

Words **Hedi Lampert Kemper**  
Portrait photographs **Ruvan Boshoff**

The team at 2AD Space Architects Inc. believes happy spaces make happy people. Judging by their rapidly growing design portfolio, they've put smiles on a lot of faces



CAPTION Xxxxxx



Jean and Wilhelm Louw met at university while studying architecture and haven't been apart since. Together they run 2AD Space Inc. Architects, in Somerset West, ably assisted by partners De Waal Ritter and Nico van Rensburg. 'Our success lies in a collaboration of talents. We are a team driven by brainstorming and a sharing of great minds. No project is ever done by individuals,' Wilhelm says.

De Waal's strengths lie in corporate design and the legal contractual side of things. Nico is an architectural technician, who produces documentation for local authority approval and for the builders.

Jean and Wilhelm are involved in the design of most of the buildings and often in the manufacturing of elements. Jean is a keen welder who conceived and crafted, among other things, the two front gates outside their property. One leads to the private residence, the other to 2AD Space's offices. Wilhelm loves creating Heath Robinson-type objects from offcuts he finds at building sites, like the door mechanism he put together from a rusted old steel cog. He

fixed it to a clean-cut glass panel. The result is Industrial Revolution meets NASA, but it makes an intriguing front door for the office. He also made a boardroom table from a steel support he salvaged from a wine distillery. 'Working with building materials leads to a greater understanding and ultimately more informed design,' he asserts.

The firm's projects run the gamut from single residential homes and estates, such as Knysna Mara Wildlife Estate and Blue Bay Sands, Saldanha, through to commercial properties and apartments.

But 2AD Space is becoming increasingly renowned for its work on wine estates, six of which now carry the firm's signature design. The jewel in the crown is the Engelbrecht Els Vineyard. 'I particularly love the entrance,' says Jean. 'The placement literally makes it a gateway to the slopes of the Helderberg.' She describes the main building as simple, uncomplicated and true to its function. 'It's a plaas that fits naturally into its surroundings. It has a sense of place.'

Wilhelm agrees: 'It has an honesty, and it's also a very humble building in the context of the

money that was spent in its making.'

The couple are particularly happy about the serendipitous excavation of some massive boulders. 'They were unearthed during the foundation-digging phase of the project and we immediately saw completely new potential, so we redesigned the building to accommodate them,' says Wilhelm. The boulders have since been incorporated into the landscape architecture and stand like proud sentinels on either side of a decked walkway.

Some of the team's most daunting yet challenging work has been at the older wine farms, where briefs called for structures with new social functions to coexist alongside long-established historic buildings. Rust & Vrede, established in 1694, is a perfect example. The client wanted to transform the old cellar building into a prestigious fine-dining restaurant. 2AD Space linked the old and newer buildings with transparent glass, so the older buildings remain visible at all times. Similarly, a transparent lobby welcomes the visitor into the restaurant, from where the entire structure is exposed as one large

DE  
GO  
GA  
AD  
NS



CAPTIONS Xxxx



volume, with the main dining area to your left and the active open plan kitchen to your right. At the far right end of the building, amid a display of the estate's wines, the chef's table is positioned so as to provide a view of the historic manor house.

'You have to work within the confines of Heritage-site restrictions,' Jean explains. 'For example, you can't make any new openings in a national monument and we had to find a way to provide the modern functionality of bathrooms to the restaurant, yet still remain sympathetic to the history.' This necessitated a new structure, which is designed to mirror the building platform of the existing cellar, as well as the adjacent manor house, in plan, proportion and scale. While the architecture is more contemporary, it respectfully highlights the authenticity of the original building without detracting from the history. And since it's nestled between two mature oak trees and cut into the landscape, the newer structure blends into the traditional farmyard.

When the team designed a new reception building for Rhebokskloof Wine Estate in Paarl, the aim was to capture the feeling of being on a wine farm in the Boland. The firm's main concern was the creation of an architectural language that would be appropriate and complementary in the context of the historic farm and could also be repeated in various interventions throughout the werf to create a more coherent whole. They achieved their objective by designing in the traditional Cape-Dutch form, so as one arrives at Rhebokskloof, the reception building, located parallel to the rest of the farmyard, is instantly recognisable, and therefore comforting.

But a closer look reveals contemporary



CAPTIONS Xxxx



CAPTIONS Xxxx

applications in the details and materials. The small window punctures in the north façade are arranged in irregular, horizontal patterns. Inside, the windows have deep, angled reveals, emphasising the mass of the walls and allowing more light to wash into the main spaces. The generous stoep is bordered by angled, crisply defined low walls and a steel-and-timber pergola. The south façade, next to the events hall, is even

more contemporary: its large plate-glass windows are surrounded by mild steel frames flush with the surface of the wall. This is all balanced by the inclusion of more traditional details in copper and hardwood, which add a sense of solidity and will allow aspects of the building to age naturally over time. 'Woodman said quality was something that time will make detours for. If time would make detours for our buildings, then we would

have achieved something,' Jean says.

But, while much of their time of late has been spent breathing life into past legacies, Wilhelm and Jean are more concerned with the legacy their generation is leaving behind. Jean is currently studying urban design at UCT. 'The new urbanist movement intrigues me,' she says. 'It inspires me to try and re-establish a sense of community and create an environment where

children can ride their bikes in the street and adults can cycle or walk to work.'

Her dream project would be to have an open budget and work together with an energetic team of innovative planners and designers to create well-designed public areas that make a difference in the daily struggle of the majority of South Africans. 'Instead of senseless, badly designed, urban sprawl swamping the landscape, I'd love to see housing projects, which create happy, thriving communities. Positive spaces make positive people,' she says.

For Wilhelm, green building and sustainability are key issues. 'For a long time now, architects have chased high-level technology. It had to be really new and expensive too, and that got us noticed. Now the challenging and exciting thing is to find equal stimulation from making sustainable buildings that are not necessarily 'hippy Hobbit' homes. You don't have to use straw bales to get 'green' approval! Wilhelm believes architects simply have to get cleverer. 'Greening is highly technical and sophisticated.' His latest obsession is the study of biomimicry. 'It teaches us how nature functions and why it's so successful. For instance, how do leaves keep themselves clean? We have so much to learn,' he says. 'How will we design tomorrow? Now that's what I'm interested in.'

2AD Space Architects Inc., +27 (0)21 855 0787, www.2adspace.co.za



"While much of their time of late has been spent breathing life into past legacies, Wilhelm and Jean are more concerned with the legacy their generation is leaving behind"

