

CALM BALANCE

A guest cottage at Babylonstoren in the Cape Winelands is as private and self-contained as a small house

Text Hilary Prendini Toffoli Styling Sven Alberding Photographs Russell Smith

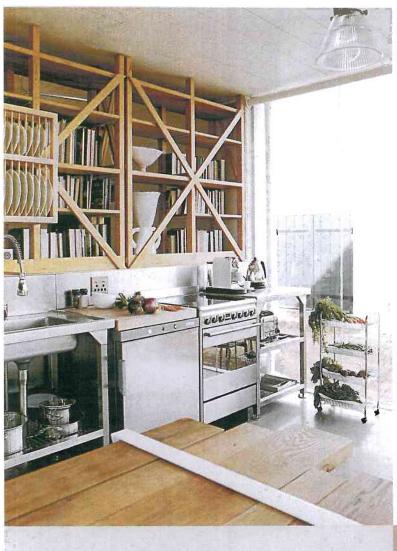
WHO KAREN ROOS AND KOOS BEKKER WHERE CAPE WINELANDS SIZE 110M²

hough Karen Roos and her media magnate husband Koos Bekker only acquired the Cape winelands estate of Babylonstoren three years ago, the 12 guest cottages they've just built there, working with architect Johan Malherbe, have inherited the history of the farm, the ambience of the pre-existing world. Yet each cottage feels modern and luxurious.

From the front you would say this particular cottage was a traditional Cape Dutch creation. Wooden shutters, small-paned windows, corrugated iron roof. Building guidelines for heritage sites are strict in these parts and this one dates back to 1692. At the back, however, a perfectly proportioned glass box looks onto what is surely one of the most beautiful gardens in Africa, created by French architect and landscaper Patrice Taravella, who has his own remarkable gardens in the heart of France. The rest of the interior is equally contemporary and minimalist, the design of this small space (110m²) so profoundly satisfying that a sense of wellbeing instantly prevails. It's all about quality and style and knowing how to work within a scaled-down situation.

Karen is a style legend, having worked in the realms of fashion and decor in the magazine industry for years before Babylonstoren effectively took over her life. What she's done here is to streamline the decor to enhance the dimensions, using creams, whites and quiet stone shades that don't hijack the sense of spaciousness. Thanks to the high attic-type ceiling – white tongue-and-groove, with skylights and the sloping flanks of a Flemish structure – the living room feels generous and roomy. Unhampered by clutter, floors, from an old factory, are amber-coloured Oregon planks as wide as Groot Constantia's. Wall decorations consist of a few choice old European botanical prints.





In the bedroom the white-painted four-poster bed echoes the rest of the space-efficient decor, as does the old oak cupboard that's now all white. The bathroom has been effectively doubled in size by a wall of mirror on which Karen has put a metal overlay in a conservatory design that creates an antique effect. 'Bathrooms got bigger when interior designers started giving them attention,' she says. 'I love a huge bathroom. They call me the bathroom queen.'

But it's the wraparound floor-to-ceiling glass enclosing the kitchen and dining area that is the special feature. On a level lower than the living area, separated by see-through bookshelves filled with Koos's wide-ranging selection, this section is all pale wood, brushed metal and imported designer appliances that are compact and economical with space.

The glass walls amplify the space. Better still, they let in the marvellous garden that's only metres away – eight acres of formally laid-out fruit and vegetables dotted with 48 giant pyramid-shaped pergolas like ancient temples covered with roses. 'The place just evolved after we made the gardens,' says Karen. 'We thought if people came to see the gardens they might want to stay, so we should have some guest cottages. And if there were guest cottages we would need a restaurant. And then perhaps a spa.'

She's since created a solar-heated spa around an old farm dam that has a wooden deck nestled in tall bamboo, and a restaurant (see page 90) in what was once a cow shed that's as elegant and simple as the guest cottages. You'd never want to leave. \Box

Babylonstoren, babylonstoren.com





THIS PAGE, TOP The designer kitchen in the cottage is all pale wood and brushed metal. The vegetable trolley is from Mr Price Home (mrpricehome.co.za). The stainless-steel units were custom-made by Vinco Steel (021-868-1271). BOTTOM A baobab hat stand by Xavier Lust for MDF Italia from Limeline (limeline.co.za) shares space with a retro server from Lim (lim.co.za). OPPOSITE Bookshelves separate the living area from the kitchen and dining space below. The trophy wases are by Louise Gelderblom (082-658-3568), and the jute matting is from Gonsenhausers (tinerugs.co.za).





