



# 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** 110M<sup>2</sup>




Though 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 (110m<sup>2</sup>) 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. Unhindered 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. ▷





SMALL SPACE #3

Glass encloses the kitchen and dining area of this guest cottage in the Cape winelands estate of Babylonstoren, letting in a view of the beautiful garden. **OPPOSITE; TOP** The white-painted antique cabinet on wheels is from Artefact (021-447-0583); **BOTTOM** A New York chair from Weylandts ([weylandts.co.za](http://weylandts.co.za)) perches in the living room, from where it's a step down to the kitchen level.





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. □

**Babylonstoren, [babylonstoren.com](http://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](http://mrpricehome.co.za)). The stainless-steel units were custom-made by Vinco Steel (021-868-1271). **BOTTOM** A baobab har stand by Xavier Lust for MDF Italia from Limeline ([limeline.co.za](http://limeline.co.za)) shares space with a retro server from Lim ([lim.co.za](http://lim.co.za)). **OPPOSITE** Bookshelves separate the living area from the kitchen and dining space below. The trophy vases are by Louise Gelderblom (082-658-3568), and the jute matting is from Gonsenhausers ([finerugs.co.za](http://finerugs.co.za)).



SMALL SPACE #3



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## Q&A WITH KAREN ROOS

**How did you imagine this small space would work as a guesthouse spot?** Our idea was to bring the gardens into the house so you would be seduced by what's out there, which is why we surrounded the kitchen with floating glass. You can walk straight out and pick your own fruit or vegetables and prepare them in the kitchen as if you were at home. **What was the guiding principle?** Nothing should take away from the beauty of the setting. Everything should be calm and in balance. **And the decor?** It's a mix of old and modern. I always go for good design, because it never dates. That's how I've done my own home – every item chosen for quality, comfort and beauty. There's too much clutter in life. Although decor must be calm it mustn't be timid, not 'ekskuus dat ek lewe' (forgive me for living). Individual pieces must be strong yet must be able to connect. That's where shape helps, and quality. **What role does this garden play in the scheme of things?** I wanted people who come here to be able to find that special mind space where you just sit and re-engage with nature, and I've noticed we're getting the sort of guests who seem to understand what we're trying to do.





### SMALL SPACE #3

**THIS PAGE** The Ibiza king-size four-poster bed is from Weylandts; the bedspread is from Mr Price Home; the Archimoon Soft Task lamps attached to the bedside tables are by Philippe Starck for Flos, available at Lights by Linca (021-511-6116). The jute matting is from Coirtex (coirtex.co.za). **OPPOSITE, TOP** The metal overlay on the mirror adds to the Victorian feel of the bathroom. The tray table is from Dokter and Misses® (dokterandmisses.com). **BOTTOM** The bath with ball-and-claw feet is from Victorian Bathrooms (victorianbathrooms.co.za).

