


# MOUNTAIN MARVEL

A STRUCTURE AS INTREPID AS THE COUPLE WHO LIVE IN IT HAS SENT THE SLOPES OF CAPE TOWN'S HIGGOVALE REELING INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

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Architect Paolo Deliperi ([pdarchitect.co.za](http://pdarchitect.co.za)) used the rooftop gardens and grassy mound featuring ngongoni three-awn grass (*Aristida junceiformis*) to merge the architecture and the site on this property owned by Jens and Julia Hildebrandt in Higgovale, Cape Town. Alan Dawson ([alandawsongardens.co.za](http://alandawsongardens.co.za)) did the landscaping. Drawing on the harbour view, the chimneys were made to resemble smokestacks on ships.





Between them Jens and Julia Hildebrandt have lived in 13 countries. ‘We’re both of German descent but Julia was born in Cairo and I was born in Buenos Aires,’ Jens says. ‘Perhaps this initial displacement has set us on a course that’s never really taken us back home.’

Three years ago, after spending two decades together in Tanzania, the Hildebrandts and their three-year-old son Liam moved to Cape Town, a city where Jens had spent some time before entering the field of international trade. ‘We loved the lifestyle we had in East Africa but every six months this urge to travel would kick in,’ he says. ‘I would find myself comparing wherever we went to Cape Town – and the truth was no place ever measured up.’

Jens and Julia wanted to build a home as they had done in Dar es Salaam. Their previous house incorporated a mix of East African and Italian elements and, situated on the peninsula, it offered expansive seafront vistas and idyllic sunsets every day. ‘We were determined to find a property in Cape Town that would allow us to experience again the impact a beautiful

environment has on a home,’ says Julia, who works for an NGO based in Germany.

After 18 months of searching – which included poring over Google Earth – what they found was this: a spectacular panorama spread out below the face of Table Mountain in Higgovale, starting with Lion’s Head practically within arm’s reach and panning majestically across the City Bowl towards the harbour before ebbing into the great blue Atlantic.

The existing home on the property, a traditional structure with a disconnected flow over two storeys, did little to celebrate the extraordinary setting. Jens and Julia’s brief to their architect Paolo Deliperi was to create a villa similar to the one they had in Dar es Salaam. ‘Paolo said straight away that the site was imploring us to do something altogether different,’ says Jens. ‘We decided to listen to him.’

Two fundamental decisions informed the design process: the first was to work with the original building footprint after the demolition; the second was to elongate the footprint at ground level rather than build a second storey. ‘This had the net effect



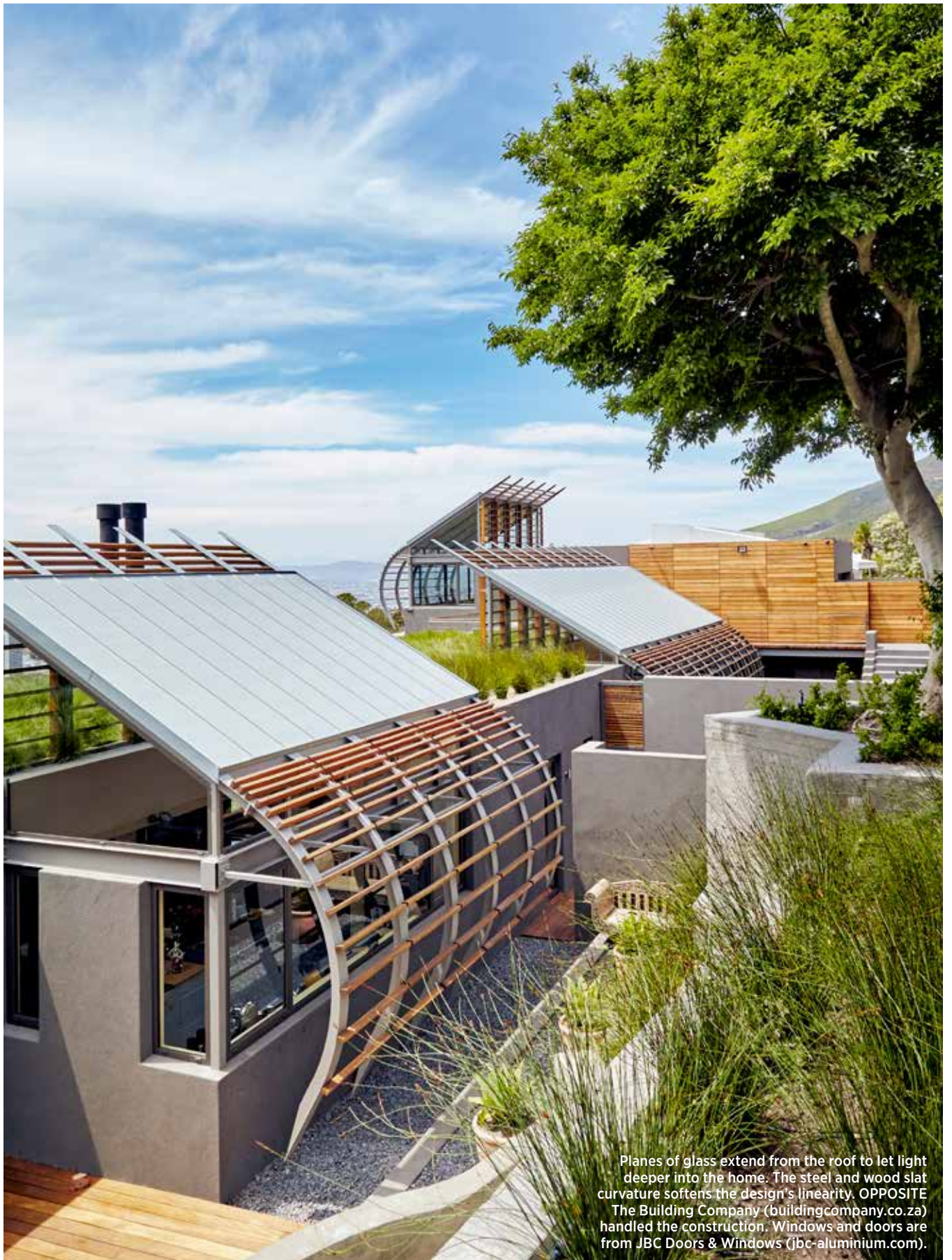
of reintroducing Table Mountain and its vegetation to the site, enabling a spatial arrangement with a pleasing flow and establishing a strong relationship between the inside and outside,' says Paolo.

In addition to an appropriate aesthetic response the nature of the site inspired an energy efficient one. Since the view fortuitously dictated the orientation necessary for optimum sun exposure, Paolo addressed all the north-facing openings with roof overhangs to respond to seasonal solar inclination. 'Where possible the interiors have been designed no deeper than a single room but in the kitchen and gallery, where this is not the case, steel and glass "periscopes" admit north light deeper into the spaces,' he says. The curvature of the steel and wood 'vertebrae' defining these projections, he adds, helps to assimilate the strong architectural language of the structure with its mountain backdrop. Gently referencing the natural landscape further, soft tufts of perennial grass sprout from roof gardens and sway on a prominent mound created with the rubble left over from the demolition.▷

ABOVE, FROM FAR LEFT A Tanzanian cabinet with beautiful hand carved detailing houses a collection of glass from La Verrerie de Biot ([verriedebiot.com](http://verriedebiot.com)). Atop it resides a selection from Kitemgela Hot Glass by Anselm Croze ([kitemgela.com](http://kitemgela.com)); the distinctive Zanzibari cocowood safari chairs are from Scanza ([cocowood.com](http://cocowood.com)); Space Solutions ([spacesolutions.co.za](http://spacesolutions.co.za)) supplied and installed the oak cladding in the living room; all the bedrooms expand into views of Signal Hill as well as the City Bowl and harbour.

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Planes of glass extend from the roof to let light deeper into the home. The steel and wood slat curvature softens the design's linearity. OPPOSITE The Building Company ([buildingcompany.co.za](http://buildingcompany.co.za)) handled the construction. Windows and doors are from JBC Doors & Windows ([jbc-aluminium.com](http://jbc-aluminium.com)).



Given the formidable character of the architecture it wouldn't be unreasonable to assume that the interior of the Hildebrandts' home would demand a suitably contemporary approach. While the smart finishes throughout the house certainly communicate something of the exterior, the mix of coconut wood furniture, Marcel Breuer's Wassily Chairs, Tanzanian mninga wood cabinets and side tables made of pilau rice pots creates a unique gallerylike space.

'Almost every item has a story to tell,' says Jens, motioning to a ship's compass salvaged from one of the world's biggest shipping graveyards in Pakistan before turning to a number of traditional Swahili mancala board games brought back from the Ngorongoro Crater. 'In trusting Paolo's vision we have a home that encompasses the magnificent surrounds as well as our life's journey.' **Paolo Deliperi, pdarchitect.co.za**



### JENS AND JULIA'S HOME TRUTHS

**I predict that 2016's biggest trend will be** reducing your energy footprint (Jens). **Our New Year's resolution** is to enjoy our new home and see more of Southern Africa with Liam. **The best thing about living here is** having 360 degree views and enveloping nature while being just a stone's throw from the city (Jens); being able to walk up the mountain just behind our house with our dogs (Julia). **The first thing I do when I get home is** greet the dogs (Jens). **I'm inspired by** *wabi-sabi* (Jens); Karen Blixen (Julia). **Our style is** a fusion of old and new. We believe in investing in high quality basics. **My most treasured decor items are** a cupboard from Domus & Domus and our glasses from La Verrerie de Biot in the south of France (Jens); the collection of icon art made by my mother (Julia). **Our summer entertaining** happens as a late lunch on our terrace where we stay to watch the sunset. **My signature dinner party starter is** grilled feta and tomato (Jens). **The place that inspires me most is** the Selous Game Reserve (Jens); Stockholm (Julia).

ABOVE, FROM FAR LEFT Liam's bunk bed is from The Room (theroomfurniture.co.za) in Stellenbosch; the passageway's floor tiles are from Cotto d'Este (cottodeste.it/en/home); in the main bathroom 1x3m tiles from the same company clad the wall elegantly and seamlessly; reclining in Le Corbusier's LC4 chaise longue is the ideal way to enjoy the spectacular views from the main bedroom.