

Every year **FELICIA LABUZA-SUTTLE** heads south from the States to her holiday home in Cape Town to enjoy the sun, sea and some precious family time

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Southern comfort



"WHEN I WAS YOUNG I DREAMT I WOULD HAVE a beautiful home by the sea," says Dr Felicia Mabuza-Suttle, standing on her balcony in Bakoven. "We bought this apartment five years ago. We were out here on holiday, and when we drove past this place there was a gentleman standing on the balcony and we thought, 'Wonder if he's selling...' — and he was!"

The Suttle's stylish four-bedroomed holiday pad is literally an arm's length from the Atlantic Ocean. The winning feature of the third-floor flat is, without a doubt, the stunning view. "I revere the sea," says Felicia. "Somehow, it makes me forget all the stress and pressures of the world. To me it's the seventh wonder of the world. Just imagine being able to wake up to that every morning."

Mabuza-Suttle, who now serves as President of SA Tourism in New York, says: "South Africa is my first love and home. It's wonderful to just be here, hanging out and laughing with my family. A lot of the year we aren't together." In the US, Felicia

shuttles between two homes: an apartment on the 65th floor of Trump Tower and a mansion in Atlanta where husband Earl, a psychologist and motivational speaker, is based. Lindi, her eldest daughter, jokes that the New York apartment is "like a Liberace palace. There is a lot of marble! And our house in Atlanta is Georgian Tuscan, if there is anything like that." Cape Town is more about "chilaxing" — chilling and relaxing, she explains. Their days here are spent reading, walking or going for drives.

It's also about reconnecting with their roots. The apartment interior is all Afro-chic, evident in the basket feature wall, the blonde, lean lines of the furniture, and the collection of masks and fetish sculptures. "I absolutely adore African masks," Felicia says. "They are a real connection with home." Lindi adds: "We must have over 200 masks back in Atlanta. We have so many we could start our own Greenmarket Square!" Mabuza-Suttle gave interior designer Stephen Falcke three months to redo the place.

POOL POSITION The Suttle sisters take a dip in the rim-flow pool. "Getting ready to go to the beach is a whole production for the girls," says their mother. "It's exhausting just watching them."



OUT OF AFRICA
The Afro-chic Bakoven apartment was decorated by Stephen Falcke. "I fell in love with his work at the Saxon Hotel in Johannesburg, and asked him to do the same here," says Mabuza-Suttle.



SPICE OF LIFE "My mother's mother was Indian, so I absolutely adore Indian food. Whenever we're here we go to Bukhara at least twice a week. Or order in."



I have a spousal mentor. Some people look for inspiration outside their family. I look to my wife."

— Motivational speaker EARL SUTTLE on life with his wife FELICIA

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS "On weekends I go to Earl in Atlanta or he comes to me in New York, so there is a lot of shuffling about. I guess what is missed most is home cooking. I make a mean lasagne."



As a girl I never stopped dreaming. I've definitely been blessed."

Her brief? Something sophisticated, that worked well with the sea and had an African flavour. "When it was finished and she stepped out of the private lift, I remember she was very happy," says Falcke. "There was a lot of noise!"

The family may be based in America, but Africa tugs strongly at their souls, and the Suttles have recently bought another piece of it, a plot at Pezula golf estate near Knysna. Although it's early days, Felicia is already mock-testing her golf swing. "We're actually a tennis family," she reveals. "The girls were going to be the next Venus and Serena. They both got into university on tennis scholarships."

It's obvious she's a very proud mom. Her daughters are beautiful, open and intelligent. She's also a tough mom. "I think theoretical knowledge ultimately trumps practical experience," she says. "I forced my children to go to business school. I said to Lindi, go and do your MBA. With that and her fashion styling experience and her work for Truworthis [she helped create the successful Ginger Mary range] she cannot fail in her next endeavour." This year Lindi, 28, is moving to Cape Town to "pursue entrepreneurial interests" while Zani, 23, despite a passion for acting, is going to business school.

This drive for education and qualifications is something Mabuza-Suttle has carried with her from her youth. She was brought up conservatively by her grandfather, the first black man to own real estate and a security company in Sophiatown: "When we were moved to Soweto, he said, 'I will not live in the government matchboxes. Instead, I will build a house that will tower over them,' and it ended up being the first double-storey in the township. It was like Buckingham Palace. There were opulent burgundy curtains, couches and Persian rugs."

While teaching Latin-American and ballroom dance, the young Felicia approached Anglo-American to sponsor an exchange trip to the US in 1975. It was here she met Earl at a folk-music convention. He picks up the story: "I forgot to get her phone number, and everyone was going in different directions, but I followed my gut and there she was. We stayed in touch. I knew she wanted to study in the States, so I found out how much it cost, paid for it, went to a travel agent and got her a flight. I thought, I'm going to surprise her, and I sent it to South Africa." The two have been married for 28 years.

SA's ground-breaking talk-show host still has a TV gig in the US, on the Africa Channel, where she interviews well-known Americans who have visited South Africa. "I'm passionate about changing perceptions of our country," she says. For her gumption and soul, Felicia is often compared with Oprah. "That's great. It means I'm a billionaire!" she jokes, then adds: "I admire Oprah. But God doesn't create duplicates. I am a proudly South African original." ■



ALL DRESSED UP "I wore this dress to accept a tourism award. It's a Malcolm Kikuk and everyone was like, 'Wow, is that from South Africa?' Usually I wear suits. Lindi is continually trying to loosen me up. Don't tell her, but I'm trying to make her more conservative."

STYLE COUNCIL

"Television is a completely different fantasy world," says the talk-show host. "If you create an image for yourself, you have to keep it going. I don't clothes shop. I'm very lucky my husband [Earl, pictured with Felicia and daughters Lindi and Zani] shops for me."

