



How the Lubwamas built their dream retreat centre

In an age when securing financial backing means collateral, credit checks, and months of paperwork, the Lubwamas' choice to turn to their priest instead of a bank loan seems almost revolutionary. Yet for them, it was a deeply natural step rooted in a life shaped by trust, community, and faith. These same values would later become the very foundation of Beauvais. The bank would have given them a loan with interest, but Father Buve gave them belief with no strings attached.

BY EDGARR R. BATTE

Long before Jarvis Mugagga Lubwama and his wife, Gladys, exchanged vows, they shared a quiet dream; to build a retreat centre. Not just any retreat, but a space outside Kampala where people could come to reflect. In 2014, the first architectural plans were drawn. At the time, the idea existed only on paper. A year later, they married, and the retreat became a promise they made to each other.

Then, almost unexpectedly, they found the perfect piece of land in Masulita, Wakiso District. There was only one catch; the owner would sell only all five acres together. The couple could afford just two. Unwilling to let the opportunity slip away, they began searching for the additional funds. When every conventional avenue failed, they turned to someone unexpected; their priest.

Father Buve, a Catholic priest, had long been more than a spiritual guide to the Lubwamas. To their relief, he agreed to help. He covered the deficit in a form of a grant. And just like that, the couple decided the retreat would carry his name; Beauvais, a homage to "Buve", in

gratitude for the almost divine intuition that enabled them to acquire land and launch their ambition.

In an era when financial institutions demand collateral, credit scores, and months of paperwork, the Lubwamas' decision to rely on their priest rather than a bank loan feels almost radical. Yet for them, it was a natural extension of a life built on trust, community, and faith, values that would later become the bedrock of Beauvais itself. "The bank would have given us a loan with interest," Jarvis reflects. "Father Buve gave us belief with no strings attached."

Today, the Beauvais "Buve" Retreat Center stands on 29 acres of serene bushland, having expanded from the original five. It offers 32 self-contained rooms and five cottages, with a total of 45 beds. Rooted in Catholic principles, it serves as a sanctuary for spiritual enrichment and personal growth.

Stronger together

J Jarvis credits much of the success to partnership. "It takes two to execute," he says. In Gladys, he found the strength he lacked. Trained as an accountant, she brought discipline and structure to balance his vision. Where he imagined, she measured. Where he stretched possibilities, she grounded them.

Gladys, in turn, reflects on their shared journey: "I feel as if I have done most of my adult life with my husband. We have had years of shared decisions, risks, and belief. Beauvais, in many ways, has grown alongside our marriage."

Their collaboration extends beyond the personal into the professional. Gladys





The Beauvais "Buve" Retreat Centre stands on 29 acres of serene bushland, having expanded from the original five. PHOTOS/EDGAR R. BATTE.

dys manages the finances with precision, ensuring every shilling is accounted for, while Javis oversees design and guest experience.

"We do not step on each other's toes," Gladys says. "But we also never step away from each other's problems." This mutual respect, built over years of trial and error, has become the invisible foundation upon which Beauvais rests.

A slow, deliberate process

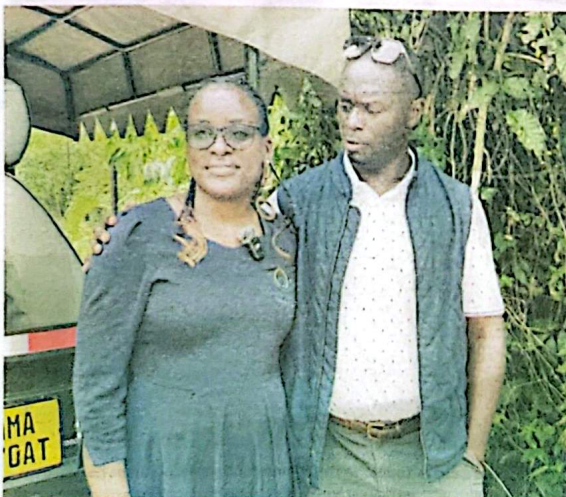
Construction did not begin immediately. The couple had careers to build, responsibilities to meet, and experiences to gather. Javis travelled widely; to the United States and Europe, often taking Gladys along. These journeys exposed them to inspiring places and refined their plans. They studied how light enters a room, how silence is preserved, and how space can shape thought.

They visited retreats in the hills of Tuscany, monasteries in rural France, and eco-lodges in Costa Rica. Each trip added a new layer to their vision. From the Italians, they learnt the art of slow hospitality. From the French, the value of sacred silence. From the Costa Ricans, the beauty of building with, not against, nature. But Javis also understood that what works elsewhere does not always belong here.

So when construction finally began, years after the idea was first imagined, they interpreted rather than copied. "You



The dining area is built around a long communal table, encouraging guests to sit together and talk.



Javis Mugagga Lubwama and his wife, Gladys, the couple behind Beauvais Retreat Centre, built not on bank loans, but on belief.

THE STAFF

Instead of hiring only experienced hospitality workers, the Lubwamas brought in people from the surrounding community, many with no prior experience and trained them. Some were casual labourers during construction.

"They were very green," the couple recalls. But they learnt. What they offer now is something harder to teach; genuine warmth.

Today, the staff of forty comes almost entirely from Masulita and neighbouring villages.

"We could have brought in a professional manager from Kampala," Javis admits.

"But that person would not know the name of every guest's grandmother. Our staff does. That is the difference between service and care."

have to define what you want," he says. And they did, carefully and patiently.

The land itself guided many decisions. They chose to preserve much of its natural state: the greenery, the trees, the indigenous vegetation. "We have tried to maintain what was already there," Lubwama explains.

Beauty in isolation

The journey to Beauvais is part of its identity. The road is not smooth all the way and that roughness forces you to pay attention, to let the city fall away, along with its noise. Almost without permission, the mind begins to settle. By the time you arrive, you are already in a different state.

Inside, the buildings reflect the same philosophy. The décor is bespoke and rustic, dominated by textured wood, some of it repurposed from what might otherwise be waste, now given new life as decorative elements. Curves in the architecture are deliberate, the kind of details that take time to build and are often avoided. "You do not build a countryside retreat like a Kampala hotel," Lubwama says.

So they did not. Instead, they built something that feels grounded. Walls carry images of African children; playing, praying, living, portrayed with meaning. A grand acoustic piano sits in a common space. Sometimes, when guests arrive, someone plays. The sound fills the space gently, each

note piercing the stillness.

The dining area is built around a long communal table, encouraging guests to sit together and talk. Large windows and wide doors invite natural light and aeration. Then there is what is not there; televisions. In the rooms, in the welcome area, in the dining area, none are to be found.

"We are all addicted to screens," the couple observes. Taking time off, they believe, means taking your eyes off the screens to interact with nature: well-tended shrubbery trees, and plant life, complemented by birdsong.

Design follows behaviour

At first, the absence of distraction feels strange. Then, slowly, something changes. Without the constant buzz, the mind begins to move differently. Thoughts come and go, then settle. The rooms follow the same philosophy. Most are single-bedroom units designed for one person or a couple. Executive rooms offer slightly more comfort. Cottages suit families or groups of friends. But even there, the idea remains: comfort without excess, without distraction. Every decision returns to intention.

Even the swimming pool reflects this. It is shallow. "Our idea was not to build an Olympic pool," the couple explains, "but a place for leisure, relaxation, and bonding."

Faith at the soul

Notably, faith is the soul of the facility and the story. Both Javis and Gladys come from deeply Catholic families. For them, faith is not something they switch on; it is something they grew into. "In our home, Catholicism was ingrained," Javis says. It shaped how they think, work, and treat people.

That influence appears in small things. The words "Be kind to one another" are visible throughout the space. A simple chapel stands on the grounds, complete with Roman inspired windows and understated décor. The chapel remains open every weekend, and a visiting priest leads Mass.

"Faith is not about rules here," Gladys explains. "It is about presence. The chapel has no lock because we believe you should never be locked away from your own soul." That openness extends to guests of all beliefs. Beauvais welcomes everyone: Muslim, Protestant, Hindu, or none, with the same warmth. "Spiritual growth is not denominational," Javis adds. "It is human."

Creative rest

At the centre of Beauvais is a simple but demanding idea: creativity begins in stillness. Javis recalls reading about Steve Jobs, how some of the most meaningful ideas emerge in quiet moments. "You cannot create in noise," he says.

So everything here is designed to reduce noise, not just the physical kind, but the mental clutter people carry with them. He asks a question that lingers: Why is stress not fully recognised in our everyday language, even though people live with it constantly?

He calls what happens here "creative rest", not merely sleeping or stepping away, but a deliberate pause that allows the mind to reset. He imagines companies budgeting for it, allowing teams to step away from routine. He imagines individuals planning for it, too, choosing to disconnect, even briefly. Because the cost of not resting, he believes, is often unseen but heavy.

Toward the end of the conversation, the story widens beyond land and buildings. It becomes about Uganda. The Lubwamas have travelled, seen other countries, experienced different systems. Yet they chose to build here. "This is our country," Javis says.