



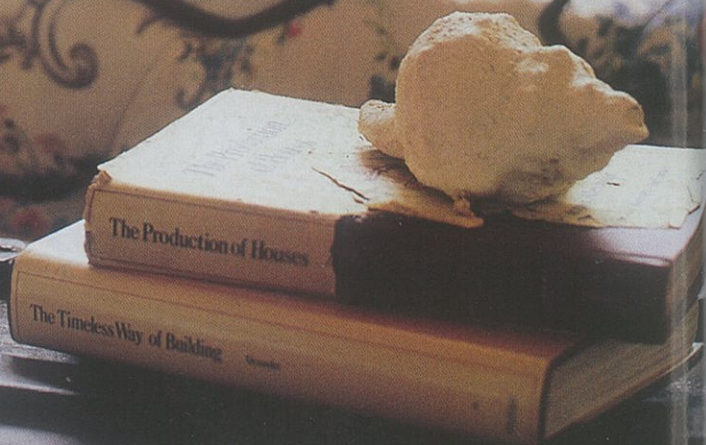
# *waterland*

Text and production Kate Wilson Photographs David Ross

In the remote river village of Vermaaklikheid, New Age entrepreneur Jack Andrew has built a magical house to channel the Voortrekkers, eels and naturopaths

'It is selfish to  
build a place and  
stay there forever.  
I want to move on.  
I came here to  
create something  
that other people  
could get away to'

— JACK ANDREW



Vermaaklikheid is not a big place. As one-horse towns go, this one's barely got a hind leg. Hardly anyone's heard of it and that, of course, is why it's hot property. Still, I find this incredible at first. It's not even a village, just cottages and a post office littering some scruffy-looking hills. Locals stare, cows roam in ropey paddocks and the theme tune to *Deliverance* rustles the *spaansriet*. Who'd want to stay here? More people than you think. Famous people even. Fashion designer Jenny le Roux owns a row of pristine cottages along the Duiwenhoks river, ex-singer Lesley Rae Dowling recently sold the grand Kleinefontein estate 10 minutes over the hill (featured in our March issue) to another stylish couple and the Borain family – of which Josie, the ex-model turned celeb photographer is a member – owns a property in town too.

But these are all holiday houses, retreats where the owners indulge their rural fantasies far from the mod cons of their real homes. The Andrews' house is quite different. The Riverstar is a family home, a sanctuary for wildlife, a shrine to Voortrekker memorabilia and, most importantly, it's the house that Jack built.

Jackson Andrew is well named. Before we meet he sounds like an ordinary guy – entrepreneur aged 35, husband of Me'shell, 32, and father of Charlotte, 18 months, living and working in this hind-leg hamlet. But when he appears from out of the reeds, woolly-haired and shirtless in dungarees, it's clear that this is in fact Jack of fairy-tale fame, currently residing on the Garden Route.

Jack – as he does indeed call himself – is an architect-builder-engineer-designer-craftsman who studied graphic design and has mastered all his trades. He has the flushed cheeks and improbable lifestyle of his namesake – leaping wrought-iron candlesticks and scaling bluegums, living in the house he built with a flaxen-haired wife who embroiders linen for their store in Stilbaai... All that's missing is the giant.

The Andrews' house, whether as a result of its enigmatic location or its eccentric owners, is truly magical. Designed by Jack in his capacity as one of JPLA Architects, it's built in a star shape, with five pitched-roof wings that meet in a central courtyard and are crowned with a viewing deck that looks out to the river. The finishes are a mass of contradictions as Jack's organic *langhuisie* leanings jostle with Me'shell's English country dreams: *rietdak* ceilings and Oregon-pine floors, whitewashed shutters and unpainted cement courtyards, pitchforks and rose beds.

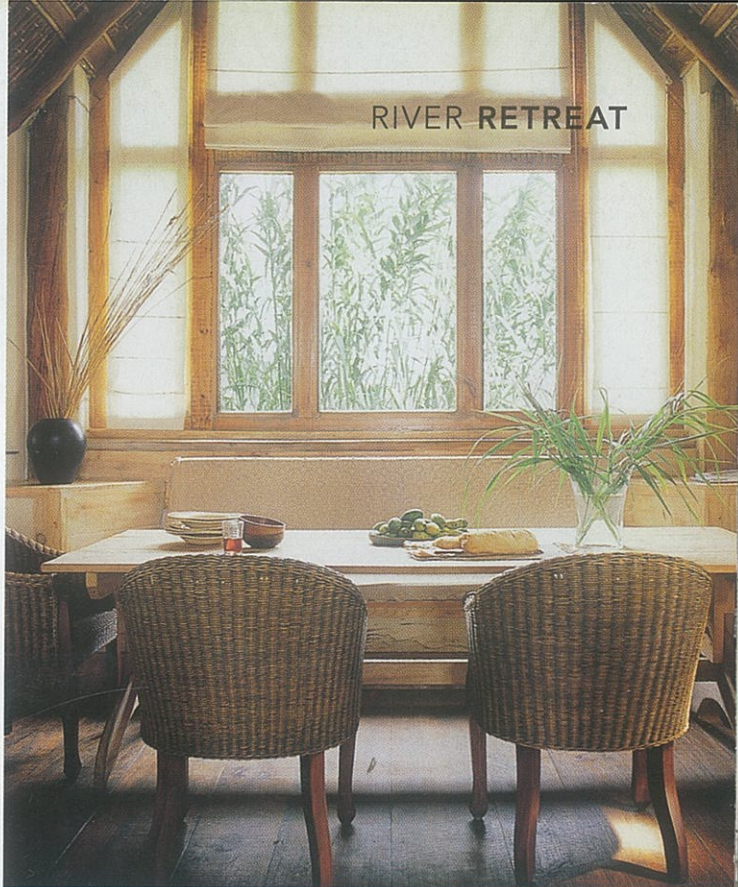
'We had to build in keeping with the local vernacular,' says Jack, 'so the house is really just a combination of A-frames and positive and negative shapes. I wanted the architecture to disappear and to bring the outside in through the informal courtyards.'

The Riverstar is almost entirely surrounded by three-metre-tall reeds, magnifying the stillness. The air buzzes with dragonflies and visitors keep appearing from out of the reeds – a man named Bill with a black Labrador, an elderly couple of 'Rawtarians', Bruno and Lorraine, who own a retreat nearby. They drift in and out again.

Jack's most recent passion – and there have been several – is crafting Voortrekker-style furniture from wood and salvaged metal. The double stairway on either side of the entrance was constructed from the springs of abandoned donkey carts. Rusting cartwheels are piled up outside his workshop awaiting their second life as chandeliers.

Apart from his admiration of their 'great style and understanding of design authenticity', Jackson says his current interest in the Voortrekkers comes from living in Vermaaklikheid:

## RIVER RETREAT



THIS PICTURE Built-in seating in the dining area is complemented by simple wicker furnishings and a view onto a wall of *spaansriet* that gives the feeling of being underwater. BELOW The main bedroom features one of Jack's reed wall panels. OPPOSITE The guest bedroom (which can double as a living room) is furnished with an iron day bed and wagon-wheel armchairs.





OPPOSITE The Riverstar's Hearth Room shares a wing with Jack's office and is home to a collection of farming implements. The triangular motifs in the windows were inspired by the work of Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy. THIS PAGE, ABOVE LEFT South African Gothic: Jack and Me'shell Andrew in front of their Vermaaklikheid home. LEFT A view of the right-hand side of The Riverstar, showing the entrance to the Hearth Room (the blue door) and the viewing deck above.