

HOME & GARDENING 

Designer van hits the road as talented ‘tiny homes’ duo keep up the pace

A tough economic climate is expected in 2023 which means that for many, spending money on accommodation will be difficult. An innovative designer couple have found a way to tackle the problem in style

29 January 2023 - 00:01



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Romy du Toit and Antony Spence have converted an old panel van into a luxurious tiny home on wheels.

Image: Boxed Micro Living\Romy du Toit

The attention to detail in an impeccably renovated van is sure to impress when “Dusty” and its new owner hit the road, far from its Cape Town designers whose latest project was a mobile vet practice.

Dusty is a “tiny home” fashioned by 26-year-olds Romy du Toit and Antony Spence, a couple with giant talent from Cape Town who have been together since they were 16.

Interior design graduates, home décor creators and furniture makers, they've thought about everything van-dwellers would desire for a comfortable life and made much of it by hand under [their brand, Boxed Micro-Living](#).

They've tested the luxurious van on three trips to the coast and the Cederberg, in the Western Cape, with their cat Leo along for the ride.

"We find a balance between what inspires us and function," says Du Toit of their custom-built, ready-to-live-in micro homes — vans or portable houses.

The head of Bunglo, Marc Pincente, who also builds tiny homes in the Western Cape, says: "There is a huge global movement to smaller spaces that will be less of a burden and allow more freedom than traditional homes."



The couple's intrepid cat Leo is happy to travel in style in the couple's converted van.
Image: Boxed Micro Living\Romy du Toit

Du Toit and Spence refined their craft during their first project, building an elegant 13m² portable house with unusual décor to fit inside a shipping

container.

A sliding screen door covers the exterior, shading the interior but allowing airflow and providing security.

The sleek fixtures, including handcrafted lights, brass hardware and tiny oval tiles in the kitchen and above the bathroom sink (more than 1,000 cast by hand), complement the couple's choices, such as a bathroom floor made of wood in the house.

Walking into their minimalist micro-homes gives an impression of space greater than the reality.

The features are multifunctional and versatile. For example, the house has a couch which can turn into a single or double bed, with a side table and drawers underneath it — inspired by their visit to Japan in 2018.

The van has a similar couch, which can slide out to become a luxurious king-size double bed. "Three functions with one movement," says Spence.



'Dusty' belongs in the wilds, with a water tank, stove and power to keep occupants content and comfortable.

Image: Boxed Micro Living\Romy du Toit

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The storage compartments were built on a cleat system so people can personalise them. A fold-out table over the kitchen door of the house can double as a second kitchen counter or a desk for remote working — overlooking a deck or a view — depending on where it is put down.

All the elements have been created so residents can "achieve day-to-day tasks in the space as they would in a standard sized home", Du Toit and Spence say.

The van feels uncluttered, even with a two-burner gas hob and basin, water pump and tank, gas geyser, deep-cycle battery and other luxuries that exceed campers' expectations. Multiple charging points and plug outlets are one example.

Climbing a ladder to the roof deck, with its solar panels, opens new vistas and a sense of freedom. An Eskom-proof home, all for less money than a

luxury four-by-four would cost.



The talented couple and their dogs at rest in the first tiny home.

Image: Boxed Micro Living

Do I wish this van were mine? Absolutely, but the new owner of the Mercedes Sprinter 309, Mari du Toit, is as enthralled with Dusty, describing her attraction as “love at first sight”.

“Going on adventures has always been my life,” says the 43-year-old co-owner of Vivo Vita Sports. “After seeing Dusty, I knew what was missing in my life to complete my circle.

“We explore this beautiful country with amazing cycling races, hikes and trail runs and after meeting Dusty I can’t imagine doing it without him,” says the explorer, who is planning to use the van for weekend adventures and holidays for now.

Dusty was completed by Du Toit and Spence after they invested money from the sale of their tiny home for this project. Since they graduated and set up shop in January 2019, they have pursued projects beyond their staple work of shop fittings and making décor items.



The couple hand-made the sink, the tiles, storage and many other features of their elegant tiny home.

Image: Boxed Micro Living\Romy du Toit

"In our first workshop we were making dining room tables, contemporary furniture and shop fittings," says Spence, of their commissions from architects.

"But when we started [the micro home] we had to build in the container outside which was uncomfortable in bad weather," says Du Toit. In 2021 they moved into an indoor workshop in a grey office park, brightened by their creativity.

Spence says of the project: "We stripped it, did panel-beating, sprayed it, then refurbished the whole van in six months."

"We have purchased another van which we will be using as a demo model and to give ourselves a taste of van life," says Du Toit, and they are busy on another custom-van conversion.

The couple turned a panel van into a mobile practice for the Manimals vet practice. "Dobby" is the first private mobile vet in Cape Town, says Du Toit, the proud owner of two Springer spaniels.

"We always have something new on the go."



'Dobby', the Manimals mobile vet service, is equipped with a lab and electrical system to provide a consistent cold-chain for sensitive medication and vaccines.

Image: Boxed Micro-Living\Romy du Toit

Ali Saga, a former leprosy patient, remembers one of the most devastating moments of his life when he visited a health clinic in Indonesian capital Jakarta. "I looked like a zombie," he says. "Stand back! this person is a leper, be careful!" I couldn't believe it's the doctor saying that." Now he is using his pain to help other residents of a...



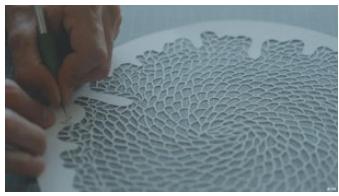
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