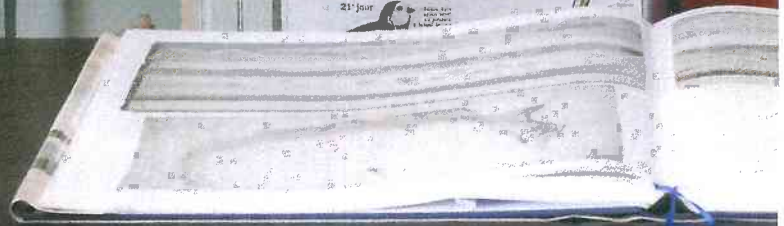
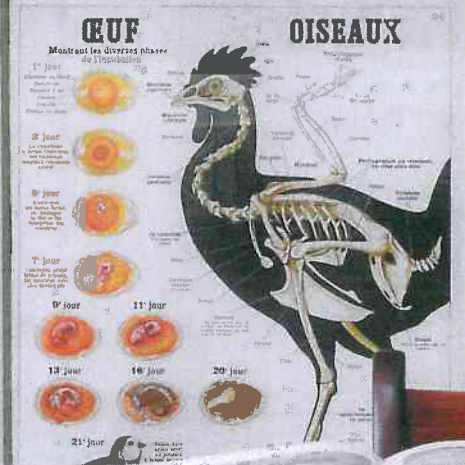
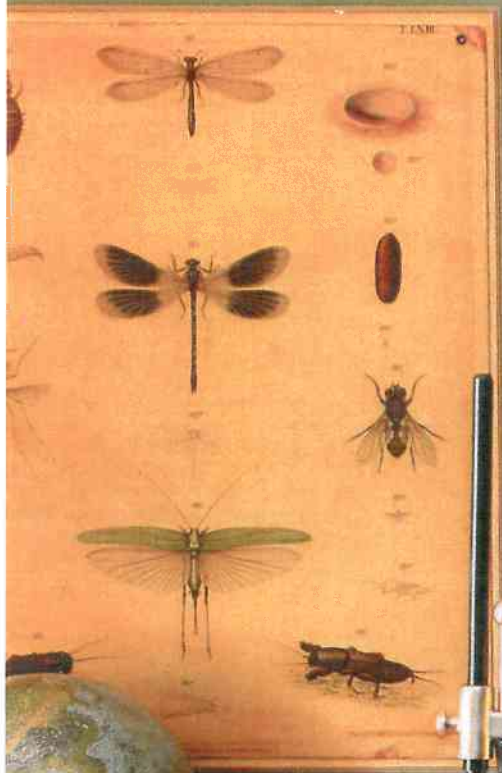


NATURAL WONDER

When Karen Roos opened Babylonstoren farm hotel late last year, she kept one room – the guest library – under wraps. In a DECO exclusive, she reveals it to us and talks about her approach to design



Karen spotted these embroidered animal trophies by Frédérique Morrel at the Milan Furniture Fair. The antique bear umbrella stand, which Karen painted gold, was picked up years ago in a second-hand shop





A large glass display cabinet from Onsite Gallery filled with natural objects sets a tone of old-world study. 'Lab' lights by Anatomy Design sit on a 'Van die Stel' table by Gregor Jenkin. The 'Diva Ostrich' console table is by French design company Ibride



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The library includes old-style board games such as this chess set; the mahogany 'Hawker' bench is from Tonic Design. Karen bought the botanical prints from vendors on the banks of the Seine in Paris; an Art Deco mirror in one of the bathrooms; 'The house is very old so we had to put in modern bathrooms, but we tried to mix in some old touches – such as this antique pharmaceutical cabinet,' she says
 OPPOSITE In the bathrom zone of the main bedroom, a sponge tray, originally a standing ashtray inherited from Karen's grandmother, sits below a painting by Andrew Putter



DECOSTYER STEAL





FROM LEFT A bedside table from Magis resembles a bird's legs. 'I tried to make the bedrooms a little playful because Cape Dutch houses can be very serious,' explains Karen; a tiny 18th-century oil painting bought at Quagga Rare Books & Art in Kalk Bay hangs above a bed. 'Playing with scale gives the oversized bedrooms drama'

IF CHARLES DARWIN LIVED IN THE 21ST CENTURY, HE'D probably have his nose buried in a book in the library at Babylonstoren, the 200-hectare farm hotel in the Simonsberg mountains owned by former DECO editor Karen Roos. 'The Green Room', as Karen calls it, was a disused outbuilding 'with no windows and little to commend it', so she decided to turn it into a reception room with a difference – a library filled with carefully chosen books and cabinets of natural curiosities. Old and new come together in an immaculate orchestration both here and in the three en-suite guest rooms in the *plaas opstal* (farmhouse), which dates back to 1777.

What makes the Green Room different to the rest of the farmhouse? The house is all about the views of the garden and the mountains and beautiful old trees. But in this windowless room, the view is turned inwards. We want this to be a place where guests can read and relax. There are books about gardening, nature and travel, old-fashioned board games and lots of antique botanical and scientific prints.

What inspired you to create this space? Period movies such as *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*), *Gosford Park* and *Atonement*. And old-fashioned men's clubs. But I like playing with making things fresh and young, mixing in modern design that is functional.

The overall feel of the room is quite layered. How did you begin? We started with the scaffolding props and then tried to layer it in a playful way. Things shouldn't look too styled – I prefer a certain nonchalance. It must be easy on the eye without being boring. At the same time, I do like a bit of drama or at least strong masculine things that force you to take notice of them. For the walls, we chose this green (Dulux 50GY 45/155) because I've lived with it in a library setting before and it makes me happy. The cabinet is in a custom-mixed shade.

How did the farm surroundings influence your approach in the rest of the house? Harmony and balance is crucial to me, especially on this farm. The guest rooms are more subdued than I would normally like because the focus is on the beauty outside.

Are there certain styles or looks that you are drawn to? I love composing using different things. I love the idea of my grandmother's house back in the days when things were chosen not for their style but for their functionality. Every piece was essential. I'm also drawn to Italian design and the stripped-down Scandinavian aesthetic. These are my building blocks. ■

Visit www.babylonstoren.com.

For Karen's Little Black Book, turn to page 101