

PAST



01

**A RENOVATED 1820S FARMHOUSE NEAR KLAARSTROOM** IN THE FOLDS OF THE SWARTBERG PROVIDES A TEXTBOOK EXAMPLE OF HOW TO MARRY OLD AND NEW. FOR ARCHITECT MARIELISE VAN DER MERWE, IT'S BEEN A DREAM PROJECT.

PHOTOS JAN RAS PRODUCTION SUMIEN BRINK  
WORDS LAURIAN BROWN

FORWARD





arielise

van der Merwe's husband Adriaan bought Gideonshoop four years ago: "somewhere to have a bit of peace and do a bit of farming", she explains. The farm lies just west of Meiringspoort, deep in the folds of the Swartberg, where the Aapsrivier has carved its own, more modest way down the north slopes. The road to the farm winds with the river through grey Karoo scrub and the occasional sliver of floodplain, greened with pasture, seed onion and lucerne.

"When he saw the house, my husband knew I would be happy because I would have plenty to do!" Indeed. The old farmhouse, a simple T-shaped structure with straight-end gables and tacked-on additions, was derelict. But within its cottage-like exterior there were treasures: yellowwood floors and ceilings, handcrafted doors, and classic fanlights and wall cupboards.

"A lot of people told us to just flatten it and do something from scratch, but I love old things as well as new, and my first thought was that I absolutely wanted to keep the soul and the feel of the house. But I also wanted to make it comfortable to live in and add something modern to it."

So began a painstaking process of restoration and redesign. The house faced east and needed more sun as well as shelter from the prevailing south wind. Adding a replica of the original north-facing bedroom wing achieved both, and the space between the two wings created an attractive entrance courtyard. The roof was simplified to create a single continuous line along the main axis, and the height was raised to allow for the necessary slope over a new stoep, where the original double door and sash windows were left in place.

To the materials and patterns of the original structure Marielise added a completely modern theme. At its north end, the rustic lines of the old house have been boldly redrawn to create a new living, dining and kitchen area in an airy extension of glass and aluminium that celebrates the space and light of the setting. It is strikingly contemporary, and shows the subconscious influence of Australian architect Glenn Murcutt – Marielise practised as an architect in Sydney for years.

Painted a soft, warm grey, the house blends quietly into the landscape. And the harmony is not merely visual. It's also designed to "touch the earth lightly" and be as energy-efficient as possible. Double glazing,

and cross-ventilation via large sliding doors are among of the measures Marielise has used for temperature control. Water heating is via solar energy and slow combustion fires warm the living area in winter.

Architects spend their working lives interpreting the wants of clients. "It was nice to do something for myself for a change," Marielise says. But the Van der Merwes are not keeping this stylish retreat to themselves. The house now serves as a farm lodge for the newly established De Aap Private Nature Reserve, a perfect place to enjoy and explore this as-yet-little-known corner of the Karoo. **V**

- **Deaap Farm Lodge & Nature Reserve: [deaapfarmlodge.co.za](http://deaapfarmlodge.co.za)**
- **Simplicitas Architects: [simplic@iafrica.com](mailto:simplic@iafrica.com)**



"I ABSOLUTELY WANTED  
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#### PREVIOUS SPREAD

- 01** Marielise, sitting at a Scandinavian-style oak dining table specially made for the open-plan living area by Fechtters in Knysna.
- 02** In the original living room, the restored yellowwood floor and ceiling frame an eclectic mix of Scandi, antique and family furniture. The round Ax table is a 1950 Danish piece by Peter Hvidt and Orla Mølgaard-Nielsen for Fritz Hansen, from Jeremy Stephens Antiques in Parktown. In the room beyond, a Wayne Barker painting hangs against a lilac-mauve wall. The orange pendant light is a 1967 Turbo by Louis Weisdorf, sourced by Jeremy Stephens Antiques.

#### THIS SPREAD

- 01** Marielise has indulged her love of colour in paint and furnishings. The coat rack in the entrance hall is a replica of a 1953 George Nelson design for Eames Furniture USA, and the purple glass pendant light is a 1979 Danish original designed by Michael Bang for Holmegaard glassworks, sourced by Jeremy Stephens Antiques.
- 02** Old and new, wattle and daub, glass and aluminium, flow into one another under a continuous roofline. Along the front of the house, the original double doors of the living room open onto a new deep stoep. The new section is an open-plan living, dining and kitchen area with sliding doors.

Visit [VISI.co.za](http://VISI.co.za) to see before and after photos of the house.



01 Some of the most striking pieces of the Van der Merwes' collection of South African art have found a home at Gideonsoop. Two 3 m-high charcoal drawings by Diane Victor are displayed to perfection in the light-filled double-volume kitchen area.

02 The quiet monochrome of the extension is warmed with the sparkle of mosaic and pops of colour. An old fanlight inset with the name Gideonsoop glows above the double door. The plush sofa and coral suede ottoman were made by Fechters, and the gold and geometric tiles on the face of the 5 m-long counter are from Douglas Jones. Behind the central counter, the Mondrian-inspired steel-and-glass sliding doors of the spacious larder were designed by Marielise. The light fitting above the counter is made from the side of an ox-wagon.

03 The old Aga stove, in its original alcove, has been restored to full working order. A brass Kohler tap on the kitchen counter adds a modern note.

## "I LOVE OLD THINGS AS WELL AS NEW."





THE AIRY EXTENSION OF GLASS AND ALUMINIUM IS **STRIKINGLY CONTEMPORARY AND LINEAR.**

01 Double-glazed sliding doors help to keep the new living area cool in summer and warm in winter. A giant freestanding slow-combustion wood-burning stove also heats the space. Finishes have been kept simple throughout, such as plain screed for floor surfaces both in- and outdoors. Alongside the lap pool, an old ploughshare has become a sculpture.



*We love!*

01





**01-02** The new bathrooms continue the comfortable mix of old and new. In this en suite added to one of the original bedrooms, blue-and-white tiles and an antique mirror combine happily with the Mondrian-inspired frosted-glass-and-steel shower and toilet screens. Fittings are all simple brass taps and copper piping. Copper washbasins from Copper Bath in Cape Town add an unusual touch. The mirrors are all from Karoo Antiques in Oudtshoorn.

**03** Of the four bedrooms, the two original ones are laid out in a similar symmetrical arrangement, with the bed against a screen wall, beyond which lies the bathroom. The artwork is a Diane Victor charcoal and the rug is a Norman Catherine design.

## THE HARMONY IS NOT MERELY VISUAL.



