



NATURE & NURTURE

At her farmhouse in the foothills of the Outeniqua Mountains, passionate environmentalist Kathy Waddell crafts an interior alive with indigenous spirit

In the kitchen, a mahogany specimen cupboard designed by Decimus Berton for Kew displays items of domestic use, whilst a series of herbiers hang on the wall beside it and on the mantle piece. On the table, placemats, napkins and round trays are from Madwa

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ustic chic is a tough taskmaster requiring, as it implies, the panache to transform a sticks-and-stones country aesthetic into a look that's true to its roots, but reinterpreted for contemporary contextual relevance. The hard bit is the interpretation, knowing where to push for newness and when to play the old-school card. Cue Kathy Waddell, co-owner of Madwa, a company which specialises in the development of woven Madagascan and Swazi decor accessories with a very design-forward signature and sustainability ethic. By syncing her affinity for pioneer farmhouses, her love of African organic form, texture, and flora and fauna of the veld, she's brought discerning direction and stylish attitude to rustic chic.

First came the farm, 19 years ago, purchased as a salvage project to rehabilitate the indigenous veld which, around these parts, has a feeling of fertile savannah to it. For years, there was no house on the property but after a while Waddell relented out of necessity and put up a braai pavilion near a copse of gum trees, a handsome stone pillared pergola with a built-in table and seats where she could at least have a civilised sit-down lunch when she visited. Lunches became more and more enjoyable. And so the idea of building a homestead in which to stay on afterwards gained momentum. Around the same time, her home in Oxford was sold which meant that a most treasured piece of furniture, a huge glass-front original specimen cupboard from Kew Botanical Gardens, was homeless. The answer was to build it a home and it now stands in the kitchen displaying not specimens, but

ABOVE Kitchen with linen slip-covered tub chairs viewed through glass sliding barn doors BELOW The back verandah, typical for this style of house, is the arrival and entrance area which owner Kathy Waddell has furnished like a rustic lobby with a bench for pulling boots on and off and an umbrella stand of hollowed-out tree trunk. On either side of the verandah are two bedrooms. Walls inside and out are painted Earthcote 'Karoo' brown above dado level and a no-name brand from the co-op below



Extra-deep front and back verandahs are sitting rooms in their own right layered with sofas and chairs in toasted tones

Dietz hurricane lanterns and retro enamelware. Amusingly, the specimens – Waddell's collection of herbiers – are on the wall beside it.

Apart from giving a cupboard a roof over its head, good memories of great houses were an inspiration. 'I grew up in an old mine house in Kimberley, with a tin roof, long passages and deep verandahs, that was an important reference,' notes Waddell. 'As was Coral Stephens's home in Swaziland, where I loved to go. It had these big walk-in showers with no doors which were so cool, and shiny white-painted bathroom furniture.' Interestingly, those houses were often detailed according to what was available from the local agricultural co-op, and what was practical. Decor inventions developed out of necessity and savvy, and in that spirit of resourceful equanimity, Waddell's brand of high-low style is the key ingredient for the magic at work here.

Designed by architect Hein Visser, the house looks like it's been there forever so iconic is the tin roof vernacular, so right is its scale to its setting. The plan is a deceptively simple H-shape, with clever configuration of spaces – four bedrooms, bathrooms and a large kitchen – and volumes off a main living area. The tricks that make it work are inconspicuous. It's not symmetrical, but it feels like it. It's not traditional but it feels like it. The paint colours are very now neutrals: one's from Earthcote, another from the co-op. Shutters are from the local hardware store, doors are custom-made. And so the high ▶



ABOVE A series of herbiers above an English 19th-century desk in the kitchen BELOW The front verandah has arts & crafts style sofas by Cécile & Boyd's and a round woven-grass mat from Madwa beneath a riempie table. Three wicker chairs have their backs to the view. On the footstools are a black-and-white checked Welsh blanket and orange-striped blankets from the Atacama Desert. This is where most of the living happens





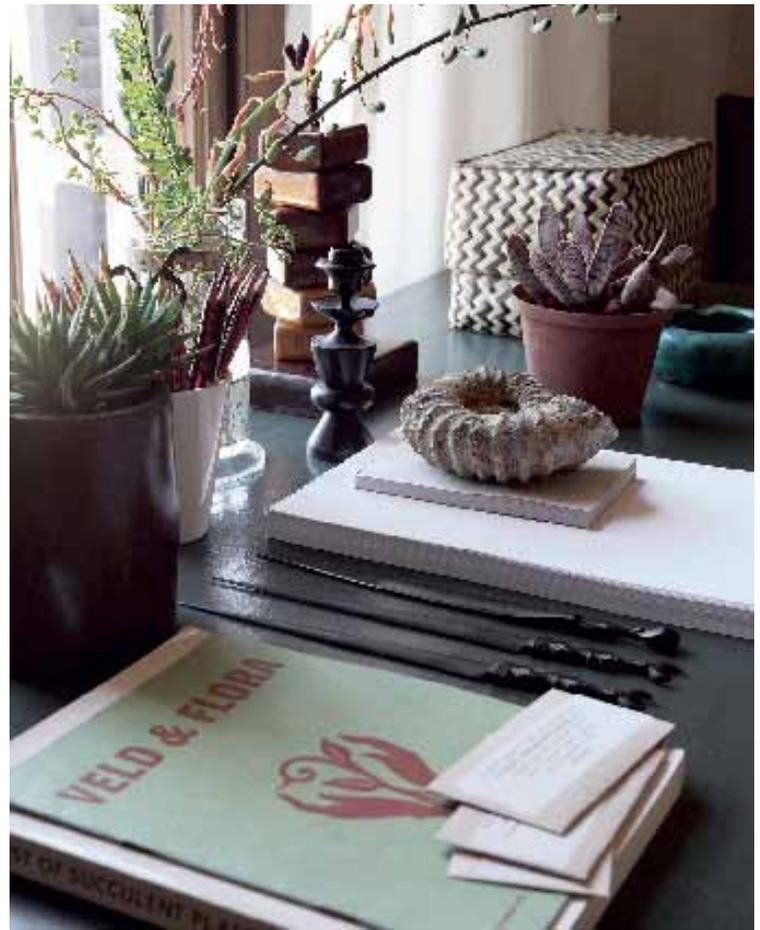
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Palm stools from Madwa tone perfectly with putty-coloured wicker chairs and linen cushions on the back verandah; the main living area is a vast room with white slip-covered sofas around fireplaces at either end, in the middle is an English library table; the front verandah OPPOSITE PAGE The library table with a collection of Linnware and Daniel Naude photograph from Michael Stevenson Gallery



and low goes. Inside, the spaces are honed and perfected for the way Waddell lives now. No long passages. Extra-deep front and back verandahs which are sitting rooms in their own right layered with sofas and chairs in toasted tones of cinnamon, bark and straw. Madwa mats, cushions and trays blend right in texturally, but their design pedigree shines a little sharper than the rest. No dining room. Instead, the kitchen is huge with a big table down the middle of it. Modernity manifests in other ways too. 'I'm a water fanatic. All the water is run-off rainwater, stored in tanks, and though we're supposedly on the cusp of summer and winter rainfall here, we get little rain. The garden isn't irrigated, every bed is mulched. Fortunately I didn't want iceberg roses and kikuyu lawn so it's not a problem,' she says. Fortunate indeed. None of that gentrified prettification would pass muster here. And who needs it when a herd of Nguni cows and calves – bovine glamour in all its glory – grazes up to the verandah. What she did want however, was utilitarian luxury, which is where Boyd Ferguson and Paul van den Berg of Cécile & Boyd's come in. 'They helped me pull it all together and customise the vision. We had the greatest fun, such a happy association,' says Waddell. Specially commissioned iron army-style bed frames were just one fruit of the association. Yes, they look monastic, but not for long. Waddell demonstrates, by peeling back the covers, a pavlova of perfect arctic-white heavy cotton linens and a mattress so swoonfull it was possibly handmade in heaven. A good place indeed to stay on after lunch. ■ Madwa ☎ 021 447 7612; 🌐 www.madwa.com

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT In the main bedroom, the austere iron army bed is dressed in simple luxury with Mauritian cotton linens; a desk in the bedroom with one of Waddell's collections of botanical reference books, seed packets and articles of botanic and natural history; from the front verandah the view provides endless cinematic allure; a table set with a Madwa woven and bound grass placemat in cinnamon colour and a handstitched table napkin in natural linen





Waddell's herd of pedigree Nguni cattle grazing in front of the house. They were introduced for environmental purposes, as veld managers, so the rehabilitated grassland does not have to get cut or burnt