

WINTER 2003 SOUTH AFRICA

# ELLE

WINE  
TWO MIELE  
WASHING  
MACHINES  
WORTH  
R22 000

# DECORATION

N°27

R24.95 (incl. evc)  
NAMIBIA  
N\$23.13 (incl. taxes)  
OTHER COUNTRIES  
R26.60 (incl. taxes)

**ECO-FRIENDLY LIVING** GREEN ARCHITECTURE,  
RECYCLING MADE EASY, ORGANIC DESIGN AND INDOOR HERB GARDENS  
**ONE-POT WONDERS** FIRESIDE FOOD TO SHARE  
**AT HOME AND ABROAD** A BUSH WALKING SAFARI, SPAIN'S BEST KEPT SECRETS

# THE EARTHY ISSUE

70 PAGES OF GREEN SPACES AND INTERIORS TOUCHED BY NATURE



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home CAPE TOWN



Elements of

# NATURAL PROGRESSION

**BUILT ON TRADITIONAL VALUES AND WITH OODLES OF CREATIVE FLAIR,  
THIS STRAW-BALE HOUSE IS TESTIMONY TO THE FAMILY THAT BUILT IT**

TEXT EMMA ATKINSON PRODUCTION KERRYN DU PREEZ PHOTOGRAPHS WARREN HEATH

The couch is a neutral palette for cushions that tell a story (the fourth one from the left was made using an old skirt belonging to a friend of Karen's). The birdcage is home to two more members of the family – a pair of lovebirds

OPPOSITE The fireplace, painted with Earthcote's 'Bantry Quartz' 4250939, is a work in progress – a flue is still to come. The bench is a Karoo find, while the three photographs on the built-in mantelpiece were part of a documentation for Woman's Day taken by Karen









MENTION STRAW-BALE HOUSING AND MOST PEOPLE WILL BE CONJURING UP A HEY shoo-wow picture along with images of drumming circles and sandalwood incense sticks. Not so for the Suskins. They may have lived in a tipi before building their Noordhoek refuge, and it may have been a communal effort, but there is nothing contrived about their lifestyle. In fact, their reverence for natural sustainable materials and their appreciation and use of nature's bounty is downright inspiring. Karen and Anthony Suskin and their three children (Joshua, 18; Keziah, 12; and Josiah, 9) have the enviable task of making this two-storey building their home.

Situated in Noordhoek, it's a barn-like space that seems to glow, both inside and out. Karen is convinced that this is due in part to the very building blocks of their dwelling: the 400 or so flaxen-coloured straw bales that lie beneath the clay-packed and Earthcoted walls. Multi-talented Karen creates clothing (textiles are an obsession) and even bakes her own bread. She's one of those women who derive immense pleasure in creating a home – without the Martha Stewart-esque plasticity. This is also reflected in her work as an interiors consultant where she eschews implementing the latest decor trends and rather works to help people reveal their personal stories through their surroundings.

The opus began nearly four years ago with Anthony, a land surveyor, leading a team consisting of the couple, their children, the children's grandparents, a local workforce in the week (clay-building expert Simon Mpahlwa, carpenter Gustav Schilbach with helpers Jackie and Charlie Mfazwe and Rasta, and stone mason Norman Setswana) and included friends on the weekend. Everyone was rewarded for all their efforts with wholesome and hearty Sunday lunches. Anthony, who now consults on similar projects, worked closely with architect Etienne Bruwer at a time when straw-bale housing was still in its relative infancy in South Africa. As a result the building was a learning process for both parties, and solving problems (like finding environmentally-friendly wood sealants), occurred on a trial-and-error basis.

At first the family lived in a small structure on the property that is now a storage facility. Most families would go crazy living in such close confines, but for the Suskins it was a growth process where each family member contributed to the evolution of their home with their own observations and suggestions. What better way to develop an environment where memories are created and stored for posterity than to build the walls of your home yourself?

The downstairs area consists of the main living space, where kitchen, dining and sitting room

OPPOSITE 'Aggie' the aga has moved to three homes and heats the home in the colder months.

The interior's clay-packed walls were kept in their natural state

ABOVE LEFT A food-loving family is revealed in a collection of sturdy chopping boards and a much-used Indian skillet found in Durban

ABOVE RIGHT The-fitted-and-partly-freestanding kitchen section of the room has had many group-effort culinary experiences





are one. Upstairs are Keziah and Josiah's enormous sleep and play areas and Karen's studio, packed with pieces of fabric collected far and wide. The couple used to live upstairs, but have since created a cosy and intimate space downstairs. Josh at 18, needs his space and lives in his own wooden dwelling on the property.

They have lived in the home for 18 months now, but Karen points out that the dwelling is a work in progress (there are plans to add sleeping houses), a growing tapestry of their lives. The electric cables, for example, are still exposed – Karen couldn't find light switches she really liked so decided to wait until the right ones came along. 'It would be extremely difficult for us to live in an environment that is not constantly evolving,' says Karen.

The interior, too, is a reflection of the ever-changing outside world. In spring, flowers are everywhere, shoved into mismatched and much-loved vases, while in the colder months the Aga is hard at work, warming up and filling the double-volume space with the comforting aroma of baking bread. 'We spend a lot of time together as a family and celebrating the seasons with food and friends is part and parcel of our lives,' says Karen. This home is the sweet fruit of their labour. ■

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OPPOSITE The beams in Josiah and Keziah's light-filled upstairs room were painted with environmentally friendly Envirotouch 5526834  
THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The family often congregate in the bathroom to share its two tubs and catch up on their busy lives; this ornate dressing table is Karen's place for her daily two minutes of meditation and moisturiser; layered with French linen, the daybed in a sunny corner of the bathroom is Karen's favourite spot for some downtime

