



**THIS PAGE**

Stairs in the Prince Albert house lead to a roof garden.

**OPPOSITE PAGE**

Kurt Steiner (left) and Duke Kaufman on the outdoor patio in Knysna.



# TWO HOMES, ONE LIFE

The opposite extremes of the Garden Route and Karoo have so captured the hearts of Kurt Steiner and Duke Kaufman that they decided to make home in both.

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It started with a home in Knysna, which Duke bought in the 1990s when he moved to the town to open a Bistro and rekindle childhood memories. “Growing up, our family had a holiday house on Leisure Island in Knysna and some of my best memories were of the peace and tranquillity of the place. I wanted to rekindle those memories and make a wholesome living, and at the time opened a coffee shop called Can-de-light.

“Knysna was very different then. It had a real sense of place with unique little shops and a resident artist culture. Interestingly, the same qualities led to us buying a house in Prince Albert 15 years later.”

The Knysna house, which incorporates a quaint garden cottage, was Duke’s first long-term garden and interior project. “My family had a carpet business and through the years I have literally been in thousands of homes. The different styles and interpretations made a big impact on me, and to this day remains a reference when I design and decorate.”

Among his many talents and experiences, his time in London working with landscape architect Christopher Masson was especially inspiring. “Christopher creates gardens for

the rich and famous. It was very rewarding and I learned the kinds of lessons that remain relevant for my business, including my furniture restoration enterprise,” says Duke.

It was also in London where Duke and Kurt met through mutual friends. Kurt, at the time a London-based private banker, visited South Africa soon after and was immediately charmed by the vibrancy of the country and its people.

The couple settled in Duke’s Knysna house, which has stunning views of the lagoon as well as the lush hills towards Simola golf course. The large covered patio overlooks the garden and swimming pool, with comfortable chunky furniture and a built-in braai in the corner. Upstairs bedrooms feature large glass doors and walk out onto a patio with a nearly all-round view of Knysna’s greenery and waterways.

“Knysna is our outdoor house, where we spend hours on the patio with friends and family. The house has become a second home to friends, many of whom have stayed in it at some time or another when they needed a roof over their heads or refuge from city living,” says Duke.

Knysna is also Kurt’s Golden Retriever Bonny’s favourite place and walks on Leisure Island are a regular treat. “She goes ballistic

#### BELOW

The lounge and dining area of the Knysna house.





when we go there, running around chasing seagulls, coming out the other end covered in mud and vegetation.”

### PRINCE ALBERT

In stark contrast to the lush and green living of Knysna, Duke and Kurt's home in Prince Albert has taken on a life of its own. “It's like living in two different worlds, not only because of the obvious climate and landscape differences, but also because of the types of people who live here and the associated small town lifestyle,” says Kurt.

In search of a new project, a friend recommended Duke and Kurt visit the quaint Karoo town of Prince Albert. “We were immediately charmed by the town's Victorian architecture, its unique character, and the *leiwater*, old-fashioned cement water furrows watering the town's gardens.”

A main road corner property with a history dating back to 1858 intrigued the pair most. There were three buildings including an old wheat mill, which at some time had been converted into offices, and a once-Victorian house that had been altered and added to over the years.

In bad repair, Duke and Kurt thought it

would be a shame for a property with such a rich history to deteriorate further. “The Victorian house in the main street is ideally situated for a business, which also gave us the opportunity to explore our interests in design, art, furniture and photography.”

The front house was turned into the Watershed complex, which houses Duke's restored retro furniture, design and interior pieces as well as three galleries – displaying the works of international photographer Jürgen Schadeberg (best known for his 1950s photographs of township living and Nelson Mandela), Cape Town-based artist Alex Hamilton and Prince Albert artist JP Meyer.

The old mill and adjacent building were turned into the living space, with the back wall of the Watershed building creating an intimate garden and swimming pool area. A special feature is the roof garden that overlooks the town and the Swartberg Mountains. “It is a favourite sundowner spot. The town really comes into its own as the day's heat dissipates, and the stunning colours of the Karoo glow in the late afternoon sun,” says Kurt.

In contrast to the shabby chic approach to the Knysna house, Kurt and Duke stayed with clean lines in Prince Albert, with

### ABOVE

The Knysna garden overlooks the hills towards Simola golf course.

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- KURT STEINER



The living area in Prince Albert.



ABOVE  
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**ABOVE**

The restored Victorian house and attachments, which now comprise the popular Watershed complex.

**BELOW**

Prince Albert at dawn.

a minimalist approach to furniture and a modern, international art collection.

Initially intended as their holiday house, the runaway success of the Watershed shop led to the Prince Albert house becoming their more permanent base. “Ironically this was meant to have been our winter hideaway but because most of the tourism business is in the warm months, we have found ourselves living here in the heat of summer.

“Prince Albert has very much become a weekend destination, with numerous shops and restaurants, and it made sense to us to remain open after lunch on Saturdays and Sundays so that people could walk off their hearty Karoo meals and do some shopping. It turned out to be a real stroke of luck, because when most other places are closed, we in effect have a captive audience,” Kurt says with a grin.

They also tend to go out more in Prince Albert, enjoying the wide range of top class eateries as well as the odd show at the Prince Albert Theatre. “Everything is within walking distance and the early evening in particular is

a time for locals to be outdoors. The silence of the Karoo settles within the people who live here, and makes for very interesting individuals and fascinating stories.”

Now that the Prince Albert project is completed and lived in, chances are Duke and Kurt may start looking for a new project to tackle. “We are admittedly nomadic, but every time I start talking about selling the Knysna house, a host of friends protest profusely. We’ve even contemplated some time in London, but I find it hard to imagine Bonny reined in by the restrictions of that lifestyle... I guess time will tell,” says Duke. ■

**WIN**

Duke and Kurt are giving away a set of five cushions printed with iconic 1950s photographs by international photographer Jürgen Schadeberg. See page 105 for information on how to enter.

