

Behold the finest house in the township

Built by Moses Stephen's own hands

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Tiny, multi-coloured RDP houses line the streets of Mfuleni. In between are structures that have been cobbled together with bits of corrugated iron and wood.

They all look strikingly similar until you come to No 5 Ceshemba Street.

The simple RDP house is still there, but it's a now a double garage, and built on to it is probably the finest house in Mfuleni.

It was built by Moses Stevens who did everything, apart from the electrical work, with his own hands and doesn't owe a cent on it.

Stevens and his wife Beatrice got the house in 2001 but never moved in.

"It was too small," he says. "So we stayed in a shack on the property and I used it to store my building materials."

The 45-year-old father is self-taught after being turned away from a technical college in Athlone because they didn't have permission in those days to teach African people.

He got a job with a carpenter building houses in Mitchell's Plain and soon picked up an array of skills.

"I'd go to the tiler or the plasterer during my lunch break and offer to help. That's how I learnt. Now I can do everything except the electrical work."

The Mfuleni house took shape over six months. It has an open plan tiled lounge with wooden ceiling, two bedrooms with built-in cupboards, a kitchen, bathroom, porch and a carport.

Steven's wife is one of his biggest fans.

"Everything he touches turns to gold."

Neighbour Janette Tapile said the house was the talk of the neighbourhood. "Everyone was impressed that he did everything himself."

At times Stevens battled to find the money for a bag of cement.

"Occasionally we couldn't put food on the table. We lived hand to mouth, but kept going."

He wasn't working at the time but would do freelance construction jobs.

Stevens, who now works as an operations manager for a labour broker, is a registered contractor and hopes that his dream home will lead to opportunities in the building industry. He has applied for numerous government tenders over the years but has never been granted one.

"It is frustrating. The government it encourages us to get registered but now we sit with our papers and nothing to show for it."

Stevens said the tenders always seemed to be granted to the same people.

"But I know I could contribute. I've got hands; I've got brains, but just no opportunity."

He and his wife and nine year-old son Caleb are living in Gugulethu looking after Steven's ailing father, but can't wait to return home. And Stevens confesses that he has a design "bigger and even better" in his head.

"I just need to find the right plot," he says.