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STUDIO EXCLUSIVE
Diane Victor, Lionel Smit,
David Koloane,
Georgina Gratrix,
Dineo Seshee Bopape,
Zander Blom & more

Kitchens for cooks – ideas for your perfect space

CLIVE VAN DEN BERG'S
MAGICAL FREE STATE
GARDEN

ON THE COVER
A STYLISH, ART-FILLED
PRETORIA ABODE

THE
ART
ISSUE

INSIDE THE HOMES OF TOP
SA ARTISTS & COLLECTORS



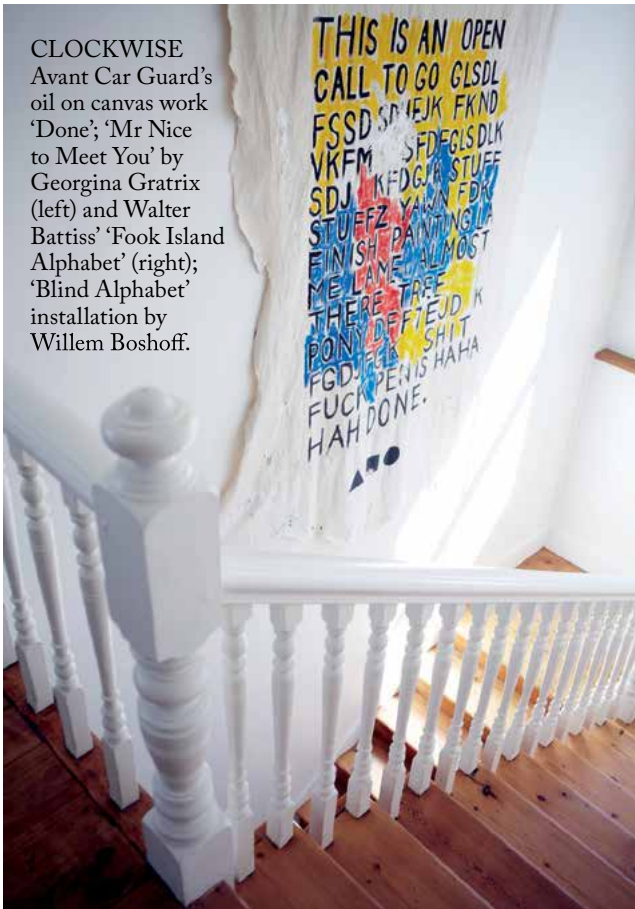
The double-volume atrium at the back of The New Church was added in the renovation process as a display area, which now houses Wim Botha's mixed-media installation entitled 'Time Machine'.



a piece of art heaven

A new private gallery in Cape Town offers an uplifting experience for fans of contemporary South African art

Text Genevieve Fisher Production Jeanne Botes Photographs Greg Cox



CLOCKWISE
Avant Car Guard's
oil on canvas work
'Done'; 'Mr Nice
to Meet You' by
Georgina Gratrix
(left) and Walter
Battiss' 'Fook Island
Alphabet' (right);
'Blind Alphabet'
installation by
Willem Boshoff.



For any contemporary art aficionado, stepping into The New Church in Cape Town's Tamboerskloof is like direct entry into heaven. The white walls and wooden floors of this private gallery set in a double-storey Cape vernacular house are laden with works by some of South Africa's current art greats – Nicholas Hlobo, Willem Boshoff, Zander Blom and more names likely to elicit a few hallelujahs. All feature in the gallery's inaugural exhibition, No.1: Subject as Matter, curated by artist and academic Penny Siopis.

'I gave Penny free rein to choose the pieces and, without knowing, many of the ones she selected are some of my favourites,' says Piet Viljoen, private collector and owner of the gallery and its prized artworks. Piet straddles two worlds: during the day he's immersed in that of asset management and finance but when he leaves the office it's to the realm of contemporary South African art that he returns.

Piet began collecting art 15 years ago after being inspired by Brett Murray's 'Africa' sculpture. He walked into a gallery to view one of the maquettes and, on seeing the rest of the artworks on display, he quite literally had an enlightening experience. Piet's collection has since grown substantially, as have his appreciation and understanding of what informs his choices – all of them filtered through three themes: conceptual, abstract and sociopolitical commentary. 'Buying art is an instinctual process based on how the artists have portrayed what they see and feel, and how that resonates with me,' he explains.

On a practical level The New Church was opened so Piet's collection could come out of storage and be displayed not just for his pleasure but also for that of the greater public. He bought the property, a stately old home that was previously a boarding house and a restaurant, and enlisted the expertise of architect Gert De Wet and interior designer Ilse van Staden to galvanise the existing structure into a gallery. 'This meant subtracting, rather than adding; simplifying the space and bringing it back to basics by removing all the modern materials and fittings,' says Piet. 'The only addition was a double-volume glass atrium at the back used as a large display space with a covert storage facility.'

There is a more zealous motivation for Piet opening the gallery: 'Funding for the arts is playing an increasingly smaller role in the agenda of the government, and public galleries feel this,' he explains. 'Because art facilitates the examination of societies' values and norms by people outside of politics and business, a private gallery can engage the public with this discourse of looking at ourselves critically.'

The name is informed by its location on New Church Street but for Piet it's also a purposeful irony. 'I've never had a high regard for religion but I've called the gallery The New Church to refer to it as a place where people can come and reflect.' Judging by the portfolio of work housed here, it's a space where spiritual experiences are just waiting to be had. ☐ The New Church, 021-657-3472, viewings by appointment only.