

JUNE 2018 | AUSTRALIA COAST TO COAST

# COUNTRY STYLE

## 20

**TOP CHEFS**  
reveal the best  
regional food  
destinations

THE FOOD &  
WINE ISSUE

### HOME GROWN

*The farm that feeds  
Annie Smithers'  
Trentham restaurant*

### FROM BROOME TO VENICE

*Foodie Skye McAlpine's  
country childhood*

*guests of honour*

GATHER AROUND THE TABLE WITH GOOD COMPANY

OFF THE GRID

HOW A YOUNG FAMILY BROUGHT A HINT OF LUXURY TO THEIR CABIN HIDEAWAY IN THE UNTAMED SOUTH AFRICAN BUSH.

WORDS JESSICA ROSS PHOTOGRAPHY WARREN HEATH STYLING SVEN ALBERDING / BUREAUX

Samantha Mellor and her three-year-old daughter Francesca looking out over the valley surrounding their cabin, which is located in the semidesert area, Little Karoo.



THERE ARE FEW SCENES AS IDYLIC as luxuriating in an outdoor tub in the middle of the South African bush, drink in hand, listening to birdsong and stridulating insects floating through the valley at dusk. For Samantha and William Mellor, this calming ritual is what their weekend bolthole, Cabine du Cap, is all about.

As founder and CEO at zoceansvibe Media — a popular blog turned successful multimedia news platform started in 2002 — William is rarely afforded the opportunity to switch off. In 2012, he and Samantha also joined forces to start their own cane furniture business, Malawi Cane, which exports locally made pieces around the world. As if these ventures weren't keeping them busy enough, three years ago the couple launched the 'du Cap Collection', a brand which incorporates a fashion boutique, as well as a café and accommodation showcasing Malawi Cane furniture.

William and Samantha's busy lifestyle is partly what made having an isolated escape so appealing. Hidden away in the Western Cape's semidesert Little Karoo region, the Mellors' cabin is surrounded by 175 hectares of rugged bushland, with undulating landscape covered in tufts of green scrub and no neighbours as far as the eye can see — it almost resembles something out of the Sydney Pollack film *Out of Africa*. "It all started with a dream to have an outdoor tub," says Samantha, 37, who carefully planned the placement of their open-air custom-made galvanised steel bath: close enough to the edge of their deck to feel plunged within the surrounding scrub, and far enough from the roof to get an eyeful of the starry sky at night. "We sometimes put on the whole *Out of Africa* soundtrack, sit in the bath and watch the sun set," she admits, with a laugh. "It's a bit sentimental but we embrace it."

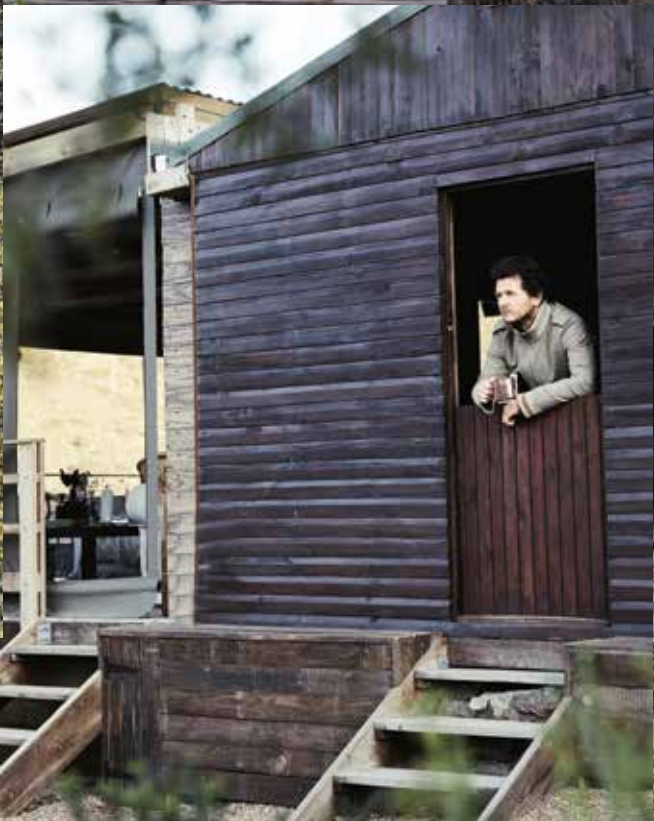
When the couple first came across the property, located about two and a half hours' drive east from Cape Town, off the famous Route 62 highway, the existing ramshackle structure was dwarfed by the majestic environment. "It was really just a piece of land. The empty cabin was falling apart, but it was the first place we looked at and we could see its potential," Samantha explains. The couple decided to buy the property in early 2016 and started visiting every few weeks with their three-year-old daughter, Francesca, and labrador, Lacoste. (They welcomed a second child, Remi, early this year). The family would travel up a precarious road to the cabin, where they'd spend their days improving the infrastructure, and nights listening to the sounds of wildlife living nearby.

"The first thing we needed to address was the connectivity," says William, 40, who installed single-battery solar panels to ensure they had wi-fi. "There's this fantasy of being totally disconnected — no cellphone signal, nothing — but that's not realistic when you have a baby and there are scorpions in the area," he says. "We've kept our footprint light — we use gas, >



The living room can be used year-round thanks to the fireplace that builder Stephen Butler created using stone quarried on the property. The coffee table is from Block and Chisel, while the cane armchair is from Malawi Cane. Bamboo has been used for the roofing. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP** The Mellor family and their labrador, Lacoste, exploring the bush; Lacoste relaxing on the deck, where the canvas awnings can be brought down to separate the space from the living area. **For stockist details, see page 132.**

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT An outdoor living room; the family around the pool; the front door of the cabin was part of the existing building; the Cape Snowbush is one of many plants native to the area; the outdoor shower; the bath is the couple's favourite thing about the house. For stockist details, see page 132.



CLOCKWISE The cabin blends into the surrounding shrubland thanks to its wooden exterior; open shelves in the kitchen display Samantha's collection of silver, copper and ceramic pieces; bird prints and a map of Africa are on display in the bedroom.





"We go for walks most mornings — heading off in any direction," says Samantha. **BELOW** The outdoor shower is an indulgent way to start the day while keeping in touch with nature. It uses a marine pump to improve the water pressure to the showerhead.



solar power and rainwater. It's as off-the-grid as we can be. And when we want to switch off, we simply turn off the wi-fi."

The couple's vision for the cabin was inspired by the French countryside, particularly the lavender-swathed region of Luberon in Provence, where they were married in 2012. They combined that European influence with a contemporary safari style. "The themes work surprisingly well together," says William. Samantha agrees: "When you go for walks around the cabin, it's a lot like being in the south of France. It's funny how the two places seem so different but actually are quite alike. They are our two favourite areas," she says.

To bring their vision to life and transform a small run-down cabin was going to take some work, so the couple asked local builder Stephen Butler to oversee the renovation. Under William and Samantha's direction, Stephen built an impressive stone fireplace — essential for winter nights in this area — and used Rhino Wood for all internal walls, floors and ceilings, as well as outdoor decking. The couple love the look of the Rhino Wood — sustainable South African pine wood, which is thermally treated to improve durability and stability — because of how nicely it blends in with the surrounding natural environment. Using it from the inside out also expands the living space and helps make it feel bigger.

The interiors were Samantha's domain; having worked in the retail industry for more than 10 years, she has a good eye for styling and used vintage trunks and bird motifs throughout the cabin. The couple was resourceful when it came to finding special pieces for the home, scouring auctions and making use of family hand-me-downs. For Samantha, inspiration came in many forms — movies, French flea markets and stacks of interior design magazines. However, nothing was as influential as the landscape itself and so a neutral, earthy palette mimics the semi-arid Karoo landscape outside the cabin, while books about the local plants and birdlife pack the shelves inside.

"What's really been amazing is how much we've learned about birds and the bush here — we can actually name some of the plant species now," says Samantha, who delights in pointing out Botterboom succulents with their thick trunks to visitors. The Mellors also enjoy admiring the shrubland that covers the Karoo, changing colour with the seasons from yellow to red. In the cooler months, a mass of Erica plants bring a beautiful purple haze across the valley. At night their attention turns upwards. "The stars really take you aback. I know, it sounds like a cliché," says William, "but you don't really understand until you're here — it's completely silent and the moon is like a spotlight... You stand here and all your troubles go away." *CS*

*For more information about Samantha and William or to rent their house, visit [cabineducap.com](http://cabineducap.com) or [2oceansvibe.com](http://2oceansvibe.com)*



Samantha and William's interest in local birdlife is reflected in the art displayed above their antique bed.

POSTCARD GET THE LOOK

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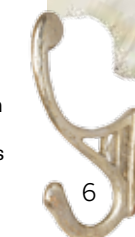
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## out of africa

THIS CABIN BRINGS TOGETHER SAFARI STYLE WITH A FRENCH FARMHOUSE FEEL.

PRODUCED BY JESSICA HANSON

1 Natural Curiosities Audubon Birds wall art #15 (top) and #1, from \$525, from Coco Republic. 2 Tinsmith soap dish, \$45, from The Society Inc. 3 Copper colander, \$90, from Williams-Sonoma. 4 Freshwater outdoor shower set, \$1350, from Brooklyn Copper Co. 5 Natural Beige and White Sprinkled cowhide rug, \$495, from NSW Leather Co. 6 Porters wall hook, \$20, from The Society Inc. 7 Äppelrö 3-seat outdoor sofa in brown stained and Hällö Beige, \$465, from IKEA. 8 Arabella baskets, \$195 a set, from GlobeWest. 9 Malawi chair, \$480, from Orient House. 10 Feuerhand Germany Storm lantern in Bronze, \$69, from Homecamp. 11 Mediterranean Fig bath salts, \$45.99, from Plain and Simple Australia. For stockist details, see page 132.