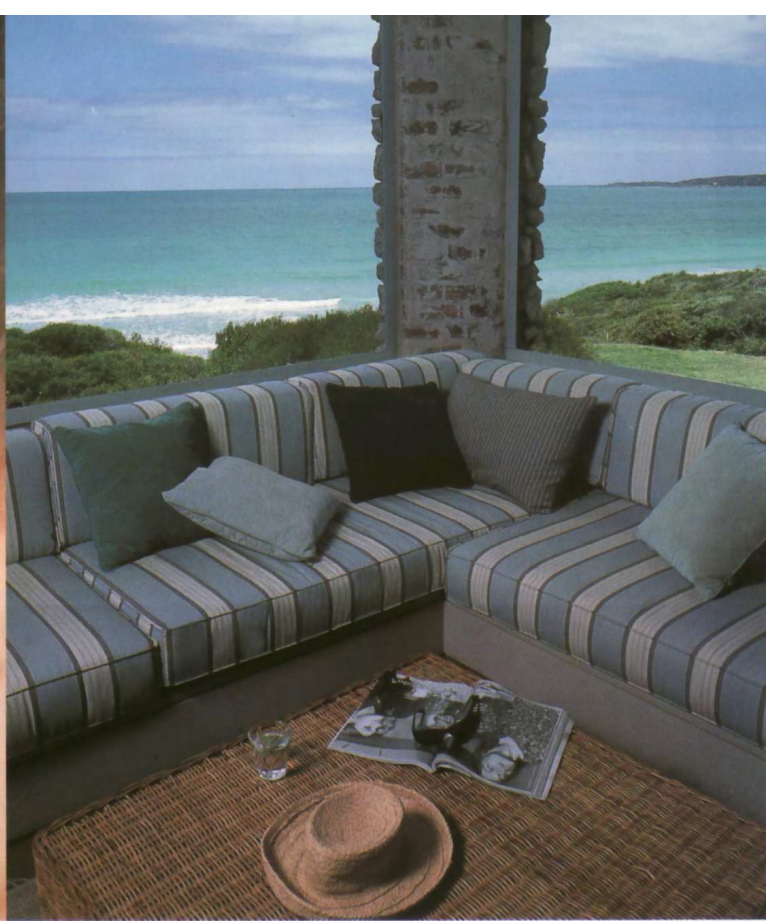




Heart of stone

Text Natasha Wallace Photographs and production Ronnie Levitan

RUSTIC MATERIALS COMBINED
WITH A GRAND DESIGN
CREATE A UNIQUE BEACH
HOUSE ON THE RUGGED EAST
COAST NEAR MOSSEL BAY



Clockwise from above The spiral stairwell leads upstairs; room with a view; through the slanted window the kids can see the ocean from their twin bunks, which were designed by the architects; the owners love Gaudí and were thrilled with the mosaic work in the bathroom by Fiona Berrisford (021) 671-6686.



This beach house on the east coast near Mossel Bay is a refreshing combination of bold design and harmonious energy – a result of the clients', architects' and contractor's shared vision. After spending Christmas in their new holiday home, the Pretoria owners have effusive praise for architects Jane Visser and Mark Thomas. 'Good clients make good architecture' is the response. 'It was a brilliant brief – well considered and detailed. They gave us a lot of rope to work with. It was like being commissioned by the Medicis,' says Mark.

The grandeur of the design – incorporating a long brick vault, wrap-around verandah and two stone cottages perched on top – would be fitting of the Medicis. The quartzitic granite, bagged brickwork, poplar beams and ironstone floors lend a rustic feel befitting the east coast. The materials are robust enough to withstand the harsh environment, and answered the clients' brief for a low-maintenance house. 'It was a long, thin, sloping piece of land with an east-facing sea view,' says Mark. 'We transcended these limitations by designing a brick vault, which runs the length of the house, culminating in a cross-vault over the dining area.'

Natural light filters onto the dining table through a series of glazed light punctures in the vault ceiling. 'That feature was added for the unusual quality of light. Jane loves to be tested by the challenge of letting light through thick walls,' says Mark. The roof punctures also act as a quirky design on the upper terrace, as the vault roof serves as a rooftop terrace too, extending from the main bedroom. The interplay of outdoor and indoor space is one of the strongest features of this house. All openings onto the wrap-around verandah fold away to let in the fresh ocean breeze and dramatic views of the cobalt sea and sky. 'We built a north-facing "outside room". A garage door can be flipped up, opening the house to create an inside-outside feel,' says Mark.

'The kitchen is my dream kitchen,' says one of the owners, and it's not hard to see why – what with a central work table designed by the architects, cheerful green fittings, open shelving, a suspended pot rack and a gleaming balau timber counter. The interiors complement the design of the house, as Mark, Jane and Janetta Lehmensich (the architects' in-house interiors associate) were responsible for that aspect as well. 'We designed the sofas in the lounge so that they could double as beds,' says Mark. They came in handy during the frenetic festive season. 'We have a big, busy family and at one point we had 21 people sleeping over. Fond memories include the large Christmas meal. We joined four tables to create one long one. I have a photograph of the family dozing on the sofas after lunch – a great reminder of the spirit of the holiday,' says one of the owners. That, after all, is what a beach house is all about – idyllic memories of a simple life and fabulous times. □

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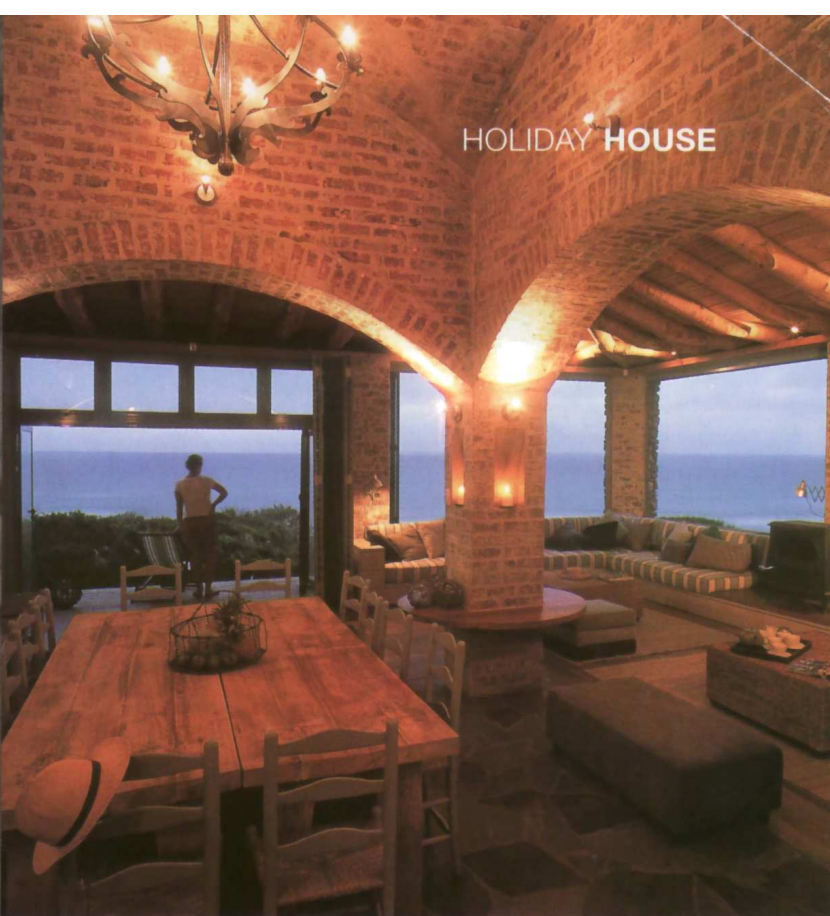
Opposite page **Bagged-brick walls, a gas stove and apple-green Shaker-style cabinets are a few of the imaginative touches in the dream kitchen.** Right, from above **A wrought-iron chandelier is suspended beneath glazed light punctures; entertaining is effortless in the flow-through dining area; the arches of the cross-vault dining area are visible from the kitchen – spotlights and candles are nestled in the recesses of the arches.**







This page The architects tackled the challenge of a long, thin plot by designing a long vault structure and two cottages for height and interest. A lookout, fondly called 'The crow's nest', is a perfect spot to soak up the views. Opposite page Glazed light punctures dot the rooftop terrace.



Clockwise from above Sun streams into the main bedroom through slatted timber shutters; the dining area sits beneath the cross vault; in 'the outside room' the fireplace, which doubles as an inside braai area, houses the spiral staircase. Hydraulic lifting doors seal off the room in bad weather.



