

The Reeds Combining modernism and an ecofriendly environment



A new development takes inspiration from its setting

ARCHITECTURE

Rude awakening in the midlands

The gentfolk driving past US-based developer Donovan Neale-May's wildlife sanctuary in Balgowan might be forgiven for doing a double take. The last rays of the sun that never set on the British empire seem at last to be fading from the KwaZulu Natal midlands. This is because Neale-May has eschewed the *de rigueur* mock colonial or Georgian homes of the area for what the locals could interpret as a particularly complex drainage culvert or a farmer's failed attempt at a concrete barn.

But Neale-May has introduced serious modernist architecture to his nine-unit development, The Reeds at Balgowan, on a 45 ha site with two trout dams, an indigenous forest and spectacular views of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg World Heritage Site of which it is a part.

Neale-May runs a successful international communications company, Globalfluency, from Palo Alto,

California, in the heart of Silicon Valley. And he has hired SA-raised Palo Alto architect Stan Field as lead designer of The Reeds' units. Field is best known as the architect of the most prominent house on the top rock at Khyber Rock, Sandton, owned by then-OK Bazaars deputy chairman Len Miller. The landscape is being designed by Patrick Watson, known for his work at Sun City.

WHAT THEY COST

Plots are selling at between R1,5m and R2m
The house will cost between R3m and R4m

6 QUESTIONS FOR...



Donovan Neale-May, SA-born, US-based developer of The Reeds at Balgowan, on the property

FM: Why SA?

Neale-May: I was born in Port Elizabeth. My holiday home is in Simon's Town.

FM: Why the KwaZulu Natal midlands?

Neale-May: A friend called me in and I fell in love with the place.

FM: Did you choose Stan Field because he is a modernist?

Neale-May: And for his interest in the environment. It's coincidental that we both went to school in PE.

FM: Will you move holiday homes to The Reeds?

Neale-May: Yes. The home being built now is mine.



FM: Are you comfortable with modernism?

Neale-May: I collect modern art; my Palo Alto home is modernist. My New York city home and office is 19th-century brownstone.

FM: And Field's design?

Neale-May: It fits the wildlife environment. The panorama replaces painting. But I'm making a few changes.

Ian Fife

Whatever locals may think of Field's design, the architectural fraternity love it; it has already been awarded a design prize in the US and *Architecture South Africa* magazine has devoted a large feature to Field's achievements.

Neale-May, also SA-born, says the first unit (pictured) is for him. "Stan and I are both keen on modernism and ecofriendly environments, which we are combining at The Reeds," he says.

But how does Field justify modernism in a wildlife sanctuary?

"It is in touch with the times," he says. "The African bush and its wildlife 'becomes' a sanctuary that is intensely perceived in the moment.

"All I needed was a way to celebrate what I saw there. I started with dry stone



Interior Modernism rules

retaining walls that zig-zag their way through the folds in the landscape. I then raised bold walls to become armature on to which the deep wooden beams are draped. So the emergent form was born of this ground."

The nine plots are selling at between R1,5m and R2m. Five plots look over the trout lakes; the other four are on the crest of a hill with panoramic views of the Drakensberg. With a house, they will come to around R5m.

Ian Fife