

Reading the light in *Houghton*

The ridge, a hundred-year canopy that disappears every winter, and three eras of window in the same house. What that combination actually does to a room — and what we would specify because of it.

■ HOUGHTON ESTATE & THE RIDGE SUBURBS ■ WRITTEN AUGUST 2026
■ ABOUT NINE MINUTES ■ SOURCES LISTED AT THE FOOT



THE WEST WALL, FOUR O'CLOCK

External aluminium venetians in side guides, hung flat against the facade. On this elevation the sun is low enough that stopping it outside the glass is the only move that changes the room temperature.

Why Houghton is its own problem

Most suburbs hand you one shading problem. Houghton hands you three at once. Upper Houghton sits on the elevated southern ridge — long views, long exposure, and no neighbouring roofline conveniently parked in front of your western glass. The window stock runs from Arts and Crafts in 1919 through the Art Deco blocks of flats, Stern House in 1935 and Noordhoek in 1938, so a single renovated house can carry timber sashes, steel casements and a wall of new sliding glass, each wanting a different fixing and a different measure. And then there are the trees, which catch people out because they behave in exactly the opposite way to how they look.

HOUGHTON, IN FIGURES

2010

Upper Houghton declared a national heritage area.

1919

Munro Drive completed, opening Lower Houghton for development.

60 years

The age at which a structure comes under heritage permit control.

TWO

The light here, in numbers

Johannesburg sits at 26.2° south. At the December solstice the midday sun climbs to roughly **87 degrees** — near enough vertical that a north window is largely shaded by its own wall and any decent eave. At the June solstice it tops out at about **40 degrees** and reaches a long way into the room.

That gap is the basis of highveld shading: **keep the summer sun out, let the winter sun in** — and because they arrive at such different angles, on the north

side you can have both.

Two things complicate it. In midsummer the sun rises well south of due east and sets well south of due west, so the “shady south side” collects a slab of raking sun early and late in December, then none at all mid-year. And the sun that does the damage on a west wall arrives late, low, and walks straight under an eave.

The canopy is a seasonal blind, fitted backwards

Houghton's jacarandas are deciduous: they drop their leaves in winter or early spring and flower on nearly bare branches from about mid-October, peaking mid-November. So the canopy is thickest in high summer, when you want shade, and gone by June, when you want sun. In principle, a perfectly designed shading device.

In practice, not quite: **the trees shade from above and the afternoon sun arrives from the side**. After about four o'clock the sun drops below the canopy and hits west glass horizontally, through a screen of trunks. Homeowners tell us a room “is shaded by the trees” — and it is, for six hours a day, right up until the two that make it unbearable.

Storms, hail and UV

Rain here is a summer business: around 700 mm a year, October to March, delivered as afternoon thunderstorms. Hail is not rare either — an observer network recorded an average of **68.5 hail days a year** across the Transvaal highveld, more than northern Italy, Europe's most hail-exposed region, concentrated from mid-November to February with an afternoon peak. That is why we sensor exterior awnings rather than trusting somebody to be home.

Winter is the mirror image: dry, with lows near 4 °C and light frost possible. And at 1,753 metres the clear-sky summer UV index runs around 11 to 13 — hard on fabrics and finishes as well as people.



FOUR O'CLOCK, WEST

A sunscreen mesh keeps the outlook legible while knocking the glare down. It is a glare and view product, though — not the strongest answer to heat.

THREE

Elevation by elevation

First, work out which way the room faces. Everything below follows from that one fact, and it is the first question we ask on any measure.

N

North — the generous one

Summer sun is almost overhead, so an eave already does much of the work; winter sun comes deep into the room at 40°, and you want it. Specify something *adjustable* rather than heavy — slats that tilt, or a blind that lifts clear in June.

W

West — the hard one

Low, late, hot, and arriving under every fixed overhang you own. The elevation where the canopy stops helping, and where exterior shading earns its money — stop the energy before it touches the glass.

E

S

East — the early one

The same low geometry as the west, at a gentler hour. A sleep problem more than a heat one: it wakes bedrooms in November long before anybody intended to be awake.

South — the quiet one

No direct sun for most of the year, then a raking slice early and late in midsummer, because the sun rises and sets south of the east–west line. A soft-glare, privacy and winter-cold elevation, not a heat one.

One Houghton wrinkle: on the deeper stands **privacy is about the street and the wall, not the neighbour's sightline** — which frees up an open-weave mesh where tighter suburbs would force solid fabric.



OLD SASH, NEW TILT

Original sashes are rarely square. Blinds here are made to the measured frame, not to a catalogue size — which is why a photograph is never enough.

What we'd specify, and why

Reasoning, not a menu. Each of these beats something else on a particular elevation, and loses to something else somewhere. Both halves are here.

01 External venetian blinds — the hard west elevation

We would choose these over an interior blackout roller on a west window, because they stop the sun outside the glass. An interior blind blocks the light, but the pane still absorbs the heat and radiates it inward. Tilting slats keep some view, too.

THE HONEST OTHER SIDE

A mechanism living outdoors, on a facade that may be heritage-controlled, and dearer than an interior blind. Where nothing may be fixed outside, a sunscreen roller is the sensible second best — it saves the glare, not the heat.

[Add to my free measure](#)

[Price it in the schedule](#)

02 Roller shutters — west wings and rooms that sleep

Where a room does not need daylight, rigid aluminium slats close the whole opening from outside: sun, heat and glare stopped at the sill, real blackout, and an insulating layer on a cold July night. These are shading shutters, not security-rated shutters — a different product, quoted on request.

THE HONEST OTHER SIDE

A full stop rather than a dimmer: down means the window is gone. The headbox and side channels need somewhere to live — on a period facade, a design decision.

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[Read the product page](#)

03 Roller blinds — sunscreen mesh, or blackout

One smooth sheet of fabric on a tube; the whole decision is which fabric. Open-weave sunscreen keeps the garden and the tree line visible while cutting the glare. Blockout gives a solid face, which is what answers a low November sunrise on an east bedroom — closed slats still leak light where the sun arrives almost horizontally.

THE HONEST OTHER SIDE

A mesh reverses after dark: once the light is inside, people see in better than you see out. A blackout fitted inside the reveal always leaves a thin light gap at each edge; fitted over the reveal it is darker, but sits proud of an original architrave.

[Add sunscreen to my measure](#)[Add blackout to my measure](#)

04 Timber & aluminium venetian blinds — sashes and studies

Where light needs steering rather than stopping, slats win: tilt for daylight with the glare taken out, close for privacy without dropping the blind. Timber suits a panelled study or an original sash; aluminium goes wherever there is steam or damp.

THE HONEST OTHER SIDE

More surfaces to dust than a roller, and a very wide opening needs an intermediate support or a split into two blinds — a call made better with the window in front of you.

[Add to my free measure](#)[Read the product page](#)

05 Cellular & honeycomb blinds — steel casements and cold rooms

Honeycomb cells hold a layer of still air against the glass. On the single-glazed steel casements common in Houghton's Art Deco and Modernist stock, that is the most useful thing you can hang in a winter room — dry highveld nights lose heat straight through old glass.

THE HONEST OTHER SIDE

An insulation and light-diffusion product, not a heat-rejection one. On a blazing west window it stays well behind exterior shading, because by then the heat is already inside the glass.

[Add to my free measure](#)[Price it in the schedule](#)

06 Folding-arm awnings — the outside room

The terrace is where a Houghton house is actually used in summer, and an awning shades the paving and the glass behind it at once. Because highveld storms arrive in the

afternoon — the hours an awning is out — we specify wind sensors so it retracts on its own.

THE HONEST OTHER SIDE

A fabric structure in a garden with hail forecast from November to February. It must retract, and an old plastered wall may want a structural look before it takes the load.

[Add to my free measure](#)

[Price it in the schedule](#)

07 Motorisation & automation — the glass you cannot reach

On a double-volume stairwell, a wide slider or anything exterior, motorisation stops being a luxury. A sun sensor on the west drops the blind at the hour that matters whether anyone is home or not; a wind sensor outdoors saves the awning. It also takes every cord out of a nursery.

THE HONEST OTHER SIDE

Motors need power at the head of the window, and routing cable through a heritage wall is a real conversation. Battery options avoid the chasing but must be recharged — a habit, not a technical fix.

[Add to my free measure](#)

[Read the product page](#)



STOPPED AT THE SILL

A roller shutter closes the opening from outside. Shading, heat and glare control — not a security-rated product.

THE MARKED-UP VERSION

Want this study read against your own rooms?

Tell us which rooms are the problem and roughly how many windows there are, and we'll send back a version of this study marked up for your elevations — what we'd put where, and why — by the next working day. It's free, and it commits you to nothing.

No visit involved. If you'd rather just have someone come and look, the free measure is further down.

FIVE

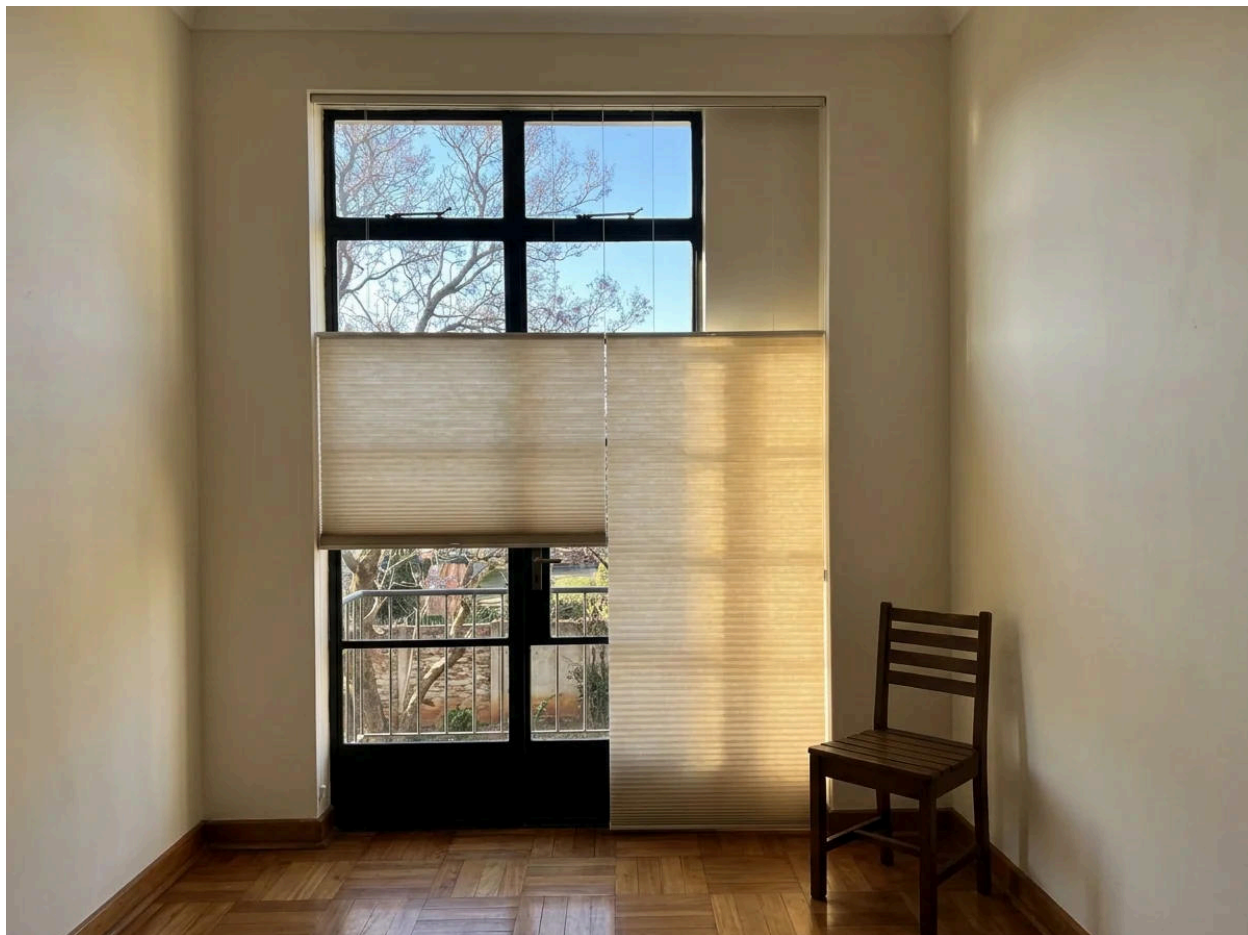
Heritage, permits and the older stock

Upper Houghton was declared a national heritage area in 2010, and Munro Drive carries a designation of its own. That matters at the window, practically.

Under the National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999), **a structure older than 60 years may not simply be altered** — a permit from the provincial heritage resources authority comes first. Since Houghton's stock runs from 1919 through the 1940s, a large share of its houses and Art Deco blocks sit inside that rule.

So: **anything fitted inside the reveal is usually the least contentious route**, and anything fixed to the outside face of a controlled building is a conversation to have before you order, not after. In the Art Deco blocks a body corporate often has its own view on what may appear on a street elevation.

We are not the heritage authority and won't speak for it. What we will do is say plainly which options touch the exterior, and supply the documentation a committee or body corporate typically asks to see.



WINTER, INSIDE THE GLASS

Single-glazed steel casements lose heat fast on a dry highveld night. Honeycomb cells hold a layer of still air against the pane.

SIX

What we'd still need to check on site

All of that is true of Houghton generally. None of it becomes a specification for your house from a desk. Five things decide the answer, and all five need somebody standing in the room.

1

The reveal, and whether the frame is square. Old sashes and steel casements rarely are. Reveal depth decides whether a blind sits inside the opening or is face-fixed over it — which changes the look, the light gap and the cost.

2

What the wall is made of. An exterior system must fix into something that will hold it for twenty years. Rendered stone, 1930s cavity brick and modern infill behave differently, and what is behind the plaster never shows in a photograph.

3

The real exposure at that window. Canopy density varies stand by stand, and a ridge-top west wall catches wind a sheltered Lower Houghton garden never sees — which decides whether an awning belongs there at all.

4

Where the power is. Motorised anything needs a supply at the head of the window. On a period building, whether a wall can be chased — and where the cable runs if not — separates a neat installation from a compromise.

5

What is already there. Burglar bars, security gates, old pelmets and tracks, casement handles that swing into the path of a blind. These quietly change the product choice, and only show up in person.

That visit is free, comes with samples you judge in your own light, and ends with a written quote per window.

TWO WAYS FORWARD

Take the expert, or take the numbers first.

THE ONE WE'D RECOMMEND

Book your free expert measure

A consultant comes to the house, measures every opening properly, and works through the rooms against the light they actually have. A written quote per window follows, and nothing is owed either way.

-
- Free in-home measure, samples brought to you

- A written per-window quote, itemised
- The section-six questions, answered on the spot
- No showroom trip, no obligation

Book the free measure →

OR, IF YOU'D RATHER NOT HAVE ANYONE ROUND YET

Send your own rough sizes

Want a ballpark first? Pop in rough sizes below and we'll send a budget range by the next working day. Not sure how to measure? Leave it — our consultant measures for free, and you'll get exact per-window pricing from that.

Print the table, walk the house with a tape, and type it in afterwards. A rough guide, not a quote.

ROUGH SIZES

Your window schedule

Room by room, in millimetres, as close as you can get. Anything you're unsure of, leave blank — nobody will hold you to a number.

ROOM WIDTH (MM) DROP (MM) INSIDE OR OUTSIDE THE REVEAL PRODUCT

e.g	1800	2100	Inside the reveal ▼	Not ▼
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0 windows so far

Nothing is uploaded and nothing is sent anywhere else — these sizes simply travel with your enquiry on the next page, where you add your name and number. If photographs would help, a consultant will ask you for them by reply.

Take these sizes to the enquiry →

LAST CALL, AND THEN WE'LL
LEAVE YOU ALONE

Or have the study marked up for your house

Same as above: name the rooms that are the problem, and we'll send back this study annotated for your own elevations by the next working day. Reading material, not a sales visit.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Sources

Every climate, sun-path and heritage figure above is drawn from the following. Where sources disagreed — as they do on South Africa's revised building-energy zone numbering — we have left the claim out rather than pick a side.

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2. Where the sun rises and sets at the solstices: [Stanford Solar Center — Where does the Sun rise and set?](#)
3. Orientation and shading behaviour of north versus east and west openings in the southern hemisphere: [YourHome \(Australian Government\) — Shading](#)
4. North-facing winter sun in South African passive design: [Green Building Africa — Passive solar design](#)

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5. Johannesburg rainfall, seasonality and winter dryness: [Climates to Travel — Johannesburg climate](#)
 6. Johannesburg temperature averages and Köppen classification: [Climate-Data.org — Johannesburg](#)
 7. Hail-day frequency, seasonality and afternoon peak over the highveld: [Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences — Characteristics of hail hazard in South Africa](#)
 8. Highveld thunderstorm season: [Flightline Weekly — Highveld thunderstorms](#)
 9. Johannesburg altitude and summer UV index range: [Nomad Season — Johannesburg UV index](#)
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 13. Johannesburg heritage register precincts, covering Upper and Lower Houghton: [Johannesburg Inner City Partnership — Heritage Register](#)
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