

SHOWCASE

A HOUSE NAMED VELD HUIS

For Raymond Smith and Lien Botha, their house in the Overstrand town of Betty's Bay is their sanctuary

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS Lien Botha



This multifunctional living space leads to an outside entertainment area. A combination of varying wall and floor treatments and ceiling types creates differentiation.



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The installation of rainwater-harvesting tanks to fill the toilet cisterns and top up the lap pool has led to the saving of a full month's consumption of municipal water per year. The two cast-aluminium riempie chairs formed the focus of one of Raymond's art installations, *Armchair Traveller*, in 2005.

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We fell in love with Betty's Bay twice. The first time was in 2003, when we bought a plot and Raymond designed a house reminiscent of a farmhouse by the sea. The initial idea was to negotiate work and play between Cape Town and Betty's Bay, but we never reckoned with the way in which this place would settle under our skins.

In time, and with Raymond having evolved his architectural philosophy towards design within the broader built environment context, we bought a second piece of land, this time exchanging sea views for a green belt. The building foundation was laid during the winter of 2015. I was the neurotic partner of a man well seasoned in the trials and tribulations of the design and construction process. Raymond kept the boat afloat, and before Christmas of that year we were able to welcome back creatures who'd found shelter in our previous garden.

Raymond believes a successful building should embody a sense of its purpose, place and tectonics. In this instance, the design drivers were as follows: low maintenance, grid-supported self-reliance in terms of water and energy, wheelchair-friendly, security-wise and within our budget.

The house has a quiet, unpretentious aesthetic; it is reminiscent of *veldhuise*, worker cottages that used to be a feature on the edge of South African towns. Built in the form of two barns, it is anchored on a soil-raft foundation level with the fynbos and parallel to a stream that forms

a boundary with Brodie Link Nature Reserve, integrating the structure with the landscape.

The exterior walls have four types of finishes: splatter-dash concrete, Zinalume roof cladding, pine shiplap cladding and red brick. Inside, the clay-brick walls are variously sealed, bagged, painted and washed. The floors are cement concrete and treated South African pine.

Light filters through the house like patterns in a kaleidoscope. Our furniture is eclectic – some items we bought, some we swapped and others we inherited. We have a soft spot for odd chairs, like a jacaranda riempie chair carved by an ancestor who was a prisoner of war on the island of St Helena.

The garden is indigenous and water-wise, with species such as agapanthus, aloes and proteas ensuring seasonal food for the birds. The blossoming of the *keurbome* in the four corners of the garden is heralded by bumblebees and sunbirds. On the east side we have established two greenhouses and in the process discovered that carrots and strawberries thrive in the nutrient-poor, acidic sand.

On a Saturday afternoon, two years since we moved into Veldhuis, as I'm writing this and Raymond is deciphering hieroglyphs in preparation for a conference in Egypt, I look up from the computer screen and see the sandstone cliff face of Voorberg, part of the Kogelberg range. A slight north-westerly wind, our winter wind, is moving through the leaves of a water-berry tree. Birds have already carried the deep-purple fruit to their nests.

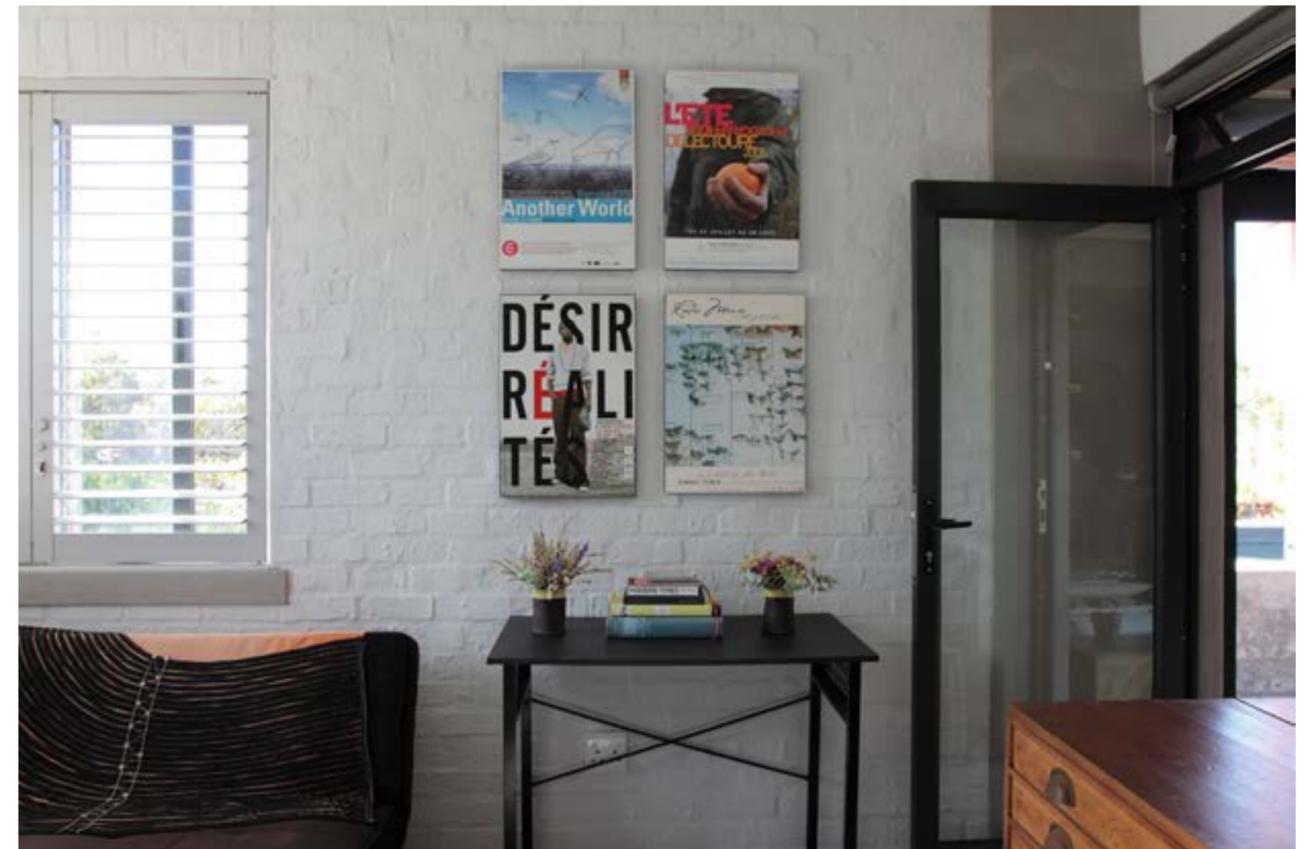


THIS PAGE Interspersed with images from Lien's portfolio are works by artists such as Cornelia Stoop, Cobus van Bosch, Barbara Wildenboer, Bonolo Kavula, Karlien de Villiers, Vulindlela Nyoni, Liza Grobler, Mandla Vanyaza, Juria le Roux, Brahm van Zyl and Luan Nel.

OPPOSITE The built form of the house, with reference to the cranked roof ridge line, was inspired by the topography of Klein-Hangklip mountain, being the field view on the north-west axis.



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Lien Botha, homeowner

ABOVE In her book *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf wrote, “Women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics.” **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** A quirky Noria Mabasa sculpture amid succulents in the garden. | A view of Kogelberg from a living area. | Veldkos in the fynbos. | Good indoor-outdoor connectivity was one of the central design parameters.

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