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JOURNAL OF THE KwaZULU-NATAL INSTITUTE FOR ARCHITECTURE
REWARDING ARCHITECTURE



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Rewarding Architecture

Editorial

This issue features the submissions for the twelfth biennial Awards Programme of the South African Institute of Architects (SAIA), KwaZulu-Natal Region, for buildings completed during the calendar years of 1997 and 1998 and restricted to Institute members.

1999 was a record year with 25 entries received for Awards of Merit consideration and seven for Conservation Awards. As has become customary, all submissions are inspected *in loco*, a task that demanded traversing some 1200km of roads throughout the Province and three days of jury time. These demands are daunting and make jury assembly difficult and will perhaps need to be reconsidered for future award Programmes.

The SAIA advises on the composition of the Panel of Assessors and the KZ-N Regional Committee followed suit. As Jack Diamond was visiting from Canada to deliver the Annual Sophia Gray Memorial Lecture in Bloemfontein, the former Natalian seemed an obvious choice for the rubric "architect from outside the region's jurisdiction". Fortunately Jack readily accepted.

Daniel Herwitz, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Natal, checked his diary and signalled his willingness to fill the rubric "eminent person or layperson knowledgeable in the field of architecture" and we are grateful to include reports by both Jack Diamond and Daniel Herwitz in this issue.

Nina Saunders, Ruben Reddy and Sydney Baillon filled the rubric "three architects who are members of SAIA" while John Frost, adjunct Visiting Professor of Architecture at

the University of Natal served as the "academic architect". The KZ-NIA Provincial Committee appointed Walter Peters "convenor" or "member of SAIA without assessing rights".

The results are indeed illuminating. All three Merit Awards as well as one Conservation Award are for buildings commissioned by the City of Durban: KwaMakhutha Library, Durban Metro Electricity Training Centre and Durban's International Convention Centre and Stratford Sheds respectively. Besides, in complying with its brief, the jury recommended to the KZ-N Regional Committee that Durban's ICC be nominated for consideration in the SAIA Award of Excellence programme to be held in the year 2000. The other Conservation Award was made for the rehabilitation of the Mission Station at Maria Ratschitz in Northern KZ-N.

While the distinction may be questionable to some, the Regional Committee again accepted the jury recommendation that KZ-N Special Mentions be made for the combined entry of Zimbali Country Club and Lodge; Highseas Holiday Cottage at Sheffield Beach; and a Special Mention, Conservation category, for 5-7 Escombe Terrace, Point.

The Awards ceremony was held at the NSA Gallery on Thursday, 23rd September. At that evening's event, not only did Trish Emmett receive a Conservation Award for the Stratford Sheds project together with her husband, Frank, but was formally inducted as KZ-NIA President, first woman appointed to that position. The certificates for the Awards were presented by SAIA President, Llewellyn van Wyk who travelled from Cape Town for the occasion; and those for the Special Mentions were presented by Trish Emmett, KZ-N President.

Walter Peters, Editor

It's odd returning after eighteen years since my last real visit to the county and cities where I grew up. Friends are easily recognizable, but of course they have changed. So too the cities, or what's left of them, familiar but no longer the same.

Apart from the Africanization of the city centres the biggest changes are the changes in scale and hence the character of place. The new highway networks dwarf buildings, reducing time - distance and hence give a diminished sense of place. Highways often isolate buildings from their old, nurturing environments, depriving them of both sustenance and dignity. Clearly precedence is given to the car, even in urban areas, rather than to pedestrians.

The spread of townships in a haphazard manner has blurred the distinction between city and country. As a result there is neither one nor the other, with, perhaps, the exception of the old centres. Coastal developments destroy the very elements that attract them in the first place. There still seems to be little recognition of the exceptional beauty and power of the indigenous plant material.

Of course there are exceptions such as the preservation of the landscape above certain contour levels in the Western Cape, but these are exceptions.

What a paradox - post-apartheid South Africa giving rise to cities whose basis is one of segregated land use. Dormitory residential areas have no shops, schools, clinics, libraries, sports facilities etc., black and brown people shop in the old city centres, white in the new suburban malls, industrial areas with no connection to their workforce, and shopping centres not related to the residential areas they serve. However, there are some signs of change, such as in Southgate, Gauteng, which now also serves residents of Soweto and Lenasia.

The overall low density of development means automobile or taxi dependency, another paradox - in a country where car ownership is very low there is a dependency on small-capacity vehicle movement. As ingenious and responsive as the minibus-taxi system is, it is ultimately limited in its capacity, expensive and presently only helps to sustain urban sprawl.

The fact that the change has been rapid can give some comfort - change for the better can be equally so. Unlike these most recent changes, however, improvement will need to be orchestrated with policies based on an integrated approach. Governance, taxation, land use, planning, transportation and strategic investment must be planned together, or it will

Rewarding Architecture

Jack Diamond: Notes on South Africa

be ineffectual at best, counter-productive at worst.

Neither European nor North American models will fit this circumstance, although they can, of course, offer insights and lessons.

Given the development of new centres outside the old cities, particularly the retail and office park centres, such as at Rosebank and Sandton in Johannesburg, these, together with the old city centres, can be the basis of a multi-nodal city: The core foundations have been laid, but they need to be diversified, particularly with housing, and linked.

The harbourfront at Cape Town is an example of what to do. The incorporation of new and old buildings, and a wide variety of industrial and commercial uses, and especially now with the addition of a significant residential component, is exactly the form consolidation should take. Moreover, the planning has been done with care, preserving an intimate human-scaled environment full of activity and rich in diversity. Of course the effect on the old city centre will need to be monitored, as the present population base may not be sufficient to support two such urban centres.

These commercial cores (the market has always been a powerful genesis of cities) can form the nuclei of a linked constellation. Development must now be consolidated around them, not allowed to spread in ever widening waves across the county. This is the critical issue.

Empty office buildings in the old cores such as Johannesburg, can and should be converted to housing - sectional title housing so there is ownership. The savings made by not building new infrastructure for urban sprawl can be diverted to mortgage insurance and other schemes to enable residential ownership, much as Canada successfully instituted after World War II.

Both legislation and a full cost pricing policy can accomplish this: that is, each new housing unit, for example, should bear its incremental cost of the highways and utilities that are built to service the areas the house stands on. Truck and taxi services should likewise bear the full ratio of cost of the highways they use. Petrol taxes should be earmarked for mass transit investment. A combination of stick and carrot.

As a consequence much more effective land use will be achieved; nor is the alternative of sprawl affordable.

In this way, too, these centres can be linked by affordable mass transit as the main framework of a public transportation system. This does not necessarily mean fixed rail transit, at least at first. Buses, on exclusive rights of way, can be the first link. Only when demand justifies can greater capacity rail-based mass transit be instituted. Lower capacity movement systems should be local, providing distribution for each centre only.

Architecture is inevitably an expression of the culture of the society that creates it. The epochal layers of architecture in Bloemfontein are a dramatic case study. Buildings of the Orange Free State Republic are a wonderful combination of the use of a universally understood language (in that instance a classical one) used to give expression to regional conditions, culture and sensibilities. The use of Ficksburg sandstone in the brilliant, clear but soft light of the Free State, producing shadows and shade modulated by reflected light, is a deeply gratifying resolution of the universal and the local, at an inherently satisfying human scale.

Buildings of the apartheid regime, by contrast, like those of other totalitarian regimes, appear brutal, over scaled and arrogantly unresponsive to context. The closest parallel I can think of are the maladroitness buildings of the communist era in East Germany - so obsessed with stamping their imprimatur on the political landscape they only exhibit their barbarity.

I heard well meaning architects talk of incorporating symbols of "indigenous", i.e. black, culture into their designs. Like the cultural revolution in China, there is the fear of being elitist. This fails to recognize the distinction between excellence and exclusion. It would be sad indeed if architects imposed self-limiting constraints in deference to some supposed sensitivities. Those who understand this issue understand that there is no need to symbolize the indigenous: accommodating the technological, geographic, climatic, social,

political and other relevant contexts, will create an inherently indigenous architecture, a many layered inclusivity. That itself is symbolic of the new South Africa.

I was struck by the absence of a South African approach, a contemporary one that draws on the best of a wonderful past and one that addresses regional conditions. I was also struck by the use of an excessive number of materials, systems, surfaces etc., facades often looking more like sample boards than buildings. When architects don't know what to do they seem to do everything, graphically illustrating design incoherence. Just as disturbing are the instances when architects import the personal language of other architects in other places. Inappropriate form without content is the inevitable result.

The restoration of old Natal buildings stands in curious contrast to the current approach to design, and I saw many excellent examples. While I did see a few well designed and elegantly restrained new buildings, in general it was not apparent that the principles that guided the past has found new expression in a South African school of architecture.

South African cities can become examples to the world of urban life in the 21st century, as the country has in its peaceful transition to a new political order. There is a splendid, noble role for architects to play, once again validating the extraordinary contribution our profession can make to South African society - the role of leadership in showing the way in city planning, urban design and architecture. And clearly this leadership is sorely needed.

A.J. Diamond, September, 1999

After studying Architecture at the University of Cape Town and Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford, Jack Diamond began practice in Durban in 1956.

Consequent upon his studying under Louis Kahn at the University of Pennsylvania and working in the master's office in Philadelphia, Jack commenced his Canadian career, initially in academia and then in private practice in Toronto. Principal in the practice Diamond Schmitt & Co, he is the recipient of numerous design awards and honours, including that of Officer of the Order of Canada, conferred in 1996.



Durban icon of the 1960s: the Tropicale Restaurant in Albert Park by Cameron, Phillips & Diamond. The building suffered the indignities of an overhead onramp to the Southern Freeway in the late 1960s; an extension in the 1980s; and abandonment in 1998. FAR LEFT: The sketch by AJ Diamond which appeared on the menu cover.

South African Institute of Architects: Award of Merit

KwaMakhutha Library

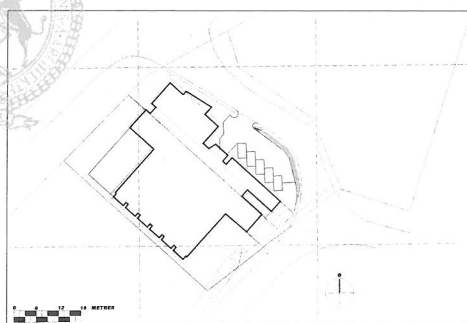


KwaMakhutha Library, Main Road, KwaMakhutha

Architects: Elphick Proome

BRIEF: The brief called for a new Community Library in the township of KwaMakhutha, owned by the community, which would serve as a focal point for community activities after library hours in addition to the library function. The community required high windows (for maximizing shelving space and for security purposes), red face brick to integrate the building into its architectural environment, and use of red tiled roofs, to get away from the "inferiority stigma" associated with "township sheeting".

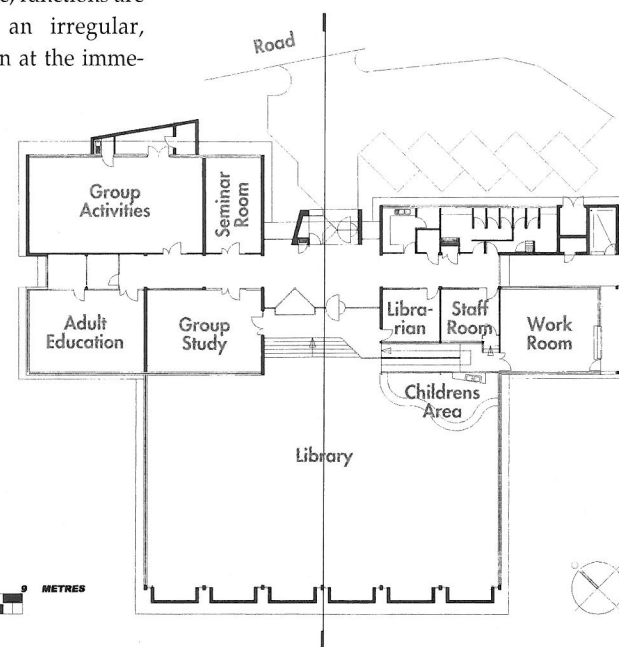
CITATION: The building opens like a book to those who enter it. From its tastefully tiled portal entrance one enters a space which unfolds to one's right, left and front in accord with its separation of functions. To the right a series of six meeting and seminar rooms allow for both public gatherings and private study or conversation, while to the left are the staff rooms, the work room and the facilities. Integration of these rooms into the overall architectural flow is efficient and elegant, and the rooms rise, architecturally, above their occasions – especially by virtue of their raking ceilings, which repeat the overall roof-form of the building and relieve the sense of boredom and confinement that comes from the standard rectangular, flat roofed, office or board room.



The third and largest segment of the building is the library itself, which from the foyer, opens down dramatically to a set of stairs and a ramp, as a large, open-plan multipurpose arena, expressed by roof lattice trusses-exposed air-conditioning ducts, and significant raking south clerestory glazing. In this luminous, friendly, unconfined space, functions are rationally distributed, with an irregular, colourful children's play section at the im-



Craig Hudson



mediate left enlivening the even distribution of shelving and reading desks which line most of the remainder of the space, surrounding the circulation desk. A sense of open expansiveness within rational order, and of individual quiet within the room of the community, pertains – which is just right for a community library, site of new knowledge and the expansion of horizons.

The jury was proudly told by the library's young manager that even community "street-toughs" shed their prickly skins when they enter this space, and behave with appropriate dignity. The building's mono-pitched roofs, its base of solid facebrick, its cladding panels, and dramatic triangular solar control baffles complete a building which the jury believes rises beyond, and therefore to, its occasion.

South African Institute of Architects: Award of Merit

Durban Metro Electricity Training Centre

Durban Metro Electricity Training Centre, 17 Supply Road, Springfield Park

Architects: McCaffery Wilkinson & Little

BRIEF: To design a centre on the existing depot site at Springfield for technical and non-technical training for the Durban Metropolitan Region and beyond.

CITATION:

This Training Centre represents a confident response to location and brief.

The L-shaped layout has a strongly horizontal building fronting Umgeni Road; the student centre marks the fulcrum; and a contrasting saw-toothed silhouette acknowledges the workshops at right angles. The principal components -

entry, lecture theatre, training spaces and offices astride the concourse, students' centre and workshops – combine as a clearly legible composition within which materials, colours and graphics emphasize the spatial sequences and establish a human scale.

The jury commends the clients and the archi-

ects for the non-institutionalised character to an educational building and especially the design of the concourse, the soul of the Training Centre.

This project was featured in SA Architect, March 1999.



South African Institute of Architects: Award of Merit

International Convention Centre, Durban

International Convention Centre, 5 Walnut Road, Durban

Architects in Association: Stauch Vorster; Hallen Custers Smith; Johnson Murray Architects
Consultant Architect: Philip Cox, Sydney
Project Managers: Andrew & Boule (Pty) Ltd

BRIEF: The brief was to provide the City of Durban with the world's most advanced convention centre, thus catapulting Durban into the international convention arena and stimulating its business, tourism and city sectors. The centre would have to be a multipurpose, flexible venue capable of accommodating multiple demands – even at the same time. The accommodation schedule was to allow for conferences of 1800 delegates, while affording multipurpose activities for up to 3500 delegates. Also intergral with the brief was that the building should exist as a world class technological achievement while also expressive of its KwaZulu-Natal setting and heritage.

CITATION: On the day the jury visited the "ICC", three conferences were in progress, yet the building remained spacious and airy in feeling, and each of the conferences felt as if it had the entire building to itself without feeling overwhelmed by it. For this is an edifice whose

dramatic size and scope in no way dwarf its human scale. Its controlled perimeter circulation allows for easy perambulation as one travels around the wide corridor (itself the width of an atrium) which allows for movement around the central exhibition and meeting spaces (themselves massive but capable of flexible subdivision by acoustic wall partitions to allow for appropriate scale). Movement is facilitated without being forced.

The glass facades which articulate the building's outer shell place the user in direct proximity to tropical Durban so that he or she never feels enclosed. These facades are protected from the sun by an elegant overhang, which also serves as a 'verandah' and encourages movement between inside and outside. The ambience is one of cool understated off-white, warmed by deep reds, blacks and Africanist tapestries and artifacts on the inside. The building's steel structure is also expressed throughout the interior and exterior, providing a feeling of connection to the whole at every point, and its undulating, roof encompasses size differentials in the

dispensation of rooms, while also providing both variation and continuity. The success of the building is measured by the diversity of persons who have enjoyed its exhibitions and conferences, as well as by its financial success. The jury believes it to be a global triumph which brings credit to the city of Durban.

This project was featured in Architecture SA, Jan/Feb 1995; World Architecture, April 1999; and KZ-NIA Journal 1/1999.



Dennis Gilbert & VIEW

South African Institute of Architects: Conservation Award

Maria Ratschitz Mission Station, Wasbank



Maria Ratschitz Mission, Wasbank, Northern KwaZulu-Natal
Restoration of Church, Blacksmith Shop and Convent

Architect: Robert JW Brusse

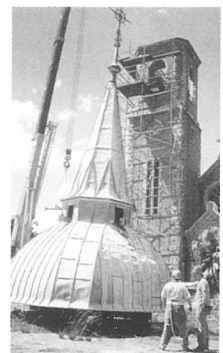
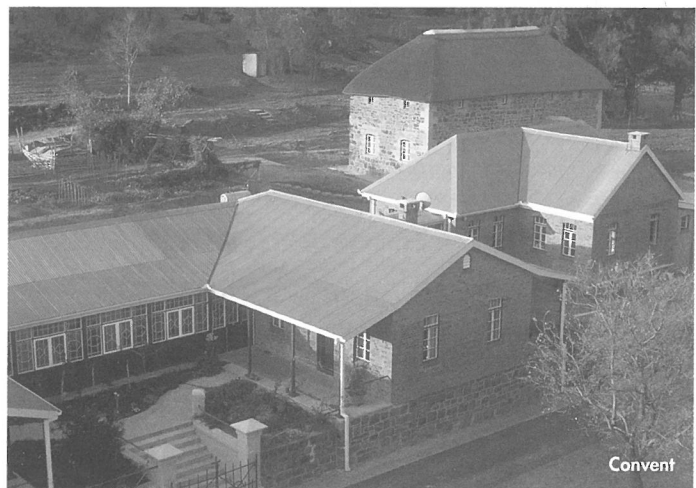


CITATION:

The restoration of the church, blacksmith shop and convent at Maria Ratschitz Mission transcends the reconstruction of a few beautiful and historic buildings. It represents faith in the spirit and opportunity present in the rural communities of the people of South Africa.

BRIEF: Maria Ratschitz mission station in northern KwaZulu-Natal was founded in 1888 as a "daughter house" to Mariannhill, and as a productive agricultural community of African converts. An insidious process began in the 1940s and culminated in 1975 when the station was even without a resident priest. Following on from the establishment of the Maria Ratschitz Development Forum in 1992, the Roman Catholic Church requested documentation for renovation or rehabilitation.

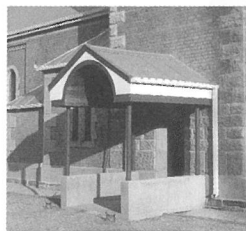
Neglect over the last 25 years had reduced the buildings to a crumbling and cracked ruin of hand made bricks and sandstone, timberwork and roof sheeting. The detailed and extensive restoration of the church is particularly inspiring, notably the painted murals and stencilled borders, the reconstructed clock and bells. The completed interior of the church is bathed in a sense of maturity and serenity which reflects its setting at the base of the KwaHlatikulu Mountain in the Biggarsberg.



Blacksmith's shop before restoration

This belies the frequently stormy history of the settlement which bears the scars of South Africa's tempestuous social and political past. The spirit of the Trappist monks who initiated the mission and its buildings in 1888, lives on in the dedicated team of owner, contractor and architect, who together with enthusiastic volunteers, have and are continuing to rejuvenate this architectural landmark.

The project was nominated for Award consideration by the KwaZulu-Natal Architectural Heritage Committee.



South African Institute of Architects: Conservation Award

Stratford Sheds, Durban



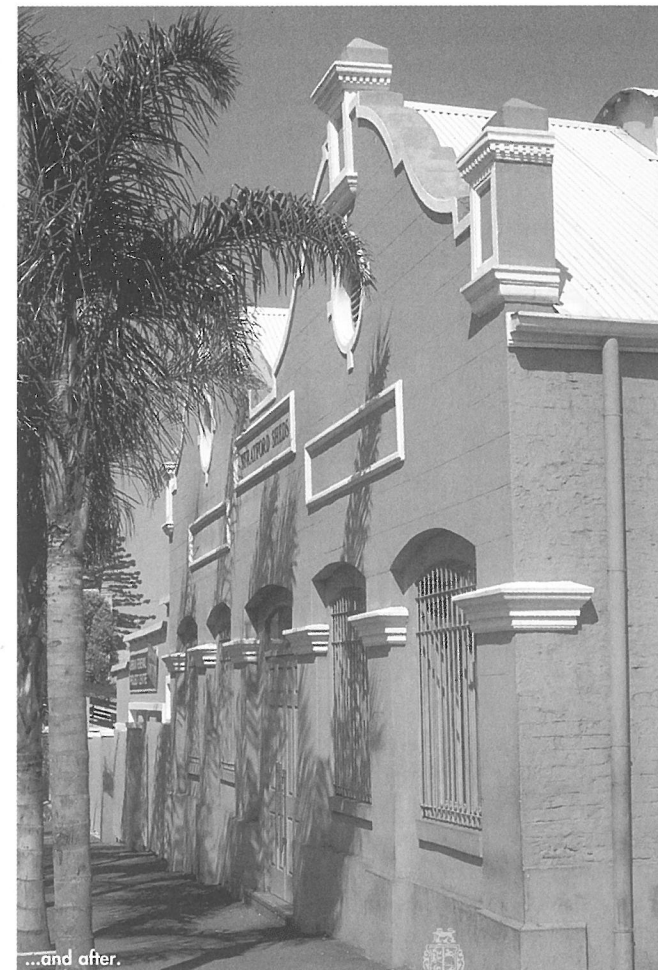
Administration interior

Stratford Sheds Community Centre, 22 Stratford Road, Warwick Junction, Durban

Emmett:Emmett Architects CC



Stratford Road, before...



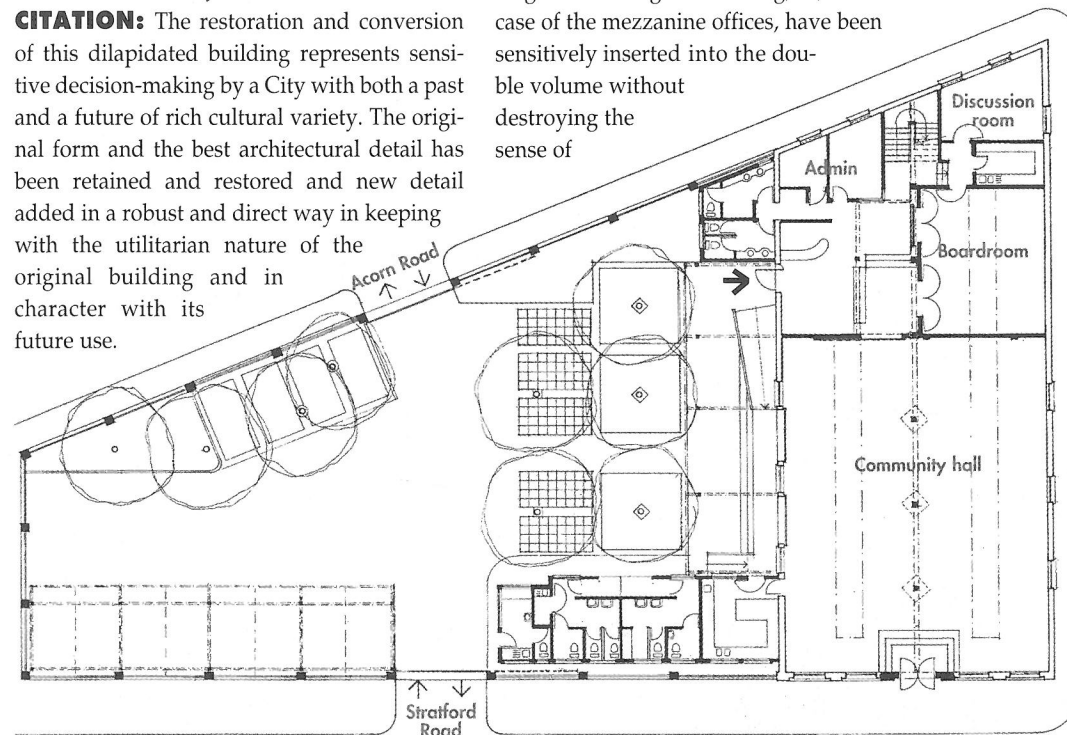
...and after.

BRIEF: To rehabilitate and recycle two industrial sheds built c1917 as a community centre and as a base for the offices of the professionals charged with the urban renewal of the area known as Warwick Junction.

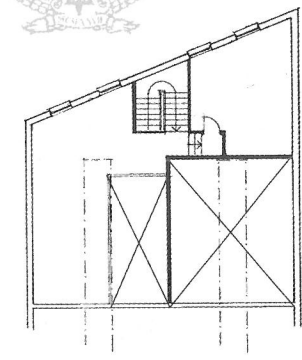
CITATION: The restoration and conversion of this dilapidated building represents sensitive decision-making by a City with both a past and a future of rich cultural variety. The original form and the best architectural detail has been retained and restored and new detail added in a robust and direct way in keeping with the utilitarian nature of the original building and in character with its future use.

New functions within the building such as the boardroom and hall, have successfully derived their scale from the internal height of the original building, or, as in the case of the mezzanine offices, have been sensitively inserted into the double volume without destroying the sense of

space. Loose fit and multiple-function spaces will ensure the ongoing and flexible use of the building in its vibrant and dynamic community.



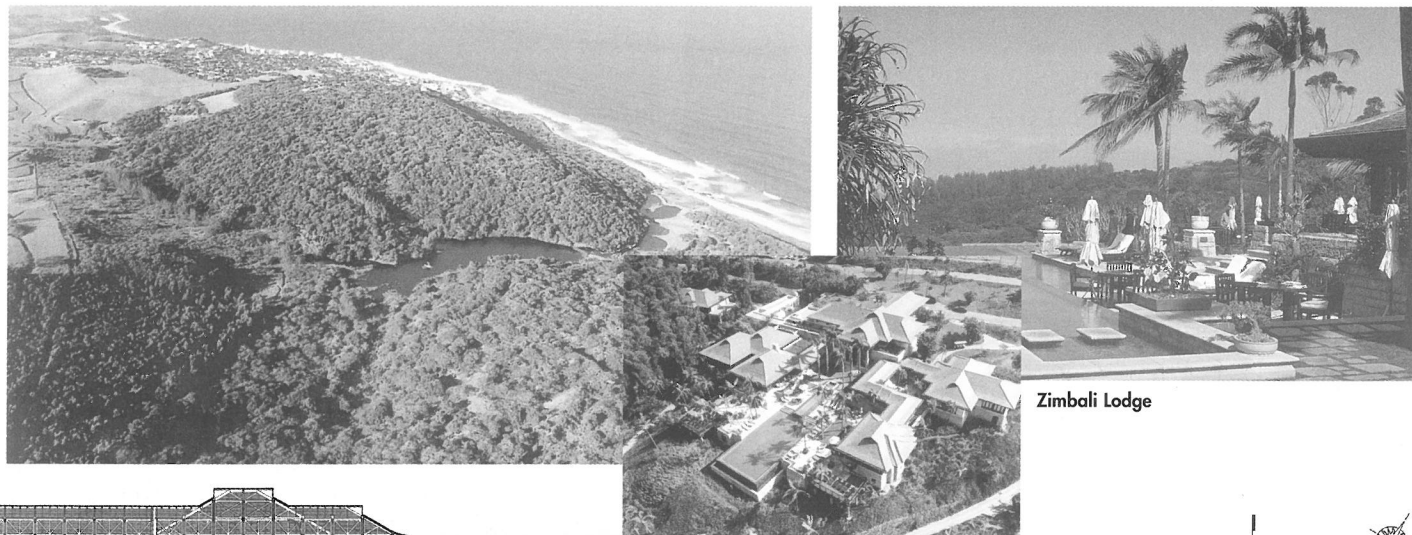
Douglas Lane



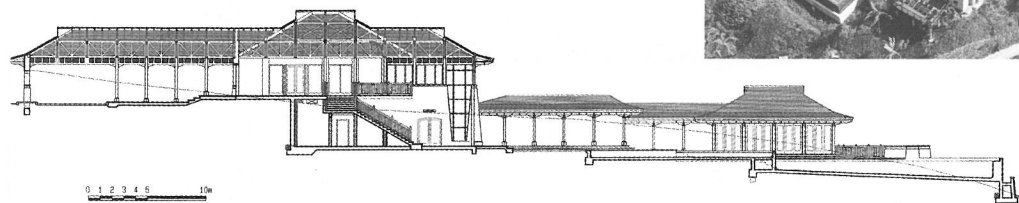
Ground and Mezzanine Plans

KZ-NIA Award of Merit: Special Mention

Zimbali Country Club and Zimbali Lodge



Zimbali Lodge



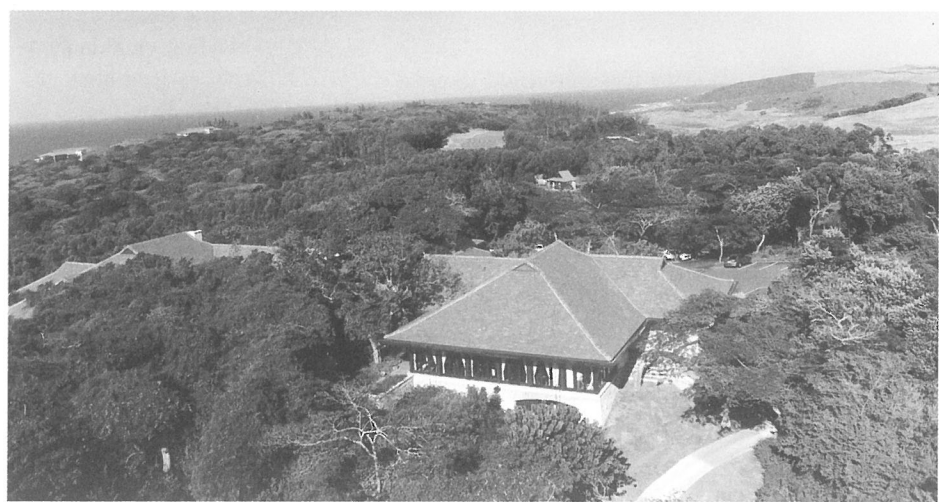
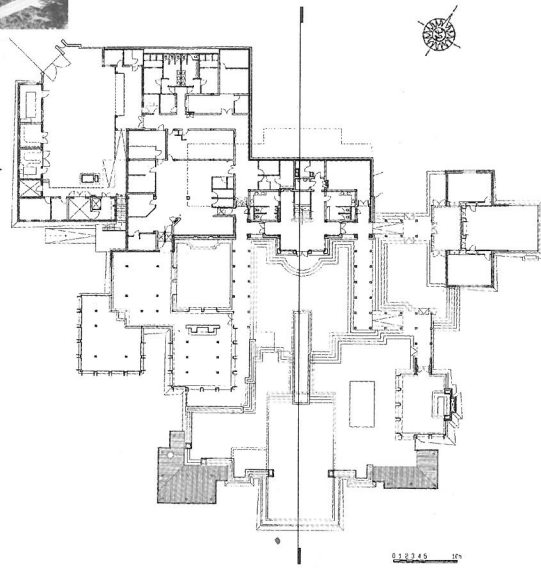
Zimbali Country Club and Zimbali Lodge,
Zimbali Estate, North Coast
Architects: Theunissen Jankowitz SA Inc

BRIEF: The creation of a coastal estate resort with a unique and secure, high quality living environment that preserves and enhances the natural character of the coastal dune forest. Building style and ambience was to be based on the luxury resorts of the tropics, with local references, and to suit the local climate.

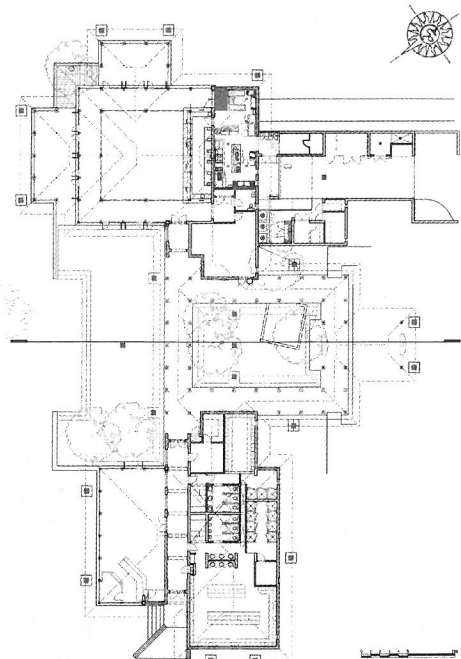
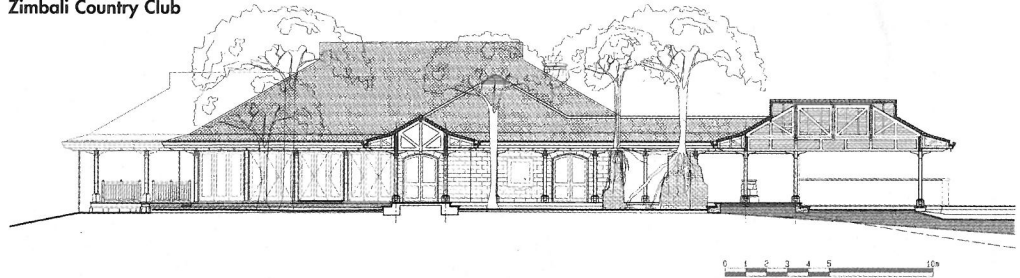
CITATION: The ruinous remnants of a farmhouse enveloped by the roots of a ficus tree mark the point of arrival to the Country Club, conceived of as a pavilion and opening to embrace the coastal forest.

Below lies the Lodge, sited on a spur and imbued with the calm refinement of a contemporary eyrie. Here the classical design *parti* and the outdoor spaces structured along an axis, acknowledge the exceptional site within the Reserve while directing views to the lagoon below and the Indian Ocean beyond.

Both these buildings deserve Special Mention for the landscaping strategy adopted. In their placement, choice of materials, indoor-outdoor relationships and climatic strategies, they demonstrate environmental responsibility.



Zimbali Country Club



KZ-NIA Award of Merit: Special Mention

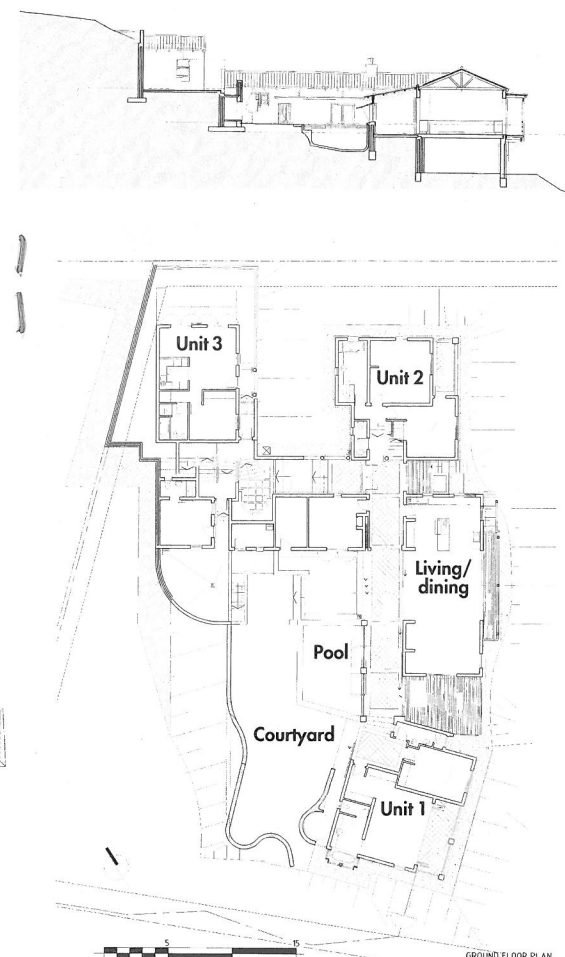
Highseas Holiday Cottage, Sheffield Beach

Highseas Holiday Cottage,
47c Colwyn Drive, Sheffield Beach
Dean Jay Architect

BRIEF: The design of a holiday cottage for the simultaneous use by three separate family groupings, and the retention of as many of the milkwood trees, and as much of the natural vegetation as possible.

CITATION: This is a cottage of considerable serenity on an exposed site. The use of materials, textures and finishes is robust, and the battered stone plinths emit a reassuring presence.

It is deserving of Special Mention for its simple approach to a difficult problem: to most beach cottages there is both a windward and a leeward side, these two usually being interpreted as the front and the back of the cottage. In this case, the leeward side is designed as a courtyard with a pool, to provide sheltered exterior living space without sacrificing the enjoyment of the spectacular views to the Ocean.



KZ-NIA Conservation Awards: Special Mention

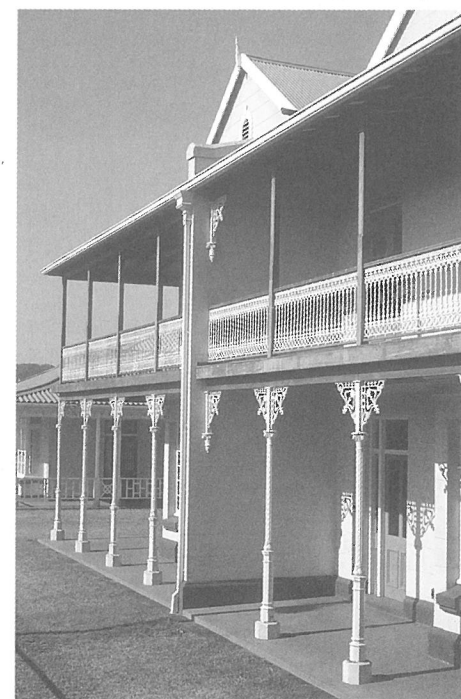
5-7 Escombe Terrace

5-7 Escombe Terrace, Point, Durban
VARA Architects and Urban Designers CC
in association with Mtetwa &
Associates Architects

BRIEF: The restoration and recycling of this building for the use of the developers of the Point Waterfront was to provide a benchmark for subsequent development.

CITATION: Five pairs of Edwardian double storied semi-detached houses, with cast iron verandas to both levels, originally occupied by harbour staff, stand proudly on a prominent dune overlooking the Indian Ocean. The exterior of one of these has been

meticulously restored and deserves a Special Mention for its contribution to the streetscape of the area and as a beacon for the future.



INSET: Awaiting conservation

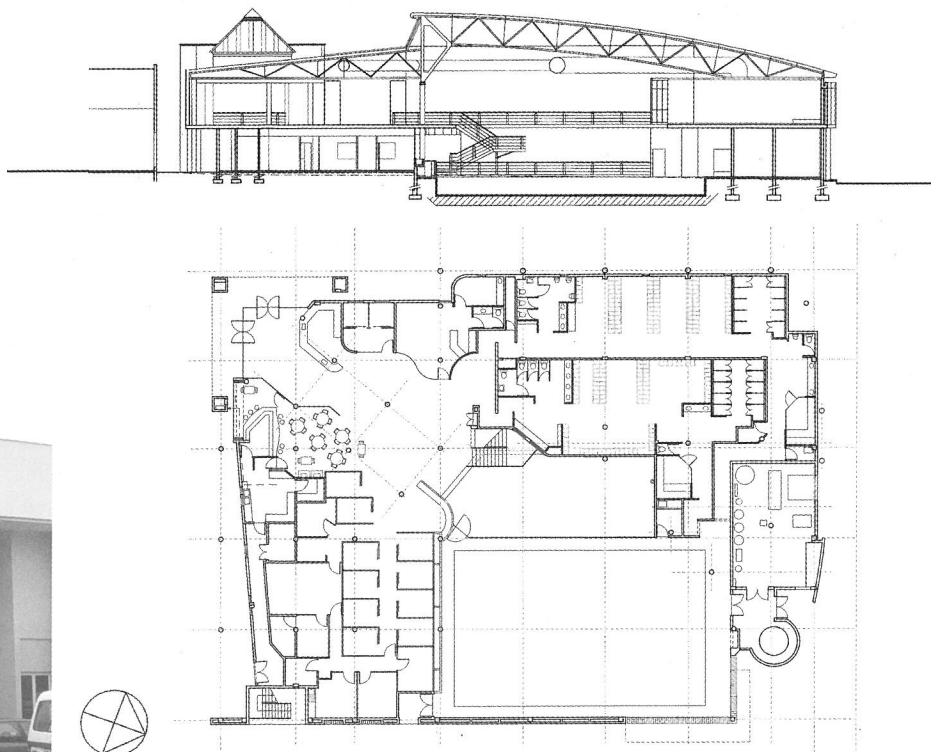


Editor's Choice: Rewarding Architecture

Bluff Health & Racquet Club

Bluff Health & Racquet Club
Peter Ries Architects

The exigencies of the location within the site of an existing shopping centre prompted the diagonal entrance which in turn created a spatial dynamic to the rectangular form. It prompted a structural colonnade which terminates on the pool located on the opposite corner, which due to its glazed corner, provides the building with an external focus at the street intersection.

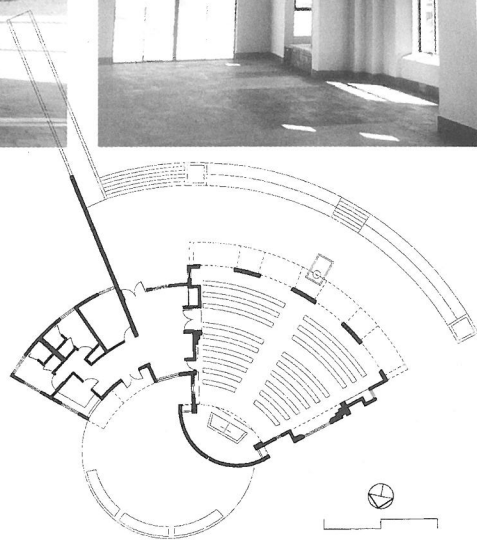
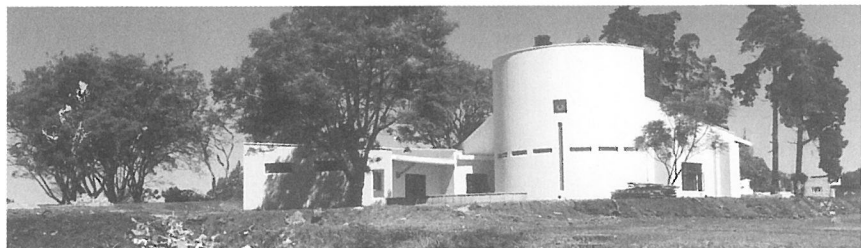
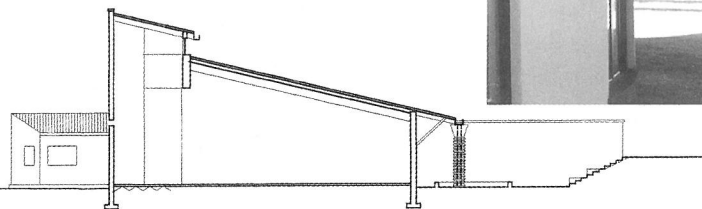
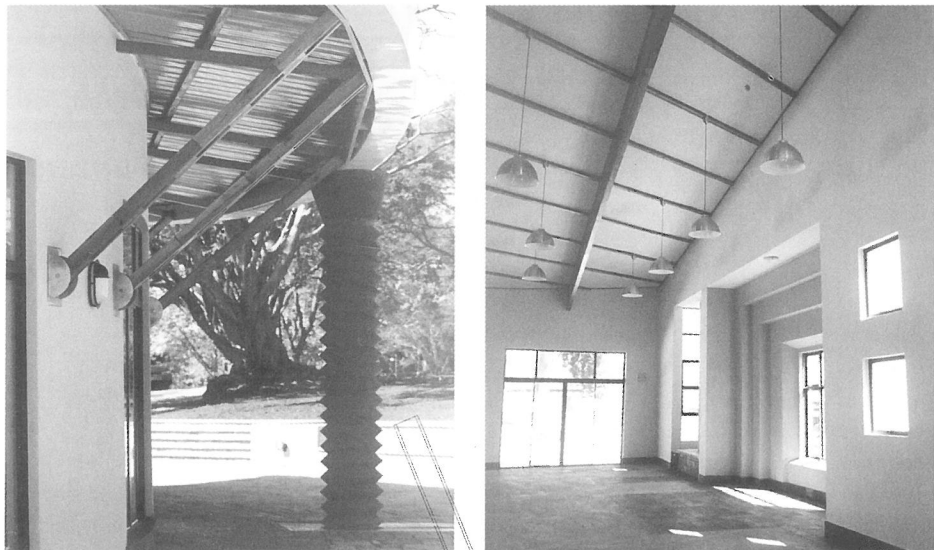


Editor's Choice: Rewarding Architecture

Poynton Centre, Botha's Hill

Poynton Centre, Botha's Hill
Sarkin & Jain Architects & Urban Designers

This centre was designed for religious and secular functions within the existing Koinonia Conference Centre at Botha's Hill, overlooking the Valley of a Thousand Hills. As a result, the building is both introverted, yet has a large window to the magnificent view, and extroverted with outdoor spaces merging with the landscape setting. Symbolism is inspired by both Christian and Zulu traditions.



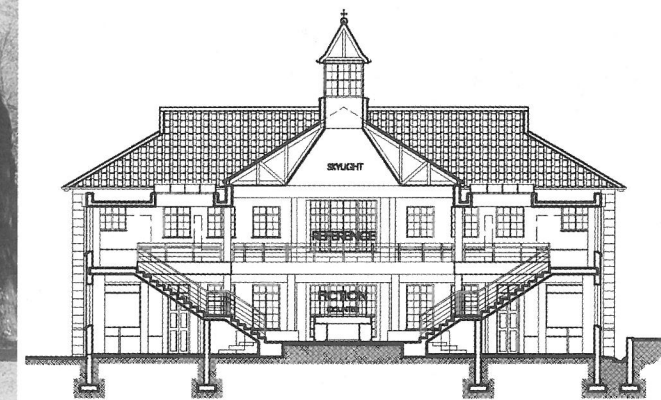
Editor's Choice: Rewarding Architecture

Media & Business Centre, Michaelhouse

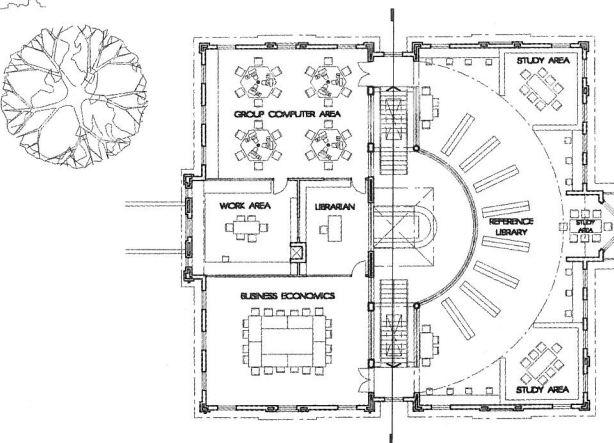
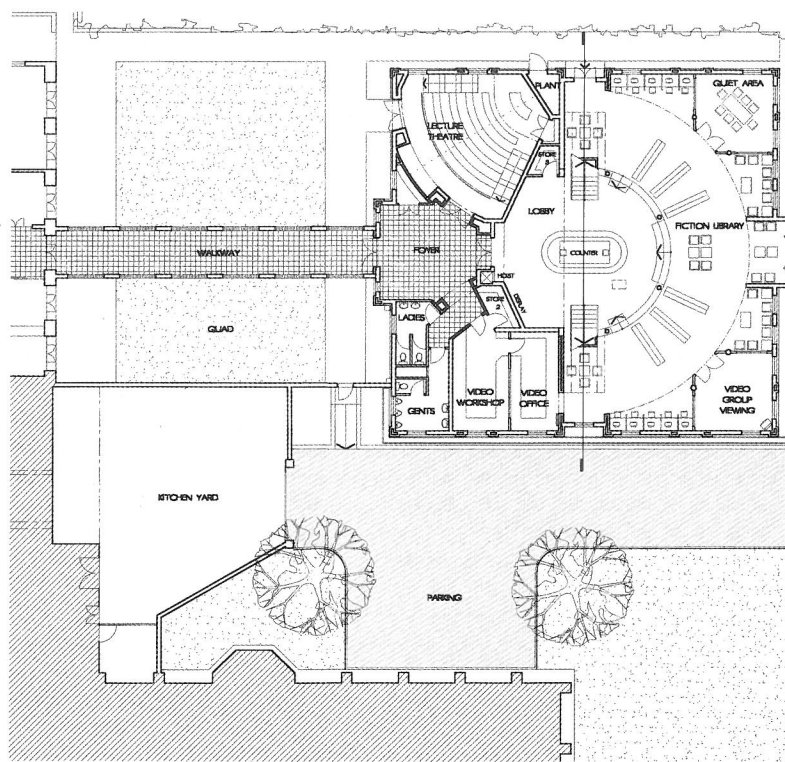
Media & Business Centre, Michaelhouse,
Balgowan
Grice, Small & Pettit, Architects

The historical library at Michaelhouse was conceived as a reading room, unfortunately too small and inflexible for modern requirements.

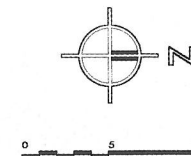
In order to consolidate the video resources unit, the computer equipment necessary for a modern media centre, and to include a facility for the teaching of entrepreneurial skills, the decision was taken to develop the new Media and Business Centre. This Centre incorporates an auditorium for speakers and multi-media presentations by pupils.



Section B-B



Ground and First floor plans

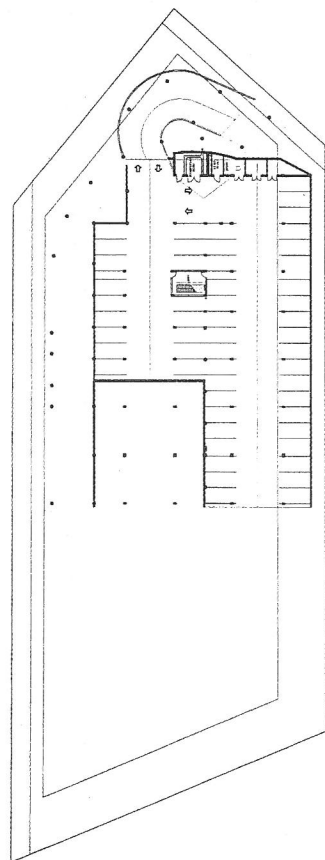


Editor's Choice: Rewarding Architecture

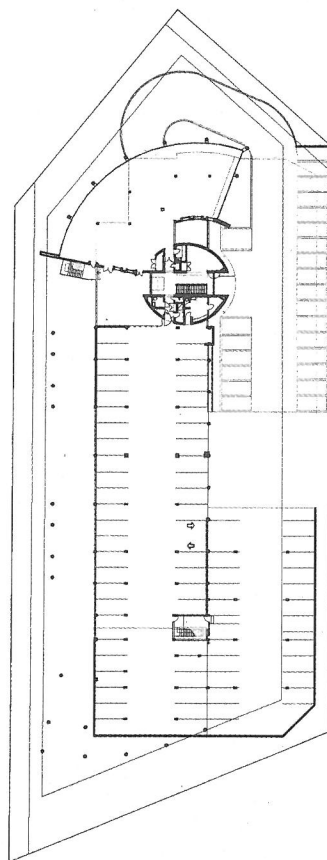
Murray & Roberts House, Westville

Murray & Roberts House, Westway Office Park, Westville
McCaffery, Wilkinson & Little

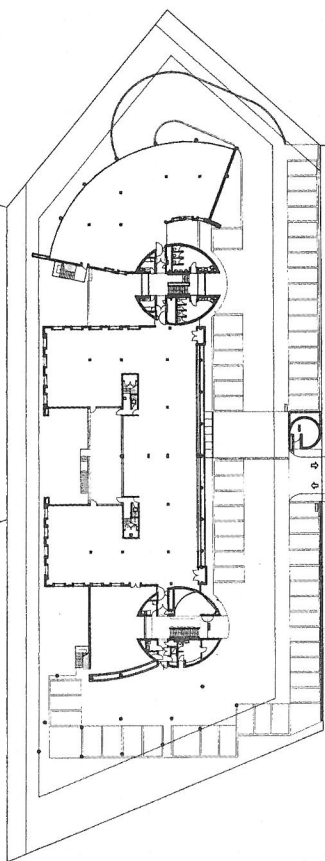
As the project abuts a Nature Reserve it was required to acknowledge the prospect and views of the Reserve while fulfilling with the urban requirements of the Office Park. Consequently the building is articulated with two crescent-shaped ends to meet with the former, and a central U-shaped block in acknowledgement of the urban context, each form punctuated by two cylindrical service cores visually anchored to the site with their earth-bound sandstone cladding.



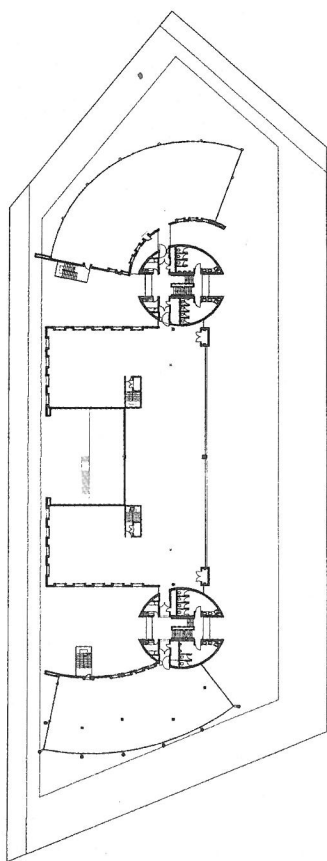
Basement



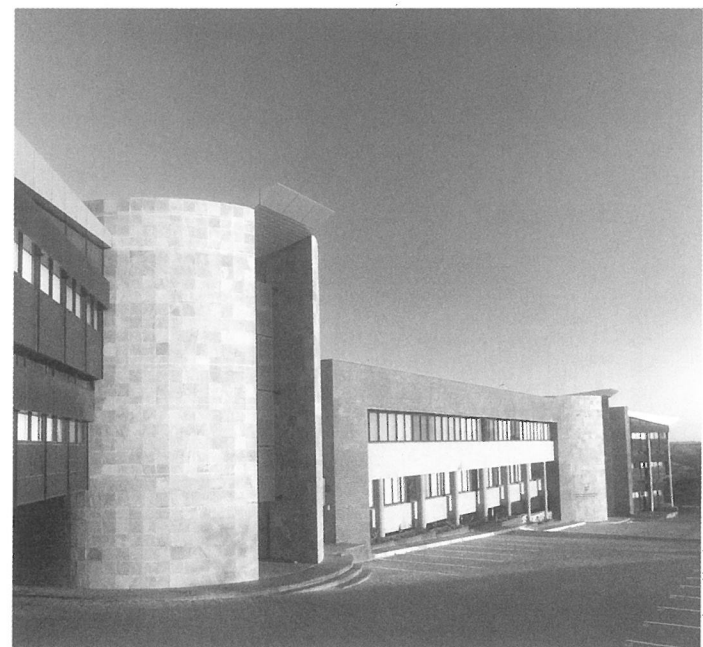
Semi-Basement



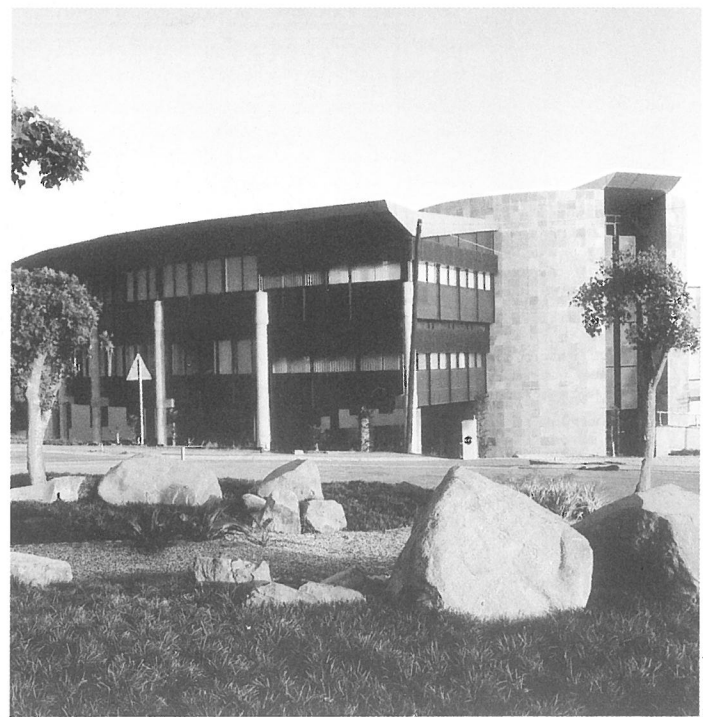
Entrance level



Typical Floor



Angela Buckland



Tony Smith

Editor's Choice: Rewarding Architecture

67 Old Fort Road, Durban

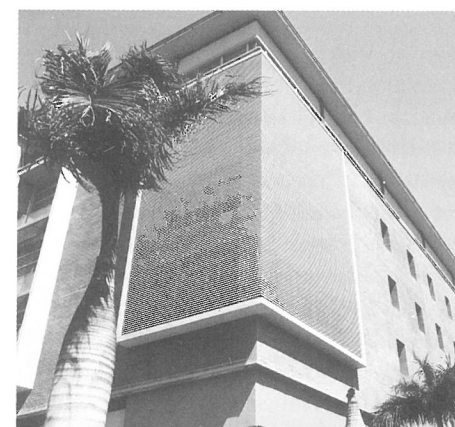
67 Old Fort Road, Durban
Dean Jay Architect

The prominence of the site lead to a number of developers bidding for the land with schemes prepared by various architects. The demand for the site resulted in the requirement to maximise lettable floor space and parking areas. Yet, the servitude and sight lines entrenched in the deed of sale determined the footprint for development.

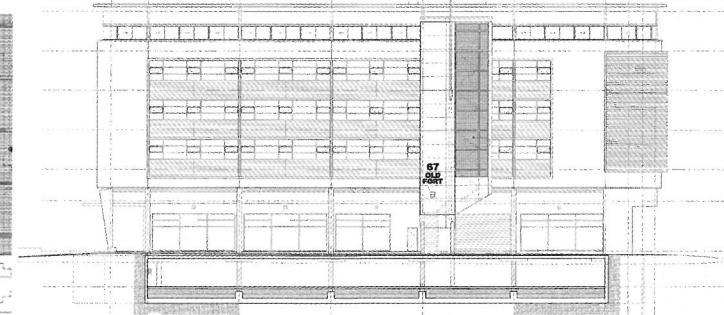
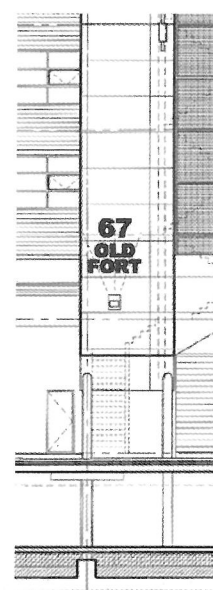
The resultant monolith required careful articulation to fragment the massiveness of the structure. The ground floor is given over to commercial usage, the basement and first floors follow. The plinth is glazed, each of the office floors acknowledges its orientation, and the attic floor is ribbon-windowed. The building was occupied within a year of sketch design commencement.



North elevation to 67 Old Fort Road



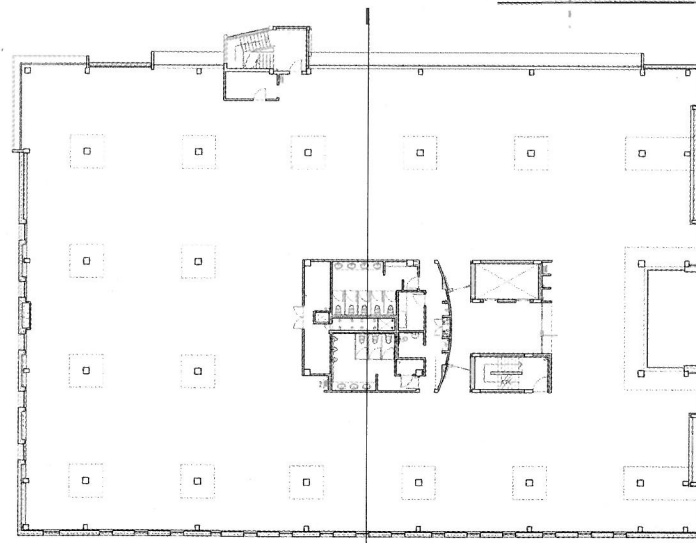
North-west corner detail



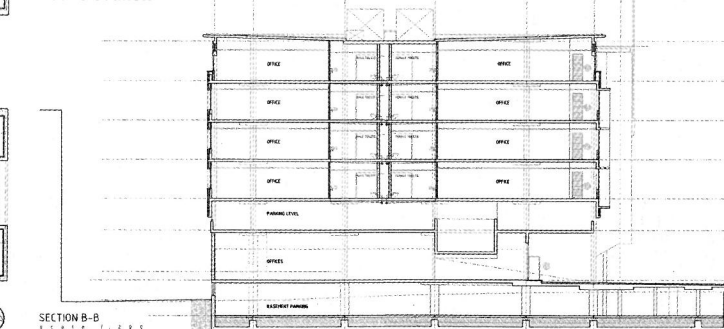
NORTH ELEVATION



East elevation



TYPICAL OFFICE FLOOR PLAN



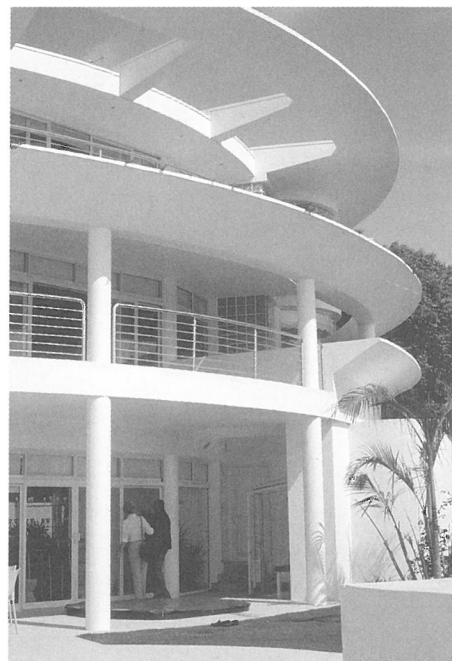
SECTION B-B

Rewarding Architecture

Daniel Herwitz: Impressions



House Shail Maharaj, La Lucia Johnson Murray Architects The circular form captures the spectacular coastal and inland views while the oversailing terraces and the ventilated void in the centre of the house provide for environmental tempering.



BOTTOM: Barrows, Umgeni Business Park, Durban Don Albert, sound space design CC This project was featured in the KZ-NIA Journal 2/1999.

There is no clearer way for an American living in South Africa to observe the differences between rich and poor than to spend a couple of excellent days, with cheerful and interesting company, touring the new architectural sites of the KwaZulu-Natal region. La Lucia beach houses superb in their tedious, unoccupied, glass and pool perfection, self-referential and indifferent to the hum of the world, pristinely executive and impersonal, for the occupant who is, mostly never there but instead resides somewhere in the money belt of Johannesburg. While, nearby, to quote the bricklayer/poet of Federico Fellini's masterpiece film, *Amarcord* and the people who recite with him: "My grandfather laid bricks, my father laid bricks, but I ain't got no house." Well I do have a house paid for with a few American dollars, dollars which could hardly have earned me the same dwelling in Los Angeles, where I am from, and which currently supercedes itself in "over the top" construction, as if in celebration of the fact that money, like personality, is only

skin deep, a system of reduplicating cells whose facades are restyled every time the stock market moves up a percentage point, so that all can see that one has kept pace with a ballooning economy. In KwaZulu-Natal there is no balloon, only perhaps a bubble; but there is a feeling among young architects that facades must be multiplied with textures, sights and signage to produce the illusion of excitement on otherwise dull designs.

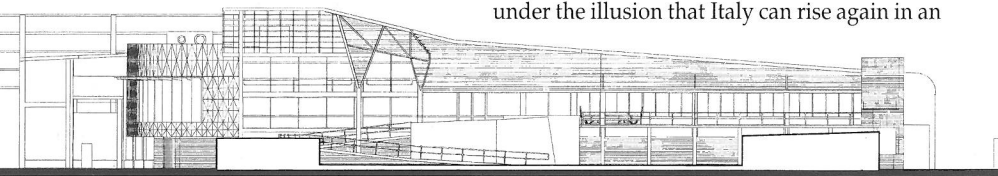
This latest exhibition of dependency, according to which South Africa, not thinking about what it might mean to build in accord with itself but instead thinking about the importation of the "over the top" from my homeland, builds to vibrate new walls with white noise, as if it has there-

fore brought about the new. This is the thinking of the ad man, the one who believes his factory is transformed because it has a few odd angled Africanist patterns clad onto its exterior, and no apparent body part integral to its inner breathing mechanism. No doubt designed from Los Angeles, such buildings speak about a failure of thought: a failure to reflect on what function is, and what the terms of true innovation might in fact be.

A Hollywoodization of architecture is slowly taking place in KwaZulu-Natal, one which reverts to the construction of wholesale nostalgia in the form of the house that is a film set for a happy ending. Anyone who has wandered the *petites rues* of Bel Air or Beverly Hills will

understand this reversion to *mis en scenes*: to the little house on the prairie, the French chateau in miniature, the New England clapboard cottage now transposed to the desert canyons of the wild west, but with the same perfectly green grass and garden of magnolias. There is an immense pleasure in the construction of such dwellings, for they signify a world in which the immigrant dream has finally come true: one can shed one's skin and become not only an American but a French count, a New England seafarer, a Midwestern cowboy from Kansas, these items now being purchasable from the architect's department store of ideas. Without, of course, the life difficulties, not to mention the dirt - which attended these styles in their actual histories. KwaZulu-Natal, ever keen to keep pace with this history of fantasy and its commodification, especially in anxious South African times, now offers such items as the wrap around verandah, the delicate French balustrade and the 18th century Balinese planter's mansion, either in the form of retirement dream cottages in gated communities for those unwilling or unable to emigrate, or in the form of double rooms at just over R1 000 per night in sited hotels overlooking lagoons. Thus does Ralph Lauren do Safari, not in the avatar of Meryl Streep and her lustrous Danish accent but in the form of the society for Architects and their claddings for the clan that is the clientele.

There is of course nothing wrong, and a great deal right, with the wrap-around verandah, and its rediscovery by contemporary architecture, if only freed of its film set qualities, would be an excellent, even liberating thing. For it is evident that the architectural moment in South Africa is one of a potentially double liberty. Liberty from the constraints of the international style (if also from its grandiose fantasies), and liberty from the constraints of neo-colonial refusals of settlers to blend in, to open their dwellings to the texture of a variegated landscape, population and architectural "patrimony". The moment is one for stylistic expansion in the name of a South Africa that will be what it has not been, in the name of identities whose flux is one of intermingling, globalization and reflection, in the name of an Africa whose only serious forms of Africanization must be those which remake the concept of Africa, rather than flattening it under the illusion that Italy can rise again in an



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Ruben Reddy, Daniel Herwitz, Sydney Bailon, John Frost and Jack Diamond; Inset below left: Nina Saunders.

The Jury in a pensive mood nearing the end of three intensive days (left) and relaxed at the halfway mark (below).



BELOW: House Mackenzie, Mount Edgecombe Country Club Estate VARA - Architects & Urban Designers BOTTOM: Deloitte & Touche Offices, La Lucia Ridge Paton Taylor Associates



African Renaissance. The Italian Renaissance deferred to classicism, but in Africa there is no history of monuments that is singularly compelling. Instead there is a repository of differences, just as there is a population of differences. This leaves a space for reflection on what it might mean to build differently here and now. There seems, however, to be little such reflection exhibited in the buildings currently on display, whatever their other virtues. If not actively seeking nostalgia in commodified form, such buildings seek to retain a kind of conservative image of masculine identity, as in the endless sports bars elaborately articulated next to the board rooms of newly wrought office buildings, buildings whose actual work spaces are monuments to the typical (read: bored rooms). Apparently women must become male surrogates when entering the cor-

porate labyrinth. Why design such buildings now? Because the patron will accept nothing else and one is glad of work? That would be, in hard times such as these, sufficient reason. But it would hardly be cause for celebration, the implication being that South Africa asserts its difference from the global circuit of postmodern styles only through reversion to an archaic masculinity. Even without building skyscrapers!

It is an irony that the most creative buildings I have seen built since arriving here three years ago have been the International Convention Centre, jewel that it is in the crown of elegant, understated, functional, high technology architecture, and a few private game farms which, like the specialty stores of the old communist days in Russia, require American dollars for their doors to open. What the communist store



opened on was a kind of magic: caviar from the days of the Czars, French Sauternes which in France no one can afford to buy anymore, a champagne-fizzing world of exploding pleasures for lucky party members. Those party to the expensive game farm with its ostrich ambience and perfected architectural siting can witness a pleasure taken by architect and patron alike in the invention of the new for a setting that is entirely local. If sometimes also exoticized. It is an irony of contemporary South African life that the complex liberalism of the moment is receiving no similar entablature. The philosopher Martin Heidegger spoke of the importance of architecture's capacity to gift the world an outlook, a face, a way of viewing its moment of complex experience, as if in a monumentalized mirror for the imagination. There are good architects, thoughtful architects, experienced architects here in KwaZulu-Natal today. But where is that mirror?

Daniel Herwitz

American born and educated, Daniel Herwitz's area of expertise lies in the fields of avant-garde art and aesthetics with a special penchant for architecture. He is Programme Director of Philosophy and Director of the Centre for Knowledge and Innovation at the University of Natal, Durban Campus.

Natal University student wins International Competition

Georgina Walker, 4th year student at the University of Natal, has won First Prize in the 9th Student Competition of the International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP).

The theme "Connecting People & Places" presented Ms Walker with an opportunity to explore a post-Apartheid vision for Durban which she interpreted with a proposal to provide facilities at Berea Road Station for the accommodation of street traders.

The prize of \$3000 was won in competition with 49 other entries from 19 countries. Congratulations! - Editor

