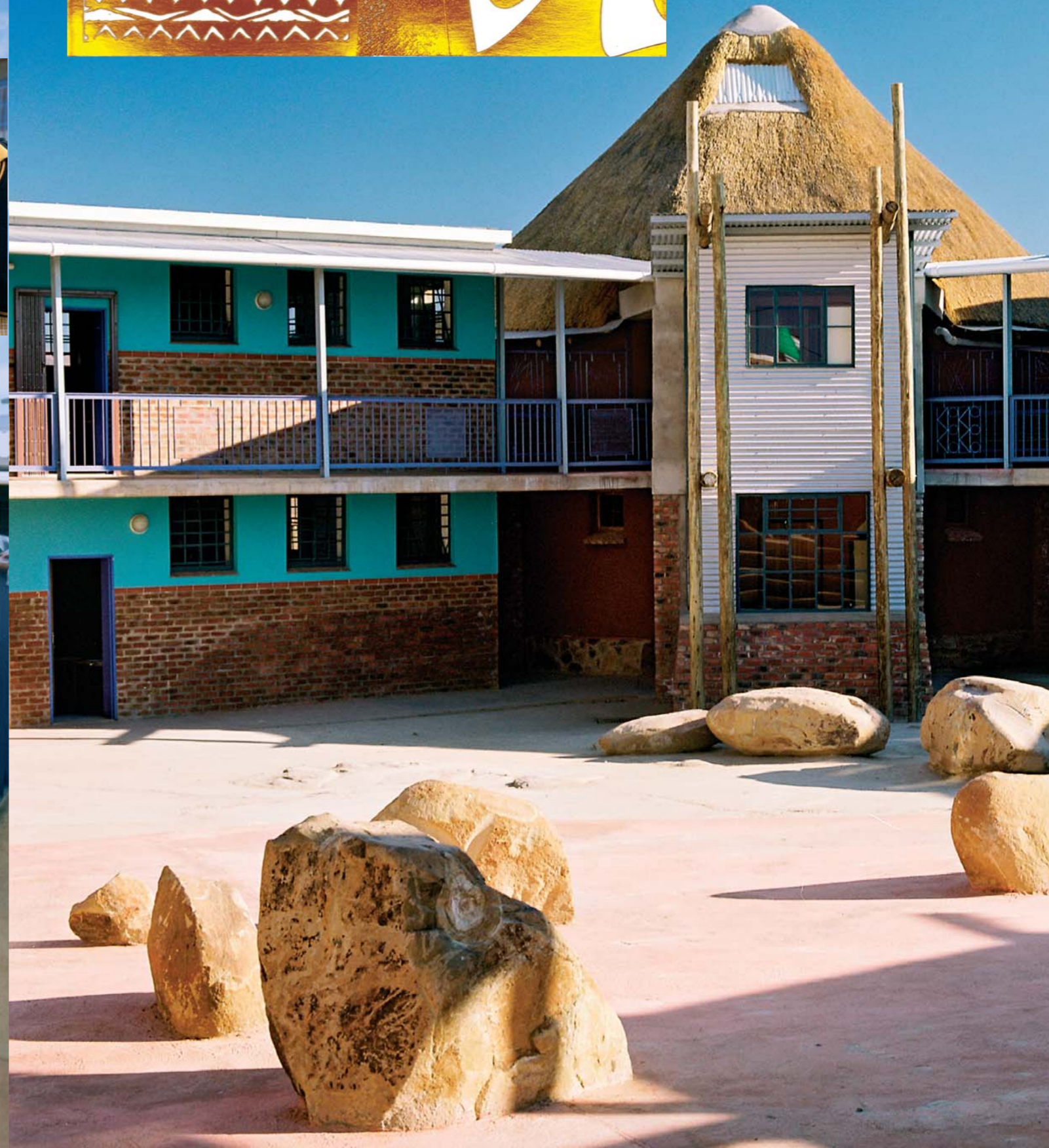
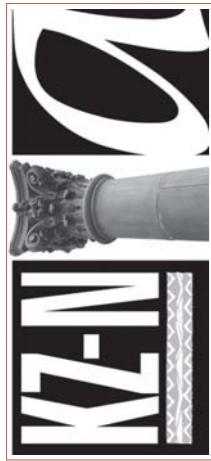


Journal of the KwaZulu-Natal Institute for Architecture

100  
COROBRIK  
CENTENARY  
1902-2002





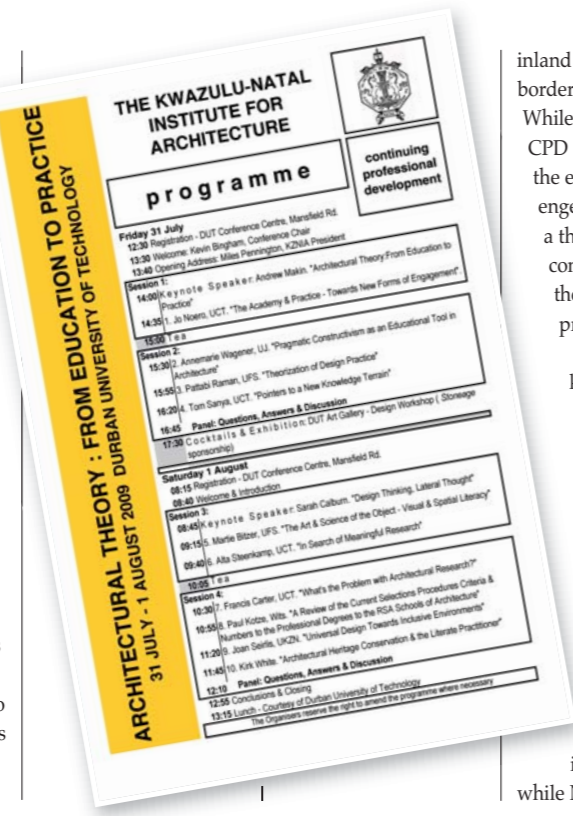
KZ-NIA JOURNAL · ISSUE 2/2009 · VOL 34 · ISSN 0379-9301  
 Editorial Board: Brian Johnson (Chair) · Patricia Emmett · Ivor Daniel · Kevin Lloyd · Mthulisi Msimang · Nina Saunders · Deborah Whelan · Editor: Walter Peters · Assistant: Janet Whelan · Design: Maria Criticos  
 Published by the KwaZulu-Natal Institute for Architecture, 160 Bulwer Road, Glenwood, Durban 4001  
 Telephone: (031) 201-7590 · Fax: (031) 201-7586 · E-mail: kznia@telkomsa.net · Website: www.kznia.org.za

This journal, now in its 34th year of publication, has since inception been sponsored by Corobrik.

News...

**Architectural Theory: 'FROM EDUCATION TO PRACTICE'**

KZ-NIA organised a highly successful conference, on Friday and Saturday, 31st July and 1st August, held at Durban University of Technology, following on from the earlier conference of 2005, 'Educating the Architect.' While the theme was academic in nature and most papers were presented by academics, there was no shortage of practitioners in attendance, with some coming from



inland and across the borders of the Province. While attendance was CPD credit-bearing, the enthusiasm engendered spoke of a thirst for a continuing theoretical input in practice.

Friday's keynote speakers were Andrew Makin and Jo Noero of UCT who together with Patabi Raman of UFS literally set the floor alight. Makin put aspects of practice into perspective while Noero introduced

the term 'projective practice', a strategy based on the premise that design cannot be taught from a purely theoretical basis but must be informed by knowledge generated from a cycle which includes reflection, reaction and action, and for that to happen the traditional form of practice would have to change.

Saturday's keynote speaker was Sarah Calburn on 'Design thinking'. This was followed by much discussion around the nature and role of research in Architecture and pragmatic concerns of universal principles and heritage.



Editorial

2009 KZ-NIA Awards for Architecture

**AWARDS AND CRITERIA:** To many members, the biennial Awards programme of the South African Institute of Architects (SAIA) is the most important. It's always interesting to see what one's peers have decided makes for the best work of a two-year cycle and by whom it was produced, but there is always room for controversy.

The structure of the adjudication panel is prescribed by SAIA according to which the KZ-NIA regional committee has to select its members. Patabi Ganapathi Raman, Research Professor at the University of the Free State, was selected as academic architect together with Carin Smuts of CS Studio Architects in Cape Town, recipient of the 208 Global Award for Sustainable Architecture, as architect from another region, and Alain Uytendaele, also of Cape Town, as lay person. The three KZ-NIA members were Ivor Daniel who had served on an adjudication panel before, Bharti Vithal and Sikhumbuzo Mtembu, Corobrik Regional Student of 2007. Sydney Baillon co-ordinated the inspections and Walter Peters was appointed convenor.

As the entries were distributed across the extremities of the Province, the team quite literally travelled the equivalent distance of Durban to Cape Town in two days. All sixteen submissions were inspected and finally the jury agreed on four awards, interestingly rather divergent, with two for residential architecture, one for a folly and one for a school. Following the discussions elicited while inspecting the entries, jurors thought a pure announcement of outcome would not

suffice and, in deference to the past, opted for feedback to the membership by way of a 'discourse' which was well attended.

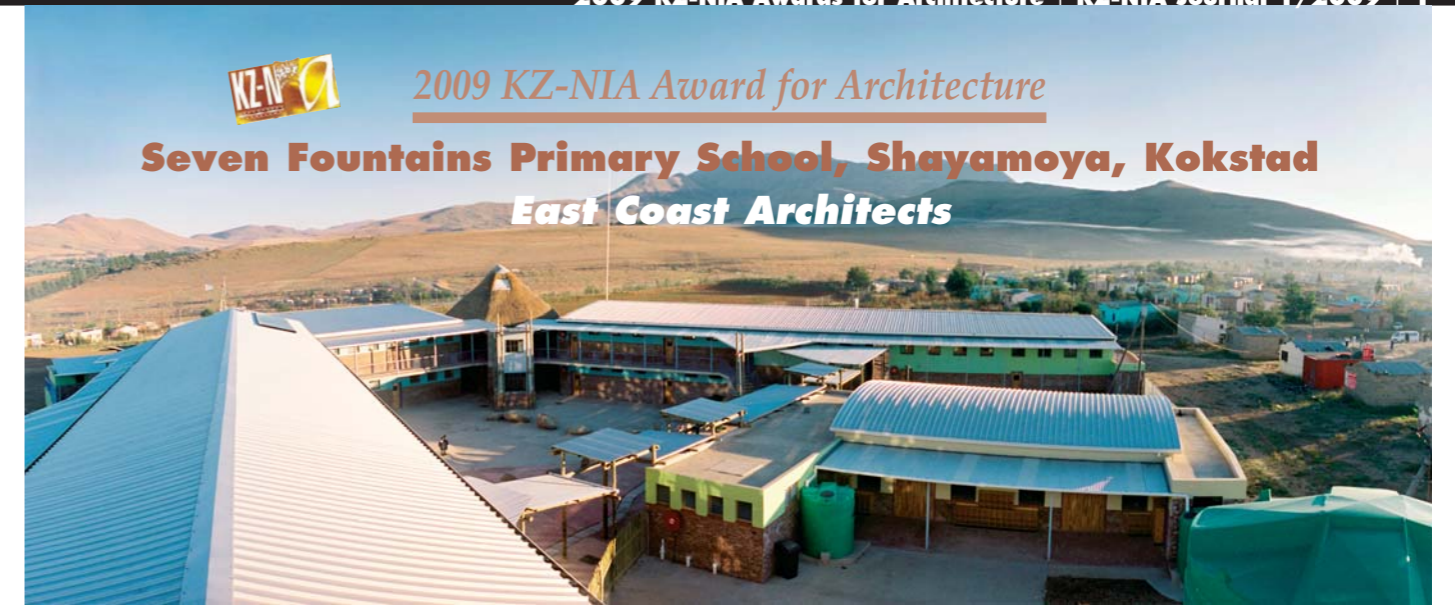
As was explained then, criteria for judging remains the 2000-year old Vitruvian triad of ideals, abstract enough to serve modern architecture and worth reiteration here. In the original sequence, Vitruvius\* proposed that architecture should be built with due reference to *firmness* which, to him, meant durability (sustainability), to *commodity* which meant functional planning perfectly adjusted to site and to *delight* which covered proportions including scale to provide a full measure of satisfaction, and it is for architects to challenge any prescribed code within this framework.

As Jury members came from widely different backgrounds, of course, their views would always be varied. This is why consensus and if this is not forthcoming, a majority view is crucial and should be respected.

This issue presents the submissions of 2007-08 in KwaZulu-Natal as well as comments by jurors. As per SAIA directive, Award certificates are to be presented to architects and clients in the context of an exhibition of the four premiated buildings, appropriately on World Architecture Day, Monday, 5th October. As all architects know, a building is the tip of an iceberg. Thus any building deemed successful by peers, is cause for celebration. Congratulations to all Award winners.

Walter Peters,  
 Editor

\* Smith, T *Vitruvius on Architecture (De Architectura)*, 2003



Due to the difficult circumstances of its nascency and charged with providing a model for emulation while meeting with the departmental standards of accommodation, budget and size, the architects challenged the standard plans and typologies while engaging with the community throughout the design and decision-making process.

The result is a well-resolved plan within a block which skilfully mediates the natural fall of the site and the curvilinear and orthogonal layout of the township while interacting with dedicated playgrounds and sports fields accessible to both the school and its community.

The jury lauds the involvement of the community in the realisation of the school, the planning and scientific initiatives employed toward the provision of a comfortable and socially sustainable environment for both learning and teaching in the extreme climate of Kokstad, and the hybrid building of traditional and contemporary forms and materials.

This building was featured extensively in KZ-NIA Journal 2/2006: Sustainability. —Editor.



**FROM TOP:**  
 Bird's eye view of the school in the context of the township and the foothills of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg. The junior playgrounds accessible directly from the classrooms. Tiered seating overlooking the sport field used also as the assembly area, with ramp for disabled in the background. Elevated rainwater tanks to provide the gravity-fed supply. Two tanks store grey water, two potable borehole water.  
 COVER: Thatched special classroom accessible off the playground/outdoor theatre. Back-cover inset: Learners wearing the newly designed school uniform.

Photography: Angela Buckland

### 2009 KZ-NIA Award for Architecture

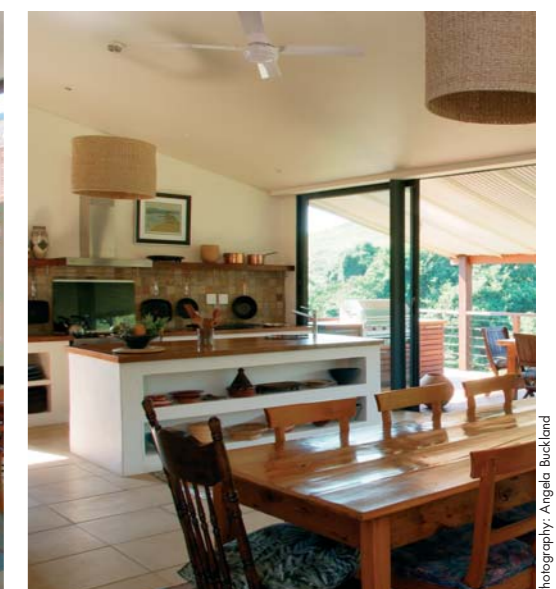
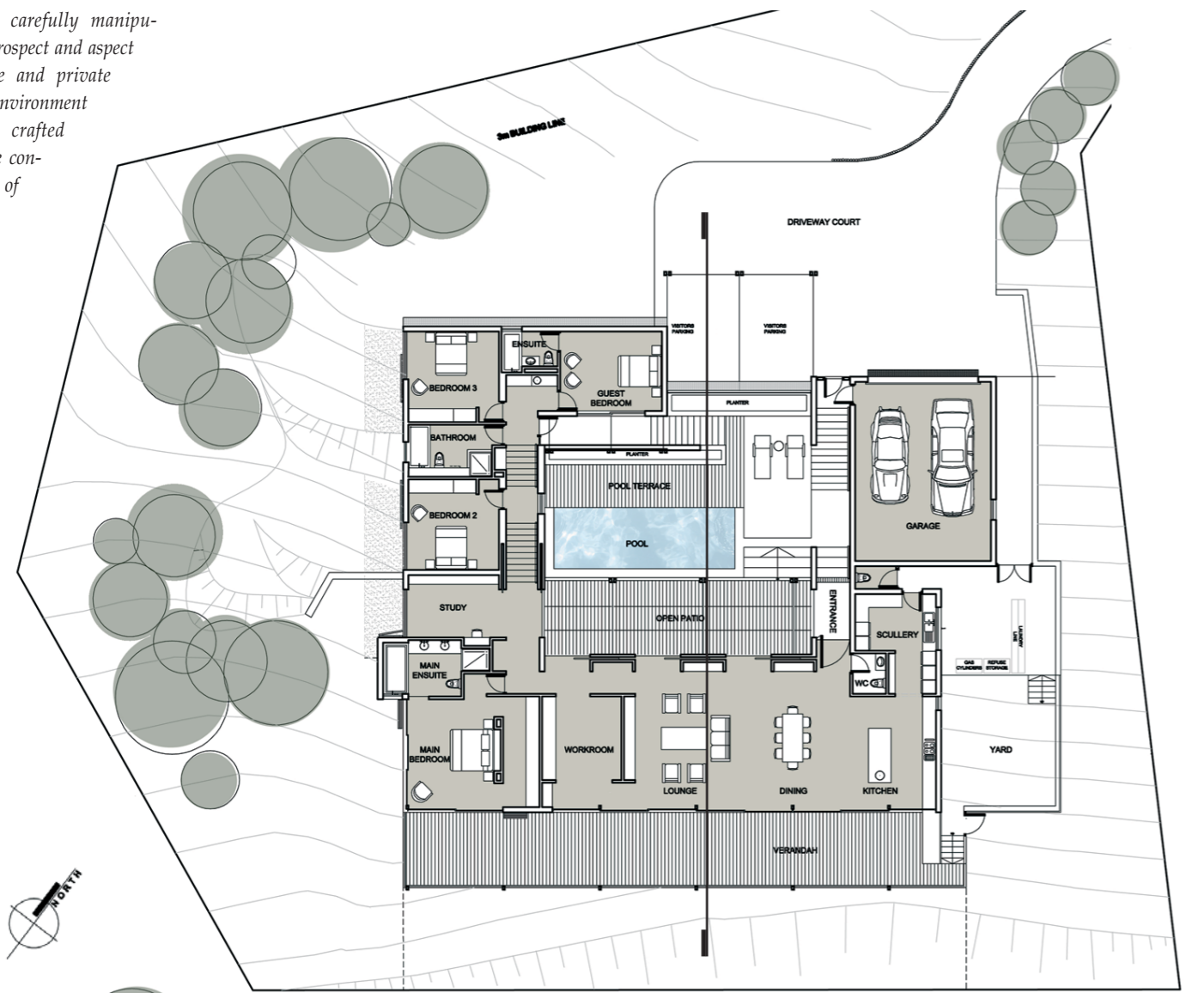
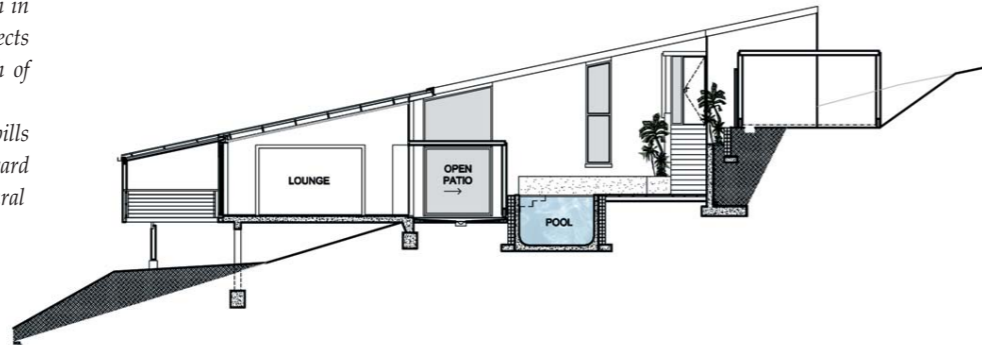
## House at Mkhuhla Close, Simbithi Eco-Estate Jay & Nel Architects



This sloping site terminates in the natural bush in the valley, the enjoyment of which the architects captured with the veranda spanning the width of the house.

As access is provided from the top, the plan spills down the hill and is organised around a courtyard with pool, cleverly arranged to suit the natural topography, open space and orientation while maintaining visual connections with the bush and the water in the court. Materials are kept simple in colour and detail, and true to the overall concept.

The architects have shown that by carefully manipulating prospect and aspect a serene and private living environment can be crafted from the constraints of the site.



### 2009 KZ-NIA Award for Architecture



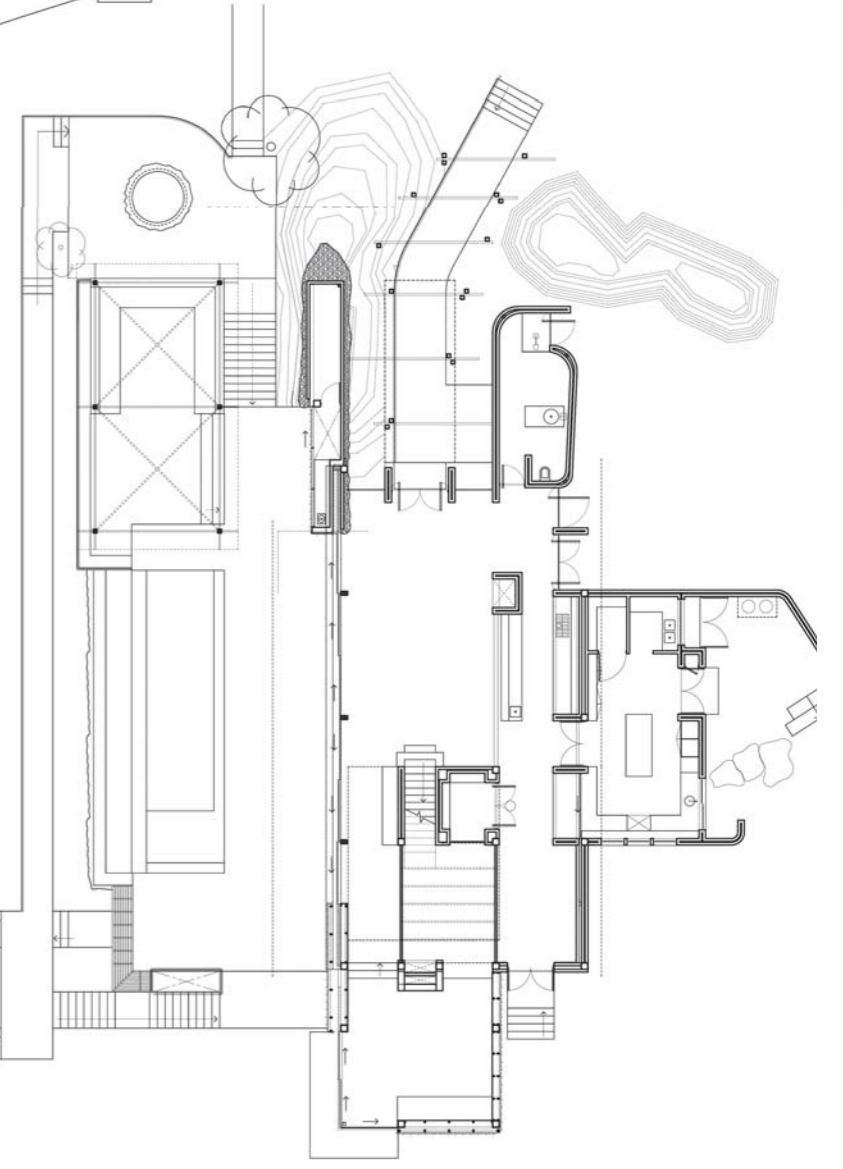
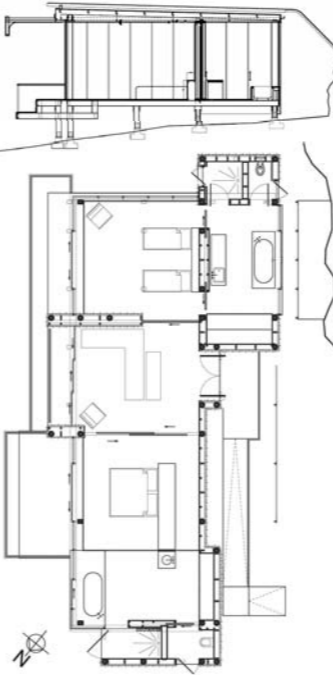
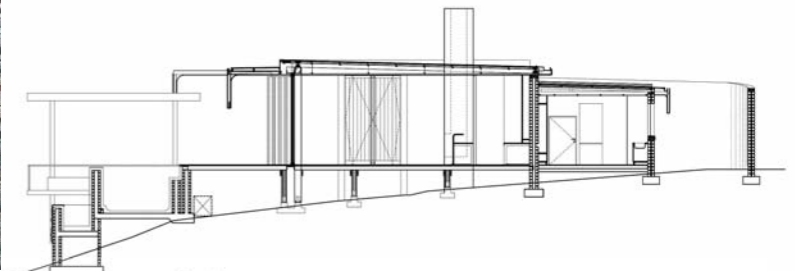
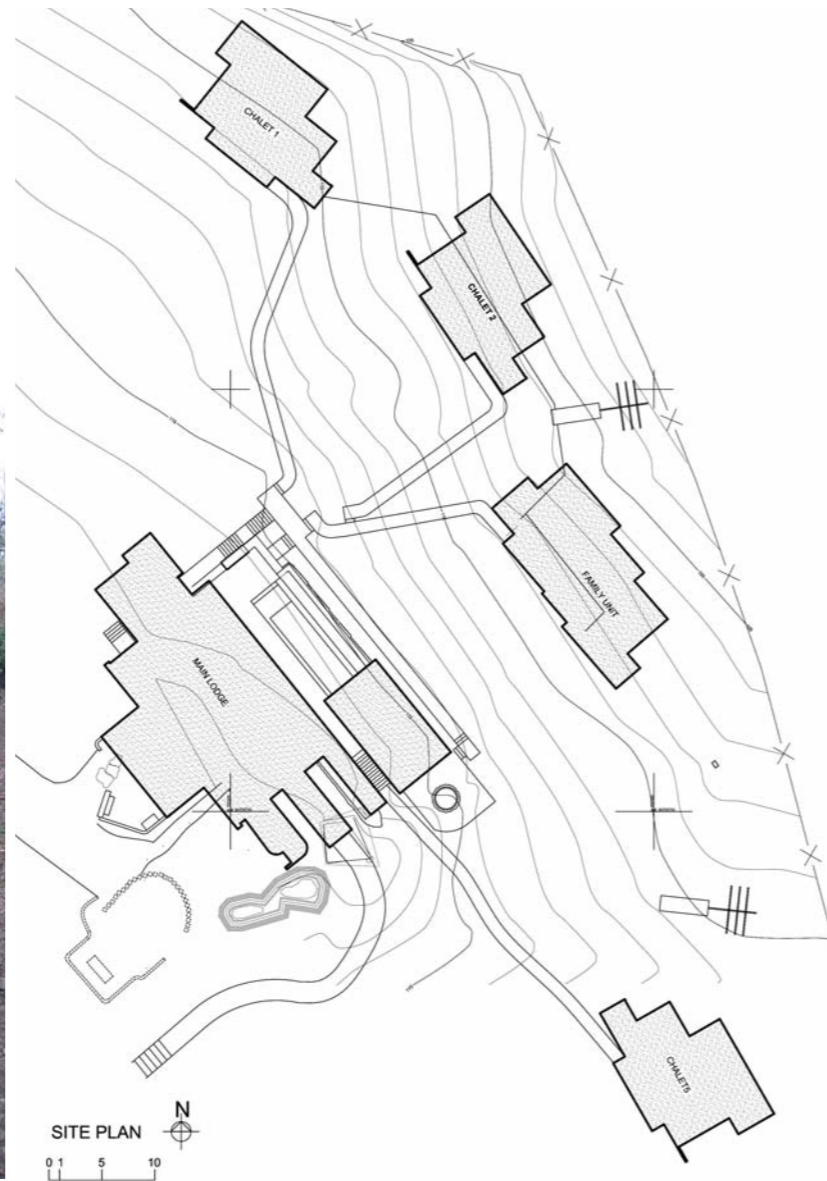
## Ukhuni Lodge, Phinda Joy Brasler Architects

The site for the lodge with family units and chalets on the edge of the Lebombo mountain range overlooks a valley of the game reserve.

The units are dispersed, almost as metaphors for small clearances in the forest, given flat roofs to limit their visual intrusion in the landscape, and clad to conceal their presence in inhabiting the landscape.

While in their designs they are tempered to mitigate the influence of the sun, the units enjoy a seamless spatial continuity from inside to outside, and are provided with unobtrusive facilities for enjoyment within this special setting.

The jury was impressed with the accomplishment, the residual spaces which do not deny the significance of this special landscape setting, and by the materiality, detailing and furnishing.



Photography: Derek Woodhouse

2009 KZ-NIA Award for Architecture

**Timeball Square, 22 Timeball Boulevard, Point  
CNN Architects (Project Architect: Rodney Choromanski)**



The brief called for the design of a device which would give visual structure and orientation to the area being re-developed, and was to incorporate an information kiosk and public ablutions in conjunction with the open-air theatre around the artificial canal.

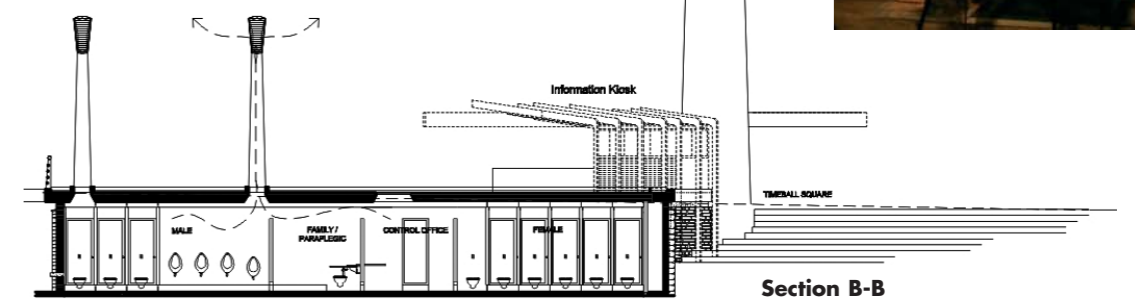
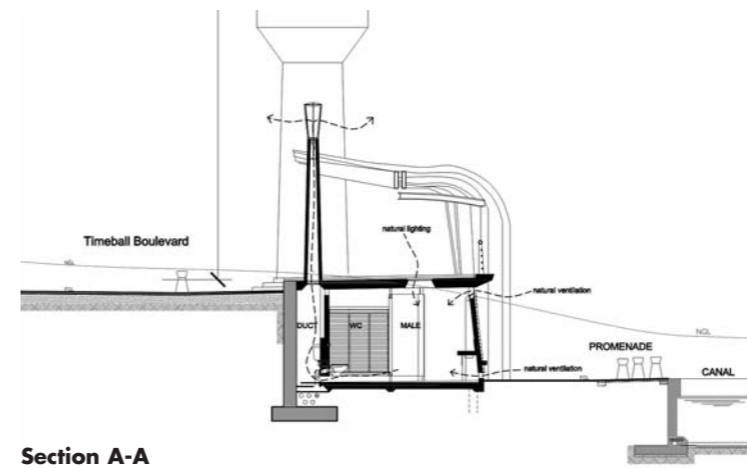
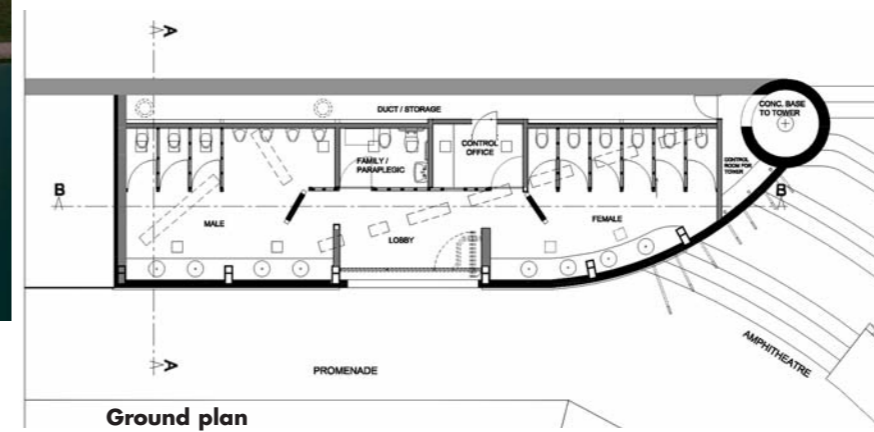
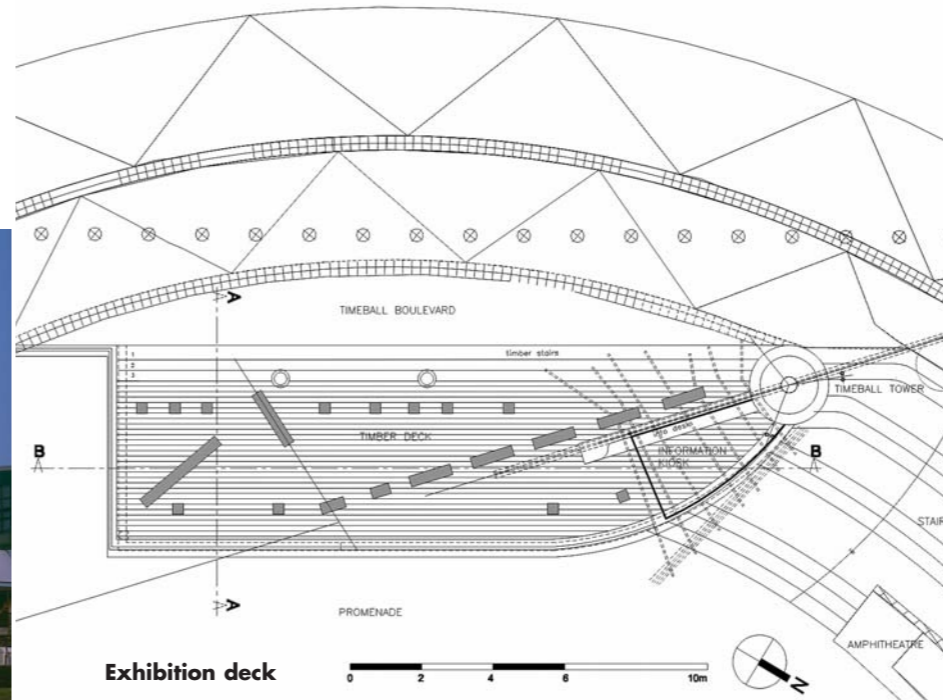
As the harbour site had historically contained a timeball, the architects re-interpreted the design in a contemporary fashion, with the needle taking its inspiration from traditional bangles, on a base that revalidates vestiges of the destroyed stone wall built by political prisoners of the Bambatha Rebellion and which anchors the device to its site. Behind this wall are concealed the ablutions, robust in design, and naturally ventilated and lit by way of careful design considerations.

What was required here was a work of public architecture, one in which art and architecture blur. To this the architects responded with skill, and the device confidently takes on the surrounding landscape, while the structure, detailing and materials make strong references to both history and location.

Readers are referred to KZ-NIAJ 1/2008: Durban's Point. —Editor



Photography: Craig Hudson



## Architecture of Engagement: Reflections on projects submitted for 2009 KZ-NIA Awards for Architecture



2009 KZ-NIA Awards jury complement. From left: Sydney Baillon, Carin Smuts, Alain Uyttebroeck, Ivor Daniel, Walter Peters, Bharti Vithal, Pattabi Ganapathi Raman and Sikhumbuzo Mtembu.

The range of submissions and the deep commitment shown by the architects was impressive. The projects included many possible commissions: mobile health clinic, urban installation, wild-life park lodges, industrial stores, a school with an intense community involvement, houses, conservation, a corporate office and an HIV clinic. Given this range, it is normal to expect a degree of indifference and banality in some projects, but in all honesty none of the entries could be dismissed for this reason. It is, therefore, heartening to note that KZ-N architects are prolific and serious about architecture that has significance, relevance and presence.

Three highly varied projects by East Coast Architects showed that every brief has its intrinsic merit if only an architect can seriously delve into its content. The award-winning Seven Fountains School at Kokstad is astonishing for the inclusive attention paid to site composition, contextual considerations, social and cultural engagement with local folk, environmental considerations including water-harvesting, use of passive solar energy, meaningful active environmental measures, earth building, use of local vernacular in ways that are transformational both architecturally and in terms of skills' formation and last, but not least, in enabling the local community to appropriate the building

proudly as their own. One would be hard-pushed to find a representative of the client to explain the intricacies of the building as clearly and as thoroughly as the Kokstad school staff did. If a minority of adjudicators had any reservations it is because the school evoked the following dichotomous feelings:

1. Social sustainability, that is to say promoting a sense that the school belongs to the local folk versus whether it is patronising. The



feeling one got from the staff who took us around and explained the key features was one of pride.

2. The clients' and users' commitment to the project versus whether the client was undemanding. Without in any way being disparaging of the people who are running a wonderful school, one cannot help feeling that the cause of good architecture could be furthered if the client was more assertive in its demands for a twenty-first century school that does not leave the school behind in terms of educational buildings. Surely the architect's job is also to raise the sights of the client and perhaps, in future, this could be done by presenting the international state of the art developments in school design in the form of an exhibition.
3. Hybridity versus a technological randomness is an issue. The combining of current ways of building using steel, corrugated iron and glass and the traditional one of using thatch, gum poles and sun-burnt brick is admirable. But one does wonder whether the form of the multi-purpose hall and its heavy steel truss, the structures of the covered walkways and the manner in which they go up and down in a random way using rather redundant structures verges on licence rather than freedom.
4. Appropriation by users of between spaces and excessive redundancy was also discussed. When we visited the building, children were using much of the spaces in an energetic way. While the architectural sensibilities longed for tauter in-between spaces, it struck one that a degree of loose-fit



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Blue Roof Health Care Centre (remodelling project), 14 Lubbe Rd, Wentworth. East Coast Architects.

FACING PAGE, BELOW, RIGHT Mobile Health Units, Umkhanyakude District, Mtubatuba. East Coast Architects.



may well be necessary to allow for varying interpretations by the users, both children and staff.

5. Formal diversity versus wilfulness. Formal diversity is valuable but was this achieved at the expense of unity? Surely the ultimate aim of any composition including traditional settlements is diversity within unity.

All-in-all though, the architect has erred on the desirable side and it may well be that a prerequisite of all original ideas is a degree of risk-taking.

The Blue Roof Health Care Centre by the same architects is remarkable for producing a cheerful solution out of a non-descript old building and a brief that is inherently dispiriting. But the disembodied nature of the access ramp, environmentally less than satisfactory atrium and office spaces worked against the architects getting yet another award. The mobile health unit at Mtubatuba, also by East Coast Architects, was much appreciated by the client but one could not help feeling that a less cumbersome solution is possible.

Elphick Proome Architects submitted two well-executed and relatively high quality projects. From an urban design and site compositional point of view the Kingsmead office used the section intelligently to counter the impact of the presence of cars and the

cricket ground at the rear. The monumental entry and the relatively low ratio of atrium volume and office volume were seen as drawbacks. There was also a feeling that the architects are well-placed and experienced enough to advance some new lines of enquiry

with regard to corporate office planning but did not do so, although the way they handled the main façade was commendable. EPA's Idwala lodge was personable and the architects made strenuous attempts to unify a collection of individual vacation units to make



Standard Bank, Kingsmead Office Park, Durban. Elphick Proome Architects.

**Idwala Lodge, Nambithi Conservancy, near Ladysmith.**  
Elphick Proome Architects.



a settlement linked by a robust random rubble wall, zigzagging in the vertical plane, a device that provides the unity. While one appreciated the architects' wish to see this wall as a counterpoint to the units, it ended up being rather cyclopean. The elegant plan of each unit is slightly marred by the relentless symmetry, and the ladder that gives access to the loft sleeping space is a slightly incongruous element in an otherwise luxurious surround. The meagre and isolated provision for the staff quarters also came under criticism.

The award-winning Ukhuni Lodge at Phinda by the architect Joy Brasler, embraced the terrain more effectively than Idwala. Its tried and tested constructional expression derived from OMM's Singita was impeccably detailed and realised. Nevertheless, with both lodges, could it be that the owners had the resources and indeed the obligation to experiment with some emergent conceptions of sustainability involving both passive and active measures to advance findings of universal value?

Small inner city projects are always interesting and surprisingly they nearly always embrace the urban wisdom of getting maximum city-form benefit out of minimum effort.

In this respect Durban can be proud of the Timeball installation (which was given an Award), the harbour tunnel access buildings also by CNN Architects and the conservation and re-use of the Berthing Master's Store by the Emmetts. The Timeball installation came across as being fresh because it looks back to history without sacrificing the need to look forward. The language of one of the tunnel

**Point Terminal Building, Durban Harbour Entry Tunnel, Mahatma Gandhi Rd.**  
CNN Architects.

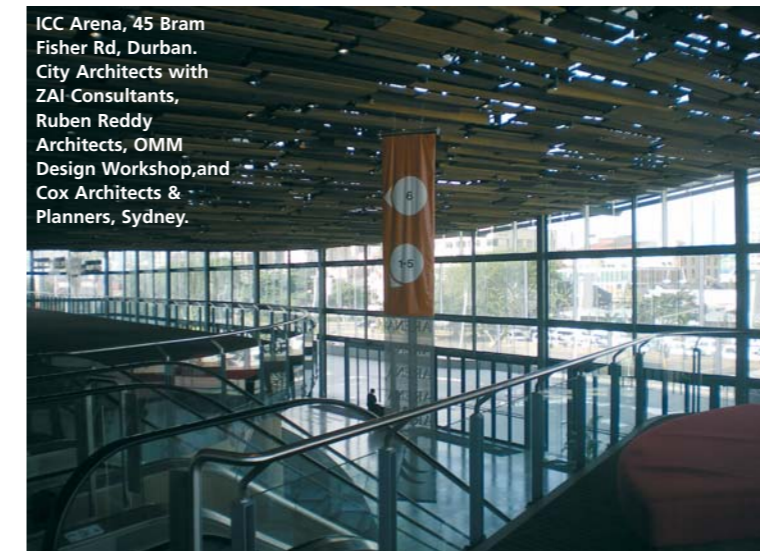


**Berthing Master's Store, Point (recycling project).**  
Emmett: Emmett Architects.



buildings struck some of the adjudicators as being an ecclesiastical one having an affinity to works of Oscar Niemeyer. This is not a criticism. After all George Gilbert Scott designed the Bankside Power Station (now the Tate Modern) in London with ecclesiastical features such as stained glass windows and chimneys as metaphors of campaniles so as to establish some form of visual conversation between his building and St Paul's across the river. Could it be that the opportunity for realising this visual relationship of buildings across the river is missed in the two Durban projects? Also historic architecture including the Bankside Power Station presents different visual information from a distance and from near, whereas, much of modernism presents the same information regardless of where one views it from. The Emmetts' conservation project was well executed, but the value put on the image of an historic building rather than on its history or on it as a once functioning entity, (for instance the sliding doors are preserved but nailed on) did not go well with the adjudicators.

ICC Durban Arena extension by the City Architects is good of its kind and has an urban presence. But the relation between indoor and outdoor could have been more telling which was the case with the older part of the centre.



**ICC Arena, 45 Bram Fisher Rd, Durban.**  
City Architects with ZAI Consultants, Ruben Reddy Architects, OMM Design Workshop, and Cox Architects & Planners, Sydney.

was a truly learning experience. The few negative remarks made on the projects studied are possibly high-level or even high-brow criticism of what, in reality, are substantial and ambitious projects.

*Pattabi Ganapathi Raman, Research Professor at the University of the Free State*

**The Grey House, 12 Hewitt Rd, Salt Rock.**  
Don Albert & Partners.



**Town Centre, cnr Mandela and Bhejane Rds, KwaMashu.** City Architects.



**SPCA, 2 Willowfield Crescent, Springfield Park.**  
Emmett: Emmett Architects.



**Lifeguard Facility, Umkomaas River Mouth.** City Architects with OMM Design Workshop.



To build on the work begun by others is a sophisticated business and reciprocity between the earlier work, which has many merits, and the new, hardly exists here. One thinks of the internal additions to the Royal Festival Hall in London made by Allies and Morrison where the architectural syntax of the original by Leslie Martin was absorbed, transferred and transmuted in the new so as to have a personality of its own.

Visiting members of the panel did not have the time to view a few buildings not mentioned here but allowed freedom for the local members to decide on whether any of them should get an award. They decided that House Simbithi must be given one and on the basis of inspecting the drawings and photos the external adjudicators agreed with that decision. This is not entirely satisfactory but hopefully a fair procedure.

At the end of exhausting visits one felt that it

## Overview: 2009 KZ-NIA Awards for Architecture

When driving through the vibrant city of Durban with its Art Deco buildings, markets, temples and more recent architectural interventions, one asks oneself the question: What makes a piece of architecture worthy of an award? The timelessness of Le Corbusier, Louis Khan, Alvar Aalto and Alvaro Siza to name but a few, bring to mind some great buildings. Is this the level we are aiming for when evaluating good design or do we have a different understanding of how one evaluates this issue?

For too long South Africa has been isolated from international awards and competitions. KwaZulu-Natal and Durban won the bid for the next UIA conference in 2014. Does this not, therefore, require a re-evaluation of what good architecture should display in line with current global trends and concerns?

KZ-NIA Journal is envied by architects in other provinces as it is a tool to bring the exciting creative work being done in the Province into the public realm. It was, therefore, disappointing that only sixteen entries were received and after much debate, only four awards were announced.

The Seven Fountains Primary School in Kokstad was a highlight of our visit as it was one of the first projects which addresses the principles of sustainable architecture, namely social, economical and ecological in a truly integrated manner.

The conventional school typology is contested as a new spatial order is proposed, which has its origin more within the South African context as opposed to the generic rectangular planning of most school

buildings. This multi-layered approach to the architectural design results in a richness of different spatial opportunities.

The design and detailing of the building includes energy reduction through proper insulation and the appropriate sustainable use of materials. The internal double-volume classrooms are also designed to deal with learning difficulties in an integrated manner. The sensitive and thoughtful way of dealing with spatial articulation indicates an understanding of the complexities of the teaching programme and, therefore, sets this project apart from the others.

In contrast, the Ukhuni Lodge hides in the dense veld of the northern KZ-N region. The design approach, use of materials and placing of the buildings on the site allows the project "to hide" or "disappear" into the landscape. However, the concern is that no real thought had gone into the use of renewable resources.

The Timeball project was difficult to judge due to the fact that it is not functioning as it was originally intended. As a landmark in an urban renewal project, it has the potential to have more urban significance, which would truly have elevated this project to another level.

House Simbithi has a gentle response within the KZ-N coastal landscape. The spatial character and qualities of the project are well integrated with its natural setting.

To conclude, unfortunately the potential of the KZ-N magic, prevalent in previous years' submission, was not evident in the projects reviewed this year.

*Carin Smuts, Out-of-Region Juror*



## Book Review

### Working in Warwick

Dobson, R & Skinner, C with Nicholson, J  
 Durban: School of Development Studies,  
 UKZN, 2009.  
 Contact: book@aet.org.za

Published earlier this year, *Working in Warwick* is a book about the remarkable fast-forward transformation of the kaleidoscopic precinct around Durban's central inner-city railway station and inter-modal commuter hub.

Perhaps it's about at least four transformations. Visually it's about the transformation of the image of urbanity and city. Instead of a template of geometrically ordered and structured two-dimensional circuit-board planning, it shows city as a three-dimensional organism, somewhere between a termite nest and Ridley Scott's 1982 cult movie *Blade Runner*. In both, the spatial matrix is navigated in all dimensions, not on a single horizontal plane.

This also approximates the spatial matrices and 'transport' systems predominant in nature, no matter on which scale. Rather than a linear, radial or grid-like structure common in planned urbanity, it's closer to a three dimensional array, and the navigational structure, though super-effective as a system, is almost invisible in itself. It's an environment where 'in front', 'to the side', or 'behind' are completely altered by the addition of 'underneath' and 'above', and then animated with the exuberant,

energising, almost hallucinogenic, colour and sound of human activity.

This alternate Zeitgeist image is captured in the photographs and descriptive maps and diagrams that seem to fill about half of the book, making it visually inspiring to have around. Many of the photos are taken by Dennis Gilbert, one of the world's top architectural photographers, of South African origin and now based in London.

When Dennis was here a few months ago, he made reference to the contrast of the world of people-less architectural 'masterpieces' with the world of human energy, at fever pitch, that he experienced in Warwick; between idealised formal and compositional perfection, and an environment whose surfaces are hardly even visible as their form is constantly distorted and reformed by perpetual human activity. The contrast between urban environments where

humans are a bit like cars on a Scalectrix track, and an urbanity where humans are almost indistinguishable from their organic physical environments, both constantly responsive and adapting to one another.

Institutionally it's about the transformation of the relationship between the citizens of a city and the 'authorities' that exist to run it. Instead of a top-down command and control chain relationship between city and citizen, Warwick was transformed through multi-level collaboration. Representatives of city departments from architecture and buildings, business support, through the transport authority to real estate and urban design, collaborated on a daily basis with muthi, music, fresh fruit and vegetable traders, as well as barrow pushers, cardboard collectors, and mealie and bovine head cookers.

What this part of the city is now, is as a result

of this collaboration between about 1997 and 2006. And it couldn't be more different from those increasingly familiar mechanistic environments conceived to serve the preferences of speculative investment and property development.

The collaborative process generated a unique, potent, high performance and vibrant urbanity built around the fluid movement of people, goods and services through public space. In principle, this is urban form representing evolving urban society at its best. If allowed to emerge, develop and refine from this foundation, this model would be captivating and highly productive to track. It would be the front end of the global urban project.

Most importantly, *Working in Warwick* is about the transformation of the very lives of thousands and thousands of people. This part of the city provides the opportunity for those at

the bottom of society's economic pyramid to feed and educate their children and support extended families and communities. And also to exercise their cultural practices central to their value systems and beliefs, which in turn is so important to society's cohesion and prosperity.

This urbanity is at the core of achieving the critical objectives of poverty reduction and with it improving health care, education and radically reducing crime. In this way, responsive urbanity is probably the most important tool in the achievement of 'a better life for all'.

Warwick Junction can have a radical transformational impact on architects and planners, investors and property developers, as key protagonists in the built environment. This would be the fourth transformation that this book is about. Because it presents an account of a viable (alternate) urbanity that is shaped

around the actual and detailed, vibrant and charged, intricate and networked workings of the base and foundational engine-room of the world's economy, at least as it represents the reality of the global majority.

If art precedes reality, Ridley Scott's vision is emerging in Warwick.

Far from either a dysfunctional ghetto or an academic's romanticising of crime and grime, Warwick Junction is a case study of the building blocks of a realistic future urbanity. A future shaped through multi-dimensional and multi-directional collaboration and co-operation, integration of diverse cultural practice, resourcefulness, inventiveness perhaps rather than innovation, and responsiveness rather than reaction. And the shifted role of city leaders, managers and officials from power and authority to facilitation and enablement for the benefit of all.

The simplicity of the book's content, layout and communication is key to its potency. It is a book about the real implications of a truly free society that focuses on its potential, no matter how unexpected the manifested consequences prove to be. It's about living life in the unmitigated opportunity of the present without fear of the outcome or wilfully trying to impose a preordained one. *Working in Warwick* is an inspiration and a vehicle of personal and professional transformation.

Andrew Makin, partner in design workshop architects



Photography: Dennis Gilbert





Architects a decade into independent practice

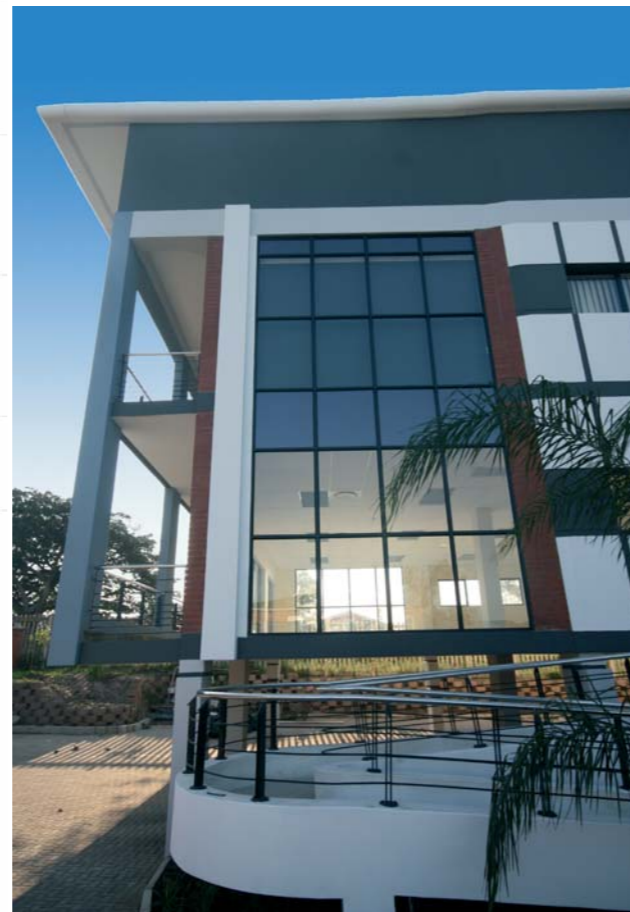
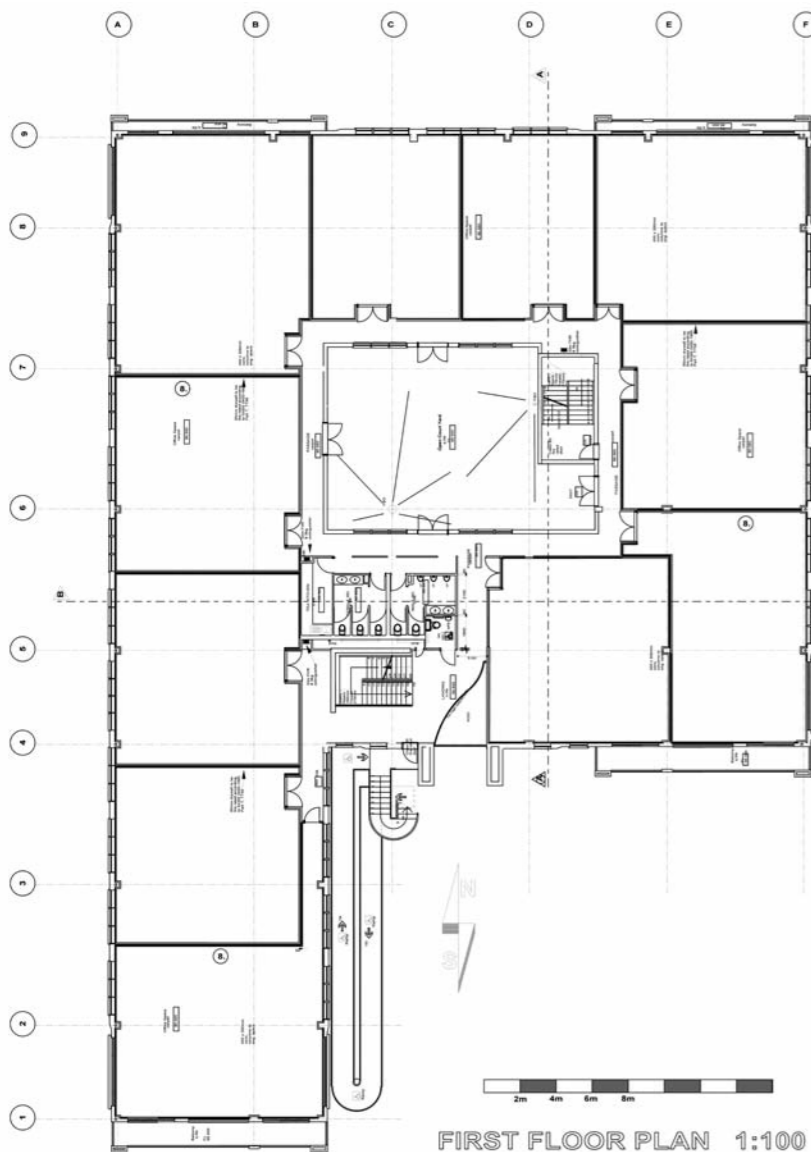
YD Studio Architects



After graduating in 1998 the economy was really slow, much like now, and I managed to get contract work at OMM Design Workshop working with Andrew Makin, Janina Masojada and Erik Orts-Hansen on the Constitutional Court, and Johnson Murray working on Gateway Theatre of Shopping. In 2000 I met Bruce Stafford and he invited me to come and work on a series of car showrooms he was doing for the SMG franchises. I learned many good business skills from Bruce during my short time there.

In 2001 I joined Paton Taylor Architects, was made an associate in 2003 and a director in 2005. Concurrently I enrolled again at UKZN, part time, where I completed my Masters degree in Commerce over a three year period. I chose to study commerce as it was always my intention to run a practice and I felt this would provide me with valuable skills.

In 2006 when our daughter had just been born and our son was three years old, I felt the need to spend more time at home. We renovated some buildings on our property in Westville and created a studio space and a meeting room and I started YD Studio (Young Design Studio)



Architects in July 2006 with one house alteration job.

The name YD Studio Architects was chosen largely because of the collaborative work environment which I had enjoyed as a student in the Architecture studios at the then University of Natal and all of the collaborative architects are colleagues who got to know and respect each other during those times. These collaborations enable us to maintain 'small office' overheads while delivering 'large office' service and design output within a working environment that fosters mutual respect, recognition and, most importantly, fun.

Of our commercial projects, Fairways Piazza is the most recently completed. Situated in an exclusive office park adjacent to the Mount



Edgecombe Country Club, Fairways Piazza is a 2800sq.m office block which deliberately breaks with the traditional green-roofed Victorian style of Mount Edgecombe. A flexible design offers almost limitless possibilities for sub-division to accommodate a wide variety of tenants.

Another departure from the prevailing vernacular architecture is our most current project, a distinctive 2500m² office development in Hillcrest's Old Main Road. "The Crest" makes bold use of modern, low-maintenance materials in bright colours and clean lines, intended to reduce total running and maintenance costs over the lifespan of the building – a deliberate step toward greener office design.

Stuart Young

OBITUARY

Des Watkins 1929-2009

After writing my last Matric subject in November 1948, I came to work for the architects Frolich and Kass where Des Watkins was in charge of the drawing office. He was older than me by several years and a contemporary of several of the architects in the drawing office, some of them ex-servicemen. I worked in the office up to the end of 1950.

Frolich and Kass was one of the busiest firms in Durban during the post-war building boom which lasted from 1945 to 'Sharpeville', 1960. The offices were on the third floor of Holt's building (long since demolished) located at the corner of Field and Smith Streets (now Joe Slovo and Anton Lembede Steets). The offices were well located and many of the busiest firms at the time could be seen from the windows. Across the road were Le Sueur and Partners, Paton and Taylor, Fridjohn and Fulford, Chick, Bartholomew and Poole, and further along Smith Street was the office of Calvert Mc Donald, the first head of the then part-time school of Architecture in Durban and, beyond Greenacres, the offices of Payne and Payne.

The busy firm of real estate agents, Isaacs, Geshen and Co, on the ground floor of Holt's building was a source of numerous projects designed by Frolich and Kass. Frolich, a Norwegian immigrant of circa 1930, was the architect for many of the blocks of flats from the mid '30s onwards, and post-WW2 he went into partnership with Fritz Kass. Fritz Kass was Jewish and he and his Lutheran wife, escaped from Paderborn in Germany in 1935 just as Hitler's persecutions were starting.

Desmond Ellsmere Watkins, Des, was a superb draughtsman and graduate of Wits. The walls of his office were covered with his excellent charcoal (conte) perspectives of current projects such as The Gables block of 192 flats along on the Esplanade (now Margaret Mncadi Ave). It was the largest block of flats at the time (and still large by today's standards). Some of the perspectives, I recall, included those of House Perling in Manning Road (now Lena Arense Rd), a house for Dr Alexander, the famous African herbalist, Bakers factory building in Sydney Road (now Curnick Ndlovu Rd), the Boy Scout building, extensions to Port Natal high school, Kings Lynn and a project for Dr Alexander in Lourenco Marques. There were perspectives of several large houses in the popular Californian Spanish style. One of these was for Major Isaacs (of Isaacs, Geshen and Co) then being constructed at 741 Musgrave Road. This house became our offices, Hallen Theron & Partners, in the early 1970s. I was very familiar with the detailing, for I had done the door and window details under Des's direction in 1949!

After the death of Gunnar Frolich the firm became Kass and Watkins. Fritz Kass also died not long after and Des took over the large stock of drawings and carried on as Kass and Watkins working from Amanzimtoti, where he later served as a town councillor.

Des was a leading mountaineer with many great climbs in the Drakensberg (uKhahlamba-Drakensberg) to his credit. He was very fit and walked the mountaineer's walk, striding rapidly wherever he went with body bent forward from the waist!

Hans Hallen, Sydney



## A Travel Diary

### Two iconic Dutch modernist Buildings



When the opportunity presented itself for me to be in Holland in April, I had a chance to visit the town hall of Hilversum by Willem Marius Dudok and the Schroeder house in Utrecht by Gerrit Thomas Rietveld, two buildings long on my agenda. Being a public building I was able to enter the town hall and although the house is accessible interior photographing is prohibited.

#### Town Hall, Hilversum, 1923-31

Hilversum is a virtual suburb of Amsterdam, 29km distant. Due to numerous buildings having been designed by Dudok, city architect of Hilversum for some time, it has been said that the town could be called Dudok-town. However, one building reigns supreme, the centrally-located town hall, now over 75-years-old and still in pristine condition.

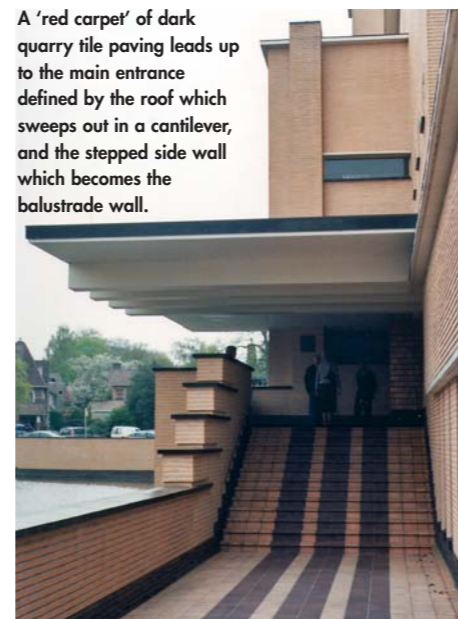
The building is marked by its extensive plain, horizontal brick surfaces with pierced windows in narrow slits or ribbons, and by its cubic massing and orthogonal geometry which can be ascribed to the impact of the concurrent *De Stijl* movement. In all his buildings the structure is suppressed, Dudok preferring the brick exterior to exposed concrete.

Located in a park-like surround, the public entrance abuts a lake and is approached along a walkway. Vertical circulation is confined to the tower off which all public spaces are accessible, and from which elevation one can view the court opposite.

While Kenneth Frampton termed Dudok a "Wrightian architect", in fact he oscillated



View from across the lake. The public entrance is from the right. BELOW: Orthogonal design to court with pool, wrap-around, ribbon and pierced windows.



A 'red carpet' of dark quarry tile paving leads up to the main entrance defined by the roof which sweeps out in a cantilever, and the stepped side wall which becomes the balustrade wall.



between tradition and modernism, with mansard gabled housing and streamlined functionalism but Wright's Larkin building could have provided an example for emulation in the town hall, and the brickwork detailing is certainly reminiscent of the Robie House, 1904-07.

Dudok shot to fame in the English-speaking world when he received the RIBA Gold Medal in 1935 and students included Hilversum on their pilgrimages and were influenced by its



Clubhouse, Natal Technical College, Durban, by Ing, Jackson & Park-Ross, demolished early 1990s. Recipient building of the Bronze Medal of the Natal Institute of Architects, 1938. (SAAR, April 1939). See plan published in KZ-NIA Journal 3/2001



mantra. The most significant local example was the Clubhouse of the Natal Technical College (demolished in the early 1990s), which won a competition for Iain Park-Ross who had studied at Liverpool.

However, Dudok's star faded rapidly, so much so that Reyner Banham concluded "when he died in 1974 many supposed he had been dead for years."



ABOVE: The buff paving of the staircase in the width of the steel-framed doors, under the cantilevering flat roof of a side entrance.

FACING PAGE, below right: The pronounced horizontality established by flush perpend, deeply recessed joints and elongated bricks is reminiscent of Wright's Robie house.



The building abruptly terminates a row of three-storey facebrick apartments and is entered beneath the projecting balcony at right. The room on ground floor (bottom left) served later as Rietveld's office, the upper when partitioned, as a bedroom for the two Schroeder daughters.



Upper floor, closed

#### Schroeder House, Utrecht, 1924

The *De Stijl* movement sought a universal, anonymous, and machine-like expression, suitable for painting, sculpture and architecture. The Schroeder house is a three-dimensional example of this, as a composition of lines, planes, volumes and primary colours. While the walls are of brick, they are plastered and designed as planes which shoot past their junctions, and for the floor and roof Rietveld, being a cabinetmaker, chose timber.

The ground floor was a self-contained unit available for rent until Rietveld himself later moved in and used the street-facing room as his office. A central spiral staircase lit from the light tower on the roof, leads to the first floor designed to accommodate Mrs Truus Schroeder and her three children. Due to the limitations of space, he conceived a transformable plan which, much like a cabinet, could be used as a single open space or subdivided by full-height sliding panels to partition dedicated spaces off from the central stair and hall. When compartmentalised the spaces are tight, and the building is sparsely furnished but the inventory includes an example of Rietveld's Red-Blue chair of 1918.



The elevated motorway put paid to the design facing the polders.

While striking today, the house at the termination of a group of traditional exposed brick rowhouses must have been perceived as an alien imposition when built. Interestingly, it is accessed not from the street but from the side, a decision probably related to its location on the edge of town, for a priority of Rietveld's was the enjoyment of the view to the polders, which as if by public revenge, is now blocked by the elevated motorway. This fact is never mentioned which again proves that there is no substitute for an actual inspection.

Walter Peters

#### Reference

Wilson, RG Willem Dudok: Modernist but not Mainstream. *AIA Journal*, August 1982, pp44-51.