



# ORGANIC LUXE

Jo'burg architect Nico van der Muelen and the M Square Lifestyle Necessities have teamed up to design an estate home that successfully combines glossy opulence with earthy texture

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THIS PAGE: The ground floor features an open-plan living area that combines living, dining and kitchen spaces – seamlessly opening onto a terrace

**F**irst-time visitors to Jo'burg are often caught off-guard by the city's high-gloss sophistication – particularly with the stark contrast to its location on a continent long celebrated for its natural spirit. When used in design, the use of contrast, successfully applied, can create an edgy and unique look. But there's a very fine line between design hero and design zero, and balance is crucial. Too many glossy elements and the result might swing towards over-the-top Liberace-style dazzle. Too many earthy aspects, and you'll have the 'ethno-bongo Afro-curio' look, à la Greenmarket Square.

This Johannesburg home, located on a suburban golf estate, is happy in Africa, as well as with its place in the global design village. The home's visual success is due to its perfectly balanced application of earthy textures against high-gloss finishes, and raw material against refined elements.

'The brief,' says architect Nico van der Meulen, 'was to create a stylish family home with ecologically sound design that maximised indoor-outdoor living to take full advantage of Johannesburg's legendary eight-month summer.'

By happy coincidence, it made perfect sense to apply the creative energies of Van der Meulen on this project. It is, after all, a family home, and the Van der Meulens run a tight-knit series of complementary family businesses: Nico heads up Nico van der Meulen & Associates architects; his son, Rudolph, and his wife Santa run its affiliated interiors company, M Square Lifestyle Necessities. His other son, Regardt, is an artist. With the exception of M Square's showrooms in Illovo and Dunkeld, the family lives and works in a new-generation compound, perfectly positioning them as real-life experts on the practical interpretation and application of space.

Says Van der Meulen, 'It's a double-storey home with an open-plan living area downstairs, an upstairs pyjama lounge, a study, and four bedrooms, all of them en suite. Three family bedrooms are upstairs, and we positioned the guest room downstairs, separating it from the family's sleeping area to maximise privacy.'

The home combines the use of rock, steel, wood and glass – classic modernist design elements remixed for new applications. The front of the home features a rusted-steel-clad wall, cleverly mounted on tracks so that it slides back to reveal the garage. Visual continuity is provided through the use of rusted-steel finishing on the garage and upper-level window frames.



Wood is used on the home's walkway and its bathroom flooring.

'There's a Balau wooden walkway from the street to the front door, which carries you over a koi pond that fronts the house, and the master bathroom also has a Balau wooden-floor decking,' says Van der Meulen, 'so when you slide back the glass doors onto the terrace, it visually creates one unified space. It's also very easy to keep clean. We've avoided the use of tiles in the bathrooms, opting instead for back-sprayed glass. For the kids' room, we've used lime green to add some visual punch.'

Visual lift is also provided through the use of sculptures by Regardt, and artist Ronel Jordaan's world-famous Merino-wool felt pebbles. It's little visual treats such as these that inform the home's many X-factors, lifting it above the mundane. Every turn of a corner provides the eye with a discreet visual delight that's almost Japanese in its subtlety, from the use of raked plaster in a wall application and the hidden-access pantry in the kitchen to the fireplace surround clad in granite panels and the pyjama lounge's floating ceilings.

The home's lower level interacts with the back garden's pool and dining terrace through the use of floor-to-ceiling slide-back glass walls that create a seamless interactive space. A kitchen window-hatch opens onto the braai area, providing an almost a modern twist on the old-school roadhouse.

'It's an ecologically smart home,' says Van der Meulen, 'with a two-foot-thick, stone-clad western wall serving as a heat absorber while providing visual kick. Likewise, the home's windows are recessed, with overhangs that are strategically cantilevered to catch the sun during the winter months, while blocking it in the summer. Similarly, the home has sun-control fins to cut out the summer sun. The ceiling is Chromadek and timber, which also provide insulation.'

When viewed from the street, the home's central core is transparent, bookended by imposing solid shapes on either side; you can look right through it onto the *vlei* and the golf course beyond its back garden.

Ultimately, the home's environment informs its location – not its design or décor. Above all, it provides a subtle sense of understated glamour through its visual accents, successfully combining with the hassle-free maintenance of its durable building materials and maximised indoor-outdoor living application – a winning trilogy that's perfect for modern living. ©



**OPPOSITE:** The children's bathroom contrasts Balau wooden floor decking against glass back-sprayed walls. **THIS PAGE, FROM TOP:** The home's exterior emphasises texture through the use of glass, wood and rusted steel; the central living area's interior is protected by mahogany fins that are designed to filter out the sun during the summer months; the master bedroom features floor-to-ceiling slide-back doors, allowing the outdoors in, while maximising sight-lines