



Melanie's family loves the freedom of life in Magoebaskloof

Can you *still* live the DREAM?

Like the idea of having a Plan B but wonder if you could ever afford a different life? Three women tell us their life switch stories... and how they financed the fantasy



MELANIE McINTOSH, 42, explains how she and her architect husband **Robin, 41,** exchanged a busy life in the city for a very different life in Magoebaskloof,

Limpopo. They have two children, Ashley, eight, and Kellan, six. "Robin is a very spontaneous person, whereas I don't like change much, but when he suggested we move to our farm in Magoebaskloof four years ago, I said yes immediately and we haven't looked back. We'd bought the farm 12 years ago with four other people as a weekend getaway,

but over time the others lost interest and sold their shares to Robin. The farm is next to an indigenous forest in a beautiful area of pine-tree plantations, all draped in a blanket of mist. It's only 65km away from Polokwane, so is the ideal weekend escape for people living in Polokwane, Pretoria or Johannesburg. In 2004, we went on a three-month holiday to the south of France, and loved the quieter way of life there. Once back in SA we decided we wanted to adopt a similar lifestyle, so we moved out to Pecanwood Estate at Hartbeespoort Dam. A short while later Robin's father retired

MAKING IT WORK
Melanie and Robin bought the property 12 years ago, along with four other partners. Robin eventually bought the shares from the others, and they then sold their house at Hartbeespoort Dam and used the money to start renovations. They have a bond.

and mentioned he was looking for something to do, which is when Robin suggested we all move out to the farm in Magoebaskloof and open a guesthouse. I loved the idea, so we sold our house in Pecanwood and used the money to start a two-year renovation project on the huge 2 400m² shed on the farm. We built in two stages – first the bottom floor, then the top – and during that time lived on the bottom floor without a proper kitchen, a shower practically in the toilet and young children

aged two and four. In those conditions, you either survive or collapse, and fortunately I survived!
 In 2007 we opened up Bramasole Guesthouse, with all the guest rooms offering gorgeous forest views. We also have an architectural firm, with offices on the farm and in Polokwane. Our whole family is together now. Robin's parents help out around the guesthouse, and my sister, Kathy, who was in the hotel business for 20

'Living in such a tranquil setting has changed our lives'

years, runs it. We find that living so close to the family works really well for us, and Ashley and Kellan love being able to see their grandparents whenever they want to. Living in such a tranquil setting has changed our lives dramatically. We leave our front door unlocked, and don't bother locking our car doors when we arrive at someone's house. My parents also live close by, so our children can ride their bikes to visit them, or they can go for a walk in the forest and do all the things I used to do when I was younger. It's a great way of life, and a wonderful way to grow up."

MELANIE'S TOP TIPS:
 + Don't be afraid to try new things. We recycled things people had thrown out. We bought parquet flooring for R1 000 and used it for kitchen counters and around the fireplace. We also bought bullet-proof glass from a bank, and used it for our staircase.
 + When it comes to renovating, try to take everything in your stride. You may feel like pulling out your hair, but it's not going to kill you in the end.