

The Artful Farm

This mountain homestead at Broederstroom
is a haven for creativity

Story and pictures by ALEX CREMER



ABOVE Wooden spikes over the main gateway into the courtyard, give the Fleischer home a fortress-like atmosphere. *RIGHT* The siting of the Fleischer house offers this view across an unspoiled valley – dotted with indigenous flora – to the Magaliesberg mountain range.

THE TWIN-STRIP concrete road to the Fleischer mountain gallery is quite tricky. It winds and twists through the pleasant, undulating countryside before ending abruptly near the complex, which is built, like a medieval bastion, on a high hill.

Even the main gateway resembles the entry to an ancient, Mediterranean fortress. Double-storey outbuildings span a wide thoroughfare that leads into the paved courtyard. Here, informal flowerbeds filled with shady trees, hardy plants and a vast array of metal and concrete sculptures, complement the unusual dwelling.

“Our home is a monument to my late husband, Michael,” says the owner, Tessa Fleischer. “When we moved to this farm,

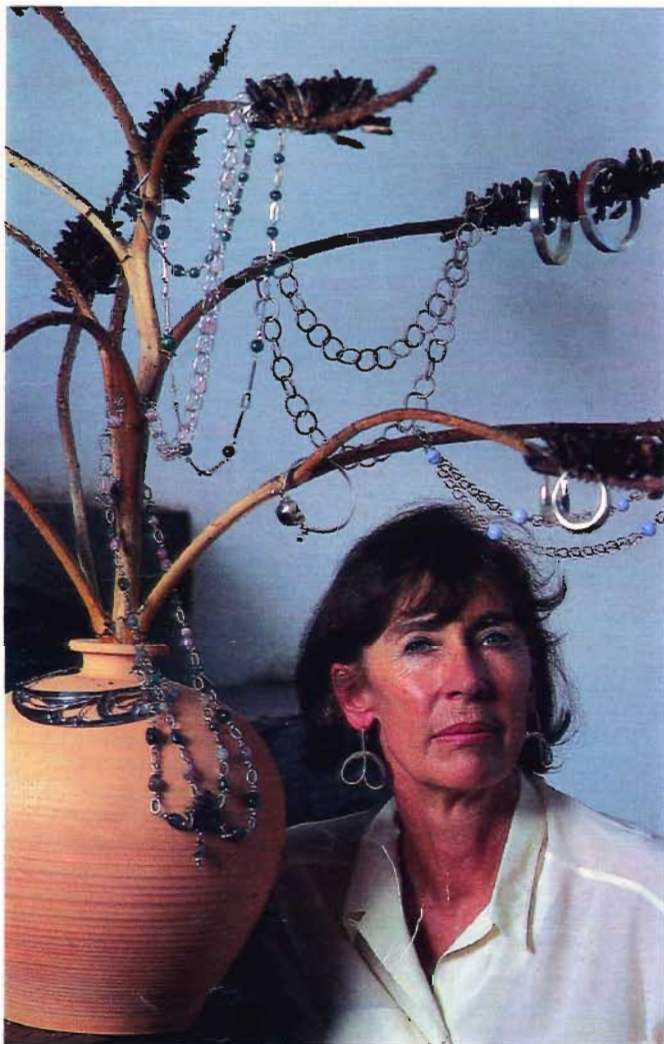
our first home was a tent camp. Michael designed and built a proper dwelling only later, in 1974. Or, as he called it, ‘a large sculpture with holes for people to live in.’”

As a sculptor, Michael had an incredible, self-taught knowledge of structural engineering. This he aptly applied in the amazing building techniques required for the new house, which was carefully planned around the needs and characters of each family member. Like the special peephole for their daughter Rebecca, so that she could look down from her upstairs room to any social gathering in the dining-room below. Or son Philip’s separate outside unit above the main gate, where he could live in peace with all his snakes and





The Artful Farm



- ABOVE LEFT* Tessa Fleischer's finely crafted silver jewellery include earrings and neckpieces, bracelets and chains.
- ABOVE RIGHT* A well-stocked library fills the built-in shelving along one wall in the cosy main lounge.
- RIGHT* A sleeper stairway sweeps up to the bedrooms above the entrance hall and dining-room, where lovely antiques rub shoulders with great artefacts collected throughout Africa.



SA Country Life
January 1996





The Artful Farm

the creepy crawly creatures he regularly gathered from the veld.

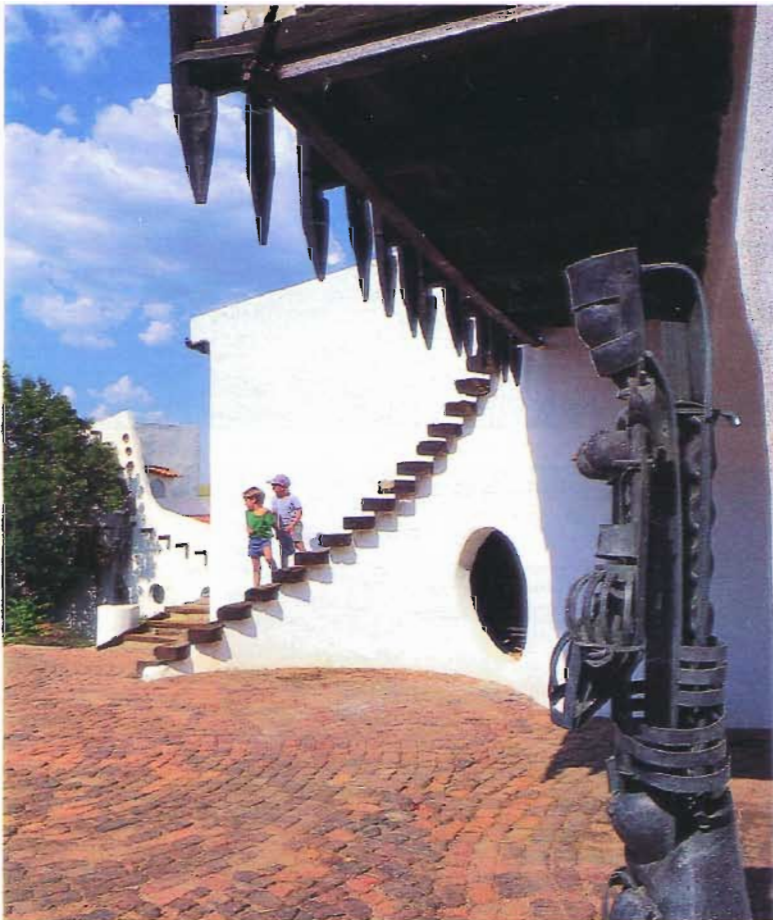
And to avoid it being an eyesore against the skyline, Michael incorporated the design of the massive watertank into the overall architecture. It now appears as a tower against the side of the house.

Numerous items saved from demolished buildings, such as doors, windows and parquet flooring, were cleverly recycled. Old railway sleepers were reworked into rustic interior and outdoor stairways, while treated poles support the roof. Roughly cut splitpoles became ceiling boards. Even terracotta flowerpots, with cut-off bases and inserted glass panels, are now most interesting portholes that bring daytime illumination to darker corners.

"The final décor for the house came out of our lives," says Tessa. "Michael and I picked up many of the items on our trips through Africa, and these have more aesthetic appeal than great value. Even Philip brought us mementoes from his two horseback trips spanning the full length of the African continent. Here and there, I brought in a number of antique pieces, bought long before such items became fashionable and expensive."

Michael was a prolific sculptor, and a perfectionist. Luckily, not all his pieces went to the art market. A few remained on site as decorations in the Fleischer garden, or became artful attractions against exterior walls. Others went into the house, like the wonderful metal light fitting in a fish form that hangs above the dining-room table.

LEFT ABOVE Tessa's daughter, Rebecca Tetley, has refined the ancient African technique of producing delicate pinchpots. *LEFT* Cousins, Nicolas and Romain Tetley, ascend the precarious steps to the rooms above the main gateway. These are flanked by one of their late grandfather's metal sculptures.



Although Michael passed away in 1991, his creativeness seems to have embraced all the family members. Tessa now specializes in finely crafted jewellery. She works mainly in silver and South African stones, like tourmaline, amethyst and verdite, supplemented by woods that include tamboti, wild pear and ebony. Her best-known work must be Bishop Tutu's crozier and pectoral cross.

Son, Philip, has teamed up with his partner, Sean Penrith, in running Green Glass, where they recycle old bottles into functional and decorative glassware. Daughter, Rebecca, works in clay, crafting large and delicate hand-built pinchpots of up to one metre in height. Her sister, Mara, is making a name for herself in industrial design.

Even Lazurus, a Zulu man, who has been on the Fleischer farm for many years, has picked up design and technical skills from Michael. He is now creating fine metal furniture in his little workshop on the property.

Although everything is not created on the farm, it is an ideal place to start a journey to the other nearby studios. But do linger a while, just to admire the house Michael built. Or to appreciate the magnificent setting, with its breathtaking views across the valleys towards the majestic Magaliesberg range. 🐦

Make an appointment to visit this interesting mountain gallery



RIGHT ABOVE Painted in various oxides and fired at 1260 °C, the motifs on Rebecca's pinchpots range from the erotic to geometrical floral designs.

RIGHT Being on the Fleischer farm for many years, and learning the basic techniques from Michael, Lazurus is now producing exquisite metal furniture of his own.

