

# HOUSE & GARDEN

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HOUSES WITH  
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INTERIORS



A photograph of an interior space, likely a living area or salon. The room features light-colored, textured walls and a dark floor. A large, leafy green plant in a rustic, terracotta-style pot sits on a small rug in the foreground. In the background, a wooden cabinet with a reddish-brown finish and a doorway with a wooden frame and louvered door are visible. The lighting is warm and directional, creating strong shadows.

TEXT AND  
PHOTOGRAPHS  
TIM BEDDOW

Designer Laurent Buttazzoni used traditional materials to connect the house with its environment, mixing organic pigments with lime and marble dust to create the wall and floor finishes. In the salon, the chairs and mirror were made in Malindi, on the Kenyan coast

# Enchanted ISLE

*After Lamu cast its spell over her, the owner of this house waited several years for a suitable site; her architect designed a modern take on traditional Swahili style, and the perfect recipe for island escapism*





Lamu island's intoxicating mix – of laid-back chic, glamorous houses, fabulous seafood, Peponi's bar, dhow trips, deserted beaches backed by gentle dunes and super-friendly locals (who always make you feel like a long-lost friend) – is now well known. Lamu Archipelago's rich history, culture and strong religious traditions – there are over two dozen mosques – add another dimension to these islands which other tropical 'paradises' lack. On the surface Lamu appears to be a normal place, with people going about their daily business, schools full of happy children chanting the Koran and men playing *Bao* (a board game) outside busy local *dukas* (shops). The contrast between the man walking his donkeys up the beach to collect sand for building and the extravagance of a Christmas drinks soiree on a private rooftop is pretty marked. But it is this curious, heady melange that is, for some, utterly and entirely hypnotic.

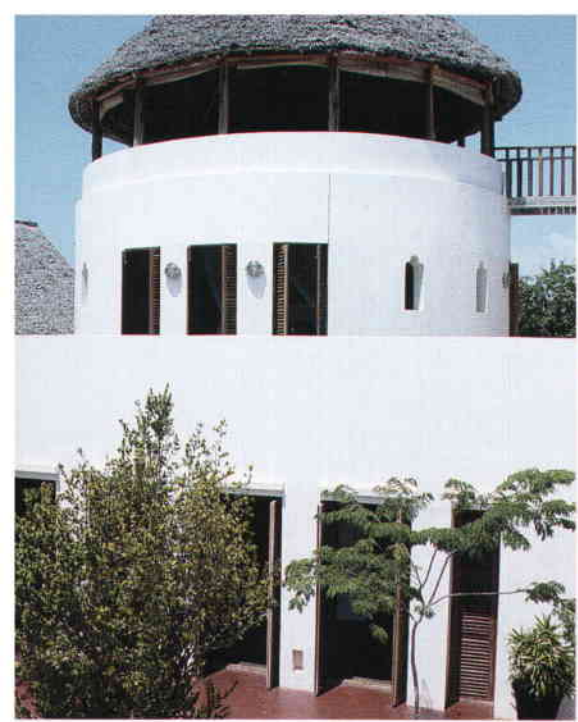
Photographic agent Katy Barker unexpectedly fell under its spell some 10 years ago; she had travelled the globe in search of a private haven until her travel agent suggested this speck of an island in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Kenya. Katy hadn't heard of it, but friends soon enlightened her to its charms, warning her that she might never leave. The minute she landed at the small airfield on the mainland and walked down a dirt track to the jetty, with views across the channel to Lamu town and the village of Shela in the distance, it was a coup de foudre.

'The first time I visited, I wanted to live, grow old and die here,' says Katy, who, some months later, did manage to leave, but only after renting a house for her family in Shela. This village, three kilometres from bustling Lamu town – which contains the more formal, historic eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mansions – has a core of tightly packed, whitewashed houses, some up to six floors tall, built in an Arab-Swahili style. Previously inhabited by traders, fishermen and a few expats who 'discovered' the island's charms in the Sixties, most of these houses have gradually been sold off and renovated, mainly by English, French and Italians. Consequently, the desire for run-down houses and empty plots for building has fanned out from the centre.

Katy continued to rent for a few years until an opportunity came up for her to buy a three-acre plot – with planning permission – on a slope up from the waterfront, just outside the village. For her, it was far preferable to have the space to build, with room for a garden, than to take one of the village plots with their inherent restrictions.

**THIS PAGE FROM TOP** An antique daybed from Bali sits in the salon. The house is designed as distinct 'units' surrounding the courtyard: the sunken seating area is the main meeting point. Beyond is the dining area. **OPPOSITE** The dining chairs were made locally by Italian artist Armando Tanzini





While the scrub was being cleared, Katy asked Laurent Buttazzoni, a French architect, to survey the site. He had been assistant to Andrée Putman for seven years, before setting up on his own. With many clients in fashion – very much Katy’s world – including John Galliano, Yohji Yamamoto and Manolo Blahnik, Laurent had met Katy in Paris and collaborated with her on an apartment there.

‘I had visited Lamu – one of the last great paradises on earth – some 15 years ago,’ says Laurent, ‘so it was a wonderful opportunity to return to design and build a house there. Our priority was to respect local architectural traditions, while incorporating Katy’s own ideas for a house for her family and friends.’

Katy lived in Zambia until she was seven. ‘The subconscious imprint of that time – of African villages and inside/outside living – was very strong and so swung my design ideas that way,’ she recalls. Together, she and Laurent devised a scheme which was, he explains, ‘a sort of miniature village, comprising small units, bedrooms and bathrooms, so that everyone could be independent, with a general meeting point for all on a covered terrace.’ This evolved into a sunken seating area under grand Moroccan lamps, with a large dining table beyond.

When the drawings were presented, ‘it was as though I had seen them already – the courtyard with distinct, separate areas coming together in the centre,’ says Katy. The U-shape building faces the sea, with an outdoor pool positioned across its open side. It was all designed on one level apart from the main bedroom and its private terrace, which are above the salon, with sea views.

Despite the inevitable African delays, building work went smoothly, lasting a year and a half. ‘We were lucky,’ says Laurent, ‘in having a very dependable contractor who handled the project efficiently.’ Dhow House (so named after the boat-building activity on the beach in front) is a very sleek take on Swahili style. ‘The biggest challenge,’ says Laurent, ‘was to combine new techniques with traditional materials to create a local yet modern vision.’ Furniture was either commissioned out to local craftsmen or bought in Nairobi and Mombasa and shipped up. A few pieces, too, have made their way from London.

Katy has to pinch herself every time she arrives. ‘I feel as though I have dived into a sort of historical watercolour,’ she says, ‘a magical world into which I’ve been lucky enough to be allowed’ □  
*Buttazzoni & Associés: 00-33-140 09 98 49; www.buttazzoni.fr | The house is available to rent through Journeys by Design (01273-623790)*

OPPOSITE An antique Indian sari acts as a throw on a spare bed (bottom). The house is on one level, apart from the main bedroom in the tower (top left) and terrace (top right). THIS PAGE FROM TOP The chair in this spare room is covered in beads made by a Masai tribe. This shower is tiled in mirror-glass mosaics. Stairs lead up to the main bedroom. The pool is beyond the courtyard

