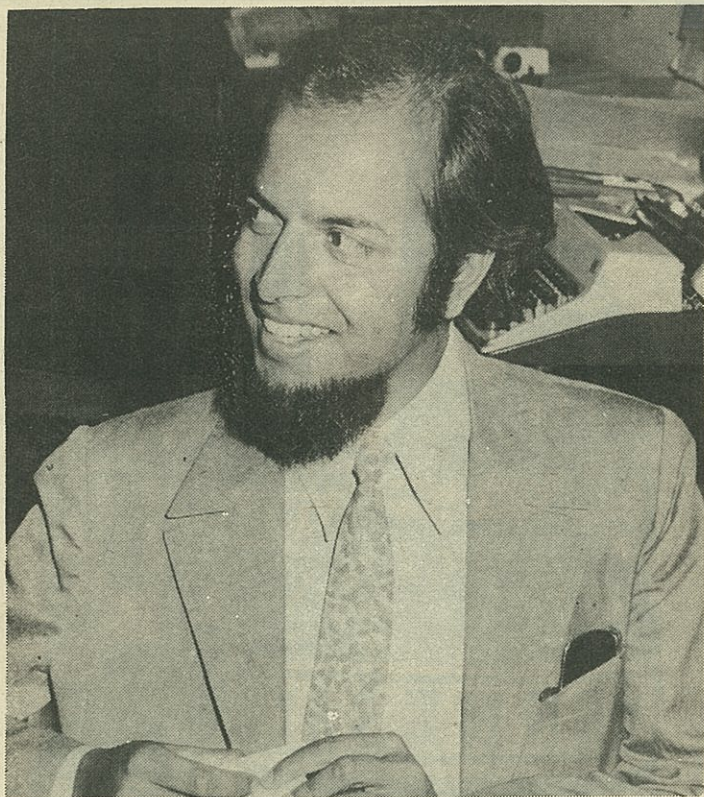


BY BARBARA KIMENYE

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# Designing for our life style



BRAZ MENEZES

**BRAZ MENEZES** is a whimsical slip of a man whose thinning hair and impressive, jutting beard look like stage props used to disguise the vulnerable youthfulness of a delicate little face.

But whimsical or not, Braz at the age of 33 is already one of Kenya's home-grown leading architects, and although specialising in low-income housing, it is in the sphere of tourist accommodation that he is causing a minor revolution.

Of lodges due to open in December this year, Masai Lodge on the fringe of Nairobi Game Park and Maneaters' Lodge in Tsavo, are fitting examples of the Menezes trend.

"In both cases," Braz explained in a voice so soft that often one misses all he has to say, "we have started off with clients who have a limited amount of money. Normally it takes about £2,500 per bed to build a tourist hotel, which

means most of the money is going into the design or into the infra-structure."

By avoiding the danger of thinking in terms of conventional type schemes which called for conventional budgeting, he has managed to bring the cost per bed down to roughly £1,500.

And how has he done this? "Just by establishing priorities. Also we wanted, particularly at Masai Lodge, to get away from this business of lodges looking 'primitive' and attempting to give the impression that this is indigenous local architecture, when in fact there is no reason to pretend otherwise. The 'primitive' look means that invariably the scale is wrong and the whole thing ends up looking sophisticated and expensive."

Not that Braz believes Masai Lodge is the answer to the pseudo-primitive. Rather he regards it as only one concept where very modern materials have been employed in a very traditional theme.

The theme, incidentally, is of a Masai manyatta complete with thorn hedges, and by sitting the Lodge on the very edge of Kingfisher Gorge, on the fringe of Nairobi Game Park, only 16 miles from the city centre, Braz has created one of the most romantic spots in the whole of East Africa.

Furthermore, realising there is usually a vacuum between the original concept of a lodge and interior decor experts who move in on completion of the

building to do the furnishing, he and his team of bright young men have designed or chosen everything from light fittings to chairs, with the result that practically everything is of local manufacture.

In the case of the "Maneaters" at Tsavo, Braz has reached the ultimate in tourist attraction gimmickry. Picture if you can 20 ancient railway carriages, set on actual track or embankment overlooking the Game Park, and converted into deluxe double-bedded accommodation complete with self-contained bathrooms. The master touch of authenticity is a real steam locomotive, a museum piece, sitting comfortably in the forecourt, and on stilts above it is an open restaurant.

The whole thing is so reminiscent of the Maneaters of Tsavo from which the theme of the lodge is derived that it is to be hoped that it doesn't awaken any hereditary memories in one or two prowling lions.

One of Braz's most important designs is for a maximum security mental hospital at Mathare. "This has attracted attention overseas, particularly from Broadmoor in the UK," he remarked. "If it is built it should be the most advanced mental hospital in any developing country, because in most developing countries, mental health is not considered a priority."

He believes that "it says a lot for Kenya, really, in that a development like this is being given major attention."

In 1961 Braz was one of the