

Topped by a series of glass and solid cubes, the patio of this modernist Sandhurst, Johannesburg, home overlooks a sunken garden designed by landscape architect Patrick Watson.

licence to thrill

RESTRAINED OPULENCE AND UNCOMPROMISING QUALITY ARE THE HALLMARKS OF THIS QUIETLY SPECTACULAR SANDHURST HOME

TEXT TESS PATERSON STYLING LEANA SCHOEMAN PHOTOGRAPHS ELSA YOUNG

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t's a crisp Highveld day when architect Keith Mason from PWM Architects walks me through this extraordinary new build in a leafy Sandhurst, Johannesburg, enclave. The initial approach is unassuming, accessed via a narrow bamboo-clad driveway. Quite unexpectedly it opens up into a vast greened parking area topped with a futuristic panoply of off-shutter concrete. 'James Bond,' is my first reaction, followed by the happy certainty that I'm about to experience something eminently off the wall. Set on a 4 000m² site and completely sheltered by greenery, this labour-intensive project took three years to complete. 'My clients were living next door when they decided to buy this property,' explains Keith. 'It's a rare location in that each of the neighbours have spacious, treed gardens. You don't see a roofline anywhere and, despite being in the heart of a city, the sense of privacy is profound.' Once the sloping terrain had been levelled and the existing house demolished, the five-bedroomed home began to take shape.

The result is undeniably sculptural, a quality enhanced by Keith's choice of the off-shutter concrete for the walls, roof and beams. 'I like the plastic quality of this material and the way that you can cast it in curves,' he says. Keith contrasted the matt, unapologetically utilitarian finish with elements of smooth plaster, timber and steel. On the ground level granite-tile flooring with a hint of a speckle adds a flinty, stonelike permanence to the neutral shell.

'I think it's quite mysterious in that the design doesn't reveal itself immediately,' >

At the front entrance, concrete grass blocks create a practical green parking space. Clad in textured off-shutter concrete, the zigzag form contains an interior ramp which connects the ground and first floors.



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he says. 'The front view, for instance, is organic and sculptural with very few windows.' On the opposite side the expansive patio and bedroom suites above it form an elegant series of cubes – a combination of glass and solid boxes that are partially suspended on columns. Linking the two floors is a Z-shaped interior ramp. Sparse and gallerylike, it's an integral part of the home's logical, fluid layout.

Keith's interior concept evolved from the idea of a highly flexible living area that could be subdivided to suit his client's needs. At the heart of it all is the double volume living room – its height and sloping walls directing ever changing light into the space. Sliding doors create a seamless connection not only to the vast patio but to the adjacent dining room, kitchen, informal lounge and study. Opened up the effect is vast, serene and unfettered. For daily living the area adjusts effortlessly into smaller, contained spaces as required.

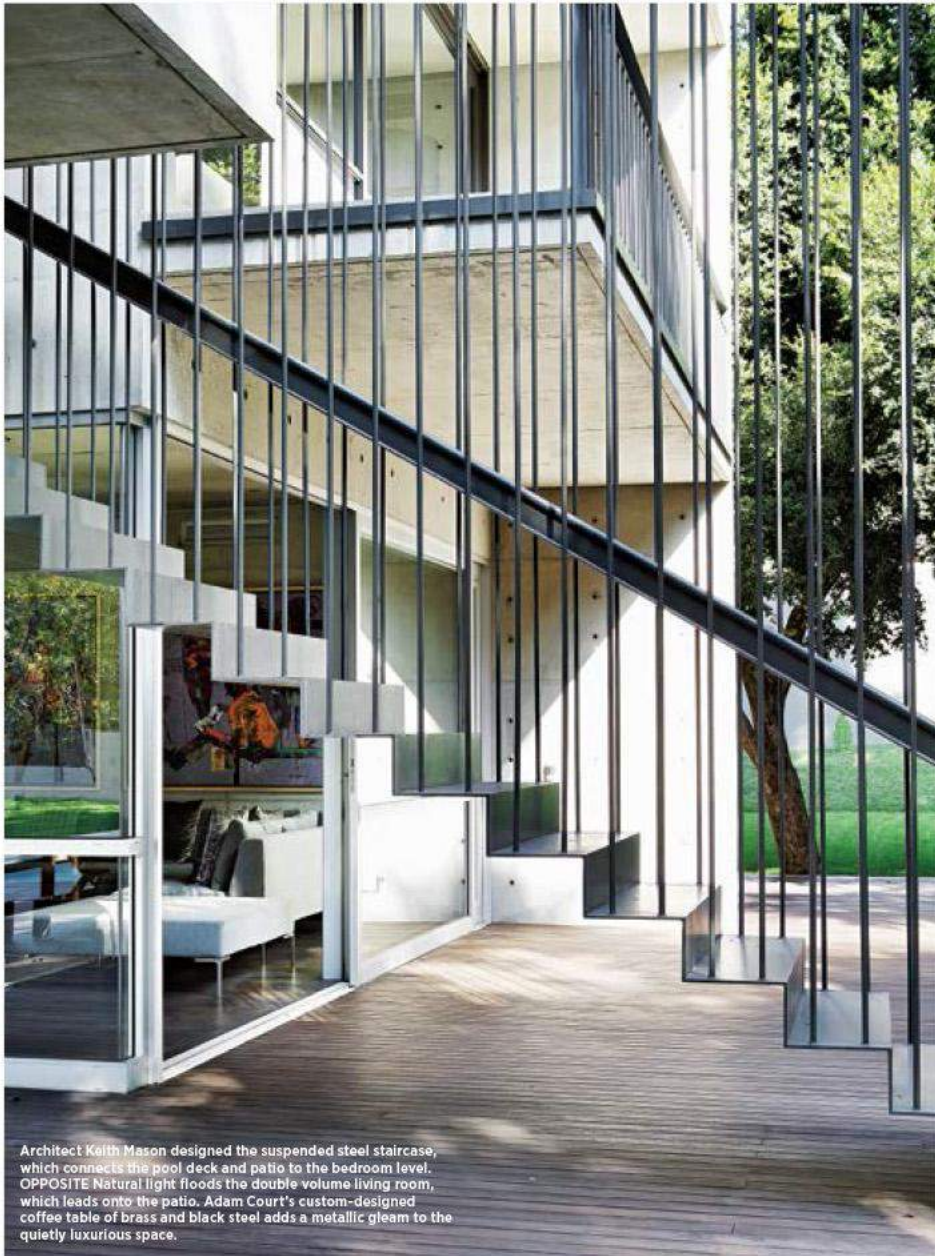
Once the building was complete the owners commissioned Adam Court of Studia, who was then a design partner at Antoni Associates, to create the bespoke interior. 'I was handed this blank canvas, which I found beautifully bizarre,' he says. 'It doesn't adhere to any rules and it makes a statement in an almost subliminal way.' Describing his approach as 'structured and formal,' Adam was responsible for designing every item of furniture. 'The interior architecture is such that nothing superfluous would have worked. I wanted to convey a sense of geometry and was absolutely rigorous with the furniture layout – each piece was designed to occupy a pre-determined spot,' he says.

Adam intentionally chose a 'lean' colour palette with subtle modulations from space to space. 'They're shadow tones and, together with the luxurious fabrics and matt and polished accents, create an opulence that's low-key rather than ostentatious,' he says. A series of custom carpets, woven in wool and silk, ground the living spaces, their crisp geometry echoing what he calls 'origami in a flat form'. 'This has to be one of my favourite projects,' he says. 'Our client was so decisive and trusting of our ideas. It's extremely satisfying when architecture and design synchronise so successfully.'

For Keith this is an original house, a restrained, practical space in which the owners can fully express themselves. 'It's not a fashion statement and there were no compromises,' he says. 'I think it will be here for a while.' ◻ PWM Architects, pwmmarch.co.za; Antoni Associates, aainteriors.co.za; Studia, studiadesign.com; Patrick Watson, 011-646-8970



Arik Levy's Wireflow 0299 chandelier for Vibla (available from Créma Design, cremadesign.co.za) adds a sketchlike quality to the dining-room space. The leather-covered chairs and solid-oak table were custom designed by Adam Court; the Grey Magic Antique granite tiles on the floor are from WDMAG (womag.co.za). OPPOSITE Adam Court's Throne chairs in charcoal-stained oak add a sculptural quality to the front entrance.



Architect Keith Mason designed the suspended steel staircase, which connects the pool deck and patio to the bedroom level. OPPOSITE Natural light floods the double volume living room, which leads onto the patio. Adam Court's custom-designed coffee table of brass and black steel adds a metallic gleam to the quietly luxurious space.



Q&A WITH ARCHITECT

KEITH MASON

What is the epitome of luxury? The freedom to do what you want. **What was the starting point of this design?**

To create a flexible living space that could be configured to accommodate change. **Whose work do you admire?**

I still love the work of Le Corbusier – he changed architecture forever. It's hard to come up with an idea that he didn't explore 60 years ago. Visiting Notre Dame du Haut, in Ronchamp, and the Couvent Sainte-Marie de La Tourette, near Lyon, was a revelation to me. **What's your favourite style of architecture?**

The work of the early modernists after World War I. It reflected an optimism for the future that is inspiring. **What did you love about this project?**

This was a very exciting project to work on as it provided us with the opportunity to do what we do best. Our client's trust in us allowed us to explore ideas and take chances. **Luxury is...**

relative; it is having more than one is used to. For me a Picasso in the living room would suffice! **What's your best way to spoil yourself?**

Travel; it's a luxury I can't get enough of. **What are some of your favourite shops?**

Hardware and stationery shops. Tools, paint, crayons – I'm a child at heart! **Which designers are on your radar?**

I have my eye on Azzedine Alaïa, who designs clothes how architects should design buildings. They are incredible, functional, sculptural works of art.



FROM TOP In the main bedroom the Kelvin LED table lamps in Shiny White by Antonio Citterio for Flos are from ELDC (eldc.co.za) and the wool-and-silk rug was custom-made; a ramp of stained oak and concrete connects the ground floor to the bedroom suites above. OPPOSITE The main bathroom has a triangular seating ledge and features a Ricera freestanding bath from OXO (oxosa.co.za).

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