



THIS PAGE In the lounge, the geometric angles of a lamp and chair by Adriaan Hugo contrast with the baroque forms of an 18th-century chair
 OPPOSITE Yellow mouldings, designed by engineer Teddy Mudge, define the space and provide an area to display objects such as these 'Oude Jan Kerk' sculptures by Dutch artist Tijn Noordenbos



OBJECT **LESSON**

Antique dealer Deon Viljoen's home is a showcase for his 'anti-retro' collection of old and new design



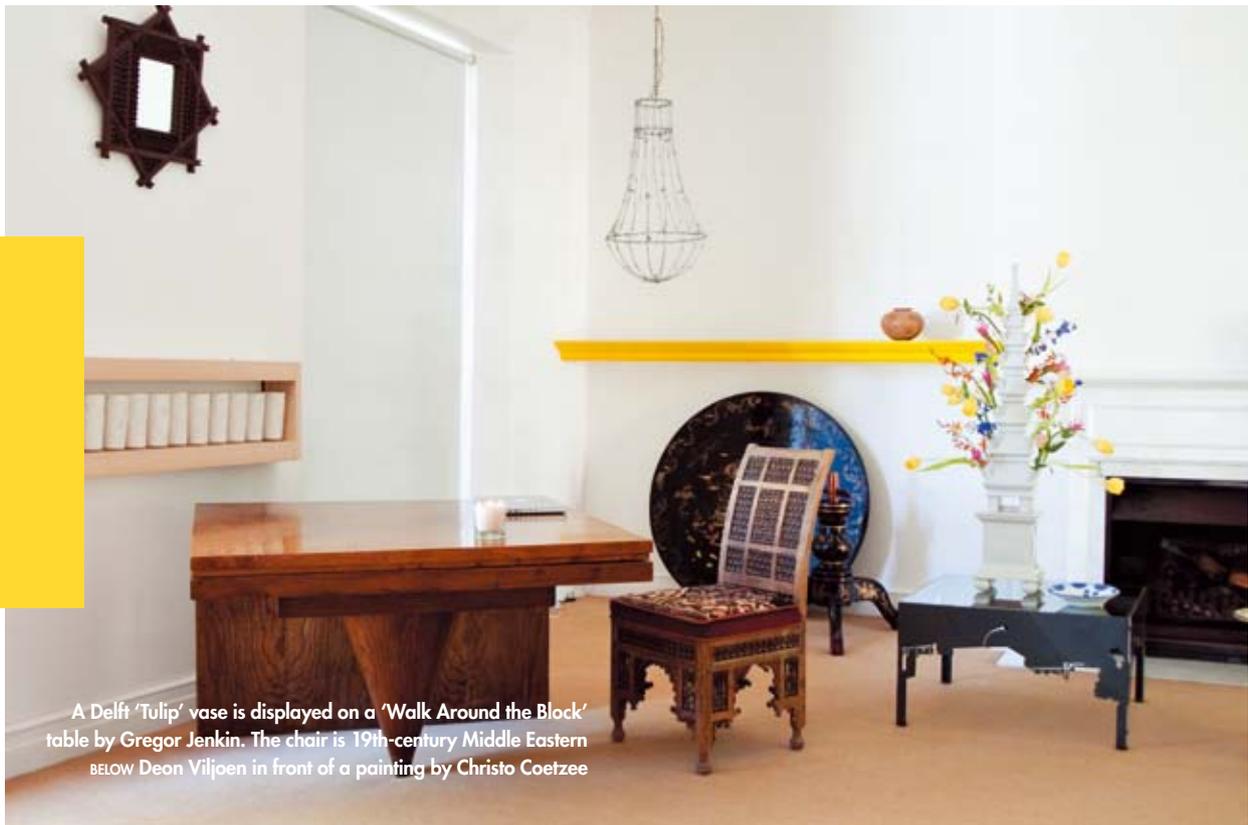
Were a volcano to erupt and bury the home of antique dealer

Deon Viljoen, excavators of the future would be thoroughly confused by its era-hopping collection of furniture. But Deon's stately home in Kenilworth, Cape Town, which doubles as a kind of showroom for his rotating collection of antique and contemporary design, is anything but muddled. He brings together objects in a deeply considered way that is both scholarly and beautiful.

A former art critic who worked as an art specialist at an auctioneering firm before branching out on his own, Deon is an aficionado of Cape Dutch furniture. He organised the first exhibit of Cape Dutch furniture in Holland, and taught the subject for two years to masters students at the University of Leiden. But it was after collaborating with Gregor Jenkin on an exhibition at the Goodman Gallery in 2005 that Deon developed an interest in contemporary South African design. And while he deals mainly in 18th-century furniture, it's design that he's interested in – 'the influences that bear on the outcome, how people adapt basic things like the design of a chair to suit their particular needs in that time and place,' he says. We chat to Deon further...



FROM LEFT Deon's eclectic chair collection includes Jesús and Jon Gasca's contemporary 'Nube', an antique from 19th-century British India and a 1930s Gabriele Mucchi classic; a Frauke Stegmann tea set in the hallway



A Delft 'Tulip' vase is displayed on a 'Walk Around the Block' table by Gregor Jenkin. The chair is 19th-century Middle Eastern
BELOW Deon Viljoen in front of a painting by Christo Coetzee

TEXT: KELLY BERMAN. PRODUCTION: LAUREN ROSSOUW. PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHAN SAMUELSSON

As an era-hopping collector, can you pin down your style for us? I call it 'anti-retro', in the sense of retro as a style that takes previous fashions and slavishly appropriates them. I prefer reinterpretation.

Can you give an example of a design that reinterprets tradition successfully? Gregor Jenkin's 'Cape Table' from his Van die Sel series – it doesn't reinvent a ball-and-claw table by painting it turquoise, for instance. He's deconstructed a typical turned-leg wooden table from the mid-19th century and reassembled it in flat sheets of laser-cut steel, using new technology.

Your home feels almost curated. How do you go about bringing different pieces together in a room? I view a room as a space for sculpture: all furniture should excite visually as pieces of sculpture. Actually, that goes for everything else in the room, too – vases, lamps, paintings. That's why I love artist Christo Coetzee's early work from the late 1950s and early 60s so much: it defies the confines of the basic canvas rectangle.

And you try to break up the room as well? I try breaking up the flat planes of the room as a cube – there's no symmetry here. I prefer some paintings to lean rather than hang flat on the wall.

How often do you change the space? The main changes happen twice a year, with lots of smaller changes in between: paintings come and go, furniture is switched around, curtains go up and come down. Because I'm a compulsive buyer, I always have plenty in reserve and can change rooms around quite easily.

What do you look for when acquiring a piece? The integrity of the design – the manufacturing and the material is paramount. But I'm also intrigued by how much insight an object can offer into the society and culture of the time.

How does it feel to live among this incredible collection of things? Because I never hold onto things for too long, I enjoy the time I have with whatever pieces 'populate' my environment. I really enjoy the human endeavour – the craftsmanship and creativity – that goes into the objects with which I choose to live.

Which object will you never sell? I never think of 'never' – I live with a kind of unsentimental attachment or a sentimental detachment. When the moment comes, we part ways. ■

Visit www.deonviljoen.com

