

# HL AT HOME

inspiring spaces, architecture and decor



## NO WORRIES

An Aussie millionaire's South African retreat epitomises sophisticated, environment-friendly local living at its best

Text **Sarah Buitendach** Production **Retha Erichsen** Photographs **David Ross**



CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT One of the guest bedrooms (there are two) with its Barn bed by Koop Design (031-303-3922, [koopdesign.co.za](http://koopdesign.co.za)). The curtains and bedspread are silk. The chair on the veranda is the Twist Terrace chair, which is still in development at Koop Design; the estate's horses; owner Ian Gowrie-Smith relaxing on The Barn's expansive veranda that overlooks the private reserve. The chairs around the table are Deauville armchairs from Spazio (011-555-5555, 021-461-0061, [spazio.co.za](http://spazio.co.za)); the building to the left of The Barn is one of the original structures on the property, and now serves as a tack room, storing riding equipment. PREVIOUS PAGE Zebras on a mid-afternoon meander past The Barn, which receives regular visits from the estate's animal inhabitants.

The nearly 3 000 hectares of land that makes up the Dalton Private Reserve near Mooi River in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands constitutes one of the most awe-inspiring spots in South Africa. Vast rolling hills cut into endless skies and white rhino and eland roam along the banks of the Bushmans River. It was a challenge to build a home here that would do justice to the reserve's beauty, and yet that's exactly what the homestead on this property does. Easily.

Designed by architect and furniture designer Richard Stretton of Koop Design, The Barn oozes understated global glamour. It's undeniably sexy – something between a James Bond film set and a luxury Outback ranch. Which is rather apt, considering that this impressive spot happens to be the retreat of internationally renowned Australian businessman Ian Gowrie-Smith. With homes dotted across the world, this is his favourite escape for a quiet break.

'It's the sheer scale of the beauty of the place,' observes Ian, who has just flown in from London for a week of relaxing on the weirs, catching trout. 'I grew up on a farm and realise that this land, so revered by the local community, is incredibly special,' he muses over a gourmet lunch on the veranda. He came to know of its existence thanks to Barry Armitage, a Durbanite who once worked for him. He's also quick to point out that it was the successful partnership between locals Barry, who became the director of the Dalton Trust, and Richard that led to The Barn's creation.

Richard's initial brief was to build on the foundations of an old farmhouse that had been ruined by neglect, and to provide a ground-floor utilitarian space with a living area on top. He designed a solid stone-and-brick ground floor with a lightweight timber structure above it, with big windows and living zones that range from light and exposed to ▸



cosy, dark and comforting. Barry was involved in directing the project, and together with his wife, Sarah Dawson, and Richard's wife and business partner, Angela Shaw, they pushed concepts further, fine-tuned the details and refined the interiors – steering them away from a predictable game-lodge identity.

Almost all the structural timber used in the construction came from the property. Alien eucalyptus and poplar were cleared off the farm, machined in the field and now form the 'bones' of the roof-and-wall structure of the first floor. These were produced in a workshop alongside the house, giving this property a noteworthy small carbon footprint. The workshop now produces the Dalton range of furniture by Koop Design, also made from wood off the property.

'The Barn is intentionally not a typical game-lodge experience,' explains Angela. 'The reserve is a wild, dirt-under-your-fingernails place and we wanted the interiors to be a retreat from this.' Most of the clean-lined furniture in the house was conceptualised and produced by Koop Design, and works exceptionally well with the space's timber-panelled interiors. With a colour palette of green, grey and oxblood, together with the light-coloured wood, the living spaces are laid-

back and inviting with dark leather sofas and lights that resemble glowing cocoons. The kitchen is light and bright and equipped with all the necessary mod cons needed to produce delicious meals en masse (many of the fresh ingredients used come from the property's vegetable garden).

The guest bedrooms are a chilled-out combination of timber panelling, textured textiles and four-poster beds, but it's the master bedroom that makes the biggest statement. 'The space is a royal quarters of sorts,' Angela notes. Flashes of deep red, dark timber, animal-hide rugs and sensuous mosquito nets billowing in the breeze are all part of the magic. With its views across the valley and wild animals grazing below, the suite epitomises absolute luxury and makes it all too easy to conceive how this little piece of local heaven has won over an international jetsetter. ◻

**Koop Design, 031-303-3922, [koopdesign.co.za](http://koopdesign.co.za); The Barn on Dalton Private Reserve is available to rent, call 036-352-0100 or email [info@daltonprivatereserve.com](mailto:info@daltonprivatereserve.com) for info.**

**Perched on a hill, The Barn has a 360-degree view of the surrounding area. A decked entertainment area on the roof includes a Jacuzzi and braai area.**





THIS PAGE, LEFT The kitchen cabinets were made from glass that was painted white and placed on African-walnut frames. The counter tops were made from CaesarStone. The open shelving was custom-made for the space by Koop Design. The stool was made by the director of the Dalton Trust, Barry Armitage, using alien timber felled on the property. ABOVE Rapid-prototype MGX lights from Materialise in Belgium (materilaise.com), hang above Koop Design's Pretty Filly 10-seater table made from alien poplar cleared from the property. BELOW Architect and furniture designer Richard Stretton of Koop Design. OPPOSITE The living room with its Koop Design sofas in oxblood-coloured leather. The Nguni-hide rug is from Goony (nguniskin.co.za).

### Q+A WITH RICHARD STRETTON

**Your design style in three words?** Practical, responsible, beautiful. **Design influence?** The Pantheon in Rome – the emotive quality of space in one single volume. **Who, or what is exciting you about local design right now?** John Vogel's furniture and a little house at Gowrie Estate in the Midlands designed by OMM Design Workshop. Clever people. **Object you wished you'd designed?** The paperclip. **Favourite local building?** Fynbos House in Betty's Bay by Sarah Calburn. We go there on holidays. It is modern, uncompromising and fantastic to be in. **Thoughts on South African architecture?** My advice to people visiting Durban, or any other South African city, is to look up and marvel at two centuries of gems towering above your head. And next time they demolish an old, derelict granny of a building for a car park, make a voodoo doll of a corporate leader and stick it to them! **Dream design project?** One where all parties involved are motivated, responsible and committed to the end product. I will design anything and love it all.





THIS PAGE, LEFT The shutters were made from eucalyptus cleared from Dalton Private Reserve, and manufactured in the Dalton Timber Workshop, on the reserve. ABOVE The Barn server by Koop Design acts as a room divider between the sitting and dining rooms. BELOW The bentwood bench in the master bedroom was sourced from an antique store and revamped with a black japanned finish and upholstered in red hartebeest hide. OPPOSITE The mosquito nets in the master bedroom were also made by Koop Design. The bedside lights are Tolomeo Micro lights designed for Artemide, from LMR (021-480-4240, lmr.co.za) in Cape Town.



## ROYAL QUARTERS OF SORTS