

# Get away from it all at the Rostock Ritz

• Sven-Eric Kanzler

TO savour the beauty and solitude of the desert while at the same time lodging comfortably and dining exquisitely — this was the idea that gastronome Wolfgang Kühhirt ('Kücki's Pub') translated into reality with his lodge Rostock Ritz at the edge of the Namib. The lodge celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary last month.

STILL slightly out of breath we sat down on a rock and let the eyes wander into the distance. On the left is a vast desert landscape, on the right a massive red mountain — and behind us half a cave. A rock ledge provides shelter from the wind and imparts a feeling of safety. It is a veritable room with a view, the desert lying at our feet. And we are not the first 'inhabitants'. Animals and people painted onto the rock bear witness to earlier, artistically endowed tenants.

"The rock paintings are about 1000 years old", explains Wolfgang 'Kücki' Kühhirt who has brought us here. We are guests at his lodge Rostock Ritz, north of Solitaire at the edge of the

desert. The ingenious, well-preserved paintings of strutting ostriches, antelope in panic-stricken flight, game grazing and people hunting can be found in a remote spot on his farm Rostock Süd.

An hour later we are back at the lodge. We are about to step from the restaurant onto the terrace. In front of us the desert, on the horizon a mountain with a red glow. Suddenly the sense of safety is back but much more intensely. It is no coincidence. The rooms of the lodge have intentionally been designed like caves. Dark, rough walls curve into vaulted ceilings.

"Since ancient times people have felt snug in caves", Kücki says. The architecture of the lodge is intended as a bridge between the desert and all the conveniences.

While the sun is setting in hues of yellow, orange, red, violet, blue and grey, Kücki recalls the beginnings of the lodge. When he bought the farm Rostock Süd in 1989 his choice was determined by the plentiful supply of water (four springs), the landscape which includes dunes, mountains,

seasonal rivers and even canyons, and also by the central location slightly south of the C14 road from Windhoek via Gamsberg Pass to Walvis Bay. The distance from Rostock to Windhoek or Swakopmund is 240 km, to Sossusvlei it is 180 km. Rostock Ritz is an ideal stop-over.

"In 1995 we started planning the lodge. The guiding principle was that the buildings had to match the landscape." Together with architect Piet Odendaal the optimal solution was found: igloo-like structures which blend into the slope and almost seem invisible.

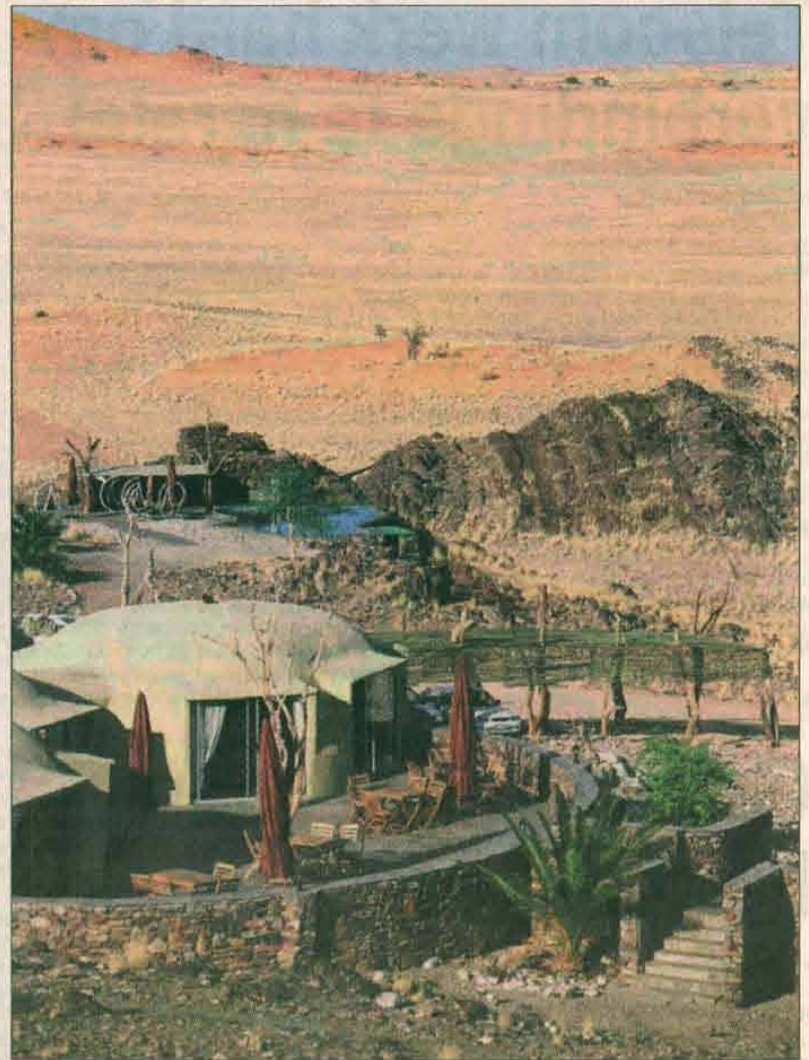
"Secondly, we wanted to keep water consumption as low as possible", Kücki explains. Special shower nozzles and toilet cisterns use less than half the usual quantity of water. Solar panels ensure warm water and the use of bio-soap makes it possible to drain bathwater into the desert without any qualms. Water is not really a problem at Rostock, though. Two boreholes, seven kilometres from the lodge, could supply much more than needed. Electricity is also available around the clock, thanks to a powerful generator and a set of batteries.

The lodge has 22 en suite rooms which each has its own veranda with unobstructed views onto the vast desert plain. Two of the rooms are equipped for disabled guests. Building started in October 1997; the first guests arrived on 3 October 1998.

Kücki is particularly proud of his kitchen. Including starters and desserts there are 50 dishes on the menu. Day visitors stopping for lunch are most welcome, too. Due to the lodge's central location between Windhoek, the coast and Sossusvlei which draws tourists like a magnet, many travellers stop for the night at Rostock. Individual guests and groups don't get in each other's way as the lodge is spread out and the restaurant offers a separate dining room for groups. The restaurant seats 60, the terrace another 30. During low season and towards the end of the year the lodge is ideally suited for weddings or staff parties. With its 1.6 km landing strip Rostock Ritz is also an attractive destination for fly-in safaris. In emergencies an ambulance plane can land there too.

Increasing numbers of guests are spending more than one night at Rostock, especially those who already know the lodge.

"Most people only start to wind down after one or two days", says Kücki. And indeed the swimming pool is beckoning you to chill out and let stress ripple away while enjoy-



■ Part of the Rostock Lodge at the edge of the Namib Desert. Photo: Sven-Eric Kanzler

ing the view reaching all the way to the horizon, 45 km away. For the more active-minded there are ample opportunities for an excursion: Sossusvlei and Sesriem, Kuiseb canyon (where two German geologists were hiding for two years during the Second World War), Gamsberg or the mountain passes at Gamsberg and Spreets-hoogte. If you want to see it all and from the air no less, you can ask about scenic flights at reception. Pre-booking is recommended.

But why venture far afield? There are lots to do at Rostock Süd as well. Like an exciting drive through Gaub canyon and to the rock paintings. Or a hiking tour along the Ubib Trail or River Trail, the Spring Walk, to the Rostock Viewing Point or to the rock paintings. Since 2000 Kücki has set up a total of ten trails which take between one and seven hours each (breaks included) and which meander through a highly diverse landscape. Camel rides are envisaged for the future.

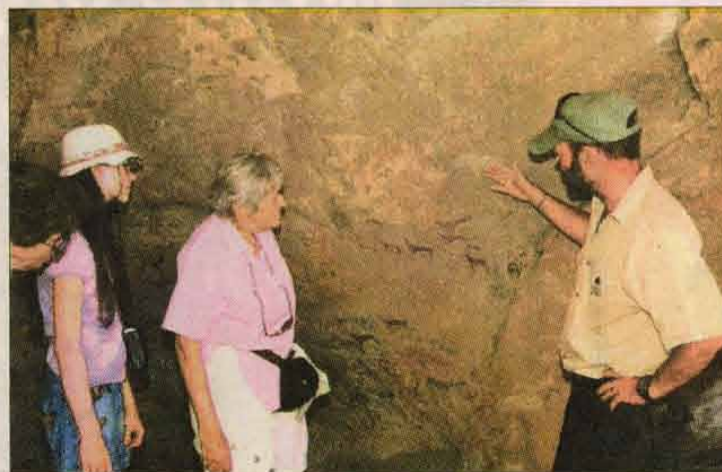
The area is characterised by remains of the Damara mountain range which was formed about 900 million years ago, 700 million years earlier than the Alps. In the northern parts of farm Rostock Süd the dry bed of the Gaub river is twisting its way through deep gorges behind which the red gneiss of Rostock rises; in the south a white marble mountain range

lines the horizon; in the west red dunes point towards the desert. Speaking of Rostock — it seems that the farm takes its name from the mountain rather than the German city of Rostock on the Baltic Sea, as is usually assumed. With a bit of luck you might spot some game while on a drive or hiking. There are mountain zebra which frequent the waterhole close to the lodge early in the morning, and there are ostriches, klipspringers, oryx antelope, springbuck and baboons.

Another priceless asset of Rostock Ritz is its staff. Guests are served with utmost courtesy and attentiveness. It is the result of thorough training by Kücki, who himself trained as a cook and hotelier, and also of years of practice: ten of the 15 staff have been at Rostock from the start and together with managers Yvonne and Hein Schulz make a fine team.

The office in Swakopmund where Annette and Lara Künzle as well as Helga Knickel offer a first-class service, is of crucial importance to the lodge.

The true hosts at Rostock Ritz, however, are four striped little fellows, which scuttle through the lodge with excited little noises and immediately conquer everybody's heart. They are four semi-tame suricates called Stomple, Tommy, Kimmy (the only 'lady') and Ricky.



■ Wolfgang 'Kücki' Kühhirt explains the rock paintings to his guests.

Photo: Sven-Eric Kanzler



■ True hosts: Two of four semi-tame suricates welcoming guests on the terrace of Rostock Ritz.

Photo: Wolfgang 'Kücki' Kuhhirt

## Thank you!

To everyone who celebrated the launch of our new corporate identity and the official opening of the Bank Windhoek Arts Festival with us, we give hearty thanks! Your enduring spirit through the unexpected, but nonetheless very welcome rain showed the true passion of all Namibians. You made the occasion special and truly unforgettable - another occasion bearing proof that *'together we do better!'*

*Our very special thanks go to:*

- His Worship, The Mayor of Windhoek, Mr Matheus Shikongo
- The City of Windhoek
- All Distinguished Guests
- All the Officers of the City of Windhoek Traffic Division
- All our clients who celebrated this joyous occasion with us
- The members of the Soweto String Quartet, Delta Blue and Weekend Band who were willing but unable to perform
- All the performers who kept us entertained despite the rain
- The Management and tenants of the Namdeb Building
- Our neighbouring business community who graciously accepted any inconvenience caused by the street closure
- All our suppliers for ensuring that everything was there on the day
- The cleaning personnel
- The rain for reminding us of the fact that *together we do better* - through rain or shine
- And last but certainly not least, everyone who celebrated with us around the country - you all made us incredibly proud of being a truly Namibian bank.

Thank you all!

