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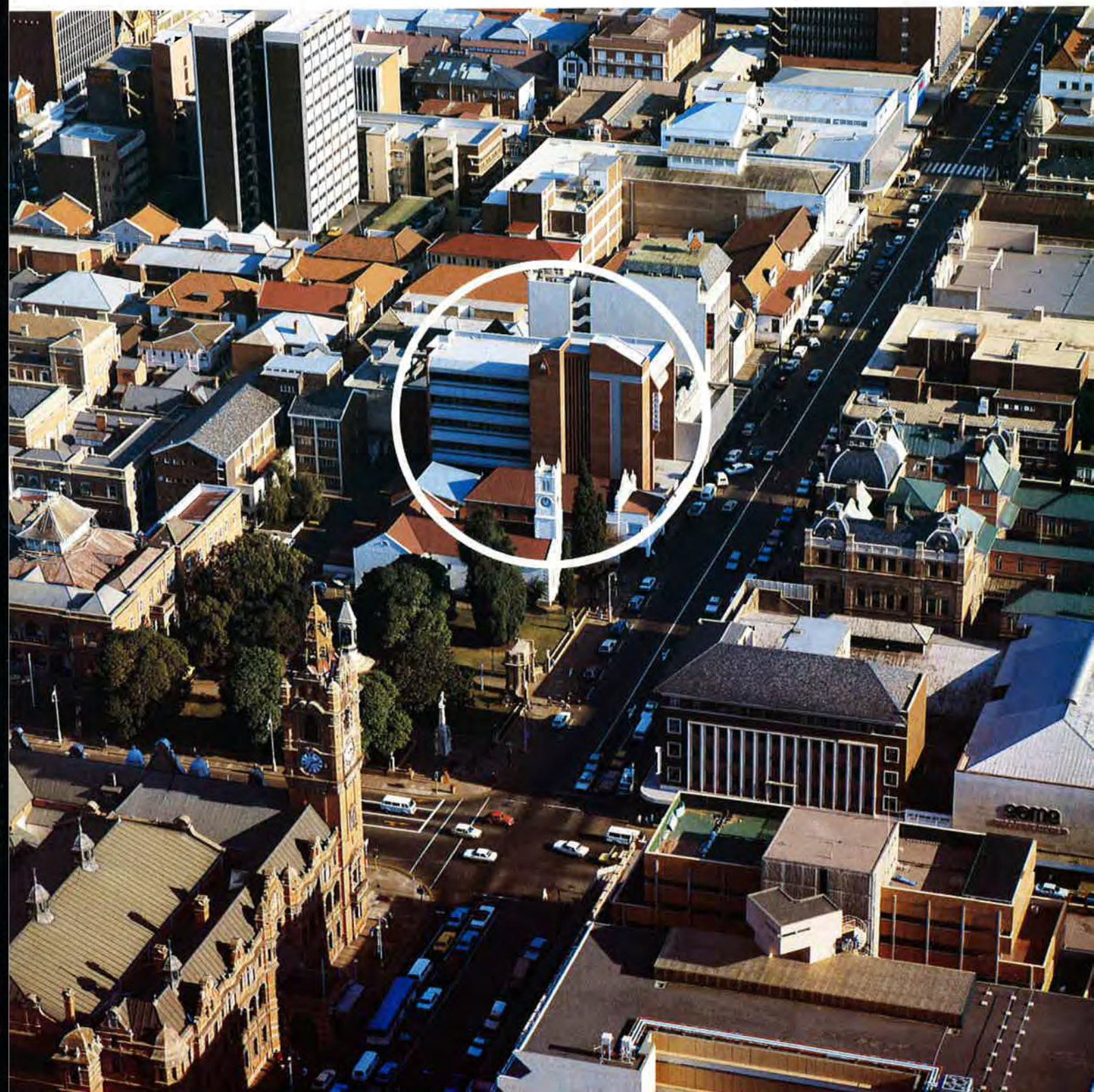
NPIA

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INFILL ARCHITECTURE

ALLIED BUILDING SOCIETY • KHATANI CENTRE • VARA OFFICES



EDITORIAL COMMENT

INFILL ARCHITECTURE

This issue of the *NPIA Journal* is devoted to three recent projects of infill architecture or the art of inserting new buildings into established environments. Any judgement on such projects is a judgement on the total environment: a comparison with its immediate neighbours will not suffice.

Pietermaritzburg is noted for its brick heritage and Stucke Harrison O'Shea and Partners have in their Allied Building responded by their choice of this indigenous building material. In the use of brick for the major vertical elements they have given themselves some freedom to use shapes and materials for the horizontal elements that might in Church Street otherwise look quite out of place. However, if there is one valid criticism then it is that the almost monolithic use of stretchers has resulted in a rather mechanical surface. The Victorians, to whom the heritage is ascribed, would have used more than a single course of soldiers at slab level. They would have used different bonds and pointings, especially at the base, and certainly would have avoided the continuous vertical slit windows. Attention to detail and the use of materials in a traditional way can recapture some of the virtues of Pietermaritzburg. The design itself appears tight if economical, and the stepped floors along the northern elevation are functionally justified as a sun control means. However, the terrace so created at canopy level appears inaccessible and, as a reflector of heat, seems somewhat contradictory. Perhaps it is not too late to garden this for user enjoyment, even if only visual.

Caught in the economic vice, Cassim Kadwa has had to implant a gigantic brief for a hypermarket, shopping arcade and parking space for 400 cars (and provide for a later office tower) into an established environment. Hiding the resultant bulk is extremely difficult and Cassim opted rather to infuse the streetscape with a daring display of lines and planes. The lines in stepped pattern artificially accommodate the differences of scale from the existing to the new. These define panels for glazing, while, at the extremities acknowledge the existing hole-in-the-wall facade aesthetic. This treatment has resulted in the Khatani Centre being a most colourful building. While avoiding any direct comparison with its neighbours it has become the new focus in that end of town.

More important than lines on elevation, or even the skyline, is the building line, a set-back VARA Studio has conceded in St George's Street. Being the only tree-lined street in central Durban, the set-back has enlivened the pedestrian pathway in this mixed usage and high density enclave.

The building with unitary function as an architects' and planners' office is a free-standing brick cube, the street elevation punctured with a semi-circular centrepiece broken by a vertical louvred shaft — an articulation as bold as and in scale with the overall massing. The corners are chamfered and the downpipes positioned there are integrated into the composition; a functional aspect not often enough considered in design terms. Above is the allusion of a receding pediment, stepped and plastered and painted perhaps in token acknowledgement of Post-Modernism. How can a building today appear without? But, the brick detailing disciplined by the unique constraints of brickwork — arches — both round and segmented are admirable. Inside, Willy Vandeverre has deployed his practice around a quadruple volume of space capped with a transparent roof light. Though I am concerned about the heat build-up, this is the sort of stuff from which architecture is made — structure, space and light. That this project has been awarded an 1987 ISAA Natal Award of Merit is a just reward and the *NPIAJ* adds a hearty congratulation.

It is easy to agree upon a general approach to infill architecture, namely, that such buildings should enhance the environment in which they sit. Established environments are not necessarily the worse for receiving new buildings but it is difficult to agree on the blanket success of infill and so opinions are likely to differ on the three projects presented here. What one can say for sure is that the character and urban values of our towns will disappear unless we can design into existing settings in a contributory fashion. What is at stake is the total space — a townscape of people, buildings and nature.

Walter Peters, Editor

VARA STUDIO

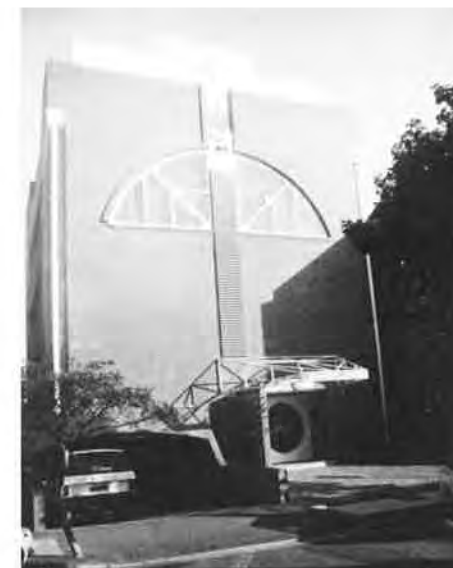
VANDEVERRE, APSEY, ROBINSON & ASSOCIATES

Architects: Vandeverre, Aspey, Robinson & Associates
Structural Engineers: L.S.C. Brunette and Partners
Quantity Surveyors: Botha, Shelper, Webber, Scott & Partners
Landscaping: Peter Haig



The segmented arch at the portico.

The free-standing cubical mass sits discreetly back from the street.



Location

In order to accommodate our expanding practice, and in an effort to have greater control over our working environment, we decided to pursue the objective of building our own studio. Our decision to remain within the city led us to investigate the available land opportunities.

The St George's Street area, with its large permanent residential population, generates a 24-hour environment which appealed to us. Although the location is on the edge of the city, it affords easy access to the CBD with direct linkages to the metropolitan freeway system.

The Concept

The major considerations upon which we based the concept of our studio were spatially to develop an exciting sense of place, visually to generate a strong and positive image, functionally to integrate all the different components of our practice into one single coherent

whole, and finally, aesthetically to achieve all this in a pleasing manner.

The Design

The building has resulted in four floors of studios, all facing inwards and grouped around a single-volume atrium. A transparent roof allows natural light to fill the entire space. Sun control is simply achieved by the use of shade cloth, and planting has been introduced throughout the entire volume.

All levels are interconnected visually and spatially, and all functions resolve themselves into a single activity, that of an active architectural and town planning practice.

The Form

The structure, as a four-storey brick box, presents a simple facade to the street. To emphasise the single image of the structure, and to dramatically break from the normal scale and rhythm of surrounding buildings, a large semi-circular window was introduced as the

major element. Smaller items, such as vehicle entry, front door, entrance canopy, and so forth, were to some extent embellished in order to contrast the stark simplicity of the basic form. The end result produced a building which, although very different from the surrounding structures, has fitted extremely well into the nature and scale of the street.

The Function

Having used VARA Studio as a place of work, and having been part of St George's Street for the past two years, we can say with some conviction that we now belong. Our building is gradually assuming the stamp of our identity. This is a slow process, but an essential and rewarding one.

Willy C Vandeverre

Photos by Willie Vandeverre
and Peter Newman.



The louvred shaft puncturing the semi-circular
centrepiece as seen through the entrance
space frame.



Every bulding has a rear elevation.

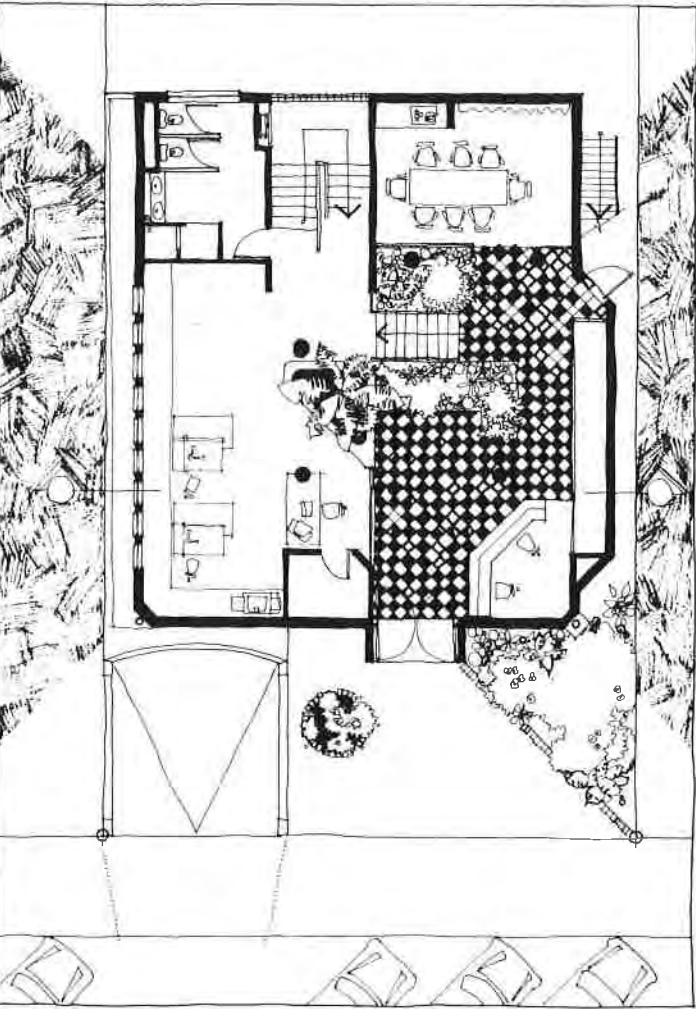


Portion of the roof light at the stair
termination.

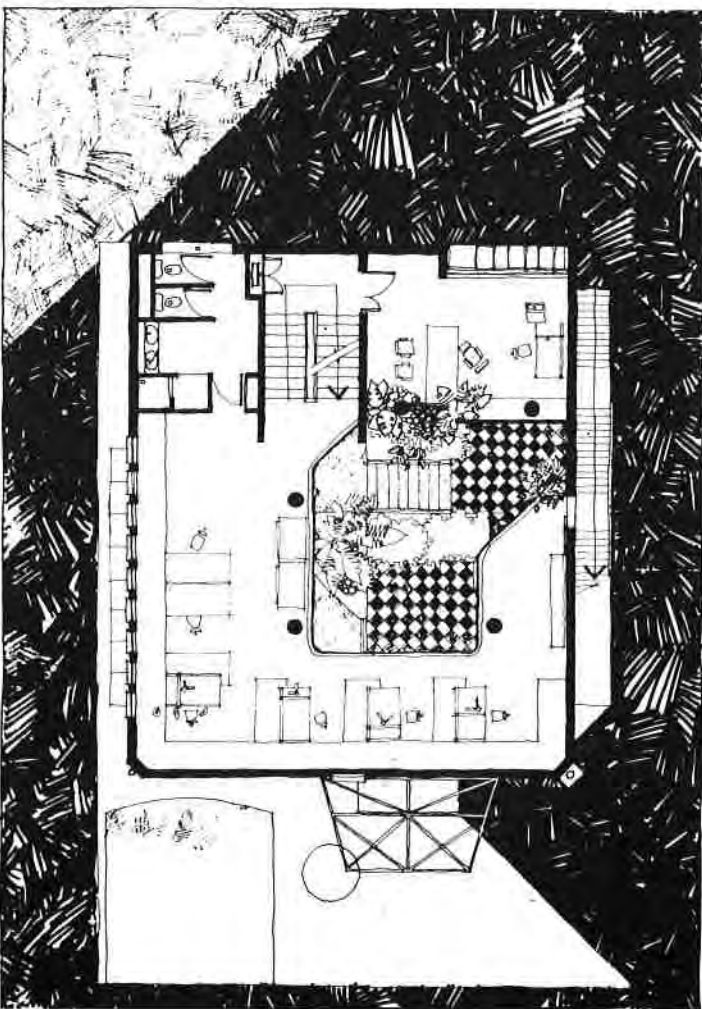


If only the hanging gardens would grow more
quickly, the staff need no longer pose for
photographs!

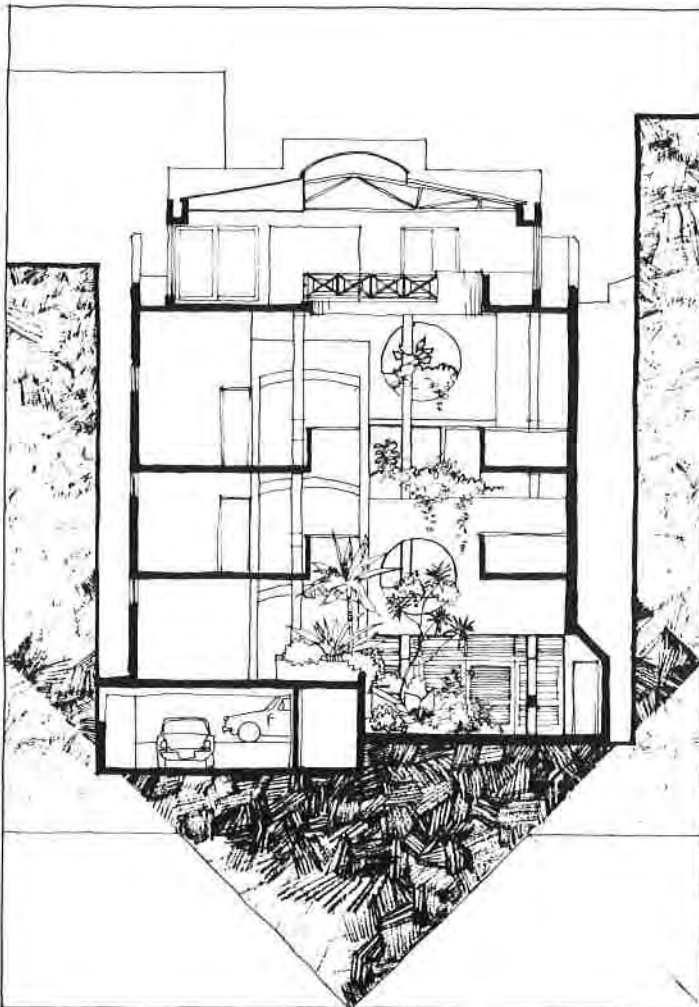
GROUND FLOOR



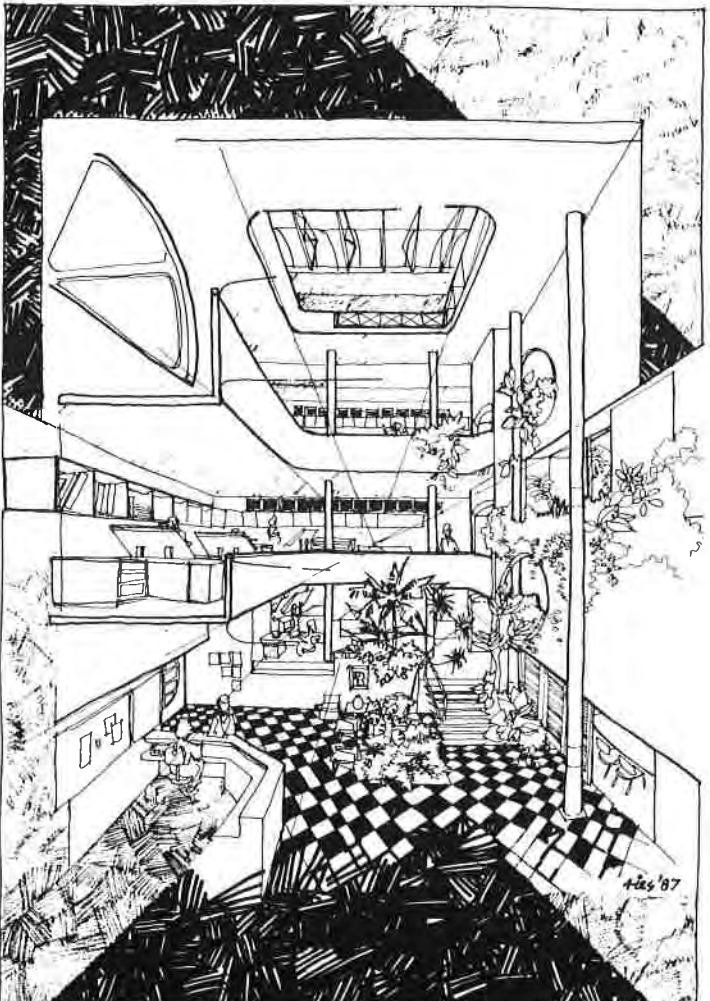
TYPICAL FLOOR



SECTION



INTERIOR PERSPECTIVE



ALLIED BUILDING SOCIETY

STUCKE HARRISON O'SHEA & PARTNERS

"... (There is a) ... fundamental silliness about Style, styles, tradition, precedent and all that! History is important as experience and inspiration, but it should not become a burden or a bore. The fundamentally important relationship is the specific one between site, context, client, designer, users and community. That is always unique."

Garret Eckbo

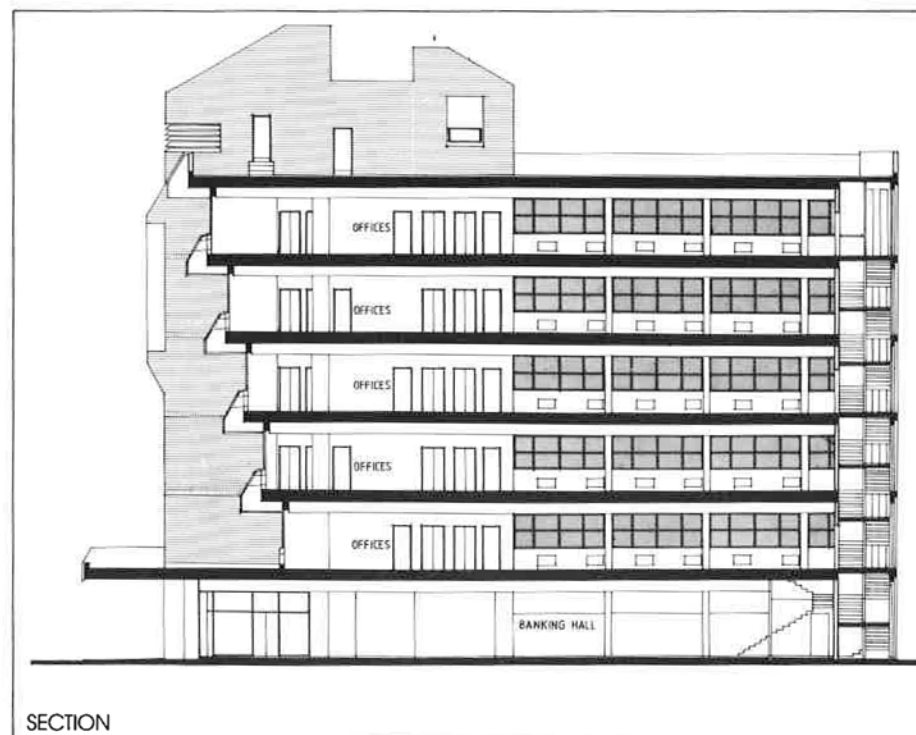
There is every reason for engaging in good neighbourliness when embarking on a new project in Pietermaritzburg. The temptation of thrusting exercises in Style

or style into the tight weave of its urban fabric must be resisted. Architectonica becomes stripped of impact and reduced to little concrete windows set in a paint job, and the New Spiritualism finds only pre-emptive expression in rusty old scaffolding and tile-stripped concrete walls. So when a major building society commissions a project requiring not only the usual banking hall and related accommodation, but that the balance of bulk allowance on the site is to be developed as a rentable office space, the primary concern becomes the successful insertion of that bulk into the Church Street precinct rather than an exercise of flamboyant individualism. "Style" then becomes simply the manifestation of

Client: The Allied Building Society
Number of Storeys: 5 above Ground Floor
Construction Area: 3 030 m²
Rentable Area: 2 520 m²
Construction Cost: R2 620 000
Rate per m²: R865/m²
Quantity Surveyors: Farrow Laing
Contractors: LTA (Natal) Limited

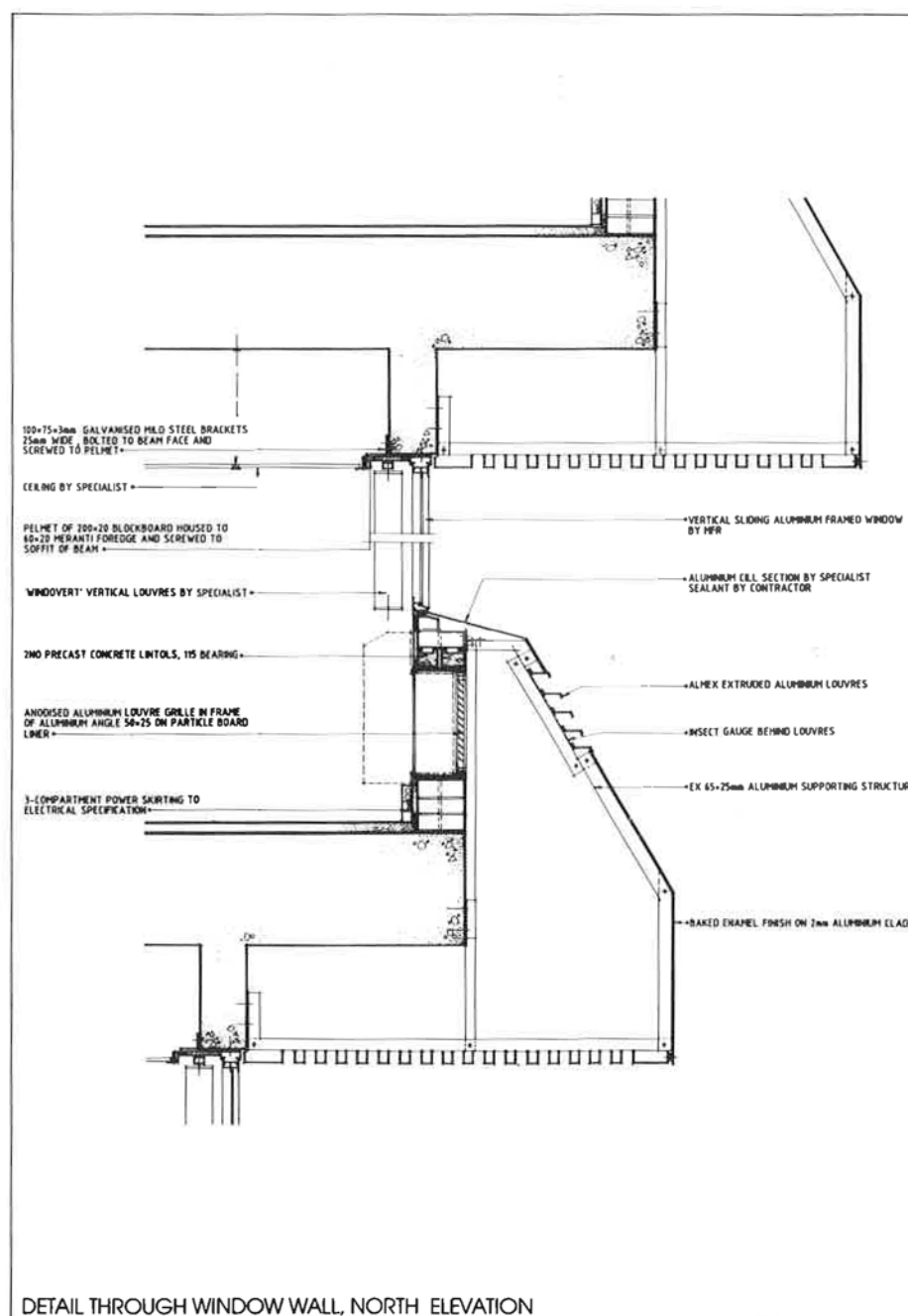
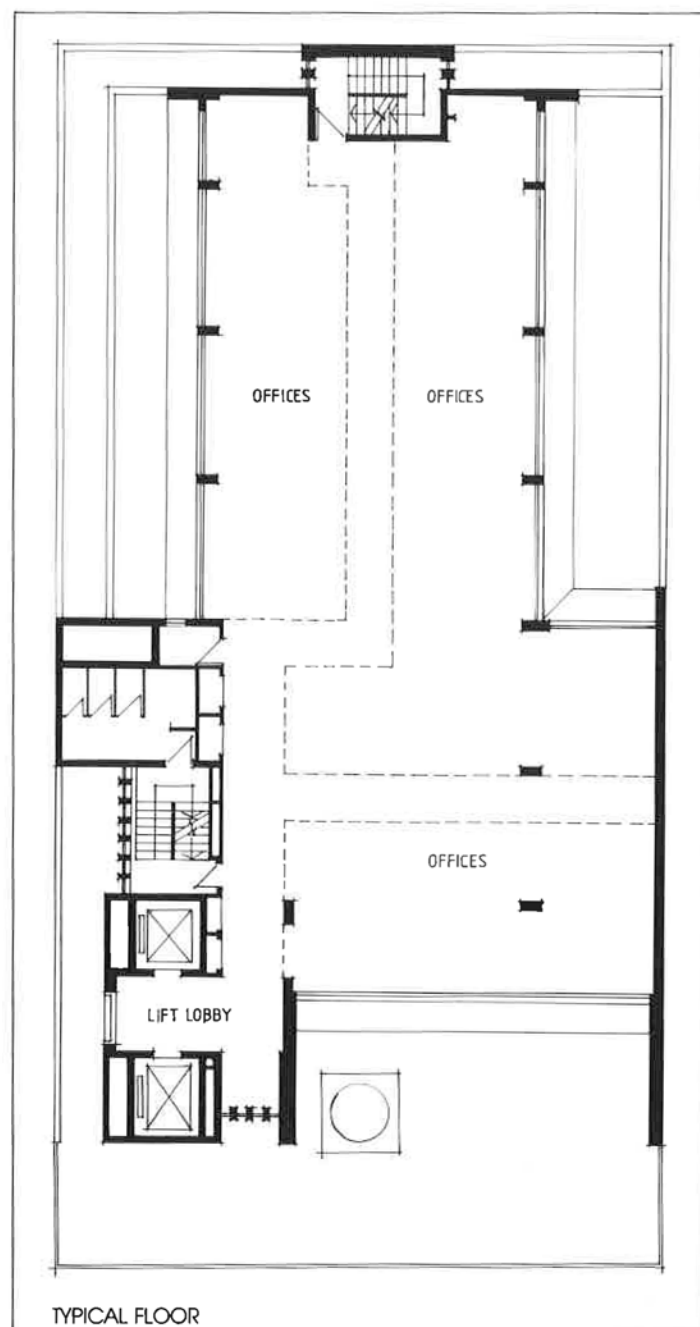
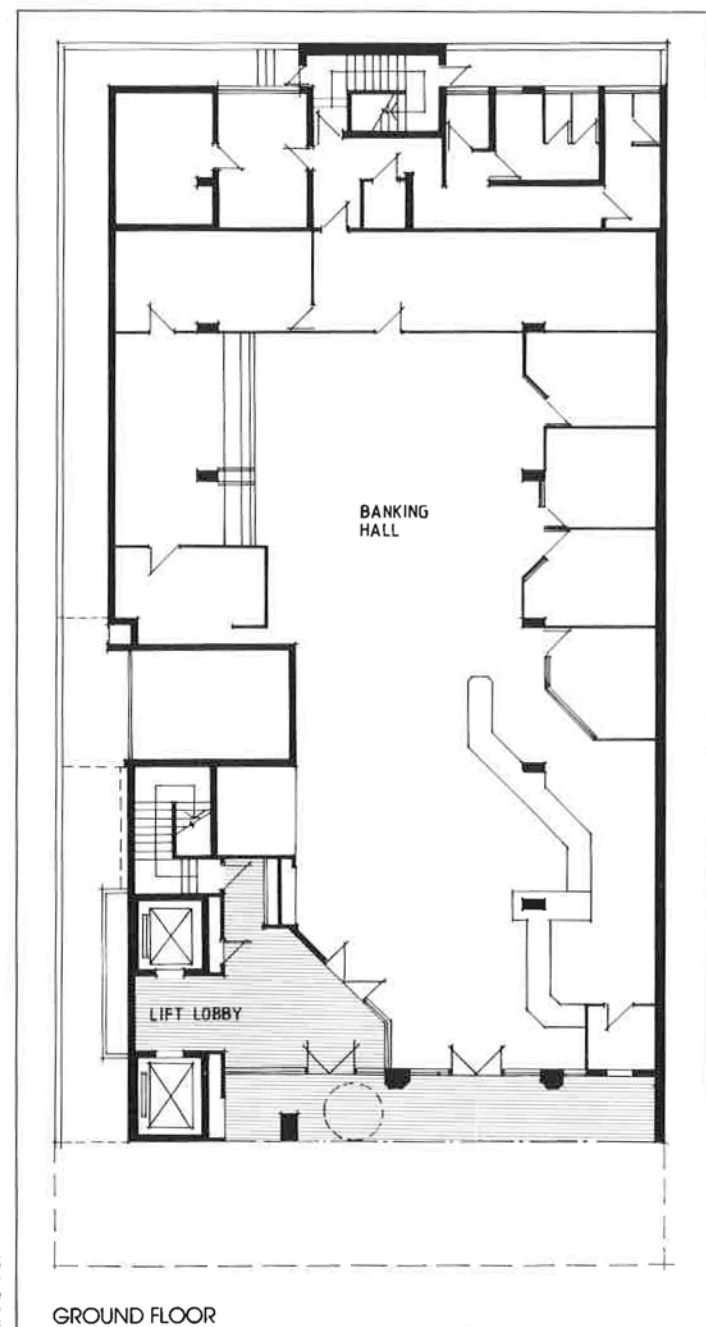
requirement resolution executed as a statement of contextualism. It must be perceived by many that the measure of quality in professional responsibility is not the design of a building that redefines the State of Architecture as Art or even as Design, but the optimum synthesis of all the development variables expressed as a product of essential quality, not only to the complete satisfaction of the project commissioners, but to the sensibilities of the greater community into which that project has been placed. We hope that we have got some of the way there.

Andrew Gibb



Photos by John Oliver from Ashleys Photographers, Pietermaritzburg

The change in scale accommodated by Kings Building. Cannot its upper level veranda be reinstated or more sensitively enclosed?



The Allied Building closing the vista of a lane off Church Street.



DETAIL THROUGH WINDOW WALL, NORTH ELEVATION

GROUND FLOOR

TYPICAL FLOOR