

# THE GOOD LIFE: *Going Green the Golden Way*

---

*SUR LA TERRE* EXPLORES THE  
WORLD OF SUSTAINABLE LUXURY.

---

**T**he luxury market is often blamed for many things: the broadening of the inequality gap, the furtherance of a society of excess and even as being a contributor to the destruction of the natural environment. True luxury, however, is not wasteful, nor is it invasive or unnecessarily consumptive. Real and lasting luxury is all about precision exclusivity and bespoke experiences, rather than mass production. Luxury is enduring, not disposable; therefore, to be luxurious, almost by its very definition, is to be sustainable.

Allowing that this may be a more conceptual argument, many corners of the luxury market have begun to take very real, measurable steps in creating and fostering a much more conservational approach to merchandise, experiences and services. In a bid to do our part, then, *Sur la Terre* would like to present the following small yet powerful list of options that could make your life *truly* rich.

## *Tucson Mountain Retreat*

One of the more uncompromising luxuries anyone can experience in life is achieving a *oneness* with the natural world. However, we as a species still have not quite learned that balance. Especially invasive is the way we adapt our environment to suit our needs, rather than evolving alongside it. Architecture and private development can cause massive and long-lasting damage to the natural world. That is exactly why we have fallen in love with the architectural design firm, DUST, and perhaps its most famous project, The Tucson Mountain Retreat.

Located in the Arizona portion of the Sonoran desert, the retreat is not so much an architectural wonder hammered into its environs, as it is one urged, divined, even *grown* from the earth itself. Rendered primarily from an ancient building technique called “rammed earth” (which, as the name implies, uses compressed soil to construct durable earthen, load-bearing walls), it looks as native as the adjacent arroyos, rock outcroppings and cacti that surround it.

The Tucson Mountain Retreat shares - rather than exploits - the gifts of its unspoiled location, incorporating fixtures and design elements that minimise the physical impact that the home has on the environment, while at the same time enhancing its various boons. For example, the retreat boasts a 30,000-gallon rainwater harvesting system with an advanced filtration network that provides this most precious desert commodity throughout the entire household.

Using design elements similar to those once used by traditional Bedouin societies here in the Gulf, the retreat also maximises its geographic positioning while naturally eliminating its more detrimental environmental factors. Heat is reduced by laying out the house in a more linear way, along its east-west axis, while capturing prevailing southerly breezes and ushering them throughout the structure as a means of natural ventilation. Of course, sustainability is also about interaction; to “know





thysself,” one must also know that which surrounds him or her, which is why the parking area is 400 feet from the house and why it enjoys such an open, by-zone plan: these design cues urge an engagement with the natural world - something that is, particularly in modernised societies, increasingly being lost.

Homes like the Tucson Mountain Retreat could and should be emulated here in the Middle East - particularly in more arid climates like those found in the Gulf - and to ignore its progressive environmental innovations would be a baffling sin of omission. To see more about the Tucson Mountain Retreat, visit the DUST firm’s blog, [www.blog.dustdb.com](http://www.blog.dustdb.com)

Of course, not everyone has the land to build such an exciting fulcrum of a life-better-lived, so instead, why not focus on making your time away from home that much more sustainable?





## *Singita Luxury Safari*

For those not yet willing or financially able to commit to incorporate positive environmental changes to their permanent dwellings, there is an emerging market called “eco-tourism,” which allows travellers to engage directly and in a non-invasive way with the natural world. Paramount amongst these options is perhaps the Singita Luxury Safari experience.

Meaning “place of miracles” in the Shangaan language, Singita is a family of luxury wildlife and safari reserves, which is truly well-named. Originally conceived as a single lodge in 1993, Singita has since expanded to almost a dozen different styles of luxurious accommodation across more than half a million acres throughout three different African nations, with each branch existing as its own stand-alone (not to mention stand-out) experience.

In the words of its mission statement, “Singita’s enduring purpose is to conserve, preserve, and protect the miraculous places of which we are custodians. Our concessions, reserves and properties represent some of the most pristine wilderness areas on the continent and we are dedicated to maintaining these incredible pieces of earth for future generations.”

Throughout its numerous sites, Singita has an even greater and more diverse number of different lodges, homes and camps to choose from, each one abounding with a luxury that is uncompromising, but one that is also pure; it beautifies its environment without molesting it with gilded excess. Even the most cursory look at [www.singita.com](http://www.singita.com) affords an amazing tour of its varied accommodation options, each of which is set like a diamond within the natural setting of its particular environment, every one of which teems with life.

Not only will your stay come peppered by run-ins with some of the more colourful members of the animal kingdom, being that they are given the same freedom to roam the grounds as you, but by signing up as a guest, you will have an even more directly positive impact on the surrounding environment. By staying at a Singita property, you are contributing to local programmes which facilitate and enrich the communities of which they are a part. Whether it’s the “Touching the Earth Lightly” programme at Singita Kruger National Park, which provides funding for environmental maintenance, monitoring and ongoing research, or the perhaps more focused Singita Pamaushana Rhino Reintroduction Programme, each of the diverse and worthwhile systems will assist in preserving the natural world through luxurious means, rather than detracting from them.

The list of awards and general praise for Singita is nigh-innumerable, if not certainly too lengthy to report within this article (a comprehensive list of its accolades can be found at [www.singita.com/about/awards](http://www.singita.com/about/awards)); suffice it to say, however, that Singita properties across Africa are well-regarded, not only for their commitment to luxury sustainability, but also for providing a bridge between Man and the natural world within an authentic, rewarding and indeed life-changing framework.



Sustainable luxury is not necessarily relegated to the realm of accommodation, of course. There are many products that have begun to crop up throughout the world that use, as their basis, the idea of a rather more long-lasting and positive luxury culture. Tropical Salvage is one such company that specialises in producing high-end goods with an equally high-minded sensibility.

## Tropical Salvage

To those readers who may be unaware, clear-cut logging (which haphazardly uproots trees on a mass scale) effectively undermines the structural integrity of forests, thus allowing erosion and the danger of resultant flooding, which in turn destroys the fragile ecosystem by robbing it of life, be that endangered animals or rare species of medicinal plants. That is just one of the potentially world-threatening dangers involved in careless methods of deforestation, and why Timothy O'Brien founded Tropical Salvage in the first place.

His visit to Gunung Lueser National Park in West Sumatra in 1998 left him aghast. After coming face to face with the shambolic remains of some particularly wasteful deforestation, he would go on to found Tropical Salvage with the keenly-focused remit of finding, excavating and utilising wild-growth, felled, buried and reclaimed wood found in the Indonesian islands of Java and Borneo to create minimalist, understated, one-of-a-kind household furniture items.

The diverse catalogue at Tropical Salvage includes everything from tastefully-carved bureaus and bed frames, to naturally-varnished entertainment stands and beverage towers, to gorgeous chests, chairs and benches. Meanwhile, organisations like the Jepara Forest Conservancy are simultaneously funded in their important work to restore forests, facilitate environmental education and dialogue, and embolden local communities to elicit change themselves.

Keen observers will note that while they are unquestionably beautiful, the wares at Tropical Salvage may also appear misshapen, with small, natural or previously manmade flaws peeking subtly through the surface of the wood. Explains the company mandate: "We embrace idiosyncrasies that history has fixed into our salvaged woods: marks from nails, old bore holes from insects [...] intense grain colours caused by long immersion in mineral-murky rivers [...] These characteristics are all part of the wood's rich history and provoke our wonder and respect."



This is a luxury that adopts what is known in Japan as the Wabi-sabi school of thought, which states that there is beauty in the transience of life, and in the embrace of imperfection, and thus, we would argue, *exclusivity*. Much of the wood re-beautified by the company has been carbon-dated at anywhere between 700 to 1,000 years old, making it a unique, time-tested collaboration between man and nature. Tropical Salvage is a celebration of a that less-invasive harmony; it appreciates a functional body that can still stand resplendent in a skin which affords the wealth of a millennia of stories; grizzled with a resounding depth that is mirrored in its scars, earned as they have been through the long passage of time. This is luxury with character, and we couldn't love it more.

To read more about O'Brien and the journey he and the artisans of Tropical Salvage continue to undertake, visit [tropicalsalvage.com](http://tropicalsalvage.com)

These are but a few of the increasingly prevalent ways that prove luxury can be beautiful, bespoke and elegant, while at the same time being environmentally sensitive, sustainable and ethically true.

But the story doesn't stop there! To see more of *Sur la Terre Arabia's* top pics for "going green the golden way," visit [www.surlaterre.me](http://www.surlaterre.me), where you will find a few more examples of how to live a rather *richer* luxurious life.