



**Homeowner Ilze Muller's fertile imagination is working overtime  
reconceptualizing the family's classic  
Cape Dutch farmhouse**

It may be mainly the complaint of folks who find the world whirling too quickly, but there is some truth to the fact that these days, the stuff of the past is more often jettisoned than cherished. Nobody wants Grandma's dishes, or Dad's old desk. And when family history can be neatly contained digitally, an attic full of stuff seems unnecessary, if not excessive. But in the right hands, the past can be a living thing, a light that illuminates the present, not a burdensome shadow.

**enraptured.**



TEXT THOMAS CONNORS PHOTOGRAPHY KARL ROGERS INTERIOR DESIGN ILLZE + WOUTER MULLER

# Uitkyk, South Africa

South Africans Illze and Wouter Muller – and their three grown children – live on a dairy farm that has been in his family since the 1820s. Their home is a classic Cape Dutch house, built by the brother of Wouter’s great-grandfather in 1840. “I love Cape Dutch architecture for its clean lines and unpretentious style, as well as for the symmetry and the simplicity,” shares Illze, who good-humoredly describes herself as “a housewife who fixes up sheds on the farm when I’m not gardening or dreaming up new designs.”

Dreaming up one of those new designs, Illze spearheaded a transformation of the family home from a place of formality and small rooms to one that is chic and spacious. She relocated the kitchen from the back of the house to a larger, crowd-friendly area closer to the action. “This is now everyone’s favorite room,” confides Illze, “where we spend most of our time talking, cooking and having a great time with our friends.” The reconfiguration also allowed for a greater separation between the home’s public and private spaces. Upstairs, she opened up an unused attic space, greatly expanding the usefulness of that floor, which now comprises a study, office and guest room with en suite bath. With no partition walls and the timber frame and thatched roof visible, this wide-open interior telegraphs an elemental sense of shelter.

Throughout the project, Illze was determined to respect the historical character of the house while making it functionally and aesthetically more congruent with contemporary life. Eager to create a closer link to the garden, she replaced three windows on the main floor with doors of the same size, which maintained the visual balance of the exterior. Illze exercised that same combination of imagination and respect for the past when she tackled an 1850s outbuilding that had previously served as a workshop and shearing shed. “It was one very long, big room, with attics at both ends, when it was built,” relates Illze. “Later, walls were added and a ceiling was put in. For the renovation, we took away all those things that were not original.” Window openings that had been covered over long ago were reopened and fitted with new, handmade frames. “Every hinge, lock, bolt, window and door that had to be replaced was made by hand, using reclaimed materials as much as possible,” notes Illze.

Change comes slowly on a farm, and now that Illze has transformed her family’s property so effectively and empathetically, chances are it won’t require much attention for a while. But when that day arrives, the design she dreamed up today will no doubt be appreciated as another telling layer of the farm and the history of the lives lived here.



1 The warmth of the stinkwood bench, a family heirloom, contrasts with the coolness of the black slate floor. 2 Illze designed the pendant lights in this corner of the entrance hall. The portrait of a Spanish sea captain’s wife is an inherited treasure. 3 Family photos and artwork line the walls of a corridor connecting the public and private spaces of the home.





A mix of heirlooms and vintage finds anchor the roomy eating area of the kitchen.



The cupboard – original to the house – displays a collection of enamelware collected over the years. The occasional tables were cut from a fallen tree in Illze's garden.





**1** Daughter Annegret's bedroom features a bed made of stinkwood and yellowwood. It's been in the Muller family for 170 years. **2** Sofas from leading home decor store Weylandts share space with an antique tête-à-tête. **3** The simply outfitted primary bedroom features a vintage wardrobe painted black and an iron bed frame Ilize bought at an antique shop 30 years ago. **4** The compact and visually dynamic study features a custom desk built with reclaimed yellowwood and a graceful concertina lamp made of solid brass with a nickel finish. **5** Swimming-pool cement was applied to the clay brick walls and floor of the primary bathroom, to keep everything dry. The concrete cupboard is detailed with stones from the property and uses bamboo blinds as doors.





With the walls and ceiling gone, the shed is now a wonderfully roomy place, an enviably attractive guest quarters open to the highly pitched roof. When it came time to introduce a bathroom, Illze opted for a steel and glass element to separate it from the rest of the interior. "I didn't want to put in something more permanent that is difficult to remove," she explains. "Now I can easily change it again if I want to."



**1** The shed's spacious dimensions offer plenty of room for guests to feel at home. **2** The workbench of a friend's father now has pride of place in the reborn shed. **3** The concrete console was inspired by the feeding trough that once occupied this space. Illze and Wouter cut the reeds for the ceiling from a river on the property and installed them themselves. **4** The Illze-designed concrete sofa in the garden was inspired by the Cape Dutch gable seen on all the farm's buildings.