

Who lives here?

Abi James

WHERE Bo-Kaap, Cape Town

SIZE 130m²

The entrance is warm and inviting with its tiled border and artwork by Abi's friend Susie Jayne Bailly.

Door painted with Plascon Velvagro in Atlantic Beach

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OUT OF THIS world

A love of travel and an eye for design have led Abi James to create a home that's both exotic and down to earth.

By Kim Arendse

Photographs Francois Oberholster

Styling Marian van Wyk



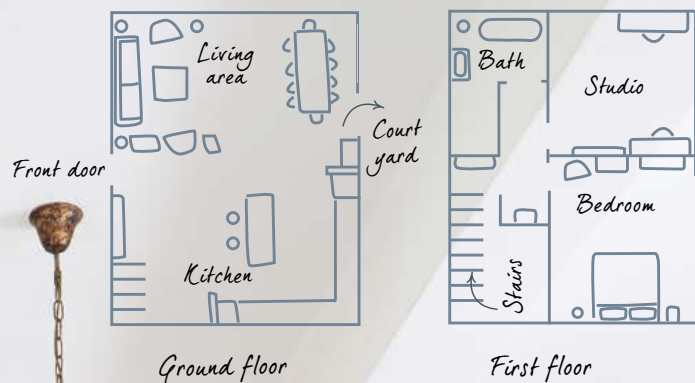
French doors open out onto a courtyard with Moroccan floor tiles. When Abi moved in three years ago, this area was a muddy mess; she removed the few odd paving stones and tiled the space with striking blue and white tiles.

You can't help but feel happy when you arrive at Abi James's home.

The striking blue front door framed by an enticing mural of a flowering granadilla brings a smile to all who visit this interior and jewellery designer's haven in the Bo-Kaap in Cape Town.

The entrance offers the first sign that Abi is passionate about all things beautiful. But she firmly believes that beauty must have substance and when you cross the threshold, it's clear that this space is more than 'just a pretty face'.

Inside is a treasure trove of keepsakes from her travels; her previous homes in the UK, North Africa and South Africa; and from artists she's met along the way. It's a sanctuary in which each room transports you to a different world.



In the living area, whites and neutrals create an elegant yet comfortable space.

Chandelier from Block & Chisel; side tables from Weylandts, gumtree.co.za and Amatuli; rug from Moroccan Warehouse

To create a multipurpose space for cooking, dining and relaxing, Abi installed an island in the open-plan kitchen. The stainless steel shelves and splashback, as well as track lighting, add an industrial touch.



Light streams in from two large sash windows on the first floor; the exposed wall displays the stone used in the original walls.
Teak cabinet from Weylandts

Abi says fresh flowers and plants are a must, hence the greenery wrapped around the hanging glass candleholder.
Wood-burning stove from Builders

Travel-inspired décor

London-born Abi has been travelling since a young age, an experience that has inspired and informed her love of décor.

Growing up, she travelled to Africa with her parents (her mother is South African and her father is British) every year. She recalls one particular school holiday when she returned to the UK from South Africa with bags full of fabric and curios to decorate her bedroom. "It probably looked pretty out of place in an English boarding school!" Abi says with a laugh.

Much later during a trip to Zambia while on holiday from university, Abi landed a job in textile design which kicked off her interior design career.

Seven years ago, a work opportunity saw her settling in South Africa. "When I first bought this property, I was living in Tamboerskloof and used this place as a shared workspace with the band Freshlyground," Abi explains. "When they began touring and no longer needed the space, I decided to turn it into a home."

Although based in this 100-year-old house that was once a fruit and vegetable shop, Abi still regularly travels to Kenya and Ethiopia where she sources beads for her bespoke jewellery line, Soul Design. She is also the interior designer for Tongabezi Lodge in Zambia.

"I love the character of the Bo-Kaap: the cobbled streets, colourful houses, and the sense of community. The daily call to prayer in this mostly Muslim neighbourhood reminds me of Zanzibar!"

Having already undergone several renovations over the years, the house was in good shape – all Abi had to do was transform it into a warm, eclectic space she could call home. >>



The main bedroom, complete with a romantic Juliet balcony, is beautifully layered with wooden pieces and bright warm colours such as the yellow bedspread Abi made from fabric she bought in India.

Curtains should always be draped on the floor, says Abi.

Chair and ladder shelf from Weylandts; rug from Ikea



Having always had a keen interest in décor, Abi picked out this light blue cabinet from a London-based French antique furniture store as a gift from her parents for her 21st birthday.

Star and vase from Moroccan Warehouse



Wooden pieces bring warmth to the bathroom and pops of jewel-toned blue, including the shower curtain Abi made from fabric she found in India, add interest.

Blue cabinet from Amatuli; white stool and candleholder from gumtree.co.za



Eclectic fabrics and collections

Abi painted the interior white to create a calm space in which her beloved collectibles would stand out. In the living areas, she had wooden floors installed over the previous black cement and then painted them white too. Upstairs, you'll find Abi's bedroom, bathroom and jewellery studio. Here, the wooden floor has been left in its natural state for a warmer look and feel.

Each room is textured with a variety of materials, artworks, plants and warm colours. "I'm drawn to a bohemian style with a mix and match of pieces and a touch of old school glamour," Abi says. "I'm also inspired by the patterns, textures and colours of India and Morocco, and I love eclectic fabrics and collections of art and books. I have a serious fabric addiction!"

She uses her collection to make anything from throws to scatter covers – and even her shower curtain!

"When I decorate, I start by buying a few items I love – whether it's fabric, a piece of furniture or a tile. Then I bring in pieces that complement those first buys," she explains. It's rare for Abi to walk away from something she loves, like the big red Perspex letters on her staircase which she bought at a Paris flea market a few years ago. "I couldn't spell anything else with the letters they were selling, so I went for an N and an O. I carted them back to London on the Eurostar and then shipped them over to Cape Town a year later. A huge "no" seemed negative, so I now use the N as a Z – I just love the way they look on the stairs!" >>

I like pieces *with a story* and I'm drawn to colour and texture. – Abi



The second upstairs bedroom serves as Abi's studio; this is where she makes her jewellery and sews soft furnishings. The pine shelves were custom made and new jewellery pieces are hung on bits of driftwood.



Q&A with Abi

What have you bought and discarded most recently?

I bought a powder-pink mug that matches my sofa and changed my bed throw to a bright Indian fabric; I gave the old one away.

If you could relocate, where would you go? San Francisco looks like a great city and Lamu Island in East Africa would be dreamy.

What is your most prized possession? My Ethiopian crosses.

What do you consider to be the biggest *décor faux pas*? Buying something because it's trendy, instead of buying something you love.

What is your favourite plant and why? I love palms; they fill a space so well.

Where do you love to shop for home *décor*? Moroccan Warehouse, Weylandts, Malawi Chairs, gumtree.co.za, Nap, Kenyan markets for fabrics from across Africa, Block & Chisel for lamps, Caroline Gibello for photos and anthropologie.com for crockery. 🏠

Abi says the 40m² courtyard (*right*)

makes her feel miles away from the busy city centre. It's filled with meaningful pieces such as an iron bed from her childhood that's now used as seating, an umbrella from India, and cane chairs. The mosaic fountain (*inset*) was already here when Abi moved in; it uses recycled water and suits her style perfectly.

Floor tiles and white table from Moroccan Warehouse

STOCKISTS Amatuli 011 440 5065, amatuli.co.za **Block & Chisel** 021 691 0878, blockandchisel.co.za **Builders** 0860 284 533, builders.co.za **Caroline Gibello** 072 143 4503, galleriagibello.com **Malawi Chairs** malawichairs.co.za **Moroccan Warehouse** 021 461 8318 **Nap** napliving.co.za **Soul Design** 076 527 8717, soul design.co.za **Susie Jayne Baily** 082 359 9412 **Weylandts** 021 914 1433, weylandts.co.za

