

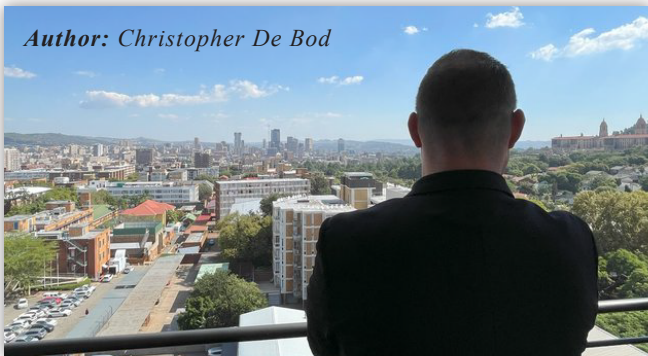
# LIVING IT UP IN THE CITY

## THE MENSSINK PENTHOUSE STORY

DATE: 15 MAY 2024

“ As an interior designer, I am always on the lookout for inspiration, ideas and just fabulous stuff that inspires me. That is how I came to know about the Menssink Penthouse project. While checking my Instagram feed one evening in February, my attention was grabbed by a video which popped up on my feed of a young lady sharing a walk-through video of the two-week progress of their renovation project. I was first intrigued by the beautiful views from the apartment's large windows. Then I realised that the iconic Union Buildings in Pretoria was on their doorstep and my heart was stolen. I immediately followed the account daily to see if there were any updates. With urban or city living amongst young professionals it is quite a norm in places such as Cape Town, it is less so in Pretoria. After following the entire process, I had to understand the psychology behind the project. That is how I got to sit down with Simon and Anna-Lize on a sunny afternoon in late April to learn about their story. ”

**Author:** Christopher De Bod



Born in Pretoria the second oldest of four daughters, Anna-Lize went on to study Information Design at the University of Pretoria. Simon, born in Kempton Park and growing up in Pretoria East, is one of four brothers, also attended the University of Pretoria where he studied Fine Arts. This is where they initially met before he left for New York for a couple of months.

After his return they reconnected and eventually started dating. It wasn't long before wedding bells filled the air when they married nine years ago in Anna-Lize's final year of studies, a few days before both of their birthdays which are a day apart from each other.

Anna-Lize, always knew that a nine-to-five at a corporate or agency was never going to work for her, so she co-founded Elevate Studios with her sister right after graduating. Her work at Elevate Studio hits a sweet spot between design and her love of working with people.

After working as a Pastor at Hillsong Church for ten years, while chasing his passion for art and working on commissions and orders from interior designers and decorators, Simon has



taken a year to follow his dreams and passion for fine art, music, and, as it worked out during the penthouse, a passion for creating beautiful spaces.

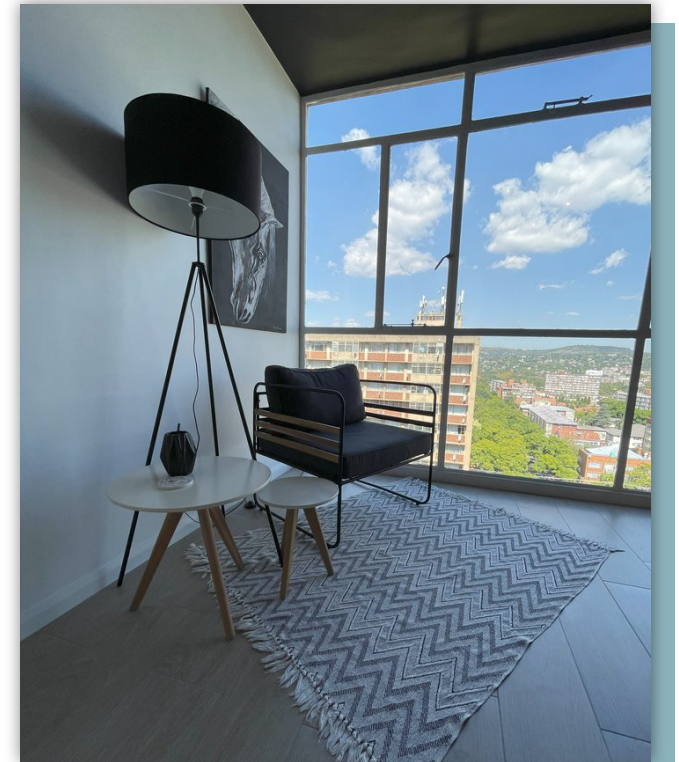
The couple fell in love with Pretoria city while studying at the University of Pretoria and always desired to live in the city. They shared love of old buildings and period architecture. A trip to New York last year, reignited their desire to live in a penthouse apartment in the Pretoria CBD.

Anna-Lize's self-confessed obsession for the city inspired her to create a photo journal of city living and people in the city while at university, which she shared with me during our interview. This beautiful book contains the most striking photographs that she took in and around the city. Their journey however has taken them on a more scenic route to this destination.

The couple purchased their first home together in Sinoville, then moved to another home in Rietondale while renting out the Sinoville apartment. After a while in this home, they found a beautiful apartment in Villeria which they purchased and renovated. Their connection to the city however was never lost. In 2020, Simon had a dream that he was living in the penthouse of a skyscraper in Pretoria CBD. He woke up and immediately started searching for penthouses to purchase in the city. They viewed many penthouses around the city before viewing this specific one in 2020 and fell in love with it immediately. With the largest footprint of all the apartments they had viewed at 180 square meters, the balcony at 60 square meters alone, and the views from the apartment were a key influencer in their decision that this was the one for them.

The asking price, however, was beyond their budget and with consideration of the amount of work that the property needed, they made an offer lower than what the seller was asking, and their offer was rejected. This, however, did not deter them and they knew that the right place would come along at the right time.

In 2022 the apartment next door the now famous Menssink Penthouse became available to purchase, which they viewed, but there was no fireworks for them, and their sights became set on 1101 again. After Anna-Lize tracked down the owner on social media, they reached out to him again and initiated discussions to purchase the property, which had not sold by then. He indicated his willingness to discuss as there was a chance that he would move to America. In May 2023 he confirmed that he was willing to sell. Anna-Lize and Simon offered him only twenty five thousand Rand more than their original offer and he accepted it. They were now owners of a penthouse apartment in Pretoria, but they had a lot of work to do.



When asked to describe the apartment when they bought it, Anna-Lize and Simon jokingly refer to the apartment as giving "crack house vibes". The apartment had been operated as a commune previously, but little of the original spaces and furniture were salvageable. Their interest in their project had already started growing by Anna-Lize sharing footage of the apartment on her Instagram account with followers commenting that they had been at parties in the apartment. It notoriously had a reputation of being a party hub. The last tenant to leave the apartment after they purchased it even posted on his WhatsApp story that club 1101 had officially closed.

When chatting about the inspiration and vision for their new home, the first mention was New York City with a specific mention of Manhattan. "New spaces in old places" said Simon. The couple shared that they knew that they wanted a minimalist, contemporary design with clean fresh





lines and that the kitchen had to move from its original small space at the front door to the new larger area that they had earmarked as the living space. They consulted with their contractor to understand what the possibilities and options were from an internal layout change perspective and allowed this valuable feedback to lead their decision making with regards to area allocation and functionality.

Armed with this information, Simon set about designing and modelling the space. Taking this approach allowed them to play around with various concepts and ideas and explore colour palettes, finishes and treatments. They found this process invaluable in the long run as being able to play around like this actually informed some of the bolder decisions in the design. For example, while playing around with the colour of the overhead beam that spans the ceiling in the living area, his decision to paint that black led them to decide on the black kitchen. The visuals of the patio area which they were planning to cover with a roofing structure led them to decide that only a third of the roof should be covered with a solid material and the rest with a clear material to allow more light into the home.

They managed to complete an entire plan with visuals before they chipped the first brick. Simon further explained this was important for them to ensure that what they saw is exactly what the

contractor saw to avoid any costly mistakes that can arise with miscommunication on a renovation project. Anna-Lize explains that this was a far cry from their first renovation project in Villieria where they made their decisions based on measuring things and taping it off on the floor to see if it would work or if the furniture would fit.

Earlier on the day we light heartedly discussed that the general assumption was that Anna-Lize was the creative mind behind the design of the home, whereas Simon's creativity and artistic flair has driven the design process and Anna-Lize using her championship like shopping skills and nose for a bargain to secure best pricing on furniture, décor items and materials allowing them to achieve a lot more with the budget that they had set aside for the project.

Tiles, taps, baths, vanities and the like were all shopped on Black Friday Deals. With the increasing sensation of their project attracting attention, they appreciated the gestures by companies such as Design Team Fabrics for sponsoring all the scatter cushions in the apartment. Artwork for the walls had obviously not been in short supply with Simon being an artist himself. They did make the decision however to edit the wall art and go with pieces that they really love and stored the rest.

Anna-Lize and Simon explained that their final colour palette of black, white, grey and cream paired with natural wood finishes allows the space to feel



luxurious and comfortable, while not taxing their creative minds as much as what a bold colourful space may have done.

The layout of the space was driven by the concept of hosting family and friends. Anna-Lize stated that bringing people together in this space was their main aim and mentioned that Simon always asked, "Okay but where are people going to sit"?

With Simon's total inventory of tools being a nail clipper and a tweezer, they never anticipated handling any of the renovation work themselves. "I am not a handy man", Simon had explained earlier, although he had very nicely assembled a flat pack bookshelf moments before my arrival that day.

They on boarded the skills of a contractor named Ronald, whom they keep referring to as Roland. He was responsible for the total renovation build. Although they had never worked with him previously, he was referred by friends who had worked with him previously and spoke highly of his skill, ability and quality of work, so they were happy to get him on board for the project.

A renovation project in an apartment block does present its own challenges. Anna-Lize and Simon explain that at first the Body Corporate had many questions and renovations, until they understood what the couple were aiming to achieve. They explained that working closely with a Body Corporate like this is essential during the process and they prefer a strict Body Corporate that enforces the rules and regulations. It puts their minds at ease knowing that the controls are in place should they decide at a later stage to rent the apartment out. When I asked about the reaction from neighbors about the noise levels during the process they laughingly explained that they received very little complaints from their lovely neighbors. "We think they are just so grateful that it wasn't the noise that used to come from "party central" they both joked. The neighbors were happy that they were improving the condition of the apartment mentioned Simon. Anna-Lize and Simon warn people considering taking on this type of project in an apartment block to check the access to the apartment before ordering certain items. Not a top-of-mind consideration for an eager home renovator, but critical to the process of the build. The top floor of this building is serviced by a winding staircase running up eleven stories. The easy way up is the lift and a no-brainer when having to get all manner of materials, appliances and furniture up to the apartment. However, an almost three meter long stone kitchen counter top would never fit in the lift and after much planning, they managed to hoist the slab of stone up eleven stories through the small gap between the elevating flights of stairs that lead up to their level, narrowly



skimming past the railings on either side. Similarly, the glass sliding door for the space that serves as Anna-Lize's office was designed to have a glass sliding door with one fixed panel and one sliding panel. When these panels arrived on site, it was determined that there was no way, not even hoisting up the staircase cavity, that these panels were going to be able to reach their intended destination and the design had to be reworked to a four panel system. "Always check your access!" exclaimed Anna-Lize.

"Now that the project is completed, how does your home make you feel when you walk in?", I asked them. "You should come see it at night!" Anna-Lize immediately answered. "I feel alive." She went on to say. Sometimes working late at night, she often looks out from the balcony and notices other apartments where the lights are still on and takes comfort in knowing that she is not alone. Their block is filled with people and families from young to old and professionals to students. Everyone with a friendly smile and kind gesture.





Even the area, which may be considered by many as dangerous, is a hive of activity. Having recently watched “Sundowns” game at the stadium, they noted while walking home at midnight the bustle of the city, “This really makes me feel like I am living,” stated Anna-Lize. Simon points out that there is so much happening in the area with a new Woolies opening on the next corner and a new Plato Coffee which had recently opened. While on a three-week trip to the UK recently, they could not wait to get home to their apartment.

With Anna-Lize racking up nearly nine thousand followers on her Instagram account by sharing their journey, they have had contact from some people who love their style and dynamic asking them to please assist them with their projects. With Simon’s newfound love for this process, he is happy to jump in and give it the Simon Menssink treatment. Circling back to their other properties, Anna-Lize and Simon explain that while in their first home

they realised that they could purchase a property, more specifically apartments in good well maintained blocks, in Pretoria at good rates and earn a reasonable income from renting them. This is what set them on this path of purchasing a property, fixing what is needed and then renting it out while moving onto the next project.

When asked what advice they have for people looking at getting into this sort of process, they both agreed that there is so much to consider and to look out for. The first consideration however is that one should never purchase in a block or area that you would not be prepared to stay in yourself.

Always check the financials of the Body Corporate and check the state of the building and grounds, they advise. Simon confirms that the first thing he looks at is the lawns to check if they are maintained. Anna-Lize reiterates the importance of







a good Body Corporate with good financials.

When asked if this is their forever home, they explained they are working according to a plan to support their strategy of owning thirty properties by the time they are fifty. It's called their 30X50 plan and in order for them to achieve this, they would move around every two years. Although for time being, they are still totally in love with their new home and any thought of moving on to the next one, although there, is on the back burner for the time being. I always approach the financials of a project cautiously. This young energetic couple, however, are happy to share that their final spend on the

purchase of the property and the renovation came in at R 1.2m, only R 50k over their budgeted amount. Having been able to spend time with them in their beautiful home, I can confirm that the spend was well worth every penny and looking at the comparable figures for the area, a great investment. With an astute mind for managing the pennies, Anna-lize has run the numbers and they are comfortable that they would be in a good position to make a reasonable profit should they decide to sell the property.

The future looks bright for this dynamic, energetic couple with a passion for creativity and designing

beautiful spaces. They pair their strengths well and work brilliantly as a team. Simon said that when they work together as a team, one plus one equals three. And this can be seen in the result of this amazing project that they took on together resulting in a beautiful space on top of an old building in a city that is almost forgotten to the masses that have moved out to the suburbs.

Their love for each other and passion for life and art and travel is inspirational and will serve them well on their path to success in the future. But right now, they are living in the moment and appreciating all the blessings that are afforded to them.

*Like and follow their Instagram accounts [@annalizemenssink](#) and [@simonmenssink](#) to watch the videos of the project and connect with them. Check out Simon's website: [simonmenssink.com](#) to see and purchase his amazing art. Also go to [elevatestudios.co.za](#) to learn more about Anna-Lize's services.*