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What the house does without you

Most shading in Plettenberg Bay gets chosen during the fortnight the owners are actually in the house — a bright December afternoon, everyone squinting at the sea, somebody says we must do something about that window. It is the wrong fortnight to decide from. A Plett house spends most of its year locked, unheated, unaired and unwatched, and that is when the expensive things happen to it. This guide is written for those months instead.

CHAPTER ONE

The months nobody writes the brief for

Plettenberg Bay is a Garden Route town on the Bitou coast, and a very large share of its best housing is second homes: beach houses on the dune line, holiday places above the lagoon, estate houses on the fairways and forest cottages inland toward The Craggs.¹ Many of them are genuinely lived in for a few weeks a year and visited for the odd long weekend around that.

Which means the honest question to ask before specifying anything is not “what does this room need in January?” It is: **what is this room doing in May, when the door is locked, the curtains are wherever you left them, and nobody has opened a window in nine weeks?**

Answer that and the whole order changes. The products that matter most in a Plett holiday house are not the ones that make the December light nicer. They are the ones that protect the building and its contents through the long, mild, wet, unattended middle of the year — and, ideally, do it without anyone having to be there.

The Cape gets specified against heat. Plett has to be specified against time.



The window that sold the house — and the one that has to look after itself for most of the year

CHAPTER TWO

A shut house in a town that never really dries out

Plett sits in the part of South Africa that gets rain in all seasons rather than in a defined wet half of the year. The Garden Route is the country's year-round rainfall belt, and unlike Cape Town it has no dry summer to reset itself in.² Add mild temperatures, a coastal position and thick indigenous forest inland, and you have a place where the air is very often carrying a lot of moisture and where nothing gets a long, hot, drying spell.

None of that is a problem in an occupied house, because occupied houses are heated, cooked in, walked through and opened. A shut one is a different object entirely. There is no warmth, no air movement, and no one to notice. The moisture already in the fabric of the building has nowhere to go, condensation forms on the coldest surfaces overnight and does not evaporate, and mould gets what it actually needs: not liquid water, just a surface that stays humid for long enough.

Where it shows up first

- **Against the glass.** The pane is the coldest surface in the room and the first place moisture goes. Anything pressed hard against it, in still air, is the first thing to grow something.
- **Behind heavy fabric.** A dense curtain or blind drawn tight across a window creates a still, cool, unventilated pocket. That pocket is a small greenhouse for exactly the wrong organism.
- **In the rooms nobody uses.** Second bedrooms, the room with the good linen in it, the store off the garage. They are shut inside a shut house, which doubles the effect.

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS, IN ORDER OF HOW MUCH IT HELPS

Air movement, arranged by a human. Someone opening the house for an hour every couple of weeks is worth more than anything on our price list. If you have a caretaker or a letting agent, this is the single most valuable instruction you can give them.

Washable, breathable fabrics in the vulnerable rooms. On a coastal holiday house we lean toward materials that can be wiped or taken down and cleaned, and away from anything dense, plush and unwashable near a cold pane.

Cellular honeycomb blinds where a room runs genuinely cold. A honeycomb section is mostly air held in pockets, and air that cannot circulate carries heat badly, so the inner face of the pane sits warmer with one drawn over it. They earn their keep here on winter comfort and on cold glass — not as a damp cure.

Said plainly: no blind fixes damp. If a wall is wet, a gutter has blocked or a roof detail has failed, that is builder's work — and we would far rather say so than sell you fabric to hang in front of it.



The cells hold still air against the pane — useful on a cold Plett night, and no substitute for someone opening a window.

The contradiction: closed for the sun, open for the air

Here is the bind every Plett holiday-house owner ends up in, usually without naming it.

To protect the inside of the house from sun while you are away, the instinct is to *close everything* — drop the blinds, draw the curtains, shut it up dark. To protect the same house from damp, you want the opposite: fabric off the glass, air moving, nothing sealed against a cold pane for months.

With interior blinds alone you cannot have both. You choose which risk you would rather run, and most owners choose wrong, because sun damage is visible and slow while mould is invisible until it is a problem.

There is a way out of it, and it is the honest reason we lead with external products on this coast rather than upselling them.

SHADING THAT LIVES OUTSIDE THE GLASS

External venetian blinds. Aluminium slats mounted clear of the window, tilting rather than only dropping. Closed against a summer afternoon they hold sun and ultraviolet off the pane entirely, while inside the room the glass is bare, the air can move and nothing is lying against cold glass. On a wide sea-facing wall this is the strongest single thing you can do for an empty house.

External roller shutters. Rigid slats coming down over the opening from a headbox. They shade hard, they add an insulating air layer on a cold night, and they take the weather that would otherwise beat on the glazing. To be exact about what is being sold: these manage sun, heat and glare outside the pane and hold no security rating. If protecting an empty house from people rather than from light is the goal, that is a different product entirely, and we will say so rather than let the word do the work.

Zip screens on the deck and the stoep, where the tensioned mesh runs in aluminium side channels. They make the outdoor room usable in wind, and they keep sun and driven rain off the sliding doors behind them.

The honest cost: anything external is a bigger spend, needs something sound to bolt to, and leaves working parts out in coastal air where they will want attention. Chapter six covers that without the gloss.



Outside the glass, tilted down — the sun stopped at the wall, and the room behind it left dry and free to breathe.

CHAPTER FOUR

What ultraviolet does while nobody is watching

Plett houses are designed around glass. That is the point of the address: a wall of it facing the bay, sliding doors onto the deck, a lounge that is more window than wall. Nobody regrets that in December.

What people do eventually notice is the slow accounting. Ultraviolet and visible light fade textiles, bleach timber floors unevenly, dull leather and take the colour out of anything hanging on the wrong wall — and the damage happens in exactly the same way whether or not somebody is in the room. Over five or eight seasons of a house standing empty with the light streaming in, an expensive interior quietly loses a great deal of its value, and there is no moment at which anyone sees it happen.

A sunscreen fabric is the standard interior answer, and it works: the lower the openness percentage, the more of the ultraviolet it stops before it reaches the room. That is a genuine, measurable benefit and it costs a fraction of external shading.

But go back to chapter three before you decide. A sunscreen blind can only do that job if it is *down*, and down for eight months in a shut coastal house is precisely the condition we spent chapter two warning about. This is where motorisation stops being a gadget: a blind on a schedule closes for the afternoon and opens again at night, all year, with nobody in the province. That is a different proposition from a blind you left down in April and will next touch in December.

WHERE EACH ANSWER FITS

The big sea-facing glass: external shading first if the budget reaches. It removes the contradiction rather than managing it.

Bedrooms and secondary rooms: sunscreen or blackout rollers as suits the room, with the instruction to whoever holds the key to leave them up between visits unless they are on a motor.

Rooms with something genuinely valuable in them: low-openness sunscreen, motorised, scheduled. Anything you would be upset to see faded justifies a motor.

CHAPTER FIVE

Milkwoods, and the shade you are not allowed to remove

Plett is a green town in a way that the Overberg and the West Coast are not. There is indigenous forest inland toward The Craggs, coastal thicket along the dune line, and mature trees standing over a great many properties — and the shade they throw is a real part of your light budget.

It is also, in some cases, not yours to alter. The white milkwood, common in coastal thicket along this coast, is a protected tree in South Africa: under the national forestry legislation a protected species may not be cut, disturbed, damaged or removed without a licence.³⁴ Before anyone in a Plett garden decides the answer to a dark room is a chainsaw, that is worth knowing.

So the tree is a fixed input, and it changes the specification in three practical ways:

- **Dappled shade is not the same as shade.** A canopy moves. A room under one gets patches of full sun crossing it through the day, which is why owners often report a room being “fine, except at about half past three”. A tilting product — venetian slats, inside or out — handles a moving beam far better than a fabric that is either up or down.
- **Two windows on the same wall can need different things.** One under the canopy, one clear of it. We would rather specify them separately than average them.
- **Trees drop things onto mechanisms.** Leaf litter, berries, seed and what the birds leave behind all end up in awning cassettes and screen channels. On a wooded property, a fully-cassetted awning that closes into its own housing is worth the extra over an open-arm one, and the channels want an occasional clear-out.



The Crags — slats tilted to catch a beam that keeps moving through the canopy, in a room a fixed fabric would either black out or ignore.

One caution about that photograph, in the interests of not selling you the wrong thing: timber slats are lovely inland and in a dry room, and they are the wrong material for a bathroom, a scullery or a beachfront window that lives in humid, salty air. Aluminium in those positions, every time. It wipes down and it does not care.

CHAPTER SIX

Salt in humid air, and weather that arrives to an empty house

Plett is milder than the Cape's wind-hammered coastlines, and we will not pretend otherwise to sell you heavier hardware than you need. What it is instead is *persistently damp*, and salt plus sustained humidity is harder on metal than salt alone. A dry salt film sits on a surface; a damp one keeps working on it.

What that means in practice on the dune line at Keurboomstrand or the ocean side of the Robberg approach:

- **Powder-coated aluminium and sealed cassettes as the default outdoors** — with fixings picked for a marine atmosphere rather than for the bottom line of the quote.
- **A rinse with fresh water now and then does more than any upgrade.** A garden hose, not a pressure washer, which only drives salt further into the seals. This is another job for whoever checks the house between visits.
- **Surface marking on good stainless is cosmetic.** A brown bloom on coastal fixings wipes off and is not the fitting failing.
- **Wet rooms are coastal rooms too.** In a humid house, the bathroom and the kitchen behave like the outside of the building. Specify them accordingly.

Wind, and the fact that you are not there

The exposed addresses here — the ocean flank of the headland, the dune front at Keurboomstrand, an unprotected deck — do get real weather, and the important thing about that weather in a holiday town is that it usually arrives when the house is empty. An awning left wound out through a squall in June has nobody to bring it in.

So on any exterior product that projects, we fit an automatic wind sensor and treat it as part of the product rather than an option. And where a deck is genuinely exposed, a zip screen running in side channels is a fundamentally sturdier thing than an awning carried on two arms — it passes load into the building down its whole height. Both are good products; the exposed sites want the channels.

The plain version: outdoor shade that folds away is a convenience, not a piece of structure. Anything that cannot put itself away will, sooner or later, meet a squall while you are six hundred kilometres inland.



Keurboomstrand — the dune front, where what protects the glazing has to work on the days nobody is in the house.

CHAPTER SEVEN

December, when the house fills with people who have never seen it

Then the season arrives, and a house that has been silent since Easter is suddenly full — family, friends, and in a great many Plett properties, paying guests who have never operated any of it before.

That is a design constraint, and it is the one most often ignored at the quote. Anything that needs a knack will be broken by somebody who does not have it, usually in the first week, and then it is broken for the rest of the season because the fitter is fully booked and you have gone home.

- **Obvious beats clever.** A wall switch or a simple remote in a labelled drawer gets used correctly. A five-channel handset with scenes programmed to it does not, and it goes missing.
- **Child safety is not optional in a let house.** You do not know who is staying. Chain and cord tensioners anchored taut to the wall are standard on our installs; cordless and wand-operated options exist for bedrooms; motorisation removes the question entirely.
- **Specify for the heaviest hand you can imagine.** In a family holiday house the sliding-door blind will be yanked, the deck screen will be run up and down twenty times a day, and the awning will be left out. Robust hardware and automatic retraction are cheaper than a mid-season repair.
- **Leave a one-page note by the door.** Unglamorous, free, and it prevents most of the damage we are called out for in January.



A deck screen that will be run up and down a hundred times over a Plett December — which is the standard it has to be built to.

CHAPTER EIGHT

What we can only settle standing in the room

Everything above can be reasoned out from a map, a rainfall pattern and some experience of holiday houses. These cannot, and they are the reason a measure here is free, slow and arranged around your trip rather than around ours.

1. **Which rooms are already showing it.** Marks on a sill, a musty smell in a cupboard, a pane that runs with water on a cold morning — these tell us more about where cellular blinds and washable fabrics belong than any drawing.
2. **What the trees actually do across a day.** Canopy shade cannot be estimated from a photograph. We walk it, and where it matters we will ask you what the room does at three in the afternoon.
3. **What the wall is behind the plaster or the cladding.** Masonry, timber frame or a boarded parapet decides whether an external product can hang there safely at all — and on a beach house that answer varies wall by wall.
4. **Power, and who holds the key.** Where usable power actually reaches, how a battery-driven tube would get recharged on a high window, and who will be at the house when we install, service or return to it. In a second home that is a genuine logistical question, not an afterthought.

All four are cheap to answer on the day and expensive to discover in January — and in a town where the owner is usually somewhere else, getting them right first time is most of the job.

NEXT STEP

Book the free measure, in season or out of it

Tell us where the house is, how often anyone is in it, and which room worries you. One of our expert consultants will contact you shortly to arrange a free in-home measure with fabric and slat samples, followed by a written per-window quote.

→ **We work around your trip**

If you are only down for a few days, say so in the message and we will try to fit the measure into that window.

→ **Nothing priced sight-unseen**

Every quote follows the measure, itemised per window, with the trade-offs written down rather than glossed over.

SOURCES

Where the checkable parts come from

The climate facts and the tree law above trace to these. The damp reasoning is standard building science stated in our own words, and the product recommendations are our opinion, given free and without obligation.

1 Wikipedia — [Plettenberg Bay](#) (the town's position on the Garden Route in the Bitou municipality, and its long-standing character as a holiday and second-home destination).

2 Wikipedia — [Garden Route](#) (the region receives rainfall throughout the year rather than in a single

wet season, which is the climatic fact chapter two rests on).

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- 3 Wikipedia — [Sideroxylon inerme \(white milkwood\)](#) (a coastal thicket tree of this seaboard, listed as a protected tree in South Africa).

 - 4 Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment — [protected tree species under the National Forests Act 84 of 1998](#) (the department publishes the list of protected species; a protected tree may not be cut, disturbed, damaged or removed without a licence).

 - 5 South African Weather Service — [weather and climate information](#) (the published climate record for the southern Cape coast referred to throughout).
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Nothing on this page is a damp survey, a tree-licence opinion or a wind-load calculation for your building. Those belong to a suitably qualified professional, the relevant department and your local authority.