



PURE DESIGN

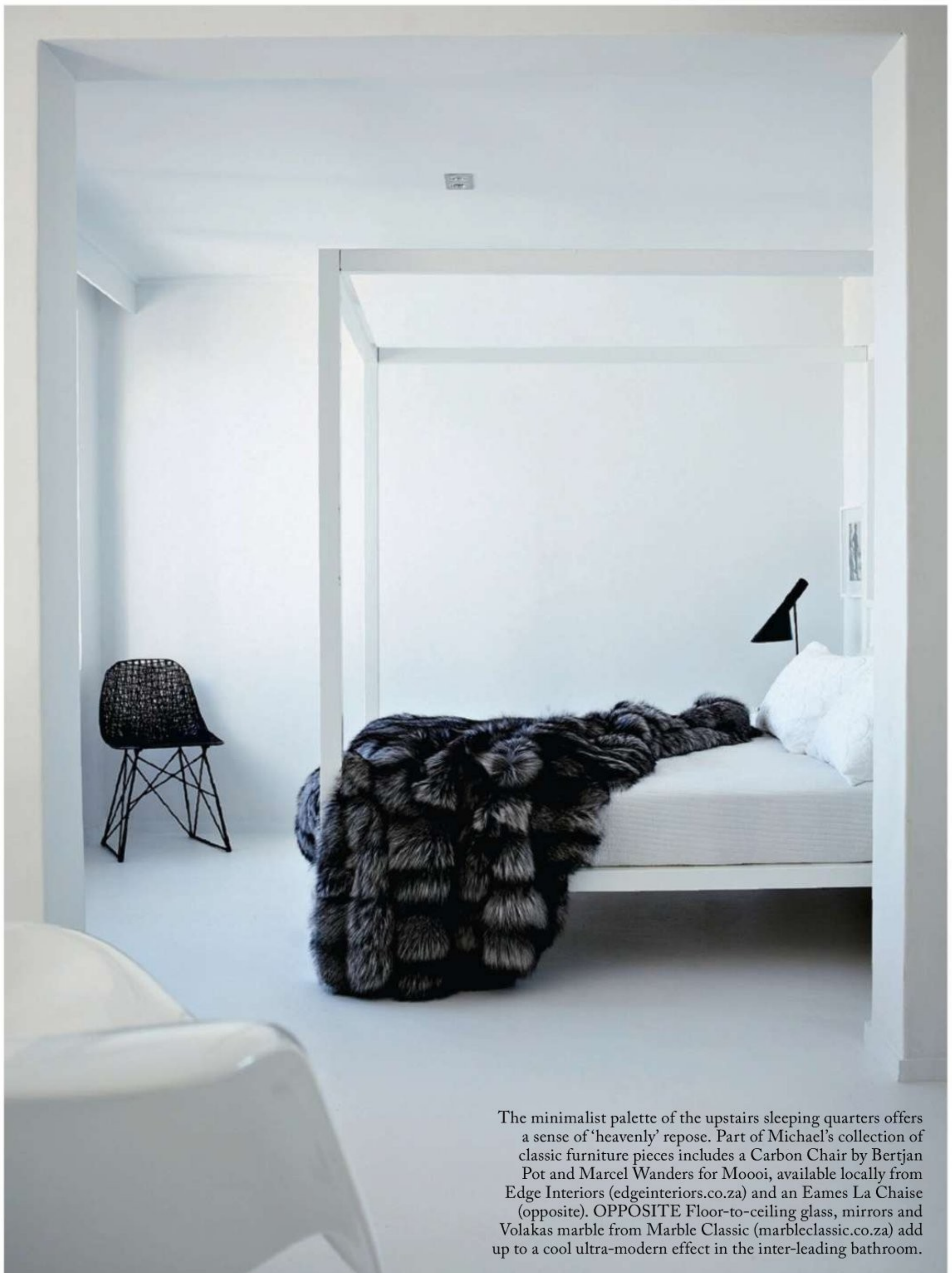
A formerly neglected heritage cottage in Cape Town's Sea Point is now a minimalist paradise

Text **Leigh Robertson** Styling **Danielle Howard** Photographs **Warren Heath**

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OPPOSITE Puro Cottage is the apt name for the immaculately renovated heritage home of Italian interior designer Michael Bianchini (pictured with boxer puppy Jack) in Sea Point, Cape Town. THIS PAGE In the dining area, photographic works by French artist Alexis Reynaud complement the blue hues of Michael's surfboard by Durban shaper Hugh Thompson (naturalcurve.co.za). The Saarinen dining table and Bertioia side chairs, both for Knoll, are available at Limeline (limeline.co.za).





The minimalist palette of the upstairs sleeping quarters offers a sense of 'heavenly' repose. Part of Michael's collection of classic furniture pieces includes a Carbon Chair by Bertjan Pot and Marcel Wanders for Moooi, available locally from Edge Interiors (edgeinteriors.co.za) and an Eames La Chaise (opposite). OPPOSITE Floor-to-ceiling glass, mirrors and Volakas marble from Marble Classic (marbleclassic.co.za) add up to a cool ultra-modern effect in the inter-leading bathroom.



BIG IDEA #1 - OPEN TOP

It took a neighbour chopping down a tree to reveal the house's potential ocean views. This sealed the deal for the previous owners to add a second level set back from the front so as not to interfere with the character of the heritage building. The new level was to have two bedrooms and a bathroom, separated by dividing walls. When the walls were being built, they thought again, deciding on the present open-plan layout of a lounge flowing into a sleeping space, and used glass walls to enclose the bathroom - a plus is that you can see Robben Island from the tub. The new owner will add on a wooden deck to extend the space.

When Italian interior designer Michael Bianchini stepped over the threshold of what appeared to be the tiniest of boxy heritage cottages, set at the top of a steep road above Cape Town's Sea Point, he knew his personal plans were about to change irrevocably. At the time he was living between cities, his primary domicile being in Geneva, Switzerland, but with annual breaks in the Mother City. He'd been after a small property to furnish and rent out on a short-term basis but as Michael took in the dazzling all-white and surprisingly voluminous, open-plan space extending to a courtyard, he instantly saw its potential as a more permanent base for himself.

'Not only was it in the city, and a house rather than an apartment, but it perfectly suited my style,' says Michael, whose lovingly amassed collection of designer furniture pieces, artworks and *objets* appears as if it was always intended for this compact but free-flowing space. He also fell for the cottage's views from its upper storey, taking in a sweep of the charming neighbourhood and the ocean beyond. Best of all, there was no work required other than the addition of an upstairs deck to take better advantage of the great outdoors.

Puro Cottage, as Michael has named it, was a far cry from its present pristine modern state when its previous owners, creative couple Deon Redman and Krisjan Rossouw, laid eyes on it. In search of a renovation project, they were amazed to come across the house - then a pokey single-storey dwelling that was used for storage. 'It was the only run-down wreck in the cutest street,' says Krisjan, a photographer. It was ripe for a complete overhaul.

Built in 1902 as accommodation for British lieutenants' wives, the terraced cottages on the block share similar quaint features, with strict guidelines for the preservation of their integrity and character. While bound to keep the facade intact, retain the uniform corrugated-iron roof and not over step the house's footprint, the

renovators were able to knock out the interior walls to create a seamless integrated area, and to go up a level and thus introduce valuable extra living space (see Big Idea #1).

The initial part of the renovation saw the kitchen re-positioned from the back of the cottage to the front, in what was previously a bedroom. Deon, a fashion producer with a fastidious eye for detail, laughs when describing how they drew on the walls, marking exactly how they envisaged the kitchen's layout. In the rear part of the house, a dry wall was installed to provide for new sleeping quarters, which, like the lounge area, opens up into the courtyard. While they had a clear sense of how it might be further transformed, Deon explains, it was architect Jozeph Smit of local firm Smit met Louw Architects who helped to realise their vision and cleverly optimise the space.

The cement-screeded floors and sculptural staircase, painted a cool off white, lend a striking simplicity to the revamped interior, while materials such as marble and smoky mirrors in the kitchen make a luxurious but surprisingly subtle statement. 'We didn't want the look to be ostentatious or over the top,' says Krisjan. Nor did they want any appliances to break the minimalist spell, and thus everything has been cleverly concealed.

There couldn't be a more appropriate backdrop for the furnishings Michael has brought back from Europe or had custom-made here. Having studied industrial design and run a successful interiors business with shops in Geneva and Italy's Como, he has a passion for classic pieces that he likes to mix with bold contemporary art and treasured items he's picked up, from a crocodile skull bought in New York's Soho to an antique birdcage picked up in Hong Kong. 'Everything has a story, has memories attached to it,' he adds. No doubt in his new home there will be many more to be made. □

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LITTLE BLACK BOOK

Architect Jozef Smit, Smit met Louw Architects, 083-449-7360, smitmetlouw.co.za **Floor paint** Build It (Plascon, custom-coloured), buildit-capetown.co.za **Handles** Raiel, raiel.com **Kitchen cabinetry** Faer (white high-gloss finishes), faer.co.za **Light fittings** Province Lighting, provincelighting.co.za **Marble surfaces** Marble Classic (Volakas Marble), marbleclassic.co.za **Plumbing** Solid Plumbing, solidplumbing.co.za **Roof** Youngman (Arctic White corrugated-iron roofing sheets), youngman.co.za **Slate tiles** (downstairs bathroom) Womag, womag.co.za **Smoke Glass** Cohesion Interiors, cohesioninteriors.co.za **Windows** Alu-Extreme (customised aluminum windows, sliding doors and glass enclosures), g.woodberg@gmail.com

LEFT Michael's favourite classic pieces in the living area include his Pipistrello lamp by Gae Aulenti for Martinelli Luce on one of the Huber coffee tables by Rodolfo Dordoni for Minotti, and a reupholstered 1950s armchair. The cushions on the chesterfield are from Weylandts (weylandts.co.za). BELOW The downstairs bedroom and en-suite bathroom are in striking contrast to the rest of the house, with a darker, more intimate palette and luxurious layering. Cashmere cushions from Louis Vuitton mix effortlessly with Mongolian llama wool scatters on the bed. Michael bought the antique statue of Jesus (c.1600) on his travels. The Tom Dixon pendants are available at Créma Design (cremadesign.co.za). The framed photograph is from a series by Krisjan Rossouw (krisjanrossouw.com). The Swan chair, as seen in the bathroom, is by Arne Jacobsen for Fritz Hansen.



On the kitchen counter are Harcourt Our Fire Lamps by Philippe Starck for Baccarat. BELOW The original cobbled stones of the outdoor courtyard, hand cut from granite blocks, were lifted, cleaned and re-laid.



BIG IDEA #2 - COOL COURTYARD

To maximise the indoor-outdoor flow, the French doors leading to the small courtyard were replaced with a large glass sliding door. Similarly, the adjacent bedroom and en-suite bathroom also open to the courtyard, creating the illusion of greater volume. For improved privacy the rear boundary wall was elevated. The courtyard was painted a deep charcoal, a colour scheme continued in the bedroom and bathroom leading off it. A vertical garden, planted by Krisjan himself, lends lushness and texture to this urban garden space (which still boasts its original hand-cut cobbled stone floor).

