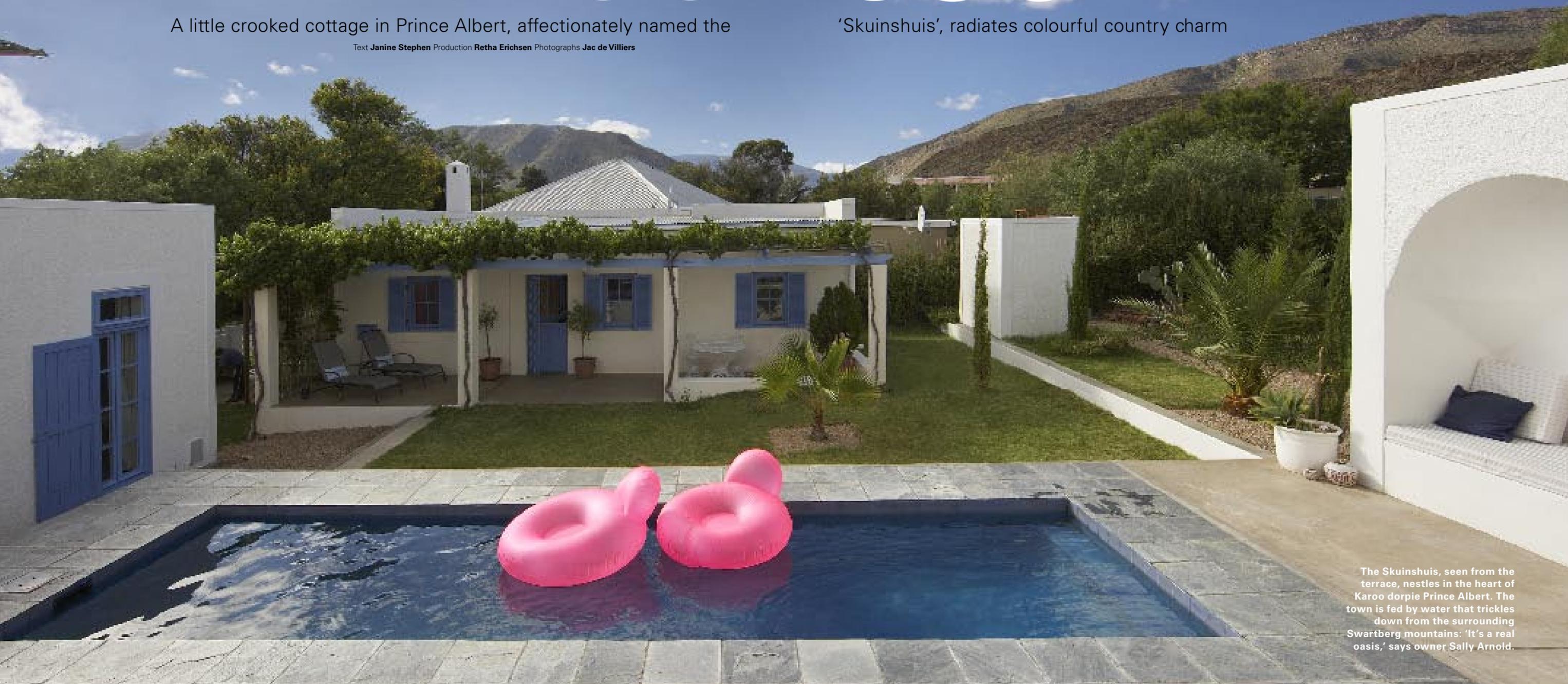


karoo cool

A little crooked cottage in Prince Albert, affectionately named the

'Skuinshuis', radiates colourful country charm

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The Skuinshuis, seen from the terrace, nestles in the heart of Karoo dorpie Prince Albert. The town is fed by water that trickles down from the surrounding Swartberg mountains: 'It's a real oasis,' says owner Sally Arnold.



Some people find change difficult. Others, like artist and designer Sally Arnold, have no trouble swapping life in a densely populated European country in favour of the infinite space and sparse serenity of a small Karoo town. Rich in colour and tranquillity, Prince Albert is about as far from the chilly formality of Luxembourg as you can get. But it's here that Sally finds inspiration and peace, elements that are reflected in the compact cottage she has decorated in what she terms 'New Karoo style'.

Sally is no stranger to South African skies: she grew up on several isolated farms in the Eastern Cape and her memories of the landscape and light still influence her work. 'I don't do wishy-washy,' she says. 'I like colour powerful.' Decades in Europe didn't alter this, and after her marriage ended and her children Lisa (25) and Felix (21) went to study, Sally was ready to return home. She now shares her space with Swedish entrepreneur and commercial pilot Anders Paulsson.

Sally went looking for a studio space after a 1998 exhibition in Cape Town – she'd had to dismantle and drag all her work over from Luxembourg and decided that next time she would produce it from Prince Albert. An estate agent showed her a 'little brakdakkie', a 102-year-old flat-roofed mud cottage that was used by a farmer's wife as a base for her tennis trips to town. Sally fell for its blue-painted shutters and crooked stance (it's aligned topographically with a contour line and so is at an angle to the street), made an offer, and the cottage was hers.

The Skuinshuis (skew house) is off a street where the passing traffic consists of little more than the odd bicycle. Day-to-day living takes place in the adjoining main house, designed by Pretoria-based architect Derick de Bruyn who borrowed from the cottage in terms of the shutter detail, flat-roof style and proportions.

Apart from adding on a bathroom and opening up the space to the terrace, she's left the cottage much as it has been for the past century. Skuinshuis is used by Sally's children when they come to visit and by friends, and is also available to rent, but it feels eminently homely thanks to her careful choice of objects and furnishings. While some are favourites from shops like Habitat or sourced from

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junk shops, there are also personal treasures – such as the antique Portuguese tiles in the kitchen that Sally 'carried around Europe for 30 years'. The cottage's reed-and-mud ceiling – with original beams – ensures the corrugated-iron-roofed house remains cool in temperatures that can reach over 40 degrees in summer. Sally's lively paintings adorn the walls and space is maximised with the use of hanging shelves and clever storage systems. Even the canopy above the bed is suspended ethereally from the ceiling, negating the need for a chunky frame.

What is most evident on entering Skuinshuis is Sally's love for colour, which blares in high definition from the living area. 'Colour excites me,' she says. 'Pink or red or orange have positive vibrations and I'm absolutely mad about lime green: it's all about hope.' One's eye is drawn from the luminous pink curtains that frame the windows to a bright butternut-orange-and-grey carpet – one of Sally's designs. Rugalia in Cape Town manufactures Sally's woollen rugs and soft furniture, and she also crafts mohair carpets and cushions in Prince Albert. 'Carpet making is tied up with my childhood – I used to play with wool from the sheep and my mom told me she'd even found me sleeping in bales of wool.'

Sally is inspired by natural beauty. 'There's a thread running through my design that illustrates what I understand about nature in a beautiful way,' she says. 'I'm interested in the fractal geometry you find in nature; the secret code of the universe.' This was true even while she was immersed in gloomy European cities. Now that she's back for good, her surroundings are an endless source of new ideas. 'I always knew I would come home one day,' she says. 'After all, my country is here and I wanted to tap into its huge potential.' ☺

Sally Arnold's new range of soft furniture and carpets was released at Design Indaba Expo 2009; showroom, 57 Church Street, Prince Albert, 023-541-1046, sallyarnold.com; to rent Skuinshuis see artistcottages.com; Derick de Bruyn Architects, 076-454-3996; Rugalia Designer Rugs, 021-461-0529

THIS PAGE The Geometric mohair carpet in the bedroom is one of Sally's. **OPPOSITE, TOP** Sally's 'Arc' woollen tufted rug – one of her first to be made by Rugalia (021-461-0529) – adds a splash of colour to the living room. The chocolate Zulu Mama chairs by Haldane Martin (haldanemartin.co.za) are offset by white wicker chairs that Sally found in Pasella Antiques in Oudtshoorn (044-272-6690). On the wall is Sally's 'Cactus' painting. The limpet-studded lights were made by Fiona Young (fionay@webmail.co.za). **BOTTOM** Sally's showroom combines her paintings, drawings and rugs for a contemporary New Karoo look. The paintings are from her *Fossil* series, and the lights are made from recycled wineglasses by Riaan Chambers (riaanchambers.co.za). The carpet is called 'Cross'.





The blue security gate was modelled on a design Sally used in a geometric series of paintings from about 2004. The seat is by Kevin Hough (073-912-4252), 'quite a famous person in town', who makes iron sculptures from old farm implements. The small marble-topped table is from a junk shop in Muizenberg. When in bloom, shocking pink roses from Die Hel and Cape plumbago add extra colour.

SALLY AND ANDERS' HOME TRUTHS

The best thing about country living is the peace (Sally). **The first thing I do in the morning** in Prince Albert is go cycling. I always pass two water furrows, which tend to trap tortoises – I've saved about 20 so far (Anders). **When eating out in Prince Albert** we're spoilt for choice. One of our favourites is the Gallery Café (082-749-2128) (Sally). **My personal decorating motto** is to play around with shapes and colour (Sally). **My motto is** 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' (Anders). **The work I'm most proud of** is a facade I did for a Luxembourg school perimeter called 'Urban Lullaby' (it won a prestigious European design award) (Sally). **One of my favourite designers** is Marcel Wanders, but now I want to immerse myself in South African design (Sally). **My favourite things include** my mother's pots. And I love my lamp stand by High Thorn (highthorn.co.za), which looks like a string of green olives one on top of the other (Sally). **My favourite SA products include** Sally's brother Kevin Arnold's wines (waterfordestate.co.za), Avoova ostrich-egg mosaics (avoova.com), Charlotte Rhys body-care products and furniture made from recycled wine barrels by Vinwood (021-887-7011, vinwood.co.za) (Anders). **I would love to work** as an artist in Venice. But the Karoo is my other favourite place (Sally). **I love Cape Town:** to me it represents democracy, peace and personal freedom (Anders).

ARTIST'S HOME

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Sally and Anders relax in the sheltered love seat at the end of the pool with its half dome. Sally is a fan of circular motifs: 'I find them very feminine and graphic and powerful.'