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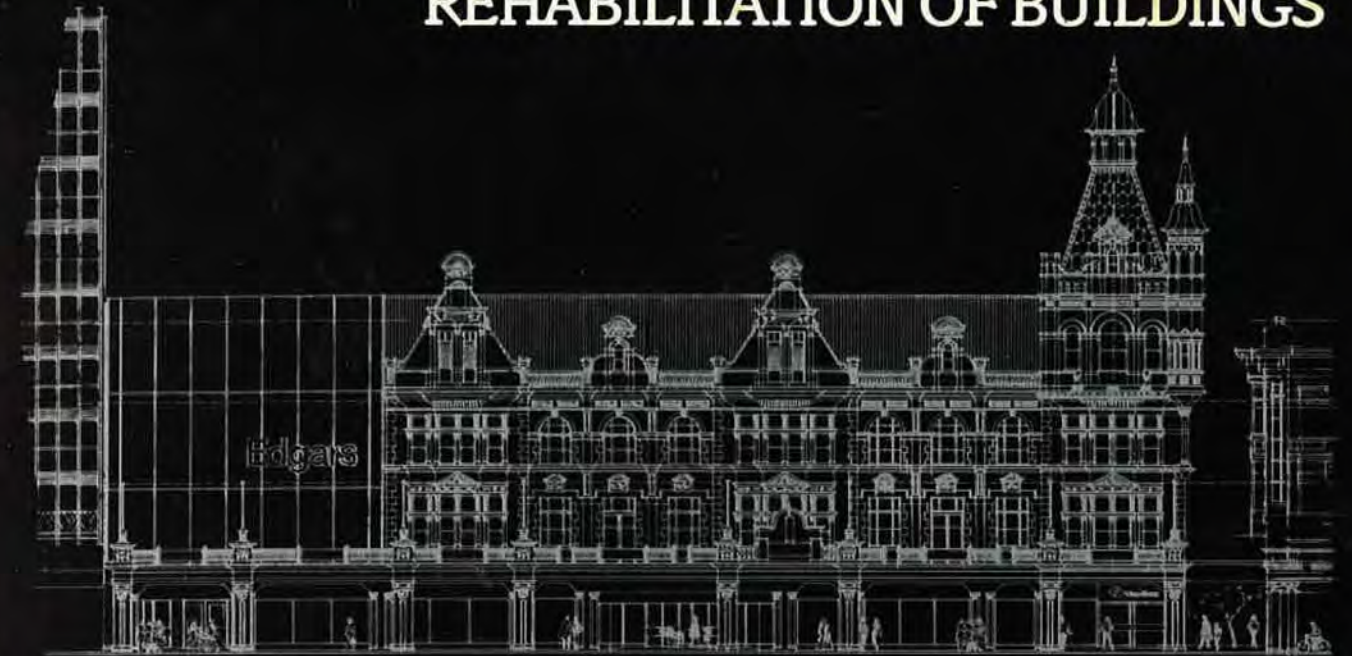
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REHABILITATION OF BUILDINGS



Journal
of the Natal
Provincial
Institute of
Architects

3-1983

NIPRA

Compiled and edited by Dr. Walter Peters for the Natal Provincial Institute of Architects. P.O. Box 777, Durban 4000, Telephone 67345
Design and production: Monica Göbel

NPIA Journal is distributed free of charge to all members of the Natal Provincial Institute of Architects and to all registered architectural practices in the Republic of South Africa. In addition copies are sent to public bodies, private corporations and certain members of the public as a means of increasing public awareness in contemporary architectural concerns in Natal. The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by contributors to this journal.

Cover: (top to bottom) Greenacres West Street facade; Old Durban Railway Station; Playhouse/Princes Theatre.

Editorial

Durban is becoming a better place. The need for urban design is being recognised, arcades are being refurbished, pedestrians are to be given advantage over motorists, and a list of historically and architecturally worthy buildings and places is being prepared.

The growing involvement in conservation has shown that Durban is learning to be more restrained with demolitions and that preservation is not the only alternative to re-development. Durban has discovered the third possibility: it is looking for new uses for redundant buildings that are not necessary of national importance, but essential to the character of Durban and it is such buildings, currently being rehabilitated, that form the basis for this issue.

Rehabilitation of a building involves the preservation of its spirit and the retention of its best features, while accommodating a contemporary use. Whilst this activity may often be more economical than demolition and re-building, it involves considerable architectural challenge.

The architect has to try to think like the original architect might have done, using the existing space with maximum efficiency for modern needs, yet re-creating an environment of delight. Discreet ways of introducing modern air conditioning, fire protection and other services must be found and new materials which harmonise with the old must be selected. But, if the challenges are demanding, equally worthwhile are the rewards. Which architect would dare design a building with as elaborate a facade as any of the three illustrated in this issue? Eclecticism is no longer disparaged but modern architecture has yet to evolve a vocabulary with such detailed delight as that which the Victorians produced so effortlessly.

Old buildings remind us of the unique history of each place. They lend to each place a sense of distinct identity in time and space and when important buildings become redundant, besides the frequent financial advantages, rehabilitation gives the presence a sense of continuity and must ultimately add to the City's aesthetic and economic vitality. The examples herein illustrated serve as encouragement and hope for Durban's future.

Incentives for Rehabilitation

We often hear of *economic recovery* in South Africa. It may therefore be pertinent to reflect on American interpretations of this term.

The *US Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981* argues that investments in new buildings neither promote economic recovery, nor add much to capital formation or productivity if they simply replace existing buildings. Hence, in order to revitalise economic prospects the Act provides significant tax incentives for the rehabilitation of older buildings: a 10 or 25% Investment tax Credit; a 5-Year Amortization and an Accelerated Depreciation. According to the *AIA Journal* of last November, these incentives have spurred interest in the rehabilitation of older buildings across the US.

In order to qualify, buildings must be income producing; be listed in the *National Register for Historic Places* and be substantially rehabilitated, inter alia, 75% of the external walls must remain extant – hence Greenacres would not qualify. Rehabilitation is not necessary cheap, but if it makes economic sense, and if our cities are to retain their images of the past, surely allowances for rehabilitation could also be legislated for in South Africa. This procedure would not only serve the property owner but could well be deemed in addition to aid the national economy.

Provincial Theatres Complex – Natal Playhouse

Architects: Small, Pettit & Robson

Project Architect: *Gordon Small*

History

Work on the restaurant section commenced in 1931/32. The owners, Messrs. African Theatres Ltd. had decided to spare no expense in making this the finest theatre in South Africa. After a short spell the project was however abandoned and Mr P. Rogers Cook, Company Architect, travelled to England and America to study the latest theatre plans with the object of embarking on a much more elaborate scheme than at first contemplated.

A further delay occurred after the completion of the front containing the restaurant. Problems were encountered in the housing of the ventilation plant which was to serve the whole of the complex including the Princes and the four storey broadcasting studio and office block, which was proposed where Medwood Court now stands. The acoustics and ventilation of the recently completed Johannesburg Colosseum had first to be put to the trial before similar methods could be applied in Durban. Once the below water table basement was complete, the largest plant in the Southern Hemisphere to supply *cool and dehumidified* air could be installed and the theatre built in the same style as the restaurant giving Durban its "all-Elizabethan playhouse".

Although *not fashionable* at the time, *Elizabethan architecture* was considered appropriate for playhouses. The associated architect Mr. A. Wolsey Spicer had an *expert knowledge* of period architecture and *designed the restaurant section to give the impression of open air, as a replica of an Elizabethan courtyard surrounded by houses of the period with an illusion of a starlit sky and sunset and dawn effects.*

The Princes which had opened on 26 July 1926 (with Charlie Chaplin in *The Gold Rush*) was to be remodelled in the 17th Century French style and refurbished with a full sized stage, whilst the broadcasting studios were to conform to the standards of the BBC in London. These plans were never carried out.

Supervising architects were Messrs. Cowen, Powers and Ellis. The restaurant opened on 6 July 1934, the Cinema on 7 June 1935.

References: *Architect Building and Engineer* August 1931, June 1933, March and July 1934.

The Preservation Battle

In December 1976 and 50 year ground lease expired. The Playhouse theatre had become redundant in terms of modern sizes and a renewal of the lease was not considered.

The central siting of the building, its considerable architectural merit and the economic advantages in rehabilitating an old building were the main factors in the Natal Provincial Administration acquiring the Playhouse.

The Playhouse site being insufficiently large for a full theatre complex, the still functioning Princes, later known as the Colosseum, Medwood Court

and a portion of the Albany Parking Garage were also acquired.

The Architectural Challenge

Guiding all rehabilitation decisions, was the fundamental desire to preserve as much of the original fabric as possible. This meant not only the physical substance, but essentially the spirit of the building.

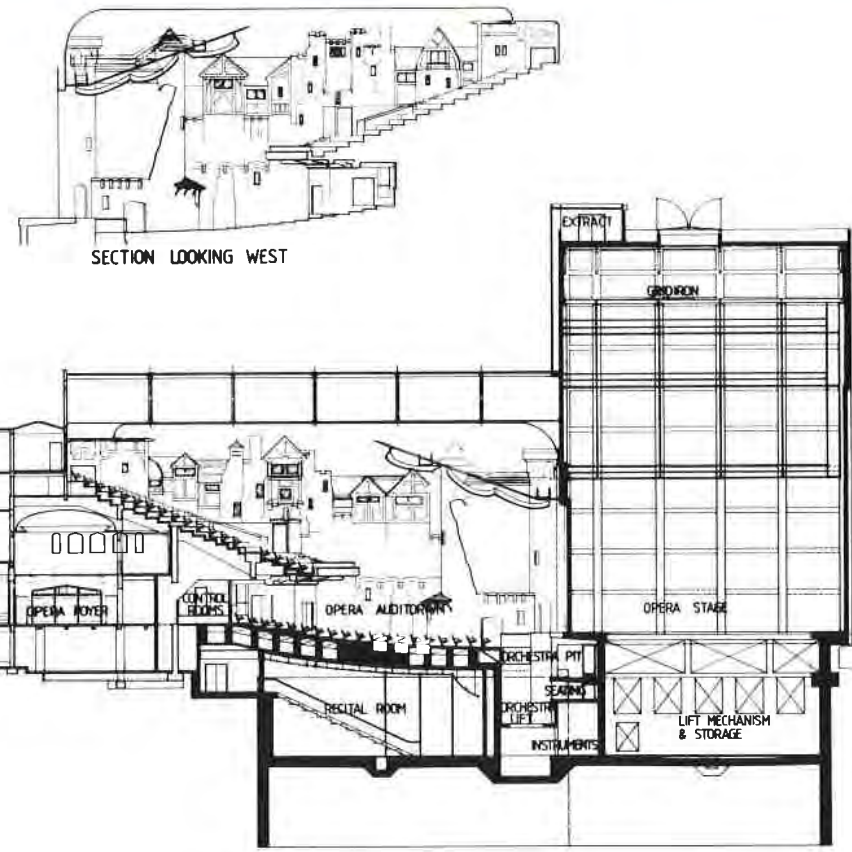
The Playhouse theatre will become the opera auditorium seating some 1300, and the circle of the Princes will become the drama theatre seating 500. The Playhouse Proscenium Area will be rebuilt to add the new stage and fly tower, in the case of the Princes and stalls area has given way to Bar and Foyer space, workshops etc. the stage being elevated to first floor level. The former entrance to the Playhouse (off Smith Street) is to become a Grand Foyer for productions and exhibitions, the restaurant to function as originally on the upper floor, the double volume linking both spaces. The shops under the Princes have been removed allowing for a porte-cochère and main entrance to the whole complex. The foyers which stretch from Acutt Street to Albany Grove give access to both auditoria.

In addition to the Opera and Drama Theatres and the Grand Foyer, there is a basement Rehearsal/Recital Room for music seating 300 and an attic Studio Theatre seating 150 - 200, and besides the restaurant there is a large Reception Room on the first floor of the old Princes over the porte-cochère.

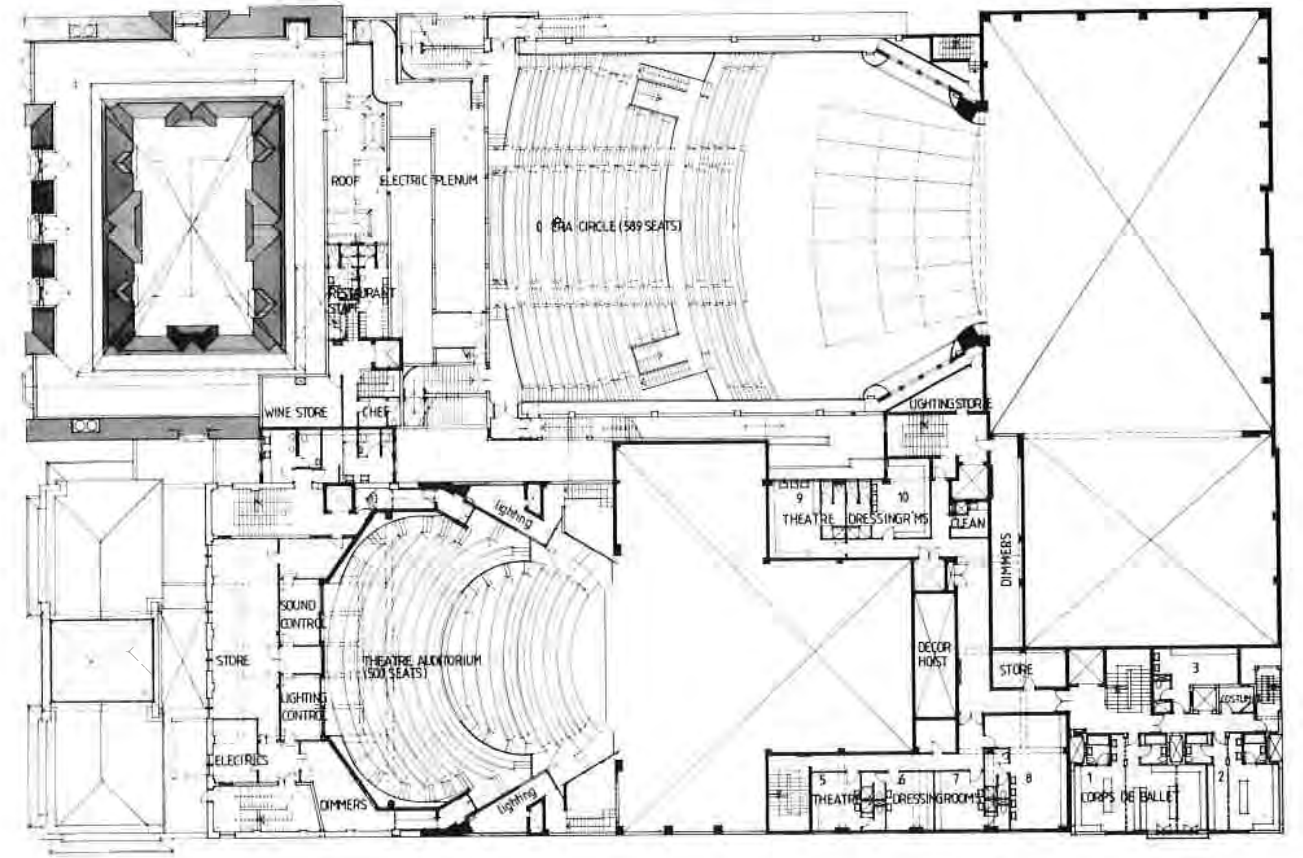
Externally, additional work will be treated as neutrally as possible so that the original buildings may continue to serve as the foci of the complex. The illusionistic ceiling of stars is to be reinstated in the Playhouse, the interior of the Princes, being infill, is to be furnished in a contemporary idiom.

Structurally there were few problems regarding the existing buildings although the roof trusses had to be strengthened due to additional loads being imposed. However, the deep basement which had to be provided to accommodate the stage machinery and the rehearsal room under the Playhouse Auditorium posed greater structural and waterproofing problems as their floors are two metres below mean sea level. The solution adopted by the Engineers was to construct diaphragm walls using the Bentonite method. These walls are some 14 metres deep and provide an impervious "dam" around the basements and to a considerable depth below them. The floors of the basements are very thick monolithic slabs restrained against upward pressure by tension piles.

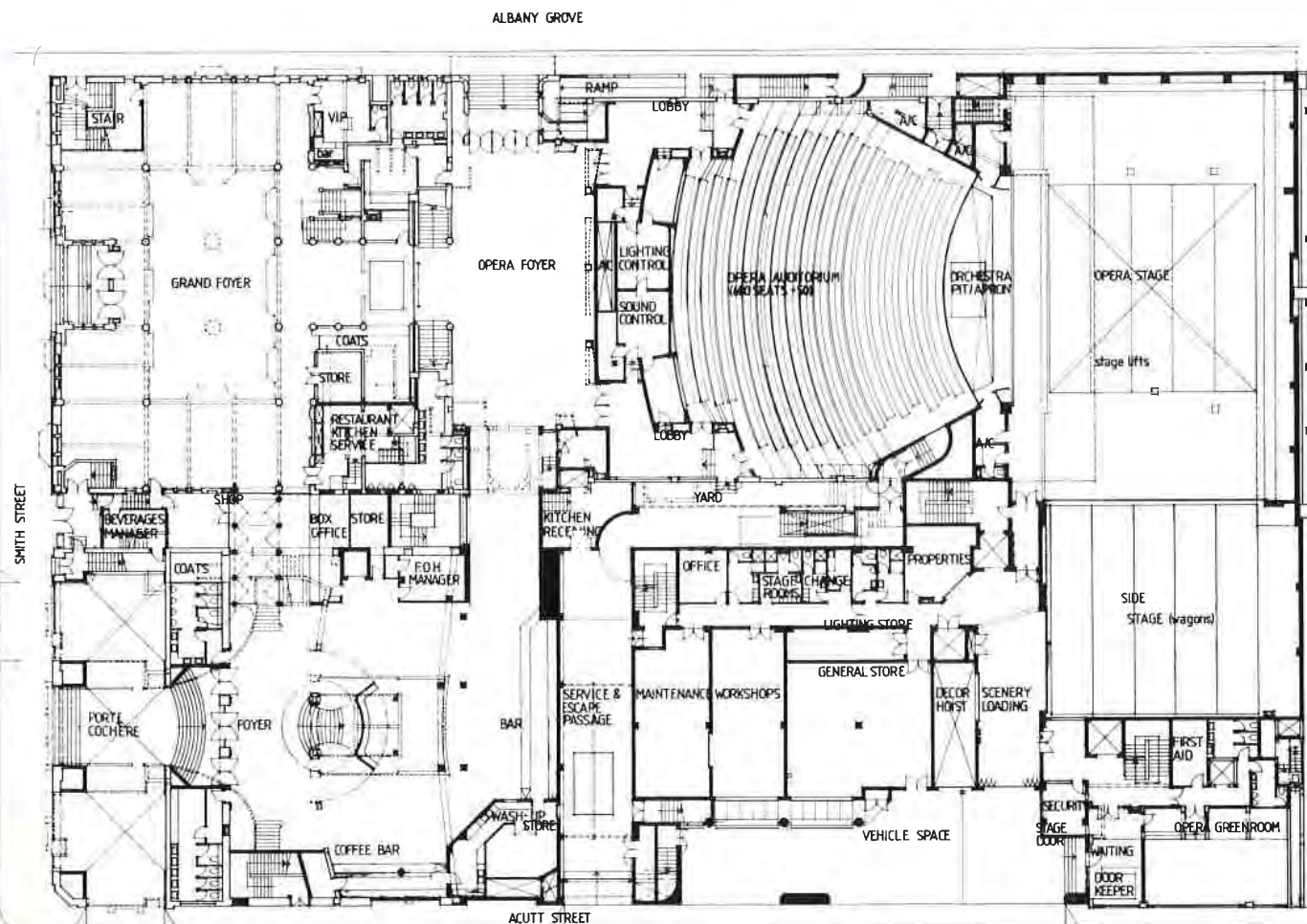
The complex is to have a phased opening – the Restaurant and Grand Foyer in October 1984, the Drama Theatre in October 1985 and the Opera in December 1985. The anticipated final cost remains, despite escalations, a more than valid reason for rehabilitation rather than building from scratch.



Longitudinal section

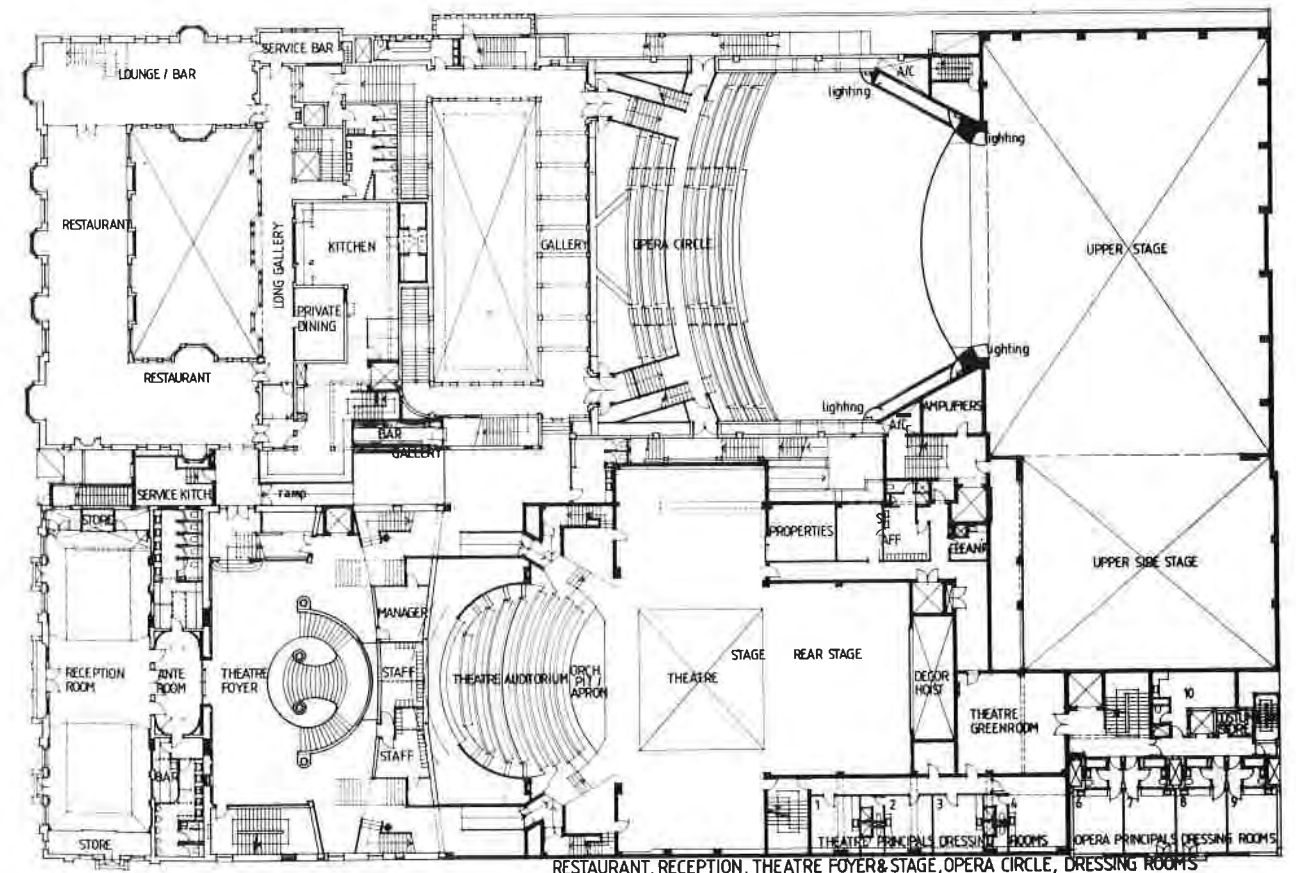


First floor



Ground floor

MAIN FOYERS, BAR, OPERA AUDITORIUM AND STAGE, SERVICE SPACES



Second floor

RESTAURANT, RECEPTION, THEATRE FOYER & STAGE, OPERA CIRCLE, DRESSING ROOMS

Greenacres

Architects: Selsick Kinnear Mitchell in association with Ben Hoffenberg

Project Architect: *Willy Malfeyt*

History

The growth of Harvey Greenacre and Co. and the development of the City of Durban have been synonymous since the 1860's. T. Morgan Harvey arrived in Natal in 1850, Benjamin W. Greenacre in 1856, both becoming employed in a West Street drapery store. In 1869 the partnership of *Harvey, Greenacre, London & Natal* was declared, Harvey returning to London as partner responsible for the buying of goods for the Durban store.

The Greenacre facade of red brick, stone dressings, mouldings and ornamentations (currently being restored) was completed in 1900. The architect was Mr. W.E. Roberts and it was designed in what was termed *modern renaissance (sic)* style. The building was an imposing and important feature of the town, its skyline dominated by the tower, which was visible from almost any part of Durban. Harvey, Greenacre's new building was said to be like a *little town in itself and thoroughly modern. Not only was the fire prevention sprinkler system the latest but so too were the ventilation system, sanitary conditions, the passenger and goods lifts, and the curving window frontage, which provided more display space.*

In 1915 Greenacre's became a joint stock company, and in 1917 a private limited liability company before part of the Greaterman's Group in 1943.

Reference: *The Greenacre Story*, brochure prepared by the Local History Museum, Durban (1982).

The Preservation Battle

In the re-structuring of the Greatermans/Checkers organization a decision was taken to close down the Greatermans store in Greenacres, and the developer secured a clothing and a food chain-store as tenant for a rehabilitation project. Subsequently the city of Durban acquired this valuable centre city property and is financing the development on a "lease-back" system.

The Architectural Challenge

The initial concept of the rehabilitation process envisaged retaining the entire building and creating an internal mall leading from West to Smith Streets. The accent of the shops was to be heavily fashion-orientated with open courts etc., and a large fashion chain on the upper levels.

Exhaustive investigation by the Structural Engineers finally condemned the internal structure as being totally unsound, and the cost of remedying this situation proved to be uneconomical in the extreme.

A compromise proposal was presented to the Durban Corporation retaining the entire West Street elevation together with the clock tower. This proposal was eventually accepted by the Local Authority.

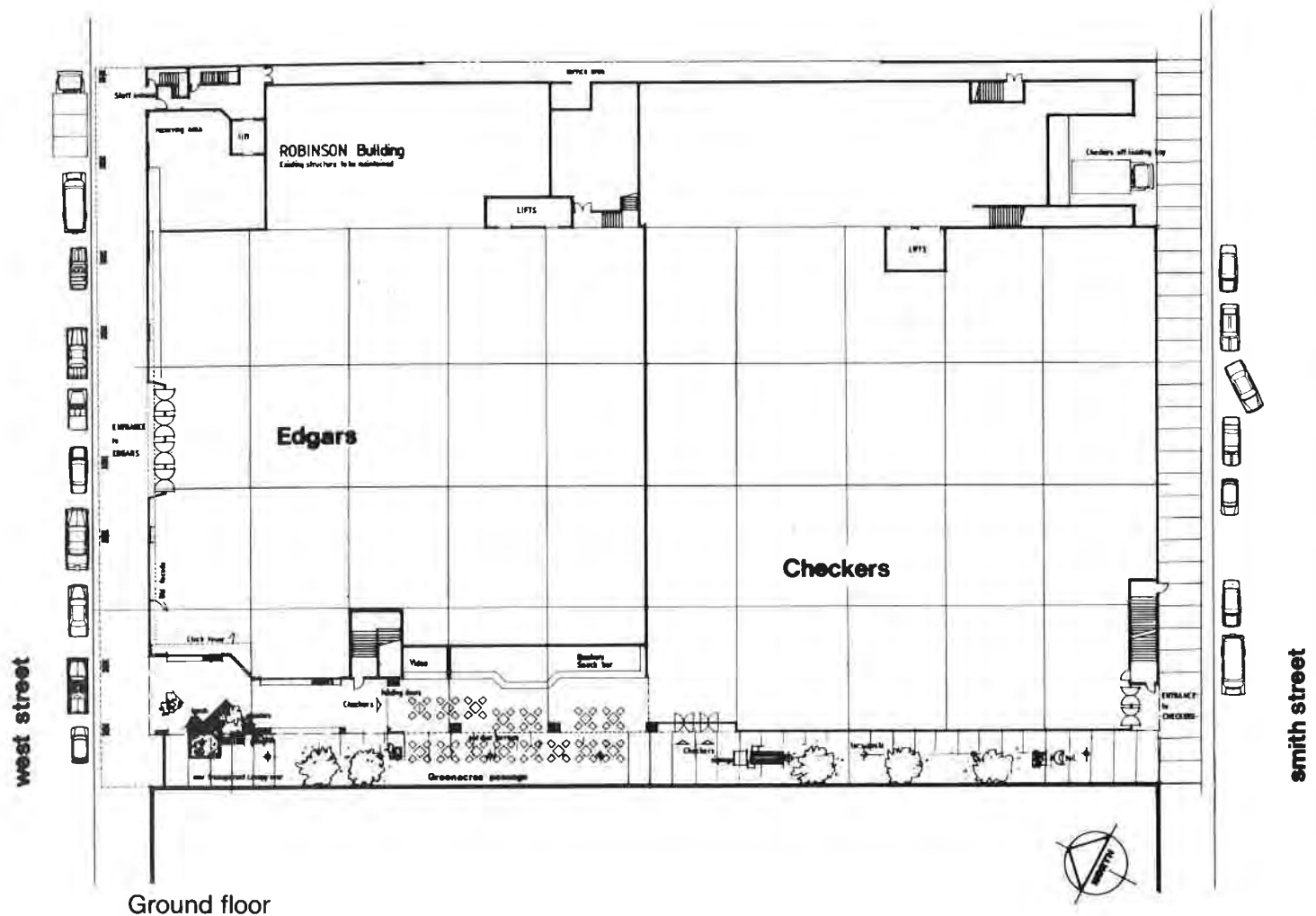
The adjacent Robinson Building, also owned by Greatermans, was to be retained and integrated into the new Greenacres Building.

Planning problems thus revolved around the integration of the floor levels as determined by the Robinson Building, and the "matching-up" of the new structural grid with the fenestration of the historical West Street facade. Having established that the shopfronts were not original, it was decided to give both stores access off Greenacres Passage and window frontage along West and Smith Streets respectively. Permission being granted, Greenacres Passage is to be partly covered with a transparent space frame.

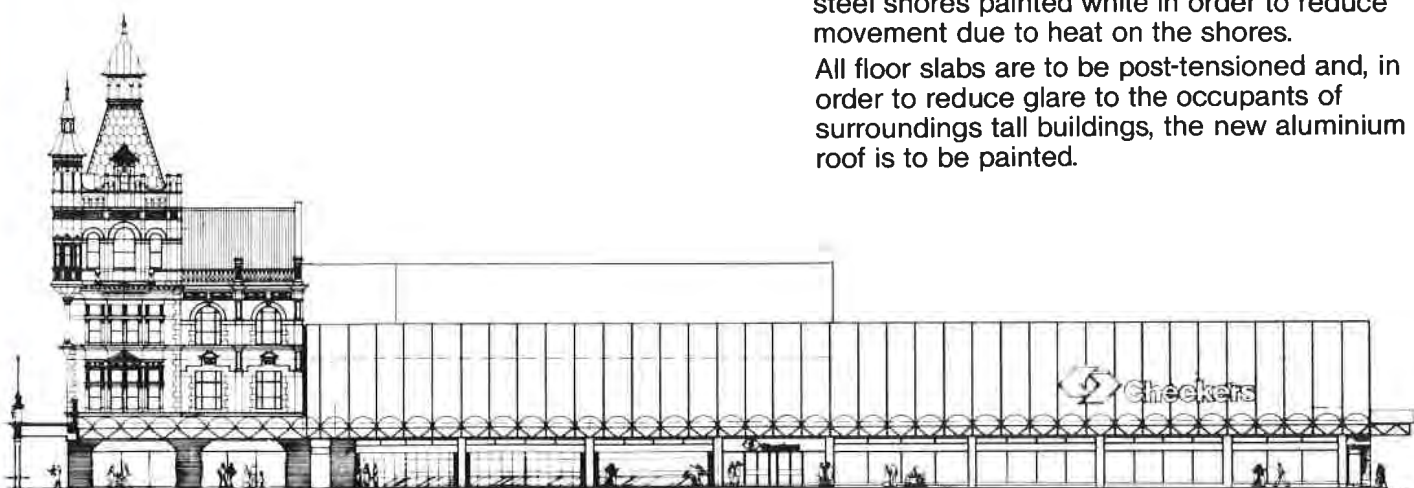
In order to give added definition to the historical facade, the new development including the Robinson Building is to be treated neutrally in bronze tinted safety glass with vertical anodised aluminium mullions. By way of a waiver it is hoped to extend the canopy with columns along West Street, thereby visually integrating the historical front with that of the Robinson Building and, to further emphasize this desire for continuity at shopper level, cast iron columns saved from the internal structure are to be integrated in the new shopfronts.

Constructional precautions need only to be observed along the historical facade where 'no vibration' piles are currently being sunk. In the meanwhile the facade is being supported by steel shores painted white in order to reduce movement due to heat on the shores.

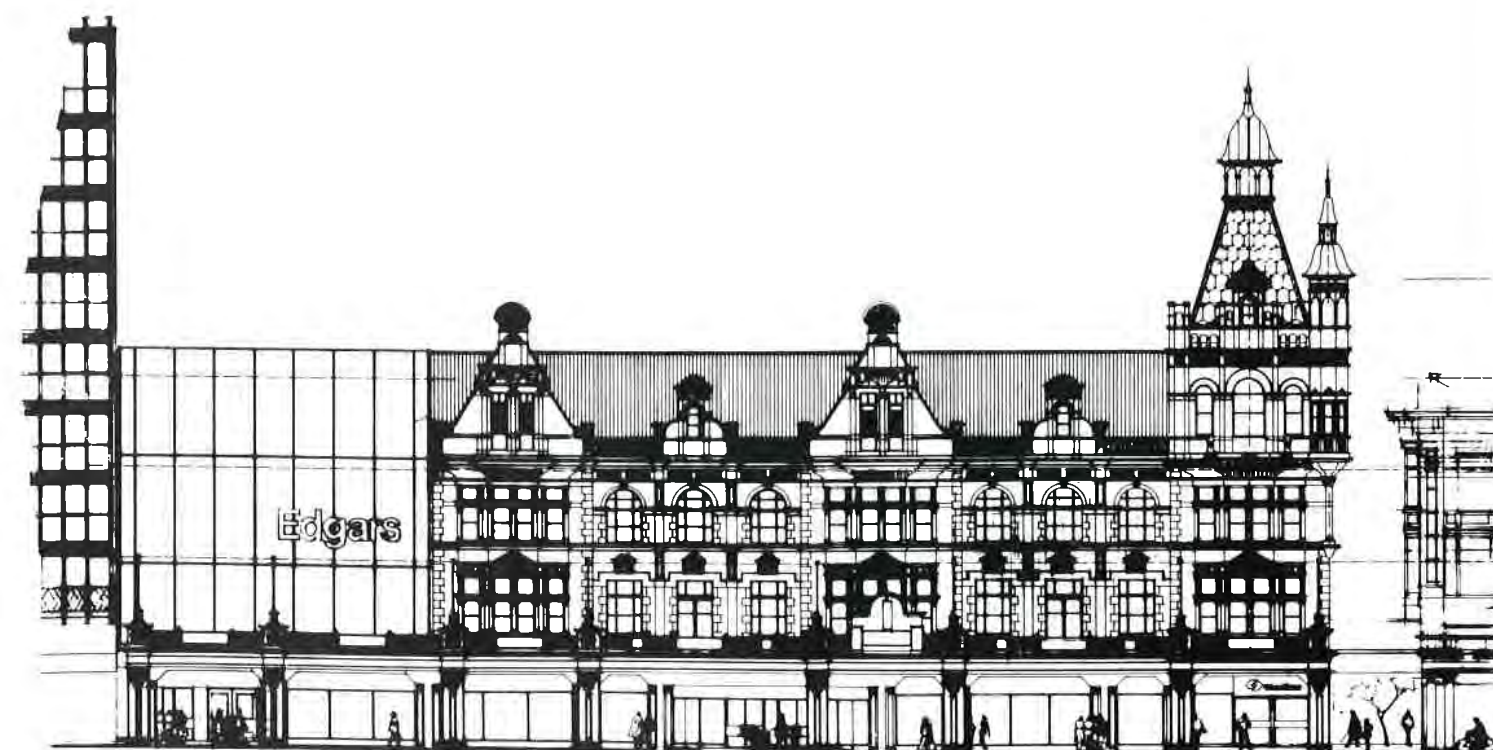
All floor slabs are to be post-tensioned and, in order to reduce glare to the occupants of surroundings tall buildings, the new aluminium roof is to be painted.



Ground floor



Greenacres Passage elevation



West Street elevation

Old Durban Station

Architects: Hallen, Theron & Partners Inc. and Interarc.

The preservation of the old Durban Station became an issue when the Railways announced their intention to vacate the building. Ownership passed to the City and plans were made to demolish the building to make way for road improvements, in particular the extension of Commercial Road.

Various interested parties showed that it was possible to retain the best part of the building with small adjustments to the road proposals. Council was prevailed upon to set aside funds to re-roof the building and thereafter commission consultants to make proposals for the renovation of the building.

The building was built in two rapid stages at the turn of the century, initially to house the administrative offices of the Natal Government Railways. Over the years the building has been altered and extended to meet the requirements of the S.A.R. The building that resulted with its rich detailing in alternating layers of brick and strucco is characteristic of late Victorian architecture and there are few similar surviving examples in South Africa. In fact, together with the building's unique urban position at the angled intersection of Soldiers Way with the square grid of the city streets, its strong historical association as the place of arrival in Durban for thousands of visitors, and its sound structure, were strong factors in favour of the preservation of the building.

The design procedure adopted was to test various alternatives on the site both for the quality of the building achieved and the amount of usable floor space created. Particular emphasis has been placed on urban design issues, in particular the appearance and relationship with the buildings in the historic centre.

The preferred solution involves the adjustment northwards by 2 metres of the alignment of Commercial Road in order that the northwest corner turret can be retained. The portion of the

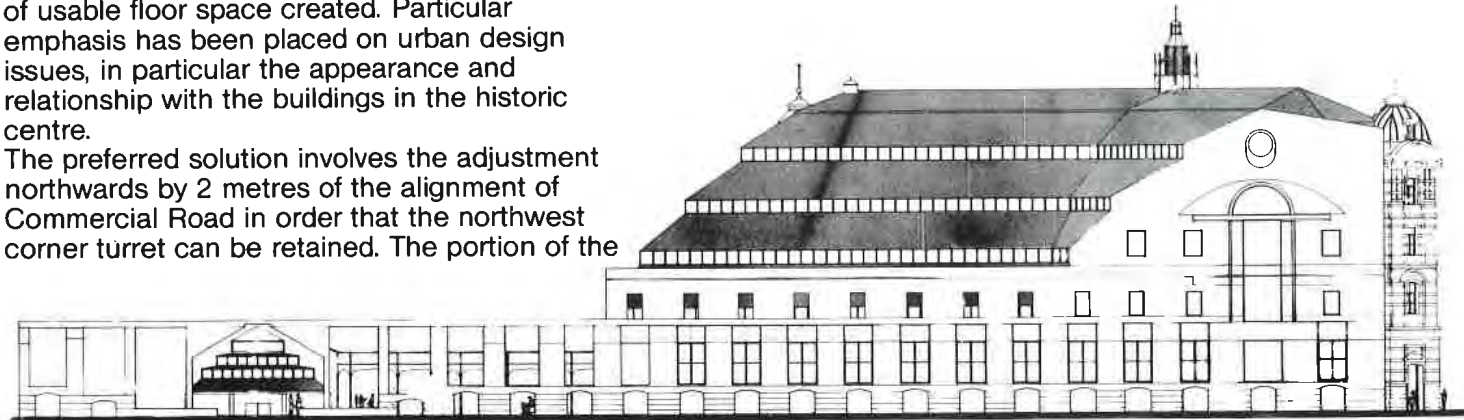
northeast wing remaining after the extension of Commercial Road is demolished, since its shape and form make it unsuitable for re-use.

The space left over between Commercial Road extension and the existing building is enclosed by means of a roof extending down from the ridge line of the existing roof.

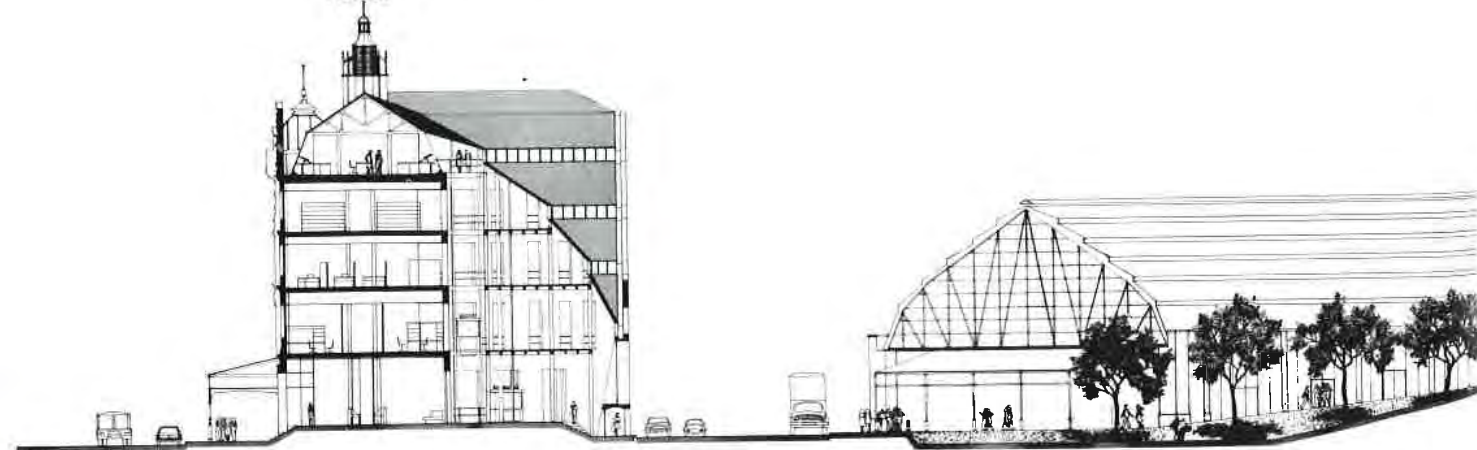
The large wall that is proposed down the length of the Commercial Road elevation is intended to relate in scale and finish to the existing building. It also needs to have a certain boldness of scale when seen at a distance against the backdrop of the City Hall and Post Office.

To this end the wall takes up some of the themes of the stucco lines and red brickwork of the existing facade and its height and the scale of its openings relate to the existing buildings to the north across Commercial Road. The roof, in turn, echoes the shape and form of the existing platform building.

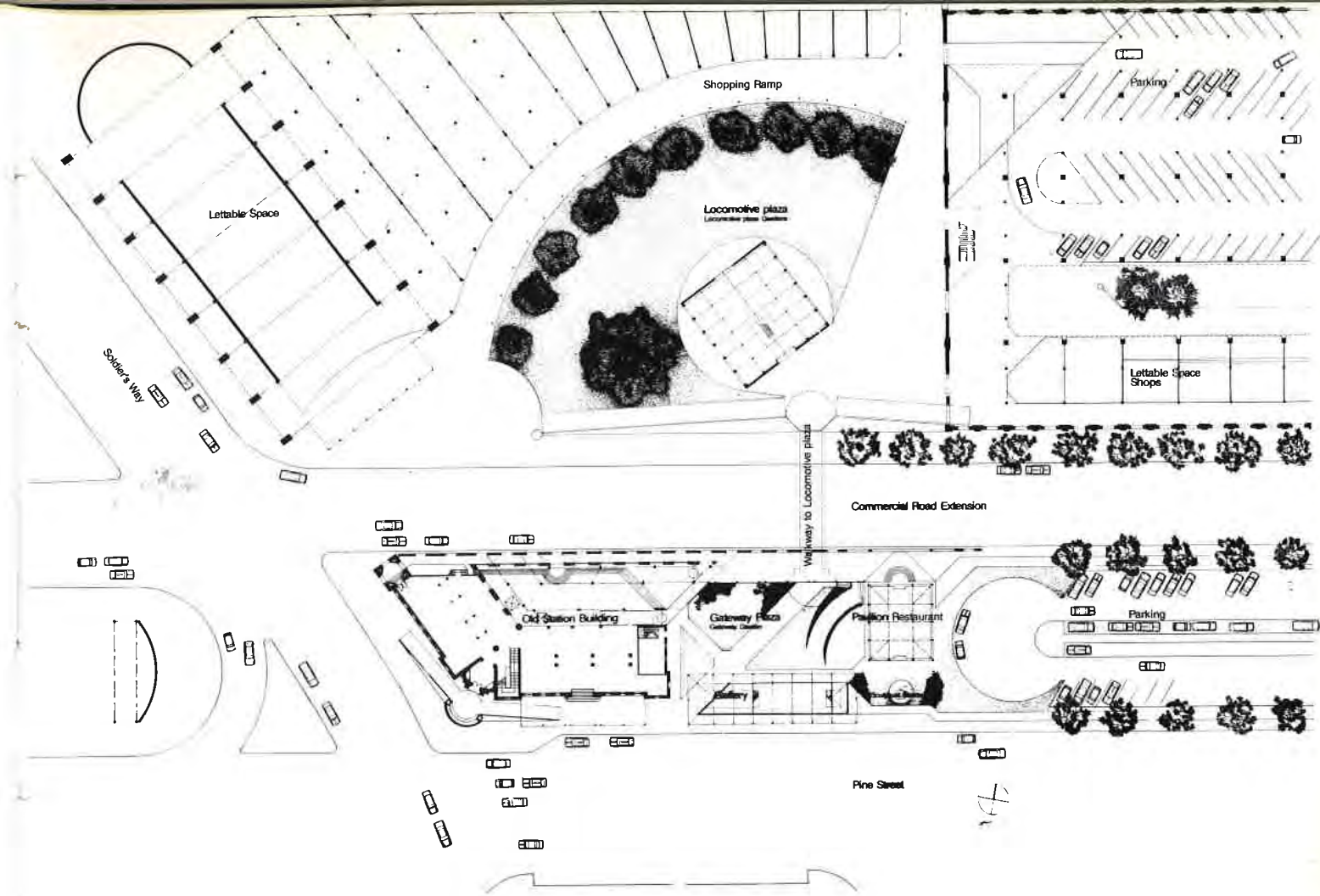
Because of its position, virtually on a traffic island, the building needs to be connected to the existing CBD and be part of a linkage system that connects the old CBD with future growth to the north of the historic centre. To achieve this the delicately constructed lantern roofs are re-used to the east of the building in the space between Commercial Road and Pine Street to create a civic space – "Gateway Plaza". The continuous and inter-related spaces, usable for shopping malls and courts are linked both at ground level and by the re-use of the existing tunnel under Commercial Road to other spaces to the north – the "Locomotive Plaza".



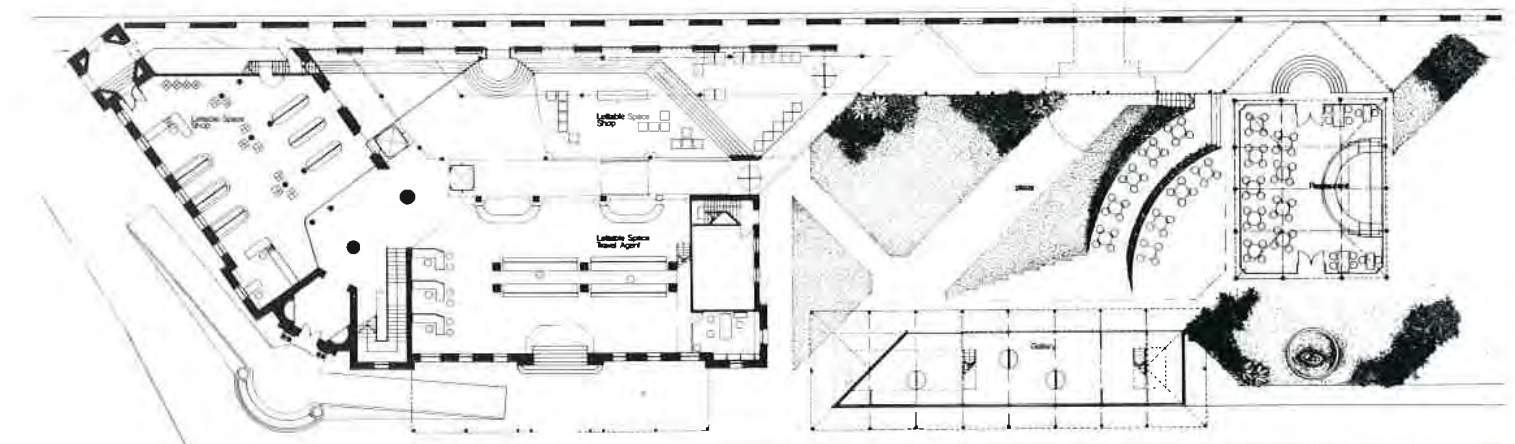
Elevation to Commercial Road extension



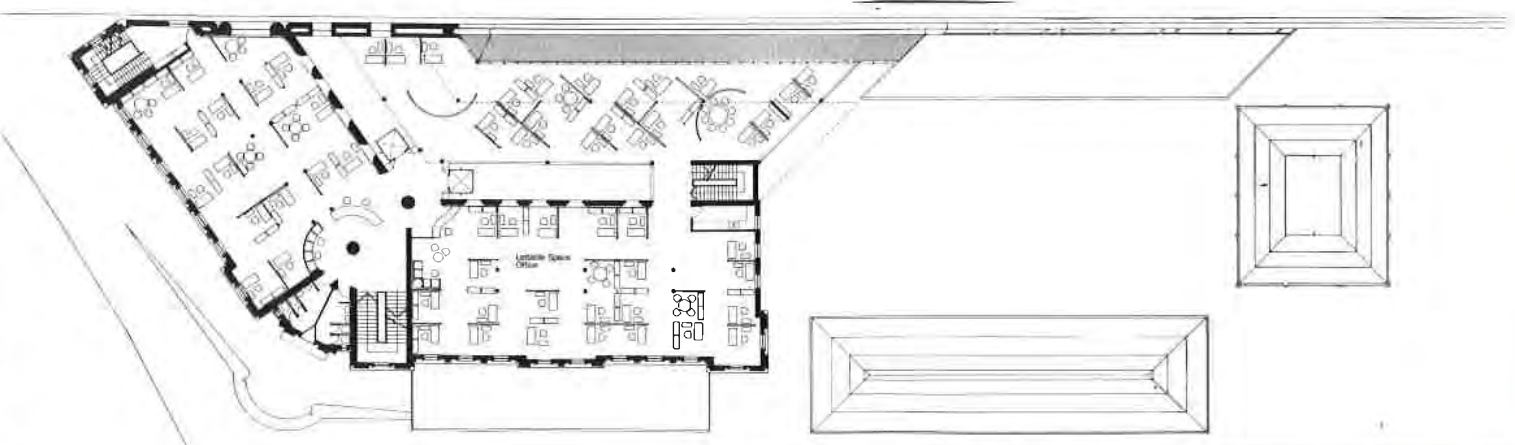
Section looking west



Site plan



Ground floor



Typical floor

Comment

It is a particular pleasure to be invited to comment on the excellent work illustrated in this issue, although I am bound to admit at the outset that, as an outsider I am not as well qualified to pass an opinion on the schemes and the issues relating to them as one of the in loco variety. If our experience in Cape Town is anything to go by, I imagine that in each of these cases, much must have been argued for and against rehabilitation and some heat generated in the process, but of this, the outsider is blissfully unaware. The Railway Station controversy had a bit of a national airing, and I recall some quite tough radio debate between local factions on whether to preserve or demolish the Old Playhouse. Having always found African Theatres kitsch revolting and lacking in charm, my reaction some years ago to hearing that thought was being given to retaining those awful buildings was that they must have gone mad. Now, given the opportunity of looking at the plans in some detail, I can see why those in favour of preservation are so fascinated.

Undoubtedly, NAPAC is going to have a theatre and opera house filled with nostalgia and theatrical character, and workable backstage facilities. But compromises have inevitably had to be made especially in the foyer areas, with their numerous interleading rooms and levels. The theatre foyer is congested in the London west-end tradition. Compromise is also apparent in the opera house, with the rear seats 38 metres from the stage apron – too great a distance by modern standards. The question remains whether the retention of what by any criteria cannot be regarded as good architecture justifies the quite major compromises that have had to be made. If the public attitude is, which it so often is these days – “But if we let the architects start from scratch, what calamity would we get instead?” – that is a bad reflection on us as architects. The work of Small, Pettit & Robson amply bears out their creative abilities, and I for one, would like to have placed my bets on what they would have done on a totally clear site. Despite this, one cannot but admire the ingenuity that has gone into this scheme, and notwithstanding my reservations, I look forward to seeing its completion, on which occasion Gordon Small will no doubt serve me these words, cooked and seasoned for me to eat.

It would certainly have been a great loss if Greenacres had been demolished, and the redevelopment scheme will obviously benefit greatly from the retention of the old facades. The facing of the new additions with bronze tinted glass suggests that the marriage of new and old will work, although one gets a little tired of that particular bland solution. It appears that little has had to be sacrificed in planning terms to accommodate Edgars and Checkers which is an altogether commendable situation.

The renovation of the old Railway Station is an extraordinary clever and worthy concept. This project demonstrates that the welding of new and old sometimes has the potential of creating a greater dimension of architectural quality than merely the sum of new and old. The architects not only show respect for what there is, but by adding to it in the imaginative way suggested, heighten one's awareness of the sheer fun and exuberance of the old fabric. As an object in the city, the Pine Street facade will be a treasure long to be enjoyed. The splitting of the shops and the locomotive plaza from the old station building by the Commercial Road extension is a serious disadvantage dictated by overriding urban planning and traffic needs which is only partly countered by the pedestrian underpass. No doubt there must be good reasons why the subway under Commercial Road could not have been broader and lined with shops, as it would greatly have added to the logic of the scheme if this could have been done. Is it too late to consider making this a far more telling feature of the scheme?

The tendencies to preserve and restore as opposed to demolition are growing in all South African cities reinforced by new economic determinants (it is often now more economical to refurbish than to rebuild) and a growing awareness of the value of the historical connection. While it is interested to note that in the case of the NAPAC project, it has actually proved more economical to recycle, the real benefit remains that of preventing the depersonalisation of the urban environment by preserving links between the present and the past. By doing this, one is not simply performing an act of architectural altruism, but carrying on the long established ideals of our profession which are to adapt human needs to the environment in economic, social, physical and cultural terms.

Jack Barnett

Jack Barnett is a practising architect, architectural correspondent for the *Cape Times*, and 1982 ISAA Gold Medal of Honour Recipient.

News

NPIA – Durban Arts '83 Exhibition

The work of Natal architects

This year's exhibition, staged again under the banner of Durban's Annual Celebration of the Arts, is conceived as an opportunity for the profession and its members to communicate to the public contribution which architects are making to the built environment, whilst at the same time conveying the strengths and talents of the various architectural practices.

Practices are invited to submit an A1 size poster of vertical format presenting work for which the practice has been commissioned. Models may also be submitted but all must be deposited with the Librarian of The Architectural Branch Library, Denis Shepstone Building, University of Natal, Durban by Friday, 26 August 1983.

The venue is the Durban Art Gallery in the City Hall and the catalogue will contain three sections: the services of an architect; the Institute and how it serves the community; and a list of all Natal practices with partners and associates named.

Revel Fox has agreed to open the exhibition with an illustrated lecture at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, 7 September. Invited will be commissioning bodies in the public and private sectors as well as any special guests whom members wish to nominate. The exhibition is to remain on view until 30 September.

All Natal practices are urged to avail themselves of this corporate and individual promotional opportunity and it should also be noted that a good public image of the profession creates the market for our professional services.

Best brick built building competition

To create awareness and interest in the qualities and beauties of bricks by both architects and the public, *Corobrik* is making available cash awards to the architect or architects who in the opinion of the jurors have designed and built the best bricks residential home and industrial/commercial building during the calendar years 1980-82.

Entrants are to submit colour photographs for consideration to the Secretary, NPIA, P.O. Box 777, Durban 4000, by 31 August 1983.

University/Institute Liaison Committee

The following events have been planned for the third quarter.

Tuesday, 2 August, 5.15 p.m. in SH.2: Andrew Verster on *The Streets and Sights of Tokyo*.

Saturday, 13 August: *Archiball*. Time and venue to be announced.

Friday, 26 August, 8 p.m., Level 7 Bridge: *Impressions of Grecian Peregrinations* by four students.

Changes

Changes in partnerships

Miss S.A. Adams has advised that she is practising as Sally Adams Architect at 4 Brents Avenue, Durban.

The Grant Vos Partnership, has advised that Mr. H.H. Grant has resigned from the partnership.

Mr. J.S. Dommissee has confirmed that he has terminated his partnership with Mr. P.C. Bakker and will in future practise as “Jack Dommissee” at 601 Sanlamsentrum, 331 West Street, Durban.

Mr. D.C. Boyd is now a partner in the firm of G.R. Klöhn and Partners.

Mr. Duncan McLagen and David Christer have entered into partnership under the style of Duncan McLagen and David Christer at 46 Patricia Road, Ballito.

Mr. D.M. de Villiers is the partner in Charge of the Durban office of Daneel, Smit en Vennote at 831 West Walk, West Street, Durban.

New members

P.C. Larkin, c/o Osmond Lange & Partners Inc., P.O. Box 18, Umtata.

G.J.H. Combrink, P.O. Box 7133, Empangeni.

R.P. Ries (ordinary) c/o Osmond Lange Inc., 32 Masonic Grove, Durban.

B.A. Jenkins (ordinary) C8 Ferncrest, 10 Gillitt Road, Hillcrest.

A.J.C. Voorvelt (ordinary) 53 Addison Drive, La Lucia.

A.Y. Miller (ordinary) 66 Fourth Avenue, Durban.

Letters

March 23, 1983

Dear Wally

I refer to the item ‘Public Relations’ under the ‘News’ column of the *NPIA Journal 1 – 1983* and would like to take advantage of your invitation for ideas on further themes.

In principle, I support the publication of articles relating to architecture, in the daily press, but believe that it needs to be of a particular type if it is going to serve a useful purpose in educating the lay public in architecture and ultimately in raising the standards of the buildings in our city.

The critic or jury system is the method employed in all schools of architecture to teach architectural design, and no doubt it is the method employed in most art schools. The system could, I believe, be extended to the daily paper. In much the same way that the other arts (music, art, films, etc.) are crited in the *Tonight* section of the *Daily News*, so too should architecture.

The *New York Times* has an excellent architectural critic, in the person of Paul Goldberger and ideally the local dailies should seek someone of similar capabilities to perform this task for them. Critics written by Goldberger do more to promote architecture than any amount of corporate advertising and I suspect it is because he makes architecture understandable to the lay public.

By testing buildings against certain principles of design, it is possible for everyone to evaluate and be critical of what they see around them.

Yours sincerely

Lance Smith

I agree with you about the need for architectural criticism, the difficulty is expressed by Jack Barnett, Architectural Correspondent for the *Cape Times* to whom I have referred your letter.

Overseas architectural criticism is not really analogous to the situation here as the people doing the criting are not practitioners and are often not architects. Reyner Banham, Ada Louise Huxtable, Pevsner. It would be ideal if you could find a perceptive lay-person to do the job, but I know of none in South Africa that would qualify.

Any discussion on this topic would be most welcome.

April 18, 1983

Dear Dr. Peters

I want to thank you for the publication on Post-Modernism which you edited (*NPIA 1-1983*). I found it very interesting and up to date in light of the continuing debate on the subject throughout the United States and Europe.

Yours sincerely

Helmut Jahn

Changes in addresses

P.H. van Coller to 3 Burg Mansions, Alexandra Road, Pietermaritzburg.

I.F. Hatting to P.O. Box 449, Umtentweni.

P.H. van Coller to 3 Burg Mansions, Alexandra Street, Pietermaritzburg.

Mrs. M. Cornford to Building Design Associates Inc., 1481 Wesley Parkway NW, Atlanta Ga 30327, USA.

C. du Toit to c/o Small, Pettit and Robson, 157 Pietermaritz Street, Durban.

P. McCaffery to Flat 1, Garside, 14 Wynford Place, Morningside, Durban.

E.L. van der Walt to 125 Nova Natalia, 41 St. Andrews Street, Durban.

Changes in class

A.R. Murray – ordinary to retired.

A.C. McDonald – ordinary to retired.

C.M. Dibb formerly AnT now Ordinary.

G.T. Downes formerly AnT now Ordinary.

J.D. Burrows formerly AnT now Ordinary – new address P.O. Box 3260 Montshiwa, Bophuthatswana.

D.B. van Zyl from Retired to Ordinary.

Changes in membership

A.W. Swaitek from TPI to NPI; address c/o P.O. Box 47, Pinetown.

M.G. Moore – from NPI to TPI.

T.A. Tennant – from TPI to NPI, Meyer & Pienaar, 15th Floor 320 West Street, Durban.