RIVER COTTAGE

Architect Joe van Rooyen has breathed life into a run-down but marvellously located cottage overlooking the Crocodile River.

PHOTOS **DOOK** PRODUCTION **ANNEMARIE MEINTJES** WORDS **GRAHAM WOOD**

When you own a share in a farm just outside Joburg with the Crocodile River running through it, setting up a weekend getaway place makes more than a little sense. But the owners of this property took their time. In fact, years went by, says architect Joe van Rooyen of JVR Architects, before they decided to commit to the project.

The perfect spot was patiently awaiting them. On a picturesque site overlooking the river stood the ruin of a stone cottage, believed to be the original farm manager's house. It had so much potential that Joe and the owners decided to renovate, although it would be more accurate to describe what the project developed into as a reinvention rather than a renovation.

"It's not a cottage any more," Joe says. It has, however, retained its charm, sense of place and authenticity, and, more literally, three of the original stone walls.

"It's quite a specific type of stone," says Joe, pointing out the walls dotted with grey-and-black pebbles. "You can see it was built from round river stones." He reused as much of the stone as they could from the walls that were knocked down to create the main barn-like section of the house. "When we ran out of used stone, we got more from the river and farm," says Joe.

The homestead is essentially made up of three "pods", Joe says, built around three old trees." Trees and views, that is. "Every room has a view," he says; "to me, this is a very appealing aspect of the house."

The living area – comprising kitchen, dining room and lounge – is a big informal gathering space at the centre of the house. Leading off it are guest bedrooms and bathrooms. Connected via an elevated boardwalk is a bedroom pavilion on stilts, which, in contrast to the stone-barn look of the living-area pod, has a modern aesthetic and appears to float.

This bedroom pavilion has some of the most magnificent views of the river and the koppie behind it.

"The owner liked the idea of having a separate pod that you can close up," says Joe. "It's a sort of introverted space."

The arrangement of the buildings has created wonderful courtyards, with one having a wild olive tree as its focal point. Outside spaces contrast big and open with enclosed and intimate. Whereas the facade of "the barn" looks out expansively over a lawn, with a swimming pool and deck, the courtyard with the tree is, by contrast, quite imitate and protected. "You have two very different exterior experiences," says Joe.

Inside, the finishes are an interplay of refinement and rawness. A corrugated-iron roof reinforces the farm-building appeal. Inside, the wooden trusses and chipboard ceilings may be exposed, but the fine metalwork detail Joe designed finishes them. "It's quite an old dairy-farm kind of detail that became quite a strong language throughout the house."

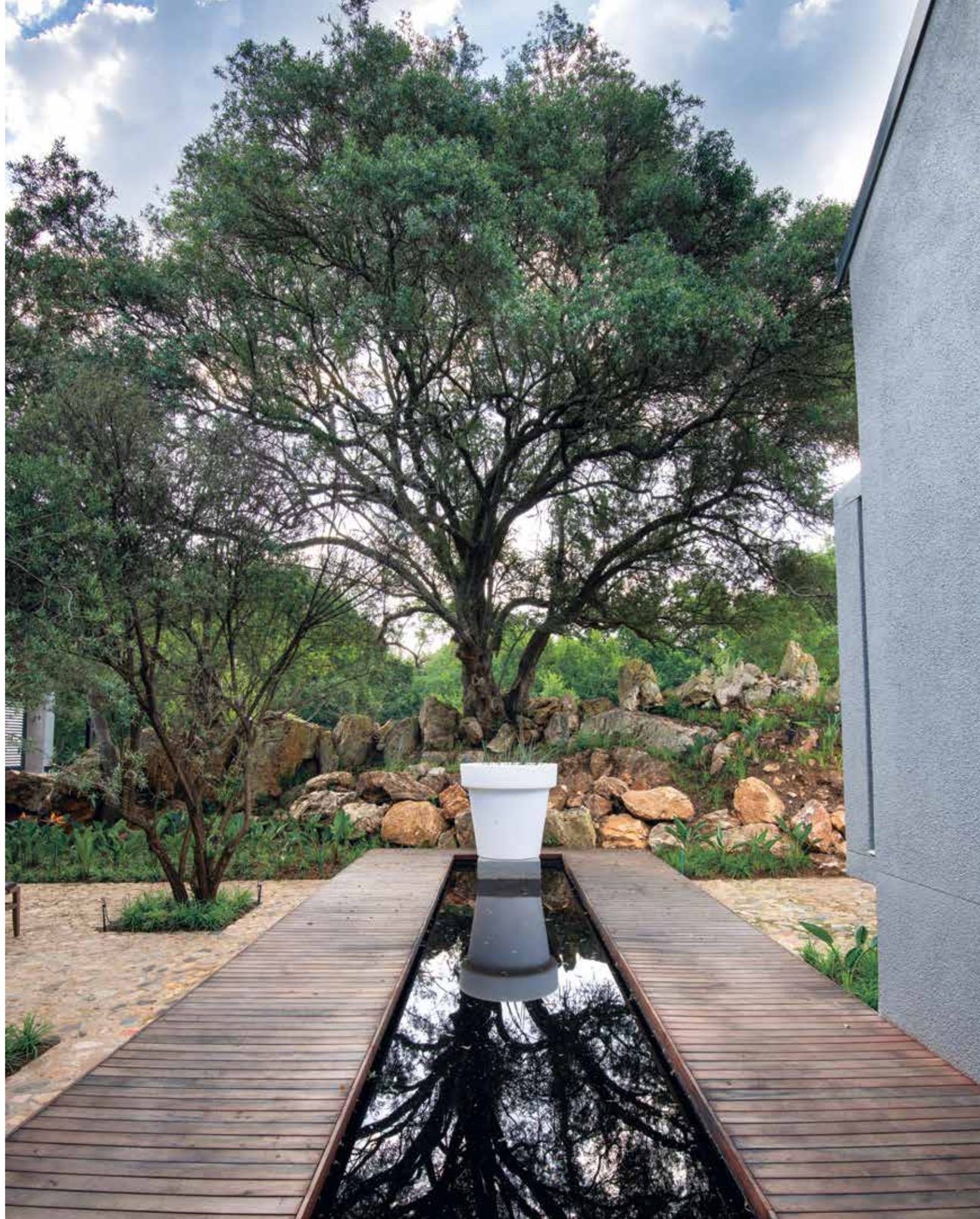
The decor, which was also done by JVR Architects, is spare and elemental: screed, wood, steel, leather, sisal. The materials are all simple, honest and hard-wearing. "You don't have to stress about guests or dogs and kids." The house is purposefully uncomplicated, meant to be easy to open up after a few months away. Which does not mean compromising on luxury. It's about how you apply your creature comforts, Joe says, like having fantastic linen.

The palette was kept simple, with warm orange and blue accents inspired by the strelitzias that Gregory Mark Landscapes introduced in the courtyards. The landscape – already part of the house in its stone – infuses the interiors with its spirit. The result may be a radical reinvention of the stone cottage that once stood here, but it's been intricately knitted into its surroundings so as to enhance the experience of the remarkable site.

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OPPOSITE The counterpoint to the expansive view from the front of the cottage over the river is an intimate courtyard with a wild olive tree as its focal point, emphasised by the linear water feature, deck and planter. **BELOW** Architect Joe van Rooyen with a sculpture by Cobus Haupt.





Flanking the dining table by James Mudge are Wishbone chairs by Hans Wegner for Carl Hansen & Son on one side and upholstered benches from Auvergne Designs on the other. The replica Agnes chandelier is from Floating Designs. Lifestyle Projects manufactured the kitchen and cabinets, and the bar stools are by Dark Horse.

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Dominating the lounge are a leather sofa from Wunders and a Legs 11 ottoman from Studio 19. The nesting coffee table set is from Mezzanine Interiors and the metal side table from Gatehouse Furniture. The pouffes, lamps and sculpture are from The Storer. The replica Branching Disc chandelier is from Floating Designs and the chair in the background is from Weylandts.

In the master bedroom, the SG Chair was designed by Anatomy Design for Southern Guild, upholstered in fabric designed by Nicole Levenberg of Aureum Design. The tray table is also from Anatomy Design. The bed and leather ottoman are both from Auverge Designs, and the replica Modo chandelier is from Floating Designs. The Delft-inspired linen is from Babylonstoren.

In the bathroom (and throughout the rest of the house), the ironwork, including the vanity with built-in basins, is by The Iron Banister. The mirror is from Mezzanine Interiors. All the sanitaryware, including the ladder-shaped heated towel rail, are from Linea Brigio. The tray table is from Anatomy Design.

In the beautiful shower space between the bedroom and dressing room, the shower is by Linea Brigio and the light is from Floating Design. The Easy Coat stand in the background is by Dokter and Misses. The wooden flooring here and throught the house (including the decking) is by Zuberi Flooring.
OPPOSITE In the guest suite, the Tutu 2.0 light was custom-made by Mash T Design Studio. The bed, ottoman and sofa are all by Auvergne Design, and the scatter cushion on the bed is from The Storer. The chair in the bathroom is from La Grange Interiors. The rug, and all the other rugs in the house, is from Rebtex.

The builders used as much of the original stone as they could from the walls of the knocked-down cottage to build the main barn-like section of the house. All the outdoor furniture pieces - Oasis bean bags and bean bag footstools, Coral sunloungers and Concrete round side tables - are from Bloc Outdoor.