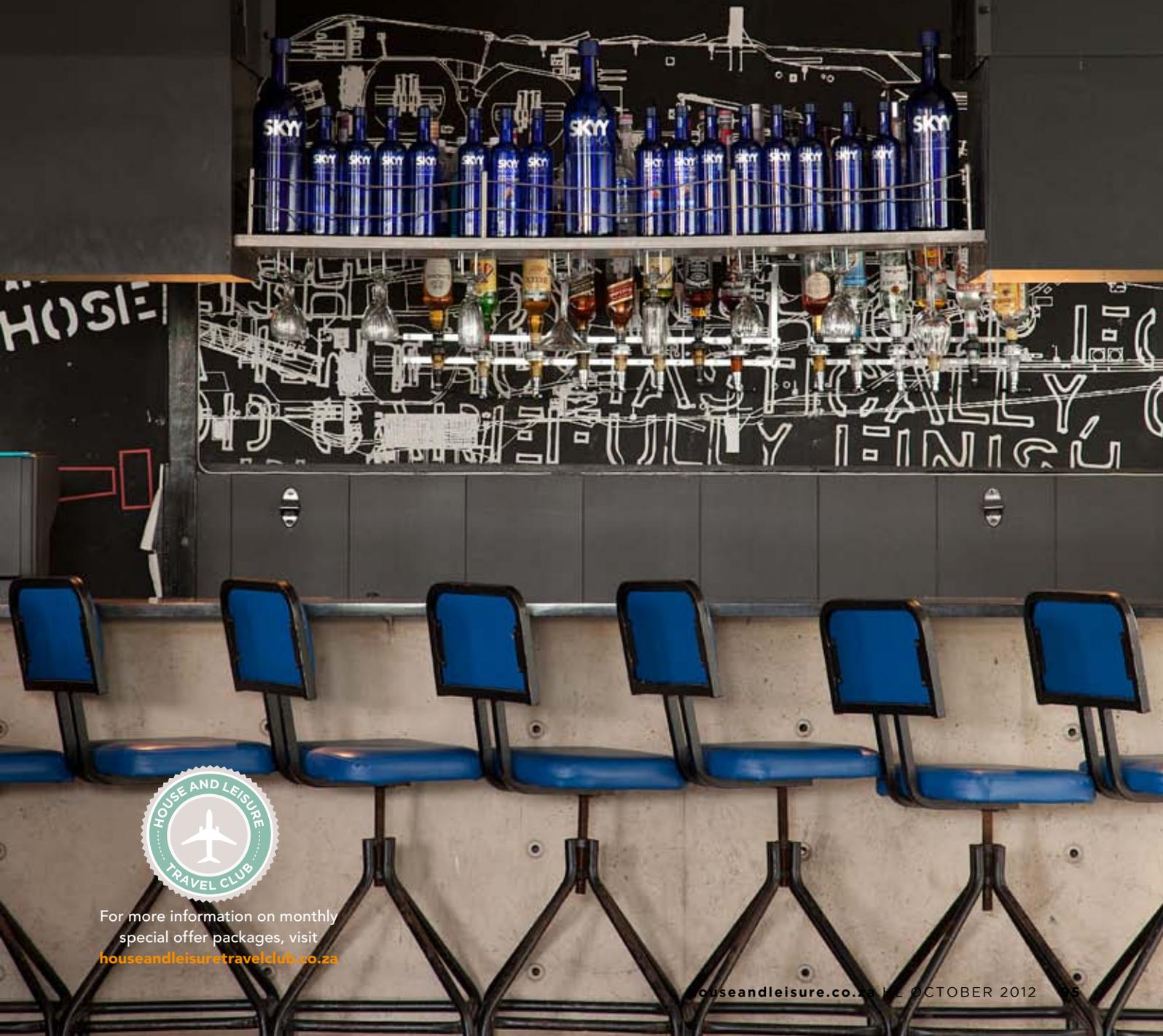


LEISURE

high point

The Docklands Hotel is the flagship of Durban's revamped Point precinct

Text **Glynis Horning** Styling **Leana Schoeman** Photographs **Aubrey Jonsson**



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The redevelopment of Durban's Point precinct was never going to be plain sailing, and feelings still run high over the planned construction of a small craft harbour at the cost of popular Vetch's Beach. Yet even cynics have been seduced by the attractive gondola-set canals created around uShaka Marine World, and by the hotel that's risen beside them.

The Docklands was fashioned from three Victorian warehouses on the once infamous Point Road, core of the city's red light district. Today this has been renamed Mahatma Gandhi Road and is slowly being cleaned up starting with the Docklands, its flagship construction.

Trish Emmett of Emmett: Emmett Architects was tasked with retaining the facade and window modules of the warehouses, which are listed buildings, while creating a striking contemporary hotel and restaurant, all on a tight budget and even tighter timeline. 'Six months,' she smiles wryly, 'That's all we had before the 2010 Soccer World Cup!'

They settled for industrial-chic lite, exposing and celebrating the original worn red brick walls and offsetting these with screeded cement floors. Some 83 slickly appointed bedrooms were built around a courtyard shaded with white pear and other indigenous trees, where Trish installed a water feature and fountain. 'We'd hoped to extend the canal ways into the complex but couldn't,' she says, 'This was the next best thing.'

The courtyard opens into Wodka, a double-volume 80-seater restaurant and bar that is the heart of the Docklands and the Point development today, with its global fusion food and funky feel. It owes much to the distinctive touch of designer Debra Parkington, power behind some of the city's most memorable interiors (Home, The Reform Club, Society), and interior decorator Julie Gillmer.

'We went for a subtle industrial feel that reflected Durban and the docks, but had an edge,' says Debra. They achieved this at a stroke by commissioning local graphic designer and graffiti artist Jason van Zyl to create lettering for the hotel's name, which they repeated and mirrored endlessly in vinyl over windows opening to the street, providing both privacy from passing pedestrians and outstanding branding.

And they didn't leave it there – Debra picked it up as a print for the fabric backs of outside wingback restaurant chairs in Klein blue, which cleverly counter the large space while giving a quirky spin to colonial-style comfort.

'Details count,' she says passionately. They do. ☺

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