

RENEW & REDO

FOUR-PAGE
GUIDE TO
SPEEDY STYLISH
MAKEOVERS

RAY OF LIGHT

An ageing Somerset West home was given a new lease on life by its cool and calm-loving owners, a couple adept at renovating homes

WHEN PROFESSIONAL home renovators and owners of Home Concept, Evi Elsner and her husband Jochem, set foot inside a double storey on the outskirts of Somerset West, they knew it could be home. The stand had endless views, and they liked the area 'full of families and young people'. Well versed in the business of turning over dated spaces into sublime classic contemporary ones, the couple has a lot of imagination; 'We see the potential in ugly old houses,' they confess.

But the house – consisting of a built basement and garage and single-level living area in wood – was in a muddle and felt forlorn. Building alterations had been halted midway. Damp permeated floors and walls. Thankfully the pair relishes animated renovation discussions over dinner. They wanted a house that wouldn't overwhelm them, but that could also accommodate visiting family without leaving anybody feeling cramped or confined (now, the basement level is devoted to guests). Open-plan, they agreed, was the only way forward. 'The house is nothing like it was before,' says Evi. 'It's higher, wider, bigger, lighter and brighter.'



THE LIVING ROOM

They decided to move in a modern architectural trajectory. A living room that once had pitiful pieces and zero flow was opened up to the views of Helderberg and False Bay. The staircase, dominating the centre of the room, was moved to the side, and wall and ceiling heights were raised. The floor area was enlarged by removing bedrooms that jutted out, and a pitched roof was installed, flooding the upper level with light. But a focal point was missing, so Elvi designed a scaffold-plank-framed window box to offset the landscape: 'We always try to use windows and openings as pictures,' says Elvi, whose hand-made lamps and wide-profile floorboards give a beach-house feel, kept in check by a steel-rimmed coffee table and tableware in mirror and glass. ▶



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THE DINING ROOM

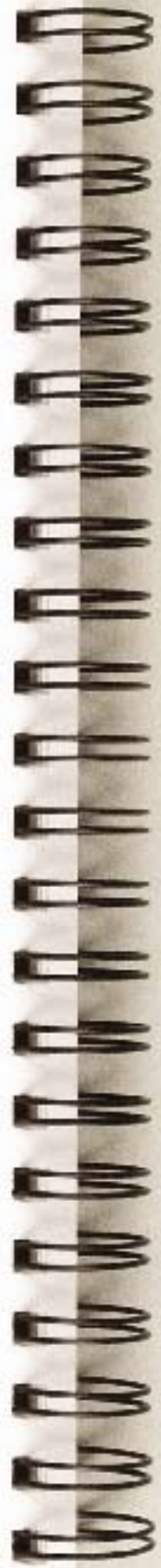
The former space felt impermanent, and lacked an anchor. Here too, the low ceiling - which stood just centimeters from the top of a doorway - evoked claustrophobia. For a couple that entertain over fish braais, fresh salads and local wines, a sense of flow between kitchen, dining and living rooms was key. They extended the dining area out to the side of the house, gaining space and an elegant entrance hall in the process.

A customised light fitting made from an antique fish trap picked up in Hout Bay now dominates the room. 'We see light fittings as works of art,' explains Elvi. 'This was the only way we could cast adequate light over such a long table!'

Stackable folding doors off the dining room and lounge allow for protection from the elements, allowing views to be savoured from inside on windy days.



A customised light fitting made from an antique fish trap picked up in Hout Bay dominates the dining room



fireplace solutions

PROBLEM: Elvi wanted a large modern fireplace.

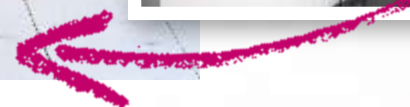
ANSWER: Her husband together with expert craftsmen and a structural engineer, thus constructed, from her design, a straight-lined cast-concrete fireplace to lend a distinct contemporary edge and sublime warmth in winter. 'Because our upper level is a wooden structure, the fireplace could not be anchored to the walls,' Elvi explains. The idea was for the free-floating cantilevered piece to be visible from all sides of the open-plan zone.



THE KITCHEN

The kitchen was one of the only rooms that retained its original floor surface area. An imposing bank of floor-to-ceiling cupboards that separated kitchen and dining room was quickly relegated to the scrap heap. Plumbing and electrics were completely redone, and stock-standard melamine cupboards, most of them rotten, were ripped out, as were uneven floors. 'We needed a lot of sand to get the floors level,' remembers Elvi. The cool smooth cast-concrete effect established by the fireplace is mirrored in the minimalist-style kitchen counters, done by Stucco Italiano, and the choice of appliances in matte stainless-steel finish. 'We work from home, entertain a lot, and enjoy lounging around and unwinding,' explains Elvi. 'All these things influenced our ultimate concept.'

She was adamant colour had no space in her scheme. 'Life is hectic and busy, we want to come home and be calm.' ▶





THE BEDROOM

In a feat of engineering, and with the help of a sub-contractor specialising in wooden structures, the light-filled and airy mezzanine bedroom is a new addition. The windows behind the bed guarantee ventilation on hot summer nights, and a skylight enables star-gazing and soft illumination. Although the space is light and airy, with walls painted a warm grey and old handmade fabrics and textured linens, sleeping here is just 'like sleeping in a luxury tent'. On the split-level, a slipcovered sofa offers an alternative space for lazing. 'We love our house, it's so easy, and perfect for us. Although, knowing us, we'll probably swap it for something new,' they laugh. 'We get so attached to a build.'

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THE BATHROOM

In an unusual floor plan, the bathroom is situated just downstairs from the couple's main bedroom. Mindful of their water usage, they did away with a bath to make way for an expansive shower. 'In designing and insulating our house and reusing materials, and in all of the paints and wood treatments we chose, we've tried to be as green as possible,' says Elvi. Conscious of accumulating clutter, they designed a sleek floating vanity without shelves, using woven baskets to stow towels and toiletries.



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