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# TIME OUT

LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF A FISHERMAN'S VILLAGE, A RUSTIC-CHIC COTTAGE IN CHURCHHAVEN IS A PLACE OF SIMPLE PLEASURES

TEXT LEIGH ROBERTSON STYLING JEANNE BOTES PHOTOGRAPHS JUSTIN PATRICK



A perfect bolt hole for families, Seagull Cottage is a stone's throw from the beach fringing the Langebaan Lagoon in Churchhaven, a charming retreat located in the West Coast National Park. Owner Véronique Susman, left, with friend Tonya Untiedt on the stoep. The sofa mattress was upholstered in ticking from St Leger & Viney ([stleger.co.za](http://stleger.co.za)). The back cushions were upholstered in old French grain sacks and the scatters were bought at Pezula Interiors ([pezulainteriors.co.za](http://pezulainteriors.co.za)).



There are some places that leave an indelible impression on you, occupying your daydreams, nagging you to return. Churchhaven, a magical spot on the Cape's West Coast, has that effect on just about everyone who's wallowed in the warm, shallow water of its shimmering lagoon, looking out at what appears to be an endless stretch of wilderness, interrupted only by the odd rustic dwelling or tide-stranded fishing boat on the shore. There's something appealingly lost in time about it; the sort of place where you can easily, and gladly, lose track of the hours.

Decor-store owner Véronique Susman, whose Coco Karoo in Cape Town's Chelsea Village is a mix-and-match anthology of one-off pieces she's brought back from her travels, from an old pig-skin linen basket to carved wooden doors and a gaggle of stuffed birds, spent many a childhood holiday here with her family. 'We rented a little tin house', she says of the days before you could get your hands on a slice of the land, then owned by a farmer. Her memories are bright and sharply focused: learning to ride bicycles with her sister on the empty roads; unending afternoons swimming or playing on the sand, where Nguni cattle still roamed.

When she introduced her husband-to-be to Churchhaven's charms some two decades ago, he was swept off his feet. As it happened, the old farm was being divided into plots and they were able to buy 'a postage-stamp piece of land'; the house they would build here would be only the third to be erected in this pristine location within the West Coast National Park.

'I wanted it to look as if it had always been there, like something out of a fisherman's village,' says Véronique of Seagull Cottage, the 'sweet and simple' whitewashed structure she designed with the help of a draughtsman. Yet it never fails to impress those who first encounter it, who love its easy mix of bohemian-tinged comfort and beachy practicality. Not to mention the dazzling views of the lagoon once the doors to the stoep have been flung open.

Leading off a central cooking, dining and living area are the four bedrooms, with bunk beds for kids, which sleep up to 11 people. While the indoor hearth is a cosy and convivial gathering spot on blustery nights, even then the stoep that flows from the living area is the place to be with its generous sofas and sun loungers from where you can take in an unspoilt sweep of scenery. From there the beach

is just a short amble away along a tiny path. 'When you arrive here you feel yourself go like this,' Véronique says, exaggerating a deep exhalation. 'Then you soak up the stillness, the beauty.'

She decked the house out in a relaxed take on Moroccan style, a look that worked with the lived-in patina acquired by the house over the years. Recently she decided a revamp was in order: 'I stripped out all the colour, just leaving a few pops here and there, and have gone for a more bleached-out West Coast look,' she explains. Now that it's become more of a rental property, she's made it 'more functional and less personal', though certainly no less stylish. Her curated Coco Karoo signature, combining textures and quirky touches – enamel pieces from the Karoo, those stuffed sea birds – with simple slip covers in hard-wearing materials, is evident throughout. 'Nothing's precious,' she adds.

When the family descends on the house, all the old traditions continue. 'On the day we arrive, 50 shucked oysters are delivered straight to the fridge. Or it's crayfish and fish. When the boats come in, everyone wanders down to the beach to see what the catch is,' says Véronique. 'It's a special place.' ☐ **Coco Karoo, cocokaroo.co.za**

FROM LEFT Part of Churchhaven's appeal is its rusticity and unpretentiousness. The house is off the grid, getting its power via the solar panels on the roof. By night, it's all about enjoying the glow of candlelight from hurricane lamps; Véronique has decorated it in a 'bleached-out, West Coast look', with a palette of blues and whites and occasional pops of colour. The chair is from her decor store, Coco Karoo (cocokaroo.co.za) in Cape Town's Chelsea village; outside, a chair from France and a table created from an old door with logs underneath offer a peaceful spot from which to enjoy a cuppa.



‘WHEN YOU ARRIVE YOU FEEL YOURSELF GO LIKE THIS,’  
VÉRONIQUE SAYS, EXAGGERATING A DEEP EXHALATION.

ABOVE In the open-plan cooking and dining area, a round table makes a convivial centrepiece. ‘The best thing about round tables is that you can squash more people around them,’ says Véronique. OPPOSITE The sweeping views of the blue lagoon have your full attention, whether out on the patio or in the living area when the doors are open. Whitewashed wooden floors and furniture, such as the cabinet found at a local junk shop, give a relaxed beachy feel. The wooden table and benches are from Hope ([hopegf.com](http://hopegf.com)).



FROM LEFT On the bunk beds in the dormitory-style kids' bedroom the duvets were made from kikois bought in Lamu, Kenya; a touch of Moroccan style in one of the three bathrooms with aqua handmade tiles from Quadrata (quadrata.co.za); in a bedroom, as in the rest of the house, a cowhide references the herds of Nguni that roamed the farm when Véronique holidayed here as a child. 'They're hard-wearing and can handle heavy traffic.'

#### VÉRONIQUE'S HOME TRUTHS

Holidays in Churchhaven are all about the simple pleasures. **The first thing we do when we get here** is pop some champagne, drinking it with freshly shucked oysters on the stoep. **The lagoon changes colour** through the day, from navy to aqua. You can sit on the sofas on the stoep all day and be mesmerised. The longer you're there, the more you see. **One of the best things about Churchhaven** is how safe it is for the kids. Like me, our daughters learned to ride their bikes and also to waterski here. The lagoon is shallow and warm, and there's nothing in it. The most dangerous things are the sand sharks. **The routine here** is get up early, go for a cycle, come back at 10 or 11 for breakfast, take a swim to cool down, have a shower and long lunch, followed by a sleep, then a walk, and then dinner... **I'm always taking on new projects**, such as developing properties, and then moving on. My family ends up falling in love with them all. **I love** buying beautiful things, which is why I have ended up with a shop. I'm constantly looking for new things, whether in the Karoo, small towns in France or street markets in Paris. Whatever I like, and find along the way. It's why Coco Karoo is a bit eccentric. **I love travelling** - I'm not good at domestic routine, although I always like coming home, too. **Seagull Cottage is available for holiday rentals through Perfect Hideaways, [perfecthideaways.co.za](http://perfecthideaways.co.za)**