

CONDÉ NAST
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dark MATTER

A sophisticated riff on coastal living saw Fyfe Boyce employ a dark palette and urban sensibility to create a cocooning sanctuary

TEXT JULIA FREEMANTLE PHOTOGRAPHS ELSA YOUNG



FYFE BOYCE DIDN'T WANT A HEAVILY TEXTURED DESIGN IN THIS ZIMBALI HOME'S BAR AREA, SO THE APPROACH WAS CAREFULLY CONSIDERED - TIMBERS WERE KEPT DARK, AND SUBTLE BRASS DETAILING WAS USED TO ENHANCE THE LOOK

OPPOSITE PAGE THE DARK WALL PANELLING AND FLOORS ARE NEVER OPPRESSIVE COURTESY OF ABUNDANT NATURAL LIGHT LET IN VIA THE OPEN-PLAN VOLUMES



despite its proximity to the ocean and laid-back coastal location, this Zimbali home wasn't ever destined to conform to typical beach house criteria. The owners – a young family – recently relocated to KwaZulu-Natal from Johannesburg but weren't moving to a holiday home, so the space needed to reflect the transition from city to coast but also the house's permanent status via the design.

With this need to steer clear of stereotypes in mind, design firm Fyfe Boyce took on board the clients' brief, which offered some guidelines, but also allowed the firm to interpret its vision fairly freely. 'They knew that they had a special home in terms of architecture and location, and they wanted us to help them realise its potential. Their overriding desire was for a sophisticated space with room to move around freely in,' elaborates Kelsey Boyce.

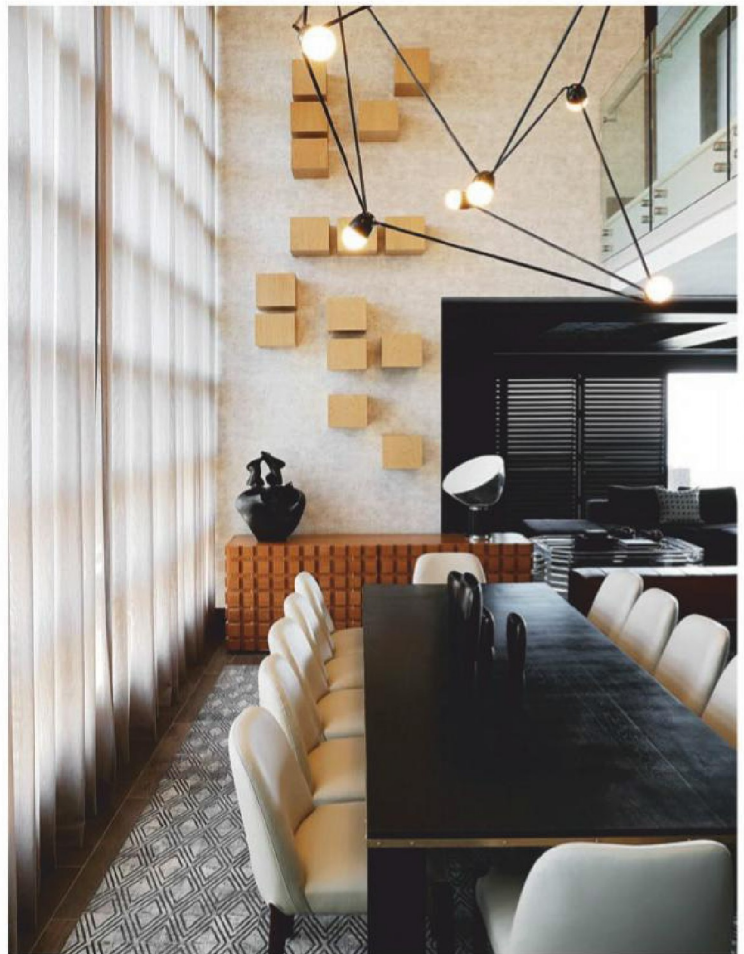
Beyond that the direction was quite open. So, cued by the clients themselves and their affinity for city life, as well as their love

of the bush, Fyfe Boyce set out to create a space that merged these passions, with an ocean backdrop. 'Their connection to the city is a strong one and although they've made Durban their home, they didn't want to lose the urban energy they'd become so accustomed to,' explains Kelsey. 'We had to avoid the obvious temptation of designing a traditionally coastal interior that would have been beautiful but wouldn't have aligned with who they are,' he explains. So rather than defaulting to seaside clichés, the designers created a scheme sympathetic to the clients' personalities.

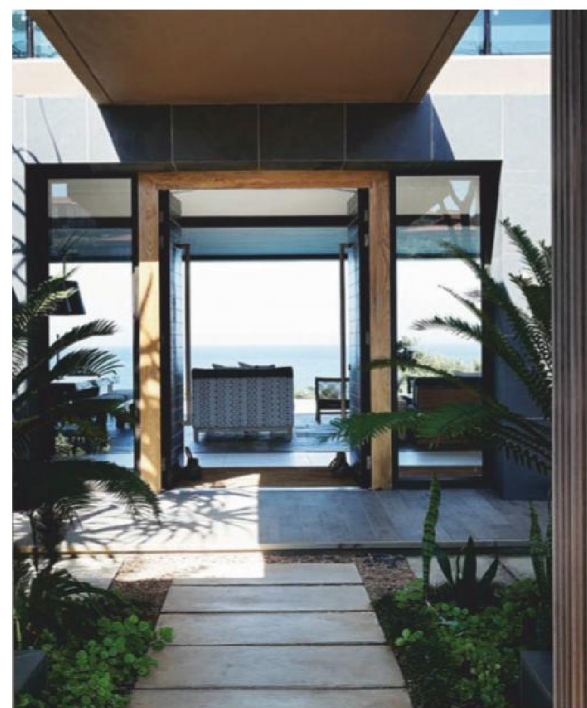


LEFT TOUGHER MATERIALS WERE USED ON THE TERRACE TO COMBAT THE ELEMENTS

RIGHT, FROM TOP THE OWNERS INITIALLY WANTED 'BRIGHT AND LIGHT' BUT IT QUICKLY BECAME APPARENT BRIGHT DID NOT MEAN LIGHT IN A TRADITIONAL SENSE, AS SEEN IN THE TV ROOM; A COMBINATION OF GRAPHIC AND ORGANIC MOTIFS BLENDS THE BEACH, BUSH AND CITY REFERENCES IN THE DINING AREA



'Our thinking kept returning to a combination we'd never seen in one space before – an urban game lodge by the ocean. We're sure nothing like that exists but if it does, this is how we think it would look,' explains Bruce Fyfe. This trifecta of styles – city penthouse, bush lodge, beach escape – while theoretically incongruous, works by virtue of common links and contrasting elements that complement one another. The organic natural textures emblematic of the bush and beach are countered by a graphic geometric undertone that smartens up the scheme. The result is ▶



LEFT, FROM TOP THE ARCHITECTURE ACHIEVED AMAZING INDOOR/OUTDOOR COHESION AND THE DECOR WAS DESIGNED TO ALIGN WITH THIS; NOT ONLY DO THE DARKER TONES MAKE THE SPACE MORE SEDUCTIVE, THEY HELP MITIGATE THE HEAT OF THE KZN COAST

RIGHT THE BLACK AND WHITE WALLPAPER ON THE LIVING ROOM CEILING INFORMED THE PATTERN USED THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE



a slickness not usually seen in a beach-house setting, which is underpinned by a predominantly dark envelope.

Completely counter to the classic breezy aesthetic one expects from coastal living, this surprising palette is peppered with an occasional dose of striking colour. 'Interestingly enough the owners initially wanted the home to be "bright and light" but when we presented a few initial images they felt they were too safe and neutral,' adds Bruce. This reaction spurred on a much punchier approach that saw the team toning down the airiness in a major



way with dark wood panelling, flooring and furniture in the living spaces, which also serve as a retreat from the heat and humidity of the KZN climate. 'The home's architecture puts it slightly on the dark side as it is, and we didn't want to fight that so instead decided to accentuate it,' comments Kelsey.

Along with strong colour, the owners wanted an unfussy interior. So rather than overfilling the spaces, the designers took the approach of creating impact through fewer but more powerful pieces and depth through a carefully considered approach

to texture. A natural and tactile base of leather, timber, sisal and stone is lifted with metallic accents to represent the urban/earthy hybrid. 'Our focus was on big, bold pieces that would occupy the vast spaces without overpowering them,' he says. Low-slung sofas inside were designed to keep the horizon intact and large pieces were only positioned against internal walls, and never against glass.

This uncluttered aesthetic is extended into the outdoors with slightly tougher materials to combat the elements – cowhide rugs, granite and hard-wearing outdoor

fabrics translate the look in a more durable way. 'We couldn't adopt a traditional approach to outdoor furniture – it needed to be hardy to survive the coastal elements but also look soft enough to coexist with the interior,' explains Bruce.

The easy transition from indoors to out is emblematic of the whole and the clever merging of style and place, which has produced a coastal house that defies convention – a cocoon of sophisticated but earthy textures that acknowledges the ocean setting without making it the central focus. ■ Fyfe Boyce fyfeboyce.co.za

A CLEVER SELECTION OF MATERIALS SIGNAL ALL THE DISPARATE INFLUENCES AND BRING IN BOTH LUXURIOUS AND LAID-BACK ELEMENTS. A HEAVILY TEXTURED RUG ADDS WARMTH AND LEATHER ADDS MASCULINITY AND HARDINESS

