

Fantasy island

Owners of Sprookjes, Dutch architect Susan Theunissen and husband Leo Coolen, remodelled a modernist villa in the Canary Islands to create their eclectic contemporary oasis.

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The upper roof terrace features white iron chairs purchased by the owners from a Spanish hotel, which sold them after renovating the hotel. The big lizard is from sprookjes.eu

Sitting calmly and elegantly next to the sea, Susan Theunissen and Leo Coolen's updated '70s modernist villa was re-designed to be faithful to the true spirit of modernism – and of contemporary interior design. Filled with antiques, as well as designer furnishings and accessories, it harnesses nature, geometry and the poetics of light and space – as well as the serenity and power of the sea.

Located in El Poris, 30 minutes from Santa Cruz, the capital of Tenerife in the Canary Islands, the holiday home cast an unexpected spell on Theunissen, her husband and three children.

"We weren't looking to own any property abroad and our image of Tenerife was even slightly negative. But then we came here to visit with friends and explored the island with them. We went out to look at a house that architects Herzog & de Meuron had built here at the coast – and right next to it we saw the villa for sale that would be ours," says Theunissen.

The late 1970s villa was a diamond in the rough. The eclectic modernist building nestling on the rocky coast appealed to their aesthetic and the location was ideal. But despite its magical charm and Theunissen's training as an architect, creating their holiday escape would mean embarking on the journey of an extensive remodelling.

"The first and only owner before us built the house himself, bit by bit. He passed away and time had stood still ever since. We kept the original dimensions, including the large patio onto which all the bedrooms open. But we've changed almost everything else. Everything looked exactly the way it was 30 years ago. That may sound charming, but it definitely needed a complete facelift – all the rusty piping, the plumbing, the electricity and the windows needed to be replaced," she explains.

Changes were made to the layout and the façade. A new floor, as well as new partitions and ceilings, gave the space a renewed vitality.

To stay true to the heart of the home, local craftsmen did most of the remodelling. "You get to know the people and the culture of the island in a different way than when you're only a tourist. The locals and their ways of working and living reminds me more of South America than Spain. The customs; the colours; the old school atmosphere of Santa Cruz," Theunissen says.



The couple kept the original windows from the 70s structure



Top:

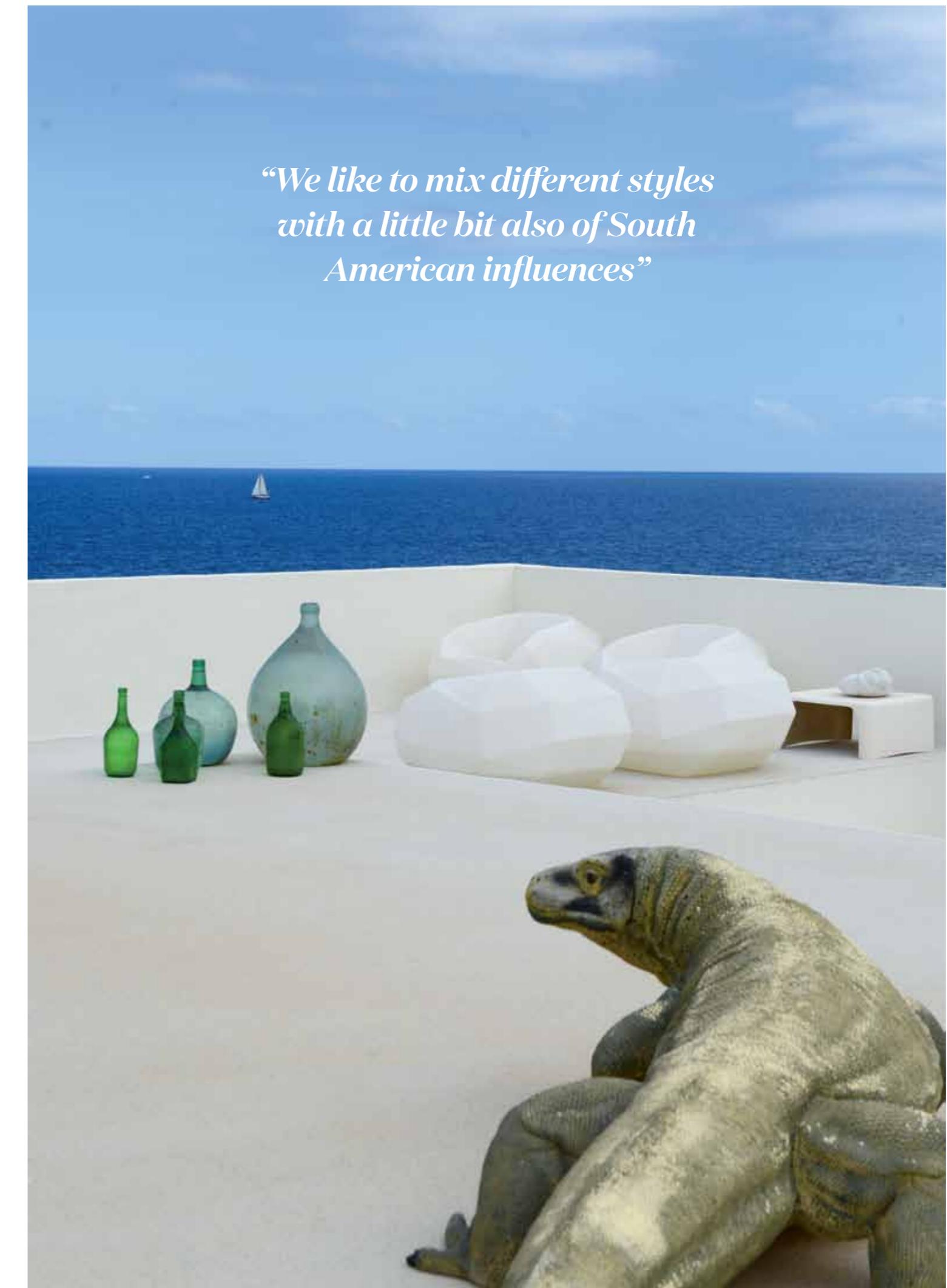
Circular swimming pool; Susan Theunissen and Leo Coolen; the dining table, chairs and hanging lamps from sprookjes.eu, photo of roosters by Belgian photographer Koen Van Mechelen

Bottom:

Reclining chair with a centre table on the terrace; Hallway: Silk-screened elliptical mirror with hard polyurethane backing, serial production of the original by Man Ray from 1938, wooden chair from Africa, egg-shaped lamps; Stairs winding down with a wall photo by Godewijn Daled



"We like to mix different styles with a little bit also of South American influences"





Top:

Vintage makeup stand from sprookjes.eu; the master bedroom; the table, leather chair and pouf are vintage, sofa from Artifort, table from Roger Capron, vintage lighting is from sprookjes.eu, floor made with a Belgian technique from the 70/80's called 'quartz carpet'; lamp by Serge Mouille

Bottom:

Bathroom; 'Tiki' wicker sofa and armchair set, cellar lounge; table from, paintings by Miró above retro-style table



The outdoor pool next on the rocky coast was built by the former owner



The couple kept the outside volcanic stones of the façade and Theunissen outfitted it with modern, comfortable and authentic details, such as the original wooden entrance doors. The spirit of the owners is just as prolific as that of their villa. Furnishings and objects were supplied by Sprookjes – Coolen and Theunissen's warehouse full of rare and fascinating objects. "We like to mix different styles with a little bit also of South American influences," she notes.

Outside, the landscaping required just as much attention. "We created a garden with big palm trees and concrete terraces with an outdoor kitchen in the front of the house. We also created a new entrance. We applied a grey coating on the walls and replaced the old Spanish tile floor (there were no less than eight different types of floor tiles in the house) with a brown stone carpet floor. By using the same flooring everywhere in the house, we achieved a more tranquil feel throughout. And because it is a house from the '70s, we tried to keep the original atmosphere by choosing similar materials and keeping the size of the original windows. The most challenging part of the renovation was that we live in Belgium so we could not be there all the time to follow the building work. On top of that, we didn't speak any Spanish in the beginning!" she exclaims.

The tidal pool right on the Atlantic Ocean is an intimate site for respite where those enjoying its cool waters feel as if they are at the end of the world. The café, built by the former owner at the edge of the rocks, is another of the villa's unique features.

Theunissen's latest project: the creation of a big adjoining apartment, which is available for rent. "For me, remodelling the kitchen was perhaps the best project we have done. I thought of creating the whimsical, round window because it creates a sense of space. But we probably spend most of our time out on the terrace and around the pool on top of the rocks, next to the ocean." ■