

# Hennie Boshoff

The internationally acclaimed artist Hennie Boshoff's years of rambling have now reached a happy ending in the little town of Prince Albert. By Liesl Hattingh.

Once upon a time, Hennie Boshoff's art teacher wrote in capitals across his report card: "If Hennie could just learn some discipline, he could become a great name in the art world!"

And that's exactly what has happened in the 40-odd years Boshoff's been devoting himself to the arts. It took six creators about a year to finish his art house, Villa Kruger, in Prince Albert. The house is nearly complete and the result is already attracting diverse reactions. "A few months ago, there was a great storm here which was attributed to me and my 'devil's work,'" he laughs loudly. At the same time he now enjoys lots of local support, finally from the Afrikaner community too...

As a teenager, Hennie turned his back firmly on the narrow-minded environment he had grown up in. "In the old South Africa, the definition of being an Afrikaner was very limited, and the definition of a man even more so. There was also no tolerance for anyone who didn't fit into these definitions," he says.

Boshoff describes his international success as mostly supportive. You might say he was a forerunner of the currently popular lifestyle consultants. "I worked with many artists to enrich their emotional and spiritual souls by unlocking their creativity," he explains. His clients included

smaller audience." *Afrikaans* in particular was an important attraction. "Now, when I learn an *Afrikaans* word, it sticks and it takes me back to when I learned it as a child. It's all very magical."

Hennie and his wife began by traversing the country, the Karoo included, but back then he doubted if Prince Albert would accept him and his sculptures. So he went back to Durban, where he grew up, and created an art house in Umhlanga.

"I'm proud of creating an art environment for people who don't usually go to galleries... artists, government officials and delivery staff have all visited the house."

The Villa Kruger in Prince Albert is his seventh art house and the one in which he wants to settle down with his wife. They miss the anonymity of large European cities, but they're adapting well. Rossetta is even learning *Afrikaans*, says Hennie.

"I don't want to travel anymore. I've finally made peace with Afrikaners and with myself. And it happened here. The Karoo is so old, so wonderful and so beautiful. Even the reactionary element disappears in this vastness."

He recently took a couple from Prince Albert's coloured community on one of his evening tours of the Villa Kruger and he now plans to offer a tour specifically aimed at this

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heavyweights like Sting, Peter Gabriel and Tina Turner.

Throughout the years Hennie has lived in many cities, including London, where he met his life partner and fellow artist Rossetta Woolf. The two of them started transforming homes, studios and even a castle in the French countryside into living museums where every imaginable surface becomes or displays a work of art.

In 1992, Hennie's dream came true: a non-profit organisation named the Azazel Institute was founded, which allowed him to live out his creative vision. "Wherever I am, there the Institute is," he says, and since 2003 it's been South Africa.

He describes his return after 30 years as a pilgrimage: "I wanted to come back to the very beginning, to my roots. I've traveled distant roads, seen many places and gained prominence elsewhere. Here, I also come back to a

community once a month. "It's so sad that the communities here are still completely separated."

He's cautiously optimistic about a project that can involve the coloured community: "Something breathtaking and maybe religious, because that's something all *Afrikaans* people have in common."

It's been a long journey home, but one of his most important life lessons Hennie learned early in his life from his art teacher, Jeanette Hanekom: "In the cruel world of the old South Africa, she was like a lifeline to me. She showed me that it's not just OK to be an individual - it can be a strength too."

"I speak the truth. I'm not ashamed of anything I've done or do now. I have a reputation for speaking candidly in a time when many people tell lies... and sometimes that makes people uncomfortable." ☛



Photo: Supplied by Hennie Boshoff