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Defining a relevant architecture in South Africa

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Architecture in South Africa is at a crossroads. After years of repression and isolation during which contemporary architecture lost its way, there is now a desperate need for architects to respond to the social and cultural challenges of a society riven by massive material contrasts. Within architecture schools, a student body more representative of society than hitherto is engaged in projects which reflect the very diverse needs of the community. Central to the effectiveness of such teaching programmes is the presence of teachers fully engaged in practice, creating a responsible architecture for a renewed nation.

Today about one quarter of the population of KwaZulu-Natal (KZ-N) lives in Metropolitan Durban, 60% of these residents live in shelters made of stabilized earth and recycled materials. Within five years it is estimated that 21% of all children living in KZ-N will be orphaned as a result of the scourge of AIDS (Harber, 1998). The pressures bearing down on city and societal infrastructures are enormous, the efforts to affect the housing imbalance are falling way short of demand, low-density starter units and wet core solutions proliferate the periphery of the metropolitan area and the lessons of densification are yet to be meaningfully addressed.

Contrasts in human experience are evident in the statistics relating to available accommodation. It is estimated that whites enjoy 33m² per person and blacks 4-5m² (from a survey in Bester Camp outside Durban, a quarter of the population had 2m² per person - an indicator of severe overcrowding) (Harber, 1994a). Overcrowding is also commonplace on infrequent and slow municipal trains and buses. The pressures are therefore placed on the combi-taxi networks. Too many people are crammed into each vehicle resulting in over-extended suspension and braking systems and speeding. Ignorance of highway codes is widespread and there are many fatal road incidents.

Continuing this theme of contrasts, Jose Forzaj¹ comments:

'I think we in this part of the world live with perhaps the most violent contrasts that mankind has ever faced. As in

many other developing countries we live in a society where material contrasts are colossal.

'I believe architecture has very little meaning as an isolated object and I believe this is the dimension that we, at best, are obtaining. I believe that we will not achieve real liveable urban environments until we have the courage to understand the deep social and cultural contrasts within our society and until we acknowledge them and try to find ways to express them and in some cases, resolve them' (Forzaj, 1991).

Herein lies the challenge. If the practice of contemporary architecture in South Africa has lost its way, as will be implied in the following sections, there is still an opportunity for architects to recognize the challenge and begin to present solutions on a much broader front than currently exists. In so doing, they can promote an architecture rooted in resource, the environment and sustainability. An architecture which recognizes the unique sense of place and which is attuned to our cultural identities and aspirations.

There is a need for teachers to be in touch with the academic, creative and practical aspects to this challenge. The inquiry into an emerging 'regional' architecture can co-exist as both an academic pursuit and a quest of practice. Being in touch with the realities of the situation will enable teaching staff to bring their experience of community, social and urban issues to the crit room and seminar tables. By creating appropriate programmes in the design studios within the schools, an awareness of the diverse responsibilities that we face as architects will be ensured.

Promise of things to come

Architectural culture in South Africa has been modelled almost exclusively along European and American ideals. The earliest commissioners of civic projects and private dwellings, conscious of their origins, built in the styles of their Dutch, Victorian or Edwardian heritage. Catalogue building elements were shipped to these far shores and assembled in colonial interpretations. Minor concessions to location and climate were developed, the verandah, for example, keeping direct sunlight from falling on external walls.

Such influences from foreign sources have been maintained throughout the twentieth century. A strong Neo-Classical influence, principally through the Herbert Baker/Edwin Lutyens connection, is evident in the form of Baker's Union Buildings, Pretoria (1910) and many other government buildings. The impact of the Modern Movement in South Africa was slow but gained momentum in the 1930s. Rex Martienssen and Norman Hanson travelled to Europe to see the pioneering work of Le Corbusier and Gropius. By 1932 Martienssen was established in a caretaking role as a lecturer at Witwatersrand University and was sole editor of the *South African Architectural Record*: 'in one term he had totally and irrevocably committed the school and the journal to a path of unabashed modernity' (Chipkin, 1993).

The northern suburbs of Johannesburg were destined to be the nursery for the early transplantations of the International Style Villas. House Stern (1934–35) [Fig. 1] and Martienssen House (1939) by Martienssen, Fassler & Cooke together with House Harris (1933) and House Hanson (1938–39) by Hanson, Tomkin & Finkelstein, were the most notable. These reverential adaptations had not gone unnoticed. Le Corbusier, having received copies of the *South African Architectural Record*, replied to Martienssen in his well documented letter of 23 September 1936. Acknowledging the work of the Transvaal Group, he laid out a manifesto to encourage his young associates to further heights.

"Use your eyes" Le Corbusier wrote. In those days the young and enthusiastic tended to look at the modern movement. The looking around came a little later. But the spirit of enquiry grew with historical and technical research and design experimentation. Research into indigenous and early colonial architectures also greatly expanded and there was a steady increase in understanding the regional climate, cultural and technical aspects of architecture and city building. The future of this architecture will depend on how well the issue of climate, culture and technology are dealt with. There is also an increasing awareness that, unlike the single rooted origins of western culture, here there are a multiplicity of roots' (Hallen, 1985).²

The preoccupation with attachment, and the imitation of styles and fashions from abroad, is well articulated in Daniel Herwitz's³ assessment of the colonial world at the margins' fixation with the bourgeois societies of Europe and America at the centre.

'These stagnant places are condemned to live in a state of

endless imitation of the centres, waiting for the good news of the avant-garde future to trickle down in the form of day old newspapers, discount merchandise and fading opera singers. Always behind the times – so the answer goes – those at the margins are lucky to have made the occasional pilgrimage to the centres, so that they might bring back something of modernity to their ordinary lives in the form of memory and new cultural routine' (Herwitz, 1999).

As was the case with the Transvaal Group, and likewise Le Corbusier in India and Niemeyer in Brazil, the pursuit of pure Modernism beyond the 'centres' was limited in success: although sculptural perfection was achieved, the imposition of cosmopolitan ideals was in denial of the vernacular and thwarted cultural influence. The period of looking around, the fermentation and incubation of supplementary agendas to those of the Modern Movement, prospered during successive post Second World War periods of building expansion.

The 'unconventional, irregular and asymmetrical' (Chipkin, 1993) Modernism of Bernhard Pabst, Patidar Mansions (1947) [Fig. 2a] in particular, stood apart from the otherwise superficial Modernism which characterized the expanding Johannesburg. Likewise in Durban, Issy Benjamin produced a series of delightful residential buildings and hotels: however, the influence was still overtly Corbusian, Brazilian and International [Fig. 2b].

It was not until the 1960s that real evidence of a modern architecture reflecting the constraints of local conditions developed, primarily through the influence of Eaton, Fagan and Biermann. Norman Eaton's Netherlands Bank, Durban (1965) [Fig. 3a], a Modernist box clad with a light-filtering ceramic screen, and Gabriel Fagan's own house, Cape Peninsula (1965) [Fig. 3b], 'creating a regional vernacular rooted in Cape Dutch vernacular architecture, yet thoroughly modern' (Buchanan, 1995). Meanwhile, the inspired teaching of Barrie Biermann and the seminal design of his own house, Durban (1962) [Fig. 3c], combined old-fashioned modern design and economic necessity to produce a regional vernacular (Biermann, 1985). All of these were to become points of reference in the assertion of a new purposeful architecture.

For the first time perhaps, South African architects were successfully developing an understanding of means and place in which Modernity was transformed into something even greater, with the resourceful use of materials in compositions sharpened by the crisp light of the African sun. A truly Southern African contemporary architecture was emerging, the co-existence of practice and teaching enabling the prolific talents of Hans Hallen, Roelof Uytendogaardt and Pancho Guedes to influence a generation of architects.

Hans Hallen's⁴ prodigious portfolio of buildings includes numerous apartment buildings, Drostdy (1963), Riebeck (1966), both in Durban, '... youthful and lyrical examples of his eclectic ability, investigating a Cape Dutch atmosphere of whitewashed domesticity in dappled shade with Brazilian ebullience, for a sub-tropical setting'

1 Architecture in South Africa has been modelled on European and American ideals as in this International Style replica in the suburbs of Johannesburg. House Stern, Johannesburg, 1934–35, by Martienssen, Fassler & Cooke

2 By the late 1940s Expressionist curvilinear forms stood apart from the

otherwise superficial Modernism which characterized the expanding cities

a Patidar Mansions, Johannesburg, 1947, by W. B. Pabst

b Hyde Park Apartments, Durban, 1959, by Crofton & Benjamin

3 In the 1960s an architecture reflecting local constraints emerged in the work of Eaton, Fagan, Biermann and others

a Netherlands Bank, Durban, 1965, Norman Eaton. A Modernist box with a light-filtering ceramic screen

b Architect's House, 1965, Gabriel Fagan. 'Cape Dutch vernacular, yet very modern'

c Architect's House, 1962, Barrie Biermann. Plan of single-storey house, living spaces enclosing subtropical courtyards



1



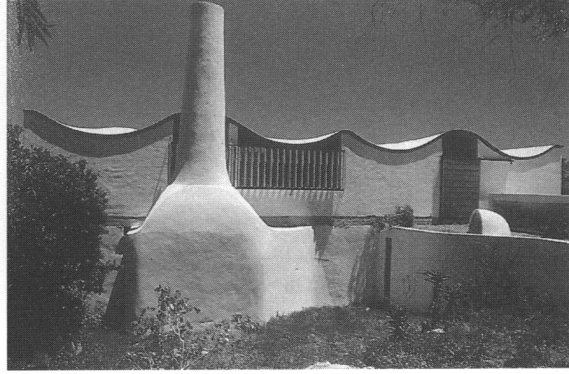
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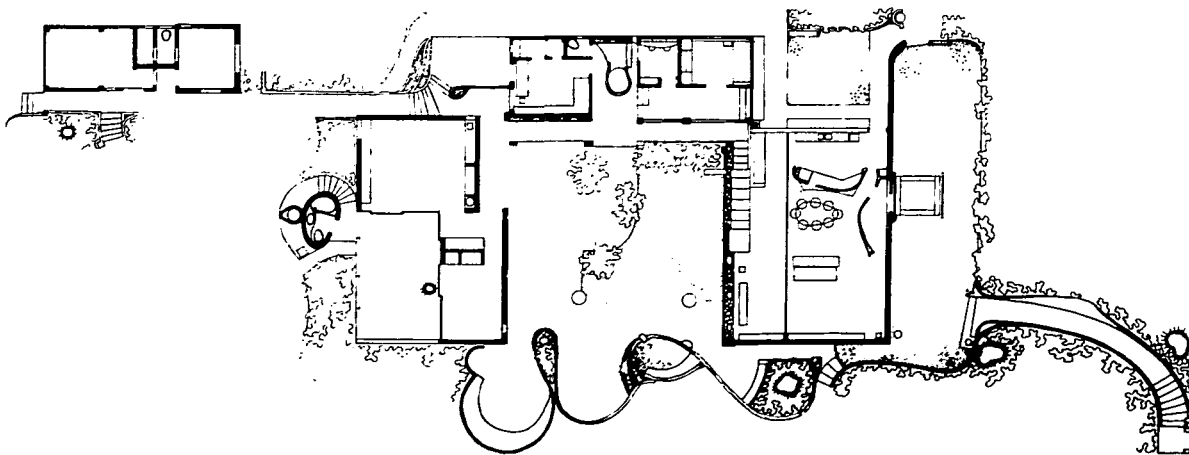
2b



3a



3b



3c

(Biermann, 1985). Later works include the majestic Huletts Head Offices, Durban (1975), the 'acropolitic' Mangosuthu Technikon, Durban (1983) [Fig. 4a], BMW Head Offices, Midrand (1984), and the Library at Brenthurst, Johannesburg (1984).

Roelof Uytendogaardt practised mainly in the Cape and until his untimely death in 1999 was lecturing at the University of Cape Town (UCT). 'Four interwoven strands in Uytendogaardt's thinking inform his work and teaching, an understanding of the timeless qualities of architecture, the consequent need for discovery of what has gone before, the attention given to urbanism in its widest sense, and implicit in this the constant of humanism - Making space eulogise people' (Nutall, 1993). His major works include the Welkom Church (1964), the Indoor Sports Centre at the University of Cape Town (1977), the Community Centre at Steinkopft (1978) [Fig. 4b] and the Hout Bay Library (1986).

Amancio (Pancho) Guedes, was born in Portugal and educated in Maputo (formerly Lourenco Marques), Mozambique. His 'phenomenal output of exuberant work was deeply personal - sculptural, decorated, full of wit acted as stimulant and irritant to a dry Southern African profession' (Cooke, 1985, p.61). He graduated from Witwatersrand in 1950 and set up practice working mostly in Maputo until he returned to Johannesburg as Head of Department at Wits in 1975. The examples of his creative genius are too numerous to mention here, however the Sagrada Familia Church at Machava, the Saipal Bakery in Maputo and finally the 'Smiling Lion' Apartment Building [Fig. 4c], stand out as masterpieces.

In the vacuum of uncertainty

Whether any meaningful architecture is possible in a society under a tyrannical political order is questionable.⁵ Certainly the darkest decades of apartheid (1970-80s) can be recorded as producing mostly conformist and sterile architecture, the airports, civic centres and corporate buildings of the expanding CBDs. The international cultural boycott had eroded the confidence of the profession. In a conscious effort to remain in contact with 'world trends' and resist the isolation, the movement towards a relevant architecture was abandoned by most in preference for designs transplanted from foreign journals.

'Post-Modernism as broadly defined, in its South African manifestation, has been a sign of the rootlessness and uncertainty of the South African spirit - the Zeitgeist of this country - as expressed in architecture. It is a trivialisation of culture in that here it cannot be the search back into history that will connect past and present, assuming that at its best Post-Modernism does this. It does not reflect our history but it certainly reflects our uncertainty' (Noero, 1993).

South Africa has played host to some of the most vulgar exploitation of indulgent facadism, the window dressing of meaningless works. The trivialized African iconography of the 800 million rand Palace and Entertainment Centre at the Lost City, Bophuthatswana, 1992 [Fig. 5a], for example,

typifies the demeaning attitude to African culture of many commercial developments. Perpetuating this condition, a 'shopertainment' centre is currently under construction on former sugar cane fields to the north of Durban. The developers are promising an Afrocentric environment, however the public will experience a series of Egyptian scaled halls with zoomorphic columns and other moulded symbolism. Northern African memorabilia attempting to evoke Southern African nostalgia!

Since the watershed events of 1990, the landscape of South Africa's cities has seen rapid change. The urban poor and previously disadvantaged have sought a foothold in the economies of the inner cities. Expanding trading areas have mushroomed around major transport nodes as well as alongside the main urban streets. Corporate business, insecure at the changing face of the CBD, has uprooted and created suburban enclaves in an attempt to displace the business centres.

There is a perverse psyche of retreat, retreat from anything and everything to a paradisiacal surrounding, secured and fortified in the image of anywhere but Africa! The architectural mercenaries of the commercial world entertain their clients and patrons with theme park architectures. Italianate palazzo hotels, Georgian office parks, Victorian cluster housing and medieval Tudor retirement homes and so on [Figs. 5b and c]. Professor Alan Lipman⁶ laments:

'Inside and out, they are symbols of not belonging; those who identify with them are not from here, from Southern Africa. They are from somewhere else. They have impounded this land, re-made it into their far-off recollected pasts. Their revivalist embellishments embody a need to erase local sense of place. They are borrowed architectures, they are filched from not - Africa. They are architectures that abolish local memories in the name of selected, far off histories' (Lipman, 1998).

South African architecture is at a crossroads - and maybe it has been there for some time.

Contemporary 'commercial' architecture has remained in a vacuum, while contemporary community and civic architecture, fuelled by a social and political agenda,⁷ is discovering expressions routed in vernacular culture, spirit and technique. It is to these areas of development that we can look for future hope.

Future hope

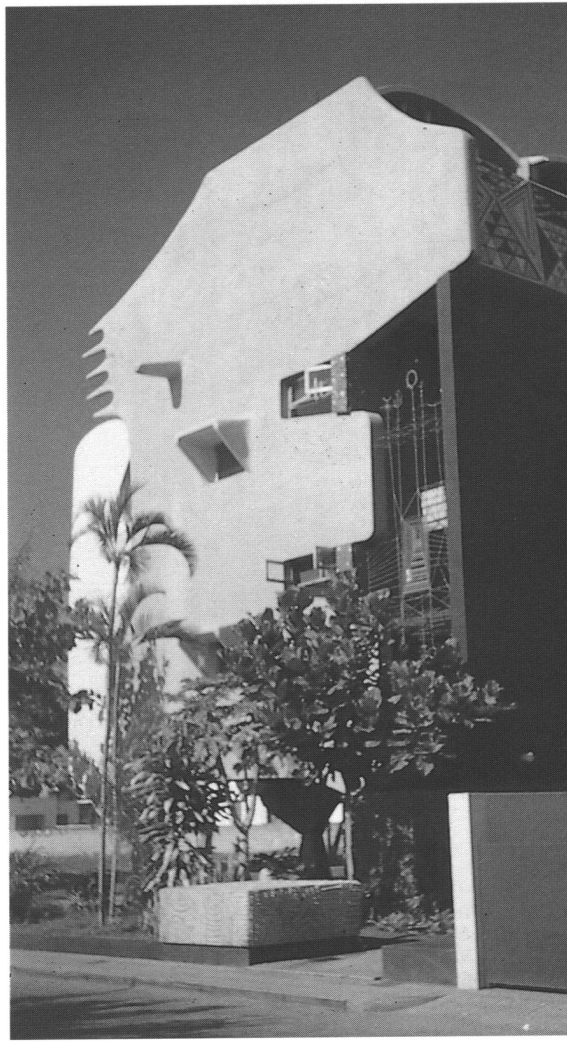
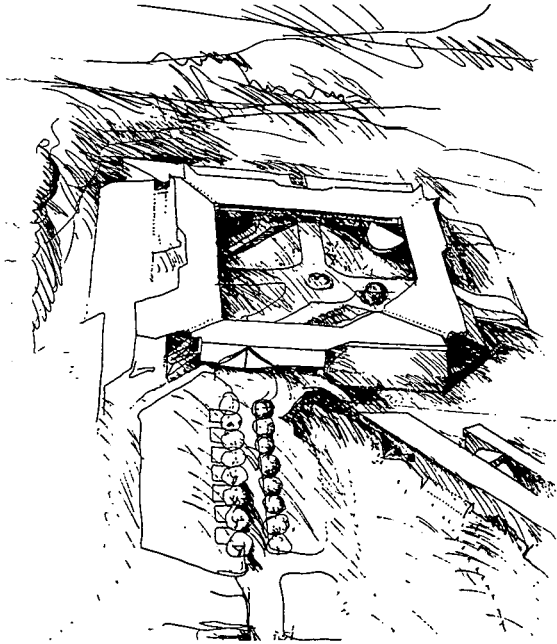
Eco-technology, sustainability, environment, place, culture and future city are themes which are promoted in the profession and in the schools. The 5th Triennial of the African Union of Architects Congress, hosted in 1998 by the KwaZulu-Natal Institute for Architecture was titled 'Towards an Architecture of Conscience'. The Minister of Public Works, Jeff Radebe, in his closing address stated:

'It is therefore more than appropriate that in this period where so much is said about an emerging African Renaissance that we turn our attention to the real meaning of African architectures. The soul of Africa needs to return to our architectural drawing boards' (Radebe, 1999).

4 The resourceful use of materials in composition sharpened by the crisp light of the African sun
 a Mangosuthu Technikon, Durban 1983, by Hallen Theron & Partners, Durban

Hans Hallen's sketch of the classic academic courtyard plan, poised on a hilltop with dramatic presence
 b Steinkopf Community Centre, 1978, by Uytendogaardt & Macaskill

c 'Smiling Lion' Apartments, Maputo, Mozambique, Amancio Guedes. Expressionistic flair with a sensibility of Corbusier and Picasso

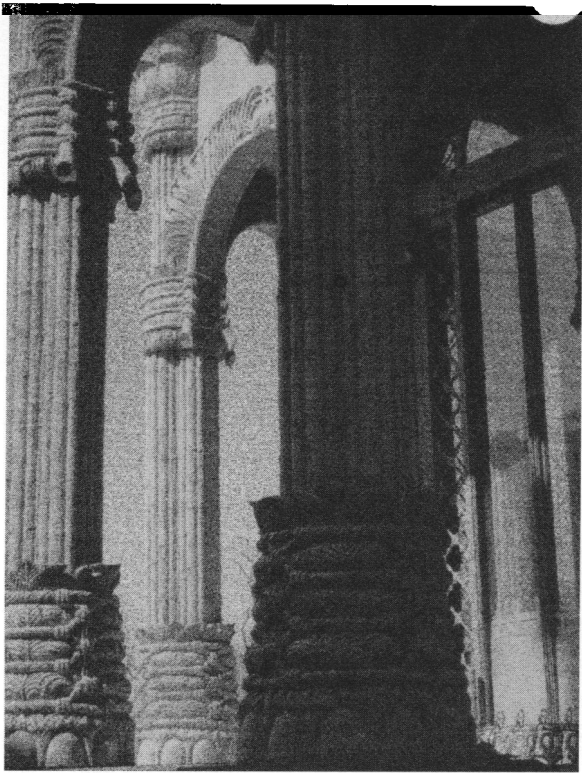


4a

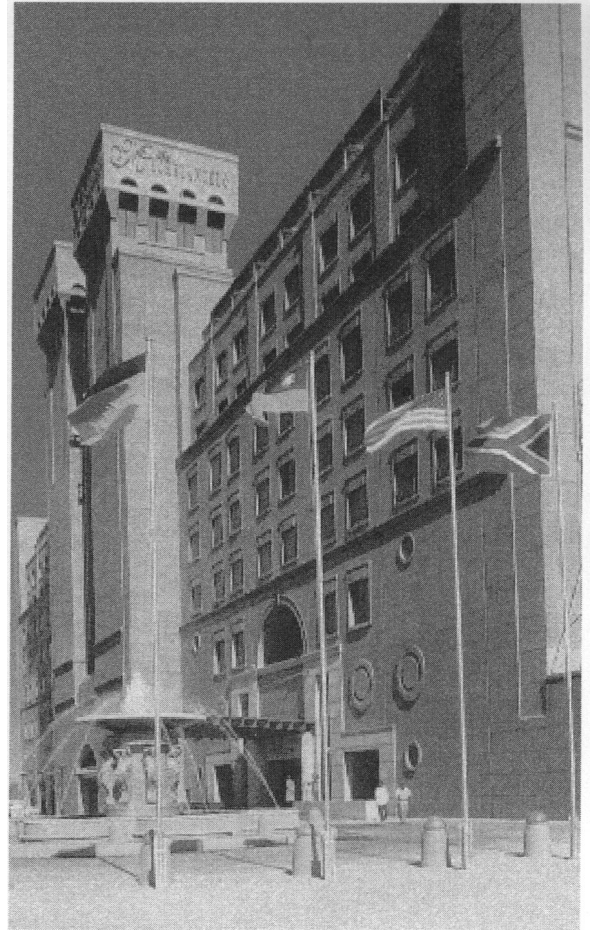
4c



4b



5a



5b

5 The exploitation of indulgent facadism
 a Palace of the Lost City, Bophuthatswana, 1992, by Wimberly, Allison, Tong & Goo with Burg, Doherty, Bryant & Partners. Fake zoomorphic columns creating an Afrocentric dreamworld?
 b Michelangelo Towers, Sandton Square, Johannesburg, 1998. Italianate palazzo in gold rush town
 c Graceland Hotel, Casino & Country Club, Secunda, 1998, Paul Steelment Ltd (USA) with Boogertman Krige Architects. Tropical chateau in a highveld industrial town



5c

The quest for a legitimate expression of a contemporary African architecture will only intensify as the increasing number of young black African architects make their mark on the profession. Presently 67% of the student composition of the Natal School of Architecture are from formerly disadvantaged backgrounds (Seneque, 1998).

Peter Malefane graduated at the University of Natal in 1979, becoming the first black African student to do so. He had worked in Durban and Lesotho before establishing a practice in Johannesburg in 1982, in 1993 he was made an Honorary Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.⁸ Until 1990 a quota

system had severely restricted the intake of non-white students into the School of Architecture. Since then the composition of the student body has steadily become more reflective of the country's population. Of 26 final year thesis candidates in 1999, 14 were from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, seven of whom were black African students. Recently the School has attracted students from countries beyond the borders of South Africa, particularly the neighbouring states of Lesotho and Zimbabwe, as well as further afield. Although English is the teaching medium, there are as many as 10 first languages spoken among the students.

New works

A renewed vigour is sweeping through the younger ranks of the profession. For some time the work and teaching of Jo Noero⁹ has been central to the revival.

I believe that the properties of architecture can be identified by defining the differences that exist between architecture and the other arts, taken further, I believe that the value of architecture as distinct from the other arts can be defined best by those differences. The differences that are fundamental and implicit in any building are function, location, technique and publicness' (Noero, 1993).

Noero's influential recent works include the Soweto Careers Centre [Fig. 6a]; the Duduza Resource Centre; the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Centre in Johannesburg and various office buildings in Gauteng.

In Durban, The BAT (Bartel Arts Trust) Centre designed by Architects Collaborative has proved to be an intriguing counterpoint to conventional practice. A disused old Port Naval structure was converted into an Art Centre by ingeniously collaging discarded building elements and recycled materials (*à la* House Biermann previously), with the assistance of local artists, to produce a vibrant and eclectic meeting place for Durban's art-goers.

Working between the realities of high tech and low tech are characteristics defining much of recent progressive work. In Gauteng, Ian Low has been working creatively in rural situations and Peter Rich resourcefully with communities: both bring an inherent understanding of culture and place into their projects, both are associated with teaching at Witwatersrand. In Pretoria, Ora Joubert has displayed a flair for the use of corrugated iron sheeting as cladding to juxtaposed and fragmentary elements in her recent domestic projects. The practices of Kruger Roos, as well as Van der Merwe Miszewski Architects in Cape Town, are demonstrating a similar exuberant regional Modernism.

Back in Durban, the work of Janina Masojada and Andrew Makin, initially working individually and more recently as the OMM Design Workshop, is proving instrumental in the emerging awareness of a relevant South African Architecture. Their winning entry (collaborating with Urban Solutions, Johannesburg) in the International Competition for the design for the new Constitutional Court Building [Fig. 6b], to be sited on the Old Gaol in Johannesburg, is potentially the biggest milestone in the development of contemporary architecture in this country. It is 'the first major competition for a public building since the installation of the new government in 1994, with the presence to become the new Union Buildings of the present historical moment' (Japha, V&D, 1998, 28).

The panel of jurors included Charles Correa, Geoffrey Bawa and Peter Davey as well as local representatives, among them Judge Albie Sachs who reported:

The main attraction to the choice of site was its symbolism. The Old Fort was the Robben Island of Johannesburg. A new Constitutional Court rising there would physically dramatise the transformation of South

Africa from a racist, authoritarian society to a constitutional democracy. The idea is to make it a lively centre of activity, providing accommodation for commissions concerned with human rights, museums, the Nelson Mandela papers, a human rights library and a place where people work, play and eat. We have plans to involve a wide range of artists, ceramicists, tilers, weavers and other craftspeople to ensure that a glowing South African ambience is created for what promises to be the first outstanding public building of the era. If it comes off – and all the signs are there it will – the word renaissance would not be inappropriate' (Sachs, 1998).

The architects have acknowledged design influences including not only their own experiences and observations of South Africa's unique cultural matrix but also international influences ranging from Scarpa and Siza to Miralles. An understanding of urban context (public realms v. private spaces), building elements in terms of space and volume, climate awareness, the opportunities and realities of building in Africa, and finally the act of commemoration (of specific histories associated with the site) are fundamental elements of the design, all of which contribute to its significance.

It will be the pre-eminent building on the north slope of the site, not because of monumental scale, but because it has the potential to express a new architecture which is rooted in the South African landscape, both physically and culturally (Competition Report, 1998).

Programme development in the School of Architecture

While the student body at the University of Natal's School of Architecture has transformed over recent years, so too has the focus on programme development within the school. Since 1995 the School has put into place an inquiry-based student and learning centred educational programme, referred to as Problem Based Learning (PBL). The shift is from individualized subject teaching to an integration of course content around set problems. The curriculum is under continual refinement and is subject to reform depending on reflection and feedback, including that from students. Megan Seneque, former Faculty Education Officer explains:

The power imbalance between teachers and learners is addressed, and the teacher is seen as part of the team, rather than as sole arbiter and judge. Such imbalance has also been addressed through the demystifying of assessment criteria' (Seneque, 1998).

In this regard peer and self assessment is acknowledged along with that of the teacher/facilitator. A system known as IMAGE is used as an assessment language during the formative stages of a process and is referred to by indicators relating to progress, Inadequate, Marginal, Adequate, Good and Excellent. It is only at the Portfolio exam stage, at the end of a semester, that a summative marking system is adopted.

Case study: Second Year, second semester 1999

Professor Rodney Harber's¹⁰ involvement in community-based projects, noted for their innovative technological and sustainable solutions, has been well documented in both local and

6 A renewed vigour is sweeping through the younger ranks of the profession
a Soweto Careers Centre, 1993, by Jo Noero – a central figure to the revival.

Strong use of form, materials and colour, new metaphors for a contemporary architecture in South Africa
b Constitutional Court, Johannesburg

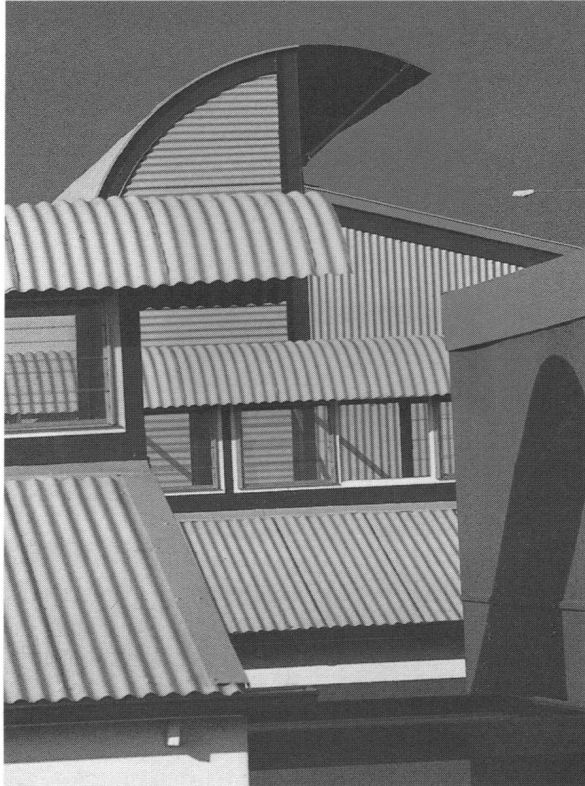
(unbuilt), OMM Design Workshop & Urban Solutions. The biggest milestone in the development of contemporary architecture in South Africa

international publications. For some time he has held the view that stabilized earth construction could be a relevant and economic solution to the country's urgent social projects. With these initiatives in mind, the programme for the semester was structured around an intensive in-situ earth-building workshop which was integrated into two design studio projects.

The workshop took place at the site of a stabilized earth-building project which was currently under construction in the Waterloo development district, 30km north of Durban. The project is a Housing Support Centre which is intended to be a training venue in earth building, to promote earth building as a viable construction solution to the housing and infrastructural needs of the community. The project has been designed by Architects Collaborative, Durban and has been funded by the Australian Government (Aus Aid) administered and orchestrated by Steve Burroughs of Earthbuilder, Canberra. Expert advice was therefore on hand to demonstrate the importance of soil selection and testing, as well as the differing available technologies. The preferred technology in this instance is mud brick, mainly because its fabrication is uncomplicated and does not require the sophisticated machinery associated with its alternatives.

Mud brick (adobe) is a sun-baking process of a stabilized soil mix moulded in simple timber trays. A cheap stabilizer is asphalt emulsion, which results in a completely waterproof structure without the need for rendering [Figs. 7a and b]. When the bricks are ready they are laid using a mortar comprising the same elements used to make the brick.¹¹

One of the alternatives to mud brick is Compressed Soil brick. Relying on mechanical pressure to mould



6a



6b

blocks, this technique is being promoted and sponsored in the Eastern Cape region by CRATERre-EAG, International Centre of Earth Construction, Grenoble, France. The third alternative is rammed earth construction [Fig. 7c] which involves the compression of soil into a shuttering system. During the workshop the students had the opportunity to practically experience each method.

The acceptance of stabilized earth construction by communities is under question as mud construction is historically associated with traditional rural dwellings (as infill to a light timber framing) and therefore has a stigma of being a second rate rather than a contemporary solution befitting a newly emancipated society. This important issue may be countered by the implementation of stabilized earth



7a



7b

7 Stabilized earth construction is seen as a relevant and economic solution for urgent social projects and formed the basis for a school of architecture earth-building workshop

a Mud bricks (adobe), sun-baked bricks, when dry will be stockpiled ready for use
b Steve Burroughs of Earthbuilder, representing Aus Aid, with students of the University of

Natal after stripping the shutter to test a section of a rammed earth wall
c Bricklayer at work using the same mix of soil, water and asphalt emulsion as a mortar to bed the bricks



7c

construction in public buildings, thus raising its implied status. Students are taking this issue seriously, and a highly commended thesis recently submitted by Ana Maria Nomico (1999), an ecological resource centre, was sited at the crux of Durban's major commuter node and trading area. The proposal was significant in its adoption of rammed earth construction and other sustainable solutions. Other progressive thesis topics were Sibusiswe Zungu's trade and cultural revival centre, promoting an awareness in African culture, Natalie Stead's community-based resort for eco-tourism and Greg Townsend designed an inner-city mixed-use development with an AIDS training centre. Abimbola Pariola and Kumarsen Thamburan chose the socially aware topic of a facility for street children.

Design for a crèche, Waterloo, Durban

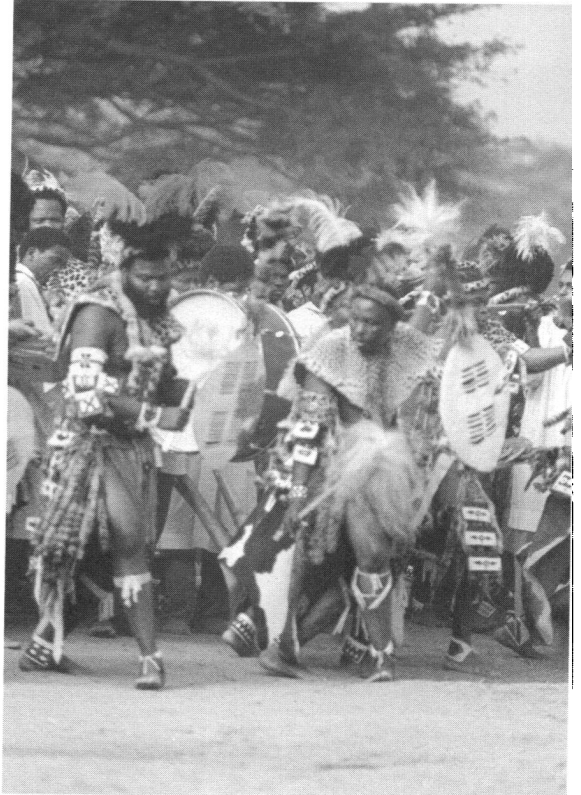
Having embarked on the practical workshop programme, the Project Managers at the Housing Support Centre informed the University group of the urgent need for a crèche in the vicinity. It was agreed that the students would develop design ideas while still working on site, and that these would be presented at the end of the three week process. From the group, 10 proposals were put on display in a community hall from which one design was recommended by the community representatives as a preferred choice. Within weeks a stockpile of mud bricks, having been voluntarily made by the community, were being assembled on the new site in preparation for construction. It is proposed that, under supervision, the necessary construction drawings will be made available by the students as part of a forthcoming technology module, to assist with the building operations.

This is consistent with a trend which is being experienced at other schools of architecture. The formation of building/implementation units within schools of architecture is promoting the assistance and intervention into community situations, where the budget and resources preclude the involvement of fee-charging professionals. The students are able to assist with design and outline documentation support, thus making a contribution to the continuing uplift of disadvantaged groups and at the same time benefiting from personal exposure into one of the most urgent areas of architectural activity in our society. The School of Architecture at the University of Natal has established 'outreach' programmes in the past. In 1983 the Built Environment Support Group (BESG) was set up as a voluntary association and assisted grass-roots organizations, and since 1990 it has developed into an independent NGO undertaking community-based initiatives and housing projects. In 1986 the University of Natal Appropriate Housing Technology Unit (UNAHTU) was established to research alternative technologies for low income groups (Harber, 1994b).

Design for travellers' hotel, Ebuhleni, Durban

Following the initiatives established by the Waterloo project, the students were presented with a more complex and stimulating challenge. The Nazareth

Baptist Church of Shembe (Ibandla LamaNazaretha), a religion introduced by the Prophet Isaiah Shembe in 1910, is 'a fascinating and unique mixture of Christian dogma and basic Zulu culture' (Reitz, 1988). Today there are tens of thousands of followers, most of whom converge every July, on a settlement named Ebuhleni situated on a flat hilltop to the north of Durban. The July festival or Great Sabbath is a time of mass prayer, dancing and baptism for new adherents



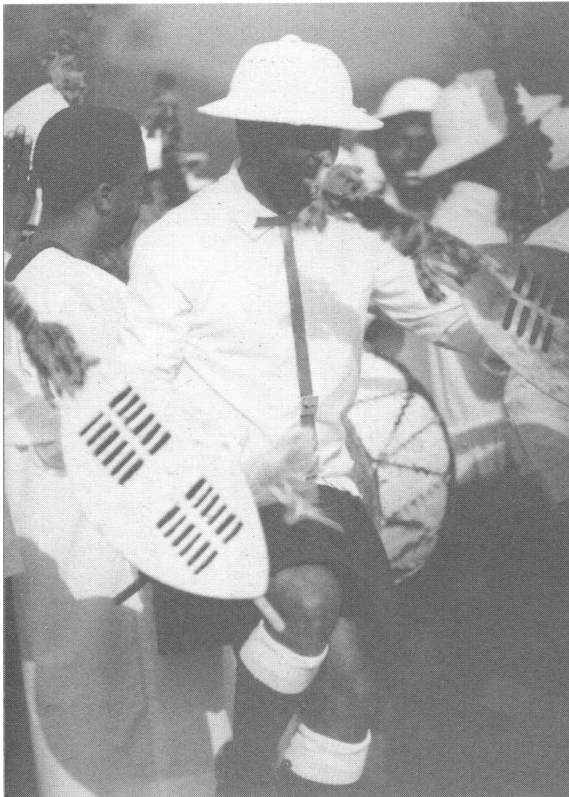
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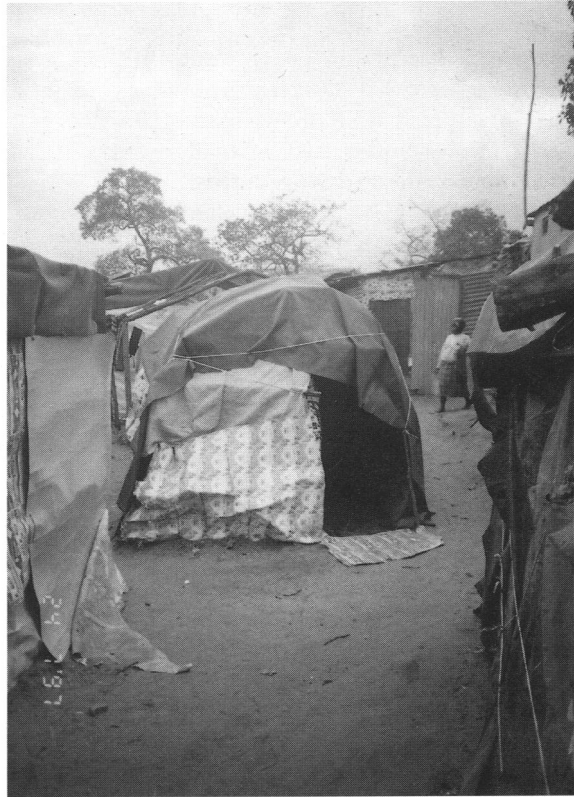
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[Figs. 8a-c]. The infrastructure implications for a settlement experiencing such an annual 'invasion' are incredible. At the peak of the celebration a minimum of 100,000 people, travelling from locations throughout KwaZulu-Natal, will have erected rudimentary single-storey shelters [Fig. 8d], at a density of 260 dwellings per hectare laid out in accordance with the gender hierarchy of the settlement [Fig. 8f].

Professor Harber who has acted as consultant to the church community for some years, was recently approached to determine the possibilities of integrating a formal structure into the existing settlement which could accommodate up to 1200 travellers, worshippers and eco-tourists visiting the site either in or out of the festive season. Once again, a project with realistic connotations was presented to the students. Understanding the culture and



8c



8d



8e

8 A staff consultancy project for a more formal structure for the annual Shembi religious festival at Ebuhleni provided the basis for a student project
 a Dancing of the married men in traditional leather and fur attire
 b Married women, Nazarite matrons gather in their ceremonial costume, and 'Mary Poppins'

umbrellas
 c Unmarried men with traditional shields, rugby socks, hockey skirts, choir tunics and white helmets
 d Rudimentary shelters, the frame may remain to be 'clad' again the following year
 e Inside a dwelling, note the inventive use of printed milk carton packaging
 f Settlement plan.

Buses and cars stop to the north-east of the site, clearly structured routes traverse the site, married and unmarried men and women are located in strictly administered zones. The central area known as 'paradise' is demarcated with white stone set into the ground. This is the holy area where, in the shade of the trees, the mass prayer services will be conducted



8f

needs of the community was essential (furniture is prohibited for example – mats are rolled out for sleeping), and recognition of sustainable solutions (water collection/sewage disposal) due to the absence of site services, and appropriate technologies were other main challenges [Figs. 9a–c].

Design and technology have recently been integrated as a single curriculum subject. The significance of this is apparent when the success of many projects in this region is dependent on appropriate decision making in material selection and environmental awareness.

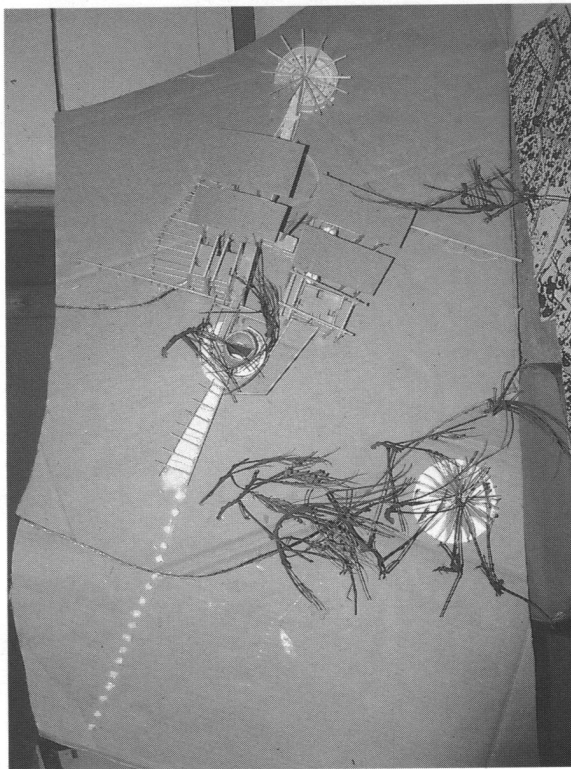
Epilogue

The importance that those involved in the teaching of architecture also maintain a basis in practice cannot be over-emphasized, particularly in a developing country such as South Africa.

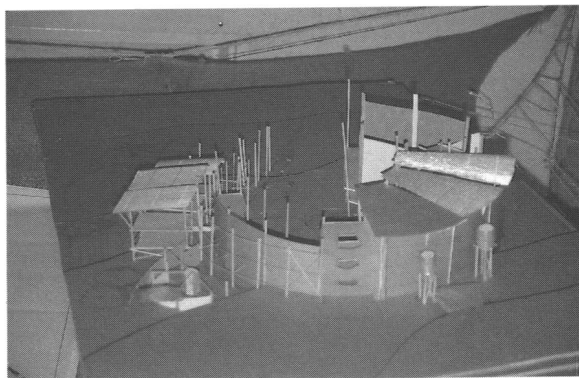
Schools of Architecture in South Africa, must now devise balanced design programmes which

acknowledge the spectrum of challenges that architects in the region are facing – from low-tech community initiatives to the formal sector urban interventions. This is reflected in the students' selection of final year thesis topics over recent years. *'Selected topics range from the "last chance to blow my mind" kind (mindful of a lifetime of door schedules and letters to contractors) to topics aimed at being socially relevant and culturally appropriate'* (Van Zyl, 1997, p.15).

The debate promoting a responsible architecture in South Africa is one that is essential in our schools of architecture and, where lecturers are also involved in the production of relevant buildings, the gravity of the polemic will intensify. Maybe we will produce a greater proportion of young architects who will in the future have the courage to resist the insipid tendencies of the many clients and developers currently defacing our urban landscapes. Perhaps in turn, they will also see a future based on substance and not mere escapist fantasy.

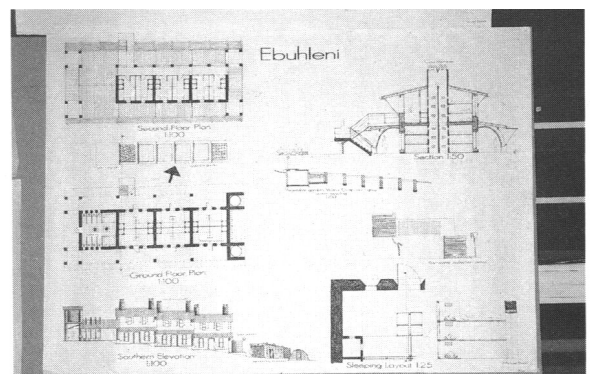


9a



9b

9 Second year student projects for a travellers' hotel at Ebuhleni
a Tawanda Chisvo
b Michael Janeke
c Michael Bond



9c

Notes

1. Jose Forjaz is a practising architect and Director of the Faculty of Architecture and Physical Planning at the Eduardo Mondlane University of Maputo.
2. The original letter from Le Corbusier to Martienssen, 23 September 1936, is in the Witwatersrand University Archives: Architectural Collection.
3. Daniel Herwitz is Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Natal, Durban, where he also lectures Architectural Theory in the School of Architecture.
4. Hans Hallen is an architect and lecturer who practised mainly in Durban 1960–1987, after which he relocated to Sydney, Australia where he continues to practise and teach.
5. Implied in the text of Hallen, H. – 'Keeping the Faith' *UIA: International Architect*, Issue 8, 1985, p.4.
6. Professor Alan Lipman. Since his retirement as Chair in Architecture at the University of Wales, he has returned to South Africa where he has lectured throughout the country and published a series of pertinent commentaries of the state of architecture in journals and newspapers.
7. Since 1994 the South African Government has implemented the uplift policies of RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) and GEAR (Growth, Employment & Redistribution).
8. From the editorial text, *TIA Journal*, August 1993, p.1, Architectural Press, Johannesburg.
9. Jo Noero is a practising architect. In 1993 he was recipient of the Ruth and Ralph Erskine Fellowship. After an extensive period as lecturer at the University of Witwatersrand, he was recently appointed as Head of School at the University of Cape Town.
10. Rodney Harber is Professor of Architecture at the University of Natal and Past President of the KwaZulu-Natal Institute for Architecture (1994–1999). He is principal in the practice of Harber

Associates and, through his involvement in teaching and practice, has been involved for many years with community initiatives and outreach programmes. His work has been published widely in the South African media as well as being featured in international publications.

11. See www.earthbuilder.com Environmentally Sustainable Building Technology.

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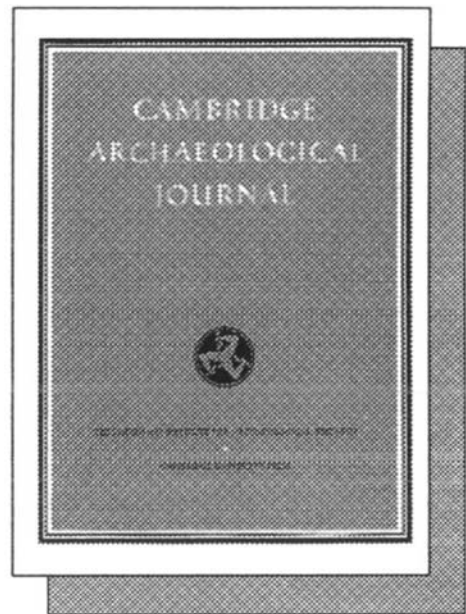
Biography

Paul Sanders is a lecturer in the School of Architecture, Planning and Housing at the University of Natal, South Africa. He practises as architect in the firm Lee Sanders Architects. He serves on the KwaZulu-Natal Institute committee for urban design matters (d'urban Changes Forum) and on the Editorial Board of the *KZ-NIA Journal*.

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