

# THE LIGHT LOCATION



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*refurbishment*  
*of this*  
COMPACT  
CLIFTON  
APARTMENT  
*was a case*  
*of getting the*  
RIGHT  
ANGLES  
*as well as*  
MAXIMISING  
*the abundant*  
NATURAL  
*light and,*  
*of course,*  
the VISTAS

TEXT GENEVIEVE PUTTER  
PHOTOGRAPHS ELSA YOUNG

THIS SPREAD  
The key design element in this Clifton apartment in Cape Town is the strong use of textures, as seen in the mounted Pele baskets from Africa Nova ([africanova.co.za](http://africanova.co.za)), hide stools from Oriental Concepts ([orientalconcepts.co.za](http://orientalconcepts.co.za)), roped drinks trolley from Cécile & Boyd ([cecileandboyds.co.za](http://cecileandboyds.co.za)), wooden-and-perspex coffee table by Andrew Early Design Studio ([andrew-early.com](http://andrew-early.com)), beaded cushions from Bead Design Studio ([beaddesignstudio.com](http://beaddesignstudio.com)) and hand-tufted rug from Herringbone Rugs ([herringbone.co.za](http://herringbone.co.za)).



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riving along Cape Town's Victoria Road in Clifton on a day when the air is warm, the sea is twinkling blue and the soundtrack is something out of an Ibiza café, it's a wonder to behold the tightly packed multilevel homes and apartment blocks. Looking like designer Lego set against the iconic curves of Lion's Head with the white sandy beaches of Clifton below, it's the picture of some sort of paradise.

For Durban-based interior designer Michele Throssell, it's also recently been the site of a dream project. Not only did she completely gut and renovate a quaint 85m<sup>2</sup> apartment dangling off the slopes of Clifton First Beach, but she was also initially tasked with finding the fixer-upper for her client to buy – so she had a hand in every aspect of the process, from start to finish.

'The client was interested in an easy lock-up-and-go apartment for weekend escapes to Cape Town from Joburg, where she lives,' says Michele. 'I found this apartment online and she was happy to move ahead with the purchase and renovation.'

The double-storey property had been renovated a while back, but the finishes were dated and served to 'close up' the already tight space. Mahogany kitchen cabinetry, off-white tiled floors, bold grey grouting and lengthy chrome handles were just some of the off-putting elements. In short, it combined a '90s timeshare aesthetic with the look and feel of a weekend bachelor pad. The brief for Michele was, first and foremost, to maximise on its prime location and views, secondly, to open up the building to create better flow and lastly, to keep it light, fresh and neutral for the illusion of space.

As with many apartments and houses in the exclusive, cliffy neighbourhood, it's all about getting the angles right, thanks to the undulating, rough terrain holding the buildings up. With this home, Michele had to undo before she attempted to redo. 'The biggest challenge was that the apartment isn't square: all of the walls are angled and had to be done correctly,' she says. When it came to the finishings, textured layering was Michele's preferred modus operandi to create a more 3D experience than just an undefined▷



'THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE WAS THAT THE APARTMENT ISN'T SQUARE: ALL OF THE WALLS ARE ANGLED.'

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By removing a wall separating the kitchen from the dining room-cum-lounge, the space was cleverly transformed into a light-flooded and integrated living area; a wooden rack from Superbalist (superbalist.com) is perfect for beach accessories.

**OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP**

Tulip chairs from Gone Rogue (gonerogue.co.za) and an artwork by Gabi Lee Smit from her *Shapes in Surrulus* collection break up the angular space with their rounded forms; a drinks trolley such as this one from Cecile & Boyd is a great solution for a small space without room for a bar or drinks cabinet.





space washed with loads of bright light. 'I mixed various shades of white and cream as well as a touch of brass and gentle oatmeal tones, coming from accents of bamboo, wicker, bone beads and, of course, the textured wooden floors throughout,' she says.

Further inspiration Michele drew on for the interiors was organic elements that you could imagine washing up on the shore below. Examples of this include the timber-slatted bed end in the main bedroom, which looks like it's from a shipwreck, and the round scatters in the second bedroom that could be giant sand dollar shells, as well as the series of furry blankets, carpets and rattan accessories that resemble sea kelp and coral. Even the artwork by Gabi Lee Smit from her abstract series *Shapes in Susurrus* resembles various life stages of a sea urchin cultivated in the mystical Atlantis. 'I love the simplicity of these works,' Michele says. 'They capture the feeling I wanted to evoke of being at the beach.'

The selection of furniture was a very considered process because of the small footprint of the apartment. There is a certain kind of magic to interior design that the untrained eye is oblivious to, and compact homes are where that alchemy is best expressed. The golden rule is always to create the illusion of space and, aside from sticking to white and light palettes, balance large pieces of furniture with smaller items. 'Because the apartment is small, we had to be pedantic in our spatial planning and with the size of furniture we selected,' Michele says. As she's based in Durban, the job required a lot of travelling, but because of Michele's attention to detail and accuracy, she nailed the project – and the results are well worth it.

Small apartments can be difficult to renovate as is, but in a part of the world where feats of engineering genius hug the coastline in all sorts of unconventional and oblique ways, one thing is certain – when you get the balance right, the light always shines brighter. ☐ [michelethrossell.co.za](http://michelethrossell.co.za)



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Interest was added to the compact main bedroom with a wall-to-wall panelled headboard designed by Michele, a gilded artwork by Gabi Lee Smit and a felt throw by Krafthaus ([krafthaus.co.za](http://krafthaus.co.za)), which contrasts with the smooth white metal bedside TK lamps from Illumina Lighting ([illumina.co.za](http://illumina.co.za)).

**OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT**  
Originally, the balustrade and staircase frame were polished stainless steel with mahogany-stained wooden treads, but as this didn't reflect the minimalist aesthetic Michele was going for, she replaced the balustrade with a slatted wooden panel, coated the stair frame white and sanded and bleached the treads; the tiles in the main en suite bathroom were all removed and epoxy-coated floors installed. Reflecting the white-on-white colour scheme is a clean-lined bathroom unit custom-made by Instyle Creations ([instylecreations.co.za](http://instylecreations.co.za)) and freestanding bath from Eurotrend ([eurotrend.co.za](http://eurotrend.co.za)).

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 GoodWood Contemporary Furniture Co (thegoodwood.co.za) manufactured a bespoke TV cabinet, which conceals the TV while also providing storage.

**OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP**  
 The same wall-to-wall panelled headboard design was used in the guest bedroom, where more of Gabi Lee Smit's abstract pieces adorn the walls; custom-designed screens and a sliding door separate the bedroom from its en suite bathroom. The custom-made floating vanity is by Instyle Creations, the basin from Marblecast (marblecast.co.za) and the stool also from Cécile & Boyd.



**MICHELE'S TIPS FOR MANAGING A LONG-DISTANCE RENOVATION**

- 1** **Communicate.** WhatsApp Messenger, email and drafting programs like CAD mean that detailed communication with quick turnaround times has never been easier. It's important to have all the channels open, but with boundaries. No messages at midnight!
- 2** **Keep track of your travelling costs.** Generally I need four to six site visits to complete a project, and this has to be budgeted into my costs. It's a good idea to schedule visits that suit both the client and you as the designer to give you the opportunity to meet face to face and touch base.
- 3** **Know your team.** I love the challenge of finding new contractors and suppliers, but I usually use remote teams I've worked with before. I know that they're good, reliable craftsmen – you need to be able to trust someone when they say they'll complete something in a certain timeframe.
- 4** **Ensure tight project management.** About 50-80% of our jobs are out of town. Sending weekly progress reports to the client is the only way to deliver a project on time and on brief. Manage the builder and contractors very carefully because often, if you're not pushing on site, delays can happen.

