



For architect Robin McIntosh, principal of Intersect Architects based in Magoebaskloof, the challenge posed by the design of a home is to find a creative solution to the practical problem of housing a family. This should be done in such a way that the architecture reflects the character and social patterns of the family rather than a relentless pursuit of the latest fashions and styles in the home magazines. Robin was tasked with the job of designing a Tuscan home for couple David and Ilse Pieterse in Tzaneen. He says originally, the couple wanted a Tuscan design home but he persuaded them to consider a more contemporary approach to the design of their first home together.

Describe the design concept of this home?

It was to focus on the concept of family living with the creation of a strong central core. This comprised an expansive open plan kitchen, dining, family room, outside patio, pool deck and formal lounge area, with very strong visual connections between all these aspects of the house. The split level entrance, open double volume, sweeping spiral staircase and the floating bridge between the two wings of the house form a dynamic hub which connects all aspects of the home, both physically and visually. The home took the shape of a W with a strong central hub offering a kaleidoscope of views from all the rooms looking in

all directions. The channelling of the prevailing winds and the creation of a cool courtyard to the rear of the house created a natural evaporative cooling effect to the entire house to cool the more exposed areas of the house.

Explain the architectural style?

It was not my overriding concept to design a modern or contemporary home. It was rather a more basic response to the challenges and opportunities posed by the site and the brief given by the client. Tzaneen, being unusually hot and humid in a tropical climate, required special attention to be given to heat and sun penetration into the house. This had to be balanced with the client's brief to have huge expansive views over the dam and mountains with large areas of glazing. Addressing this balance became the primary concept to the design of this home.

What were some of the aims and challenges of this design style?

The aim was to sensitively balance the need for large open spaces with uninterrupted views with the challenge of restricting and controlling heat that results from large glazed surfaces. I found my solution in the principles of passive design. This requires a holistic approach to the design when considering the orientation of the site, >





position of windows, sun screening of windows and exposed patio area. It was important to control light and shade, ventilation as well as insulation. It was these aspects rather than an overriding objective to design a modern or contemporary design that guided the final design of this home.

Tell us a bit about some design features of this home?

This house is orientated away from the west with smaller and well protected, carefully selected windows to the views offered to the west. It features large expansive overhangs and simple shutter shade structure over large areas of glazing and exposed patios aimed at reducing the effects of direct heat onto these surfaces. The roof is a simple design which facilitates the harvesting of rain water and the shape of the house makes optimum use of natural ventilation offered by the prevailing breezes. At the back of the house, the pond/water feature was designed to passively cool the house by creating an evaporative cooling effect throughout the house. It also creates a visual and sound connection to the lush shaded garden and the sound of water that comes out.

When you approach a new project, what triggers your vision – your emotional heart or the technical challenge?

Architects unlike graphic and fine arts, do not have the luxury of responding to raw emotional creativity without acknowledging the impact this would have on the functionality of the building. It was a revelation to me that by solving the technical challenges in a design, a creative manner very often reveals itself naturally. Without delving too deep into the balance and harmony that exists in nature, it is remarkable that solutions to technical aspects of the design often result in the very same balance and proportion used as the guidelines for good design.

As an architect, how do you blend contemporary materials used in construction with the natural?

The blending of contemporary and natural materials has become the ultimate challenge for me because it offers endless modern contemporary design opportunities. The use of recycled timber and steel offers a further dimension to modern eco design principles, with the use of texture and life that only age can provide.

Intersect is a well established firm with projects across Africa and a portfolio that includes work in residential estates, commercial buildings and luxury game lodges. email: robin@intersectarchitects.co.za or visit www.intersectarchitects.co.za