

A lush garden with a pond, tall trees, and two dogs. The scene is a dense, green landscape. In the foreground, a calm pond reflects the surrounding greenery. Two grey, shaggy dogs are on the grassy bank of the pond. The middle ground is filled with various plants, including ferns and flowering shrubs. The background is dominated by tall, slender trees with dense foliage. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

IN PERFECT harmony

Architect Marcus Smit's garden has been specially designed to blend seamlessly with its surroundings.

By Marié Esterhuysen • Photographs Greg Cox/bureaux.co.za



Who lives here?

Marcus Smit, his dad Ben,
two Schnauzers, Luka
and Flicka, and greyhound Kiku

WHERE Grabouw

SIZE 5 000m²



[ON GOLDEN POND]

The garden is mostly flat, except for the slightly higher area by the pond. The table and chairs nestled among the shrubs offer a beautiful view over the water towards the house. The edge of the pond is planted up with red-hot pokers (*Kniphofia*) in the foreground and bloodroot (*Wachendorfia thyrsiflora*) and river pumpkin (*Gunnera perpensa*) in the background – these provide a wonderful display in large groups.

The pond was built in a spot where Marcus discovered a huge hole after he'd bought the property. The pond is topped up with water from a borehole, plus grey water and rainwater collected in tanks from the 400m² roof.

"Grabouw's summers are relatively short and the climate is cool, so there's little evaporation from the pond," says Marcus. "We also use its water for irrigation; the borehole is only used if the weather is very dry. But the good thing about an indigenous garden is that it needs little water. There are only a few plants – like some of the plectranthus – which are quite thirsty."

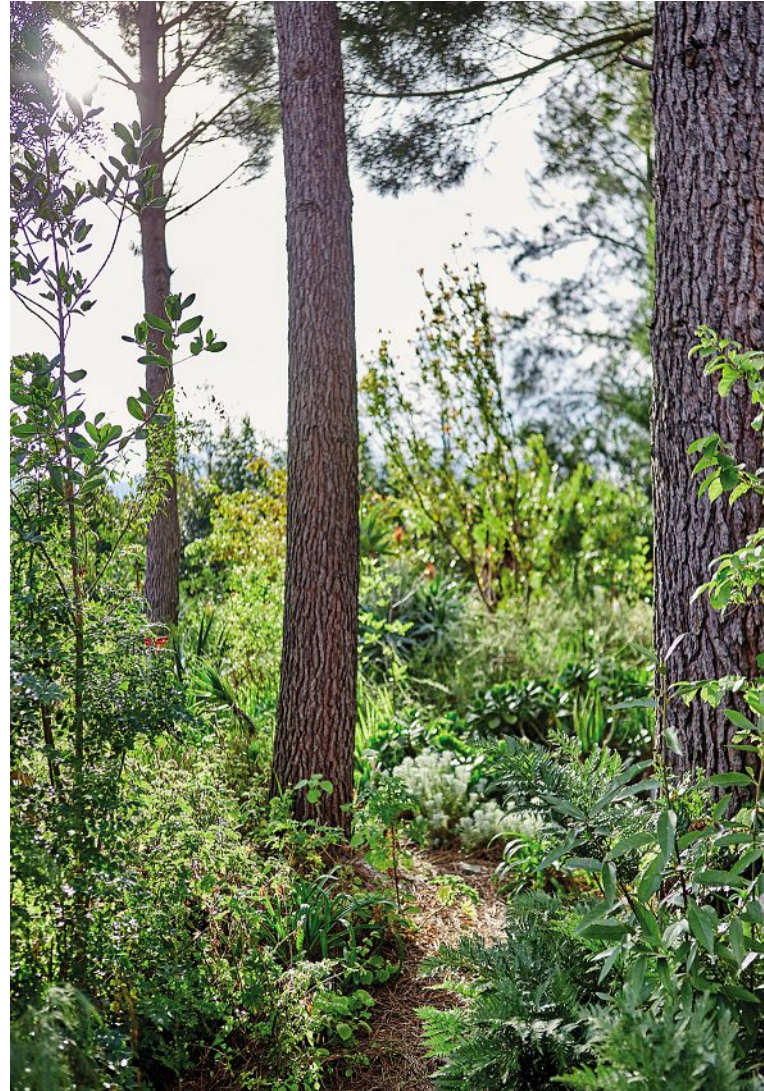
Marcus Smit has given the plants in his Grabouw garden carte blanche to grow as wild as possible. And, he says, the further they are from the house, the wilder they grow!

"I bought this property in 2005 and started the garden in front of the house a year before the house was even built," he says. "This was only possible because the house is right at the back of the property so the construction work didn't affect the development of the garden."

Landscape architect Albert Venter designed the garden and also took care of its layout and the planting. The property was initially overgrown with pine and wattle but all the wattles were removed along with about half of the pine trees. The pine trees that remained provide welcome shade, while those on the street side give shelter from the westerly sun. They also ensure a measure of privacy.

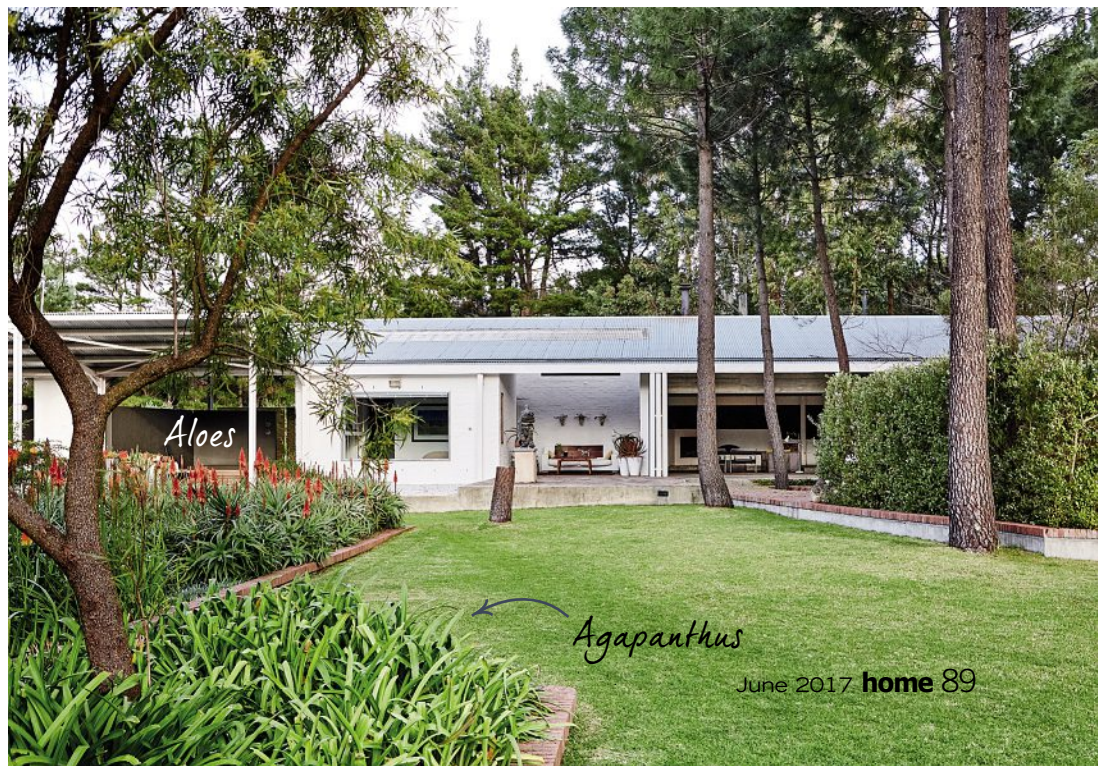
Together with a large bluegum and some fynbos shrubs, these were the only plants retained from the original vegetation – the rest of the garden was then planted to be in harmony with the future house. The plants, especially the endemic ones which thrive in the sandy soil, self-seed and are left to their own devices. This gives the garden a natural look and creates an informal, unspoilt feel.

"Because the garden is so wild, it requires little maintenance," says Marcus. "The scale of the garden makes this 'untidiness' seem natural. It's not a highly-manicured garden; if it becomes too overgrown, we lift the excess self-sown plants and give them away. We also do a bit of pruning from time to time. The sandy soil does need plenty of compost, so we replenish it constantly. On the other hand, some of the plants, such as the proteas and other fynbos, prefer poor sandy soil so we leave it just as it is around these plants. Pine needles serve as a natural mulch and also provide a good surface underfoot." >>



Informal pathways wind between the pine trees and natural vegetation; these paths change their shape as new plants come up. Marcus prefers the garden further away from the house to look as natural as possible.

A piece of lawn in the centre of the garden leads up to the living room and covered stoep. The rest of the garden evolved around this central lawn. Large clusters of aloes and agapanthus add structure to the garden. Marcus says mass plantings are essential to balance the informal and natural areas that constitute the major part of the garden. They also serve as an architectural link between the house and the garden.




Marcus and his two Schnauzers, Luka and Flicka, relax on the furnished stoep leading out to the garden. Dune aloes (*Aloe thraskii*) and *Aloe lutescens* (on the right) are used as accent plants in pots. "Slate floors – both indoors and outdoors – are so practical because they're easy to clean and are not slippery when wet. I really love the look," says Marcus.



The secluded garden *isn't visible from the neighbouring property*, ensuring that the house has all the privacy we need. — Marcus

The living room and kitchen flow out onto a large stoep where a cosy dining area is shaded by towering trees. A ticky creeper (*Ficus pumila*) softens the low walls and sides of the concrete bench. >>





Marcus says he's always on the lookout for succulents to adorn various outdoor nooks because of their exceptional aesthetic simplicity. "I'm not a succulent expert but I can't resist these plants! I'm always discovering varieties I've never seen before and I instantly add them to my collection." In this section of the garden, a variety of plants in terracotta pots have been placed on a bed of gravel where they can also be seen from the house – a bit of landscape art that serves as an eye-catching focal point.

If space allows, *try to design your garden so that it forms a cohesive whole with your house.* – Marcus

The lacy foliage of silver sericea (*Ursinia sericea*) adds interest to the garden – it also bears pretty yellow blooms from September to February.



Marcus's garden is an integral part of the house. The front stoep looks out over the pond and the natural garden among the pine trees.



Two walls screen off the driveway at the back of the house, guiding visitors up the pathway through a shady part of the front garden towards the front door. Marcus – with the help of his dad and a few friends – created the inlaid mosaic tiles on the path.

It's wonderful sitting somewhere in the garden with a glass of good Elgin wine. And, of course, playing with the dogs and swimming in the pond in summer! – Marcus

Marcus's favourites

- **White stinkwood** (*Celtis africana*) I have wonderful memories of this beautiful tree from my childhood. I love its attractive bark, bright foliage and the fact that it's deciduous so it changes with the seasons. In summer it provides shade, in winter the sun filters through the bare branches and in autumn its foliage turns the most gorgeous yellow.
- **Aloes** After many years spent travelling our country's dirt roads, I have discovered so many varieties of this plant. Aloes require little maintenance and are so striking. While not all of them do well in the cold and wet Grabouw winters, the krantz aloe (*Aloe arborescens*) thrives here. When it is planted in large groups or as a hedge, as often seen on old farms, it looks most impressive during its winter flowering season.
- **Plectranthus** These low-maintenance plants are great for shady spots in the garden and they bloom spectacularly! My interest in them was sparked when I chanced upon Ernst van Jaarsveld's book *The Southern African Plectranthus*. 🏠

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This stone statue on the front stoep, entitled "Sitting and Standing", is by Angus Taylor.