JUNGLE FEVER

Infused with a back-to-basics vibe but kitted out with all the comforts of home, this awe-inspiring rainforest retreat on the edge of a Brazilian hillside is the definition of laid-back luxury.

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Photography: AMAGAT IMAGES / LIVING INSIDE

Exterior: Constructed entirely of reclaimed wood and featuring a traditional piassava roof made from woven palm leaves, Villa Kabru sits in a tranquil clearing on the Bahia Coast; its impressive angular design extending into the rainforest.

The pool area, set into the hillside, is shaded by towering vegetation.
Nestled in Bahia’s Atlantic Rainforest, just moments from the ocean, this spectacular Brazilian retreat in Itacaré has to be seen to be believed. A thoroughly modern yet equally magical interpretation of a tree house, Villa Kabru sits in a small, tranquil clearing, on the edge of a hill, its impressive angular design extending into the surrounding jungle. The house belongs to Swiss filmmaker Patrick Armbruster, and Greek-born Daniela Karagizopoulos, a fashion designer. ‘Daniela and I spent our first holiday together in Itacaré,’ says Patrick. ‘We stayed for three weeks, and spent a lot of time daydreaming about building a house here. On the second-to-last day we decided to take the plunge and set about buying a piece of land.’ The plot they chose was surrounded by towering vegetation but had been cleared by a storm. ‘We were adamant that we didn’t want to cut down any trees to build the house,’ says Daniela, ‘so we had to find a space in the forest that had been created naturally.’

Open to the elements on all sides, the house is a series of platforms and a canopy, constructed entirely from ancient, recycled wood and featuring a traditional piassava roof made of palm leaves, which was hand-woven by local artisans. It’s set high on slanting wooden stilts so it’s perfectly positioned to make the most of the cooling sea breezes and the incredible views of the surrounding forest. ‘We wanted it to be a place where we could experience nature fully, but with all the comforts of home,’ say the couple, who commissioned Christoph Kellenberger of architectural practice OOS to help realise their vision for their jungle hideaway, which was built by Brazilian craftsmen, entirely without machinery. ‘As the house is located on a hillside, it was clear that we needed to raise the structure up,’ Patrick says. ‘And after visiting the area a few times, we realised that we’d rarely have the inclination to spend any time in an enclosed space as we wanted to be outside all day. So that’s how we came up with the idea to build a large canopy-like roof and use the trees around the house to create a feeling of protection,’ he explains.

Inside, the house is simple yet luxurious, a testament to Daniela’s eye for interior design – a succession of inviting spaces, each with its own unique panorama. The upper level consists of one large area dedicated to lounging, cooking and dining, and a bedroom – complete with outdoor shower – and bathroom, separated only by a billowing white curtain. Below this is another space that’s been set aside for yoga, meditation and massage. The decor is suitably pared-back and unpretentious, a rustic feel that’s tempered by clean lines, strong shapes and sparse decoration. ‘What we’ve created is basically a luxury shelter,’ says Patrick. ‘We can work when we need to, and even set up what we call our ‘jungle cinema’, which consists of an HD projector and several hundred films. But other than that, life is quite simple; I go surfing in the morning while Daniela’s busy being creative in the house or in the garden, sometimes we hang out by the pool, and then we head to the harbour market to buy fresh fish for supper, which lands on our kitchen grill 15 minutes later. It’s a pretty addictive way to live.’
‘WE WANTED IT TO BE A PLACE WHERE WE COULD EXPERIENCE NATURE FULLY, BUT WITH ALL THE COMFORTS OF HOME’
Dining area A simple wooden dining table pairs beautifully with the graphic outline of Konstantin Grcic’s Chair One designed for Magis, available at Panik Design.

Living area Two wooden armchairs made by a local carpenter are ideally positioned for relaxing in the sunshine.

Stockist details on p153

The house is a succession of inviting spaces, each with its own unique panorama.
Kitchen. Made from tinted concrete, the chunky bank of kitchen units serves to separate the living room from the dining space. The black pottery is traditional of the Minais Gerais region of Brazil. ‘We head to the market in the harbour every day to get fresh fish for dinner, and it lands on the grill at home 15 minutes later,’ says the homeowner.

‘WE BUILT A LARGE, CANOPY-LIKE ROOF AND USED THE TREES AROUND THE HOUSE TO CREATE A FEELING OF PROTECTION’
Bathroom. One of the villa’s more private spaces, the bathroom is closed off by a latticework screen. Equally simple in design, the basin unit is made from the same stained concrete as the kitchen.

Shower. Jutting out from the main bedroom like the bow of a boat, the open air shower boasts incredible views of the surrounding rainforest, creating a feeling of being totally at one with nature.

The house is perfectly positioned to make the most of the incredible views of the surrounding forest.