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PREFAB MODERN

THIS TINY CUSTOM-PREFAB WEEKEND RETREAT REINVENTS THE COASTAL COTTAGE AS A SLEEK, SCANDI-INSPIRED FLOATING BOX THAT CUTS BUDGETS AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT WHILE DELIVERING ON DESIGN

*Words **Grabam Wood** Photography **Greg Cox***



DECOR



Fisherhaven is a small village along South Africa's Western Cape coast, a verdant strip of coastline known for its beaches, glamorous golf courses and natural beauty.

Nearby Hermanus is world-famous for its whale watching, as pods of southern right whales drift into the bays to calve during the winter and spring months. But Fisherhaven's lovely, indigenous plant-covered dunes and beautiful mountain backdrop remain, if not undiscovered, then largely undisturbed. Amazingly, herds of wild horses roam free.

Clients of industrial designer Philip Nel of Inizio Homes found Fisherhaven's off-the-beaten-track appeal perfect for the kind of build-anywhere, steel-frame prefabricated construction he pioneers.

In SA, while prefabricated construction has been used for industrial buildings for some time, it is only now beginning to gain traction as a popular method of building homes. But it's perfect for remote places such as Fisherhaven, because most of the components are manufactured off-site, in a factory, and delivered as required, ready to be assembled within a few weeks. Through Inizio, Philip offers his clients a complete turnkey service, all the way from architectural design, right through to manufacturing, construction and project management.

The construction process is quick, precise and clean, and has much less impact on the environment than conventional building methods. Philip has developed a precast concrete foundation system that is fully manufactured off-site, which ensures the strength of the home's base. The entire house is lifted off the earth and the small, pad foundations ensure as little disturbance to the soil as possible. Between the lightness of the structure (about 10% of the weight of a brick and mortar house) and these foundations, this prefab construction method is particularly well suited to tricky conditions, where soil quality is poor, for example. The structure is factory manufactured and produces a lot less wastage, as well as less dust and noise pollution than on site.

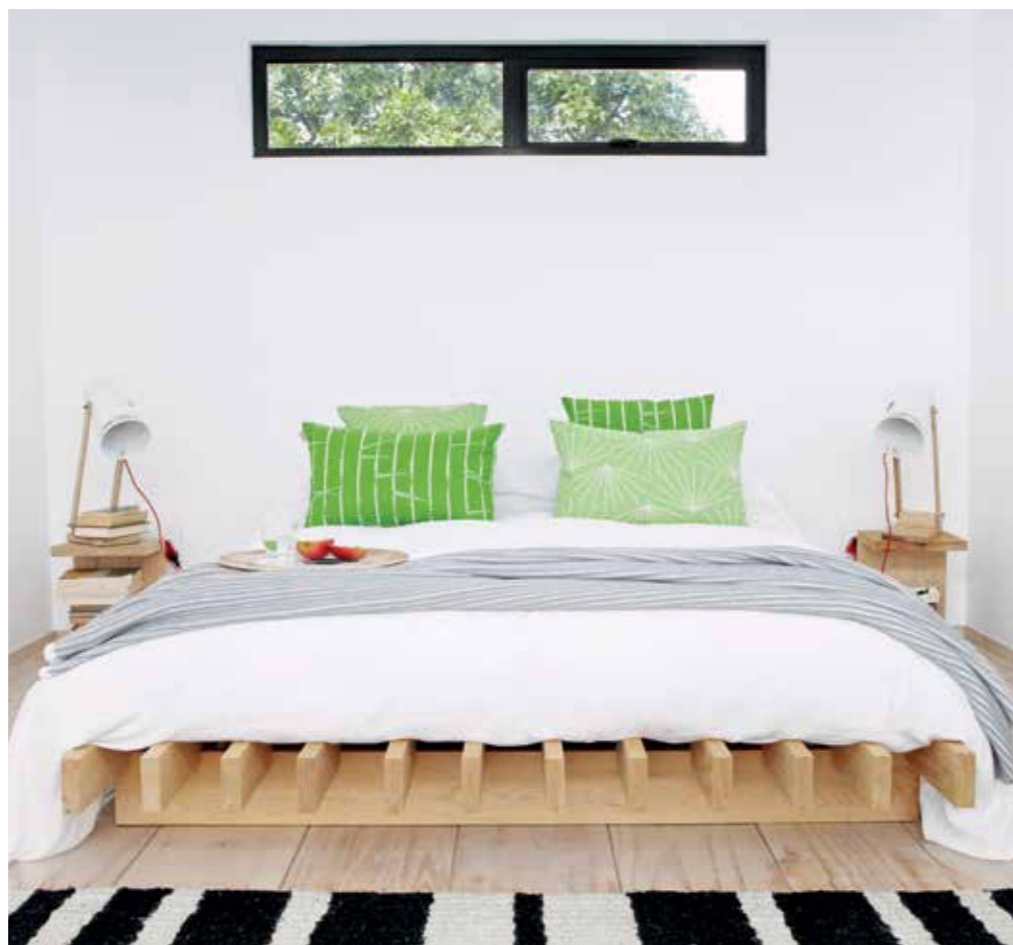
'The main bedroom has sliding doors that you open to step straight onto the lawn,' Philip says. 'And we added a big veranda, deck and gabion wall at the front to extend the living area to maximize on its outdoor spaces.' The gabion wall provides privacy, so passers-by can't peer in, while obscuring neighbouring houses. The back of the house is relatively impenetrable. 'It has small, high-level windows, so there are no significant openings from that side,' he adds. 'That's partly for privacy, but also because of the wind and weather.' Fisherhaven can be quite blustery, so the southern side of the house had to be more sheltered than the north.

Inside, the pared-back design reprises the Scandi simplicity of the exterior. The crisp-white and bleached-wood palette is coupled with an industrial stainless-steel kitchen. 'The wooden flooring is actually shutter-ply sheeting that we cut into floorboards,' he explains. 'Varnishing it is cost-effective, but also adds an organic, earthy element, and it's light, which suits a holiday house.'

'There's recycled content in the materials and the house, as a whole, can be recycled if it ever becomes necessary to do so. If this does happen you could remove the house and leave nothing behind on-site,' continues Philip. 'Internally we use very effective insulation that requires a lot less energy to cool down and heat up, and LED lighting all round.' These are just some of the ways Philip and his team have created a home that is a statement for sustainable building.



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THE ARCHITECT WEIGHS-IN

HOW DO FOUNDATIONS ON TOP OF THE SOIL STAY STEADY DURING CAPE WINDS OR NORTHERN RAINS?

The foundations are seated on a prepared or compacted bed about 500 mm under the ground level and then backfilled and compacted. The end result is the same as casting the concrete in holes dug on-site, but much cleaner more accurate and greener.

IS THE SOIL TYPE IMPORTANT TO ELIMINATE DAMAGE FROM THE MOVEMENT OF THE FOUNDATION OVER THE YEARS?

The soil type is always an important consideration, the foundation blocks work well on most soil types as they move with the soil, but in some cases a different system is needed. An engineer is always

needed to ensure the correct specification is maintained.

CAN CLIENTS CHOOSE VARIOUS HOME STYLES AND SHAPES?

All the homes are designed from the ground up to suit the clients' exact needs while also keeping the site conditions and requirements in mind.

WHAT ARE SOME FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING TO BUILD SUSTAINABLY? LOCATION OR BUDGET, FOR EXAMPLE?

Location: The more remote, the more expensive. Access is also a consideration; if it is very difficult to get to, the costs will also be higher. Uneven surface: It's definitely possible to build on a slope, for example, but it could be more expensive

because of structural considerations. The north-facing side is important, for instance if you have a great view facing the west, it will definitely be more complicated to design something that takes both the view and heat gain into account. To build sustainably, it is often more costly at the beginning, but the operational expenses are less so eventually the costs balance out.
inizio.co.za

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