

a new home a new life

So much more than just a house, this bold private home in Nelspruit represents a fresh start for owner Marianna van Wyk as she creates a new life on her terms...

Words Dianne Tipping-Woods **Photos** Anthon Wessels





This house situated on a lofty stand in The Rest in Nelspruit, is part sanctuary and part adventure for owner Marianna van Wyk. "When you are older, people get these broekie lace ideas in their heads, but I wanted a house I could flourish in," explains the vivacious 66 year old.

Moving to Nelspruit from Centurion in Gauteng, the nurse turned landscape designer was leaving behind a long career in the Defense Force, an ex-husband and all her preconceptions of what a house – and a life – should look like. "When I first met architect Klippie du Toit from EarthSwitch Architects, I thought 'he's so young!' It soon became apparent though that there was a wonderful synergy between his vision and hers and now, "this modern house fits me perfectly," notes Marianna.

Her initial turmoil was linked to her decision to invest almost everything she had in the property, so there was no room for later regret. On Klippie's advice, she wrote a wish list of the things she wanted. "I wanted plenty of glass so I never have to turn on a light during the day. I wanted a high ceiling so I have a feeling of space around me. I wanted to sit in the bath and be able to see and hear the birds. I wanted a roof to garden. I wanted a sky light so I could see the clouds and the stars. I wanted detail, beauty, class..."



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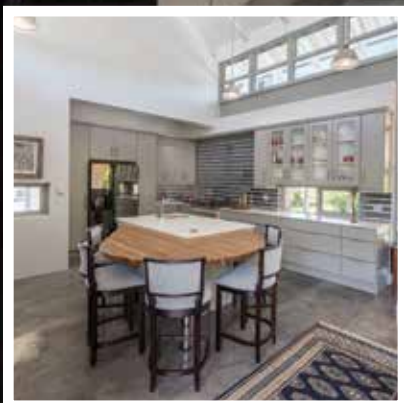
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The result is a manifestation of Marianna. It's a home infused with her character, reflecting her interests and channeling her creativity. The house is 265m², with two bedrooms with full en-suite bathrooms, a guest bathroom, an open plan living area including kitchen and separate scullery, a study/studio space, a loft, double garage and three covered exterior patios. Talking about it, her enthusiasm is contagious. Every detail is cherished and celebrated as an act of emancipation and an exploration of herself, her hopes and her dreams for this next phase in her life.

"Look at this staircase, built like a sculpture. I have a piece of art now instead of just some old concrete stairs," she says, showing off the beautifully designed access to her roof garden. "And the western wall. It's a rammed earth masterpiece. It may be the most beautiful part of the house. I still want to make a little space here to sit and enjoy it."

The multi-level garden gives her particular joy. She designed the paving work and landscaping herself and has big plans for the beautiful beds she has created, with small garden courtyards between the rooms and a large garden space above the double garage because, "in this climate, everything just grows!"

The inside of the house also delights. Most of the rooms get natural light from at least two sides. In the bathrooms, the boxes under the sink are on wheels and the various seating slabs dotted around the house hover over the glistening floors. The roof has been lifted to accommodate clear story windows at wall-plate level, and to create a seemingly floating roof from certain angles. These elements are complemented by plenty of grounding woodwork, and the clay bricks from the entrance, which are repeated throughout – adding warmth to the coolness and some earth to the sky.

Balance is an important principal throughout the house and in



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Marianna's life. For the house, it's created through the materials, the lines of the buildings, the light grey palette and the mix of old and new in the furnishings. Decorated by Marianna with input from Klippie, there are a surprising number of sentimental pieces that have been transformed to fit within the modern space. "Klippie had to design a wall especially to accommodate my old stinkwood cupboards," explains Marianna. The piece that didn't fit was repurposed as a TV stand. The little stove on the stoep has travelled with her for more than 40 years and the Tamboti furniture on the stoep used to belong to her mom.

Near the kitchen, two more recent acquisitions add meaningful detail to the home. Prints by Congolese artist Maludi depict scenes from the Democratic Republic of Congo where Marianna spent a transitional year. It's significant that she hangs them in what she calls "the heart of the house." Marianna loves to cook and have guests over. The custom-designed 'packman' table is a clever extension to the kitchen counter and serves as an elegant dining area without taking up too much space.

The house is also extremely low maintenance, practical and very secure, despite the 'openness' of the design. It features bio-climatic design principles, such as orientation and window placement, to allow for natural cooling and heating, and natural ventilation. Corrugated water tanks supply toilets with flush-water and one tank supplies water to the garden.

"Everyone who comes to my home notes how different it is, despite adhering to the barn-style architectural guidelines on The Rest Estate," says Marianna. It has an incredible energy to it, with the promise of both comfort and surprise. Speaking to Marianna, it's clear that building this house has been life-changing. "I am Marianna. I am my own person. And this is my house."

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Marianna's little black book

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