



# African Painted Houses: Basotho Dwellings of Southern Africa

*Gary N. Van Wyk*

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## **African Painted Houses: Basotho Dwellings of Southern Africa** Gary N. Van Wyk

This New York Times award-winning book explores the mural paintings that Basotho women apply to their homes. It includes more than 100 color photographs by the author, which constituted an acclaimed exhibition presented in New York, Paris, and other venues. The text explains the cultural and historical context of Basotho murals, including chapters on male and female initiation that show how body arts are linked to house decoration. Basotho architecture and murals are imbued with fertility symbolism that links women, the earth, and plant forms. The mandala-like geometric patterns are prayers in paint, addressed to the ancestors and appealing for rain. When the renewing rain comes, it washes away the murals designs, which are replaced or rejuvenated the following year. The art form is part of the cycle of life. The patterns captured in the photographs have inspired mural designs throughout America, in public projects ranging from Times Square to Arizona. The book is based on the author's dissertation and draws on several years' fieldwork in the Free State of South Africa and in Lesotho, for which he received a Rockefeller Award.

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