

# natural perspective

In harmony with its striking surrounds, an intimate cluster of eco homes embraces green living

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This eco-development in Hermanus, Western Cape, comprises four self-contained houses, including the Dreyer family's original holiday home (front left) that once solely occupied the site. OPPOSITE Louise Dreyer in the living room of her home. Taking pride of place is the Morso stove ([morso.co.za](http://morso.co.za)); the sofa is from Weylandts ([weylandts.co.za](http://weylandts.co.za)).





A section of the living area is dedicated to shared meals, on a poplar dining table designed by Mareli, Louise's daughter. The armoire is a family heirloom and rests in a corner designed especially to accommodate it. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Floating concrete stairs are both functional and a superb aesthetic detail; an upstairs study; the bathroom and walk-in closet off the master bedroom; a view into the bathroom, where you can take a shower with amazing mountain views.

ECO HOME  
HOUSE OF THE MONTH

The open-plan kitchen and living area in one of the back houses displays clean, functional design. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP Mareli designed the table and bench with moveable seats. The lights above it are from Province Lighting ([provincelighting.co.za](http://provincelighting.co.za)); clever use of frosted glass affords privacy in the en-suite bedroom.



It's hard not to notice the cluster of handsome modern dwellings wedged between the ocean and craggy mountains on the drive through the holiday-home enclave of Voëlklip, Hermanus, in the Western Cape. While the angular design and arresting palette of varying greys make each stand apart from many of the older bungalows and more traditional residential dwellings set in parallel rows to one of the Western Cape's most popular Blue Flag beaches, the four houses occupy a site where, not too long ago, just one family cottage stood amid a luxurious expanse of lawn.

For Cape Town-based project manager Mareli Dreyer, who had more than a hand in the concept behind this new development and the design of its interiors, the old house was the base for all her school holidays while growing up. It was a united family decision to develop the property – occupying four stands – into four separate, self-contained units set within a communal framework. 'My brother, André, who lives in San Francisco, and I both love being able to spend time here, but we realised that we couldn't continue to stay at our parents' house indefinitely,' explains Mareli with a laugh.

The original house had already undergone a considered renovation by acclaimed Johannesburg architect Gardiol Bergenthuin about 15 years ago. As a trusted associate of Mareli's parents, André and Louise Dreyer, she was again lured to the coastal town to take on the design of the three new structures – one of which is increasingly considered 'home' to the couple, who plan to retire here.

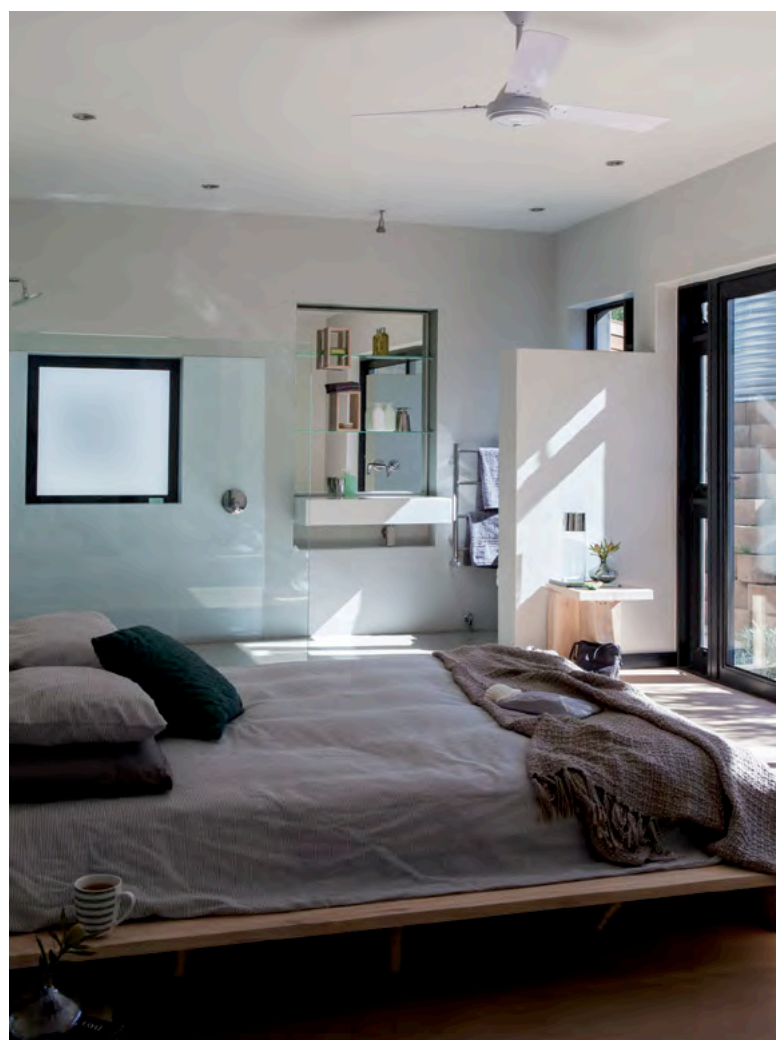
Gardiol's brief was for the houses to be clean-lined and contemporary in their design, with open-plan living spaces, and plenty of sleeping room for occupants and visiting guests. The double-storey dwellings would need to be infused with natural light and, most importantly, comply with the family's desire for the development to be a model of green living. And thus everything is powered by solar energy (in colder months, if there are continuously rainy days when there is not enough sun to charge up the batteries via the solar panels, the system can revert to Eskom-supplied electricity) and makes use of borehole water on the property.

It doesn't stop there, of course. The interior spaces might be coolly minimalist to look at, but they're cosy as can be, thanks to extensive insulation of walls, floors and ceilings, water underfloor heating and double-glazing. Add to that the stylish black Morsø stoves that radiate heat from their potbellies, making the living areas popular spots to congregate when the Cape rains set in.

Rotsberg, the towering mountain that appears to be almost in their backyard, is a powerful presence. 'Often people who live in coastal towns are obsessed with sea views,' says Louise. 'We asked Gardiol to look to the mountains in our case.' Viewed from the entrance to the driveway, the rocky expanse looms up through the cleft between the two back dwellings, while a clever placing of windows and skylights means aspects of it can be seen inside the houses, too.

These mountain views, along with the deep-toned grey walls and screeded floors, combine to a wonderfully organic effect in the interiors, which is enhanced by the liberal use of timber furniture, most of it custom-designed by Mareli, who has a background in graphic design. She tells the story of a windstorm that sent a roof, complete with structural beams, flying off one of the houses. What started out as a calamity ended well when she was left with piles of poplar that could be recycled into shelves, expansive dining tables and even one of the staircases. It just goes to show that green thinking is at the very core of this inviting cluster of homes. ◻

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Mareli's long wooden table and chairs on the deck of one of the back houses. OPPOSITE Architect Gardiol Bergenthuin's brief was to maximise the spectacular views of the mountains that form a dramatic backdrop to the property.

### LOUISE'S HOME TRUTHS

The best thing about living here is that we are a stone's throw away from Hermanus' cliffside path, the hiking routes in Fernkloof, and the Hemel-en-Aarde wine route (a best-kept secret!). I'm not a big fan of winter, but our Morsø stove goes a long way towards making it bearable. My favourite room is my bedroom, because I can sit on my bed and see how the mountain turns gold at sunrise and then becomes pink at sunset. I'd describe my style as casual and eclectic. But the design advice that resonates most is 'less is more'. I'm inspired by enthusiasm in any form. The first thing I do when I get home is have a glass of chilled Sauvignon Blanc. My most treasured piece of furniture is my solid stinkwood cabinet, a family heirloom. I'm reading *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century* by Steve Coll. This winter, I'm entertaining with lots of home-made soup and bread, and Gorgonzola and Brie with preserved green figs, and a little Roodeberg red to complement everything. But my signature dinner-party dish is braised neck of lamb served with a bordelaise sauce and wild rice.