

GREAT HOMES & DESTINATIONS

Building on Hilly Terrain in Sunny Southern France

By LIZA FOREMAN NOV. 14, 2013



The open-plan living area in home built by Ernst Jan Zantingh and his wife, Karin Zantingh-van Os in Montauroux, France. © Zantos

Montauroux, FRANCE — For Ernst Jan Zantingh and his wife, Karin Zantingh-van Os, the prospect of finding a new home was not daunting.

In their home country, the Netherlands, he had trained as an architect and she was an interior designer and artist. Then, in 2000, the couple created their own full-service construction and design company: Zantos Interiors & Exteriors.

But when they decided to leave the cold winters of Northern Europe for the sunny south of France in 2004, they found that they had a challenge on their hands.

“It was not easy for us to buy what we wanted,” said Mr. Zantingh, who was born in Zeist, in the central Netherlands.

The couple started searching for properties in Var, a southeastern French region, which includes the town of Montauroux, with 5,000 residents, because Mrs. Zantingh-van Os’s parents own a home in the nearby town of Brignoles.

Mr. Zantingh continued: “The first street we looked at was in Montauroux where we saw a yellow house. We said, ‘If we could buy this house, it would be great with its super view and peace and quiet and easy access to the shops and airport.’”

But a real estate agent told them that there was nothing to buy on that street.

Then they came close to purchasing a house that was being built, only to learn that it already had an owner. And they looked at a plot of land that turned out to be half the size they had been told it was.

Finally, an hour and a half before they had to catch a flight back to Amsterdam, they went to see another piece of land. “And you would not believe it: The agency showed us the plot of land above the yellow house,” Mr. Zantingh said. “We bought it in five minutes.”

The couple paid €500,000, or about \$670,000, for a plot of 6,800 square meters, or 73,000 square feet, and then spent €1.1 million building the two-level home over the next two years.

Mr. Zantingh designed the house, a 380-square-meter structure with five bedrooms and three baths, to reflect the couple’s tastes and general style of the area. Then he gave the plans to a French architect. “Three months later we had the permission, so it went very fast,” he said.

However, building on the lot’s hilly terrain turned out to be more expensive than they had expected, so the outdoor pool and a 50-square-meter office and atelier for Mrs. Zantingh-van Os, who is also an artist, were not completed until 2012.

“You try and help clients keep within their budget,” Mr. Zantingh said, “but it is much harder to do it for yourself.”

“With flat terrain, it is easier,” he added. “This terrain has a lot of hills. There was nothing here: no electricity, no water, no road and lots of trees.”

The house was built of concrete blocks and painted with *crépi*, a kind of textured paint sold in the region; the roof was tiled over oak beams.

Inside, the ground floor was designed in an open-plan layout, with floors tiled in Egyptian stone and its walls plastered white. The living room space was decorated with Mrs. Zantingh-van Os’s playful art and a grand piano, while the dining area, at the far end of the room, was separated from the kitchen by an island.

The French doors in the kitchen lead to an outdoor terrace with an additional dining and sitting area. The house has broad views that include the Terre Blanche Golf Club, an exclusive golf resort built on a property previously owned by Sean Connery, and St.-Cassien Lake.

The bedrooms and bathrooms, all on the upper floor, are decorated in pale colors to give an airy feel.

“The design is a mix from old and new, from mostly Dutch and Italian designers,” Mr. Zantingh said.

The family, which includes the couple’s three sons — Jeannot, 11; Guido, 14; and Duncan, 15 — enjoys the town’s laid-back lifestyle and the mild

weather.

“It’s green and it’s quiet — you have the lake and the nearby cities of Cannes and Nice, and from Nice Airport you can travel easily to other countries,” said Mr. Zantingh, who often travels to work with Zantos clients around the world.

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