

**WHO LIVES HERE?** Ronelle and Vince Muir  
with their three Dachshunds  
**WHERE** Steenberg, Tokai  
**SIZE** 220m<sup>2</sup>

*gorgeous*  
**Our empty nest**

The Muirs swapped their big family dwelling for a chic estate home on the slopes of Constantiaberg.

By Kim Arendse • Photographs Karl Rogers • Production Marian van Wyk



Pool tiles from SQM Flooring; engineered oak floors from Eco Oak Flooring; towels from Mungo



The couple wanted an open-plan kitchen and living area for easy entertaining.



A neat row of oak wall hooks is convenient right next to the front door.



**I**t captivates you the moment you step into their home – a panoramic view of the nearby Steenberg Mountain slopes and meandering *Ou Kaapse Weg*, not to mention the lush grounds of the surrounding golf estate and vineyard.

It's easy to see why this breathtaking view won over Ronelle and Vince Muir, the owners of Holly Wood Design Studio.

Ronelle came across their future plot by chance when the Nieuwe Steenberg Estate was still being built in 2021. "I was sitting on the deck at a nearby restaurant, looked up at Constantiaberg and spotted this plot. It must have the most incredible view, I thought, and later, once we'd seen it for ourselves, we knew it was meant to be," Ronelle tells us.

The timing of this find was serendipitous – the couple had just become 'empty-nesters' as the last of their three children flew the coop. They'd been thinking of downscaling from their large family home in Tokai, which they'd owned for 16 years (featured in *Home* November 2016), to a more compact, sophisticated space for just the two of them.

"We loved our old home; it's where we raised our kids," Ronelle says. "But what was important to us back then – a large garden for kids and dogs, a TV room and designated spots for doing homework, less décor and more practical spaces – has changed now."

Ronelle and Vince were ready to relax with a view and enjoy a home with plenty of light, space for entertaining and scope to design and decorate according to their own style.

"Whatever stage of life you're in, design around that," is Ronelle's advice.



Wall panels were fitted in the dining area as well as in a few other rooms in the house. "They're very handy: they add texture, serve as a shelf and we hide all our electrical wires away in them," Ronelle says. A banquette seat also serves as storage.

Reeded oak leg table from Holly Wood Design Studio

## Open-plan living

Moving from their large five-bedroom home into this smaller house meant a big cleanout. "I don't like a lot of clutter; especially since there was always stuff lying around in our previous home, things we'd collected over the years... The process was therapeutic and I'm more mindful now about the things I can accommodate in this smaller space," Ronelle says.

She decorated the interior with open-plan living in mind. "We wanted each area to be defined but still harmonise with the rest of the house." To achieve this, Ronelle connected each space with colours and textures.

"We had the advantage of building from scratch, so we could create this kind of continuity from the beginning, instead of doing little renovations and updates here and there, which can often lead to a space feeling mismatched or cluttered," she explains.

The first thing the couple did was choose the flooring for their new home. "We paid the deposit on the floor as soon as we started building – it's an important aspect of a home, especially when connecting open-plan spaces, and usually by the end of a build or renovation, there is little budget left over for it," says Ronelle.

"I'm not a minimalist; I like simplicity, but I also like a home to feel like a home. Hence, the natural elements such as wood, linen and mudcloth fabrics, big indoor plants – anything that adds warmth and texture."

Nothing in this home is placed haphazardly. "Everything we have on display means something, including the artworks we love, photos of our children or pieces we brought from our family home, like the big comfy L-shaped couch in the living room. It's important that we have things that are meaningful surrounding us." >>



Apart from removing a few internal walls, Vince also reworked the home's original floor plan which had the kitchen facing away from the stunning views in the living area. He designed the steel-and-oak staircase leading to the second storey. "When it comes to a freestanding kitchen, it's best not to do everything at the same time because ideas can change as you go along," says Ronelle.

**It's in the detail**

The Muirs opted for shadow cornices throughout for a slicker look.

Kitchen by Holly Wood Design Studio; pendants from K.Light; tiles from Limegreen Sourcing Solutions; chairs from Holly Wood Design Studio; Neolith Abu Dhabi stone island top from Sangengalo Marble & Granite



**In the kitchen**

Vince and Ronelle design kitchens for a living but this doesn't mean that they had it all worked out when creating their own, especially at the beginning. "How it worked was that I designed the kitchen and Ronelle changed everything!" says Vince with a big belly laugh.

In the end, they settled on Vince's clever design of an open-plan kitchen with a partial wall separating it from a long, narrow scullery, allowing plenty of light into the area.

They agreed on a combination of classic oak and white – a simple look that complements the rest of the open-plan space and is easy to adapt over time with the addition of accessories and colour.

"Most of all, we wanted the kitchen to feel like part of the home, not a separate area just for cooking, as we know it's not only about cooking when it comes to a kitchen," says Vince.

For Ronelle, sufficient storage in the kitchen was vital, so drawers and cabinets were installed all around the island. Two freestanding pieces, including the eye-catching black arched cupboard – the kitchen's statement piece – were also added.

"Believe it or not, I was thinking of putting a piano in the space! But – and this is something everyone should try – once we'd lived here for a bit, it became clear that we needed more storage and so we had this cupboard made to accommodate for that," Ronelle says.



The couple's daughter Holly and her fiancé Cameron Prins are hard at work at the dining table. Chairs from Vogel Design

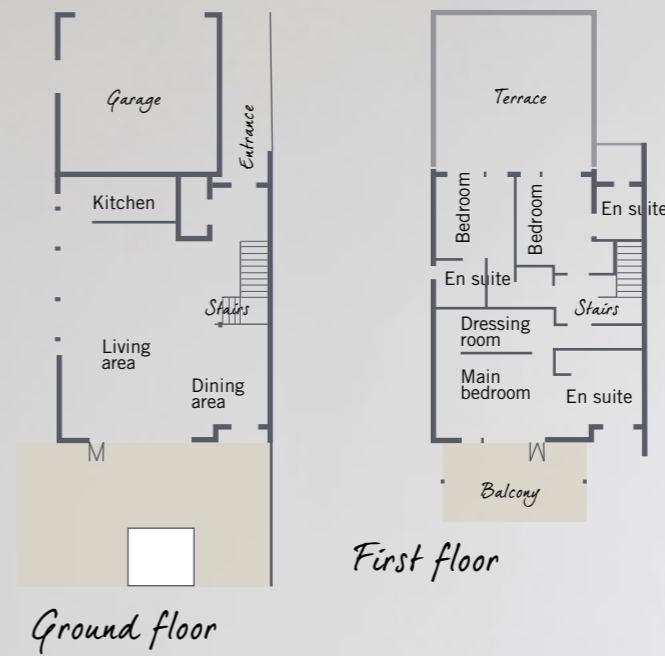
**DESIGNING A KITCHEN FROM SCRATCH**

Vince and Ronelle offer these tips for a new build:

- **Be upfront about your budget** with your kitchen designer. This will allow them to create a kitchen within your limits and give you options as to what can be added later when more funds are available.
- **Choose your counters wisely.** The areas around sinks and prep zones need to be impervious to water; materials such as quartz and granite work much better than wood, for example. On the other hand, wood is a good choice for a sociable kitchen island because it isn't as cold as stone. However, stone requires less maintenance and it's less likely to get scratched.
- **Create a good balance between functional and decorative.** Use plants, artworks and beautiful kitchen items to personalise your space without taking up too much of the workspace.
- **If you have an open-plan kitchen, make it as interactive as possible.** This way, you can socialise with people while prepping and cooking. Your island will become the heart of the home when entertaining, so make it a statement piece while also ensuring that it's functional.
- **A 3D render offers a great way to visualise a design** before a build. Use it to see what your space will look like and make changes accordingly.
- **Carefully consider what material to use** for your kitchen units; the main choices include:
  - Melamine** is affordable and easy to clean but colours are limited, and the doors don't have a profile.
  - Sprayed doors** come in a wider range of colours and can have a profile such as Shaker or tongue-and-groove.
  - Supawood (MDF)** offers endless possibilities and your colour choice is unlimited. The entire kitchen can be repainted in situ if you want to give it a new lease on life after a few years. It's also environmentally friendly as most paints have a water-based option. >>



In the main bedroom, the bed was positioned in the middle of the space, so it has the same mountain view as downstairs. The house is south-facing and the Muirs were concerned about it being cold, so they extended the flue of the freestanding fireplace downstairs into the bedroom. Vince designed the wooden headboard with its floating shelves; it doubles up as extra storage at the back. White tufted cushion and charcoal throw from Mr Price Home



Shutters in the en-suite bathroom help to regulate temperature and provide privacy. Shutters from Plantation Shutters; towel (in basket) from Mungo



Whatever stage of life you're in, design around that. - Ronelle



## READER HOME



White with oak and touches of gold is the look that the couple went with for their own en suite and the guest bathrooms. "Gone are the days when the whole bathroom was tiled," says Ronelle. "You only need tiles around the very wet areas – the rest you can paint. It's a great cost saver!"

Concrete basins from Lux Crete; terrazzo tiles from Tiles by Tactile; vanities from Holly Wood Design Studio; hand towel from Mungo

A wall panel serves as a headboard and shelf in the guest bedroom. It's painted Sage Grey, a Holly Wood Design Studio custom colour. ↑

