

ELE DECORATION

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BIGGEST DESIGN EVENTS



Nº 4

LOCATION BARRYDALE, SOUTH AFRICA
DESIGN ANTONIO ZANINOVIC, MARLON LEGGAT
WORDS KERRY N FISCHER
PHOTOGRAPHY ELSA YOUNG/FRANK FEATURES

SACRED SPACE

There are houses that borrow from their landscape, and houses that surrender to it entirely. This home, set beneath the Langeberg mountain range, is unmistakably the latter



Exterior The door, crafted from accoya with custom-made brass handles, opens into the cupola – a vaulted entrance hall that draws the eye through to the terrace and pool beyond. In the distance, a water feature made of African white sandstone quietly echoes the idea of a baptismal font ►



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here is a moment, driving through the arid landscape of the Klein Karoo valley towards Mura Retreat, when the Langeberg mountains appear to rise up and claim this house entirely. The property sits in Lemoenshoek, a valley outside Barrydale, a small municipality three hours from Cape Town, but feels a world away from the bustle of the city. The building itself – low and plastered the colour of the surrounding shale – has the quiet confidence of something that has always belonged here.

It was a couple from Munich who found the land it now stands on, left behind years after a fire had claimed the stone house that used to exist here. They arrived with a brief that was as much spiritual as architectural: a modern take on a Karoo farmhouse, woven through with monastic restraint. Croatia-based architect Antonio Zaninovic remotely conceived the initial design concept but, unable to execute it from abroad, handed the project to South African architectural designer Marlon Leggat. Together with builder Stuart Saggars, Marlon modelled the home on an old monastery, with deep-set windows borrowed in spirit from Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp.

That subtle monastic thread runs throughout the house: a stone bird bath stands in for a baptismal font; the coat cupboards by the front door hint at confessionals; and a slim sliver of window above the entrance lights the cupola from within, the way clerestory glass might in a chapel. Orientation does its own quiet work: large windows face south to hold the mountain view, while the north side has smaller openings, shielding the house from the harshest of the Karoo sun. Much of the stone used for walls and exterior paving was salvaged from the original house – the fire's only real survivor reworked into the foundations of what replaced it.

The house is generous in scope without feeling overbearing: seven bedrooms, a cloister, a yoga room, living and dining areas and a show kitchen backed by a prep kitchen and scullery. Marlon also took on the interiors, seeking calm over spectacle. 'I wanted a sense of peacefulness, austerity,' he says. 'Nothing arresting, no bright colours. Here, nature and the outdoors are the heroes.'

That philosophy explains why so few artworks made the final cut. One of them is a piece by Jackson Hlungwani, whose figures carry an ancestral weight that makes them presences rather than objects. Outside, the spoor of sculptor Dylan Lewis, whose studio lies nearby, marks the earth, nodding to a history much older than the building itself. In keeping with that instinct, furniture was sourced rather than designed: primal pieces that appear to predate the house. A three-legged chair, carved from a single piece of wood by local carpenter Abel Zata, sits beside a grinding stone found on the owners' land. One cabinet was built from the timber of old ball-and-claw furniture, with the original screw holes left visible. Nothing here pretends to be new.

At the heart of the house is the fire room – a single space built entirely to honour the ritual of communing around flames. It is very much the home's emotional centre. Outdoors, an infinity pool holds the mountain's reflection, the water turning the colour of the rock above it. Plus, when the sun drops, with no other light for miles, you can see the the stars. Its a fitting view, as the name Mura comes from the Khoisan word for the two pointer stars that lead the eye to the Southern Cross – believed, in San cosmology, to be the eyes of a lion watching over the land. The Western Cape is one of the few places on Earth where this constellation is visible year-round and, on a clear night, it is easy to understand why a name drawn from the sky felt right. antoniozaninovic.com; marlonjames.co; mura-retreat.com

Living room Scattered with Belgian-linen cushions and a throw from Barrydale Hand Weavers, the sunken seating area looks out over the pool. Raw mohair rugs, woven on a loom in the town of Prince Albert, cover the terrazzo floor, alongside stepping stones cut from local stone. The kiaat, riempie and limestone coffee table sits at the centre. The three-legged stool is the work of a timber artist from the area ►



Dining room The 14-seater table is cut from solid iroko-wood slabs, selected and designed by architect Marlon Leggat, and surrounded by kiaat chairs woven with seagrass. Overhead, a branch found on the farm – still bearing the char of the veldfire that razed the original house – has been repurposed as a light, with a LED strip routed within it. The custom fire dogs were designed by Marlon and made by the farm manager. Here, as in the rest of the house, every material is natural and African-sourced ➤



Kitchen The island is hewn from sandblasted African ivory granite, its mass anchoring a space designed by Marlon with old Cape Dutch kitchens as his inspiration. Solid ash doors with cast-iron handles from a forge in Riebeeck-Kasteel, an antique limestone trough sink sourced from India and an old French butcher's block complete the space

Study This south-facing room overlooks the pool area, with views of the mountains. The seagrass rug is from Coirtex. The vintage chair is one of Marlon's favourite pieces; sourced by the clients in Germany, it was designed by Junzo Sakakura, a Japanese architect who worked with Le Corbusier. The desk is made from a slab of solid iroko ➤



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Patio The west-facing braai (South African open-fire outdoor kitchen) patio at sunset, sheltered beneath a cantilevered pergola of iroko beams and local blue gum. Stones salvaged from the original house were laid for the floor by a local mason and grouted with the same plaster used on the walls. The outdoor furniture was designed by Marlon and made by Cane World ►

*The home was MODELLED on an OLD MONASTERY,
with interiors designed to SEEK CALM over spectacle*



Bathroom Simplicity reigns with a stand-alone 'Omnia' bathtub by BC Designs oriented towards the views outdoors, while the built-in shelves sit beneath another deep-set window that takes in the greenery outside
Bedroom The built-in bed and seating blends tonally with the walls ensuring minimal distraction to the eye. The vintage coffee table was bought at auction while the carved wooden seat and little stool were made by Right Mukore, a Zimbabwean wood sculptor in Cape Town, using locally sourced eucalyptus wood, stained dark brown ➤

*The INFINITY pool holds the
mountain's REFLECTION,
the WATER turning the COLOUR
of the rock ABOVE IT*

Pool area The pool shell was one of the only things the veldfire left intact, so it set both the size and orientation of the replacement. Marlon's intervention was to convert it to an infinity pool, directing all the attention at the view. [See Stockists page for details](#) 