

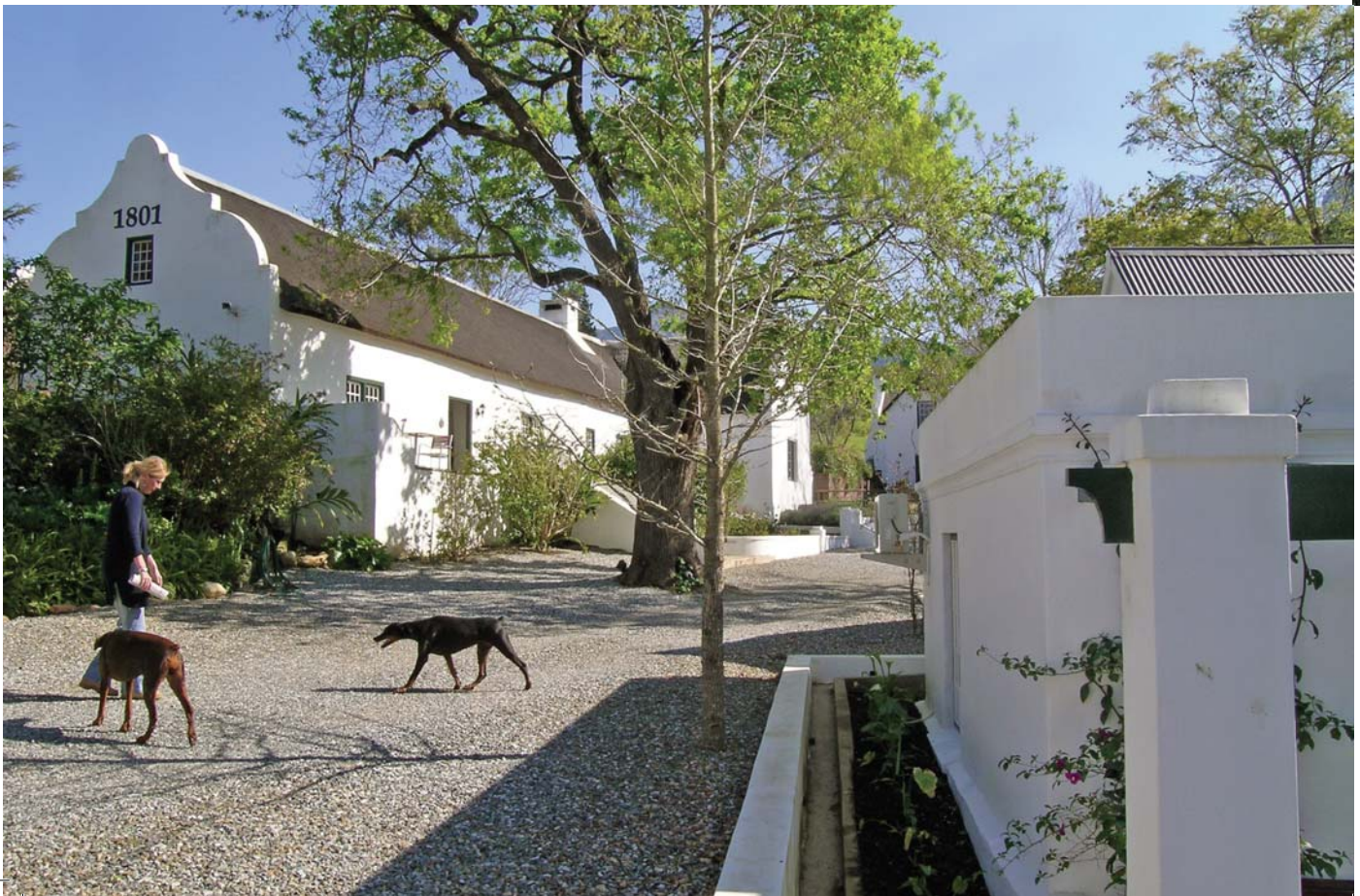
Converted to **Comfort**

by Alex Cremer

De Kloof Estate proves that a vintage home need not be dark and formal

THE impressive old place of De Kloof Estate is neatly tucked away in an almost hidden ravine in the heart of Swellendam. The main, Cape Dutch-style house is a National Monument, dating back to 1801, and it's flanked by two other buildings that seem to have been built much later.

One of these used to be a three-vehicle garage and workshop complex near the entrance to the property. This was built in the typical high-pitched, corrugated-iron roof style of around 1920, when motor vehicles became popular. The other was a weaving studio that the previous owners had created by radically altering and extending the original thatched coach house.





"When we bought the place just over two years ago, everything was structurally sound, but the general layout was not practical for the guesthouse complex we had in mind," say current owners Roy and Marjolein van Mourik. "But it took us a long time and a lot of work to convert De Kloof to provide upmarket accommodation plus a cosy home for ourselves."

At first Roy thought he would save time by employing contractors, but he soon realised the work progressed better with him supervising a dedicated group of casual labourers. To make sure everybody understood what had to be done, Roy drew chalk outlines on the existing walls to show where he wanted new windows and doors, basins and baths, drains, taps and electrical points.

The walls and thatched roof of the T-shaped main dwelling were in good condition, but some badly rotted window frames and sills, plus a few wide floorboards, had to be replaced. The rest of the original woodwork, including lovely yellowwood doors in stinkwood frames and the old ceiling beams and planks, needed just a thorough cleaning and preservative treatment.

The purposes of some rooms were altered, such as a bedroom on the left of the entrance hall, which was turned into a guest lounge, and the voorhuis opposite it, which is now the office. A wide opening links this with the living room, which the owners have kept intact as their private lounge.

opposite: Marjolein, with Fela and Samura, in the driveway to the main house.

above: Old oaks cast cool shadows across the historic De Kloof facade.

below: The old garage complex, now changed into two luxury guest suites.





From here a wide old door leads to a section that was added in around 1900 and which consisted of two small bedrooms flanking a tiny bathroom. This has now been changed into Roy and Marjolein's spacious en-suite bedroom.

"The only real problem we had in converting this section was with the new fireplace in our lounge," says Roy. "The actual fireplace wasn't the problem, but the chimney, which had to be a suitable old-fashioned shape. We also had to hunt for refractory bricks that looked like ones used long ago. And because of the thatched roof, it was important to put a spark arrester in it."

Reached through wide doors from the entrance hall, the dining room was left as it was, but the antiquated kitchen was completely modernised. All the electrics and plumbing were also upgraded. At the back and linked to the kitchen were a storeroom, laundry and guest toilet built in 1985, all of which were retained.

Despite a wild eclecticism that is richly influenced by both Europe and Africa, the mood inside the main house is of pared-down, superbly comfortable sensibility. Marjolein's professional interior design expertise has ensured that the decor stops well short of the clutter and large, overly ornate furniture normally associated with the old Cape era. She has introduced an interplay between rough and smooth textures set among subdued colours.

The inside of the three old garages near the front gate were changed into two guest suites in a more contemporary style. This was a massive task, aggravated by the need to install all new electrical and plumbing systems. Two of the original doors became entrances to these modern suites, but a lean-to workshop in front of the complex was dismantled to make way for a covered patio.

The inside of the double-storey, thatched weaving studio, which is situated some distance from the main house, was converted into two spacious and luxurious guest suites, plus a third, twin-level, two-bedroom family unit. The old carpets on the top floors were removed to reveal the lovely wooden floors. Only minor repairs were needed to restore some of the timber window and frame sections. A wooden stairway had to be installed and two new verandas built.

As the land is steep, most of the garden had already been terraced by previous owners. On the top level, behind the house, was a wonderful pool with a magnificent view towards the well known Twelve o'clock Peak in the towering Langeberg range. Here the old changing rooms were converted into a gym and a garden workshop. New surrounding walls were also built, and the concept extended in design and shape to other parts of the garden, which was upgraded by Marjolein.

"Everything was growing a bit wild when we moved here," she explains, "but we found a nice selection of well-established and flourishing classical roses, and I'm constantly

introducing more varieties. We did not like the casual and rather disordered look, so I made the garden more formal, filling the beds with mainly lavender, agapanthus, arum lilies and irises."

After the Van Mouriks and their 40 casual craftsmen had laboured for seven months, using up 20 tonnes of cement, 30 000 bricks and many truckloads of sand and stone, the required changes to De Kloof Luxury Estate were completed to perfection.

As it's a five-star guesthouse, everybody is welcome to stay over and see for themselves what handsome dividends the labours of this enterprising couple have reaped. 🐼

Map reference: G3 (see inside back cover)

De Kloof Luxury Estate: Roy and Marjolein, tel 028 514 1303, fax 028 514 1304, email info@dekloof.co.za

opposite from top: The cosy lounge of the twin-level, two-bedroom family suite.

The historic 1801 dwelling is reflected in a terraced garden pool.

The sparkling swimming pool with views of the Langeberg range.

below left: An original bedroom is now this cosy guest lounge off the entrance hall.

'everything was growing a bit wild when we moved here'



The dedicated group of casual labourers tackling the alterations.