

THE SPIRIT OF HOUSE

Architect Gardiol Bergenthuin writes ...

The site always is my starting point. Clues abound: view, fall, orientation, vegetation, the context of the built environment. Equally important is the client, the personality and the brief, exotic or downright practical!

From these many pointers, and following intensive germination, the spirit of house evolves. Any house that is uplifting has a spirit.

The spirit could be in the volume, the mass or the detail; it could be the scale, the order, the progression of spaces; or it could be the subtle handling of light.

Designing houses is exciting, a fascinating creative journey, for each one is singular. The richest reward is to find on subsequent visits a building that works for its inhabitants.

dation walls on reinforced foundations, and suspended floor slabs at ground level.

Side-space requirements called for one metre clearance on three sides of the building, and non-habitable rooms were placed accordingly, with windows of habitable rooms three metres from the boundary. This explains the use of glass bricks in some bedrooms, the absence of a kitchen window and the setting back of other fenestration.

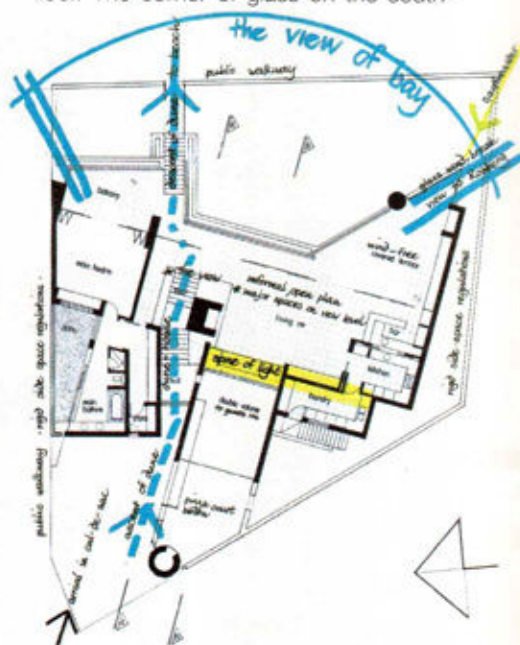
A height restriction of 8,5 m suited the horizontal concept. Aesthetic criteria laid down for The Sanctuary (an area near Robberg) had to be accommodated: plastered beige exteriors and the partial tiling of the roof. The latter became a design tool – the roof climbs up over the building to become a rooflight at the apex, throwing a strong shaft of light into the compact shape and into spaces which could have been dark with the large accommodation programme. The covered floor area is 578m².

Prime seafront stands rarely are available. In this design the ocean was the prime design consideration, and the building acknowledges it by keeping a low profile. Thus the horizontal concept

with the emphasis on an unobstructed view (note the spans in concrete).

I wanted the approach to the house from the cul-de-sac to the west, to be exciting – the feeling of climbing a dune with a breathtaking view as a reward. The stairway also had to be important, and then once at the top, the descent to the beach was to be as easy as rolling down the dune. The exterior stair completes the seaward line of the interior stairwell.

The two floors form distinct zones with the major space (living and main bedroom) on the upper level, and sleeping/recreation spaces for family and friends (usually large numbers of these) below. Even the utility room sleeps two. In quieter times the house easily accommodates the owners only, on the first floor. The corner of glass on the south-



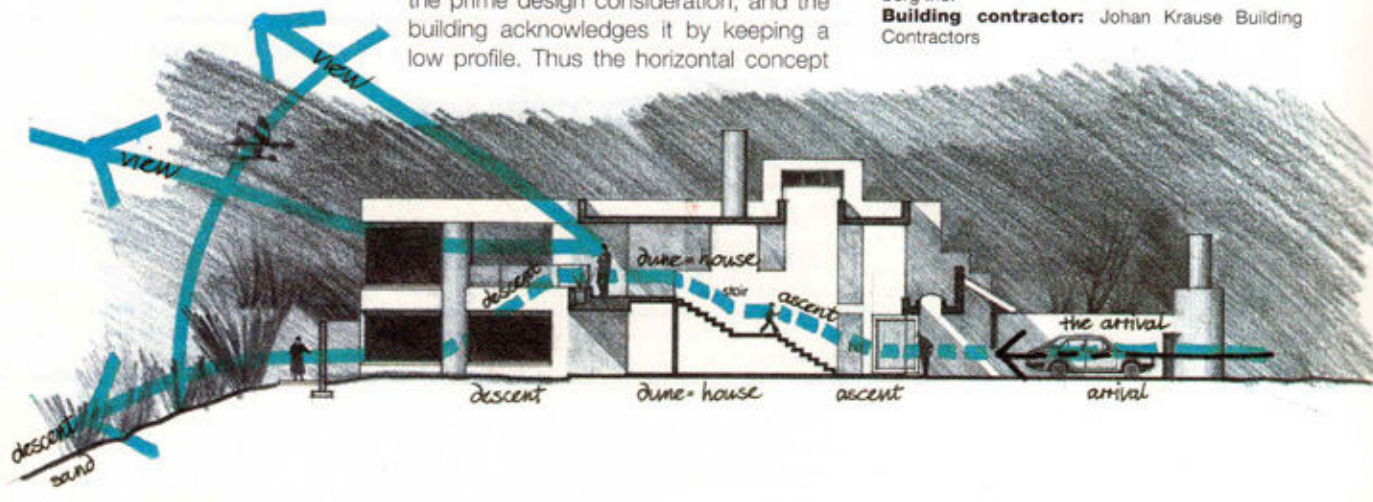
Left: The low profile on the dunes above the sea. Above: Plan of first floor. Below: Sketch plan, section A-A.

east side of the covered terrace pays homage to Robberg Nature Reserve and also serves as an aerodynamic diverter of the Southeaster.

Structural engineer: Bruinette Kruger & Stoffberg Inc.
Building contractor: Johan Krause Building Contractors

House Dippenaar, Plettenberg Bay

The brief called for a holiday house with maximum exposure to the view. Suitability for informal living was of prime importance. The 686 m² site of disturbed dune required three metre deep founda-



Left: Sectional drawing, House Ferreira
Below: The Diaz cross picked up in ceramic work by Dina Prinsloo



House Ferreira, St Francis Bay a 424m² building on a 1360m² site

The St Francis Bay Council requires houses to have thatched or black/grey tiled roofs a minimum of 45° in pitch, and white exterior walls with no colour usage. The clients required a maximum of sea view, spacious volumes and where possible, exposure to thatch in the main living areas. Other requirements were timber shutters on the ground floor for privacy, and security when the house is not occupied; a wind-free courtyard and maximum wind protection on the covered terrace along the seafront; six bedrooms with additional bunks provided and separate guest accommodation.

The Diaz cross planted on a sandy beach always has been a strong image for me. The symbol of two intersecting lines is man's most ancient means of defining a point, a place.

In this house the two intersecting lines of the cross define the most important space, and at this central point of intersection, the highest point in the volume, it is punctuated by a tall

chimney of two fires, one inside and one outside, the true heart and hearth.

Movement through this space is on two levels and in many directions: on the ground floor the space is criss-crossed from the covered terrace to the open courtyard, from hall to stair, and from kitchen to family room; on the first floor a wooden bridge links the family rooms across the main space.

The long arm of the cross indicates the directionality of the design – always pointing seaward. It stresses the importance and the luxury of a seafront property, making the sea view almost sacred. The seaward direction is emphasized further in the linear approach from the sleeper paving at the front door, through the main central space and down the dune on the wooden stairway to the rocks. Arrival had to be exciting, and anticipation had to explode inside the huge volume, with the sea beckoning lower down.

The bridge crossing the central volume is a design device to obtain maximum

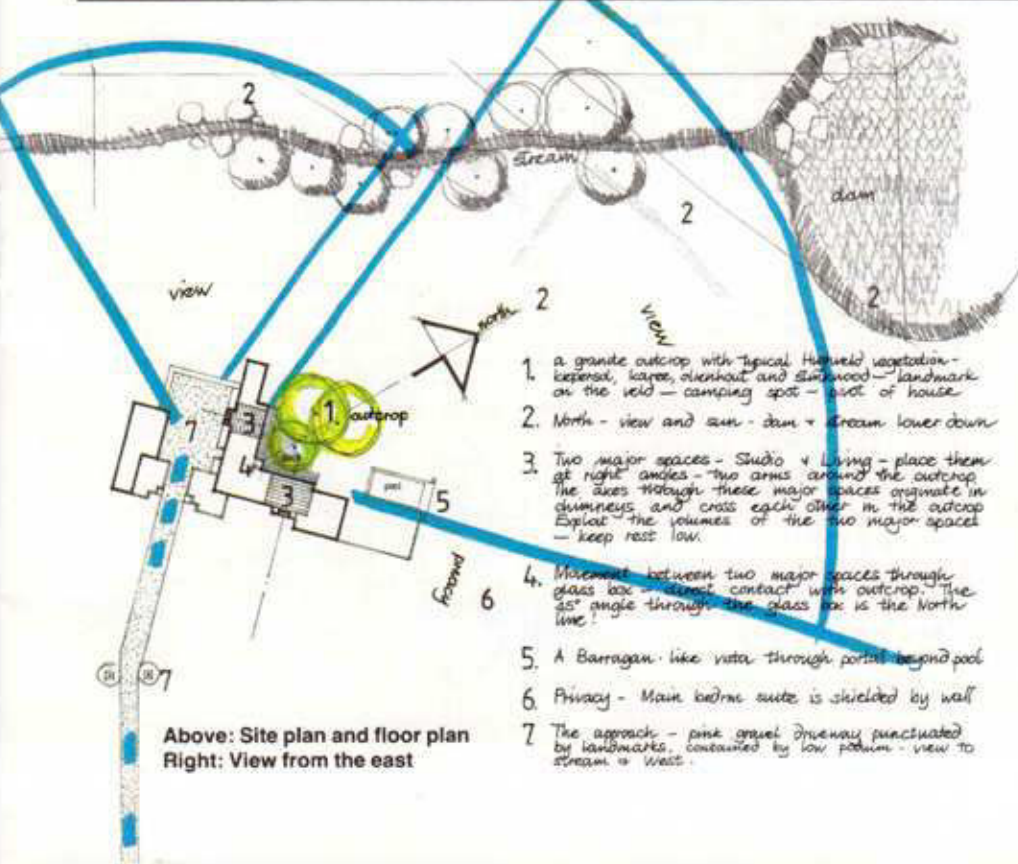


exposure to the thatch in the living spaces (a problem with double storeys). The narrow window on the stair to the bridge makes the climb more exciting. With the narrow sea frontage of the site a double storeyed house was logical to maximise the view.

The gable ends could not be softly rounded and hipped on the upright building – a more severe and angular gable end solution seemed appropriate, and so the thatch-

end problem was solved by the corbelled chimney-like parapet ends, almost figure-heads to a ship. That is how I drew my cross on the sand at St Francis Bay.

Structural engineer: Bruinette Kruger & Stoffberg Inc.
Building contractor: Boet Strydom



Above: Site plan and floor plan
Right: View from the east

A smallholding at North Riding – a 400m² house for two actors on 8,5 acres

Structural engineers: Fabcon
Building contractor: Matke Construction

