



The structure of the beautifully manicured front garden complements the balanced symmetry presented by the house's facade

# Sun SEEKER

Through a contemporary renovation, this heritage home in one of Joburg's oldest suburbs capitalises on year-round sun and a verdant landscape

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## with

the right orientation, fenestration and savvy planting choices, you can actually outsmart winter in Johannesburg altogether. And, when you've bought in one of the city's most sought-after garden suburbs, where trees soar like monuments, vast gardens unfurl and historic hilltop homes abound, hacking the seasons makes for near-perfect living conditions.

Having bought their property in 2009 from late interior decorator Krysia Back, Jackie and Deon Wilken were drawn to its pristine 1930s heritage features and sprawling garden. The latter, amounting to nearly 4 500 square metres of green was, in and of itself, an exceptional feature.

When they finally embarked on their renovation almost eight years later, it was light and warmth that they yearned for most. Tip-toeing around strict heritage guidelines, their changes included enlarging the home to the rear and above to accommodate four bedrooms, creating a large communal node for cooking, eating and gathering and moving the driveway, which had previously divided house and garden.

The new layout exists as an ode to the sun. Almost entirely glazed along the western and northern elevation, the kitchen, living and dining room collectively act as a sun trap. Where new and old meet, the U-shaped layout embraces a small gravelled

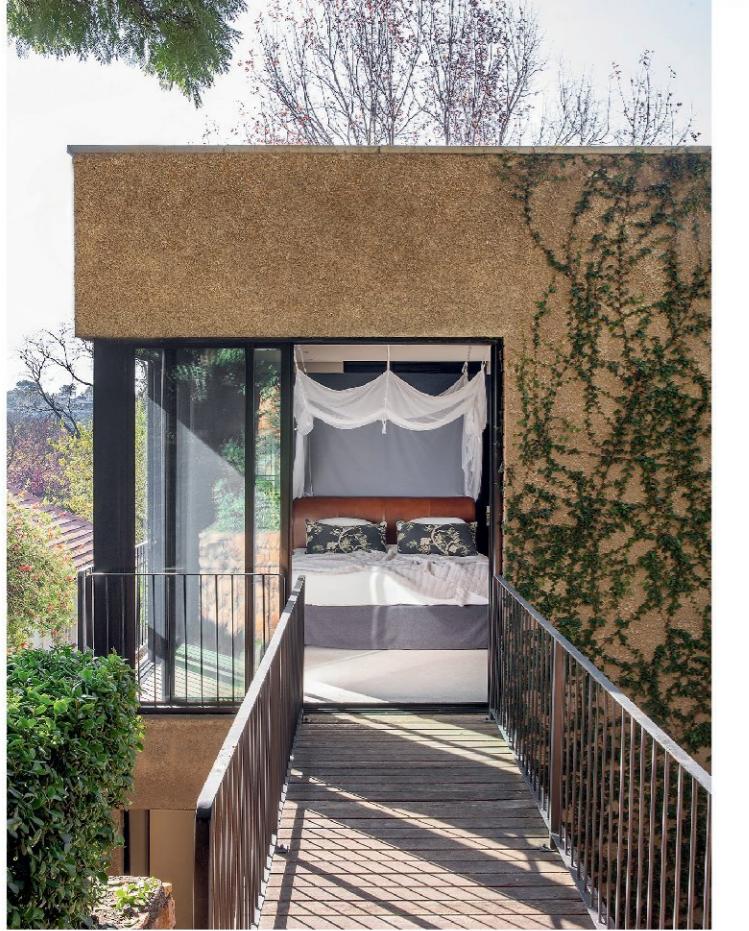
courtyard endowed with an established pin oak, potted shrubs and a dining table.

Once an inconsequential yard that fringed the original driveway, this space, according to Jackie, is arguably the home's biggest triumph, manifesting as a sunny core throughout the seasons. "When the doors are pulled back, it feels more like a patio," Jackie notes. Having waved off suggestions of removing the oak, the tree now towers well above the new roof line. In its winter bareness, it allows the hot afternoon sun to creep deep into the adjacent spaces. Come spring and summertime, the oak's new green coat filters the harsh west heat.

Rather than pass the new build off as homogenous, the extension is markedly contemporary with razor-sharp borders, streamlined aluminium windows and little decoration, manifesting as a floating white box with a generous arched entrance. Tempering this contrast is a blanket of tickey creeper, proliferating along the stippled plaster façade, softening the new and knitting in the old.

To the rear, the slope climbs steeply, forming part of Westcliff's characteristic rocky koppie. In honour of this exceptional view into gargantuan trees and hill-hugging foliage, the couple boldly chose to face their own bedroom south. What they lack in sunlight in this one instance, they gain in a sylvan panorama of tumbling greenery and a bedroom with genuine sanctuary status. "Looking out from our bedroom, it's hard to believe I'm in the city," remarks Jackie.

A shrewd bargain hunter with a penchant for old bamboo, Jackie has accumulated most of her furniture from second-hand markets such as Gumtree and Marketplace. This graciously ▶



**ABOVE** In winter, the courtyard functions as a sun trap, enveloping the adjoining dining room in warmth. The table is from The Crown Collection and the bamboo chairs were bought from a restaurant closing down

**LEFT** From the main bedroom, a secluded terrace in the back garden can be accessed via a bridge

**RIGHT** The formal living area forms part of the existing heritage house, featuring cottage pane bay windows. On the walls, Plascon's Fat Alley Cat establishes a sense of drama and intimacy





**OPPOSITE PAGE** The contemporary extension situated at the back of the home takes the form of a white box that gives the illusion of floating on another structure clad in tickey creeper

**ABOVE** In the kitchen, two bespoke pendant light fittings enhance the high ceilings and work with the island to anchor the space

**TOP RIGHT** Crittall-style doors establish an understated and elegant divide between the entrance and dining area

**RIGHT** Larger gatherings take place in the family room, which opens onto the courtyard. A Cara Saven print rests on a cabinet from Mavromac and The Gatehouse

**NEXT PAGE** The Sir Herbert Baker-designed desk in the study was bought on auction and the Palladian-style cabinets were inherited from the previous homeowner, interior decorator Krysia Back



understated mix includes classical and vintage pieces, comfy slipcovered armchairs, and a plethora of smalls that lend the interior provenance. She casually points out that her handsome antique dining table from The Crown Collection brings her just as much joy as the inexpensive cane armchairs (scored from a restaurant closing sale) that surround it.

In the 700 square metres of garden that stretch beyond the original checkerboard entrance, Jackie put her skills as a landscape designer to work. While the garden was formalised and well cared for, she switched out species that were unsuited to either the deep shade or the change of season for evergreen and hardy varieties like spekboom, viburnum, star jasmine and Indian hawthorn. A melange of greens all year round, her plantscape is organised into hedges and rows that give the garden structure but require little fuss. Having once been cautioned that her design changes would leave little room for artworks, Jackie quickly responded “My garden is my art. To me, it’s worth more than art.” ■

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*I was cautioned that my DESIGN changes would leave little room for art, but my GARDEN is my art.’*

JACKIE WILKEN

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