Capetonian architect Stefan Antoni, of world-renowned SAOTA architects, is the creative genius behind some of the Atlantic Seaboard’s most jaw-dropping and magnificent homes. Here, he tells us about the ‘Cape Town look,’ post-Covid-19 living and the trick of designing spaces which combine sophistication and soul.

**Q. Cape Town, especially the Atlantic Seaboard and the CBD, has a fascinating history which has resulted in a wide divergency of architectural styles. What do the buildings tells us about our historical journey?**

A. We must not forget that the original inhabitants of the Cape were the Khoikhoi Strandlopers who lived by hunting and gathering food along the beaches of the Cape and along the West Coast, up to the present-day Namibia. Then came the Dutch, the English and the Malay followed by the rest of the world, making Cape Town a thoroughly metropolitan city. These various influences are evident in the rich architectural heritage of the Cape. One of the true, great regional styles of architecture is of course the Cape Dutch homes and farms scattered around the Cape. Today, the Atlantic Seaboard is one of the most exciting places to see cutting edge, contemporary architecture.

**Q. The City of Cape Town has a very unique topography. What do you like best about designing homes in this city, and what are some of the challenges?**

A. Our brand is known for creating dynamic and dramatic spaces and memorable experiences as people seek out what has been dubbed the ‘Cape Town look.’ This is sophistication with soul; a modern aesthetic playing with light and space, but also with charm and intimacy. South African design is all about leveraging our climate, stunning topography and awe-inspiring landscapes to create confident buildings that connect indoor and outdoor spaces seamlessly. It is about capturing light in order to make the magical interior spaces ‘glow’. The Atlantic Seaboard sunsets are legendary. Even the greyest day often holds a surprise just as the sun drops into the ocean.

**Q. Our climate plays a big role in the way we live, and the fluidity of inside/outside spaces. Has the issue of sustainability and the global scarcity of water changed the way you design homes, and if so, how?**

A. Climate heavily informs the work. It is about making the design functional, and playing it off against the context in which it stands. Technical studies aid our understanding and allow us to make practical design decisions. It fuels the creative process as each site presents a different set of issues, all needing a design-minded response. Good design can reduce the need for excessive consumption of power and water. In addition photovoltaics, high performance glass and recycling can add to reducing pressure on the environment. Being a water-scarce region, the use of drought-resistant planting is becoming more important.

**Q. Covid-19 will likely change a lot about the way we live, particularly in terms of traveling for work. Now that almost everything can be done from our homes we will likely be utilising our living spaces more than ever before. Can you see this impacting future housing design?**

A. Covid-19 has inevitably impacted all businesses in South Africa and will have a knock-on effect on the global economy. The outbreak of Covid-19 has brought a lot of uncertainty and has transformed the way many designers work. About three months ago we decided to start working from home (WFH). We have successfully migrated our 211-member team to a fully operational WFH model. As most of our work is already remote, we were able to transition almost immediately. This flexible model will no doubt remain in place after the Covid-19 pandemic is over.

The pandemic has led to widespread lockdowns in virtually all major cities, resulting in people spending most of their time in the homes. From this perspective, the importance of a variety of spaces with different atmospheres, views, light and amenities becomes incredibly important in the design of a project. The exterior spaces and gardens similarly become imperative; spaces to enjoy the sun and the views the property commands. A home office or working spaces for the whole family are now essentials, preferably with a wonderful view or outlook onto the garden.

**Q. A lot of people are inspired by your architecture. What inspires you?**

A. We are huge admirers of the creative geniuses - Leonardo da Vinci, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Wright, Niemeyer, the Eameses, Gehry - who believed that everything we encounter can be enhanced by good design. We are naturally inquisitive, curious and restless and, as such, we refuse to accept the given as unchangeable. We are not alone in this; there are many architects and designers with these creative pursuits. Architecture is such an incredible platform from which to think and work, and it reinforces the engagement with other aspects of design which makes it so much more fulfilling.

**Q. What trends are you seeing at the moment, and what trends do you foresee for the future?**

A. There is a greater confidence to pursue South African solutions, and to explore ‘raw’ and more ‘primal’ solutions. There is a bit of a move away from the excessive slickness found in European and American designs. People want to feel more relaxed and carefree. We have a great climate, so living barefoot around the house makes a lot of sense. Finding appropriate local materials and simpler ways of making things also positively influences the designs. People often compliment our work as being ‘very South African.’ By that, they mean that the designs are confident and strong without being alienating. We strive to create work that is not ‘fussy’ but still retains a certain magic and mystery.

**Q. The Atlantic Seaboard must be one of the best places on earth to live. What do you like most about living here?**

Q. The Atlantic Seaboard has a great climate, stunning topography and landscapes and great beaches and restaurants. And the people are some of the friendliest you will find anywhere.

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