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FREE GUIDE · NOTHING TO SIGN

Downstairs Is a Different Climate

A Paradyskloof house is not one building with one sun problem. It is two or three floors stacked against a mountain, each with its own light, its own wind and its own answer. This guide climbs it, level by level.

Most shading advice starts with a compass. That works on flat ground. On the streets that climb off the valley floor onto the lower contours of the mountain, it only gets you halfway — because on a stepped site the thing that decides a room's light is usually which *floor* it is on, not which way it faces. The lower level is set into a bank that shades it and holds damp against it. The floor above sits level with the treetops and takes the whole afternoon. They are the same aspect on the same title deed, and they want opposite products.

Four numbers that apply on every floor

Before splitting the house up, four figures worth having, because they are true for the whole address and easy to verify yourself.

79° / 33° Noon sun at midsummer, and at midwinter, for this latitude of about 33.9°S. Ninety degrees minus the latitude, plus or minus the earth's tilt.¹²	241° Where the sun sets in late December — well south of due west. The last hour of a midsummer day lands on the south-west corner, not the west wall.²	11–13 The summer ultraviolet index across the greater Cape — the “extreme” band, strongest through the middle of the day.³
787 mm Average annual rain, most of it in June and July, almost none in January and February.⁴ A winter-rainfall climate, not a summer-storm one.		

The 241° figure is the one that catches people out on a stepped site. A terrace built square to the view can be perfectly comfortable at four o'clock in March and unusable at six in January, because the sun has swung round behind the corner the architect assumed was safe. On a flat erf you would just move the table. On a terrace cut into a slope, there is nowhere to move it to.

LEVEL 1 The floor cut into the bank

LEVEL 2 The living floor, and its stacking doors

THE VOID The part of the house with no floor at all

LEVEL 3 Nothing above it but sky



Read it first, book later

This is what we work through on a Paradyskloof site visit before anyone mentions a price. If it is useful on its own, use it — and if you would rather have someone walk the floors with you, the measure at the foot of the page is free.

[Book a free in-home measure](#)

LEVEL ONE

The floor cut into the bank

On a stepped stand the bottom level is half underground. Behind it sits a retaining wall holding back the slope; in front, a courtyard, a garage apron or the top of the pool. It is

usually where the guest suite, the study, the gym or the flatlet ended up, and it produces a very particular set of complaints.

The first is cold and damp. A wall with earth behind it stays cool long after the rest of the house has warmed, and in a winter-rainfall climate⁴ that surface is working against you from May to August. The second is the opposite: bounced glare. A slab of pale paving, a pool or a light-coloured retaining wall throws a surprising amount of light back *up* into a room that gets almost no direct sun — a low, flat glare on a screen that no amount of overhang will fix, because it is not coming from above.

The third is privacy in reverse. On a slope, the street or the neighbour is frequently above you, looking down over your sill rather than through it. A blind that opens from the bottom — a cellular blind on a top-down, bottom-up mechanism, so the lower half covers the sightline while the top half stays open to the mountain — solves that better than anything that only comes down from a headrail.

Honest trade-off: a top-down, bottom-up system costs more than a plain one because it carries a second set of controls, and cellular fabric will not tolerate scrubbing, so a shower room or a scullery on this level wants aluminium slats instead. It also cannot tilt, so it is an insulation-and-privacy answer, not a view-steering one.

LEVEL TWO

The living floor, and its stacking doors

This is the floor everything else was arranged around: kitchen, living, dining, and a run of stacking or sliding doors onto a terrace with the valley in front of it. It is also where the biggest single piece of glass in the house usually lives, and where the standard advice — “put a blind on it” — is least useful.

Two things make a four-metre stacking door different from a window. It has to be walked through constantly, so anything that has to be raised and lowered every time is a nuisance within a week. And when it is open, the shading has to be out of the way completely, not bunched at the edge of the opening. That points at panel blinds or vertical vanes, both of which stack back clear of the frame and leave the opening genuinely open.

The terrace outside is a separate job again. Two answers, and the choice between them is not about budget:

- ③ **A** where the terrace is reasonably sheltered and the point is shade you can
folding- take away again — out for a January lunch, retracted so the low winter sun
arm reaches the paving in July.
awning
- ③ **Zip** where the wind is the actual complaint. Mesh held in tension inside
screens aluminium channels does not flap, does not lift, and turns an unusable
evening terrace into a room. It is the honest answer on the more exposed
stands, where an open awning arm would spend half the summer retracted
anyway.

Either way, on this kind of frontage we would motorise it with a wind sensor as a matter of course. The Cape south-easter blows through spring and summer and weakens the further inland you come,⁵ but a slope adds its own local air movement in the evening as the ground cools, and a sensor does not need anyone to be home to make the right call.



Lower half closed against a sightline from above, top half still open to the mountain.

No approval opinions here. Where this guide mentions estate or body-corporate consent, it is flagging that a step exists. What your scheme actually permits is a matter for its own trustees and its current rules.

THE VOID

The part of the house with no floor at all

Double-volume entrances and lounges are the signature of the newer building here, and they behave like a chimney. Warm air rises off the living floor, collects at the top of the volume where nobody is standing, and stays there. Meanwhile the tall glass that makes the space work is admitting sun for the whole of its height, including the part six metres up that no one can reach.

Three things follow from that, and none of them are optional if the room is going to work:

- ✓ **Shade the top, not the bottom.** The high glass is doing most of the heating. Shading only the reachable lower half leaves the problem exactly where it was.
- ✓ **Motorise it.** Not as an upgrade — as the only sane way to operate something at that height. A rechargeable tube motor needs no wiring at all, which matters on a finished wall.
- ✓ **Decide on a concealed box at drawing stage, not after.** A blind dropping out of a slim ceiling slot with every bracket hidden is the detail that keeps a minimal double volume minimal — but it is a build-stage decision. Retrofitting one into a finished bulkhead means opening the ceiling.

The honest trade-off with a concealed system is exactly that timing, plus the fact that a hidden headbox is harder to reach when a motor eventually needs servicing. Where the ceiling is already closed, a face-fixed motorised roller on a discreet bracket does ninety per cent of the same job for a fraction of the disruption.

LEVEL THREE

Nothing above it but sky

The top floor of a house on a slope is the most exposed part of the property, and usually the last to be dealt with properly. It sits above the neighbour's roofline, above whatever trees are on the stand, and looks straight out over the valley — which means no obstruction whatsoever between its west and north-west glass and the sun from about three o'clock until it goes.

Interior fabric alone cannot win that argument, and it is worth being clear about why rather than just asserting it. Sun that has already crossed the pane has delivered its heat into the room. A blackout roller behind the glass absorbs that energy and then re-radiates it back into the bedroom as warmth — the room is darker, but not much cooler. Stopping the sun on the outside of the glass is a different physical event: the pane never warms in the first place.

That is the case for the two premium answers here, and they do different jobs:

- ✓ **External venetian slats** when you want to keep the view. They sit outside the glass on guide cables or rails and tilt: closed against the low sun, tilted open to give the valley back. Motorised, with a wind sensor, because they are outside.
- ✓ **Roller shutters** when you want the room genuinely dark and cool — rigid aluminium slats rolling down from a headbox outside, with a layer of still air trapped behind them that insulates as well as it shades. Ours are shading products for sun, heat and glare; a security-rated shutter is a different product and we would quote it as such rather than blur the two.

Both are fixed to the outside of the building, which is where the rules in the next section come in. Where an external fixing is genuinely not possible, the honest second best is a sunscreen mesh at around five per cent openness on the inside: it cuts glare and a good deal of the ultraviolet, it keeps the valley legible, and it will not do nearly as much about the heat. Better to say that plainly than to sell mesh as an air conditioner.

One more thing lives up here: the roof glass. Skylights over a stair and raked gable windows take near-vertical midday sun square on — the one orientation that eighty degrees at noon punishes rather than spares. Those want a tensioned system cut to the actual pitch and running in side channels, made to order for that opening.



A ceiling slot in a double volume: the fabric arrives from six metres up, where the heat actually is.



THE RULES

What a complex will let you fit outside

A large share of the newer housing on this side of Stellenbosch sits inside a gated development, a sectional-title scheme or both, and that changes the order in which decisions get made. Under South Africa's sectional-title framework, a scheme's conduct rules ordinarily require an owner to get the trustees' written consent before altering the external appearance of a section,⁶ and free-standing estates run their own architectural or aesthetic review to the same end. We are not going to pretend to know what your particular scheme allows — ask the managing agent or the estate office for the current rules, in writing, before anything is ordered.

What we can tell you is where the line usually falls, because it is the same line everywhere:

“Anything fitted inside the reveal is a furnishing decision. Anything fixed to the outside face of the building is a decision about the building.”

THE DISTINCTION EVERY SCHEME CARES ABOUT

Interior blinds almost never need sign-off. External venetians, roller shutters, zip-screen channels and awning cassettes almost always do, because they change what the elevation looks like from the road, the common property or the neighbour's terrace. That is not a reason to avoid them — on the upper floor they are the products that actually work — it is a reason to build the approval into the timeline rather than discover it after a made-to-measure order has gone into production.

Practically, that means: photograph the elevation, get the projection and fixing detail and the colour reference on paper, submit, and only then order. We will put that pack together as part of the quote. What we will not do is call an approval a formality or submit it in your name.

Five things a floor plan cannot settle

1. **What is actually in front of each floor.** A neighbour's roof, a mature oak or the bank itself can take three hours off one level and none off the one above it.
2. **The true orientation of each elevation.** Houses on contoured stands are turned to the view, not squared to the street, so the aspect has to be read at the wall rather than off the plan.
3. **The substrate behind the plaster.** Brick, block, a retaining structure or a light-weight upper-floor wall all take different fixings, and on an external system that decides what is possible at all.
4. **Wind at your own terrace, at the hour you use it.** Two stands three streets apart behave differently once the ground starts cooling — and that is the awning-versus-zip-screen decision.
5. **Where power is, and what the scheme requires.** Whether a motor can be reached and recharged without a ladder, and what the trustees or the estate need to see before a bracket goes on the wall.

Which is the whole reason the measure is free. Every one of those five is cheaper to find out before a quote than after an installation.



An upper balcony closed in with tensioned mesh — the version of shade that stays put when the air moves.

External venetians

Roller shutters

Zip screens

Cellular honeycomb

THE NEXT STEP

Walk the levels with a consultant

A consultant comes out with samples, walks each level with you, reads what is actually in front of every elevation, measures every opening and leaves you with a written quote itemised per window. Free, no obligation, and you are welcome to take the guide and stop there.

TRACEABLE CLAIMS

What is sourced, and what is arithmetic

The claims above about latitude, sun angles, ultraviolet, rainfall, wind and sectional-title consent all come from the sources below. The solar figures are arithmetic from a published latitude rather than a quoted statistic, and are marked as such so you can check them for your own street.

- 1 Wikipedia — [Stellenbosch](#) (33°56'S, town elevation about 136 m, set against the mountains at the head of the Eerste River valley).
- 2 NOAA Global Monitoring Laboratory — [Solar Calculator](#). The noon altitudes (about 79° in late December, about 33° in late June) and the late-December sunset azimuth near 241° are standard solar geometry for the latitude in source 1, computed rather than cited. Enter your own coordinates and date to confirm them.
- 3 Institut de Recherche pour le Développement — [Extreme solar UV radiation exposure in Cape Town](#) (the greater Cape reaches the World Health Organization's “extreme” ultraviolet band through summer).

- 4 Climate-Data.org — [Stellenbosch climate](#) (Mediterranean; about 787 mm of rain a year, concentrated in June and July, with January and February under 20 mm).
- 5 Wikipedia — [Cape Doctor](#) (the south-easterly that blows through spring and summer, and how its influence weakens further inland).
- 6 Government of South Africa — [Sectional Titles Schemes Management Act 8 of 2011](#) (the framework under which a scheme's rules govern alterations affecting the external appearance of a section; your own scheme's current rules are the operative document).

The floor-by-floor reasoning, the product recommendations and the trade-offs stated against each one are our own opinion, offered free and without obligation. Nothing here is planning, heritage or body-corporate advice.