



CASTLE IN THE SKY

THROUGH A SYMBIOSIS OF DESIGN BETWEEN ARCHITECT, INTERIOR DESIGNER AND LANDSCAPER, THIS CONTEMPORARY FRENCH CHATEAU-STYLE HOME IN LLANDUDNO WAS ACHIEVED IN EPIC PROPORTION

TEXT PIET SMEDY PRODUCTION MARTIN JACOBS
PHOTOGRAPHS ELSA YOUNG



The house is situated only metres from Llandudno beach
OPPOSITE PAGE
The entrance hall in smooth French limestone is a study in symmetry



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he idea of achieving a golden mean between the elements of classic design and contemporary decorating is, for many, an architectural golden fleece. Yet, after the Homeric seven-year development of an inhospitable beachfront site into a modernist masterpiece, it appears that some legends do come true.

'From the start we knew that we didn't want a typical beach house,' say the owners. 'That would have been too obvious. We wanted it to be something controversial.'

The land in question was a craggy protrusion of granite with a fynbos stubble and an austere disposition. It would take two years of Wile E Coyote-like levels of tenacity and dynamite, setting off controlled explosions to blast 14 metres into the solid rock face, to create space for the proposed structure. Architect Keith Mason's mandate was clear: create a chic city residence metres from the ocean.

'The site is on the front-line, with nothing obstructing the view. It has the feel of a private island,' say the owners. ▶



The strong linear design is apparent in the view from the kitchen into the dining room OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The La Cornue kitchen; the terrace lawn frames the ocean view; a dignified atmosphere pervades the dining room; casual outdoor seating looks onto the pool

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The living room, tastefully appointed in custom pieces by decorator Christian Liaigre, features a hand-carved French limestone fireplace



The lushly planted garden still retains a formal structure OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The library lies off the main bedroom; a wall is planted with a vertical garden; the custom-designed archways pay homage to French interior designer Jean-Michel Frank

Built using imported French limestone, the 1 300-square-metre, three-level home is an ode to subtle luxury. 'The house is designed around a central bronze staircase that links all the main spaces. The rooms are arranged along axial lines, extending into each other to create vistas,' says Keith. 'The simplicity of the plan creates a building that is easily understood and a lifestyle that mirrors this clear and uncluttered special approach.' From the lilac-tintured volakas marble in the main bathroom (the guest bathrooms gleam with bianco gioia tiles) to the pale silk rugs in the living area and the La Cornue kitchen, no detail has escaped the owners' tasteful consideration.

When it came to crafting the interior, Paris-based Christian Liaigre was the natural choice. 'What really drew us to Christian, and French design in general, is that there's only one finish that runs throughout the space,' say the owners. 'No one knows how to balance textures – matte bronze and lacquered wood – like he does. He is the master of minimalism.'

The colour scheme is a restrained one, opting for pale tones of silver and gold in the living areas, blooming into more vibrant hues in the bedrooms. Christian designed every piece in the house in his iconic 1930s, Jean-Michel Frank-inspired style, with prominent use of burnished bronze, high-gloss Makassar ebony and, on the enclosed terrace, pale sandblasted French pine.

'We don't have much in the way of wall surfaces, given the home's open-air layout,' say the owners. 'But we have incorporated the views with windows just shy of five metres.' Where there is available wall space, you'll find artworks by German-born, Paris-based artist, and a personal friend of the owners, Christoph von Weyhe. 'His paintings of Hamburg Bridge are truly evocative of city living,' they explain. 'That's why it works so well in this setting. When you look outwards, you see the azure waters of a secluded peninsula, but look towards the house and it's classically urban.'

Step outside and the garden manifests in three distinct forms: a terrace lawn, lushly planted areas and a wall of succulents. However, a garden on the seafront is directly exposed to ocean winds and high levels of salt. 'The salty air was ▶





a massive factor,' says landscape architect Patrick Watson, who designed the outdoor spaces that were brought to life by Arlo Mitchell of Greencube Landscapes and Gardens. Along the borders of the property, wind-resistant shrubbery, such as *Tarboanthus camphoratus*, was planted, while trees, such as *Ficus burtt-davyi*, provide a screen that offers privacy.

For the lawn, Patrick imported *Paspalum vaginatum*. 'It's a tropical grass and it can really handle the conditions – you can even irrigate it with salt water,' he explains.

The vertical garden, an eco-conscious cairn to the genius loci of the site, incorporates granite salvaged from the blast to form an irrigated pocket wall that holds thousands of succulents. 'It works to bring a feeling of life to what could have been an otherwise bare wall,' says Patrick.

Perhaps the garden's most unique feature are the tall birch trees that guard the property's entrance, planted as a nod to the owners' Russian heritage. 'I don't think anyone has ever planted birch trees this close to the sea,' laughs Patrick. 'It was challenging, but now they're doing well.'

Aristotelian in its tenets of symmetry, what Keith, Christian and Patrick have achieved is a harmonious stability between timeless style and modern sensibilities.

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'No one knows how to
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French-oak flooring and the proximity of the library to the master bedroom continues the theme of old-world elegance OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Volakas marble dominates the main bathroom; the dressing room was designed with the help of Bottega Veneta creative director Tomas Maier; the main bedroom boasts spectacular ocean views