



ENDURING PRESENCE

TREASURED POSSESSIONS FIND A FITTING SPACE FOR DISPLAY IN A WELLINGTON HOUSE THAT HAS STOOD THE TEST OF TIME

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ARTISTS' HOME



Anthony Harris and Gerhard Swart of Ceramic Matters are by their own admission obsessive collectors. Nineteen years spent collaborating as ceramicists have paralleled a journey of amassing a miscellany of antiques, art and objets. While their magpie's nest of curiosities is not defined by an overarching theme, it's a representation of the ideas that inform the pieces they produce. 'We've always been intrigued by the form and history of things past and present, and we continually respond to this by merging the traditional and the contemporary in what we create,' says Gerhard. This sentiment speaks as much to their works as it does to the extraordinary space they have crafted in De Klippen Valleij, their historic Wellington farmstead.

A traditional H-frame Cape Dutch farmhouse built in 1714, the structure lost a significant part of its original identity in 1898 when a fire destroyed the thatch roof. The owner at the time chose to have the gables filled in to accommodate the construction of a corrugated iron roof. Alterations ensued at the hands of multiple owners and at some point an Italian architect and prisoner of war built the colonnaded veranda. Three centuries later the palette

of change is evidenced not only by a layout akin to a rabbit warren but by some wonderfully incongruous elements.

When Anthony and Gerhard walked through the home for the first time four years ago, they recall, they experienced a palpable weight of nostalgia in every room. It was defined by the house's original framework as well as its subsequent renovations. 'We committed ourselves to maintaining the home as we found it because witnessing its history and change helps us to understand and value its place in our present,' explains Anthony. The present involved curating each space with items from their grand assembly of contemporary and period furniture, African artefacts, religious icons, animal skeletons, ceramics and art. It's a visual indulgence as beguiling as a walk through a museum of natural history.

Each room has a hero feature. In the dining room a Cape Dutch 'muurkas', built into the wall and finished with an elaborate mulberry wood frame, genteelly displays rows of Ceramic Matters' skulls on lace-bedecked shelves. In a guest bedroom it's an ornate Indian swing presided over by a print of a Renaissance figure. 'The swing is one of Anthony's most precious possessions and it's only

through sheer persistence that he managed to convince a friend to sell it to him after 10 years,' says Gerhard. Perhaps the most arresting feature, simply because it is so out of place, is a double-hinged shuttered window encased in a bedroom wall. The folly? An external wall rendered internal by a previous haphazard addition.

One room they did change was the kitchen, its 300-year-old bearing compromised by a knotty pine ceiling added in the 1970s. 'Curiosity got the better of us, so we dismantled part of it and discovered the original beamed reed ceiling in excellent condition thanks to the limewash it had been preserved with,' says Gerhard. The floor – a woeful pairing of concrete and rotting wood – was resurfaced with black and white tiles. Aside from the tiles and a gas stove, the space reveals no commercial trappings. An old table from Gerhard's oupa's farm fronts the hearth and an heirloom cabinet, sporting drawers made from Hugo's jam crates, earths the environment. 'It would have been a room used only by servants, but ironically the kitchen is where we spend much of our time,' says Gerhard. 'It truly is the heart of our home.' **Ceramic Matters will exhibit for Trent Reed at Knysna Fine Art from 14 April**

ABOVE, FROM FAR LEFT The birch wood table and chairs in the entrance were made in Italy; the Moroccan furniture on the veranda was a gift from friends; Gerhard and Anthony built a 'werfmuur' along the original driveway to add to the property's farm heritage; while the wooden door was the original entrance to the house, the veranda was a later addition built by an Italian prisoner of war. Gerhard and Anthony are seen with Louis the parrot, Marble the Great Dane and Fifi. PREVIOUS SPREAD, FROM LEFT A built-in Dutch 'muurkas' filled with skulls by Ceramic Matters makes a surprising feature in the dining room. The Rococo table and chairs are from South America; a collection of fruit, vegetable and bread-inspired pieces by Ceramic Matters makes it hard to tell what's real and what's not on the kitchen table.



An heirloom cabinet in the kitchen displays a collection of old Staffordshire and Delftware, pieces from China and India, and some Ceramic Matters originals. The shells were bought in Knysna and the skulls are of a giraffe, zebra and donkey. OPPOSITE Gerhard researched and designed the fireplace based on original Rumford designs. The black and white tiles were chosen for the balance they would strike between traditional and contemporary.



In what was once a reception room, an elephant skull is displayed on an antique Indian table alongside Empire-style furniture from South America. The screen print features performance artist Steven Cohen. OPPOSITE The teddy bears above the door are works by Ceramic Matters. The abrupt change in level and type of flooring reveals the additions made to the house over time.



ANTHONY AND GERHARD'S HOME TRUTHS

The best thing about our kitchen is the atmosphere of the space and the fireplace (Gerhard); the space, the fireplace and being surrounded by the objects I love (Anthony). **When we entertain** we like to have our guests cook and celebrate with us (Gerhard); we do so in the kitchen around the old table (Anthony). **My signature dish** changes all the time but for now it is paneer tikka masala (Gerhard); is Mr Delivery (Anthony). **The best aspects of living where we do** is our private and beautiful space (Gerhard); the tranquil, creative environment (Anthony). **My favourite space in our home** is the vegetable garden (Gerhard); the living room (Anthony). **If we could live anywhere other than in Wellington, I'd live in** New York for a little while, if I could afford it (Gerhard); Venice (Anthony). **Our style** is personal and nostalgic (Gerhard); eclectic and concerns issues of the heart (Anthony). **I am inspired by** my passage through life (Anthony); so much – my environment, friends... (Gerhard). **A perfect weekend away** is a road trip in the Cape (Anthony); a private beach on the West Coast (Gerhard).

ABOVE, FROM LEFT Floral wallpaper that remains from the 1940s provides a backdrop for two glass paintings by Nicolaas Maritz and a collection of 1950s children's posters; the bathroom displays antique mirrors and a cabinet from India. OPPOSITE In the bedroom an Indian swing seat frames a blown-up Leonardo da Vinci print.