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It's not often that one gets to snoop around the private home of international interior designers – and, what's more, come away with a few décor tricks of the trade.

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After visiting the Plettenberg Bay home, or should we call it the castle, of Jas Jhol and his partner in life and business, Andre Meeuwis, you are guaranteed to never look at décor - or your own home with the same eyes again.

These dishy and super-accomplished guys bought their Plett property in late 2018 and renovated it during the fateful lockdown. Combining their international experience in interior design with a passion for hosting guests,

“A home should be a quiet and calm zone creating a healthy environment for mind, body and spirit”

they have created an elegant and blissful space – a veritable canvas of the work they do the world over.

Jas was born and raised in Singapore and is an interior designer by trade, while Andre is South African and is also an accomplished designer. Their

talents merge perfectly in the Sugarbakers design and décor company which has been going strong for 29 years. Andre says they named it after an American television sitcom, “Designing Women”, which centred around the lives of the characters in an interior design business.

Jas and Andre met by chance in South Africa in 2006. Jas fell in love with the country and Plettenberg Bay in particular; they have been living in this Garden Route town for the last five years.

Naturally, their home has sea views over Robberg, but it’s easy to find yourself so enchanted with the interior that you often forget to look at the ocean. Artwork that draws you in has all been commissioned for the space it occupies – with contemporary South African artists such as Brian Rolfe and Neil du Bruyn taking pride of place on their walls.

Their attitude towards their home embodies the same philosophy they share with their clients. “A home should be a quiet and calm zone creating a healthy environment for mind, body and spirit,” says Andre. Sugarbakers embrace a biophilic way of living which, simply put, means letting elements of nature, like greenery and wood, enter a home along with maximum natural light.





Their home is decorated in shades of grey with no colours, maximising natural elements. Fitting in with this mood are the many different bird cages that decorate their house and open doors that enhance good feng-shui.

Jas and Andre love to entertain, and one is drawn to the bespoke piece of natural black granite especially chosen for the island in the dining/entertaining area. It boasts a built-in gas stove which allows guests to sit with Jas as he whips up South East Asian culinary dishes.

Sugarbakers are internationally renowned and have worked on homes in Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and India. Their portfolio includes projects like a boutique hotel in Botswana and a South African cabinet minister's residence (I asked them for a name, but their lips were sealed).

A private home in Plett which they did from scratch, has seven bedrooms, nine bathrooms, and 13 toilets. It is home to a family with numerous rescue dogs. When the owners arrived in Plett, Jas and Andre literally handed over the keys to a home that was totally finished, from the actual structure to the colour of the walls, to the art and every last coordinated soft furnishing such as bedding, curtains, cushions, you name it. Even the dogs had dedicated beds and a sleeping area built into this design.

Sugarbakers call this 'turn-key designing',

meaning they create an entire home from scratch – from the first bricks to the last vase of flowers – and then hand the clients the key.

When their clients buy a house, Sugarbakers advise them to immediately factor in a budget of 8%- 12% of the value of their home for the interior design, décor, and all finishes before they even move in. "It happens all too often that you move in and get used to things not being right, and then you just stop noticing it," says Jas.

A clean slate is where Sugarbakers enjoy coming into the picture. The experts sit with their clients right at the beginning doing what might be likened to a Spanish inquisition. They get to know their clients, finding out every possible thing about their lifestyle and what they want from a home. From the actual structure and flow of the place, the art they like, to preferred colours, Sugarbakers don't leave a stone unturned.

Do clients work from home? Do they entertain? Do they want to show off their home, or is it more of a private sanctuary? Do they have children? Do they have pets, and where would they ideally live in the house? Do they like to cook, and what is required of a kitchen? Do they braai? What do they want from a garden?

Amazingly, small details like storage space are also considered. Where will clothes hang; is a cupboard for long dresses needed? Where will



each person's shoes live? What side of the bed do they sleep on, and how should a bathroom with a his-and-her space work? These are all factors they consider.

Once armed with the client's wish list Sugarbakers have state-of-the-art technology (a gamechanger) which allows them to create a three-dimensional animated presentation enabling them to do a mock-up of the home and show it to their clients, who then get a picture from the structure and flow, down to minute details like how the curtains or blinds will look, where the couch will sit and how the art will hang or where a particular pot plant needs to sit. Only once this process is perfect does the actual project start.

They often work remotely and virtually with international clients, and this technology and design tool allows people to see their dream space in 3D without so much as visiting the property.

Jas says the way people view their homes started changing during the pandemic. "People are working from home and rethinking the importance of a home as a dwelling, entertaining and workplace."

CONTACTS:

Francois Cloete for fittings and cabinets on – 072 914 6960

Neil du Bruyn, a local artist from Plettenberg Bay for commissioned pieces – 079 900 5505

Fabrics from HERTEX – hertex.co.za





SUGARBAKERS' ESSENTIAL TIPS:

- Don't fall into the trap of buying a décor piece you have seen in a styled environment [a shop]. It may look great there, but not work in your home. Consider the entire space or room before buying anything in isolation to avoid this mistake.
- There are fashion trends in décor and design every year, but try to keep that timeless elegance that will last five to 10 years or more, says Jas.
- Wallpaper is very in-vogue again, but great care and expertise are needed when choosing the right pattern and colours, they warn.
- Paint and fabric colours follow the fashion world, and the Pantone colour for 2023 is Viva Magenta, "but that doesn't mean just because it's the trend, it should be splashed around, even in a contemporary home. Colour must fit the client and space.
- The way a painting is framed makes or breaks that piece of art, so get professional help.

