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Group Editors



REFURBISHMENT



EDITORIAL

REFURBISHMENT

Semantics some could say. Rahab, refurb etc. all mean conservation. Correct. However, refurbishment is the specific conservation term used when one refers to the normal cycle of renovatory work, preparing for a new user or tenant, probably the same kind as before or, in short, to do up afresh, to revive. The degree of intervention could however range from cosmetics to critical surgery.

There appear to be two main reasons why a developer will decide rather to refurbish than to rebuild. Building by-laws may have changed and there may be incentives for retaining the facade or alternatively, he may wish to improve the letting potential whereby an older building which may contain the required letting area, may not have the facilities nor the high standard of finishes now demanded by tenants. Refurbishment can thus be defined as the creation of prime occupational space in existing buildings.

Many architects are currently engaged in refurbishment commissions and though these may have been occasioned by a general lagging behind in standards appropriate to users and location, there remains the nagging question as to whether the concept of conservation may finally have taken hold of the popular imagination - in Durban?

ARCADES

With the renewed respectability of Salisbury Arcade and the recent rebirth in 362 West Street, the arcade as a building type appears to be experiencing a resurgence in the centre of Durban. Certainly its value in shopping centres in our suburban city areas has been established.

In 1969 Johan Geist wrote a long book called *Arcades*. "Perhaps," he wrote, "this work will come into the hands of those who can still save something from destruction." Bearing in mind that this book was written when Durban's London Chambers, and McFie's, Castle and Club Arcades had already gone, it is a real pleasure to see the last of this illustrious lot, Salisbury Arcade, refurbished.

The arcade was developed in the nineteenth century as a creation of the private sector of speculative building. It provided an opportunity for connecting streets and opening up the centres of blocks, making full use of properties while being reserved for pedestrians protected from vehicular danger and pollution and the weather. Arcades thus offer the prospect of new urban amenities and new city life.

In this context it is interesting to note what Hans Hallen in a special issue of the *South African Architectural Record* on Natal wrote in 1965: "... in the last analysis the city centre is a walking place, a lively market place and a forum for public and private business ... Durban and Pietermaritzburg were remarkable at one stage for the sense of space that their centres possessed. The lanes, the arcades and the buildings all contributed to the ease of access and movement, and even more to the sense of place."

Walter Peters, Editor

GERAGHTY-LITTLE-McCAFFERY SALISBURY CENTRE

Durban is a city full of potential which seems seldom to have been recognised. We were thus overjoyed at the opportunity of working with developers such as Southern Life who were relatively new to the development field in Durban.

We were approached by our clients to look at the potential of four adjoining buildings and an existing arcade. The buildings ranged in age from 25 to 60 years old. Generally the buildings were in disrepair and in need of revitalisation.

First we decided to unify the four separate buildings to form what we believed should be the heart of Durban. The character of the shops had to change to make the centre attractive and prestigious. We believe this could be achieved by enhancing and maintaining the present character in the Smith Street facade and introducing and reinforcing this character in the entire centre.

We had to adapt the existing cellular office arrangement to allow for more flexible large multi-office suites.

The upgrading of power and lighting and air conditioning for a flexible office arrangement was undertaken. Similarly the ground floor shopping arcades were united to form one arcade, enhanced by the addition of shopping courtyards, splayed corners, the use of mirrors and new all-glass shopfronts. All of these features were used to upgrade the shops as well as increase the apparent width of the arcade and promote its prestige.

We also created an upper level of shopping, encouraging sufficient traffic by providing an escalator to the lowest lift station on the first floor. The appropriate shopping environment was also created by unifying the buildings with a common shopfront theme and flooring, but individuality was maintained by modulation, largely determined by existing structure and services. Where the existing light-wells were turned into courtyards we were able to provide larger shopfronts and new shops facing these areas. By roofing the court with translucent sheeting we were able to maintain lighting levels and ventilation, at the same time providing an all weather 'outdoor' area ideal for restaurants, gathering spaces and visual relief. The Smith Street theme was carried through the complex in a modern way with new work being approached with a somewhat colonial aesthetic. Planting throughout provided the complex with scale and softness and character.

Peter McCaffery

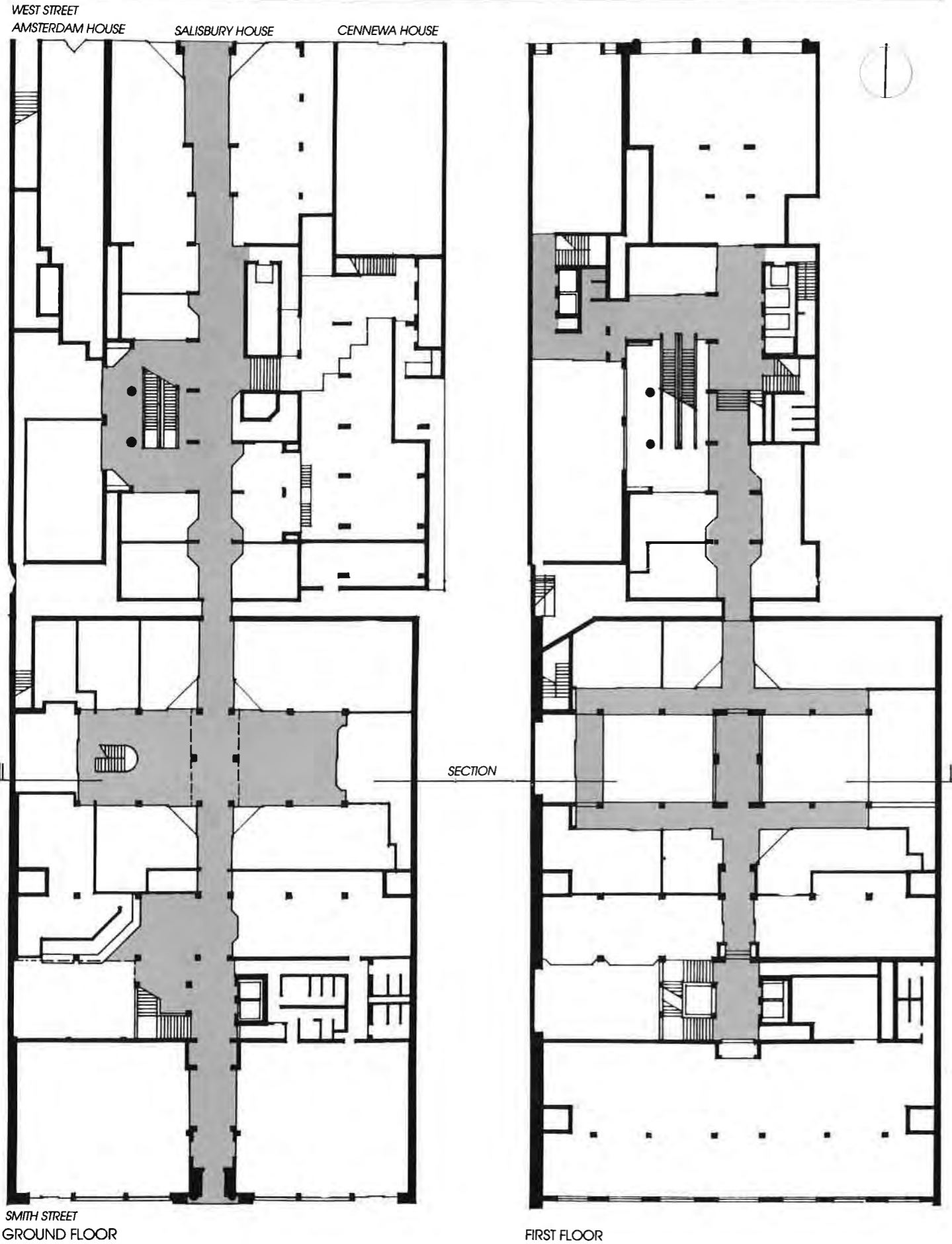
Shopping Arcade
Prior to refurbishment



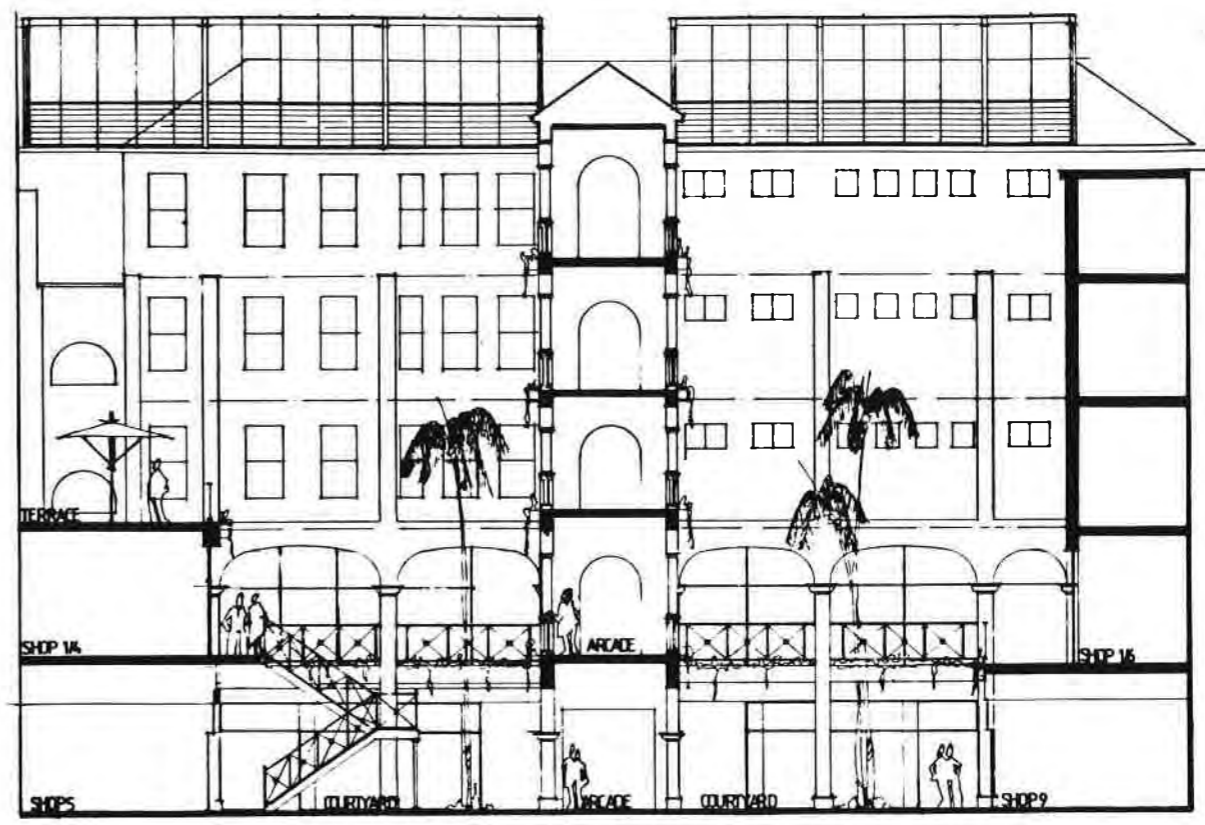
After the refurbishment



GERAGHTY-LITTLE-McCAFFERY SALISBURY CENTRE



GERAGHTY-LITTLE-McCAFFERY SALISBURY CENTRE



SECTION



Far left:
Courtyard
"Press Club Cafe"

Shopping Court



Refurbished
Lift foyer

PEMBROKE MANSIONS MULLINS ASSOCIATES



WEST STREET ELEVATION

HISTORY
Pembroke Mansions was designed by architect E.S. Cornelius (of whom little is known) and built for the Stirling Company in 1925. It comprised shops at street level and two floors of residential flats above. In 1927 the roof overhang was increased to cover the balconies on the top floor. The building remained essentially unaltered thereafter, apart from some tenants enclosing their balconies. It was, however, when inspected by ourselves in 1983, in a state of disrepair and decline, though structurally very sound.

THE BRIEF TO THE ARCHITECT

The client wished to halt the deterioration of the building, to update and increase the areas of the shops, to investigate the possibilities of 'change - of - usage' from rent-controlled flats to offices, and called for viability studies for the project.

THE ARCHITECTURAL CHALLENGE

The state of the building when taken over by the new owners led to the initial assumption that it should be demolished and replaced with larger shop areas and a more cost effective planning of office space. The potential revitalisation and restoration through new emphasis of the various elements and their generous detailing, was however immediately apparent. It remained therefore to prove the viability of refurbishment and re-cycling.

The building is not situated in a prime lettable area, and rents are therefore correspondingly lower than in the C.B.D. itself. This fact, coupled with high interest rates, put a restraint on the budget as

became apparent in the feasibility studies. Thus a new structure of approximately the same area was not justifiable in terms of greater income when compared with the use of available money on the refurbishment of an essentially solid structure.

Proposals for retaining the existing building emphasised the importance of the major pedestrian route from beach to city centre on to which the shops have frontage. It was felt that by allowing more light to penetrate to the street level behind the arcade, the shops would become more exciting. It was also proposed that colour be carefully introduced into the street-scape to attract attention to the commercial outlets.

On the above basis, the client accepted the proposal to refurbish the existing building.

THE PROJECT EXPLAINED

The building is essentially a three storey structure surrounded on its two road frontages (Prince Alfred Street and West Street) by an asymmetrically placed screen with balconies linking building to screen. This can be seen as an extension of the verandah - type solution to the Durban climate, though the sitting-out function has been impaired by present day noise levels from the street below.

By letting voids through the balconies, the previously two-dimensional screen is given a third dimension to pedestrians looking up and through the arcades which frame the changing sky. The

remaining balconies offer potential display space for commercial tenants, as well as being 'outdoor space' for office workers.

The external treatment of the building is essentially a play on the two-dimensional appearance of the screen from the street. Colour has been applied on the external faces only, while the interior of the arcade, windows and doors, as well as the interiors of rooms have been painted white. The overhangs which were a later addition to the building (in 1927) have been removed, partly to re-instate the original design, and partly to allow sunlight to penetrate to the pavement below. Coloured roof lights cover the voids on the upper balconies, keeping rain out and allowing blue-tinted light to wash in water-like hues over the white arcaded walls above the pavement.

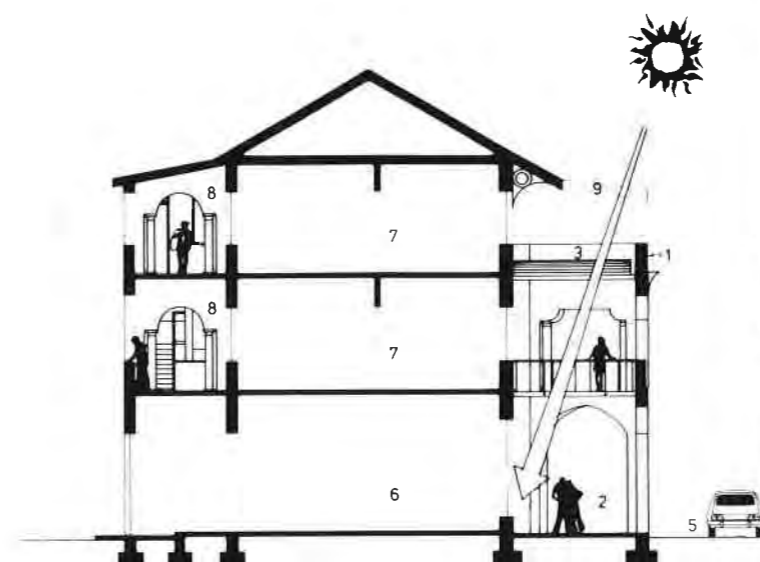
The original turned timber shopfronts with leaded transom lights have been retained, restored where necessary and matched where alterations were required.

Internally the former flats have been adapted to offices by means of simple alterations and refurbishments, retaining where possible the generous internal balconies, columns, arches, windows and balustrades. The noise level will be substantially reduced by the yet to be implemented proposal of double glazing. The project will be completed for R230 000, 10% under budget and was fully let, shortly after space was made available.

Mike Mullins

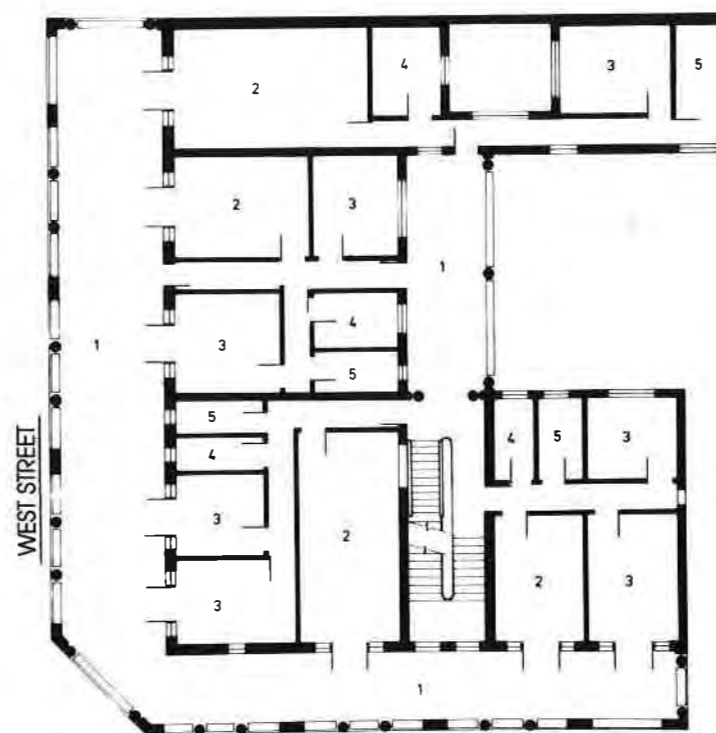
PEMBROKE MANSIONS MULLINS ASSOCIATES

Views of the double
volumed pavement space.



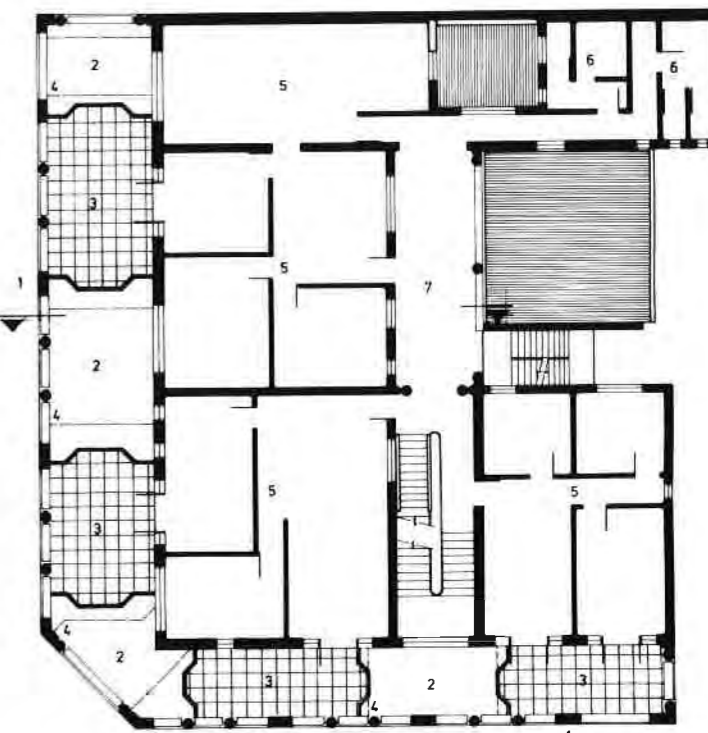
SECTION

1. Screen
2. Arcade
3. Roof lights
4. Roof balconies & voids
5. West Street
6. Shops
7. Offices
8. Internal balconies & access
9. Overhang removed



1ST FLOOR PLAN
PRIOR TO REFURBISHMENT

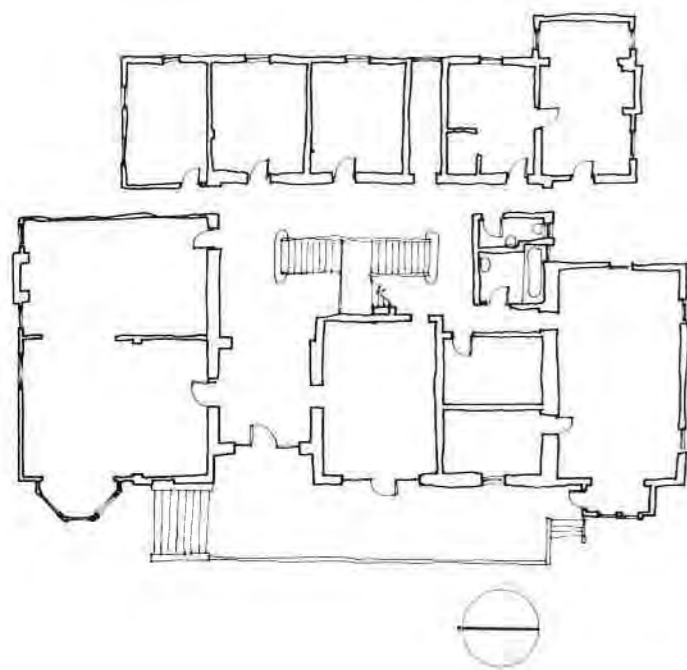
- 1 Balconies
- 2 Living rooms
- 3 Bedrooms
- 4 Kitchens
- 5 Bathrooms/WC



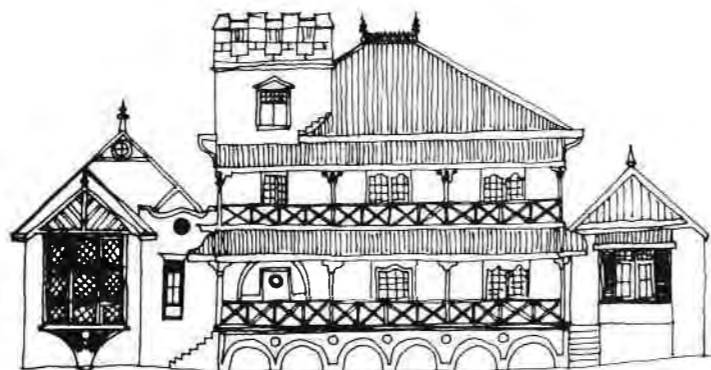
1ST FLOOR PLAN
AFTER REFURBISHMENT

- 1 Screen
- 2 Void
- 3 Balcony
- 4 Roof lights over
- 5 Office Suits
- 6 Toilets
- 7 Internal balcony

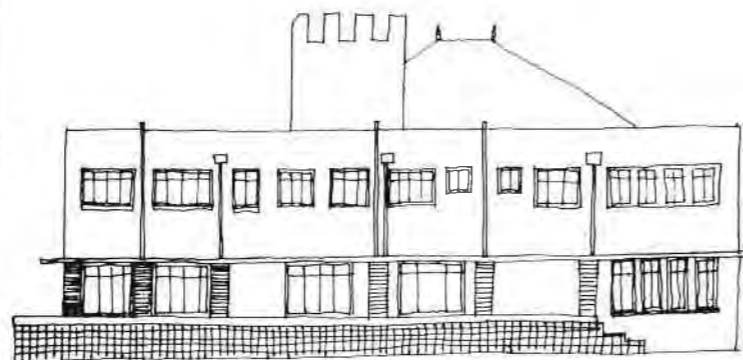
HARROGATE HALL FERREIRA DA SILVA AND STAFFORD



PLAN - 1907



ORIGINAL ELEVATION 1907



REMODELED ELEVATION 1932

Earliest plans of Harrogate date back to 1907 showing a sketch of alterations to the original house built around 1890 for Mr Horace Acutt. Extensive use was made of shaped corrugated iron roofs, timber balustrading and gable roofs to the outbuildings. The plan was organised around a central stair well (still in existence today), serving the upstairs sleeping accommodation. The entire house was surrounded by deep verandahs. From the turret, an uninterrupted view of Durban could be enjoyed. During the late '20s the house was converted into a small boarding establishment, changing little in its structure. However, major alterations took place in 1932. The entire building was remodelled, all facades were radically changed and the verandahs stripped off to make way for a '30s style facade of plastered walls with a facebrick plinth.

The hotel obviously flourished and was again extended during the '50s. A second floor was added and treated in the same '30s style. What remained of the original house was the stair well, complete with stair, wall and ceiling turrent minus battlements; while the lounge and kitchen retained their original use.

The building changed little after 1960 and became a popular permanent

residential hotel, consisting of fifty rooms.

Our firm was initially approached to prepare a feasibility study on the site. Of the two options, the possibility of demolition and construction of a new building proved too costly and time consuming.

The option to refurbish was based on cost in the first instance, whereby the sub structure, superstructure and roof could be maintained and the 'soft' inside fabric could be gutted and replanned. The building was structurally flexible, being a concrete frame structure and was built around the central stair well which was ideal for internal access to all parts of the building.

The building was zoned for maisonette development and special consent for the change of use was a formality with the rider that the building could not be added to externally.

Our brief was basically to create as many two or three bedroom units without any major structural changes.

The existing courtyard with original stair became the vortex of our scheme, being the point of access and the central public space. The ground floor was designed as four three-bedroom simplexes, while the first and second floors were combined to form seven duplex units. An existing cottage in the garden

made up the twelfth unit.

The roof of the stairwell in the internal courtyard is to be removed and replaced with a glass roof creating a solarium from which all units are accessible.

The unfortunate destruction of the original facade during the '30s left the building with no architectural identity and therefore the design attitude towards the upgrading of the elevations has been somewhat eclectic based on a 'provençal' theme, reminiscent of rough chalky pink or terra cotta walls, hand painted tile window surrounds, tall chimney pots and richly decorated window boxes.

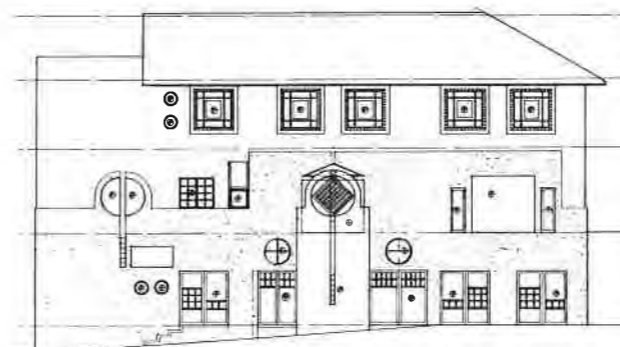
The sea facing elevation, opening out on to extensive gardens and distant views of the city, echoes a grander scale, with tall supporting elements and celebratory pediment. On the other hand, the street facing elevation, visible only from the first floor up has been purposely detached from the street, linked only by a pedestrian 'draw bridge' and overlooked by a mini 'guardhouse', repeating the silhouette of the overall building. The chimney stack, which is operative, has been retained and clad with rich patterned tiles reminiscent of homecoming and warm welcome.

Bruce Stafford, Luis da Silva

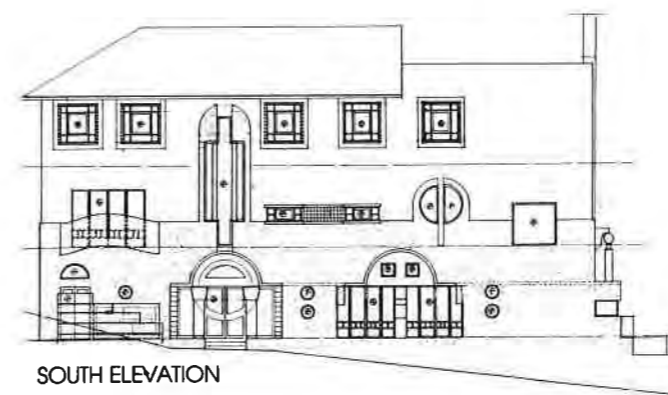
HARROGATE HALL FERREIRA DA SILVA AND STAFFORD



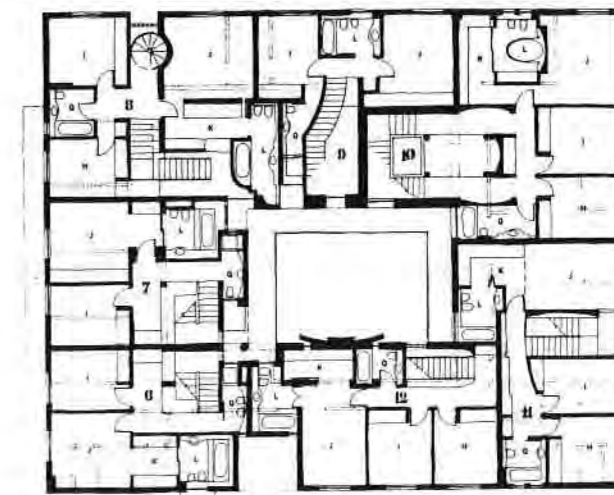
EAST ELEVATION



NORTH ELEVATION



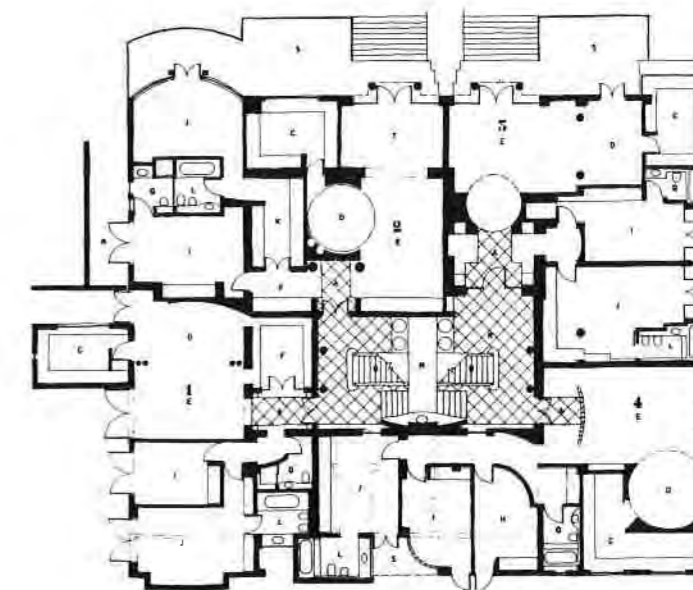
SOUTH ELEVATION



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



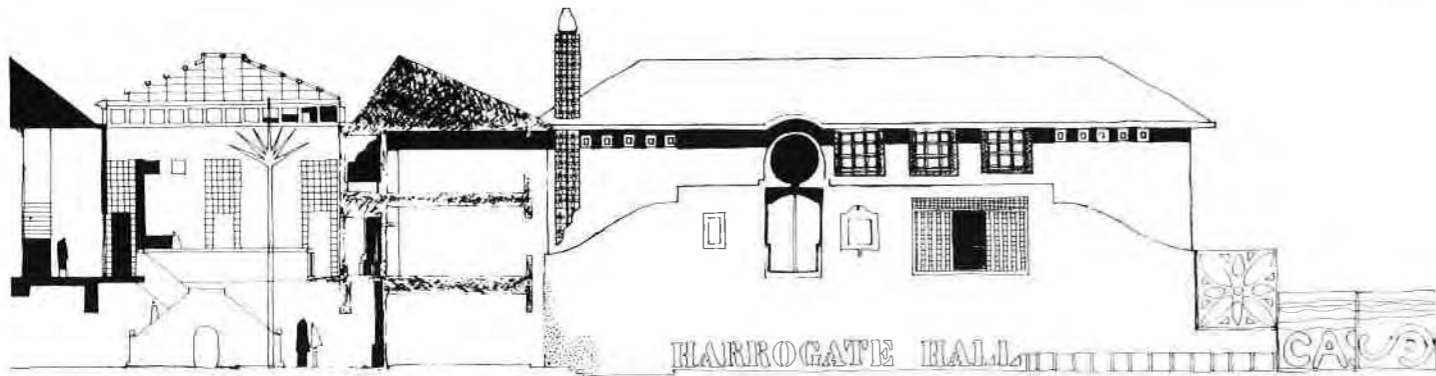
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

- LEGEND**
- | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| A. entrance hall | K. dressing room |
| B. guest w.c. | L. en-suite bathroom |
| C. kitchen | M. entrance |
| D. dining room | N. access subway |
| E. living room | O. existing timber stair |
| F. study/library | P. access corridor |
| G. gallery | Q. bathroom 2 |
| H. bedroom 3 | R. court |
| I. bedroom 2 | S. loggia |
| J. bedroom 1 | T. family room |

HARROGATE HALL FERREIRA DA SILVA AND STAFFORD



IMPRESSION SECTION - STREET ELEVATION

PRODUCT NEWS

MAXI - THE BRICK OF THE FUTURE

A new larger than normal style of clay plaster brick, the 'maxi', developed and made by Corobrik Natal and which can help cut labour costs by up to a third, is being used successfully in a range of housing and flat development projects in Natal.

Whilst it was initially developed five years ago as a material aimed at low cost housing, it has proved so successful in tests among private contractors that Corobrik Natal now intends to boost production.

A large proportion of capacity at a planned new brickworks at Avoca will be earmarked for maxi bricks.

Mr Brian Waberski, managing director of Corobrik Natal, said that the maxi was considered by some contractors as the brick of the future, and one of the most exciting developments in building for a decade.

"It has been effectively proven to enable a builder to pass on 'in the wall' cost savings in excess of 22 per cent to the end buyer," he said.

The maxi brick was developed following initial investigations by Mr Jimmy Swarbrick of the Corobrik Natal sales staff into requests from specifiers for a cost competitive burnt clay product that could be used in a rendered or unrendered application in mass housing projects.

The new larger brick thus designed, which was in a way an answer to the cumbersome and abrasive concrete block, was pioneered in mass housing in Durban.

"We used our Avoca works from which we were assured of uniformly hard, top quality bricks which could be used in an unrendered application in double skin construction for core housing," Mr Waberski said.

"After some refinements we ended up with the present maxi brick, now part of a range of products we call the 'Fastwall system' because of the time saving factor they bring to construction.

"The Fastwall range of products is comprised of both plaster and facing units and companion blocks for reveals and corners to reduce the need for cutting.

"In addition by arrangement higher compressive strengths can be made for loadbearing brickwork."

The maxi brick is 114 mm high, this is one-and-a-half times the height of a conventional brick. The length is "normal" at 222 mm, but the width of 90 mm is 16 mm less than a conventional brick. In use, the laid area of the maxi is the equivalent of 1½ standard sized bricks, and herein lies its most important advantage.

A bricklayer can lay virtually the same number of maxi brick units per hour as he can standard bricks. However, because only two maxis are laid where normally three conventional bricks would be used, the wall will rise faster.

In fact the increased size of the brick unit means that building with maxis takes up to a third less time and labour.

For example a building requiring 30 000 normal plaster bricks would only need 20 000 maxi bricks to construct the same walling area - and it would take a third less time to do it.

The cost of the bricks themselves is around the same per square metre for both maxis and normal plaster bricks, but the savings come in labour, installation time and mortar.

Having proved the workability and cost effectiveness in Black core housing schemes, particularly in the new Inanda township, Corobrik Natal, through increased capacity, was able to offer the product to private contractors undertaking both conventional housing and luxury developments.

The introduction of the product has been an unequivocal success largely because tradesmen have been able to easily master the required techniques of dealing with a new size of brick. With the product being so well accepted by the

"users" and the contractors realising the economies they were able to achieve, a large increase in demand for maxis for all types of construction blossomed.

They have been used throughout the 600-house NBS Sea Tides scheme for Indians at Tongaat, for extensive Comhousing residential developments, and in increasing numbers of top of the market townhouses and flats in suburban Durban and areas such as Umhlanga and Ballito Bay. Sundry supportive products such as re-inforced concrete lintels made to suit the narrower width of the maxi brick are being developed by wide-awake suppliers.

Note that as previously mentioned the Fastwall range also includes a 190 mm return brick for bonding solid double maxi brick walls at window and door reveals and in piers.

Corobrik Natal is the only manufacturer in South Africa making the maxi brick and other Fastwall products and at present they are primarily available in the Durban area.

There is a possibility that they could be produced later this year at Glencoe to supply Northern Natal. The maxis are delivered on site in stretch-wrapped packs which not only facilitates handling and stock control but also prevents pilferage.

Their narrower width contributes to the fact that a wall of maxi bricks is 25 percent lighter per square metre and the lighter mass also means less labour is needed on site for moving bricks from stockpile to work area.

Notwithstanding all these attributes, Mr Waberski said, perhaps the most important factors about the maxis apart from their contribution to cost saving, are those also inherent in all Corobrik's clay bricks.

"Maxis as with all our other clay bricks are fire resistant, they have excellent sound and thermal insulation qualities and they are and will continue to be among the most durable building products known."



Maxi bricks have been used extensively in mass housing projects near Durban. Here a Natalia Development Board construction team uses maxi bricks in a rendered single skin housing scheme at Inanda.

The maxi brick (rear) is 1½ times the height of a conventional clay plaster brick. The increased size of the brick unit means that building with maxis takes up to a third less time and labour.

COMMENT

Why the sudden proliferation of refurbishments being undertaken by developers? Is it the economic climate that now makes 'refurbishing' topical? Is the increased concern with old buildings related in some way to disillusionment with new buildings and their inability to create places and spaces that are a delight to their users? Is it just a fancy name for alterations and additions, maybe the editor is trying to sneak another 'specialist' into our midst? Or is it too much to hope that there has been a change in the collective heart and that people now see the wisdom of a city which has, as part of its matrix, elements that tell of its past. One hopes it's the last but suspect it's the first.

What is certain, is that 'refurbishment' is not a new activity in the world of architecture, it is a phase in the life cycle of most buildings. The architect's role in this situation remains the same - the making of spaces both meaningful, in terms of the activity they house and the pleasure they give, remains his primary task, only the method of achieving them is different. Most of us have been taught and practice architecture as an 'additive' process - activities are added one to another, arranged around a system of movement and the whole enclosed in a space given order by structure. 'Refurbishment', particularly in a change of use situation, is a reverse of this process - the structure exists and spaces are made by removing and relocating elements - it requires a change in perception and skill in the manipulation of space. Any relationship of space to structure is usually coincidental, raising problems of expression and language.

Two of the schemes illustrated tackle and resolve these problems directly and simply but from different standpoints.

The change in activity in Pembroke Mansions is achieved with very little fuss. Typical of the buildings built in the early part of this century it has a powerful external expression of pilasters and arches enclosing a verandah. This structure is retained but used in a new way to form a screen to mediate between street and office space. It facilitates changes to fenestration without altering the external appearance of the building and preserves the idea of its original architect. The double volumes over the pavement are added delights.

The problem of Harrogate Hall is different. The building has undergone numerous changes in its life obscuring the intent of its original designer and leaving behind little of architectural merit. The response seems to bear this out. The existing reinforced concrete frame structure is denied existence. It is lost in the thickness of walls used to make the new spaces and has no expression on the exterior facades. These are treated as loadbearing textured planes punctured to accept windows and doors where required. Given the circumstances the approach is a valid one although some doubt exists about the appropriateness of the 'provençal' theme to an Essenwood Road setting. That some of the units will not enjoy the best in the way of orientation is the price paid for retaining the existing building.

The grouping of appropriate and compatible activities on correctly scaled pedestrian systems is the key to successful city centres. Thus the arcade system is an important contributing factor to the continued success of Durban's city centre. Unfortunately the lessons of the Madressa and Castle arcades (natural light, human scale, strong unifying element and the use of few materials) have not always found their way into the newer arcades.

Salisbury House was one such arcade - too tight, dark and congested. Happily the renovation work by Geraghty - Little - McCaffery has corrected these faults. The introduction of natural light, courtyards and meeting places has given the passage new life. Together with the additional first floor shopping space, easily visible and accessible from the ground, these elements have helped generate sufficient pedestrian traffic to make the arcade one of the more lively and pleasant places in the city.

The 3 schemes show that, at no matter what level - city or home, old or new - it takes the special skills of architects to recognise and exploit the opportunities latent in the juxtapositions of conflicting requirements and interests.

Lance Smith

Lance Smith holds post-graduate qualifications in architecture and urban design. He is a partner in the firm Hallen Theron & Partners Inc. Editor.