



How Waibi turned family home into a thriving bed and breakfast facility

What becomes of a six-bedroom home when its sole occupant is left behind, and the world outside falls silent? For 57-year-old Leah Harriet Waibi, the answer was not resignation but reinvention.

BY TREVOR LUTALO

A few minutes just outside the bustle of Jinja City, the first thing you notice is not the building, it is the feeling. A wooden pergola stretches out in front of the main house, casting patterned shadows on a paved floor where a few guests sit, unhurried, their conversations softened by the rustle of leaves overhead. Beyond them, a garden

breathes. A soursop tree bends slightly under its weight, passion fruit vines curl along trellises, and a pomegranate tree stands in defiance of the urban edge creeping ever closer.

A pair of friendly dogs wander through the compound, pausing occasionally to inspect a new arrival, while a few local breed chickens peck casually at the ground, undisturbed by the presence of strangers. There is no loud mu-

sic, no clinking of glasses from a busy bar, no rush of staff moving in coordinated urgency. Instead, there is calm.

At the centre of it all is 57-year-old Leah Harriet Waibi, a hotelier of more than three decades, who has chosen to do something unusual in Uganda's fast-evolving hospitality landscape; she has built a business around rest.

"I wanted people to come and relax and rejuvenate," she says. "That is why this is not a typical hotel."

Waibi is the founder of 3 Brothers' Restcourts, a homestay she carved out of what was once her private residence. The name, she explains with a smile, is drawn from her three sons, twins as her firstborns and a younger one she fondly calls "the follower." But beyond the name lies a deeper story, one of space, timing, and a decision that would transform not just her home, but her understanding of what hospitality could be.

From residence to retreat

For years, Waibi worked in Uganda's hospitality sector, managing hotels and building experience across different establishments. Like many in the industry, she nurtured a long-held ambition to start something of her own. But the cost of building a new facility kept that dream at bay.

Then came the Covid-19 pandemic. "I was here, alone, in this big house," she recalls. "I realised it was being wasted."

At the time, the house had six bedrooms, more than enough for a family, but far too much for one person living through lockdown. As uncertainty gripped the hospitality sector, Waibi began to rethink her approach. Instead of

constructing from scratch, she looked inward literally.

"I decided I did not need to construct a new facility because of the costs involved," she says. "So I turned my own residential home into a bed and breakfast."

It was a decision rooted as much in practicality as it was in instinct. Drawing on her years of experience, she set about converting the six rooms to meet hotel standards, comfortable beds, clean finishes, functional bathrooms while retaining the warmth and informality of a home. In August 2022, she opened her doors.

Designing for stillness

What distinguishes her place is not just its origin story, but its deliberate departure from conventional hospitality design. In a sector increasingly defined by amenities, swimming pools, bars, conference facilities, Waibi has taken a different path.

Her space is built around stillness. The pergola at the entrance doubles as a communal area where guests can sit, read, eat, or simply watch the day unfold. Inside, the dining and living areas are open and accessible, encouraging interaction without imposing it. There are no rigid separations between "guest" and "host" spaces, only a gentle blending of the two.

Outside, the garden does more than decorate, it feeds and engages. Guests are free to pick fruit when it is in season, adding a tactile, sensory dimension to their stay. The greenery also serves a subtler purpose, it slows people down.

"People come from busy places," Waibi

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Lessons.

"Some people make bookings when they arrive, they do not like something as basic as bathroom design can become a mix of friction, property of squat toilets reflecting its original residential structure, subsequent modification. Some guests have had to cancel because of those references. I have had to explain advanced management." Leah Harriet Waibi, Hotelier.