

CONDÉ NAST

House & Garden

SOUTH AFRICA

OCTOBER 2010 R37,95 (incl. VAT)
OTHER COUNTRIES R51,20

EXCLUSIVE
INTERIORS
UPDATED
CAPE DUTCH
PROVENCE MOD
SMART MARINE

new thinking

BRIGHT IDEAS

PINK MAKES AN IMPACT | STYLE UP YOUR BEDROOM

Gardens

- ALL-TIME FAVOURITE ROSES
- PLANTING INSPIRATION

RENEW & REDO

CONVERTING TO OPEN-PLAN



9 771028 989004

Point of View

OCTOBER



Homes that pay homage to their heritage and surroundings inspire us this month, whether it be a twist on tradition or the framing of a beautiful view.

P68 Dutch Master Karen Roos's triumphant restoration of a historical Cape home is both sensitive and authentically her. **P76 Labour of Love** A designer's lifelong ambition takes shape in a classic Regency home. **P82 Classical Cool** This progressive take on Provençal design sees a designer couple inject tradition with fun.

P88 Nautical but Nice A glamorous take on coastal cool where clichés are out of the question and the blues have an edge.





dutch master

TIME SPENT IN THE NETHERLANDS GAVE KAREN ROOS A TASTE FOR AUSTERE INTERIORS AND AN ICONOCLAST'S EYE, WHICH SHE USED TO RESTORE THE 18TH-CENTURY CAPE DUTCH FARMHOUSE ON BABYLONSTOREN IN THE FRANSCHHOEK WINELANDS

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS TIM BEDDOW



LEFT The *gaandery*, or meeting room, is in the crossbar of the H-plan building and has been given a contemporary twist with Italian sofas **ABOVE** The mid-point gable of one of the two long buildings that flank the entranceway driveway

Some years ago Karen Roos was studying art while living in the Netherlands with her husband and young children. At a tutorial one day, her teacher said: 'You're an anarchist, yet you want to create calm in your life.' It's certainly a perceptive comment, for Karen's unruffled demeanour belies a revolutionary outlook when it comes to interiors. This process revolves around, she says, 'raising awareness of things while creating a bit of drama'.

Integral to her philosophy is respect for the inherent quirks of the building's architecture. Just as she did at her home, Waterhof, in Cape Town years ago, Karen created ▶





LEFT The boules court and vegetable garden, with views of Simonsberg Mountain beyond **RIGHT** The spare bedroom is testament both to the owner's ability to let the structure of the house speak for itself and her love of modern bold pieces. The pendant light is by Willowcamp



ABOVE Karen Roos has departed from tradition by turning what is usually the dining room in these Cape Dutch houses into a library and office **OPPOSITE PAGE** The grandfather clock is one of a few objects that came with the house

a slice of pared-down elegance at Babylonstoren. But this time with a contemporary twist.

Karen grew up in the former Western Transvaal (now North West) in a small town set among maize farms in a flat landscape. 'Life was a little Victorian,' she recalls, 'poring over London magazines, my sister and I were hard-core fashionistas. Twiggy was the rage, so we stitched up clothes ourselves.' She remembers her grandparents' home which, though simple, had a certain elegance in the celebration of the strictly functional. Life here developed her imagination and gave her the confidence to follow her own mind.



Later Karen weaved her way through the worlds of journalism and book publishing. A two-year stint as a fashion stylist at *Glamour* in New York showed her a city with a 'stripped-down aesthetic'. On her return to South Africa, she was appointed fashion editor of *Cosmopolitan* and launched the magazine *Red*. Publishing interiors and style books followed. The only time she's not been immersed in magazines was while raising children in the Netherlands, where her husband ran a business. They lived in a house on the river Amstel, behind a proper dyke, with an interior of typically Dutch austerity. It was the beautiful northern light that streamed in through the house's tall windows that inspired Karen to go to art school.

That era ended when the couple returned to Cape Town and bought the old market garden Waterhof 10 years ago. This experience honed Karen's interior style for Cape Dutch surroundings. But some years later a chance diversion led to the purchase of a farm in the Drakenstein Valley.

The estate, now on the R45 between Franschhoek and Paarl, was originally set out by governor Simon van der Stel in 1690. Rough pioneer buildings of stone went up first. These were superseded in the 18th century by the present H-plan farmhouse. One benefit of this shape is that it allows sunlight into every room from multiple angles. As in Cape Dutch ▶



ABOVE In the main bathroom, 1940s mirrors from Argentina overlook the Agape tub, while trinkets are displayed in glass cabinets that resemble those in old chemist's shops
OPPOSITE PAGE A bedroom opens up onto the front garden

homes of the period, interior spaces were often multipurpose and there were no passages.

The Louw family acquired the property in 1844 and managed to hang on to it until the 21st century: a remarkable achievement. Karen compliments her predecessors on retaining – through 160 years – the basic integrity of the architecture and even reversing some Victorianisations.

'The farmyard was magical for me,' says Karen. 'But because thatched and whitewashed 18th-century buildings impose their personality so boldly, they are not easily meddled with.' Yet with intuitive élan, she seems to have pulled off a revitalisation. ▶



BELIEF IN THE POWER OF ARCHITECTURE TO SHAPE DESIGN HAS



The first step was to strip back floors and ceilings to their original state (the ceilings are almost uniformly yellowwood; the floors wide boards of Baltic pine, with some original terracotta tiles) and to eliminate modern compromises in the kitchens and bathrooms.

Architects Trevor Thorold and James Brummer did superb restoration work. For some floors, terracotta tiles were cut by angle grinder to the old 14-inch format. For walls in the kitchen and bathroom *witjes* (small square traditional tiles) were baked by Piet Jonker in Holland in individual batches, so that colours differ marginally, giving a slightly

mottled and antique effect. The *spens* was reconstructed with hand-beaten ironmongery.

Over the past few years, as the editor of *Elle Decoration*, Karen has been exposed to new thinking in design and she dared to chance a few contemporary touches. The residual effect of new on old, though, needed to be timeless. For Karen, this project is something of a ping-pong game between respect for original 18th-century intent and a disrespect for common convention. As well as an appreciation of the functionality of furniture pieces.

Like a typical Cape Dutch house, the layout of the farm house features a *voorkamer* (sitting room) and bedroom at the

BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO THE FARMHOUSE AT BABYLONSTOREN



ABOVE The H-shaped building, which dates from the 1770s, features ornate Cape Dutch gables
OPPOSITE PAGE The kitchen has a monastic feel. The overhead light is a wine-bottle drying rack that has been electrified and the table a 19th-century butcher's block

front, a master bedroom and kitchen at the back, joined (in the waist of the 'H') by a *gaandery*. Karen remained faithful to this floor plan, though the *voorkamer*, on the right as one enters, was reborn as a working library.

The *gaandery* is a curious thoroughfare-cum-living-space where the beady-eyed housewife in olden days could observe goings-on throughout her domain. Today, sleek Italian sofas grace it. Karen finds the inbuilt cupboards here somewhat flowery, but impossible to remove. One now sports copies of her favourite design magazines. Evidently her signature is being slightly quirky and feeling confident about the change.

Opposite the hallway is a sparsely furnished bedroom. A rosary hangs on one wall, a travel collage on another. It was inspired by the concept of itinerant people passing through. 'The Cape is somehow like that,' says Karen. 'Transitory with restless people forever on the move.'

Karen's belief in the power of architecture to shape design, along with her penchant for twisting tradition, have breathed new life into the farmhouse at Babylonstoren.

■ *The garden at Babylonstoren, a restaurant and guest accommodation will soon be open to the public. For more information contact Babylonstoren ☎ 021 863 1804; 🌐 www.babylonstoren.com*