off the floor. This, with the under-counter strip lighting at the bar, makes a lively space for evening drinks.



Although most light throughout the installation is warm white, cool white light is used to highlight certain of the sculptures. Here, a Jane Alexander sculpture is profiled.