



curated

In the dunes along the Wilderness coastline,
a home finds form in a thicket of indigenous trees

calm



‘Everything is pared back; everything is elemental’

200

— Chris van Nierkerk, architect



Previous spread Architect Chris van Nierkerk’s clarity of form is eloquently expressed in the home’s eave detailing, which establishes a refined relationship between its shallow-pitched roof and brick-and-mortar body. **Above** Set into an angular recess, the front door is reached by a short flight of stairs beneath a milkwood bower. Turning right, the stairs continue upwards to the guest suite. The courtyard’s freestanding chimney, seen here from the terrace, is a singular feature of the home’s silhouette. MÜVEK’s Object 3, a brass tealight holder and oil burner are displayed on a low shelf. **Opposite** A change in level and a subtle shift in flooring gently delineate the sunlit entrance from the living area. A small leather elephant inherited from Katalin’s late father rests on the window shelf opposite the front door.







The idyllic setting of the Garden Route, with its mist-belt forests and expansive beaches, has long been familiar to architect Chris van Niekerk. His parents, Jan and Katalin, lived there for over a decade before selling their home and embarking on an extended trip to North America in 2022, with a view to emigrating there to be closer to their grandchildren.

When they ultimately chose to resettle in Wilderness two years later, an overgrown plot in the same gated eco-estate where they had previously lived became available. 'I had always imagined it would be wonderful to live in a house that Chris had built, but I thought any opportunity long since passed,' Katalin says. 'And then the dream was revived.'

The main feature of the site is also its primary constraint: the thicket of milkwoods to which the house responds, following a triangular floor plan to accommodate the more established evergreens. Of these trees, one held particular significance to the architect: 'It has a leaning, oblique trunk and strangely wayward branch, which served as a starting point for this project,' Chris says. As you approach the house along a meandering gravel path, an external staircase ascending in the opposite direction is visible, its diagonal rise mirroring that of the tree. 'The staircase introduces the idea of the angular into the design, which carries through the house in its sharp, 45-degree corners.'

Nestled in the forest, out of sight of the sea, the building is oriented inwards towards the central courtyard, offering a sense of secluded calm and containment. Against its lime-rendered exterior, which is reminiscent of beach sand in tone and texture, the limber lines of milkwood shadows play. The subdued palette throughout, as well as Chris's commitment to natural materials – limestone flagstones, concrete surfaces, light-coloured brick pavers, the motif of wooden detailing – further ground the home in its environment, lending it a sense of being in and of the landscape.

A refinement of form defines the home's outward impression, which reads as a series of volumes unfolding vertically and horizontally, rather than a tightly contained whole. Windows, doors and apertures are placed without regard for rhythm or symmetry, offering instead considered framings and discrete functions. 'Every opening is where it needs to be,' Chris says, speaking to the particularity of each encounter between interior and exterior. 'However modest in size, there's a real sense of depth in the lines of sight across

the house, in the sequence of spaces, seen from one side of the building to the other and beyond to the garden – scenes within scenes.'

The heart of the home is its light-filled living area, which is shaded by a deep northern cave in the humid summers, and warmed by a wood burner on winter evenings when the fog banks the dunes. The primary bedroom shares the same structure and both feature vaulted ceilings, giving them an airy, tranquil atmosphere. A second bedroom across the courtyard is likewise intimately connected to the communal spaces, while the guest suite and terrace on the first floor, which are accessed by the external staircase, are set apart from the main house.

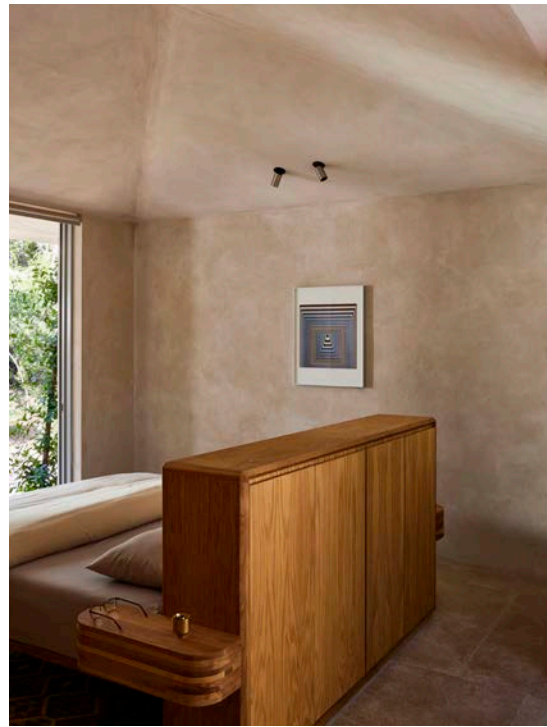
Because Jan and Katalin had sold the contents of their previous Wilderness home, there was the additional opportunity to curate existing and custom furnishings by MŪVEK – a design studio co-founded by Chris and his husband, János Cserhádi – in dialogue with the space. The angularity and material qualities of MŪVEK's signature style echo those of the home: the facets of the hipped pitched roofs are recalled in the iroko benches in the courtyard, the garden's wind-bent trees in the barstools' leaning uprights, and the surrounding foliage in the deep green of the sofa.

In ethos, the architecture and furnishings are harmonious. 'When designing something, the question is always, how can I express the essential quality of what the thing is?' Chris says. 'Everything is pared back; everything is elemental. There are no extraneous details – no cornices, no skirting boards, no paint, no doorframes. Those places where geometries intersect are left undisguised, even augmented.' This sensibility is beautifully distilled in the home's unusual angles and acute corners, which are emphasised rather than obscured, each refigured as a moment of spatial lyricism.

The house has offered Jan and Katalin a simpler way of being, unburdened by the material accumulations of a life. Only a few decorative objects and artworks have travelled with the couple into their new home, each a touchstone of personal significance. This minimalism has been liberating, by Katalin's account, an opportunity to make do with less. 'It has been so rewarding to see my parents settle into a house that I considered and planned over a long period of time,' Chris reflects. 'There's a quiet reassurance in knowing they now inhabit a space that supports their everyday lives in a way that is both poetic and carefully measured.' ●

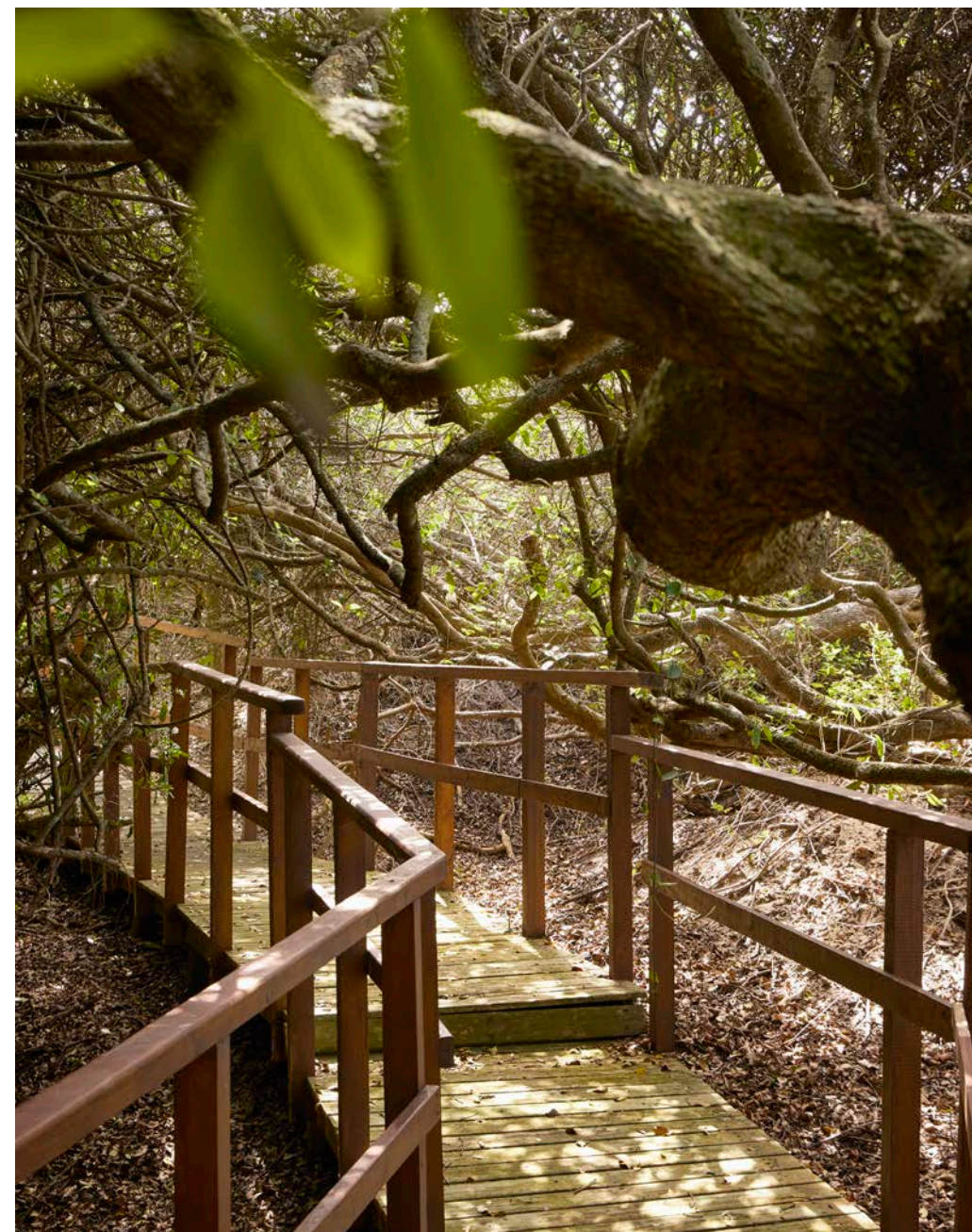
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Previous spread The interior's restrained palette carries into the kitchen cabinetry. Against this muted backdrop, the iroko-and-limestone island and select MŪVEK pieces – including a travertine prototype table and new barstools – with reupholstered Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec softshell chairs by Vitra, assume a sculptural presence. The home's formal attributes – simplicity, angularity, material honesty – are reflected in its furnishings. In the living area, twinned lounge chairs and a sofa are arranged around the sandstone-topped coffee table, all by MŪVEK. A wildgrass rug, Richard Sapper-designed standing lamp by Artemide, and a framed print by Gunther van der Reis complete the scene. **Opposite** The central courtyard, with its steel table and wooden benches, is sheltered from the wind and sun.



Above While visually unified, spaces are delicately demarcated by the modulation of natural light, from the bright openness of the living area to the cocooned quiet of the bedrooms and the slanting shadows in the guest bathroom. **Opposite** A partially frosted glass wall invites dappled sunshine into the primary bedroom's en-suite bathroom, which features an Omina bathtub by Boutique Baths.





Opposite The upstairs terrace reflects the building's triangular plan. A raw aluminium prototype of MÜVEK's MÜ1111 round table, paired with stools from Hope Garden Furniture, makes it the ideal setting for summer sundowners. **Above** Though the plot does not afford an ocean view, the beach is only moments away, reached by a boardwalk that leads directly from the estate down an incline through indigenous forest.