

CONDÉ NAST

House & Garden

SOUTH AFRICA

JULY 2000 R17,50 (incl. VAT)
NAMIBIA N\$17,50 OTHER COUNTRIES R15,35

IN STYLE
Black and white decor

ENTERTAINING
FUSS FREE DINNERS

TRAVEL
TIME OFF IN THAILAND

coming home

- CAPE GEORGIAN REVIVAL
- SEAFRONT PENTHOUSE
- WEST COAST BEAUTY

GARDENS
Classic Cape landscaping
Hedging in your garden





terra firma

The architecture of **Jane Visser** and **Mark Thomas** is robust, honest, modest, as if it had always been there, says **Noëleen Murray**

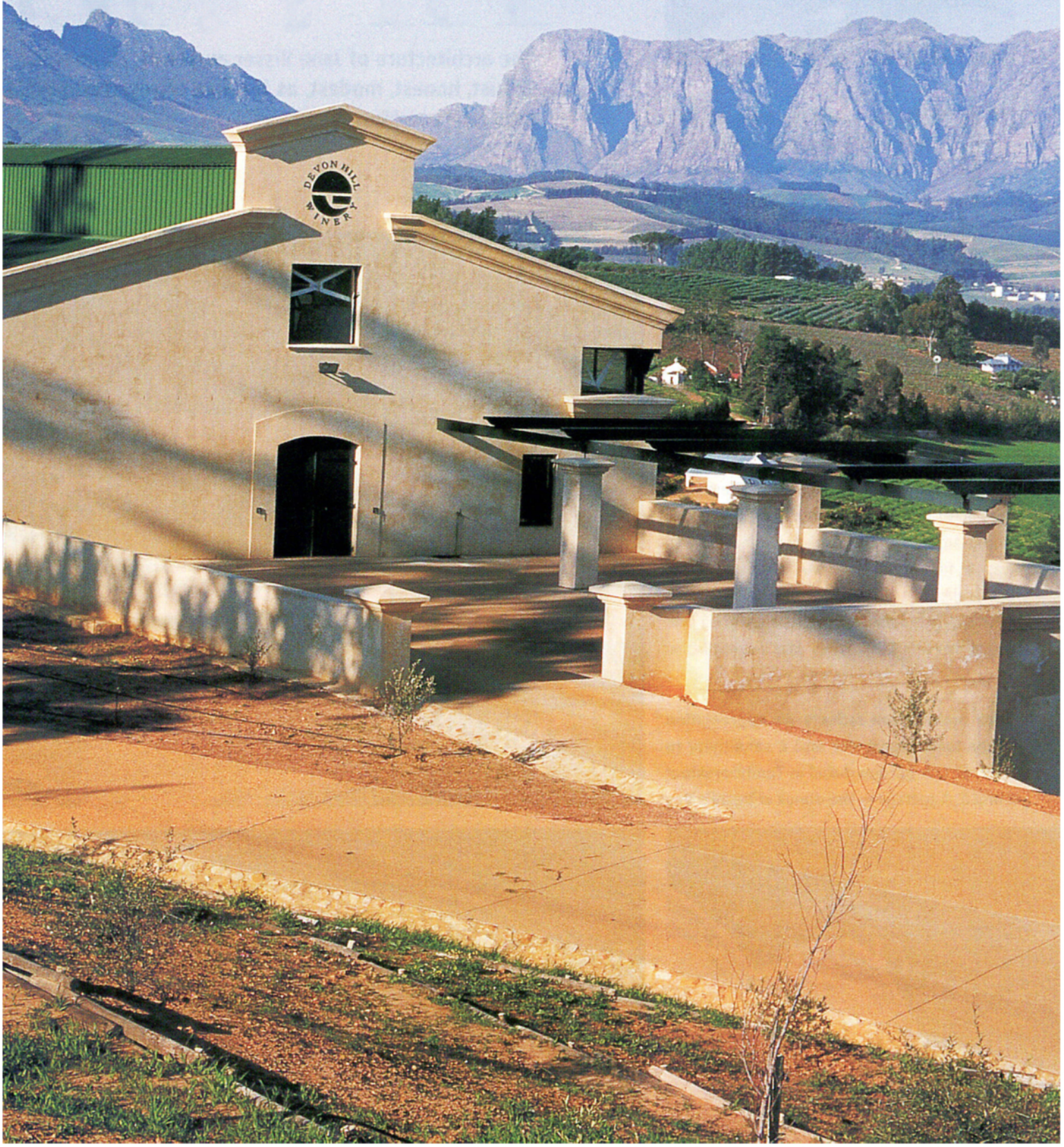
There are two young architects who work from a remarkable office-studio in Tamboerskloof, Cape Town. Jane Visser and Mark Thomas (above) have changed a typical turn-of-the-century villa into a relaxed, comfortable working environment. Visiting them there speaks volumes about their architectural approach. From a walled gateway, you cross a gravel-textured garden court, pass through a canopied stoep, and enter a slick, sophisticated new world that complements and contrasts with the old one outside. This juxtaposition, consciously executed, reflects their interest in the relationship between vernacular and contemporary design.

Jane Visser graduated from the University of Cape Town with a distinction in design, won the 'Young Architect of the Year' award in 1992 and was a finalist in the ISAA Classical Rome Scholarship. She worked for Munnik Visser in Cape Town and Terry Farrell in London before going into partnership with Mark. While Jane's strengths lie

Their architecture reflects an appreciation of the local vernacular and a sensitivity to context 1. A garden detail in Tamboerskloof 2 and 3. A cottage in the dunes at Betty's Bay



The Stellenbosch Devon Hill Winery, a fusion of traditional building materials and modern technology



in design and documentation, Mark focuses on handling clients and managing a medium-scale practice. 'We like to do work where the client is the end user,' says Mark.

One of their projects, House Pienaar in Philipskraal, Betty's Bay in the Cape, won a merit award from the Institute of South African Architects. The homestead, sunk into dunes, is both contextually appropriate and practical. The sensitivity of this design, lying between the sea and the Harold Porter Nature Reserve, has fynbos sweeping right down to the sea. In contrast to the prevailing white and apple-green 'Victorian' cottages dotting the bay, warm colours of sandstone with charcoal roofing and pale-grey woodwork were chosen.

The house was conceptualised as a shell with a protective exterior and a smooth, light interior. Sacrificing some of the view, the homestead was cut into the hillside to offer

protection from the harsh sea winds. 'The architecture was to be robust, honest, modest and as if it had always been there,' says Jane

Many young architects cut their teeth on commissions for private houses. Jane Visser and Mark Thomas are already moving on and their current portfolio includes projects like the Devon Hill Winery in Stellenbosch. Here the brief was to design a modern winery with the latest technology in a building that would be neither like a factory, nor historically dated or typecast. The building was planned in close consultation with the winemaker and the result is a state-of-the-art building with a handmade vernacular quality. Textured finishes to the walls, ochre-tinted plaster, and wall mouldings that capture some of the sculpted quality of the detailing of many early Cape buildings are hallmarks of this project. The building aims to fit into its natural and cultural context.

'We took agricultural buildings, barns and other outbuildings as our models of traditional Cape architecture, rather than homesteads, as this was more appropriate to the function of a winery,' says Jane. 'Our concern was also to integrate two languages of technology: that of traditional masonry work and that of steelwork.'

Although there is a common thread connecting all their projects, each one is tackled separately. These two young architects thrive on finding innovative solutions to architectural challenges. From the simplest buildings to the most complex interventions in sensitive historical contexts, such as the new sports hall and pre-primary school at St Cyprian's school in Cape Town, they hope 'each project will develop in its own way'. ■

**Jane Visser Mark Thomas Architects,
5 Carstens Street, Tamboerskloof,
Cape Town; ☎ (021) 423-3241; e-mail:
jvmt@new.co.za**

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RONNIE LEVITAN

Creating diversity with slick spaces in Bantry Bay (bottom left) and rustic character at Boggomsbaai in the Cape (bottom right)

