



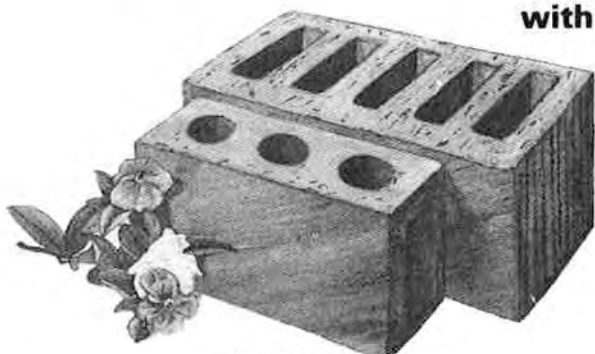
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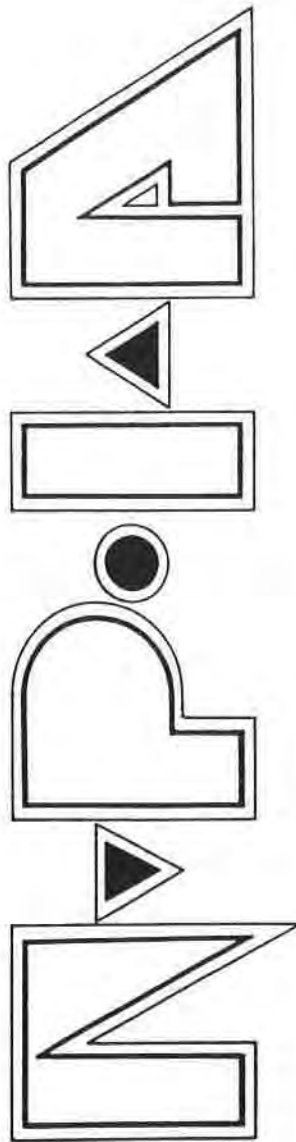
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DURBAN MUSEUM AND LIBRARY COMPETITION, 1989



GUEST EDITOR DOUW VAN ZYL

CHIC SYMBOLS AND OTHER SACRED COWS



COVER: Photograph of site by Gonsul Pillay, Durban Purity Association. Glimpse of winning entry of Uytenbogaardt and Rozendal — photo by Craig Hudson. Cover collage of various drawings submitted by participants.

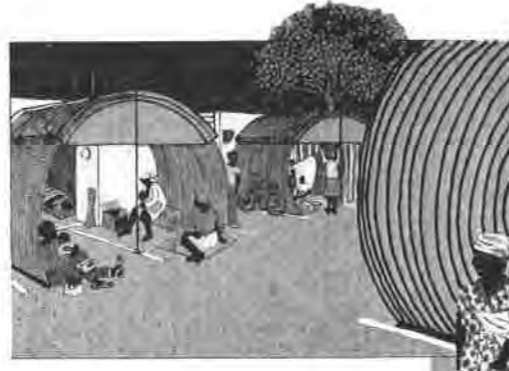
NATAL STUDENTS WIN 1989 DES BAKER AWARD



DAYTIME PERSPECTIVE

Fourth year students Laura Hunt and Kenny Webster write about their submission which was honoured with the coveted Des Baker Award:

The brief for this year's Des Baker Competition was to infuse residential life into a hostile urban environment — to create an OASIS for a group of 50 to 100 people. We chose to accommodate the women who sleep on the pavements around Warwick Avenue Squatters' Market area in Durban. Our brief was to provide shelter, utilities and storage facilities for these people. The site is



NIGHT-TIME PERSPECTIVE

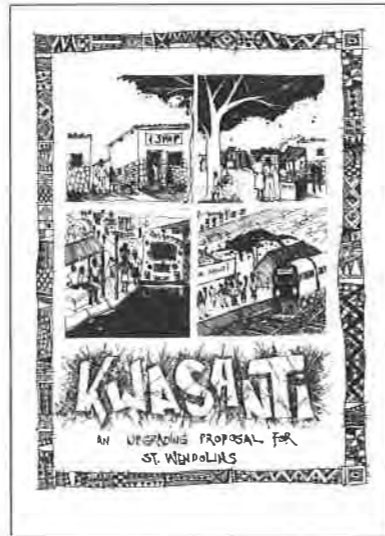
a car park. The shelters are 800 mm wide cores which run between parking bays. Roofs project out over the bays to provide covered parking during the day, at night the roofs extend and enclose a four-bay room. Although a specific site was illustrated, the shelters could be built on any car park. This, the bold simple concept and the relevance of the design to contemporary South African urban problems were reasons for the success of the scheme. All six SA Schools of Architecture participated in the competition.

PUBLICATIONS BY THE NATAL SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE



Clairwood Redevelopment.
 67 pages. Price R20 including GST and postage.

Planning and political uncertainty, level topography and its proximity to the city have eroded the residential character of this historically Indian settlement area of Durban. Now that industry is to be curtailed and the area is to remain residential, students were charged with addressing in detail the interface of industry and traditional houses, religious schools, places of worship, and landscapes of this stoic ethnic community.



Kwasanti. An upgrading proposal for St. Wendolins
 118 pages. Price R25 including GST and postage.

Research related to the wider issues of urbanisation is well established at the Natal School of Architecture. In this case the pursuit is integrated into the undergraduate teaching programme and the focus is on a Black residential area. Proposals for appropriate houses for low-income households on particularly steep land is the special theme of this publication.

Both projects were funded by the PG Foundation.

A limited number of copies are available from The Secretary, School of Architecture, University of Natal, King George V Avenue, 4001 Durban.

CIVIC SYMBOLS AND OTHER SACRED COWS

A PERSONAL REVIEW OF THE DURBAN MUSEUM AND LIBRARY COMPETITION, 1989

DOUW VAN ZYL : GUEST EDITOR

Douw van Zyl is a practising architect and lectures in architecture at the University of Natal



In February this year Durban hosted a major event in the national architectural constellation, namely the exhibition of competition entries for a new civic library and museum on the Centrum site. A competition of this magnitude offers a unique glimpse into the state of South African architecture, and as such deserves further discussion in architectural publications — preferably at a scale beyond the scope of this journal.

One interesting suggestion overheard at the exhibition, was that the funds retained as a result of the unallocated second prize be put towards a beautiful commemorative manuscript published by the City of Durban, in recognition of the unstinting contribution by the 48 participants!

For this review I have selected six projects on the basis of their conceptual diversity, urban design impact or interest generated by their architectural language.

The point of view expressed here is a personal one and takes issue with some of the points expressed in the assessors' report. In order to provide exposure

to projects not yet published, the winning entry of Uytenbogaardt and Rozendal has not been reviewed here.

I have included some three-dimensional sketches made available at this stage, as perspectives and models were specifically excluded from the competition entries. I find it difficult to agree with the reasoning here, especially since the public had to relate to colourless two-dimensional drawings only.

This restriction, coupled with the assertion in the assessors' report to the effect that not a single project worthy of a second prize was submitted, may have provided the public with a rather dim impression of our abilities. In the following pages I hope to redress the balance to some extent.

A FOREST IN A FORTRESS

ENTRY NO 6 : SILVERMAN, CHALLENGER CC, JOHANNESBURG

THE APPEAL of this submission can largely be ascribed to the evocative qualities manifested in the concept of "A city within a city". A massive "fortress wall" surrounds an inner square filled with a high-tech "forest" of steel columns and filigree roof, a combination that promises to enhance our experience of Durban in a powerful way.

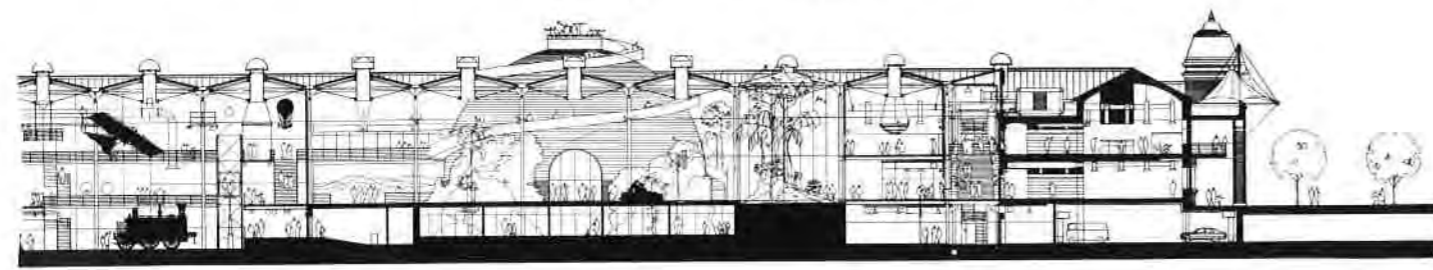
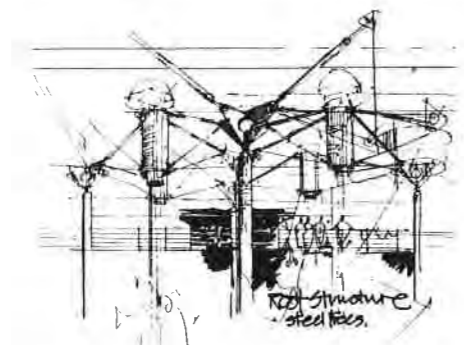
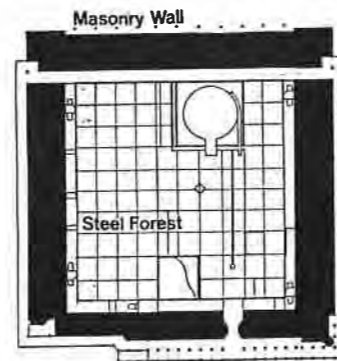
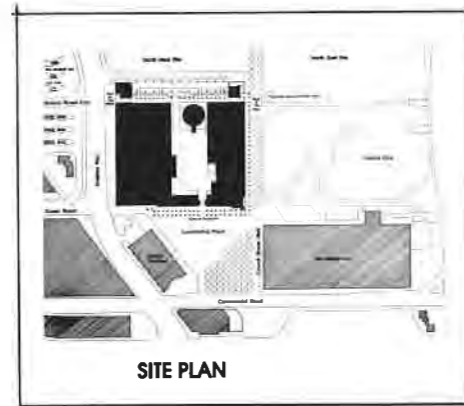
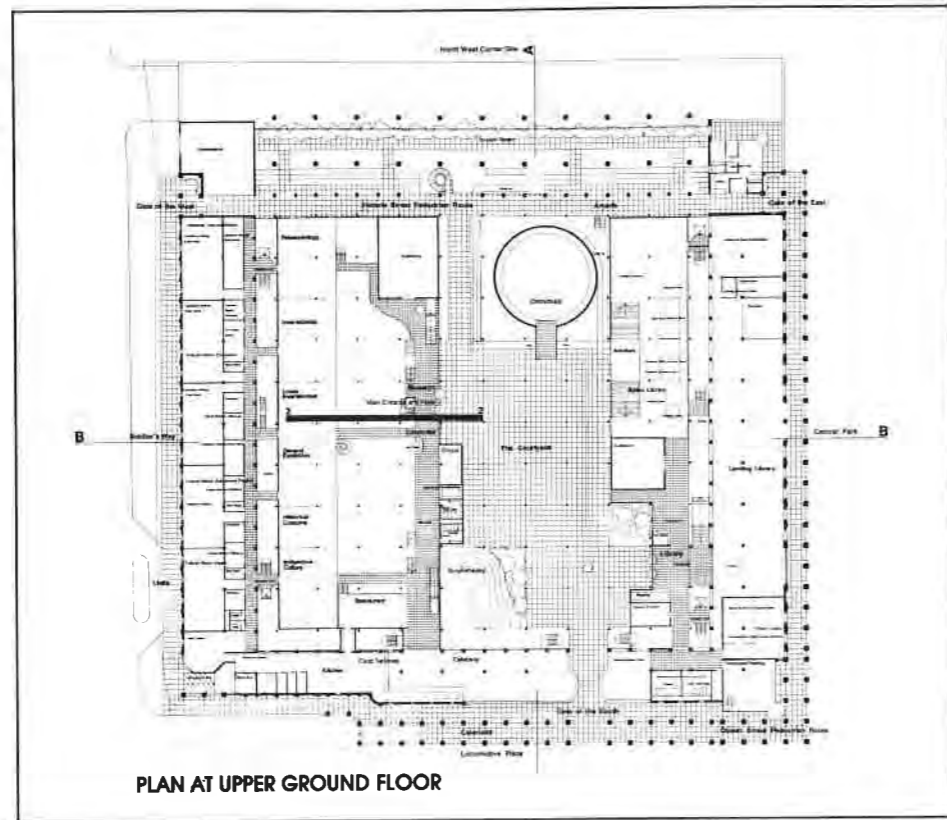
The omnimax dome provides a focal element to the central piazza, with a spiralling ramp leading up to a lookout post complete with telescopes and weather vanes. The theme of spanning across millennia of time, from the medieval collage of the wall to the most recent of tensile structures, is posited here as an intentional analogy to the conservation function of the museum.

Notable examples of this genre are Carlo Scarpa at Casstelvecchio, and his pupil Poltrineri's tour de force in the Palazzo del Te in Mantua. Both these projects admittedly are adaptations of older structures, which may explain the sense of conviction derived from them — a quality that is not quite so apparent here.

Whereas the large scale sections boast confident steel detailing in the tradition of Foster Associates, the development of the "ancient" elements in the project remains less convincing — in the development of both plan and elevation.

For example, while the facade on to Locomotive Plaza provides a sound barrier along the northern edge, the proportions appear squat and overbearing. The west elevation may well benefit from greater protection against Durban's sun, and here one thinks of the wealth of solutions available once one admits to the approach of mining the treasure chest of architectural prototypes.

While some of these concerns may be due to the rudimentary elevation drawings, these underdeveloped aspects suggest that the journey of historical discovery has only just begun for these young architects. We hope it will continue undiminished by the ups and downs of architectural competitions. (This entry, together with that of Johnson Murray Architects, shared the third prize).



TYOLOGY, KRIER AND URBAN PROCESS

ENTRY NO 4 : FRANCIS CARTER, CAPE TOWN

THE ORDERING system for this project revolves around the creation of a series of squares and arcades, and seems to be responding with a radically different set of geometries to the familiar model of streets and squares proposed by the Krier brothers. The geometry derives from a series of marginally divergent axes, responding either to existing urban movement lines or to new focal points positioned centrally to major new cones of vision. In the process various minor local influences are also acknowledged, contributing to the curious blend of organic and classical geometries.

An awareness of the basic sequential nature of all human experience is reflected here in an approach akin to that of a film director, where the design process is perceived as one of urban scriptwriting.

Walking down the tree-lined arcades, a surprising new vista awaits us around each corner. The tight control of urban space, reminiscent of the hill towns of Italy and Greece, is a welcome departure from the overscaled wasteland offered by so many modern urban renewal projects, and is consistent with the Krier approach.

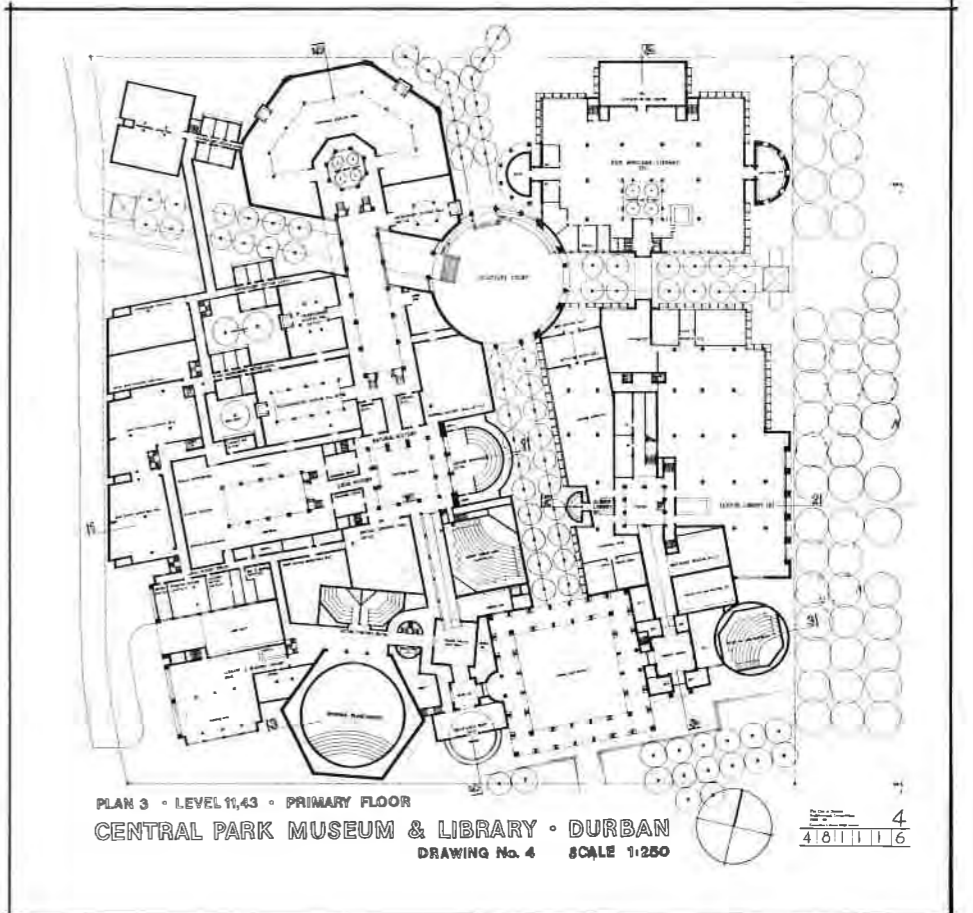
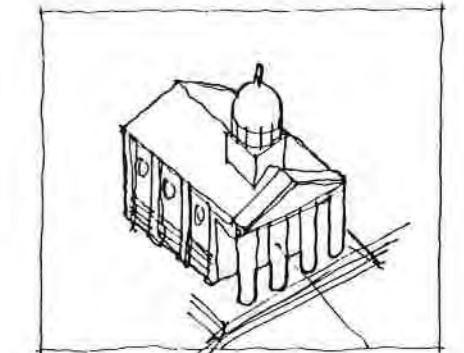
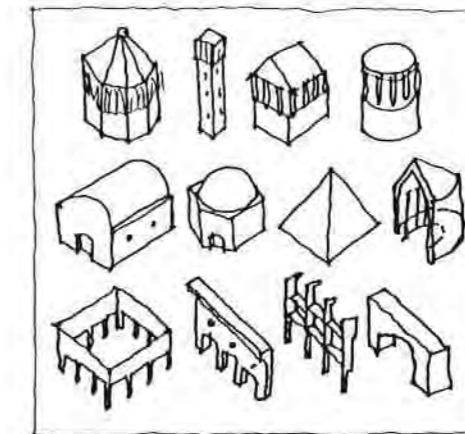
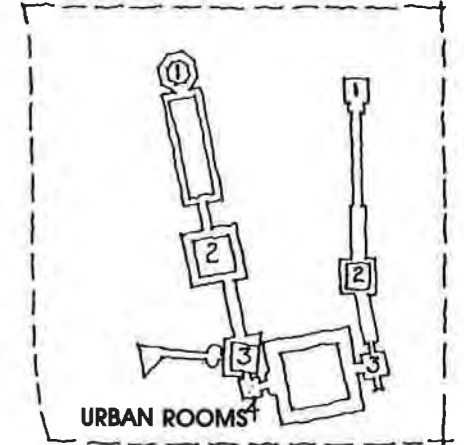
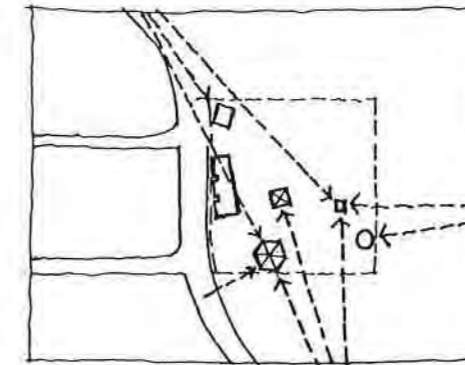
(The influence of these largely American-inspired megaspaces seems particularly appealing to local planners in places like Ulundi, Umabatho and Bisho, with seemingly little concern for its relevance to pedestrian Africa — Corb in Chandigarh all over again? In contrast, Francis Carter offers a fascinating prescription for the large remaining tracts of land on the Centrum site.)

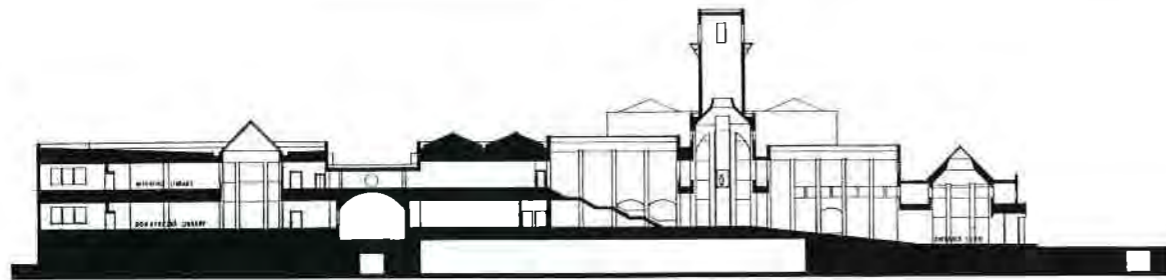
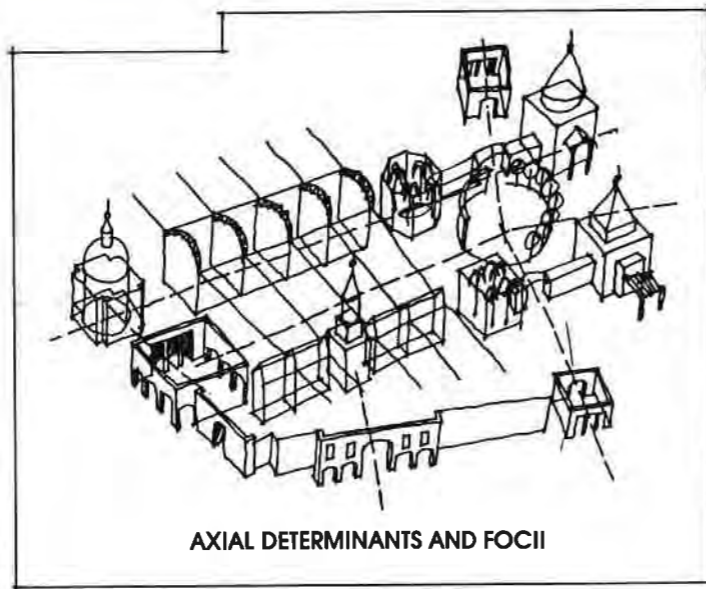
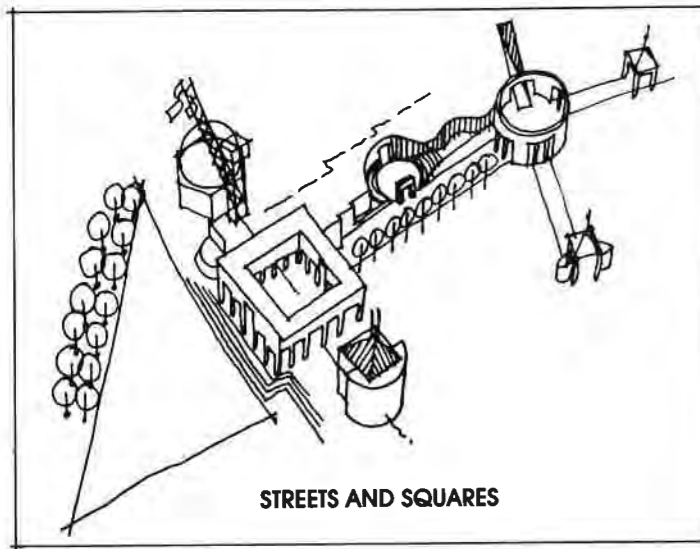
The internal spatial development is consistent with the urban concept, while the placement of both entrances on to Locomotive Plaza extends the internal experience to a maximum.

Within the "maze" the architect has placed a series of nodal "landmarks", lit by skylights over, to form welcome orientation spaces for visitors, who may well verge on complete disorientation at times!

The project will undoubtedly benefit from another level of resolution in the detail planning. The nonchalant clash of geometries that abounds, as well as the residual format of some courtyards, are essential candidates for this process. Servicing generally remains schematic and service to the restaurant seems blissfully unresolved!

In the context of a conceptual submission these concerns should perhaps not be over-emphasised — with a little faith these details can undoubtedly be resolved without great sacrifice to the conceptual strength of the project.





SECTION 4 - LONG SECTION THROUGH LIBRARY



LOCOMOTIVE PLAZA ELEVATION

IN A SUNKEN GARDEN

ENTRY NO 13 : TYSER AND PELLEGRINI, JOHANNESBURG

THE APPEAL of this project at the urban design level relates mainly to the elegant way in which the buildings are inserted into the setting, defining existing as well as new open spaces in a succinct way while at the same time solving the problematic junction with the Old Platform Building.

The project comprises of a large circular and two rectilinear elements, grouped around the diagonal route from the new Bus Ranks to the Workshop Centre. This route is dramatised in the form of a pedestrian bridge passing over the top of the sunken museum display spaces and garden, allowing passers-by a direct view into the main display areas.

The major display volumes are supported by the administrative and holding spaces, situated in a linear arrangement to the west.

Separating administration from the exhibition areas we find a semicircular "object movement zone" in the form of a curved gantry, obviously very useful for swinging dinosaurs through the pedestrian drawbridges!

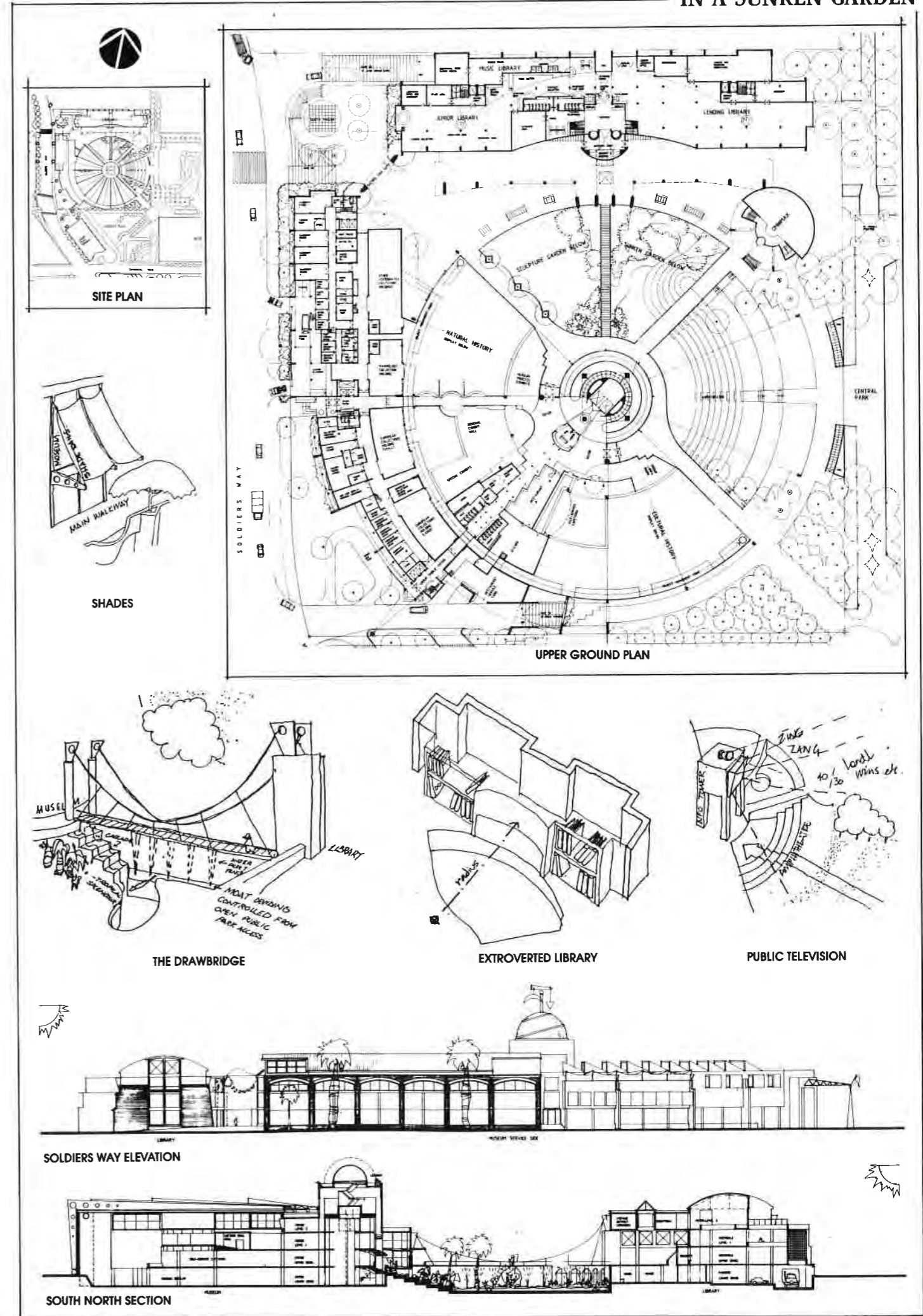
In a bold departure from the brief, the library is situated to the north of the Victoria Road axis. Although the accessibility from the south is somewhat extended in the process, significant orientation benefits result.

The south facade of the library is given an open treatment, while the northern edge is populated with the main working and administrative spaces. This is in marked contrast with the north-south alignment adopted for the library in many submissions, at the risk of an ongoing energy cost to the

city for the life of the building.

On a more critical note, the rather *ad hoc* feel of the various facade elements is not significantly clarified in the design report. Quite a few projects submitted contained similar rudimentary elevational drawings. This causes one to wonder if the "conceptual solution" posed in the briefing document has not allowed us to gloss over one of the most vexing questions posed by this competition, *ie* the meaning of these public institutions in South Africa today, and the related problem of an appropriate architectural expression.

The answer to this is proving to be quite elusive, not only to us architects but also to the City Council of Durban, where the debate as to the future of the project is continuing in the midst of a press embargo.



FORM plus FUNCTION?

ENTRY NO 17 : FRANKLIN GARLAND GIBSON AND PARTNERS, DURBAN

THE distinctive overall format of this design is in the main a response to issues emanating from the context of the site:

- Locomotive Plaza is defined by the library along its northern edge, yet this facade subtly curves away on the southwest corner to reveal the gable-end of the Old Platform Building. The faceted curve of the roof over the Platform Building is echoed in the stepping of the roof over the main volume of the museum, while the dome of the omnimax theatre provides an interesting foil.
- In addition to defining the western edge of Central Park, the complex creates a vital new piazza, extending the Park and locating the open-air amphitheatre on a diagonal that echoes the major pedestrian route through the park.
- A range of new urban gateways is created, positively separating Locomotive Plaza from Central Park and Soldiers Way. Victoria Street is extended to become a tightly scaled pedestrian arcade, simultaneously resolving the problematic misalignment of the street with the northern edge of Central Park.

- It acknowledges the important pedestrian approach from the CBD and Queen Street area with a secondary entrance to the museum positioned opposite the Old Platform Building. This very real problem appears to have been glossed over by many entries, which prefer to rely entirely on the Church Street underpass, as emphasised in the brief.

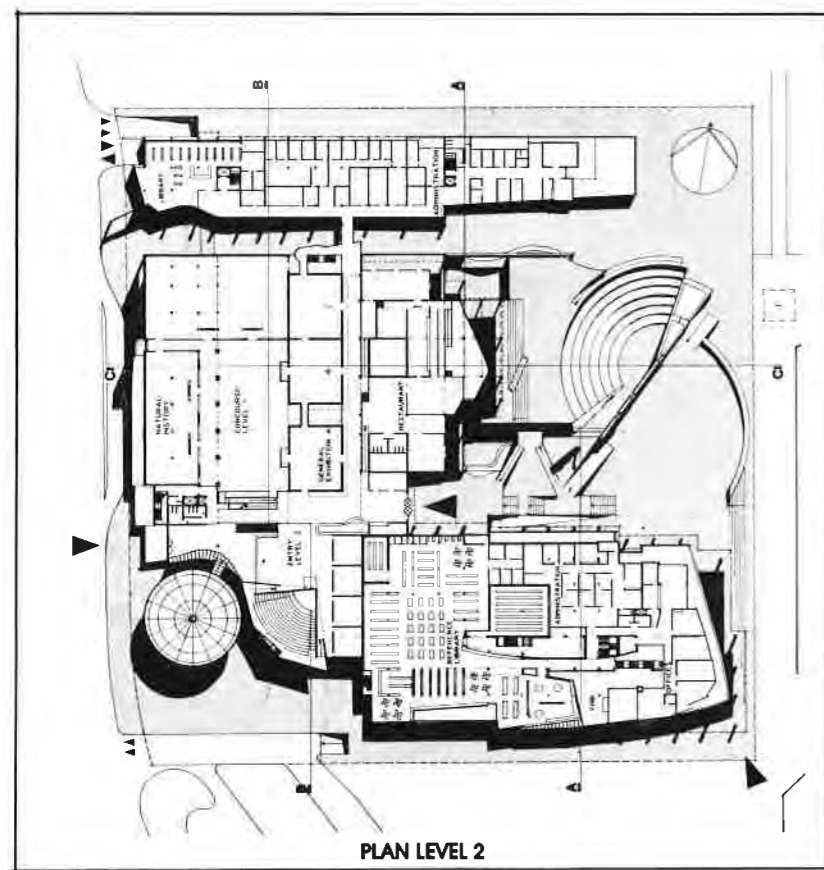
- The massing theme is equally responsive, with the dominant volumes abutting Soldiers Way reducing down to an intimate scale around the entrance forecourt. Here the approach gently rises up to the entrance, where the visitor is welcomed by a series of cascading copper roofs (see section C-C). Behind, the faceted roofing system over the central volume rises up into view, hinting of prehistoric wings and pterodactyls lurking inside. The linear administrative wing along the northern edge displays a similar reduction in volume along its length, ensuring a pleasant orientation and view to the north. The facade on to Locomotive Plaza is appropriately scaled to the Workshop Centre, but is eroded and glazed at ground

floor level, to induce pedestrians around to the forecourt.

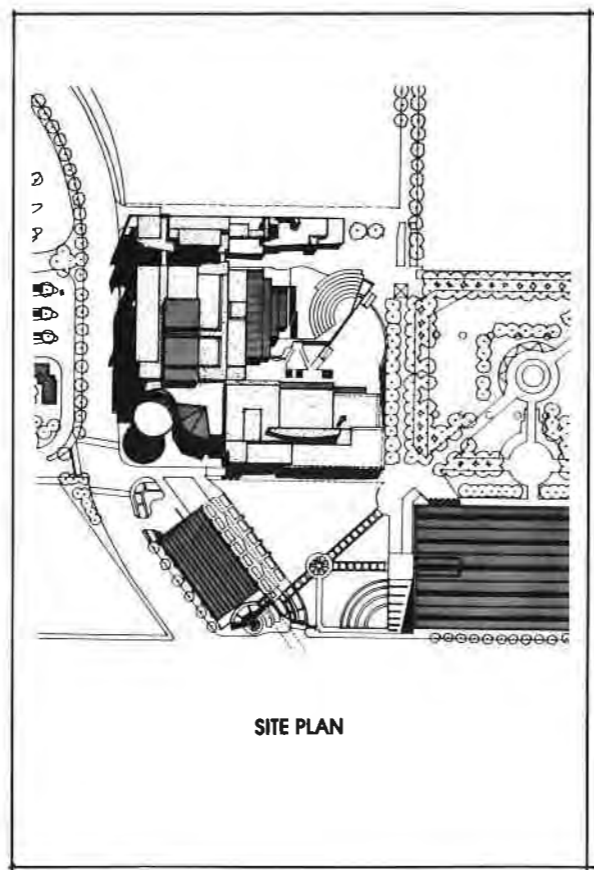
On first reading, the project appears to continue in the mainstream of orthodox modernism, functionally inspired and unfettered by the "crisis in architecture" created by the architectural journals.

A few disquieting notes are however detectable, suggesting that this design is not completely unaffected by the current wave of free-form radicalism emanating from the Architectural Association in London and so popular in schools of architecture everywhere.

Here the planar morphology expressed in the plan of the library, the faceted roof over the main volume and sculpted arcade extending Victoria Street are of well controlled expressions of a kindred spirit. As a result the project exhibits a maturity beyond the youth of the design team, and may be inspirational to many students of architecture at present lost in a "Deconstructive fog"!



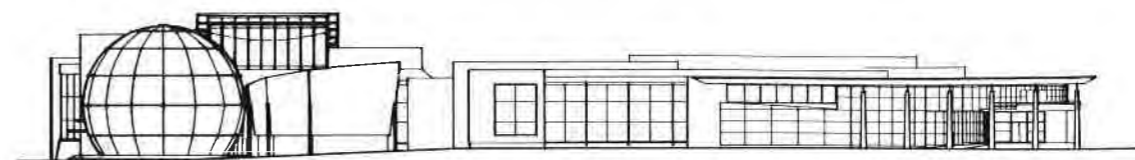
PLAN LEVEL 2



SITE PLAN



SECTION C-C



SOUTH ELEVATION

A CHALLENGE TO PERCEPTION?

ENTRY NO 25 : H C DALLE VEDOVE AND STEINER, JOHANNESBURG

THIS ENTRY exhibits a striking departure from what architectural critic William Curtis has aptly termed "the ponderous exercises of Post-modern neo-classicism", and which still proved to be a popular choice for this competition. This departure inevitably opens the door for that favourite academic pastime — determining the architectural genealogy.

The first question to face is whether we are dealing here with the voluptuous slipping and sliding forms of the "New Spirit"? The plan suggests this, with the images of "ships passing in the night". The design report also speaks of the need to reflect "... the diverse forces, sight and movement lines, flowing across the site".

This obsessive exploitation of real as well as imaginary energy lines, particularly when expressed in a dynamic and fluid aesthetic, is of course typical of the "Spirit".

Further reading into the scheme soon reveals a rootedness in the site that is quite atypical of the movement. The extensive excavation is perhaps more reminiscent of say Hans Hollein's museum at Mönchengladbach, where a similar theme of an

underground mausoleum to house valuable artifacts is pursued.

This makes one question whether we are not confronted here by a new strain of that dreaded nihilistic wave of punk-inspired architecture emanating from Europe? (see AD Aug 1986). The perspective also confirms a solidity in the massing, while still maintaining a sense of streamlining — rather like the fifties stuff?

Perhaps it is then merely another project from that nostalgic group of late-modernists who, in the mould of Koolhaas and Zenghelis, are actively reworking the language of orthodox Modernism

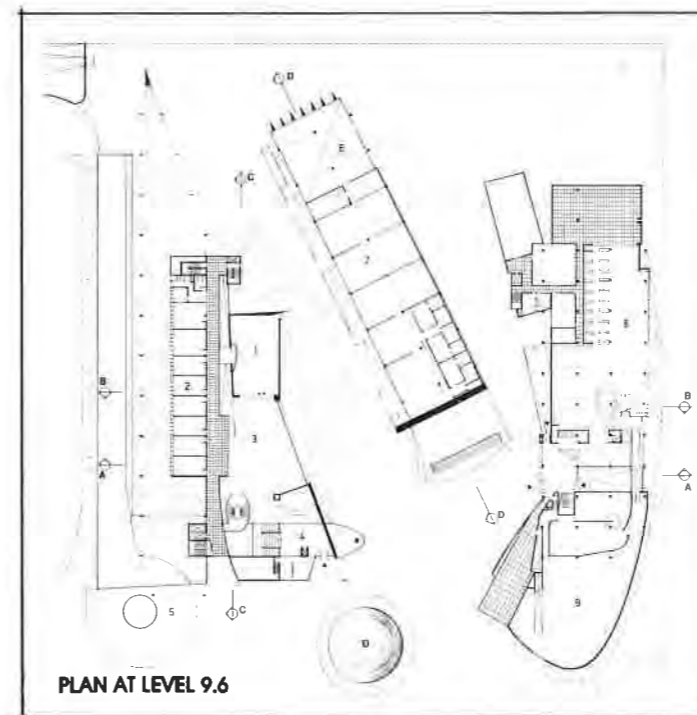
These architects are of course painfully aware of the Post-modern critique that the egotistical pursuit of disassociated iconic solutions has contributed to the decline of the urban fabric in a major way. As a result the work of the neo-fifties group generally displays a great concern for context when inserting new buildings.

This aspect evidently places the iconoclastic approach of Dalle Vedove outside the embrace of this group. The authors have this

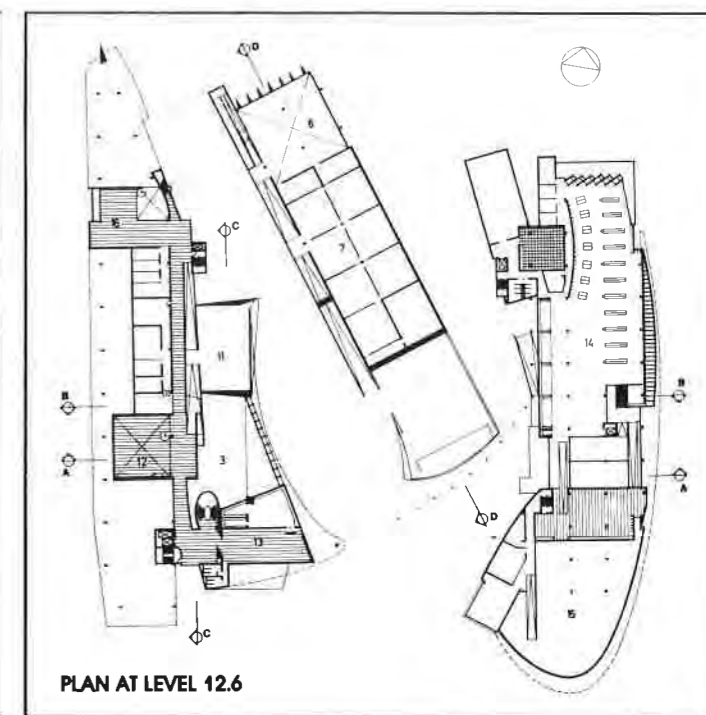
to say "... (the design) is neither literally contextual nor metaphorical in its reference ..." and "... the outmoded vision of Natal and its port as the Last British Outpost has already been transversed and enmeshed with its true first and third world identity".

Surely then, we are confronted here by a particularly subversive version of the Deconstructive approach, and clearly not operating at the popular (if superficial) level of fractured forms a la Gehry. No, we note here a quite restricted incidence of those deliciously discordant geometries. Rather it appears to pursue an intentional "disjunction" with both the cultural and physical context, intent on inducing in the viewer a perceptual shift, a slippage of the collective frames of reference (as promoted by Tschumi *et al*).

Perhaps the challenge posed here is one of an essential transformation of perception we are to experience as a prerequisite to the recognition of a true architecture of the Post-apartheid era — free at last of the tarnished imagery of Colonial Neoclassicism or the stunted prototypes of Regional and Ethnic Revivalism.

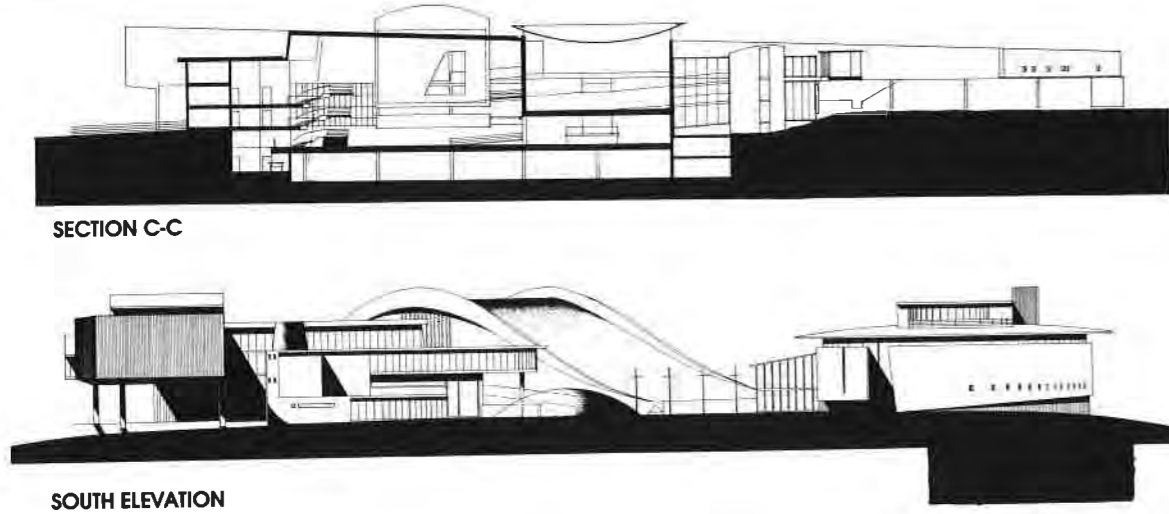
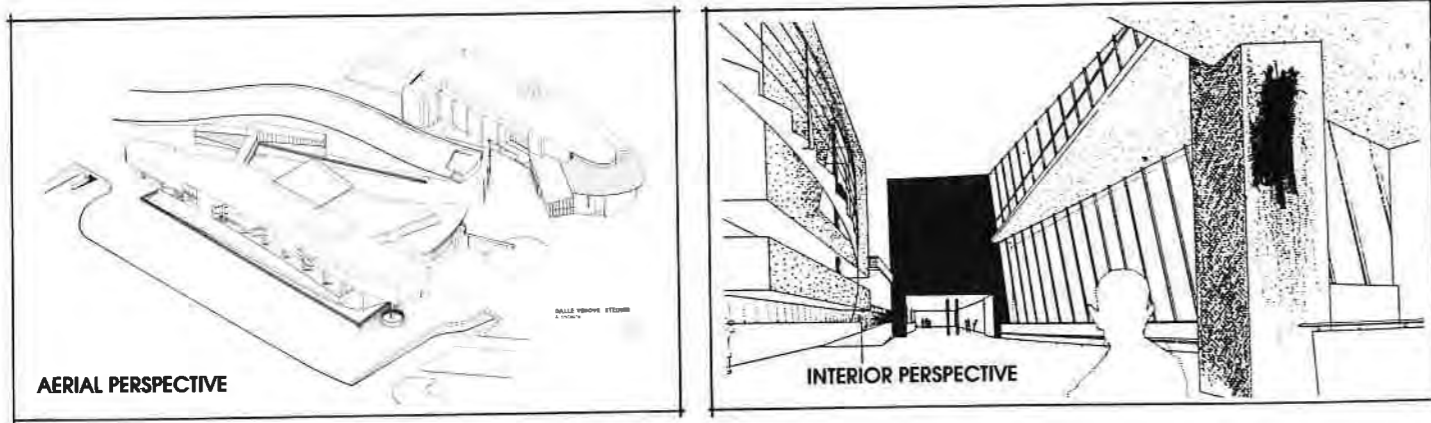


PLAN AT LEVEL 9.6



PLAN AT LEVEL 12.6

A CHALLENGE TO PERCEPTION?



AFRICA AHOY . . . AT LAST?

ENTRY NO 18 : AIA ARCHITECTS, DURBAN (MAURICE DIBB ASSOCIATES)

THE CONCEPT here originated with the myth of ancient travellers stumbling across two amazing caverns in a fossilised coral dune in the middle of the Umgeni delta.

These caverns were found to contain numerous relics of past occupation, and during the ages the caves were further extended by the addition of two mysterious serpentine colonnades — possibly erected by some early time travellers, who spotted the prototype for the columns as they passed over the temple of Poseidon as Paestum on their way down to Africa!

The only remaining task for our architects was to sprinkle a few large rooms around the edges of the dune, tunnel these back to the caves proper, and landscape the top.

Far-fetched as this may be, this theme has clearly captured the imagination of the project team, as can be seen in the high level of creativity expressed at many levels in the design, as well as in the quality and charm of the drawings.

The serpentine colonnades encircle a large Cultural Plaza, from where the entrances to both complexes originate. An extensive

range of ramps and paths leads up to the various viewing spots on the “dune”, and a raised pedestrian boulevard has been constructed on top of the colonnades, overlooking the Cultural Plaza.

An enticing array of conical and pyramidal rooflights pierces the dune silhouette — very atmospheric stuff at night — and the main concourse and science museum rear up in the form of a Zulu shield floating on top of near invisible late 20th Century patent glazing!

This was too much for many viewers who, completely captivated by this vision of an alternative future, were rather dismayed by the carping in the assessors’ report about “not so much extending the dignity of the architecture of the CBD, but *satirizing* it (my italics).

So for those disappointed viewers, please try to understand that competition juries often are extremely conscious of their duty to protect the dignity of all and sundry. Consequently we find that these days juries are highly sensitized to the undercurrent of satire evident in much Post-Modern work.

Clearly this movement is quite capable of fatally debasing all that latent Voortrekkers

as well as Last Settlers hold dear. This paranoia has by now reached a level of complete automatism, so that even the most active protestation of being misinterpreted will be in vain.

Thus the claims about integrity of intention in the design report (*ie* “Bronze lettering on the entablature above each entrance identifies the library and the museum. The portals are similarly constructed of bronze with bevelled glass, opening on to inlaid marble entrance foyers with indigenous hardwood fittings and leather covered banquet seating”) did not seem to make any impression on the committee.

For that matter, Roy Farren, principal designer, might as well have done his entire “African thing”, complete with assegai spires, elephant columns and shield-shaped roofs. Whilst the accusation of satire may not have been quite so automatic, there is little doubt that such a design is likely to be perceived as yet another outrageous assault on collective dignities, and thus would be considered equally *outré*!

