

Update on Zandspruit Bush & Aero Estate

By Athol Franz

Shortly before the end of 2016, my fiancée Christine Brits and I spent three days at the magnificent Zandspruit Bush & Aero Estate, which is a lifestyle aviation 1 000-hectare estate close to Hoedspruit. Only 350 hectares of the complete estate will ever be developed, leaving 650 hectares as wilderness space for the many species of plains' game that roam freely on the Estate.



Typical house on Zandspruit with the runway in the background

The residential development has been designed around bush homes with considerable character. Each home has a one hectare area of virgin bush so that rarely can residents of any one home see another home on the Estate. This arrangement also affords one the opportunity of watching the miracle of nature from the comfort of one's own home. The wilderness area has several sand roads where residents may enjoy game drives, horse rides, cycling, walking, jogging or a sunset picnic.

Amongst the development projects are a four-star Safari Resort and an Equestrian Centre. There are 200 stands that make up the Bush and Aero Estate, of which 38 stands are specific Aero stands located along the 1 000m paved surface runway. These stands give you the option of building your own hangar next to your home, enabling you to arrive at your property in your own plane and hangar it right next to your bush home. Already more than 100 stands have been sold and there are 48 completed homes, with four others under construction.

Zandspruit Bush & Aero Estate offers a variety of pre-designed homes from which prospective buyers may choose. Each design has been diligently thought through to ensure that one enjoys the maximum benefit of the beautiful environment. These designs can be adapted to your personal taste by allowing minor alterations to the plans such as an additional bedroom, pool, pool deck or extended room deck. Professional Architects Förtsch and Associates have provided all the pre-designed homes and

have been involved in the estate from its inception. This in turn provides the experience required to offer the best possible options for maximising the benefit of living in such a magnificent environment. However, all residents are entitled to create their own design within the architectural rules and guidelines set out by the Zandspruit Estate Home Owners' Association.

At this point in time, the Estate is almost 60% sold out and 48 homes have been completed. Presently there are four homes under construction, whilst several more have been scheduled to start early in 2017. There are around 80 stands left and if you haven't secured your piece of paradise, now is the best time to do so! The developer's recipe of having pre-priced and predesigned homes, which are offered to customers as a one-stop way of building a dream home has been well received. It is almost common practice now that potential clients travel to Zandspruit for a week, choose their stand, decide on which home they would like, sign the necessary papers and head back home. Zandspruit's developers then take care of the entire process: from variation instructions to the architects, local municipal approval of the plans, registration with the NHBRC, site hand over as well as construction. Owners are kept up to date with photographs from the site on a regular basis. Normally eight months later the keys are handed over. This concept makes the daunting thought of building far away from base a pleasurable experience. Marketing Director of the Estate developer, Martin den Dunnen says "Everything is possible, but the impossible just takes a little longer!"



Runway 35 approach

The developers have completed the installation of all the Estate infrastructure in five years as originally promised and are pleased that the programme could be finished on time. Zandspruit Bush & Aero Estate has certainly earned the reputation of being well-managed and successful, which provides for a solid return on investment for owners.

Prior to our arrival, the area received some much-needed rain, which has added a splash of colour to the estate, which has really matured in many ways. The rains started in October with 30 mm falling on 24 October. Since then the estate has recorded another 69 mm, but when we were there the river was still very dry, meaning that the rainwater had soaked into the land. We could see that the vegetation was starting to recover, but the Estate needs more rainfall urgently.

Plains' game on the Estate:

Blue Wildebeest, Bushbuck, Duiker, Giraffe, Impala, Kudu, Nyala, Reedbuck, Steenbuck, Warthog, Waterbuck and Zebra. In addition, leopard and caracal have been sighted. Whilst we were at the estate we were privileged to hear and see an abundance of birds. The birds' calls ranged from that of the Woodland Kingfisher to that of the Fish Eagle.

Meeting with Marcel and Charlot Nijdam

As retired KLM airline captains Marcel and Charlot Nijdam had been researching various aviation estates in which they could build their dream retirement home. I spent some time with this delightful couple, poring over their aviation experiences and how they eventually found Zandspruit. Marcel tells his story:

"This story began in 2011 when members of the pilot union of Air France / KLM were invited to participate in the annual flight festival in Montlucon, central France. We flew there in our Speed Canard and met a few hundred pilots who flew anything from Vougas to Vampires, a Hawker Hunter and all other types of aircraft that provided fun flying. When we were at the festival the following year we saw there was a Piper Cub on floats, so I chatted to the owner who operated the Aquitaine Flying Club School. Amongst the planes at the school were two float planes. My wife Charlot loves all forms of boating and flying and the idea of buying into this aviation estate was considered by us.

In the autumn of that year we flew our Commander to spend one week at Biscarrosse on the Atlantic Ocean at an airport situated on a large lake where many years ago, large Latécoère flying boats, which flew from the lake to the French colonies in Africa and to South America, were built. After a few days, the weather turned sour and we found some shelter for our Commander. All private villas had a private hangar, a small pool in which one could cool off, a well-stocked mini-bar and a place to rest for the night. In the morning after breakfast and a pre-flight on one's plane one can plan a trip along the beach before returning and enjoying an evening barbecue. The idea of this estate was likened to those in the U.S. where there are several dozen such air parks.

However before making any decision, we visited the aviation trade-show AERO at Friedrichshafen in Germany, where we found all kinds of possibilities. As we were involved in such an important project, being our retirement home, we needed to undertake some research in Western Europe, but this was not only difficult, but very expensive. We had a little more success in Eastern European countries such as Finland, East Germany, Hungary and Romania, where there were also air park estate projects. However, the underlying problem was that we did not feel attracted to the languages and cultures of these mainly ex-Soviet countries, which were frankly downright depressing.

Our thoughts then turned to South Africa. The predominant language being English which we both speak and an exchange rate that was very favorable for us. Those were two good starting points! We knew South Africa as only a ten-hour flight with KLM and we had travelled there several times and flown with SkyAfrica based at the Benoni / Brakpan airfield. SkyAfrica was owned by the late Austrian Karl Finatzer. Here we undertook a 'bush' flying course, which was an introduction to a very different flying world. We met enthusiastic pilots who taught us how to fly into semi-prepared airstrips in aircraft such as the PA28 and PA32. We were taught about short field take-offs and landings, survival in the bush, basic technical knowledge about the aircraft and much more. That first year, we were all sent on flights together and after a week of visiting famous sites such as Isandlwana in Kwa Zulu Natal, where an invading English army under Lord Chelmsford was massacred by Zulus in 1879 and battlefields famous from the Anglo-South African war of 1900, we were 'sold' on South Africa.



Charlot and Marcel Nijdam

We flew to Newcastle to refuel, Jackalberry in the Lowveld and Mariepskop high above the Blyde River Canyon. Flying in South Africa is a must for the development of tourism and for the supply to bush lodges situated in the wilderness. We found that aviation in South Africa was well-supported with relatively low fuel prices and often no landing fees. For example, at the Benoni / Brakpan airfield one could undertake touch and goes all day for the cost of one landing fee. In addition, the landscapes are fantastic, whilst we could land right next to lodges when we undertook our exciting flying safaris.

A year later, we hired a PA28 from SkyAfrica again and undertook a South Africa, Botswana and Namibia round trip for two weeks. All the preparations were managed by SkyAfrica and with good briefings, a check ride and off we went! Kalahari Desert, Okavango Delta, Namib Desert, Atlantic Coast, Fish River Canyon, Kimberley diamond mine and so many more places of interest. What a fabulous trip meeting such hospitable people and flying in beautiful weather.

We visited AERO at Friedrichshafen again and visited the exhibition stand of Zandspruit Bush & Aero Estate. We decided to combine a visit to the Aero Estate when we next visited South Africa. This time we flew in the PA32 to Bulawayo and the Wankie National Park in Zimbabwe, Victoria Falls and ten other destinations in fourteen days. We saw literally hundreds of elephants and everything that lives in



Bush camp

the game parks, but we were also very sad to see the devastation being caused by the elephants due to drought conditions. However, this was an amazing adventure flying into beautiful holiday destinations. On our return to South Africa via Polokwane, we were scheduled to spend a day at Zandspruit Bush & Aero Estate. We landed on its beautifully paved 1000m runway. However, we ended up staying for four days and decided that this was the Estate on which we would build our beautiful retirement home.

Where is Zandspruit?

Zandspruit Bush & Aero Estate is located next to Hoedspruit, a Wild West town with everything you need to enjoy life and is located on the doorstep of the world-famous Kruger National Park. Our home was constructed together with a magnificent hangar with its automated hydraulically lifted bi-fold door. All that was required was to fly our two aircraft in formation all the way from Europe to Zandspruit, but that is another story. Today the two aircraft stand side-by-side in the hangar, located a short distance from the runway always ready for that early morning or late afternoon flight over the sheer splendour of the region.” 

For more information on Zandspruit Bush & Aero Estate please contact Martin den Dunnen Tel: +27 (0) 15 793 1192 Cell: +27 (0) 82 449 8895 Website: www.zandspruit.co.za



Front entrance



Dam in bush area