

Business unusual

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THIS CAMPS BAY ABODE PLAYS HOUSE TO THE
LATEST GENERATION OF HIP HIGH-FLYERS





THIS PAGE The house's owner, Rolf Hoffmann, with his three-month-old daughter Annamaria. Well-chosen contemporary furniture generates a homely feel. The openness of the space is designed to encourage communication between guests and create a feeling of being on holiday.

OPPOSITE The street entrance is dominated by the building's dramatic yet graceful roof structure.



Architecture is as much about expressing the trends of our times as it is about design, as this house in Camps Bay shows. Designed as an abode for ‘business nomads’, the ‘Lobster’ house is the brainchild of Cape Town architect Dennis Spaeth and industrial engineer Rolf Hoffmann, who is based in Munich. ‘A few years ago we came to the realisation that while many people, particularly young members of the IT community, were travelling more and more, most of them were also becoming increasingly frustrated with impersonal hotel rooms and the loneliness associated with frequently being abroad,’ says Dennis. ‘They all seemed to be seeking the same things: a cosy, familiar place to spend their time away from home, and the chance to share ideas and network with like-minded professionals.’ With this idea in mind, Rolf and Dennis designed travel accommodation that would encompass the qualities of community living as well as the need for business resources and privacy.

Dennis responded by dividing the house into three distinct levels, each with its own particular function and character. Driving past the property, you could easily mistake the house for an ordinary family home. The driveway is marked by a timber fence, which reveals a landscaped pathway that takes you to the front door. ‘We wanted the house to look and feel like a home – especially the entrance area,’ says Dennis. ‘We wanted people to feel at home the moment they arrived.’

The reason for the lack of walls and partitions in the main living space is therefore clear and your sense of enclosure is only defined by the huge glazed panels, which maximise the spectacular view. The space is carved up into an open-plan kitchen, dining area and informal lounge. Appropriately, the dining-room table is flanked by two long modern wooden benches reminiscent of camp-style dining halls.

ABOVE The ‘chill-out area’ overlooks the entire entrance space and is defined by large windows that reveal the view of the Twelve Apostles behind. The carefully positioned top-level openings maximise air flow through the double-volume space.

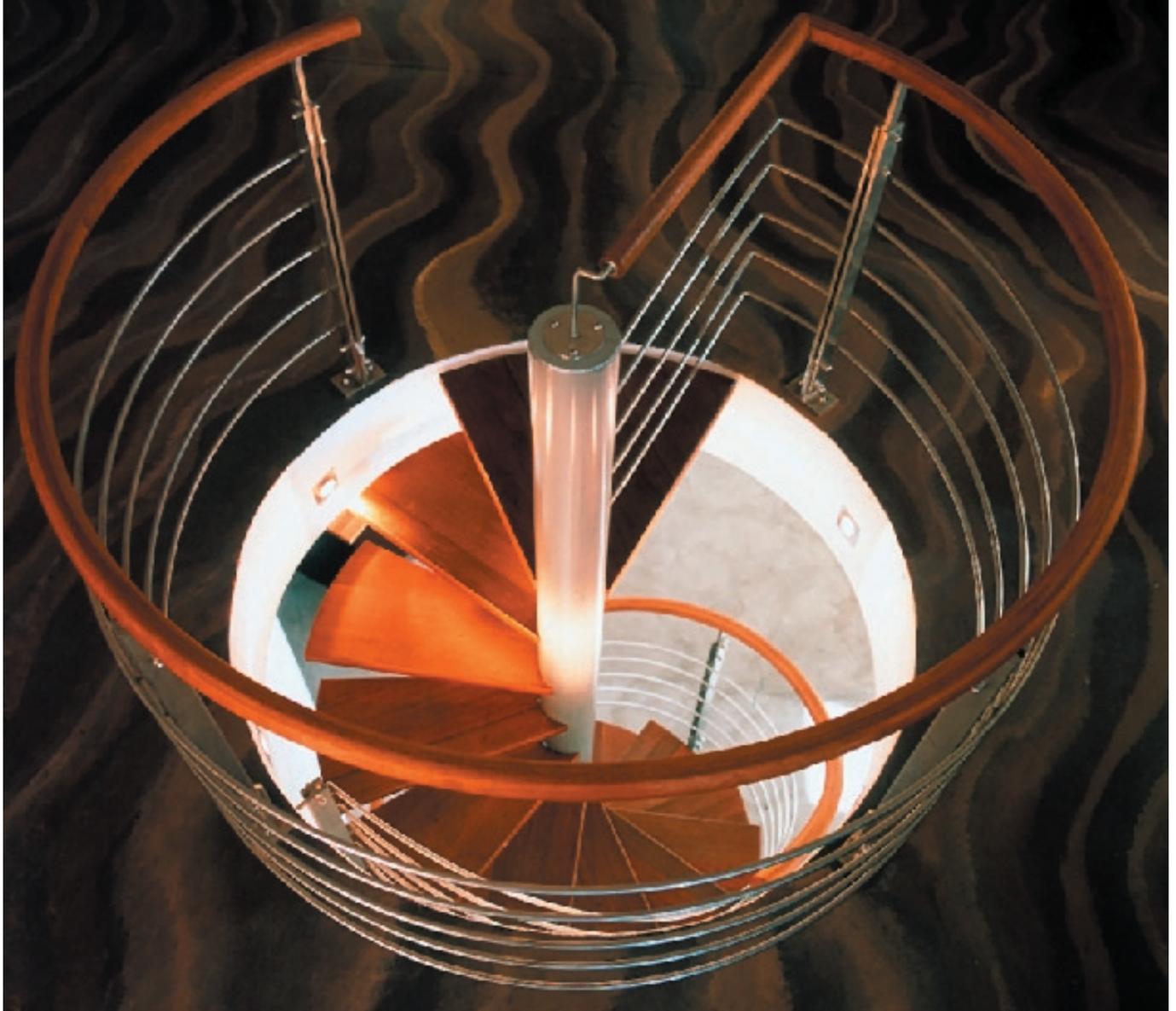
OPPOSITE, TOP The steel-cage structure is exposed in the bedrooms and reinforces the structural integrity of the design. **BELOW, FROM LEFT** The timber bathroom floors provide a contrast with the sleek white mosaic tiling and compact stainless-steel and timber vanities; the fully equipped kitchen is open-plan, creating a seamless connection between the varied spaces of the main living area. The back shelving wall hides storage space.

‘To afford people the choice,’ says Dennis, ‘there are also three decks projecting off the main space, which each allow for more intimate experiences in an open setting.’

The true measure of this space is felt on the mezzanine level. Accessed by a series of chunky concrete steps, the ‘chill-out area’ is an internal deck overlooking the entrance space. Dennis defines this as a ‘really comfy lounging space with scatter cushions and low tables. It’s a place to relax after work and appreciate the view.’ This space, fully visible from the street, is defined by the delicately sculptural profile of the roof. Resembling the wings of a bird, it feels as if the roof is about to take off, so light does the structure seem.

Dennis is careful to point out that everything in the house has a structural purpose. ‘Nothing is fake here. In fact, despite the contemporary nature of the house, the palette of materials is surprisingly natural and down to earth. We wanted to really extend the idea of a home by using materials that are familiar to people and exude warmth.’ Descending a timber staircase, you reach the ‘belly’ or private level of





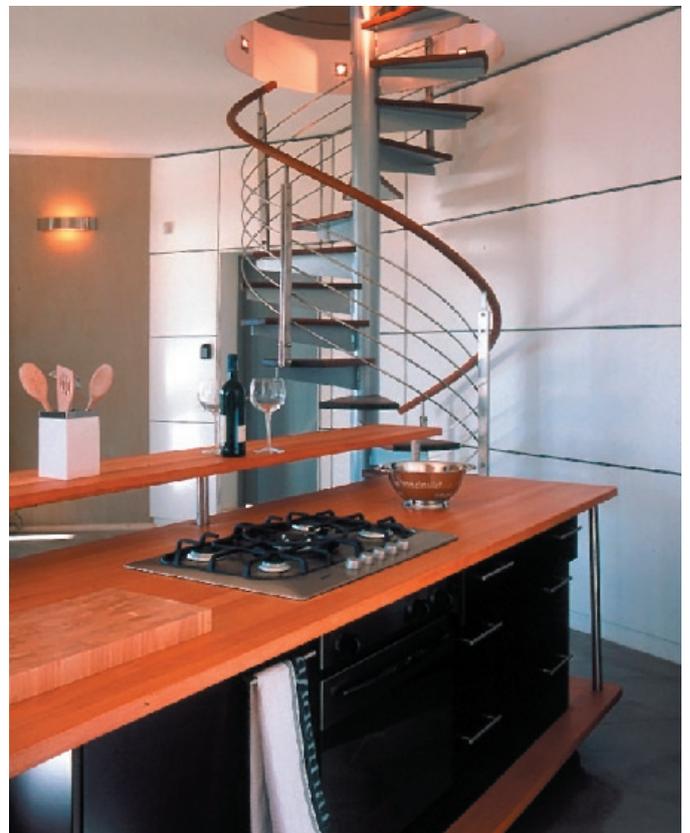
the house. Here, four rooms – or ‘cocoon’ – are situated around a central circular space. For the first time, you recall the true purpose of this house. Each room is marked by a simple door and security keypad panel – guests enter their rooms using a personalised code.

‘This area is not for socialising. It’s designed to maintain privacy and intimacy,’ Dennis explains. The timber floorboards and custom-made furniture give each space a lived-in feel. The bathrooms are encased in frosted-glass sliding doors that can either be closed for privacy or be fully slid back to make the bathroom’s area form part of the main room space. Each room also has a full set of plugs and network connections that satisfy the needs of even the most demanding IT traveller.

The third or ground level of the house boasts another living area and open-plan kitchen. This is the most flexible space, nicknamed the ‘leisure zone’. The kitchen is completely portable. ‘People often take the kitchen outside for summer eating,’ explains Dennis. Who wouldn’t? The garden is an urban oasis of landscaped lawns, natural rock formations and a very sexy swimming pool. It is also from the garden that you begin to really appreciate the spatial dimension of the house, with its bedroom pods jutting out like the prongs of a plug.

After its current occupants unplug their laptops and head back to Europe, the house is to play temporary home to an international film crew – such is the versatile nature of this place. □

Dennis Spaeth 082-862-4956, www.lobster-house.de



THIS PAGE 'At first the engineers and builders thought we were crazy when we showed them what we wanted,' says Dennis. The exterior material of the house is an artful composition of fibre-cement boards, which form the outside skin of a four-layered wall system. The whole house is insulated against heat and cold, including individual climatic control panels in each bedroom.

OPPOSITE, TOP The timber-and-steel staircase artfully winds its way down to the garden level. BELOW The mobile second kitchen is specially designed for flexibility and was made by A4A Studio 021-887-4070. It is often used outside as a server on the pool deck.

