

SOUTH AFRICAN STYLE Edited by Angelika Taschen, photographs by Deidi von Schaewen, Taschen Icons, R89

HMMN. I guess when the hip German publisher, Taschen, releases a title called *South African Style*, we've made it somehow. Internationally at least, a distinctive South African aesthetic has earned its décor stripes. We exist! And the world will bear witness to our lekker lifestyle.

One might have hoped for a more astute and imaginative showcase, though.

The book's jacket splashes an azure, Atlantic view, with a crude, Senufo bed planted on the deck. The flowery intro is better suited to a tourist brochure — and if that's what this is meant to be, *South African Style* is a winner. It will certainly lure more visitors to the overpriced Cape and luscious lodge-circuit. But as a portfolio of the elegant and innovative aesthetic progress interior designers and architects have made in this country recently, this book could have been far more exciting.

Indeed, this notebook-sized picture book from Taschen's *Icons* series betrays a wily ability to repackage existing material on a shoestring, and make it look new. Many of the book's images have been snatched from Taschen's 2003 double-volume tome *Inside Africa* — and so we revisit all the predictable décor culprits: fashion designer Malcolm Kluk's blue house; architect Pierre Lombart's low-tech art showcase; Sylvio Rech's organic fantasy-lodge, Maklali; Beezy Bailey's baroque mansion; and a spatter of Ndebele huts and shack chic tossed in to lend the requisite nod to social conscience. But these pale in comparison with some of the fresh, contemporary editorials in our current glut of décor magazines.

Where is the internationally acclaimed work of home-grown designers like Gregor Jensen, Egg Designs, Tonic and Maira Koustoudakis? Where is the fabulous wirework from Durban's BAT Centre? Stephen Falcke's award-winning Saxon Hotel? Where are Hylton Nel's plates? There isn't even a KentrIDGE hanging. Sadly, these have all made way for 200 pages of "kuba" cloth scatter cushions; grungy wrought-iron work; rustic chic close-ups that could be from anywhere; and penguin portraits straight

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out of National Geographic. The book's clumsy format demands laborious fiddling through thumbnail shots at the end of each chapter for caption information which, because it is in three languages, lacks detail. Artists are often not even credited.

Internationally, this book will provide adequate PR. It does capture some of this country's contrasts, and those who've never been here may well be enticed by corrugated iron walls papered with Koo labels; Bakoven sunsets; Cape Dutch gables; township hair salons; and lofts, kitted in Art Deco and gemsbok horns.

So if you have some far-flung guests you intend luring on holiday, a copy of *South African Style* may well do the trick.

If, however, you want to jazz up your coffee table with a dash of sexy, new Mzansi chic, you're better off with a local décor magazine from the corner keffie — which, incidentally, doesn't feature in the book.