

# AN INSIDE VIEW

The Johannesburg home of art critic Lucia Burger is a balance of intimacy and scale

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## ART CRITIC'S HOME

In the dining room of Lucia Burger's Johannesburg home, two horse sculptures, one by William Kentridge and the other by Deborah Bell, are displayed on the table in front of a triptych by Terry Otopik.





‘We’re probably the only people in Northcliff who don’t have a view,’ says Lucia Burger, pouring Earl Grey into a small, Memphis-style teacup. The table is a slab of glass, detailed with a big white octahedron – the only feature on the large, shady patio of this Johannesburg art critic’s home. ‘We’ve worked with the same architect (Johan Bergenthuijs) on five homes, from Kimberly to Bloemfontein, and then three here,’ she explains. ‘So he knew pretty much what we needed when we built it.’

That was 15 years ago and, aside from little bits that have changed the impressive volumes, severe angles and slate floors, reminiscent of the Mexican architect, Luis Barragán, and the muted grey-toned walls – a canvas for Lucia and her husband Faan’s splendid and nuanced collection of South African art.

Although the architect especially maximised the northern views to keep out the harsh light, keep the house cool and protect the artworks, the southern views are almost tangible through the large expanses of glass, and so the indigenous vegetation of the koppie and koop pond become part of the interior. ‘You may miss the droll panorama of suburban sprawl beneath the diff, but this only highlights the drama and sensitive curating of what feels so much like a gallery as a home. In the living room, a massive Farel Nel drawing is set off against a newly acquired, suspended piece by Wim Botha – a cluster of bibles clamped together so that the pages spill out into fans. As often here, the juxtaposition of the works makes them all the more compelling.

You pay little attention to the furniture – classic black Le Corbusier chairs and a clean-lined sofa suffice for the sitting room, while a long steel table and set of Louis ghost chairs mark the dining area. The luxury of colour is reserved for the artworks: a large William Kentridge drawing, and then in the alcove that leads through to the gallery kitchen, a quirky mélange of original Fornsiet plates alongside those by Hylton Nel, some Kentridge cups and some early Clementina van der Walt works.

Despite her asymmetric haphazard and signal-red spectacle frames part decoration and part camouflage, she says, there’s something warm and earthy about Lucia, who was once art writer at *Die Beeld* and a judge on various high-profile art awards. Despite the abundance of it in the art world, Lucia abhors pretentiousness. As she tells me through each piece in her home it’s evident that it is the story being told by each artist that interests her most. ‘I wasn’t critical when I wrote,’ she recalls. ‘I felt there was such a lack of education about art that that was most important.’

At this stage of her life, Lucia is very clear about what’s important to her: exhausting every interesting exhibition on the calendar at documenta(13) in Kassel, where she and Faan are headed in June; art classes for her six grandchildren. She won’t, however, bother with superfluous home knick-knacks or fashion accessories. The world she’s created is strongly functionalist, leaving all the fantasy and delight to a 40-year-old art collection.

It is perhaps her beginnings in Kimberly that have made her so salt of the earth. She met Faan at 17, and he, too, has grown as passionate as she is about the art they collect, and they often entertain the artists whose work they buy. And yet, there is little sense of clutter in their home – each rich layered area is balanced with a minimalist canvas.

There is no mysterious reason as to why a couple from Kimberly should own one of the more comprehensive private local collections in the country – count in Walter Battiss, Alexis Preller and Eduardo Villa, if you’re in any doubt. It is simply a case of knowing what you love and making it an integral part of your life – and making sure to pay little attention to anything else. □

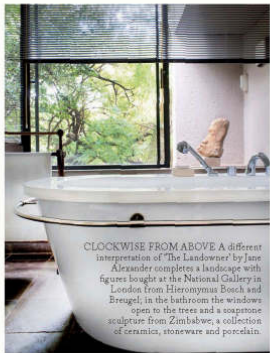


The staircase was inspired by Art Nouveau lines and made by Guy du Toit and David Rossouw. Mick Jagger's by Andy Warhol and a work by Kentridge complete the picture. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: the architect, Johan Bergenthuijs, enjoys the morning light with artworks by Walter Battiss, Andries Botha and a clay baby by Willem Craiser in the living room; white walls in the study carry colourful paintings by Robert Hodgins.

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The entrance hall has a gallery-like feel with prominent works by William Kerec, Zander Blom, Robert Hodgins, Willem Boshoff and a smoke drawing of JM Coetzee by Diane Victor on display.





## LUCIA BURGER'S HOME TRUTHS

Luxury is when all my interests and passions come together and I can share it with someone I care about. My favourite thing about our home is the spatial qualities, the light and the fact the trees and birds share it with us. I've always enjoyed that certain special people share my time and place on earth. This applies to artists who interpret my country with all its ups and downs, and the specific time we share in history. I don't like art that is not art: art in the park and art in malls. Style is the result of being very confident in who you are, what you appreciate and who or what you love. I was last inspired by a concerto I heard on Classic FM called 'Barber by Lovers' 'Vulva Concerto' by Chen Gang and He Zhaoshao. My favourite building is the Miho Museum near Kyoto, Japan, designed by IM Pei. It is, however, not just the building or its contents but the setting, and spiritual and philosophical importance of the visit that makes it unforgettable. I love furniture from any period that is well designed, functional and beautiful. My best investment artwork is a drawing by William Kentridge that we bought in 1987. I enjoy areas that are calm, minimal and still contrast with spaces that are rich and busy. My pet design hate is anything pretentious. If my house caught fire I would push the dog, Ming Foo, out of the door and run around like a mad woman trying to rescue as much of the artworks as possible. Buying objects or artworks that enrich your life is never rash.



ART CRITIC'S HOME

A 'nocturnal' drawing by William Kentridge and smaller works by Penny Siopis flank the bed. The cushion covers are by Judy Woodborne. ABOVE A view through the lounge where Ming Foo, the show-dog, keeps the owner company. The sculptures that complement a work by Karel Nel are by Peter Schuur, Wilma Cruise and Marco Cianfanelli.



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A glass passage links the kitchen and garden to the living areas. OPPOSITE, BELOW FROM LEFT Enhanced by the dappled light through the trees stands a work by David Brown, a sculpture by Eduardo Villa.