

HAPPY HOLIDAYS
Susan and Leo Coolen bought a 1970s Spanish villa in 2011 and transformed it into an inspiring holiday home. *Opposite:* The main deck is adorned with modern comforts and antiques.



YOU, ME & THE SEA

An ARCHITECT AND A COLLECTOR discovered their future HOLIDAY HOME while on vacation. They gave it a facelift, stocked it with personal mementos and now a piece of this PARADISE is yours to hire.

WORDS TINA HOM PHOTOGRAPHY JEAN-MARC WULLSCHLEGER





LAZY DAYS

The hammock and plunge pool invite travellers to slow down and take in the scenery. Some objects, like the giant lizard statue, came from Susan and Leo's store, Sprookjes, while others such as the green glass bottles came with the house.

El Poris is a 30-minute drive from Santa Cruz, the capital of Tenerife in the Canary Islands. It was here, in this tiny Spanish village, that Susan and Leo Coolen bought their dream holiday home, a modernist villa built in the late 1970s. Since then, the couple and their three children have spent as many holidays here as possible, taking in the laid-back culture and the North Atlantic breezes. It was lucky they stumbled upon the house at all.

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

The family immediately loved the quirky building and its exceptional location, which affords spectacular views from the rocks out to the sea. They soon realised, however, that remodelling the house would be an enormous undertaking. "The first and only owner before us had built the house himself, bit by bit," Susan says. "He had died a while back and time had stood still ever since."

Since Susan was trained as an architect, she became responsible for the renovation. This involved retaining the original dimensions of the property, including the large patio that all the bedrooms open on to, but changing nearly everything else.

"Everything looked exactly the way it was 30 years ago," Susan says. "That may sound charming, but it definitely needed a complete facelift – all the rusty piping, plumbing, electricity and windows needed to be replaced, for example." ▶



SUMMER HOUSE



SPANISH STYLE

This page, clockwise from top left: One living area showing off its brown "quartz carpet"; the coffee table and chairs were gifted from the former owner; the stone cellar is one of the most unique areas of the house. Opposite: Indoor-outdoor lounge spaces and midcentury-modern furniture induce siestas.

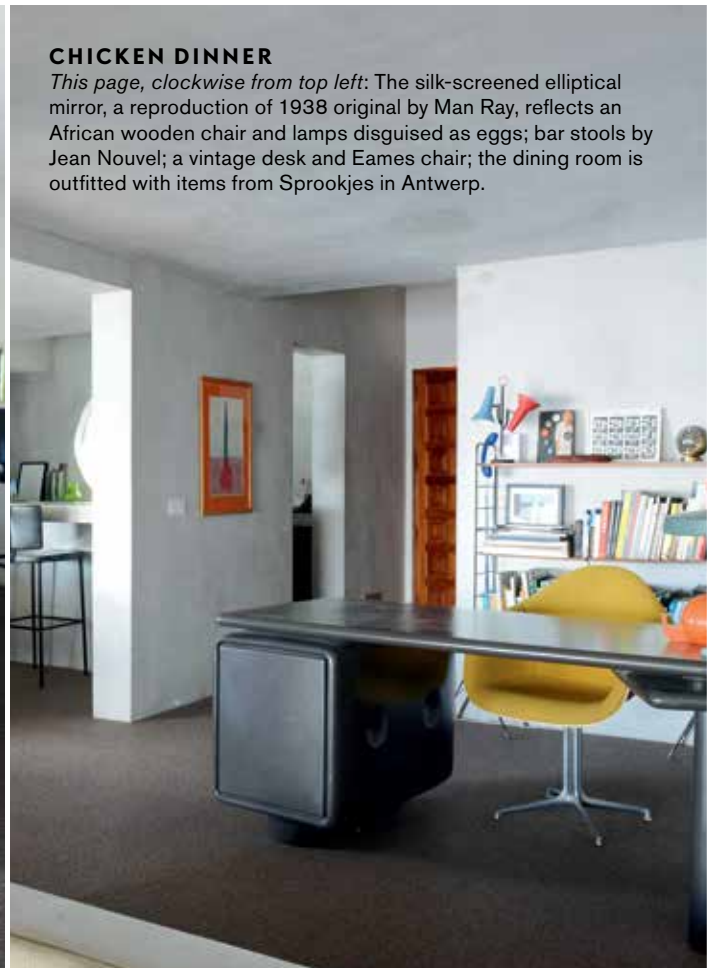
The couple also made some updates to the layout and the façade; removed and added new partitions and ceilings; and laid flooring made of sand throughout the house, using a Belgian technique from the 1970s and '80s called "quartz carpet". They also took advantage of the full plot of land by adding a garden with palm trees and an outdoor kitchen at the front of the house. For the interior, the Coolens applied a grey coat of paint on the walls and replaced Spanish floor tiles (there were eight different versions in all) with the brown "sand carpet". "Using the same floor coat everywhere in the house gives a more tranquil feel to the whole," Susan says.

As the house is from the '70s, the pair decided to try to preserve the original atmosphere of the home by choosing similar materials and also decided not to increase the size of the windows. The most challenging part of the renovation, according to Susan, was being based in Belgium during the process and not speaking any Spanish at the beginning. Susan kept her eyes on things as much as she could but had to put her trust in local craftsmen.

"You get to know the people and the culture of the island in a different way than when you're a tourist," she says. "The locals and their ways of working and living remind me more of South America than Spain – the customs, the colours and the old-school atmosphere of Santa Cruz."

Although inspired by island life, the couple avoided creating a scheme that's contrived or clichéd. Much of the original character of the home was designed in homage to the surrounding seascape and that's something they wanted to conserve. The couple kept the volcanic stones of the façade, for example, as well as the original wooden entrance doors. ▶

SUMMER HOUSE



CHICKEN DINNER

This page, clockwise from top left: The silk-screened elliptical mirror, a reproduction of 1938 original by Man Ray, reflects an African wooden chair and lamps disguised as eggs; bar stools by Jean Nouvel; a vintage desk and Eames chair; the dining room is outfitted with items from Sprookjes in Antwerp.

SUMMER HOUSE

SLEEPING BEAUTY

Vintage pieces, including an old vanity Leo and Susan snapped up at Sprookjes, adorn the couple's bedroom and bathroom (below).




The result is a modern, comfortable and authentic holiday home that gives off a warm Spanish look and feel. Windows offer perfect sightlines to the inside and outside world, and an impressive tidal pool sits right on the edge of the Atlantic.

The Coolens' penchant for the peculiar is evident throughout the property, from the giant lizard statue out on the deck to interior objects including egg-shaped lamps and chairs sourced from a cinema in India. Leo, in particular, describes himself as an item collector and all the furniture and decorative pieces in the house were shipped from Sprookjes, the furniture and antique warehouse Susan and Leo run in Antwerp.


"We like to mix different styles with a little bit of South American influence," they say.

Another special feature is the cafe, a cavern-like bar and cellar space built by the former owner at the edge of the rocks. He used to make banana wine and store it here. The Coolens use it more as a hangout area where they relax with their children or friends. Susan's latest project is the creation of a spacious adjoining apartment, which will be available for rent.

Susan says remodelling the kitchen is the project she's most proud of. "I came up with the idea of the whimsical, round window to create a sense of space."

The family spends most of their time on the terrace, however, in and around the swimming pool and on top of the rocks that stair-step to the sea. If spending time with loved ones and the ocean is the purpose of a holiday home, it sounds like Susan and Leo have built the dream. 

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KEYWORDS: DECOR, HOUSE, DESIGN.

