



A covered walkway leads from the driveway to the front entrance of the renovated 1960s Parkhurst home of Brett Lotriet Best and Khalid Shawwa. RIGHT The positions of the living room and the veranda were switched. OPPOSITE Looking up towards the house from the garden, which slopes towards the rivulet, it's clear that the spirit of the original design has been retained.



READER'S RENOVATION #3

OPEN HOUSE

A PARKHURST RENOVATION PROVES THAT WITH GOOD BONES AND 'SOME CONCEPTUAL DYNAMITE' THE PAST CAN BE KEPT ALIVE

TEXT GRAHAM WOOD PHOTOGRAPHS AND STYLING ELSA YOUNG

When Brett Lotriet Best and Khalid Shawwa first saw this house in Parkhurst, Joburg, they were instantly enchanted by its magnificent garden. The stand was the last of its kind along Braamfontein Spruit. It stretched from one street, spanned the rivulet and ran up the other side to the opposite street. 'It was this huge piece of land in the centre of Johannesburg with a river running through it, the edges almost untouched forests,' says Brett. The house, however, was dilapidated. 'To be fair, in its day I'm sure it was lovely but when we saw it it was in disrepair.'

By that time, though, the house and stand were already part of an ingenious rescue plan. Architect Sarah Calburn had discovered that the plot was for sale and was 'terrified' that the rare expanse would be subdivided. 'I arranged to buy the property and make it sectional title so that the garden could remain open and unbuilt upon forever,' says Sarah. She designed three row houses for one side of the spruit and planned to alter and renovate the original house (now Brett and Khalid's) on the other side.

She was motivated partly by the urge to preserve this unique remnant of the area's historical character but also felt a strong personal attachment to the house. Sarah was friends with the

BIG IDEA #1

Understand history and context

The street-facing side of this house is open. While much of Parkhurst has become fortified through the years the property has no boundary wall. It is, of course, secure - it's not a naïve design - but it is welcoming in a way that resonates with the history of the area. Parkhurst homes used to encourage engagement with passers-by, a factor that is still at the heart of its thriving café culture and street life today. Even though it is sophisticated and elegant, this house faces the street in a way that embraces the neighbourhood's character, past and future.



BIG IDEA #2

Keep the good ideas even if it means shifting them

A key moment for Sarah in realising this design involved deploying 'quite some degree of conceptual dynamite' to the former lounge, an area that posed a problem for the overall design. A central feature of the house had been the veranda overlooking the garden and stream. When Sarah realised that she could demolish the lounge to create a new covered patio and then incorporate the old veranda into the interior, flipping the inside and outside spaces, it was a breakthrough. The outside area 'has been moved but retains its potency', she explains. Preservation doesn't have to be literal.

BIG IDEA #3

Amplify and resonate

Rather than fight against the original design Sarah chose to improve and modernise it by capitalising on its strengths, at times amplifying existing aspects of the house. This may involve revealing 'spatial correspondences and structures that were hitherto concealed', she says. For example, where the old staff quarters were converted into an office, a view was opened through the house to the garden and river. Sometimes this approach means exaggerating definitive features such as the skylights, which were extended 'to an expressive strip that brings light into the centre of the house'.

The interior was opened up to create a lighter, more dynamic living space. The original low-level kitchen window used to look onto a courtyard that is now part of the covered veranda. OPPOSITE Just off the veranda a floating staircase leads to the new self-contained bedroom upstairs.





BEFORE



original owners' daughters and spent much time there as a child. The space was formative in the development of her architectural consciousness. 'It was a revelation,' recalls Sarah, 'an explosion of beauty and wonder housed in a simple architectural shell.'

The house was built in 1965 by architect Neil Duncan for himself and his family. Sarah describes it as 'quintessentially subcontinental, climatically appropriate, unassuming, modest yet modernist'.

For her, altering and updating the house for Brett and Khalid, 'bringing its living and energy requirements into the 21st century' and meeting their tastes, accommodation brief and budget also 'demanded remembrance, respect, memorialisation'. Sarah sought to 'enhance the best parts and rethink the problematic areas while keeping it all resonant with its original intention and feeling'.

Khalid says the most important thing they wanted was 'to get rid of as much wall as possible and simply live inside a great glass box so the inside and outside felt like they ran into each other'. He and Brett also wanted a 'huge bedroom that was like a house in itself - that had everything self-contained on the upper floor'.

Sarah opened up and lightened the ground floor, adding a sense of luxury. 'The 1960s compartmentation of hall, kitchen, TV

room or study, passage, living room and dining room has been blasted open,' she says. She incorporated the veranda into the living space but recreated its spirit in a covered patio overlooking the garden where the living room had been. 'The old staff quarters were converted into an office with a view through the house to the river beyond,' she adds. The main bedroom, now a guest suite, was expanded. Its bathroom overlooks a 'previously problematic' private courtyard. Sarah also added another storey for the master bedroom.

'Iconic elements such as the double circular columns were remade and reused in new positions,' she says. Existing skylights have been 'extended and amplified'. The fireplace in the living room was kept in place although it is now on the patio. Even the original driveway bricks have been relaid (this time with planting slots).

'I hope that the house's energies are released now to new lives,' Sarah says. The new owners confirm that it's 'simply amazing' to live in. The Duncan daughters, who now live abroad, have seen the alteration and love it. 'Where the house has changed most, elements are recognisable although differently deployed,' Sarah says, 'yet you can still feel the original plan. You walk around wearing X-ray specs, as it were.' [Find the specialists' details in the HL Black Book \(page 95\)](#)

ABOVE, FROM FAR LEFT The tubular sculpture in the back courtyard was made by the former owner and architect of the house and has been restored; circular paving stones that formed part of the original pavement garden have been reused here and in the courtyard outside the guest bathroom; the new upstairs section includes a bedroom and open-plan bathroom that leads onto a roof balcony and has a study behind it at the top of the staircase. The upper level was intended to function as a separate realm so that the owners wouldn't need to go downstairs if they didn't feel like it.

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