

**HOUSE OF SIMPLE**  
The hotel's museum features Gandhi's spinning wheel, his writings on the 11 vows and the seven social sins, and other materials related to his transformation.



**HOTEL**

# IN THE SPIRIT OF THE FATHER

*Can a hotel incorporate self-denial and austerity into its interior design? The answer is a simple 'yes' at Satyagraha House in Johannesburg, where Mahatma Gandhi's former home has become a minimalist hotel that's true to his philosophy*

WRITER NISHA JAIN • PHOTOGRAPHER MANUEL ZUBLENA



*(From the top)*

**OUTHOUSE**

The Kraal as it was originally built; part of the main garden, which is an ideal spot for meditation, reading, meals or relaxation.



**B**etween 1908 and 1911 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, then just an Indian lawyer practising in Johannesburg, lived in a house called 'The Kraal' (the farm). Whilst living there with his friend Hermann Kallenbach, the architect of the house, Gandhi, who would eventually become the Mahatma of India, began orchestrating his theories of passive resistance, or Satyagraha. The Kraal was also the birthplace of the 11 vows that defined Gandhi's ideology, which he and Kallenbach tested by embracing a completely austere—verging almost on uncomfortable—way of life.

In 2009, Voyageurs du Monde, a French travel company, bought The Kraal in an auction, much to the consternation of the Indian government, which also attempted to bid for this important piece of Gandhi memorabilia. "Jean-François Rial, the CEO of Voyageurs du Monde, called me on a summer evening asking me to investigate after he saw an article in a French newspaper. This article talked about the Gandhi House, an actual family house for sale in Johannesburg. It was July 31st 2009," remembers Fabrice Dabouineau, who manages the African department at Voyageurs du Monde. "Three weeks later, our company signed for the purchase of the house. Jean-François Rial is >





< deeply concerned about India, and Gandhi's life and heritage and really pushed to buy this house in spite of many rational disadvantages. He was strongly convinced it was a chance for him and for all of us to accomplish our life's masterpiece, something that could be bigger than all of us."

Last year Satyagraha House opened in its present avatar, a space that's halfway between a guesthouse and a museum dedicated to Gandhi, Kallenbach and Satyagraha. (Tara Gandhi, granddaughter of the Mahatma, has been a visitor.) The seven-room house is accessorized with objects from Gujarat, South Africa and Europe, and Dabouineau says the house is "simple but nice, not luxurious, the decoration only serves the cause and the message". And, as befitting Gandhian beliefs, the hotel is vegetarian, doesn't serve alcohol, and doesn't allow smoking, television, music or any form of entertainment (of course, yoga and meditation are thoroughly welcome). "We modestly think the Satyagraha House is our message; a tribute to Gandhi, his life and what he changed in humanity by giving up violence, by being convinced truth always wins," says Dabouineau. Most appropriately, the tour of the house begins with a handwritten message from Gandhi, 'My Life is my message'. ❖



(From the top)  
**IN MEMORIAM**  
Photographs chronicling the life of Gandhi adorn a wall in the hotel; the exterior of the new wing that overlooks the garden.



(From the top)  
**LESS IS MORE**  
The minimally furnished Manilal bedroom, which was added as an extension to the main house in 1910; it is directly connected to the main house. One of the bedrooms in the new wing of the hotel.