

# THE GREAT ESTATE

GQ Editor **Craig Tyson** on why your hunt for a gentlemanly getaway may be over

**T**ry as I might, I couldn't hit the pigeons that kept flying across my sights, so I fired a warning shot that brought the first bird down in an explosion of fragments.

Clay pigeons are not the only things you can shoot on Dalton Private Reserve – there are white-water rapids when the river runs high and game birds when the season comes around. There's also archery when the wind is right, and plenty of time to shoot the breeze around a fire with a good red wine and a gourmet meal in the elegant Dalton House dining area.

Being a game reserve and gentleman's retreat, the range of activities on offer at Dalton is vast. Consider this itinerary: a morning of bird and game viewing on horseback, rugby viewing in the comfort of your suite, followed by a chef's master class with wine and food pairing. Or, if you prefer: fly-fishing, a quick set of lawn tennis, river rafting and a champagne picnic at sundown before retiring to the lodge for dinner. Lying in wait for you is

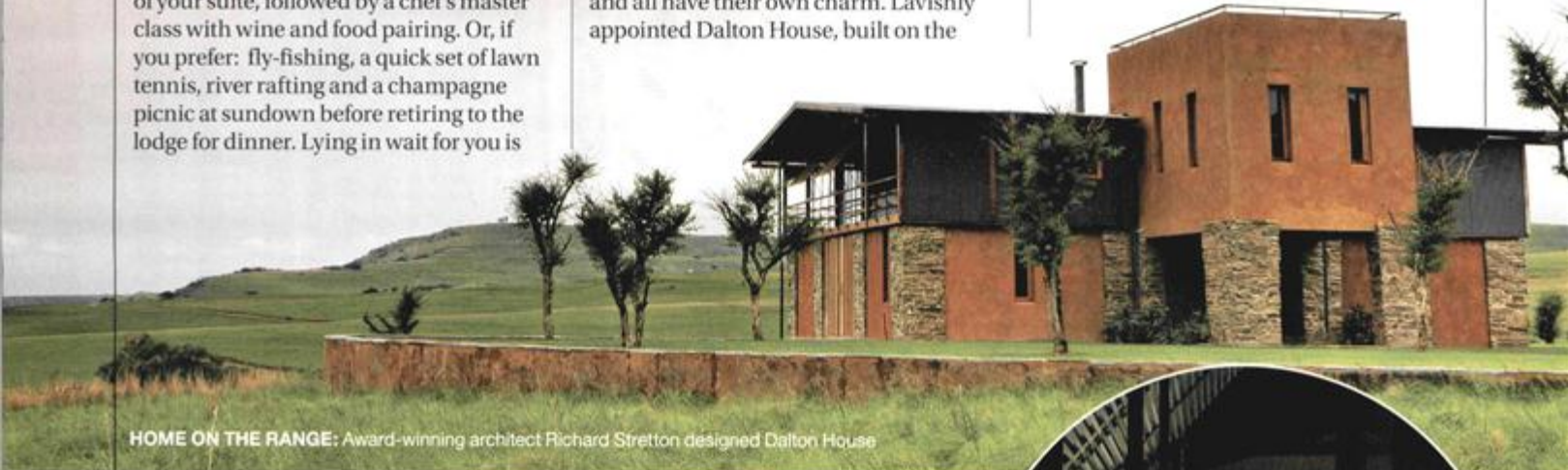
a long to-do list that includes battlefield tours, balloon flights, abseiling and mountain biking. Concise decision-making is called for. There is, of course, a spa, yoga and even a spot of Trappist history study. Or simply select a book from the impressive collection of South African history and literature, a fine wine from the cellar and off you go, solo.

Seven years ago, Dalton was an abandoned cattle farm overrun by invasive wattle. Now it's a model ecological conservancy of 7 000 acres in a remote corner of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, employing a staff of 60 trained in conservation. It's also a luxurious getaway with slick home comforts and heritage-inspired architecture.

Accommodation options are varied and all have their own charm. Lavishly appointed Dalton House, built on the

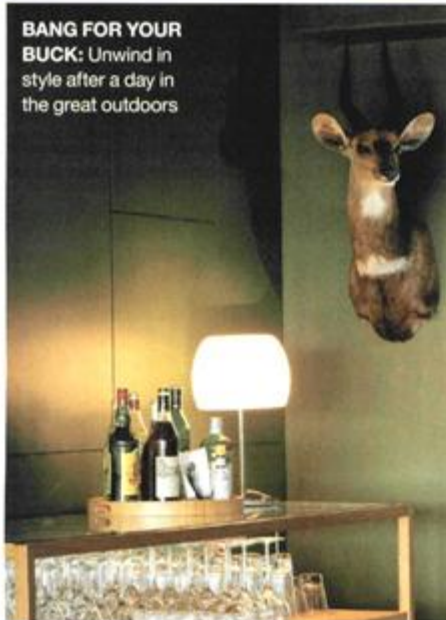
remnants of a 1903 farmhouse, can house up to three couples, and once you've booked you get the place to yourself, with the services of a personal chef. There's an intimate lake cottage and a lodge on the banks of the Bushman's River that can sleep a party of 12.

Joe Dawson, a university-educated outdoorsman, runs the place. He's a tough-as-teak conservationist who manages the reserve's large herds of game. Wing shooting in season is allowed to maintain the reserve's balance of game birds and to give the trained gun dogs a good run. Joe's also what's known as a part-time paleo – what he kills, he eats after first cleaning, skinning and cooking it. His mother, Sue, runs the organic gardens that provide fresh fare for the guests. >>



HOME ON THE RANGE: Award-winning architect Richard Stretton designed Dalton House

**BANG FOR YOUR BUCK:** Unwind in style after a day in the great outdoors

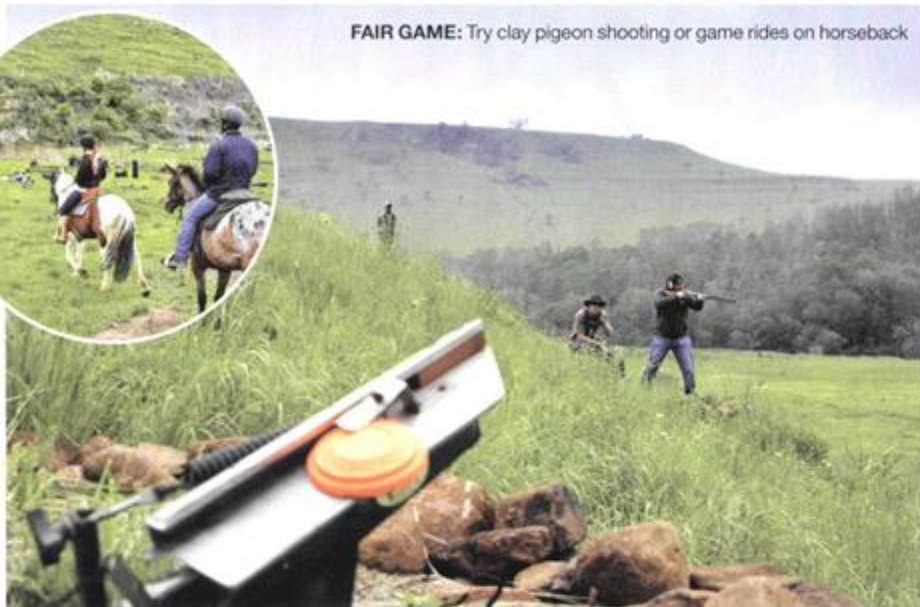


**FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD**

(clockwise from above): Views of the distant Drakensberg; spend bushveld nights in luxurious splendour; and wake up to nature




**FAIR GAME:** Try clay pigeon shooting or game rides on horseback



Dawson's other interest is horses and, specifically, the famed Nootgedachter breed, revered for its hardiness and companionship. Combine the two and you get the special experience of seeing white rhino (of which there are ten on the farm) up close, from the back of a willing mount.

Fishing Dalton's 15km stretch of river is considered an honour by fly-fishing enthusiasts. The Bushman's was one of the first rivers in SA to be stocked with Brown trout, thanks to a band of British officers who released 500 fingerlings of prized Scottish Loch Leven Brown Trout when they were stationed in the area during the Anglo Boer War. And if you look closely, you can see the groove marks in the rock pools where young men of the amaHlubi came to sharpen their short-handled fighting spears, before setting off to war in King Shaka's army.

Dalton's owner, Ian Gowrie-Smith, was looking for a certain lifestyle to balance a high-flying career that took him to too many parts of the world too often. The farm offered him a chance to kick back and suited his vision for an environmentally sensitive conservation project that would involve the local community. The Dalton Education Trust teaches skills training and game conservation, and a crèche caters to children in the area.

By night, the sound of the rapids drifts up the valley to where the eland graze below the house. It's just another side to the gentleman's estate experience. 

[daltonprivatereserve.com](http://daltonprivatereserve.com)

## WHITE OUT

The name 'white rhino' is a misnomer – the largest of the five rhino species was called the 'wyd' rhino by the first Dutch settlers because of its wide and square lower lip. Hearing the term, the Brits interpreted it as white rhino. Rhino numbers are dwindling rapidly as a result of poaching. Poachers typically hack off the horn, which is ground into a powder and used in traditional Chinese medicines. Three hundred and thirty three were killed in SA last year, 146 of them in the Kruger Park, Africa's foremost conservation centre. Already wiped out in Zambia, and under threat in Botswana and Zimbabwe, the once solid southern African rhino population is dependent on human protection. Due to their vulnerability to poaching and costs of protecting, their value in the world of game management has dropped. Disease-free buffalo are now considered more valuable, and fetch higher prices, than rhino.



**WHERE IS IT?** Dalton is located in the heart of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, two hours' drive from Durban and four hours from Johannesburg. Rates include internet and DSTv, game viewing activities, fishing, all meals, drinks and the services of a chef.  
**CO-ORDINATES:** 29°06'51.21"S, 29°47'26.42"E.