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AMAZING GRACE

GRAND IN SCALE AND CLASSIC IN CONCEPT, THIS CONSTANTIA VILLA
MAKES FOR AN OPULENT BUT RESTFUL FAMILY HOME

TEXT **HILARY PRENDINI TOFFOLI** STYLING **DANIELLE HOWARD** PHOTOGRAPHS **GREG COX**

The French motto *Une bonne cuisinière a besoin d'une bonne cuisine* (a good cook needs a good kitchen) was hand painted onto the splashback in Lauren Searll's kitchen in Constantia, Cape Town, by Chinaworks (chinaworks.co.za). The French butcher's rack holding the pots is from Morgan Associates (morganassociates.co.za). OPPOSITE The chaise and ottoman in the living room were designed by decorator Georgina Bagg and made by Moorgas & Sons (moorgasandsons.co.za). A crystal chandelier from Morgan Associates and an ornate mirror from Chandler House (chandlerhouse.co.za) add to the French feel.





On arrival at this grand home in Constantia, Cape Town, your immediate impression is of a house of baronial proportions: graceful old-world style in the most sublime sense of the term. This house, however, is just over a year old.

‘We moved in last year in April,’ says its owner Lauren Searll. ‘I bought the property in August 2012. There was a 1970s single-storey house on it and we planned to use the foundations but once we started the engineer said we needed to construct better ones. So we built from scratch.’

Having worked closely with architect Jacky Cattell for three years Lauren’s vision was clear: ‘I knew exactly what I wanted. A French-inspired, romantic, classic home that breathed warmth and love.’

She and her late husband Aaron Searll, the Cape Town clothing-industry magnate, used to visit the legendary Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Antibes in the South of France every year so it’s no surprise that stylish France is visible in her home, not only in the crystal chandeliers, ornate mirrors, French dressers and Louis XV cabriole legs that pop up everywhere but also in the special pieces

such as the 19th-century French church pew in the hall and the French butcher’s rack that acts as a kitchen pot hanger.

There’s French oak, too, on the floors and in the glass-fronted cabinets, while a rustic feel is maintained in the ceilings with poplar beams and exposed trusses.

You might imagine that Lauren and her two daughters – Juliette, 11, and Sophia, 10, – would rattle around in this mansion. Yet, thanks to the relatively small rooms and quietly elegant decor, it’s the kind of home that wraps itself around you. It’s serene and relaxed, an effect achieved partly by muted natural colours throughout. As Lauren puts it: ‘Everything is gentle except our upstairs playroom.’

She was responsible for the decor, with the assistance of interior designer Georgina Bagg.

The calm spirit of the house is rather like that of its unflappable owner. ‘I’m a very traditional person and family is the most important thing in my life,’ Lauren says, ‘so I want to live in a space that is completely comfortable and warm. As a Taurean I love life’s luxuries so beautiful fabrics, antiques and crystal always have to feature but nothing is precious and anyone coming into my home



must feel completely relaxed. Spill something or break something, it's just part of the journey.'

Jacky says Lauren's brief was for a large family home with great areas for entertaining. 'The roof is broken into smaller sections so it never feels like a mansion,' explains Jacky. 'The rooms are warm and personal to reflect Lauren and her family, each designed especially for its function, although they flow into each other.'

Jacky introduced the Cape Dutch vernacular in the external chimney stack, which is of hand-tooled stone. Her smart domestic suggestions, with entertaining in mind, included the location of the drinks fridge not far from the pool, a long, thin ironing table of oak on castors so it can easily become an extra table and two dishwashers instead of one.

Landscape architect Tirzah Webb designed the French country-style garden, maximising views and screening neighbours' roofs while creating an abundance of sumptuous greenery that softens the strong lines of the house. Undulating slopes became levels and various intimate areas were established and contain urns and garden benches from Lauren's previous home. ▷

ABOVE, FROM FAR LEFT 'Family is the most important thing in my life,' says Lauren, pictured here with her daughters Juliette and Sophia; the lamps, dresser and baskets in the entrance hall are from Block & Chisel (blockandchisel.co.za) and the silk Persian carpet is from Gonsenhausers (finerugs.co.za).

Lauren's favourite place to unwind is the potager created for her by landscaper Heimo Schulzer (hsgardens.co.za); most of the dining-room furniture is by Moorgas & Sons working with interior designer Georgina Bagg, using fabrics by Mavromac (mavromac.co.za).





‘The main garden required earthworks and styling,’ says Tirzah. ‘We kept it simple, yet bold and dramatic like the view of the mountain. The pool and its terrace garden were positioned to be appreciated from all angles, whether braaiing outside or dining on the main veranda or in the conservatory.’

A cheerful line-up of mop-head trees leads to the front door, large troughs spill over with colourful flowering plants and water features provide a tinkling soundtrack. Naturally France pops up again in the potager. At its heart rises a small fountain column from a pool enclosed by low, square bagged-brick walls. Granadillas climb over a wooden structure surrounded by vigorously growing edible vegetation. It’s a place where Lauren can sit on a bench in the midst of fragrant foliage or pick her favourite roses.

Lauren’s so content in this lovely home she says she hates having to leave it: ‘I would happily spend every minute of the day here.’ **Georgina Bagg Interiors, geoginabagg@law.co.za; Jaclyn Cattell, jackycattell@telkomsa.net; Tirzah Webb, tirzah@mweb.co.za. This property is available for holiday rentals through Perfect Hideaways, perfecthideaways.co.za.**

ABOVE, FROM LEFT Perfume flacons adorn the top of an antique walnut cabinet in the living room; the main bathroom opens up on to the stoep and has a bath by Victorian Bathrooms (victorianbathrooms.co.za).

OPPOSITE Ceramic tiles from Chinaworks cover the walls of the outside shower and the floor features wood-effect ceramic tiles by Italcotto (italcotto.co.za). The shower head is from Victorian Bathrooms.



'I KNEW EXACTLY WHAT I WANTED. A FRENCH-INSPIRED, ROMANTIC, CLASSIC HOME THAT BREATHED WARMTH AND LOVE.'



LAUREN'S HOME TRUTHS

For me luxury is spending a weekend cooking with my girls and having the time to lie in a bubble bath reading by candlelight. **The most luxurious thing I've ever bought is** an antique chest with a full set of sterling-silver cutlery. **What I like about Constantia is** the rural feeling and being surrounded by trees, fields and mountain views. **I like to relax with friends by** having them over for lazy afternoon braais, with children running around, wine flowing and music playing. **When entertaining I** plan well in advance, from the menu and drinks to the decor and flowers. I set the table the day before so I can mingle and I prepare food without formality. I always make sure the bathrooms are full of fresh flowers and lit candles. **In winter the first thing I do when I arrive home is** light a fire and pour a glass of wine, then I start preparing dinner. My daughters usually decide in the car on the way to school in the morning what they want for dinner – curry, soup, Mexican food, steak – so we all have something to look forward to at the end of the day. **Our favourite way to relax together is** with a puzzle. **The music you are likely to hear in this house is** completely eclectic, everything from Mozart to Ella Fitzgerald and Taylor Swift. **In decor I draw the line at** extreme abstract art. Paintings have to be beautiful, gentle and in no way unnerving. **I can't do without** lovely, expensive linen and scented candles. **The most unpredictable thing I've ever done is** to put on my pointe shoes and dance at a dinner party.

ABOVE, FROM FAR LEFT The bunk bed unit is from The Room (theroomfurniture.co.za); the mirrors in the guest bathroom are from MRP Home (mrphome.com) and the cabinet is actually a bedside table from Block & Chisel on which Lauren put a marble top and basin, and plumbing inside, while still managing to keep the drawers; the headboard in the master bedroom is by Moorgas & Sons in a fabric by Mavromac and the embossed cotton bed cover is from MRP Home; the bed and the bedside table in the guest bedroom are from Block & Chisel.

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STAART FARM

WHERE? Voor-Paardeberg, Paarl, Western Cape, 021-790-0972

WHY WE LOVE IT Sometimes you find a place that calls to mind all the romantic images that the words uttered by Meryl Streep in *Out of Africa* evoked: 'I had a farm in Africa'. Staart Farm is obviously not in Kenya but its majestic setting at the foot of the Paardeberg mountain, its historic homestead – all 'big, thick whitewashed walls, colonial verandas and comfy sofas' – and grand interiors certainly make you feel that South Africa is an amazing place.

X-FACTOR It sleeps 10, has huge lounge areas inside and out, and, as a working farm with cattle, horses and sheep, it's great for kids. There's a vineyard, olive grove and magnificent vegetable garden. perfecthideaways.co.za



BELMOND MOUNT NELSON HOTEL

WHERE? 76 Orange St, Cape Town, 021-483-1000

WHY WE LOVE IT The Nellie needs no introduction to tourists and locals seeking a glamorous Cape Town hotel but many may not be aware that this grande dame's historic Helmsley Wing Suites have had a revamp. The New York based design studio Champalimaud has worked some real magic on the 18 suites with a colour palette of chocolate and camel, herringbone floors and soft furnishings all chosen to 'emulate the city's Cape Dutch heritage'.

X-FACTOR The hotel puts together interesting and affordable packages, which are worth looking out for. Likewise, the Chef's Table, right in the centre of the hotel's kitchens where you can see the chefs in action, is available for bookings of up to 12 people. mountnelson.co.za



SPA OF THE MONTH

With its considered, light-filled interior, tree-top views and celebration of local products, such as Terres d'Afrique, the Spa at Four Seasons Hotel The Westcliff is something to experience. We recommend the Afrique in Harmony Balancing Massage with essential oils. The alfresco Après Spa and Westcliff Deli are two reasons to linger for the whole day. fourseasons.com/johannesburg ☐