

Sunday Times

home

OUR FEATURED HOME IS IN THE MODERNIST STYLE AND INSPIRED BY LE CORBUSIER



Linear
LIFE

INSIDE OUT

Nestled in a forest-like landscape in the small village of Grabouw, this architect's home has a seamless flow between interior and exterior

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1 The Woodsworth crockery collection creates a focal point in the kitchen. Marcus Smit designed the dining table with an African mahogany top as a centrepiece to match the steel structure of the house. The pendants are 1970s track lights salvaged from a renovation project 2 In winter, the built-in bench in front of the fireplace is where you will find Smit and his dogs 3 The white leather sofa on the verandah is Smit's favourite spot for Sunday afternoons. The three ceramic cow heads were made by a friend, the late ceramicist Nicolene Swanepoel

MY house is like a train station; people are forever popping in and out," says architect Marcus Smit. However, when the white steel structure started taking shape in the small Overberg village of Grabouw, an hour's drive from Cape Town, many residents were appalled at the modern industrial building in their neighbourhood.

"Most houses here are typical country homes — sometimes a barn style or thatched, and often timber," says Smit. "However, over the past decade, people got to know the house and accept it. Today it is almost completely sheltered by the garden and hardly visible from the street."

Smit designed his 225m² Modernist home as a pavilion that is set back on the 0,5ha (5 000m²) site, where the narrow 50m-long structure forms a backdrop to the garden, especially when viewed across the reflection pond — or "the dogs' swimming pool," as Smit refers to it. He shares his home with two Schnauzers, Luka and Flicka, and Kiku, a Greyhound cross. His father, Ben, has his own studio space with a separate entrance.

Apart from the generous size of the site — "great for gardening and peace" — and the quiet neighbourhood, it was the forest-like setting and its vast number of tall trees that sealed the deal. "It's so quiet here; if I had to complain about noise it would have to be about the frogs' nocturnal croaking," says Smit.

"When I bought the site, there were mainly alien species such as pine and bluegum trees growing here. I managed to keep most of them during construction, but also planted a variety of indigenous species.

"I love the fact that my garden is wild and indigenous rather than manicured. It is home to chameleons, insects, birds, frogs, bats, even the odd harmless snake. It self-sows. I stopped planting long ago. Now, I just pull out plants and give them to friends."

The natural landscape softens the rigid graphic lines of the steel structure, which is punctuated by tactile building materials such as concrete, bagged brickwork and corrugated



4 The reflection pond is a Modernist feature, and attracts birds, insects and frogs. "There was a hole right here on the site," says Smit. "Its setting in the garden turned out to be very special, as the garden developed around the pond"

iron. "I'm an avid Le Corbusier disciple and, if I could have afforded it, all the wet work would have been off-shutter concrete à la Corb..."

As an architect trained in Modernist design, Smit is partial to furniture from the Bauhaus era and an uncluttered, functional interior. "With so many built-in units in the house, I needed only a few pieces of freestanding furniture, and all of them are used. I can't choose a favourite piece, but I do find the Wassily chairs very comfortable, and I love the combination of simple pine chairs with the steel-framed dining table in the kitchen."

The slasto flooring is a childhood reference. "I grew up in a house with black slasto floors. It's a warm, earthy extension of the garden into the house, and the brown hues show less dust and dirt when the dogs come running in straight from the pond, covered in mud."

Colour is limited to olive-green accent walls and Smit's art and ceramics collection. "My love of ceramics and African art comes from my mother, who was a potter. My siblings and I practically grew up in her studio and were creative with clay from early childhood."

The open-plan interior layout suits Smit's sociable lifestyle. In summer, the house lends itself to al fresco entertaining. The entire living area opens up onto the outdoor entertainment area, with a bar counter along the kitchen window, a 10-seater table and a built-in braai.

There are three guest bedrooms — two on the mezzanine levels on either side of the living areas, and another on the ground level behind the kitchen. "The house can sleep 10 people, so I always have space for friends who want to get out of the city. That said, it's great to be alone here, and that's when I enjoy my other hobbies — painting, reading and gardening."

So what was it like to have himself as the client? "I was impossible! I had far too many ideas. I took too long with my design and, of course, I blew the budget. If I could rebuild the house now, it would be even more graphic and sleek. The older I get, the more I aspire to simplicity and a reduction of the design. But realistically, from a planning point of view, the house is perfect for me."



5 The stark lines of the steel structure are softened by the forest-like setting and the slasto flooring that continues from the outdoor entertainment areas into the interior. The house is north-facing, ideal for the southern hemisphere. In winter, the interior is flooded with sunlight. In summer, the roof overhangs keep the sun out 6 The lounge houses Smit's collection of ceramics and traditional Zulu and Venda pots. The TV is cleverly concealed by a black background in the shelf unit. A steel staircase leads to the mezzanine level with a home office and a guest room 7 In the guest bedroom on the mezzanine level, the window follows the slope of the roof 8 A sunken floor defines the lounge, which is open-plan to the kitchen





9 The guest bathroom, also along the spine wall, is adorned with African masks
10 The exposed concrete box above the built-in bed in the guest bedroom is both a structural and a design element. 'I love the tactile texture of rough off-shutter concrete as used by Le Corbusier,' says Smit. A Le Corbusier camp chair serves as a night stand. A painting by Tania Poole and a throw from Weylandts provide a pop of colour

