



**01** Nestled snugly in the tall Highveld grass, the house was designed to become one with the surrounding landscape and virtually disappears from sight when viewed from a distance.

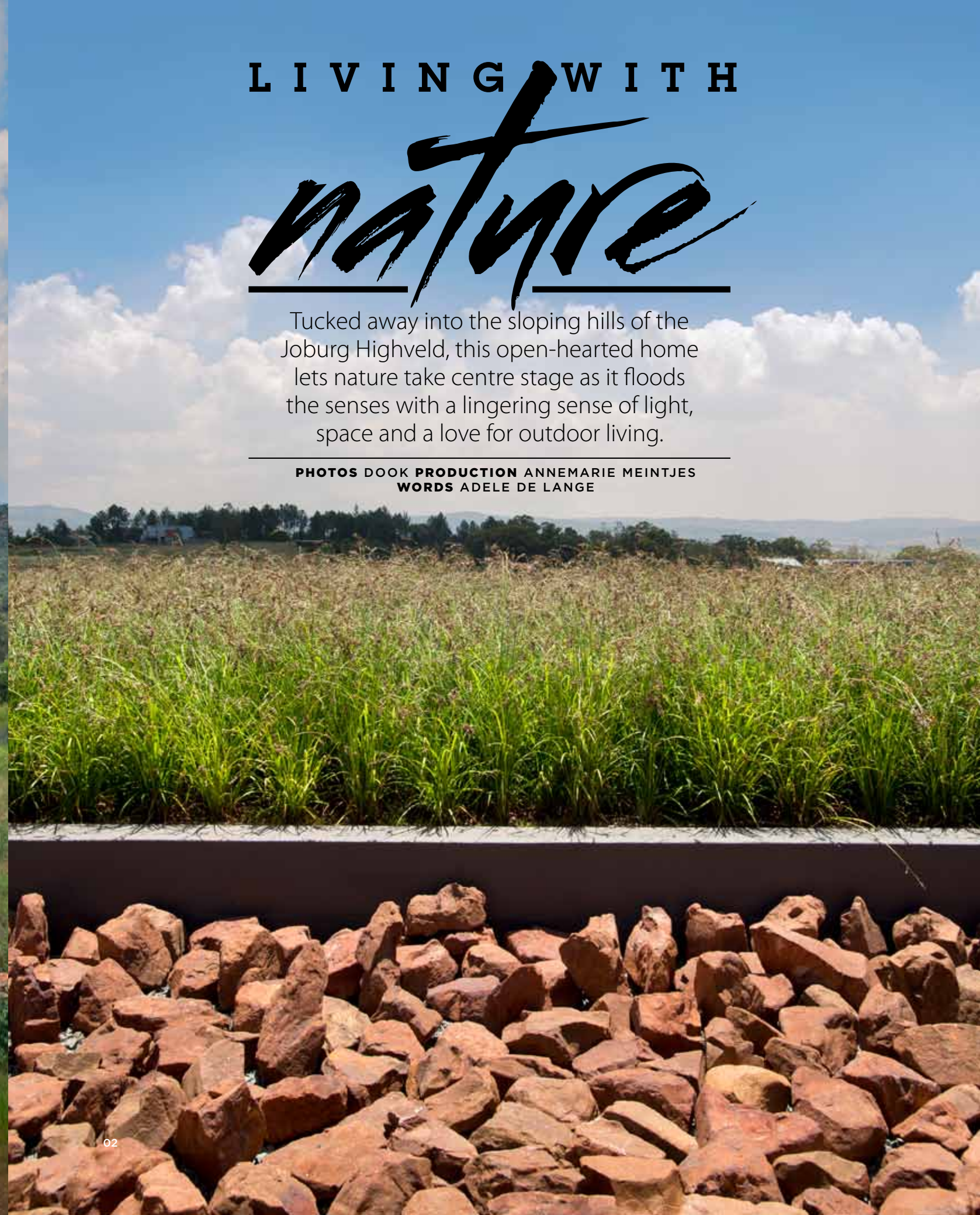
**02** The indigenous grass planted on the first-floor roof frames the view from the master bedroom and invites the garden to spill in from across the windowsill.

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# LIVING WITH *nature*

Tucked away into the sloping hills of the Joburg Highveld, this open-hearted home lets nature take centre stage as it floods the senses with a lingering sense of light, space and a love for outdoor living.

**PHOTOS DOOK PRODUCTION ANNEMARIE MEINTJES**  
**WORDS ADELE DE LANGE**



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everyone

knows that taking the wrong off-ramp on one of the Gauteng highways is asking for disaster. Fortunately for Wim and Mitzi Hollander, the disaster turned into the best mistake they ever made when they discovered the tranquil Eye of Africa golf estate, conveniently situated just far enough south to shake off Joburg's non-stop hustle and bustle, but still only 17km from the city centre.

Their unconventional steel-cladded house, which seems on the verge of disappearing down the slope of a koppie, is the work of Johan Wentzel and Grete van As from W Design Architecture Studio. "We love to invite people in just to see the look of surprise on their faces when we take them inside," Wim laughs. True to his word, the secretive exterior hides a spacious gem filled with views as far as the eye can see.

Commissioning Johan and Grete was based on how "their designs really capture the essence of what is great about living in Africa," says Wim. "For us, that means letting nature into our home – and to celebrate the light side of life." The most striking manifestation of this is the roof of the lower level of the house, which is entirely planted with indigenous grass, effectively extending the garden below. By using the same steel cladding for the roof and the upper-level walls, the house creates the impression of



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being a single-storey building.

Inspired by the couple's theme for the house of "the bearable lightness of being", the architects came up with a concept to capture lightness in the design that would defy the conventional notions of a house. Johan explains: "We prefer to focus on the spaces that we want to create, instead of the solid structures that surround it – and with this house we really wanted to break free from the predictable boundaries that define space as a room with four walls and a roof."

As such, oversized sliding doors extend the living area seamlessly into the garden, with eye-catching views across the estate's landscaping beyond. The all-in-one living, dining and kitchen area transforms effortlessly into a roomy entertainment area for friends and family. A recessed boma in the corner of

the garden provides the perfect spot for stargazing and cuddling around a raging fire.

Surprisingly, the internal courtyard was not part of the original design but was added to give the guest bedrooms access to north-facing sunlight, which is ideal for our climate. Aside from being the perfect picture of tranquillity, the addition of the pond has a practical side to it, too – it creates a visual barrier between the guest rooms and the living area. "When nobody's visiting, we virtually forget about that part of the house, but we have the extra space whenever we need it," Mitzi points out.

"This is my favourite part of the house – everywhere I look I am surrounded by beauty. I can sit in the living room and watch the butterflies flit from one flower to the next, or stare out over the valley below," she beams. **V**

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01 Architects Johan Wentzel and Grete van As of Pretoria-based W Design Architecture Studio, whose signature style "spills outside easily".

02 Playing havoc with the senses, the house was designed to let nature flow freely through it, leaving the uncanny sense of never quite being entirely inside or outside, upstairs or downstairs.



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- 01 The tranquil pond is the perfect spot to relax and do a bit of bird watching from the comfort of the couch.
- 02 North-facing sunlight spills from the courtyard into the guest bedrooms. The pond creates some privacy between the guest wing and the living area beyond.
- 03 Light floods the passage from all directions, radiating warmth off the natural timber finishes and adding a dramatic backdrop to the steel and timber staircase.
- 04 The floor-to-ceiling glass sliding doors are all that separate inside from outside, with the open-plan kitchen expanding seamlessly onto the outdoor patio area.



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**01** At night-time, the slatted-steel front door acts like a lighthouse, entertaining neighbours by casting intriguing shapes into the night sky. By day, however, it keeps its secret lightness hidden from view.

**02** The en-suite bathroom to the master bedroom opens up into a private courtyard complete with an outdoor Jacuzzi. Wim loves this space: "It's the perfect spot to relax, unwind and be part of nature."

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01 The boma in the corner of the garden is an ideal place for stargazing and enjoying the blazing fire with friends and family.

02 The casual passer-by will never suspect the light and spacious nature of the interior, judging by the unconventional, yet unassuming, exterior of the house, here seen from the front entrance.