

A testimony to the timelessness and versatility of mid-century modern architecture, this glass-and-steel structure inspired by the works of Mies van der Rohe rests amiably in the rolling veld environs of Gauteng's Monaghan Farm. Architect and homeowner Gillian Holl, husband Ivan and son Noah walk alongside the penetrating, rammed-earth wall, which pays dramatic tribute to the natural context and the estate's sustainable ethos.

# common ground

WHILE THIS FARMHOUSE IN GAUTENG HAS A MINIMALIST INTEGRITY, IT ALSO EMBODIES A SENSE OF WARMTH

TEXT **NATALIE BORUVKA** STYLING **HEATHER BOTING** PHOTOGRAPHS **ELSA YOUNG**



The garden features a **natural** swimming pool designed by Gillian and Ivan. Green Art (082-854-0880) supplied the water plants and the *Celtis Africana* tree. The lighting was implemented by Hi-Tech Lighting (hi-techlighting.co.za). OPPOSITE TOP The house's north-facing facade incorporates natural rusted Corten steel boxes that juxtapose the lightweight feel of the structure. BOTTOM The house was constructed by Du Plessis & Lombard Building Projects (084-511-8614). Consultation on the floating cantilever slab and rammed earth wall, which is a composite material of lime and soil excavated on site, was provided by InSynch Sustainable Technologies (insynch.co.za).



# W

hen architect Gillian Holl and her husband, Ivan, bought a stand in the grassland surrounds of Monaghan Farm in Gauteng, her abiding enthusiasm for the glass-infill steel structures of 20th century modern architecture finally found a fitting platform for expression.

‘When we visited the estate for the first time my thoughts immediately turned to the expansive vistas of Mies van der Rohe’s New National Gallery in Berlin,’ recalls Gillian. One of her chief objectives was to capitalise on the natural surrounds. To this end, at the centre of the house, separating the office space from the bedroom wing is a 14-metre long open-plan living area enclosed on either elevation by wall-to-wall retractable glass sliding doors. One side frames the entrance courtyard and the other captures fields of grazing Nguni cows and panoramic views of the distant Magaliesburg Mountains.

The kitchen, which lies at the far end of this space, is where Gillian most enjoys spending time with Ivan and their four year-old son, Noah. It’s also the area she feels most successfully materialises her vision of creating an interior that continues the architectural language of the house.

‘Despite being a minimalist at heart I believe in intrinsic detailing,’ she says, referring to the cabinetry’s custom-crafted handles, which were manufactured▷





Jayde, the Yorkshire terrier waits patiently for some attention from Noah. The sofa is from Casamento (casamento.co.za) and the rosewood dining-room table and bench were custom-designed and manufactured by Veld Architects (veldarchitects.co.za). Mud Studio supplied the chandelier (mudstudio.net). OPPOSITE, FROM TOP Designed by Veld Architects, the brown kiaat kitchen cabinetry features Blum drawer systems and hinges purchased at Eclipse (eclipsegroup.co.za) and counter tops by StoneTech (stonetech.co.za); heat generated by the Morsø (morsø.co.za) fireplace is supplemented with underfloor heating installed by Florad (florad.co.za).



from recycled steel window frames and designed to reference the profiles of the house's I- and H-beam framework. A further connection is formed by the glow of kiaat and copper that echoes the tones of the rusted steel panelling on the adjacent exterior wall. It's at the entrance, however, that the conversation between exterior and interior reaches its pinnacle with a projecting rammed-earth wall. An as yet uncommon building practice, the construction involved compacting soil excavated on site. The resulting striking colour striations, combined with the earthy hues of the kitchen, introduce subtle warmth to the interior. 'I realised that in winter, when the intrusive landscape loses its lovely greenness, it would be important to have elements like this to help alleviate the austerity and coldness that a strongly minimalistic aesthetic may create,' Gillian explains. 'Ultimately beyond the vision of the design was a home for my family that would be comfortable and inviting.' And this the home indeed achieves.



Despite the sense of contemporary sophistication cemented immediately at the entrance by an impressive cantilevered concrete slab (Barcelona Pavilion-inspired), whimsical and playful touches in the interior create balance: curiously-suspended light fittings, jolts of vibrant colour and seemingly incongruous items of retro furniture. 'The croaking frogs and jackal calls at night remind us that we're here because we want to live simply and close to nature, so the last thing we wanted was something pretentious,' says Gillian. For the Holls, a key appeal of the estate was its ethos of sustainability. Gillian met the challenge of a design with reduced running costs by orientating the house just off north and employing roof overhangs, which optimise the angle of the winter sun while creepers create shading in summer. 'Interestingly, one of the issues with the Barcelona Pavilion was the glare created by the granite floor, which made exhibiting problematic,' Gillian explains. 'We went with terrazzo floor tiles that absorb the radiating sunlight and release the warmth at night when the temperature drops.' The home's ability to retain heat is bolstered by the use of low-emission glass, while solar-powered under-floor heating and two efficient Morsø fireplaces lend additional cosiness in winter. 'We also have loads of blankets because for me there's no better way to warm up than snuggling into one with Ivan and Noah,' says Gillian. □

Gillian Holl 082-856-5419

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE The bedroom and bathroom walls have been finished with Earthcote's Pandomo by Casonia Coatings (074-893-6303). The headboard and bathroom vanity were custom designed by Veld Architects while the towel railings were a joint DIY project between Ivan and Gillian. The ostrich egg pendant in the bedroom is from Hi-Tech Lighting.



#### GILLIAN & IVAN'S HOME TRUTHS

**The things I love most about winter** are gluhwein, fondues, hot chocolate and cuddles (Gillian); wearing warm comfortable knitwear and scarves (Ivan). **We stay cosy** by keeping the Morsø going (Ivan). **The best aspects of living here** are the freedom, and driving 40km an hour (Gillian); the slow pace I return to after daily commutes to my Sandton-based office (Ivan). **Our favourite space in the home** is the kitchen – we cook, we laugh and are happy here (both). **I'm inspired by** Danish and Scandinavian design, and nature (Gillian); Gill inspires me (Ivan). **The first thing I do when I get home is** run to Noah for hugs and cuddles (Gillian); go mountain-bike riding on the trails with Gill and Noah (Ivan). **My most treasured piece of furniture** is my grandfather's typewriter and my grandmother's Singer sewing machine (Gillian); my dad's dumpy level, which he used during his early career (Ivan). **I could never live without** Ivan (Gillian); my family (Ivan). **The soundtrack to my perfect weekend** is Hôtel Costes (Gillian); Tree63 (Ivan). **The most inspiring places for me** are Gaudi's Sagrada Familia abroad and, locally, in my study at my desk facing the Magaliesburg (Gillian); homes without boundaries (Ivan). **My favourite winter comfort food is** lamb and bean stew (Gillian); freshly baked bread with lots of melted butter (Ivan). **For friends, we'll entertain** with a fondue starter, lamb curry tagine and chocolate fondant (Gillian); around the fireplace with gluhwein to start and espressos to end (Ivan).



ABOVE The floor to ceiling curtains were made up by Caroline Wright Interiors ([carolinewright.co.za](http://carolinewright.co.za)), and Ivan designed and installed the simple cable mechanism. Classic Trading ([classictrading.net](http://classictrading.net)) supplied the Hansgrohe taps. The bath was sourced from Bella Bathrooms ([bellabathrooms.co.za](http://bellabathrooms.co.za)) and the Douglas Jones mosaic glass tiles from BC Design Office (011-465-8912). RIGHT The hanging wood lamp is from Goet ([goet.co.za](http://goet.co.za)) and the bedside table is from Veld Architects. OPPOSITE Gillian painted Noah's bedroom walls while the custom-made vinyl wall art was supplied by De Waal Art ([dewaalart.com](http://dewaalart.com)). The white oak bunk bed is by Veld Architects and the chair is from Raw ([rawstudios.co.za](http://rawstudios.co.za)). The easy-to-clean natural oak floors are from Oggie ([oggie-sa.co.za](http://oggie-sa.co.za)).

