

# Fashioning a life from flotsam 'for family to be safe'

IT HAS taken most of Colin Abrahams's adult life to build his house.

Block my block, layer by layer of mortar, reclaimed wooden beam by beam, zinc and asbestos roofing sheet by sheet, for 30 years, he has been building.

"Every month, with the little money I make, I buy 10, maybe 20 (cinder) blocks. And I build. *Stukkie vir stukkie* (little by little).

"These beams I found floating in the harbour, or when someone's shack burned down, or wherever I can find them," he gestures up towards the roof.

His furniture, kitchen appliances, and sanitary ware are all reclaimed. Pre-owned, pre-loved, and not in the best condition.

Pride of place in his lounge, atop an old, weathered wood-and-glass display cabinet, belongs to a big flat-screen TV – the only item he has purchased new.

The battered two-level oven in his kitchen stands on two rudimentary brick-and-mortar stands; the kitchen counter reclaimed from a long-abandoned bar, the sink collected from a rubbish dump.

Bare live electricity wires provide power.

"It's not much, but it's home."

There is a mound of wet concrete in the passageway, ready to be added to the growing wall in one of the rooms.

In one of the anterooms leading off



**RESOURCEFUL:** Hangberg's Colin Abrahams has been building his house 'tide by tide' for decades. He tells of the loss of fishing quotas... and wonders what will happen when his temporary R100 a day job also dries up.

the lounge area stands a portable picnic table, on top of which are a reclaimed two-plate stove, a catering urn and an old kettle.

Across the room, reclaimed French doors, one storey above the home below where his brother lives, open to a view from the slopes of the Sentinel over the harbour, with a magnificent view of the

Hout Bay beach and Constantia Nek.

He stands looking out, deep in thought. Tears stream down his face as he recounts the labour of love that has been the building of his home over three decades.

Abrahams is of medium build and speaks in slow, measured tones, his husky voice soft and comforting.

"I wasn't always a good person. I did bad things..." he trails off, drying his eyes with a rag he picks up off a couch nearby.

"But God is good. He gave me another chance, and here I am."

Abrahams spent most of his life working the seas as a fisher.

Now, without a fishing quota and no crew jobs available, he collects flotsam which he crafts into ornaments to be sold on the roadside or at the various markets in Hout Bay.

He is currently part of an Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), but the opportunity brings little in the way of income.

"I earn just over R100 a day, but the EPWP job is only for three months. I clean up the streets, I tidy up the fire break, I keep the *slote* (gulleys and gutters of sewage and wastewater) clean. I pick up the mess. But when this is done, what must I do then?"

It's taken Abrahams, the eldest of his surviving siblings, all this time to build his home because he wanted to make sure it was solid and secure.

"I don't want my house to burn down... In winter the people's homes wash away. Other people have their shacks destroyed by the authorities. I don't want that to happen to me," he says through more tears.

"I want my family to be safe."