



The gravelled drive announces your approach to the house with roses and fever trees on either side RIGHT Under vines, an outdoor breakfast spot feels like a slice out of the Italian countryside

## IN DETAIL

**What** Holiday cottage for a Johannesburg-based couple **Design roots**

Farm-style charm and classic country interiors with both South African and European roots

**Location** Near Barrydale



EURO COUNTRY-CHIC  
AND AFRO CASUAL MEET  
AMICABLY IN THE KAROO  
FOR A HOME THAT'S ALL  
ABOUT AUTHENTICITY  
AND THE ART OF LIVING

TEXT JULIA FREEMANTLE  
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# OUT OF AFRICA



In this oh-so local landscape the house itself has a look that can't be pigeonholed to any place in particular

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othing says South Africa quite like the Karoo. The Groot Karoo, in all its wide-open grandeur, is iconic, while closer to the Cape, the Klein is more Karoo-lite with a touch more green and, especially here bordering on the Overberg, gently rolling hills. It's here that you'll find a Gregory Mellor-designed holiday home where all

you can see in any direction are swathes of mountain and the heather-like scrubby fynbos so indicative of that terrain.

Interesting then that in this oh-so local landscape the house itself has a look that can't be pigeonholed to any place in particular. Low-slung, its profile is reminiscent of a Provençal country cottage despite being built of Karoo slate. There's also a suggestion of pared-back Belgian restraint à la Axel Vervoordt and Marcel Wolterinck, whose use of overscaling, slipcovers and neutral linens has definitely come into play, Mellor drawing from them their signature universally timeless look. And then, just to remind you where you are, a smattering of Cape pieces roots you in the surrounds.

Mellor's clients – a family from Joburg – gave him a lot of rope, making this a 'dream job' for the designer. After the initial work of replacing the roof, insulation and gutting the bathrooms, the owners' general guidelines included 'comfortable' and 'farmy', which the designer followed by avoiding an overly themed approach. Intentional imperfections give the space a homey feel, as though the house's contents had been collected over time. The bedroom is one such place, where mismatched floral fabrics give pieces an accumulated rather than bought feel. 'I wanted the impression to be of a floral armchair inherited from granny that doesn't quite match the bedspread but is charming precisely because of that,' explains Mellor. One ▶



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**  
 A quirky boot rack; fynbos and fever trees are the language of this landscape; a covered verandah offers the best of indoor and outdoor, earthily decorated with Malawian chairs and wooden tables; all along the mountain-facing façade of the house, Virginia creeper and wisteria grow up the slate; the kitchen's pizza oven, sturdy island and easy-access shelves make it a blissful space for the entertainer owner; roses in the forecourt flourish under the baking Karoo sun, planted in amongst herbs for a typical country kitchen garden; the verandah with its cosy armchairs and fireplace is an all-weather retreat; the raised outdoor dining area is breathtakingly dramatic  
**OPPOSITE PAGE** The kitchen's dresser and slipcovered dining chairs are more than slight references to Provençal living







The living room's linen-covered armchairs are a bright point in the room. A Mellor signature – animal skulls – fill a dresser, flanked either side by Kurt Pio herbariums featuring plants endemic to the area. Bleached tortoise shells form a very South African still life on the coffee table



Gregory Mellor has kept the tension just right with touches of polish, like the dark-brown-tinted screed floors, which are layered with Belgian sisal and Persian rugs

of the few specific requests was for ‘bits of yellow’, which have found their way into the interior via saffron-coloured easy chairs and assorted upholstery and a sunny Lacanche stove. The kitchen was a key area to get right – one of the owners is a passionate cook and so it needed to be kitted out accordingly. A pizza oven and a solid French oak James Mudge-designed kitchen island with a rough stone top, are hard-working accessories, but also look appropriately rustic. Copper pots hanging above the stove and wall-mounted shelves filled with Sarah Ord earthenware are a country kitchen epitomised.

Although rustic to an extent, throughout Mellor has kept the tension just right with touches of polish, like the dark-brown-

tinted screed floors, which are layered with Belgian sisal and Persian rugs – even in the bathrooms where copper tubs stand alongside showers without walls – or a bedroom, whose upholstered-and-studded headboard is Parisian chic to a riempie bench’s Cape casual.

The setting, though, is what takes this house from charming to truly spectacular. Announcing your approach to the house, a gravelled forecourt feels remarkably Italianate – formal planting of roses and herbs growing around a water feature. On the other side of the house, looking out towards the mountains, a covered verandah with a fireplace flanked by faded-rust-coloured armchairs and black Malawi chairs has slate underfoot and

rietdak overhead and generous arched windows, giving the landscape its due and providing almost all the decoration it needs. The owners wanted a second, properly outdoor, area – one tailor-made for unadulterated alfresco dining – and the long table seating 12 on a raised concrete platform right out in the open is about as magical a setting as you could wish for. ‘That was non-negotiable,’ says Mellor. The garden this side sees wisteria growing up the stonework and gravel gradually giving way to the natural vegetation: the bright-green fever trees, yellow fynbos and purple lavender a lovely metaphor for the harmonious mesh of styles and provenances.

■ Gregory Mellor [www.gregorymellor.com](http://www.gregorymellor.com)



A riempie bench and rietdak are hallmarks of many a Cape country house  
OPPOSITE PAGE FROM LEFT  
Persian carpets add softness to the glossy brown screed floors; a copper bath catches the sun in a bathroom that opens out onto the mountainside through generous arched doors