

A Berber carpet from Gonsenhausers Fine Rugs grounds the lounge in this Jo'burg home. The botanical wallpaper on the right was added as a backdrop for extra interest



HISTORICAL GLAMOUR

GOLDEN YEARS

STRIKING PATTERNS, NATURAL TEXTURES AND A MEASURE OF GLAMOUR HAVE TURNED AN OLD JOHANNESBURG HOME INTO A PICTURE OF RELAXED REFINEMENT

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T

he road between outmoded and elegant can be a long one in the realm of interiors. And yet, it's a course that designer Michele Throssell navigated in only a few months when tasked with turning a dated home in Johannesburg's Saxonwold into an easy-living base with a sense of sophistication.

The bones of the old house were strong and stately: this was a build of handsome proportions, with wooden floors and arched windows that spoke of history, set amid a large garden. But the interiors were a study in dowdiness. 'The walls were beige and the floors, ceiling beams and stairway were made of Oregon pine,' says Michele. 'There was just too much orange'.

Added to this, the owners felt they weren't utilising the property's various communal spaces well enough. As family-orientated homebodies they wanted to open up the living area. This wish prompted the only major structural change made: the removal of the wall between the kitchen and dining room. Now guests and residents can float from one space to the next and on into the adjacent TV lounge (previously a formal living room) or out onto the covered patio, a refuge on summer days that leads onto the generously treed backyard.

The challenge then was to marry the breezy downstairs layout with a touch of refinement that would befit the house's age and the owners themselves. Michele's answer was to lift and lighten the interiors by painting the walls and ceilings white, while staining the floorboards a deep charcoal brown (reminiscent of the parquet used in many homes in the area).

Against this – in Michele's words, 'brush strokes that hold everything together', she added shots of colour – mustard in the lounge and dining room for old-world elegance, soft blues and greys in the master bedroom for a sense of Provençal calm and splashes of graphic interest. 'I'm mad about pattern and geometrics,' admits ►



ABOVE The husband's study, based in the standalone cottage, is a decidedly pared-down space. The geometric rug was custom made for the room and the steel desk is by Gregor Jenkin **RIGHT** The old TV lounge was converted into a spacious study for the wife. The armchair is covered in fabric from Hertex's 'Moody Blues' collection **OPPOSITE PAGE** Nguni hides, lighting by Bofred and an artwork from David Brits's 'Snake Man' collection add graphic interest to the entrance



'I'M MAD ABOUT PATTERN AND GEOMETRICS. I THINK THEY CONTRIBUTE A NICE TENSION TO A ROOM' Michele Throssell



ABOVE Joining the flooring between the kitchen and dining room after the wall between the two spaces was removed was quite a feat, but the result is striking
OPPOSITE PAGE The TV lounge leads through to the dining room, where mustard drapery breaks the otherwise neutral scheme





IN THIS HOME THE FOCUS IS, FIRST AND FOREMOST, ON COMFORT

the designer. 'I think they contribute a nice tension to a room.'

The most striking manifestation of her penchant for visual richness is the mosaic tiling in the bathrooms and kitchen, and the playful wallpaper that dresses surfaces in various rooms – botanical motifs in the lounge and leafy jungle greens in the guest suite, which, quite fittingly, sits tucked away among the trees in the upstairs portion of the property's standalone cottage. Aside from pleasing the eyes, these patterns also nod to the owners' zest for gardening and serve to bring the lush surrounds in. 'The house doesn't have sliding doors or much glass, and we didn't want a major restructure, so we used these references to speak to the beautiful garden outside,' says Michele.

Layers of natural texture are offset by traditional elements in Michele's signature trace of glamour. Basketry, Berber rugs, Nguni hides and Kuba cloth-covered cushions add warmth, while velvet upholstery, brass light fixtures, silver trays and mirrors lend lustre.

Similarly, Chinese chests, antique tables and a Cape Dutch armoire from the owners' pre-renovation collection find companions in furniture and lighting newly crafted by esteemed young South African designers. The likes of Gregor Jenkin, Tonic, James Mudge, David Krynauw and Mia Widlake are all represented, giving a historical shell contemporary verve.

In this home the focus is, first and foremost, on comfort. It's the driving force behind the plump sofas – 'you can just flop down on them,' says Michele – and soft throws. It's also at the heart of the expansive patio and the table that sits ready for languid summer lunches under the oak on the front lawn. The house may be a refined, decorated nest, but as the designer maintains, 'it's a homely home, not a showpiece.' ■ **Michele Throssell Interiors** 📍 michelethrossell.co.za

RIGHT
Cabinetry in the main bathroom is washed in the same soft, calming blues and greens as the adjacent master bedroom
BELOW The wardrobe in the guest suite is a bespoke piece
OPPOSITE PAGE Leafy wallpaper from Jaima Brown in the guest suite contributes to the feeling of being up in the trees

