



THE QUIET LANGUAGE of SCENT

Lost on a dirt road in the Waterberg, you'll stumble into something unexpected – a journey guided not by maps, but by scent

BY RYAN ENSLIN



Frustration tempers my excitement as I make an illegal U-turn on a dirt road deep in the Waterberg. I'm headed for BABOHI Lodge at QWABI Private Game Reserve, but having arrived at the second of only one advised checkpoint, I accept that I am lost. A bead of sweat traces its way down my right temple as I pause to take in the raw, dramatic beauty of this untamed corner of Limpopo, wrestling back control of the situation in an earnest attempt to restore my excitement quotient.

In time, I would come to understand the moment to be a welcome harbinger of what was to come.

Composed once more, I arrive at QWABI, a broad smile evident for the attendant to see. Excitement mounts as I hand over my keys and climb onto the game viewer for the short ride to BABOHI, the luxury lodge perched on a hillside in the reserve, my home for the days ahead. This break in the bush feels perfectly timed, a chance to recalibrate after too long living at a frantic pace.

A QWABI WELCOME

There's a quiet honesty to the land here, I reflect, as we make our way to BABOHI. Tyres grind over loose rock, a sound I embrace as my personal welcome to the bush. Taking in the beauty of nature all around me, I breathe in deeply, catching a slightly herbal scent carried on the wind. In that moment, I'm transported to memories of my grandfather, himself an avid explorer, albeit only of the infamous South African back road. It's a good space for me.

Curious, I ask Joe van Rensburg, my guide for the duration of my stay, about the fragrance that's stirring something within me. He brings the vehicle to a halt, jumps out and heads for a grey shrub with the ease of someone who belongs here. "That's the camphor bush," he calls back, plucking a small leaf and rubbing it between his fingers. "We probably crushed a leaf while driving over the rocks." He walks back, holding out the leaf for me to smell.

The air is now infused with its distinct fragrance – resinous, earthy and woody. As we continue, I notice how the scent seems to ground me while igniting a quiet sense of adventure deep within my soul.

ARRIVING AT BABOHI

As we enter BABOHI, the vehicle wades through a body of water, sending dramatic ripples in every direction. A familiar, musty fragrance hangs in the air, but my attention is captured by the elegant arc of water rising beside me. The name BABOHI draws on the symbolism of water, a nod to the cycles of renewal and flow of the land. Water is an ever-present element in this sanctuary of refinement in the heart of the African bush, a place where every detail is curated for discerning travellers.

I'm greeted at the lodge with warm smiles and a handwashing ceremony, a simple yet meaningful ritual that marks my arrival. Inside the beautifully appointed lounge, Samke Mthembu welcomes me with quiet grace. The space is a blend of earthy tones, wooden finishes and warm fabrics, seamlessly merging with modern copper accents and sophisticated hues that echo the drama and subtlety of the bush. She offers a brief introduction to life at BABOHI.

A FRAGRANCE JOURNEY

As her smile deepens, she presents a trio of aromatic oils. “The smells of the bush are primeval,” she says, “mirroring the very meaning of life since the dawn of time.” I lean in, invited to breathe in the layered notes of aloe and cucumber, rooibos honeybush and velvet breeze. The sensory thread from earlier in the day picks up again, weaving me deeper into the rhythm of this place. “These scents were chosen to stir memory and emotion,” Samke explains, “to create a bridge between your world and the one just outside.” She watches with interest as I make my selection, a moment that feels both intimate and quietly transformative.

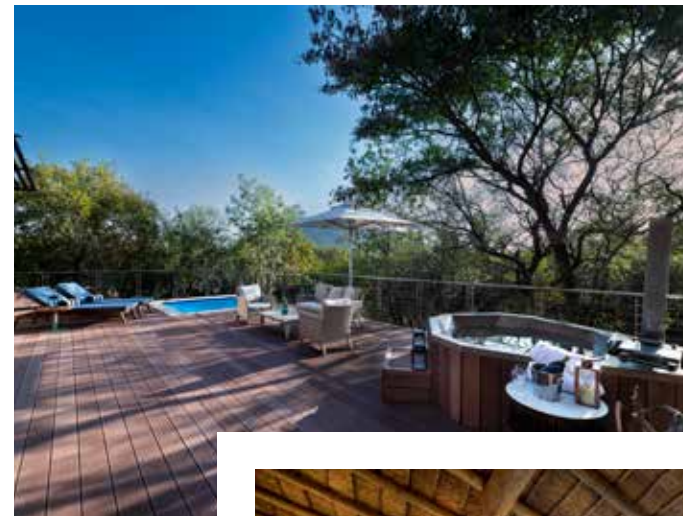
Drawn in by its gently sweet, quietly floral yet earthy notes, reminiscent of my earlier encounter with the camphor bush, I choose the rooibos honeybush fragrance. Samke explains that my selection will subtly infuse my suite, from the room diffuser to the air freshener, each detail designed to extend the sensory thread. That night, I discover a rooibos honeybush linen mist on my pillow, a small, comforting turndown gesture that lingers with surprising warmth.

In the evolving world of luxury hospitality, where experience is everything and differentiation is key, fragrance is emerging as an invisible yet unmistakable signature of high-end hotels and lodges. More than just an ambient flourish, scent has become an emotional anchor, a carefully curated olfactory identity that lingers long after checkout.

Some establishments now offer scented souvenirs. Candles, diffuser oils or room sprays allow guests to carry a trace of the experience home. At BABOHI, these thoughtful touches are available in the curio shop, and during my stay, I even had the chance to craft a candle in my chosen fragrance. That candle has been lit more than once since my return, its earthy notes unfurling through my home like a memory rekindled, taking me back to quiet bushveld evenings on the reserve.



PHOTOGRAPHS: RYAN ENSLIN



Whether it's on a game drive or from your private deck, you're surrounded by a unique blend of scents from your surroundings.

Opposite page: Create your own fragrance to match your experience of the scents of the bushveld.



FRAGRANCES IN THE BUSH

Later that afternoon, I'm back on the game viewer, crossing the same stretch of water that marked my arrival. That familiar, musty scent rises again, curling through the air. It registers briefly in my mind, but my attention shifts. The guides had mentioned a lion sighting earlier, and the possibility awakens something primal within me.

As we weave through the bush, my senses remain alert. Another fragrance drifts past, one I used to call the “Port Elizabeth smell” – herbaceous, spicy, with a dry, straw-like edge. In an instant, I'm back in the Eastern Cape, on holiday with my grandparents and my younger siblings in tow. I smile at the memory and ask Joe about the scent. “That's the curry bush,” he says, and we carry on. As the afternoon deepens and we move through the bush, I surrender to the warmth of those remembered days, wrapped in the quiet comfort of being.

The sun begins its slow descent as we stop for sundowners. The bush quiets. A wildebeest, clearly unsettled, charges past us. He stops, glances back. We follow his gaze to where a pair of lions emerge from the bush. They take note of us briefly, then move on, continuing the age-old rhythm of predator and prey.

And in that reverent, timeless moment, it struck me. Getting lost had only served to heighten my senses, forced me to find my way, and it was indeed the beginning of my BABOHI journey. This heightened state would prepare me for the quiet language of scent, both curated at the lodge and right there in the bush. It took getting lost to truly arrive, not just at BABOHI, but back to my senses. 🦁



SCAN TO BOOK

BABOHI AT QWABI
PRIVATE GAME RESERVE