



# IN THE KITCHEN

with Karen Dudley and family

For Karen Dudley, food informs the family dynamic and her home is as multilayered and as delicious a delight as her colourful personality and cooking style



WORDS VICKI SLEET PHOTOGRAPHY GREG COX  
STYLING BIELLE BELLINGHAM

**THIS SPREAD, FROM LEFT**

Karen Dudley is the epitome of a magpie – with her penchant for vintage crockery and collectables, all the family's meals are served on mismatched china; Karen at work in her Woodstock kitchen. The mounted wall panel features a print entitled 'Floating Feather' by Dutch artist Melchior d'Hondecoeter (rijksmuseum.nl). The kitchen's black marble countertop and splashback are a suitably dramatic backdrop for the Dudleys' eye-catching cooking space.

**W**hen it comes to food and cooking, I learned from my mother how to make “nice” with what we

feed the people we love and care about,’ says Karen Dudley, author, cook and creator of The Kitchen, the much-loved Woodstock dining destination that she opened in Cape Town in 2009. ‘We were the kind of family who would be sitting at the kitchen table in the middle of the night, eating her perfectly thin French crêpes, if repairs after an argument needed to be made. Delicious food has always been my love language,’ she says.

Karen lives in Woodstock with her husband David and their children Ben (16) and Maggie (13). Just a few roads away is The Kitchen, her charming hub of homemade food and happiness, so loved by Capetonian foodies and disciples of her particular brand of fresh, seasonal fare. Of their latest renovation, she explains, ‘We’d renovated our home before, not long after we bought it in 2001, but the children are bigger now and we wanted to create more space for them and for us as a family too. They needed their own rooms because they’d been sharing since they were little and I really wanted a new kitchen. After we’d moved my catering business to The Kitchen, our home kitchen looked like something after a Spanish conquest,’ laughs Karen.

While the book- and art-lined living and dining rooms were perfectly functional for the family, the kitchen was not. ‘I would feel quite lonely in the kitchen while everyone did their own thing,’ says Karen. As a result, the new changes consisted of lopping off the back of the Victorian house and expanding its footprint slightly so that the kitchen now has an extension that welcomes the outside in. The result is pretty remarkable.

‘We couldn’t believe how much light and what a gorgeous view the new steel and glass wall let in; the kids have new bedrooms and a swanky shared shower room, we have two family work stations

and, most importantly, I have a kitchen that I absolutely love. This house has lived so many lives and it’s been the making of us.’

The couple also expanded and upgraded their own en suite bathroom and built a dressing room so Karen could say goodbye to their formerly bulging wardrobes – she is, after all, as stylish and well dressed as she is creative.

Much as many of Karen’s childhood seminal moments happened at the kitchen table, so the family’s expanded kitchen at home, with its massive central island, is an undoubted hive of conversation, cooking and caring. ‘I’m acutely aware how precious our time together is, in between work, school, homework and extra murals, and so eating together has become an absolutely critical thing for us as a family,’ says Karen.

She and David were at pains to design a kitchen that was seriously functional – the island conceals myriad perfectly proportioned drawers for everything, from all the paraphernalia needed to make the teens’ toast, to Karen’s treasured knives and precious vintage spice and herb jars. The new and improved kitchen has space for friends and family to eat at the island (‘people just seem to naturally gravitate here’), there’s plenty of room for prepping food for their laid-back midweek feasts, and David custom-made shelves for Karen’s incredible collection of vintage crockery and china, sourced from dusty vintage stores and markets aplenty.

When it comes to eating together, easy suppers are the dining style du jour for the family. ‘I very rarely plan a meal – I may spot a nice piece of fish at the fish shop down the road, or maybe Balmoral Supermarket on Woodstock Main Road has some fresh veggies that have just arrived... I’m all about what’s simple, what’s easy and what flavours will be super delicious together,’ says Karen, who admits to a current penchant for Asian flavours as an addition to her unique signature of Levantine-meets-Cape foodie style.

If ever was a person who embodied the notion that food is love, Karen Dudley is it, and love certainly abounds in her home. **O** [karendudley.co.za](http://karendudley.co.za)

**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
Karen’s eye for turning the everyday into something extraordinary is legendary; case in point are the oystercatcher baskets that have been refashioned into striking pendants above the kitchen island. ‘We deliberately opted not to have a prep bowl and tap so that the island could double as an entertaining and eating spot, and so far it’s worked brilliantly,’ says Karen.





**'Delicious food has always  
been my love language'  
– Karen**

**THIS PAGE, FROM TOP**  
Karen has a honed eye for antique glassware too; the vagaries of work, school, and life in general have made eating together as a family absolutely critical, she says.

**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
Once their most recent renovation was completed, her husband David built an over-door cabinet to be used as a display and storage unit in the dining area - and Karen chose a perfect pink to contrast with the darker-hued walls.





**THIS PAGE, FROM TOP**  
The living room is a treasure trove of vintage finds that embrace both comfort and quaintness; the mosaic floor was created using original Victorian encaustic tiles, which Karen rescued from a neighbouring building site. David built a frame in the exact dimensions of the space and together the family pieced together a workable mosaic floor covering. **OPPOSITE PAGE**  
It's clear that Ben has inherited his mom's eye for colour and curation.



**David custom-made shelves for the incredible collection of vintage crockery and china, sourced from dusty vintage stores and markets**





**THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP**  
 The main bedroom is a moody space dressed in suitably contrasting jewel tones. The fabric cushions were made from '60s fabric that she found at a vintage fair in Stellenbosch and the beautiful paintings on either side of the bed are by Michael Metelercamp; Karen found the marble-topped vanity at The Strand Trading Post (021-853-6619) in Somerset West; this original plaque featuring Saint Anthony is one of Karen's favourite elements: 'Saint Anthony is the saint of lost things and good husbands and I kind of feel that he watches over our family,' she says.  
**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
 The gallery wall of artworks is an excellent reflection of Karen's eye for colour, detail and display, and a brilliant solution for the many artworks she has not been able to say no to. The velvet-covered chaise was picked up on a buying trip with a friend to the Platteland.



'This house has lived so many lives and it's been the making of us'





**THIS PAGE**  
Karen at home with her husband David and children Ben and Maggie. The family's home, with its original gable, was built in 1896 as an officers' residence for the British Army (the major's house can be seen from the back garden). Though they have undertaken two separate renovations, respecting the Victorian vernacular was an important factor in their upgrades.



**PURE AND SIMPLE** *'I love to turn simple ingredients that are easily available into seriously delicious meals - that's how The Kitchen came about, and it's how I keep cooking for our family every night - easy but delicious works every time!'* - Karen



## RECIPE

### **GRILLED CHICKEN WITH CHIMICHURRI**

*For the chimichurri:*  
40g fresh coriander, stalks removed  
40g Italian parsley, stalks removed  
1/2 chilli, chopped  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
2 T red-wine vinegar  
1/2 cup olive oil

Blitz the first five ingredients in your food processor, and slowly add the olive oil while processing.

*For the chicken:*  
4 deboned, chicken breasts, skin on  
1/2 cup lemon juice  
4 T olive oil  
1 1/2 t ching-ching seasoning (paprika, cumin, salt, white pepper; available at The Kitchen) or favourite rub of your choice  
1/2 cup chimichurri

Coat the chicken breasts with olive oil. Drizzle the lemon juice over. Season generously with the ching-ching.

Lay in a baking tray or oven-proof dish and bake at 180°C for 25 minutes. Allow the chicken to rest for 10 minutes or more. Slice long flat slices so that you can fan the breasts out.

Drizzle generously with the chimichurri. Pour over any juices from the baking tray, and serve!

**SERVES 4**