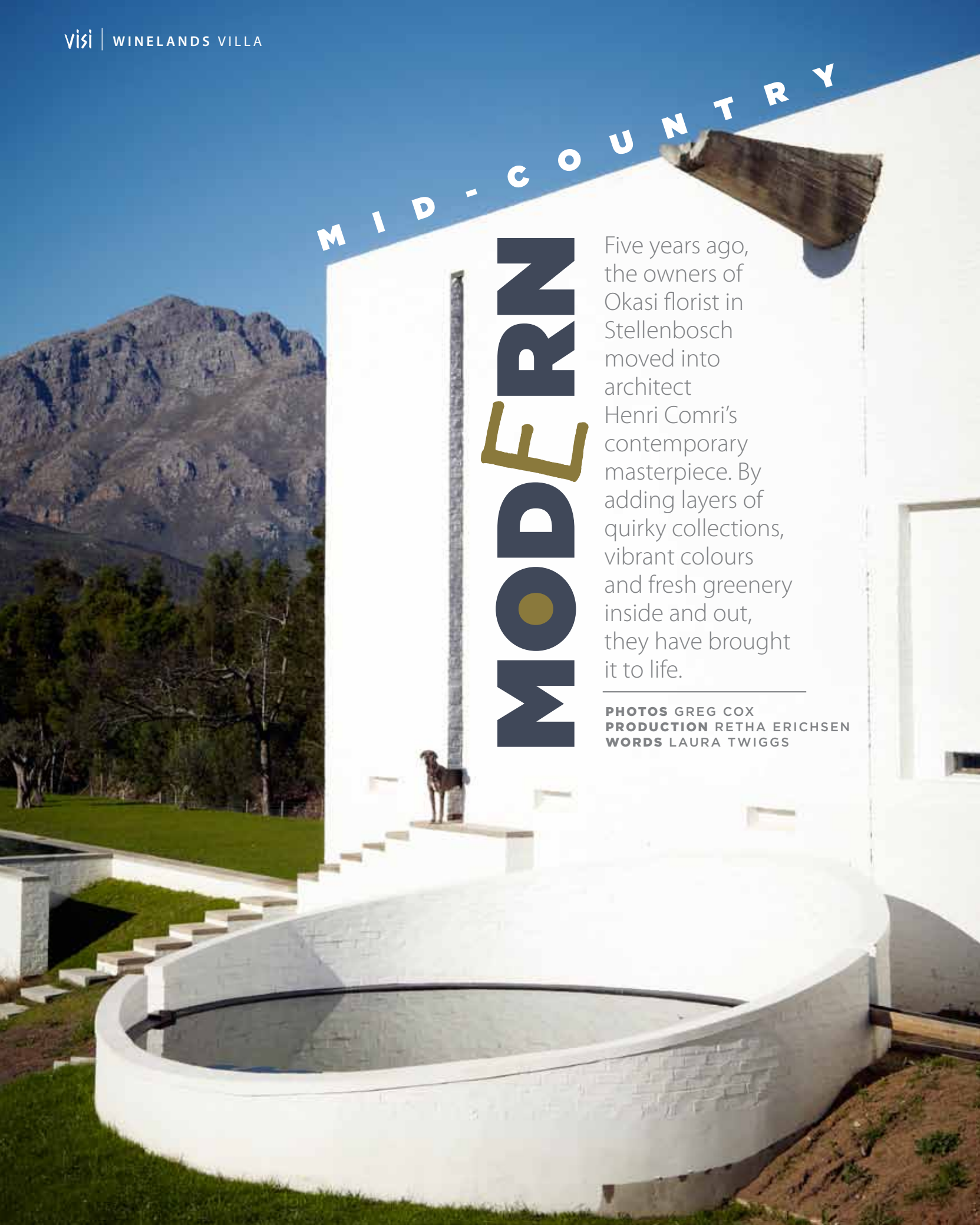


M I D - C O U N T R Y

MODERN

Five years ago, the owners of Okasi florist in Stellenbosch moved into architect Henri Comri's contemporary masterpiece. By adding layers of quirky collections, vibrant colours and fresh greenery inside and out, they have brought it to life.

PHOTOS GREG COX
PRODUCTION RETHA ERICHSEN
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IT'S

not hard to see why Henri Comrie garnered a coveted Cape Institute of Architecture Award for the house at Johannesdal in the Banhoek Valley of the Cape Winelands. Or that it has been short listed for the 2014 Corobrik SAIA Awards of Merit and for Excellence.

Which may come as something of a surprise for those who regard the architect primarily as a leading urban design specialist. (His then-firm Comrie + Wilkinson won the bid for the urban design and architecture of the 2010 World Cup Stadium in Cape Town.)

Inspired by architect Le Corbusier, vast white lime-treated walls, expansive spaces, exposed brickwork, integrated industrial metal, raw concrete ceilings, untreated wood and

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bountiful glass make a strong Modernist statement without being incongruous to the 2.4-hectare smallholding or the Cape vernacular that characterises the greater area.

Owner Dane Erwee explains that he and his partner Chris Willemsse envisioned "something that nestles; a modern exterior but with a farmhouse interior". The force behind the popular Okasie florist and events company in Stellenbosch, the couple's personal aesthetic flair is as much the reason for Johannesdal's success as Henri's design.

"No fixed cupboards" is their only design rule and a light, almost mischievous touch pervades everything. At every turn there's an unexpected vignette (a globe of the world and a pot-plant upon a weathered antique wooden chair, for example) or a wild splash of colour (like the bright yellow fireplace) to arrest the eye. Yet while freely unorthodox and at times perhaps theatrical, there's a sense that every inch of the decor is underpinned by carefully considered curation. "Authentic and not forced," is how Dane describes their design ethos. "Styled as opposed to decorated; collections that tell stories."

Because, collections are everywhere. "What don't I collect?" laughs Dane. "I like things that tell a story; things with dirt on them and not something I would find in a mall." Layered, colourful and dramatic though the many arranged collections may be, there's nothing uptight or "precious" about them.

Rules of symmetry aren't religiously applied; indeed, they seem to have deliberately been thwarted. These tableaux aren't mere messy jumbles, mind: each has a common thread that turns the assemblage of objects into an intellectually engaging narrative as well as a visual treat. Their every element is invested with personal or historic meaning; they share a common soul.

"We don't find them – they find us. They're mostly passed-on heirlooms, gifts, and junk shop or reclamation yard finds," says Dane. "For example, I grew up with the blue and white plates that hang on the wall in the living area; it was my mother's collection. I recently unpacked it and the vine growing through it is a new take on something old. In a way I guess it may also be a nod to South African Dutch heritage, but that wasn't my specific intention."

What's more, like these plates, each tableau has breathing room. Dane and Chris have made sure that there's plenty of neutral space to act as restful pauses for the eye. From the light-filled triple-volume entrance hall with its honed limestone floors and raw concrete ceilings, to the untreated pine passage leading to the bedroom and study. And from the open-plan dining and kitchen area with its exposed I-beam to the patinated lime-treated walls common to every space, the building itself is the star and its real "it" factor is its interface with the natural surroundings.

PREVIOUS SPREAD

01 Johannesdal is one of the properties short listed for the 2014 Corobrik SAIA Awards of Merit and for Excellence. The winners will be announced at the end May.

02 Le Corbusier-inspired architecture gains contextual relevance with its lime-washed walls – a characteristic feature of traditional building in the area.

THIS SPREAD

01 The Big Ben clock by Marcel Wanders for Moooi (with a personalised Clouds label) dominates the landing, while Kobus le



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"The modulation of internal spaces with the house as a backdrop to living," Henri concurs, is the most successful aspect of the architecture. "Framed views of the natural landscape and the interplay between intimate and generous spaces also work well. And I enjoy seeing the aim of using varied internal light quality realised after putting a lot of effort into positioning openings very carefully."

South African landscapes dominate the subject matter of the many paintings clustered together in the private study. Generous verandas extend the open-plan dining and kitchen area, the study, main bedroom, bathroom, dressing room and wet room on the floor above. Large windows are everywhere, from the stairwell to bathrooms, bringing in the views. A scullery leads to a kitchen garden, while a wooden spout placed high in an exterior wall channels water to an appropriately farm reservoir-styled swimming pool.

And, unsurprising seeing that both Dane and Chris grew up on farms, the grounds are even more lived-in than the house: "We spend a lot of time in the garden and are mostly outside," says Dane. "We like things that are honest and true to our roots and lifestyle."

Johannesdal is the perfect illustration of exactly that, within a distinctly Modernist idiom. V

• johannesdal.co.za

PREVIOUS SPREAD

01 In the living area, a large bright yellow niche housing a curated collection of objects is a playful focal point.

THIS SPREAD

01, 03 + 07 The entrance to Johannesdal houses Dane's collection of wall-mounted ferns.

02 "Everything happens here," says Dane of the dining and kitchen area. This space has an antique Burr cut Mahogany wardrobe reinvented to store crockery.

04 + 06 Chris and Dane's scullery leads out to their herb and vegetable gardens and often doubles up as a floral studio.

05 ?? Type of orchid? Or plant container inherited from aunt who lived in India? (for example). No caption supplied.



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01 In the entrance hall, the arrangement of colourful decorative ornaments and bright Turkish carpet is grounded and contextualised by the addition of a wall-mounted old and cracked wooden table-top. "I like the way it interacts with the cubistic space," says Dane. The large, dark painting is by Cora Coetzee.

02 The combination of lime-washed walls, untreated wood, raw concrete, sandstone and glass creates a modern frame with an organic feel in keeping with the natural environment.

03 The main bedroom's unpainted plywood wall provides an earthy contrast to the vibrant Turkish carpet.

04 The back of Johannesburg displays its strong linear cube-like architecture.



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