

The dining room is unpretentious, with an 18th-century reproduction dark-wood table by G2 Design and accompanying harlequin dining chairs. Britti tile floors laid in a herringbone bond recall the rural kitchens of historic French homes

Home Country

IN HER SOPHISTICATED JOHANNESBURG HOME, ARCHITECT LISA TOLKIN STRIKES A BALANCE BETWEEN RUSTIC REFINEMENT AND URBAN LUXURY WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF DISCREET ANTIQUES

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For each of us, the definition of country living varies. For some it's the lull of those areas far from the city bustle, complete with cows and winding stone walls. For others it's about adding meaning to daily life by getting back to basics. At its core, country living relies on a sense of calm no matter your location. For owner Lisa Tolkin it meant creating a sanctuary within urban bounds, which she did by obtaining a piece of land big enough to allude to the sense of space and isolation of a country house. As an architect and landscaper, a life lived in the farmlands wouldn't have made sense. Nonetheless, her home in Hyde Park is as close as one gets to inner-city refuge with its understated country aesthetic and sunlit interior.

Accessed from a crooked and overgrown lane in an area blocked off to passing traffic, quietude comes with the territory. The property was an ugly duckling – unwanted by all but Tolkin – who had the vision to see beyond its dated and dim interior. Today, all that remains of its original form is the shingle

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT An English oak coffer grounds the roomy entrance hall; the light-filled living room; Stefanus Rademeyer's algorithmic print hangs above a desk in the study

roof and exterior walls; the rest she gutted and redesigned. Her goal was to create a breezy and transparent space, more home than house. Having teamed up on a number of other projects, Tolkin chose antiques maven Lynn Grant to decorate.

'It's subtly sophisticated without being precious,' says Grant of a decorating style that fuses European refinement with contemporary classics. Upon entering the home, the eye is drawn to the view of the garden beyond the patio, a gesture that hints at Tolkin's affinity for outside views. Light floods the interior through walls of stacking shutters, sash windows and French doors while high ceilings enhance the feeling of space within. Central to the sense of tranquillity are the all-pervading glimpses of garden and courtyard from each room in the house, an intentional part of the redesign that results in a space washed in natural light and cocooned by lush greenery.

Tolkin's anthology of antiques was acquired organically over many years and forms the rustic backbone of the interior. Combined with ample light and space, the pieces are allowed to breathe, their newfound context lending a modern twist. ▶

TOP RIGHT A contemporary table paired with early 20th-century French dining chairs BOTTOM RIGHT An industrial printer's table and inherited antique chairs in Lisa Tolkin's home-office





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‘We chose early country and decorative furniture with honesty. Statement pieces such as these should be uncrowded, or else the look is too stuffy,’ remarks Grant.

Colour comes in the form of natural tones ranging from oatmeal to linen, forming a subtle backdrop for the antiques. Furniture and fabrics follow suit in an equally restrained palette of black and white. It’s the essence of low-key style. An extension of the kitchen, the dining room is unpretentious with an 18th-century reproduction dark-wood table by G2 Design and accompanying harlequin dining chairs. Brittli tile floors laid in a herringbone bond further imbue the home with a country sensibility, calling to mind the rural kitchens of historic French homes.

On the enclosed patio, a clean-lined, contemporary sofa is backed by a 19th-century workbench and aluminium aviation cases. A French Bergere chair from the 1880s is repurposed for use in the bedroom – beyond it a view of the garden reveals manicured hedges and a rose bed. The air of pared-down ease is no more evident than in the bathroom where an old Victorian bathtub and French bistro table take centre stage in an otherwise undecorated room. The spirit of era hopping is at its all-time best as the balance of ornate and plain, light and dark has been carefully mastered.

Tolkin’s is the abstraction of a country life with all the conveniences of urban existence, an exercise in restraint that embodies country calm. ‘Essentially it’s about how you feel in a space,’ she remarks. ‘I love coming home, it’s my refuge.’

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A contemporary sofa is backed by a 19th-century workbench on the enclosed patio OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Natural tones form a subtle backdrop for antiques; an old Victorian bathtub and French bistro table take centre stage in the bathroom; the view from the bedroom reveals manicured hedges and a rose bed