



BUILDING UP

The team working on this project trumped many harsh challenges to deliver this literally top-end Oranjezicht home

Words Genevieve Fisher

Photographs Tim Lake



ON SHOW

The position of this Oranjezicht home is prime. Situated along a quiet, winding road, just up from bustling Kloof Street, it's orientated towards the west, high up on a slope of Table Mountain, catching an abundance of the most prized resource in these parts – the sun.

This three-storey, 240m² home is sandwiched between two other properties, making the street view very narrow. But then you walk through the front passage to the bright first floor with its lounge, three bedrooms, two bathrooms and access to the garden and pool deck. From here the double-volume staircase leads your gaze upwards as light from every angle reflects off the white marbled floor and the steel railings of the staircase.

On the second level, you are met by an ultramodern open-plan kitchen and dining area with an off-shutter concrete feature wall and extended balcony on the west side and open-plan TV room on the east side. But it's the views of Signal Hill, the surrounding neighbourhood and the harbour in the distance that take your breath away as you appreciate how high up above the city you really are. The spatial flow of this level is easy – you feel as if you're wafting through it. For architect Charles Thesen, this was the desired result, but with it came a lot of problem-solving, something that Charles professes is 'his thing'.

The client and his wife, who are both from Europe, bought the 420m² site together with approved plans for the construction of a new house, as there was an existing heritage property on the site. The client was referred to contractor Jurgen Kuhnel of Cape Core Construction to put these plans into action. Because of the challenging site – narrow, sloping and difficult to access off the steep and narrow street – Jurgen enlisted Charles, with whom he had worked previously, to consult on the project.

Charles says, 'Once the building was laid out we discovered errors on the site plan, which meant that the building had to be reduced in size to accommodate the existing boundary wall encroachments from both neighbouring sites. The underground conditions on these sites are often challenging and this project was no exception. We employed a top engineering firm to handle the structural aspects and their expertise was particularly important with the foundation design.' Over and above this, they had to retain the structure of the old property and incorporate it into the new one, because of its heritage status. 'The existing structure had to be kept, although the walls were weak and constructed from porous sun-dried bricks. Much of the budget was spent on the engineer-designed internal structural system to allow us to retain as much of the existing building as possible,' he says. The City Council's stipulations for building in this area allow for building upward to the height of three storeys, and so build upward they did.

'The brief from the client was a modern family home that took advantage of the unique position, which meant maximising the views,' he says. The clients, says Charles, knew exactly what they wanted, were decisive but also open to suggestions. 'They showed me pictures of their old home in Europe, which had a very modernist Bauhaus aesthetic that they wanted to have in this one. The challenge, however, was to incorporate the old property in this look and feel,' he says.

That's when Charles came up with the idea of juxtaposing materials and design facets – hard against smooth, rough against sharp. The result is a home where smooth-plastered brickwork sits comfortably next to the fair-faced un-plastered brickwork and where off-shutter concrete complements the white polished marble floors. The central charcoal steel staircase ties everything together.

Climbing the staircase to the third level, you find the pinnacle of this home, the en-suite main bedroom. Because it's a storey higher than the open-plan living area, the views are unbelievably more dramatic. Taking in the vistas, you realise just how much can be done on a small site when the right people are involved. ☺

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Above left WOMAG (World of Marble & Granite) enjoys the reputation for being South Africa's preferred supplier of quality natural stone tiles for flooring and surface applications. Its factory is equipped with the best machinery available, enabling it to craft the finest stone into perfect tiles and customised countertops. Show here is WOMAG's Vibrant Bianco Venato Polished (porcelain) 600 x 600 tiles, retailing at R209/m² (excluding VAT). Also featured is the wall-hung Diamond Bellini toilet, retailing for R2 995 (including VAT). **Above right** Charles Thesen is a professional architect registered with SACAP and the Association of Arbitrators. He has more than 25 years' experience in providing specialised architectural and contractual solutions, including dispute resolution, to other professionals, contractors and clients on complex medium- and small-scale projects.



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