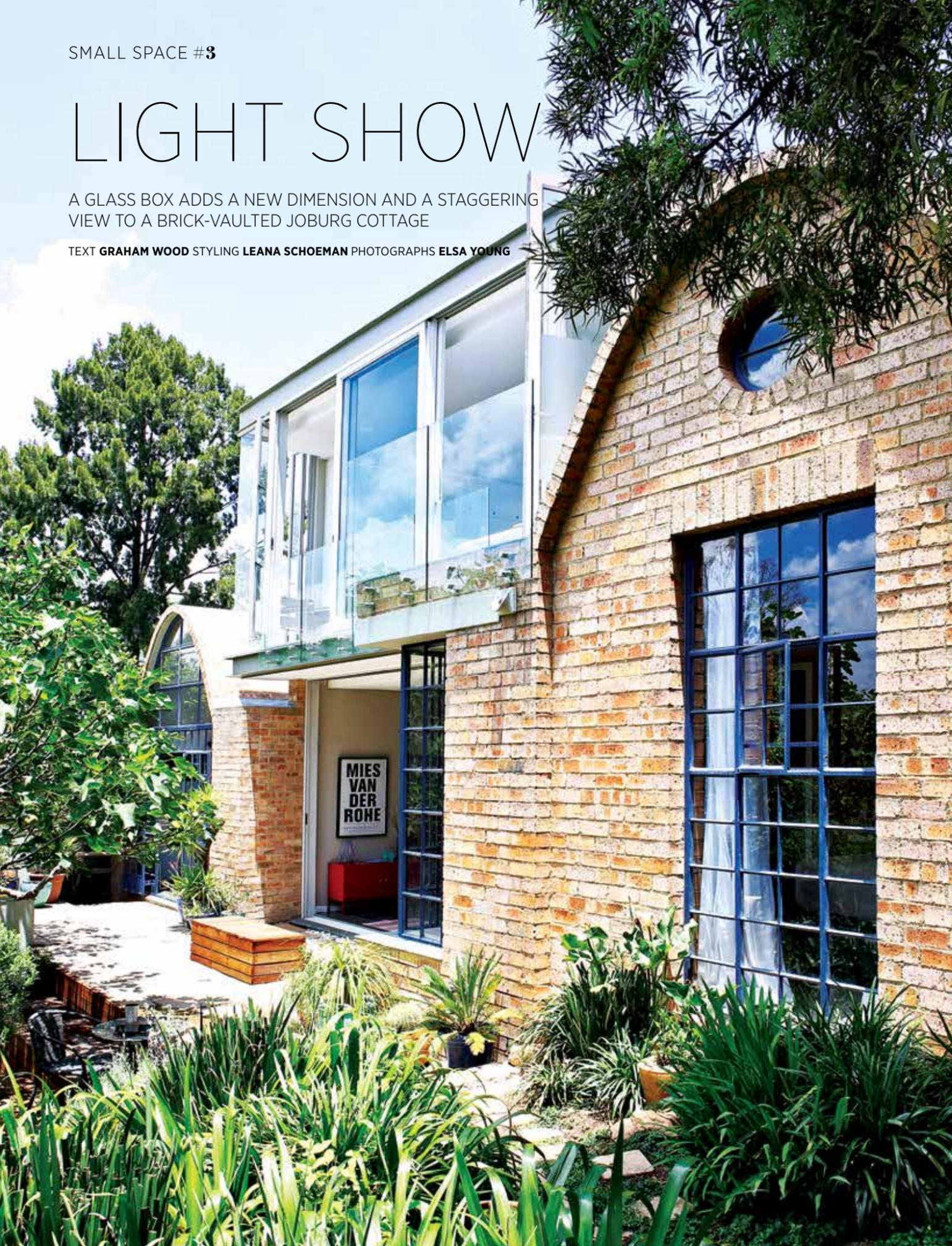


# LIGHT SHOW

A GLASS BOX ADDS A NEW DIMENSION AND A STAGGERING VIEW TO A BRICK-VAULTED JOBURG COTTAGE

TEXT **GRAHAM WOOD** STYLING **LEANA SCHOEMAN** PHOTOGRAPHS **ELSA YOUNG**



OPPOSITE The glass box that 'lifts the lid' off this third-generation alteration in Melville. THIS PAGE Owner Pieter Botha's enthusiasm for Mid-Century Modernist architecture, exemplified in the glass box, extends to his furnishings. His collection includes the Le Corbusier armchair, the Eileen Gray side table in the living area and elsewhere he has Mies van der Rohe Barcelona chairs.



FROM LEFT The kitchen area remained largely unchanged, except for the ceiling and insulation, which was added to the brick vault, and the addition of pendant lights from xxxxxx; the steel I-beams of the glass box float out over the original vaulted brick, leaving it 'unmolested' in the words of architect Sarah Calburn. OPPOSITE The kitchen area opens out onto a courtyard and covered outdoor seating area. The interiors have an almost landscape-like effect, connecting them to and continuing the outdoor space, and effectively extending the house outside. The outdoor table and chairs are from xxxxxx



This tiny Joburg house on the slopes of the Melville Koppies, now in its third incarnation, began life as a garage. After a subdivision, architect Sylvie Vantillard converted it into a house for herself. She added vaulted brick rooms on either side – one housed the kitchen, the other the bedroom and bathroom, and the middle the living area. It was simple, but cosy, and had flair.

Several owners later, when Pieter Botha moved in, little had changed. But after living there for a while, he needed extra space. As a fan of Mid-Century Modern design, particularly the famous glass houses – he reels them off: 'Farnsworth House and Villa Savoye, Philip Johnson's Glass House, House Kaufmann by Richard Neutra' – he knew he wanted a 'glass box'. After seeing a house designed by architect Sarah Calburn on a rocky outcrop in Craighall Park (dubbed Little Cliff House) and being impressed by its bold but sensitive take on the theme, he gave her a call.

She came to see his house the next day, and they agreed: a glass box it would be. 'It was clear that we should go up in the middle,' says Sarah. While Sarah favours clean lines, sleek finishes and simplicity in her designs, it is in the details that many of them come

alive. In this instance, the pared-down minimalism of her work has the calming effect on the eye necessary in a small space, but there is a simultaneous intensity in her care to make the most of details. The question, she says, is: 'How do you make yourself feel most excited in the space you are given? I wanted it to be an intense, joyous space.'

The sensitively proportioned glass box that became Pieter's upstairs bedroom, for instance, not only opens up the incredible view east over the treetops of Joburg's urban forest and the CBD's skyline, but also turns the corner to 'look back' at the original brick vaults. 'The slick box contrasts with the vaults, emphasising their handmade and tactile qualities,' adds Sarah. The contrast is a way of honouring the original, framing it within the modern addition. Similarly, the edges of the glass box are designed so they appear to hover above the brickwork. 'The corner floats out over the edge of the original vault, and doesn't touch it,' says Sarah. 'It leaves them unmolested.'

Downstairs, while the kitchen and original bedroom stayed much the same, the central interior space – the old garage – was where most of Sarah's work concentrated. 'The lounge area is not much bigger than it used to be, but much more useable,' says Pieter. >



THE PARED-DOWN MINIMALISM OF ARCHITECT SARAH CALBURN'S WORK HAS THE CALMING EFFECT ON THE EYE NECESSARY IN A SMALL SPACE.

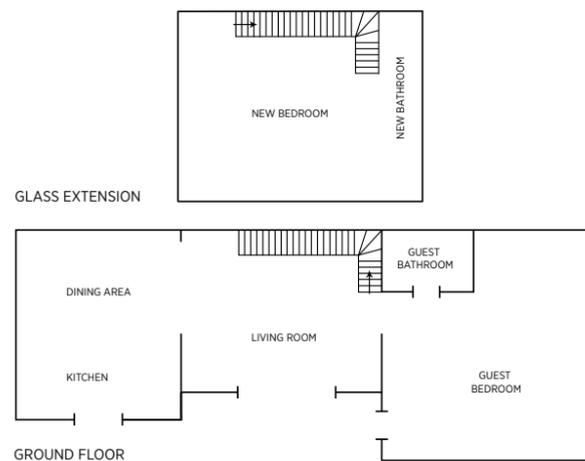


She stole some space from the original downstairs bathroom and 're-jigged the interior to be a more landscape-like experience'.

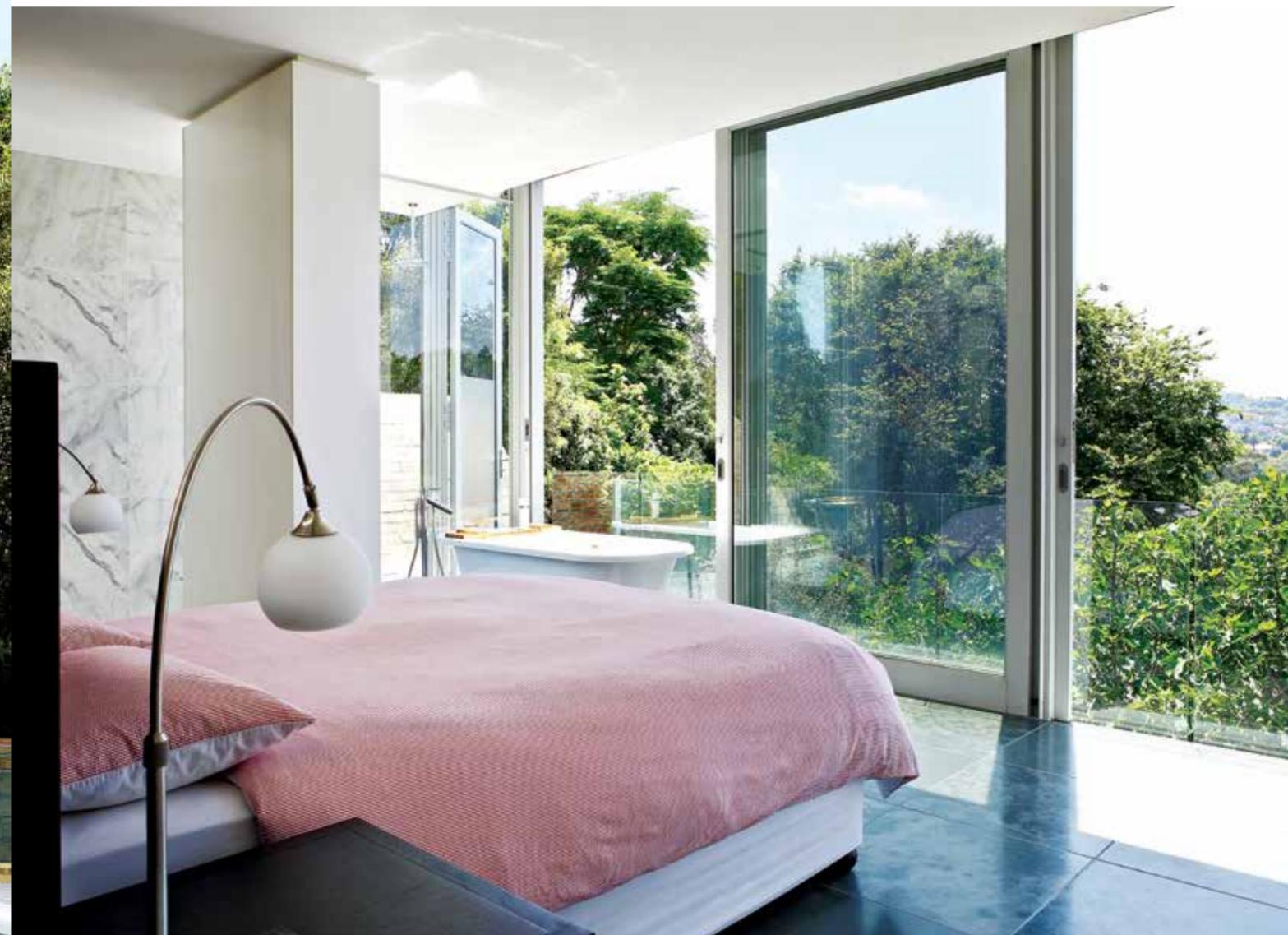
The staircase winds up from the sitting areas and turns around before leading up the back wall. The idea was to make the stairs 'habitable'. 'People like to sit on them now,' Sarah says. The stairs also 'communicate' with the couch, which was measured and designed into the architecture, so that the stairs seems like an extension of the furniture. (And, inversely, much of Pieter's furniture is architectural: Breuer Wassily Chairs, a Le Corbusier armchair, a set of bent steel cantilever dining chairs.)

Sarah installed a skylight above the staircase, washing the back wall with light, which makes the room seem spacious. The stairs are another rich but subtle level of detailing. 'There are three kinds of stair,' Sarah says, 'solid, semi-solid and floating.' They seem to get lighter as they go up, indicating something of the character of the house: the downstairs section, connected to the garden, is an intimate, grounded space. As you ascend, it becomes all about air and space. 'Upstairs the world is your home,' says Sarah. □

**Sarah Calburn Architects, sarahcalburn.co.za**



Pieter's cantilever chairs, more mid-century classics, came from **Decade Wasteland (083-477-2430)**. OPPOSITE, FROM LEFT A striking framed print by xxxx hangs above stairs; the outside courtyard areas feature multiple levels.



#### PIETER'S HOME TRUTHS

**The best thing about living here is** being central and close to everything, but high up against the koppie in a cul de sac where it's so peaceful you'd never think you're in the city. **I surround myself with** things I like, things that are important to me. **My top tip for living in a small space is** to move in gradually and start with only the essentials. Sometimes it's just so liberating not to be bound by material things. Store the rest of your things until you're sure they will either be useful or add comfort. Get rid of the rest – gradually. **My interiors motto is** 'keep it clean and simple'. **My favourite part of the house is** the main bedroom and bathroom. I remember waking up at 3am, having moved in the previous day, and I couldn't believe how lucky I was when I saw all the treetops, city lights and open sky from my bed. **When it comes to furnishing a small space,** be practical – always have your furniture in mind. There should always be room for at least two couches and a coffee table in the living room; never buy bulky furniture. **I have a large collection of** model cars, mostly Porsches; Barbapapa figurines I found in Sweden; some Frank van Reenen statuettes and loads of books. **My most treasured pieces of furniture are** my Le Corbusier LC2 chair and a well-worn seventies Wassily chair. **The best way to spend a weekend is** doing very little, in Cape Town or surrounds, overlooking the sea. Other than Melville, I'd also love to live in Bakoven in Cape Town. **My favourite travel destination is** Prague – the most beautiful place I've ever seen.

The bedroom has unspoilt views over the treetops with the glass expanses allowing natural light in. OPPOSITE Upstairs the bath and shower make the most of the spectacular views. It's also apparent how the glass box 'looks back', as Sarah puts it, at the brick vaults, not only contrasting with the texture, but actually enhancing the appreciation of the original features of the house.

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