



ABOVE A calming koi pond occupies a corner of the vigorously textured garden where the passageway to the bedrooms and entrance hall converge OPPOSITE PAGE In the private sitting area, coir flooring provides a textural contrast to the minimalist furniture. In the background, an antique African pot sits atop a coffee table



MODERN VISION

A STRIKING EXAMPLE OF MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE, THIS HOME IN JOHANNESBURG IS A CLEAN AND CALMING SPACE THAT PROVIDES THE PERFECT FOIL FOR THE OWNERS' IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY ART

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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Flanked by circular columns, the open-plan living area steps up from the entranceway where Brett Murray's 'Little Pig' keeps watch; sliding doors allow for an easy flow between the private living room and a leafy courtyard; the grooves on the plastic shells of Ron Arad's 'Tom Vac' chairs inject interest into the all-white dining area



Le Corbusier once said that ‘architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of volumes brought together in light’. With this in mind, he’d no doubt be impressed by this four-bedroom abode that focuses so sharply on the interaction between light and the sculptural form.

Built twenty years ago in Johannesburg’s Houghton area by Johan Bergenthuin of Louis Louw Johan Bergenthuin Architects, this house is an expression of the owners’ love of the international school of design. At the time, this style was the fashion but it’s a testimony to Bergenthuin that it still looks fresh and cutting edge today.

The reason is perhaps that like Le Corbusier, Bergenthuin has his own five points of architecture, which he believes is the formula for timeless design. ‘It’s not about being fashionable but modern,’ he says. ‘A well-designed contemporary building will openly and clearly explain its internal arrangements; be free of unnecessary adornment; will not cajole or bully; will be fully integrated; and will accept the patina of the elements.’

With a clean layout, minimal decoration and great indoor-outdoor flow, this home certainly adheres to his criteria. Perhaps most importantly, however, it continues to meet the owners’ original brief for a modish space that would be easy to live in.

This relaxed easiness is in part explained by the harmonious way all the components of the house are put together. At the entrance, there’s a stairwell to the left and a hallway that opens onto a progression of bedrooms. Straight ahead is the elevated open-plan living room, which draws the visitor in with its large square proportions and sunny disposition.

There’s also the simplicity that’s been achieved by architectural restraint. ‘There are only three major elements,’ explains Bergenthuin. ‘Firstly, floor slabs that follow the natural contours of the site stepping up and down as required, secondly the columns that are placed in an organised matrix and lastly the roof slabs, which also step up and down.’

The resulting design revolves around the interplay between this trio of elements, with the large columns acting as pivots for the walls and slabs. It is the light that makes the space sculptural and it is for this reason that it’s invited inside at every opportunity.

The living room, which opens out onto a garden with a covered outdoor sitting and dining area, is the best example of this. The fact that the patio is almost a mirror image of the setup inside (both in terms of the positioning of the columns and the choice of low-slung white furniture), makes it seem like one huge room, the sliding ceiling-to-floor glass doors a barely visible divider.

Due to the size constraints of the site demanding that the house be stretched from boundary to boundary, the outdoors is also brought in with the creation of internal courtyards instead of a traditional garden. Skylights further reveal slivers of blue at surprising intervals. While horizontal sections of glass – running at floor level – encourage daylight to stream in from all directions, highlighting the angular lines of the house. ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Paul Wunderlich’s ‘Minotaur’ sculpture sits on the large coffee table in the living room, whilst a book on minimalist Japanese architect Ando, rests on one of Eileen Grey’s chrome-ended tables; the heavy bronze form of Brett Murray’s ‘Praise Singer’ contrasts with the transparency of the glass table on the outdoor patio; Philippe Starck’s ‘Ghost’ chairs provide a stylish seating option in one of the courtyards





Highlighted by light flooding in from the windows and skylight, the floating stairs in the private sitting room take on sculptural form, adding graphic interest to the space ABOVE Oversized sofas and ottomans with white-linen slipcovers frame the sitting area and provide ample seating in the open-plan living room. While 'Counterpoint' by Victor Pasmore anchors the space



This is all, of course, brought together by a universal palette of white, which was applied to both the structural elements of the house and the furnishings. White-linen slipcovers can be found on most of the furniture, whilst glass and high-gloss finishes abound elsewhere. To keep it from becoming a blur of white, strikingly modern pieces, such as Ron Arad's white-plastic 'Tom Vac' seats and Philippe Starck's 'Ghost' chairs, as well as iconic work from Eileen Grey and the oversized curve of an 'Arco' floor light, punctuate the space.

The look is unapologetically stark but it is this backdrop of serene severity that provides the foundation for the next layer of the house, an impressive collection of contemporary art. Works by William Kentridge line the passageway to the bedrooms, whilst minimalist oils on canvas lend a warm wash to the walls of the living areas. Sculptures, including the commanding bronze 'Goggle Head' by British artist Dame Elisabeth Frink and Brett Murray's 'Little Pig' and 'Praise Singer', are also dotted around at strategic intervals.

Despite this extra layer of interest, there's not one corner that deviates from the owners' commitment to clean minimalist design and fuss-free living. It is the brave execution of the modernist style that is the reason for this dazzling white shell's enduring appeal.

■ *Louis Louw Johan Bergenthuin Architects 011 781 3663; www.ljhb.co.za*



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The calming neutrality of the all-white scheme is continued in the master bedroom; in the en suite, the underslung bath lies alongside Percy Konqobe's 'Reclining Figure'; Dame Elisabeth Frink's 'Goggle Head' serves as a focal point on the patio, whilst deck chairs line up alongside a row of silver birch trees, which form the backbone of the garden

