

KZ-NIA JOURNAL SPONSORED BY



KZ-NIA



# 2013 KZ-NIA AWARDS FOR ARCHITECTURE

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 38th year of publication,  
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KZ-NIA presidential induction guest speaker Peter Williams (left) out from New York is photographed with the immediate past KZ-NIA-President Nina Saunders and newly inducted President Kevin Bingham.



Kevin Bingham with his former Technikon Natal classmates Ian Barsley and Luyanda Mpahlwa and their teacher Alaric Napier, second from left.



At the same function Emeldah Majola who commenced work at KZ-NIA in 1993 was presented with a Long Service Award. Quoting from the citation, past-President Ivor Daniel pointed to Emeldah's commencement at KZ-NIA in 1993 and her having "become a gem in the running of the Institute". He then presented her with a certificate "with respect and affection" and in acknowledgement of her "two decades of dedicated service".

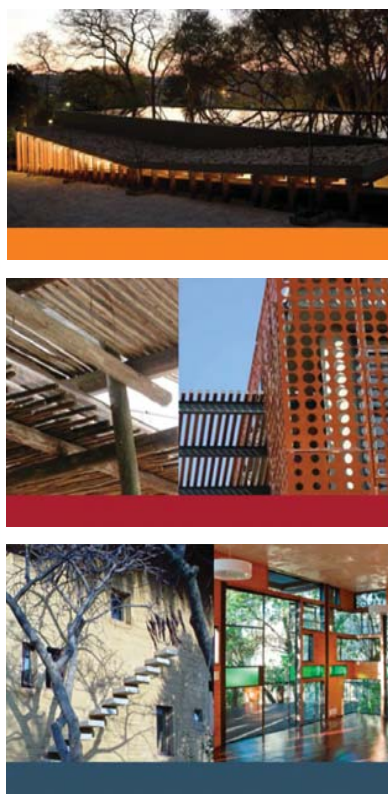
## KZ-NIA presidential induction

At a well-attended function held at KZ-NIA on Thursday, 16th May, Kevin Bingham was inducted as 60th president of the 112-year old KwaZulu-Natal Institute for Architects. In accepting the honour, Kevin referred to teamwork which he believed characterised KZ-NIA and, not to underestimate what can be achieved, he cited sociologist Margaret Mead "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has".

Guest speaker was architect and social entrepreneur Peter Williams, and founder of ARCHIVE, an acronym for "architecture for health in vulnerable environments", an organisation which "uses one basic right – housing, to deliver one basic need – health".



Kate Otten Architecture for Every Day



## In Memoriam

KZ-NIA Journal has learned with regret of the death of the following colleagues:

**Graham Downes** (1956–21 April 2013, San Diego); and sitting KZ-NIA committee member **Mpho Selepe** (1977–2013) who died tragically in a road accident in northern KwaZulu-Natal. *Tsamaya hantle, Abuti.*

## Kate Otten: 2013 Sophia Gray laureate

This year's Sophia Gray laureate, the 25th, again has roots in KwaZulu-Natal.

Kate Otten was born in Durban and studied Architecture at Natal before relocating to Wits and setting up practice in Johannesburg. A number of her projects have received SAIA Awards, but the late Alan Lipman summed up her oeuvre more poignantly when he termed it "cheerfully humanist". This she clearly demonstrated in the Sophia Gray Memorial Lecture for which she chose the topic 'Architecture for Every Day'. The event was held in Bloemfontein on Thursday, 29th August.

THE CALENDAR of the South African Institute of Architects (SAIA) contains many events but of the best subscribed and perhaps most debated amongst members is the bi-annual Awards programme. This three-tiered programme commences at regional level during the first year and at national during the next, where regionally awarded buildings compete with their counterparts for *Corobrik* Awards of Merit and for Excellence.

However, whenever decisions have to be made, there is room for controversy. Thus SAIA called a special meeting on 14th May for jurors at all levels and from different regions to deliberate and agree on criteria in advance of the *in loco* inspections.

It was an interesting day particularly so because the meeting reaffirmed the architectural qualities drafted in about 25 BC by Roman architect Marcus Vitruvius: firmness, commodity and delight. To this were added contextual sustainability, recognition of process, and the need for buildings to contribute to societal betterment. Besides Awards, this meeting resolved to re-introduce Commendations, or Special Mentions as these are known in KwaZulu-Natal.

In inviting KZ-NIA members to submit buildings for regional Award consideration, both the criteria and the jury composition were distributed. This attracted 24 entries of which one was later withdrawn. The jury consisted of an architect from another region, Luyanda Mpahlwa of Cape Town; as layperson Durban-based fashion designer Terence Bray; as the academic architect, Architecture discipline head at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Mthembeni Mkhize; and the three KZ-NIA members were Joy Brasler, André Duvenage and Rodney Choromanski. The jury agreed that when consensus could not be reached, majority view would prevail.

Planning the route of inspection over three days was particularly challenging this time and stretched the ingenuity of veteran co-convenor Sydney Baillon. On the first day, the tour went to Reunion and Umgababa on the South Coast, past Centocow to Himeville in the Drakensberg, to Nottingham Road and Pietermaritzburg. The second day was spent in and around Durban before heading northward to Ballito and Zululand for an overnight stay at Jozini Dam. The return trip on the third day, Saturday, commenced at Mkuze and Hluhluwe before descending on Salt Rock and Umhlanga. The tour covered a total of 1528km in a combi, the venue for much fatigue balanced with lively debate.

On conclusion, the jury proposed that four buildings be awarded and that another four receive Special Mentions, which the regional committee accepted.

It takes courage to submit one's buildings to peer review but success still holds the highest accolade. To those buildings which landed Awards, congratulations indeed, and to those with Special Mentions, well done. But to all entrants, heed the advice once given by Sydney Baillon to a youthful KZ-NIA president: "whatever you do, do your best to be the best at it".

Walter Peters

Editor and Awards co-convenor

2013 KZ-NIA Awards jury from left:

Terence Bray, Rodney Choromanski, André Duvenage, Mthembeni Mkhize, Joy Brasler and Luyanda Mpahlwa.



# 2013 KZ-NIA AWARDS FOR ARCHITECTURE

EDITORIAL





## AWARD 2013 KZ-NIA Awards for Architecture programme Unilever Indonsa Plant, Riverhorse Valley Business Estate, Durban ELPHICK PROOME ARCHITECTS

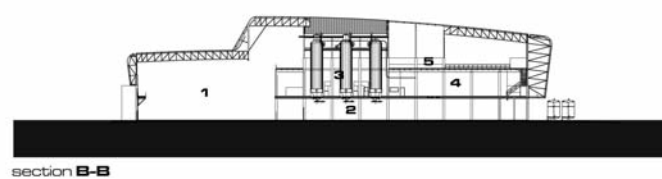
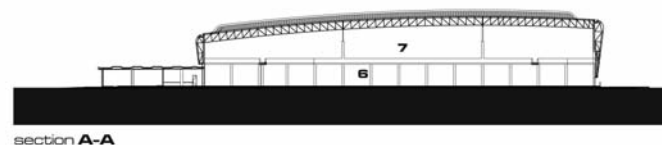
*This is a fine and very sophisticated building, rationally conceived, impeccably detailed and engaging, which expresses the brief requirements with great clarity. It demonstrates a thoroughly integrated brace of environmental control to minimise energy usage while maximising user comfort, including the penetration of natural light into all spaces. Despite the global protocol and structure of the company, it is clear that a remarkable client-architect relationship prevailed.*

This plant consolidates two existing factories at Prospecton, south of Durban, one a savoury dry-food plant and the other an integrated research and development facility with offices at Riverhorse Valley, westward off the N2 outer ring road in Durban, and the architects were given three weeks to design and submit the proposals for local authority approval.

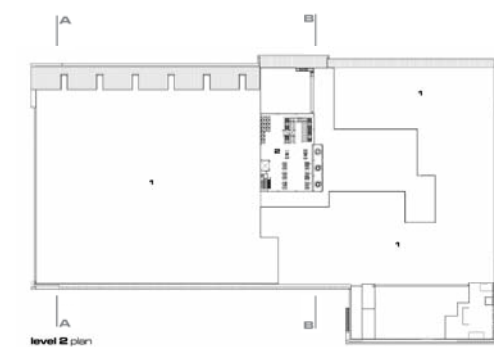
A key design decision saw the offices being disengaged from the factory allowing each an individual expression, with functional planning, spatial requirements and references to conveyor belts determining the forms.

A particular challenge was to optimise water usage while reducing the carbon footprint. For example, this plant harvests rainwater from the roofs, recovers air conditioning condensate and grey water to render it water neutral. In addition, biological and reverse osmosis treatment allows for the reuse of 70% of the water in the production process. Consistently, water-cooled chillers were substituted with air-cooled ones which reduce water consumption.

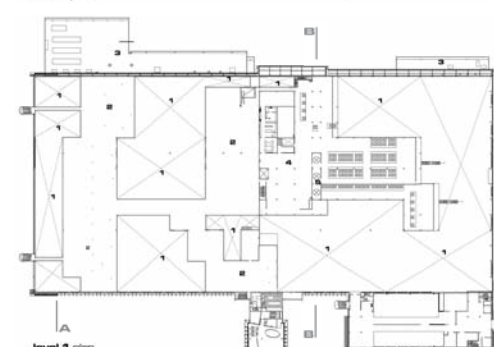
Roof and wall cladding is insulated to achieve U-values of 0.43 and 0.37 w/km<sup>2</sup> respectively. Heating for humidity control is provided by heat recovery chillers without using additional energy requirements. There are no geysers; instead, heat extracted from the factory space by the air-conditioning system is transferred to the hot water plant by heat exchangers. Ducting was manufactured from a recyclable fabric which can be demounted and washed for hygienic purposes.



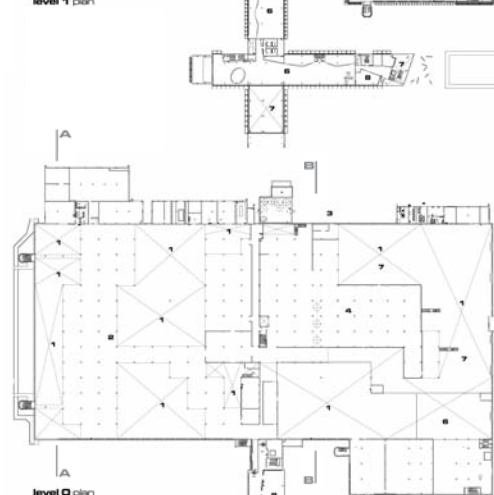
section A-A section B-B  
1 void space  
2 lower level processing area  
3 silos  
4 upper level processing area  
5 service platform level  
6 lower level packaging area  
7 upper level mixing area



site plan  
1 warehouse  
2 offices  
3 clinic / security  
4 R & D pilot plant  
5 future packing extension  
6 rainwater tank  
7 pump room  
8 water neutral plant  
9 wetland marsh forest  
10 weigh bridge zone  
11 gate house  
12 pallet store  
13 taxi parking  
14 parking  
15 loading



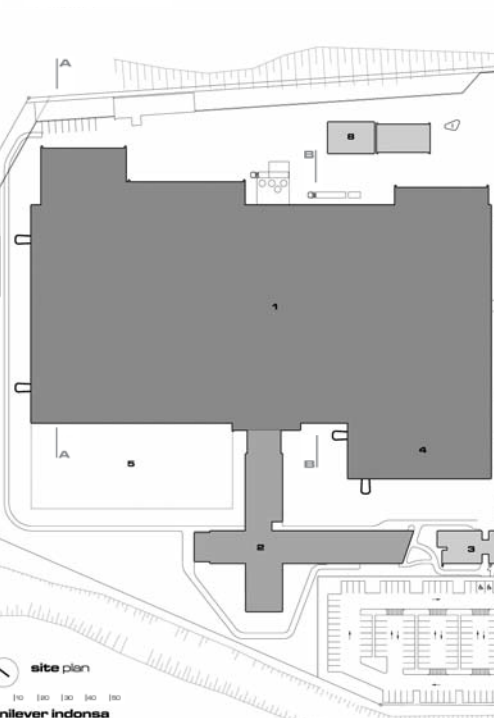
level 0 plan  
1 void space above  
2 lower level packing area  
3 loading zone  
4 lower level processing area  
5 manual palletizing  
6 finished goods dispatching area  
7 raw material storage  
8 training rooms  
9 female change rooms  
10 male change rooms  
11 kitchen  
12 double volume canteen  
13 enclosed open terrace  
14 reception  
15 entrance  
16 landscaped area  
17 clinic  
18 security  
19 parking area  
20 gate house



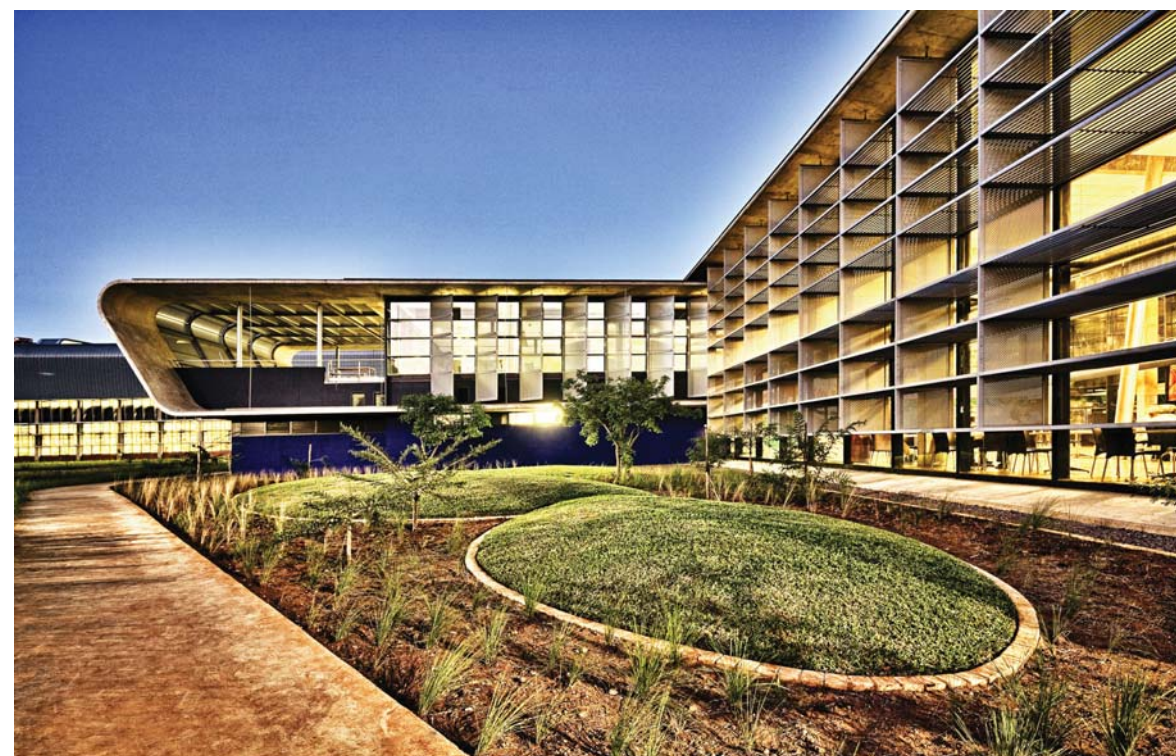
level 1 plan  
1 void space  
2 upper level mixing area  
3 concrete roof slab  
4 upper level processing area  
5 silos  
6 open plan offices  
7 double volume  
8 boardroom



level 2 plan  
1 void space  
2 service platform level



site plan  
10 120 140 160 180 200  
unilever indonsa



AWARD  
UNILEVER INDONSA PLANT





## AWARD

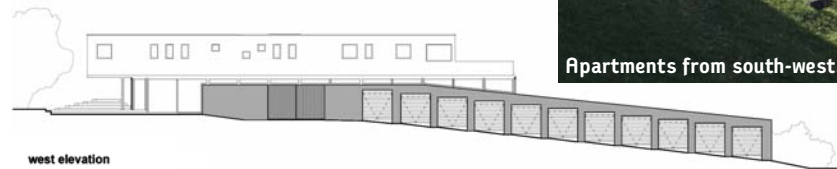
### 2013 KZ-NIA Awards for Architecture programme Dunkirk all-suite Hotel (DASH), Dunkirk Estate, Salt Rock DESIGNWORKSHOP : SA

*Neatly detailed palisades front the access stairs and entrances to the units, which are entered through a courtyard and cleverly mediate the private-public interface. The spacious apartments are designed around the living spaces which open to sea and land. There is a sense of originality in this complex, tectonically sensible yet understated.*

The reception and restaurant, with offices and gallery over, line the road and the apartment block, arranged for best sea views, defines a triangulated courtyard off which all suites are accessed. Each suite consists of two bedrooms *en suite* on either side of the central dining-living space. The last is "treated like a courtyard", to look out to sea on one side, and communal cortile on the other.



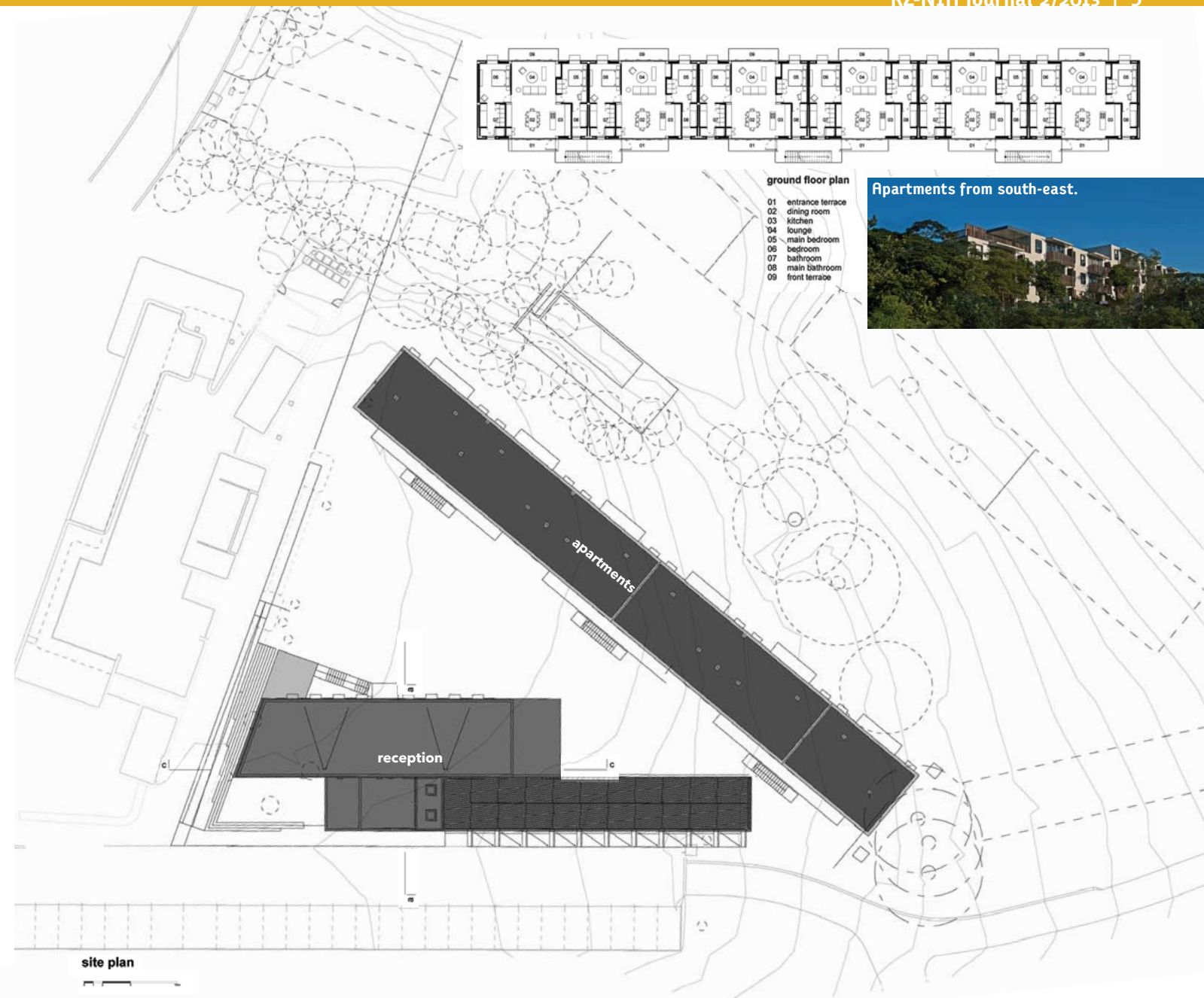
Apartments from south-west.



west elevation



Reception. View from north-west. Photo: Roger Jardine



Apartments from south-east.

section c-c

- 01 entrance courtyard
- 02 restaurant
- 03 office
- 04 reception
- 05 dash office
- 06 gallery
- 07 balcony

first floor plan

- 01 entrance
- 02 dash office
- 03 ablutions
- 04 gallery
- 05 balcony

ground floor plan

- 01 entrance courtyard
- 02 restaurant verandah
- 03 restaurant
- 04 wc
- 05 disabled wc
- 06 office
- 07 reception
- 08 kitchen
- 09 kitchen yard
- 10 female ablution
- 11 male ablution
- 12 parking garages

section a-a

- 01 reception
- 02 kitchen yard
- 03 gallery



Reception. View from south.





**AWARD**  
**2013 KZ-NIA Awards for Architecture programme**  
**Dunkirk Beach Clubhouse, Salt Rock**  
**DESIGNWORKSHOP : SA**

*Perched above its beachfront site, this clubhouse is conceived as both a pavilion and a belvedere, and is distinguished by the clarity and openness of its planning, the integration of parking and landscaping, the seamless transition between indoors and out, and the appropriately spare palette of materials.*

The demolition of a house on an elongated site on the beachfront of Salt Rock enabled the realisation of a clubhouse for a residential estate.

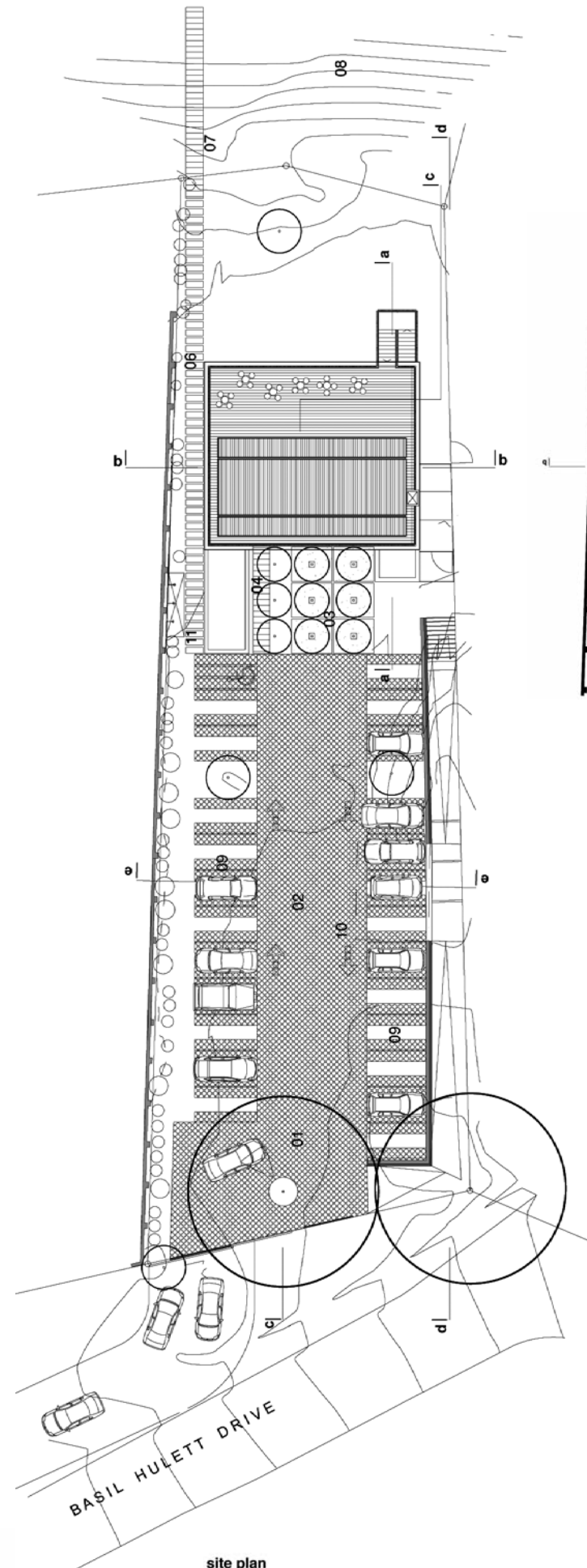
A landscaped transitional space at the head of the parking area gives access to the clubhouse located on the edge of the dune. The restaurant on the ground floor opens to a lawn, and a staircase gives access to the deck above from both of which spectacular views are offered up and down the coast.



Photo: Roger Jardine

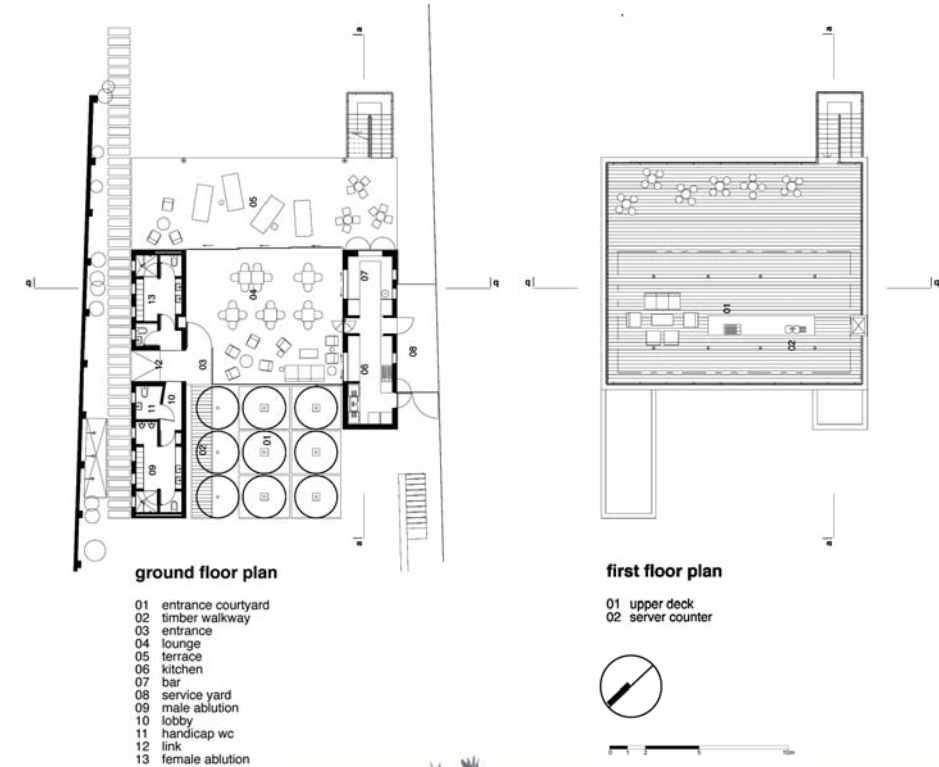
site section c-c

- 01 terrace
- 02 bar
- 03 kitchen
- 04 server counter
- 05 upper deck
- 06 stair
- 07 entrance courtyard
- 08 parking



site plan

- 01 parking
- 02 entrance courtyard
- 03 entrance walkway
- 04 beach access
- 05 outbuilding outline
- 06 outdoor showers



ground floor plan

- 01 entrance courtyard
- 02 timber walkway
- 03 entrance
- 04 lounge
- 05 terrace
- 06 kitchen
- 07 bar
- 08 service yard
- 09 male ablution
- 10 lobby
- 11 handicap wc
- 12 link
- 13 female ablution

first floor plan

- 01 upper deck
- 02 server counter





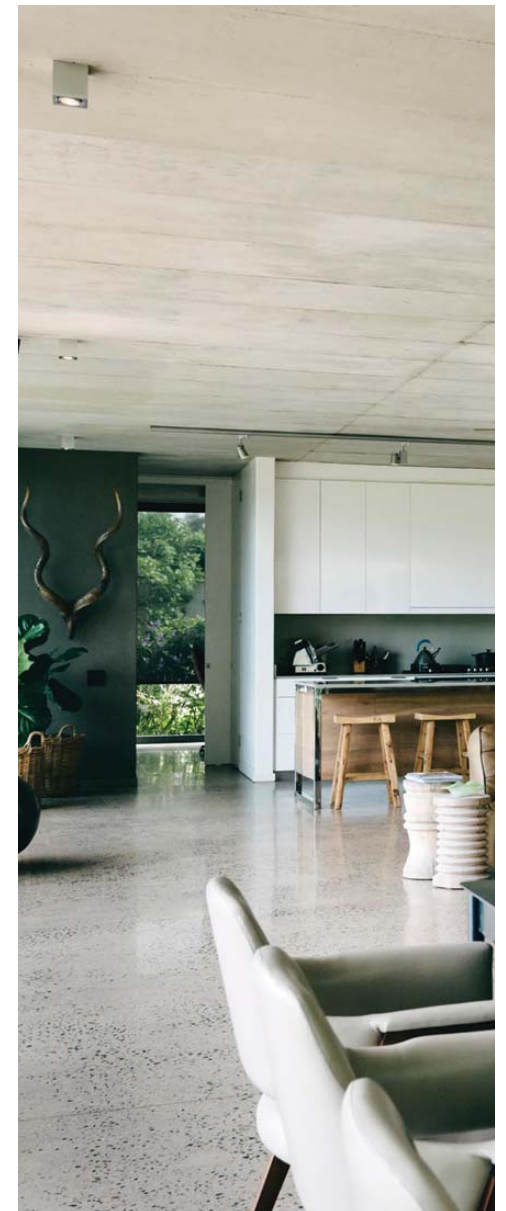
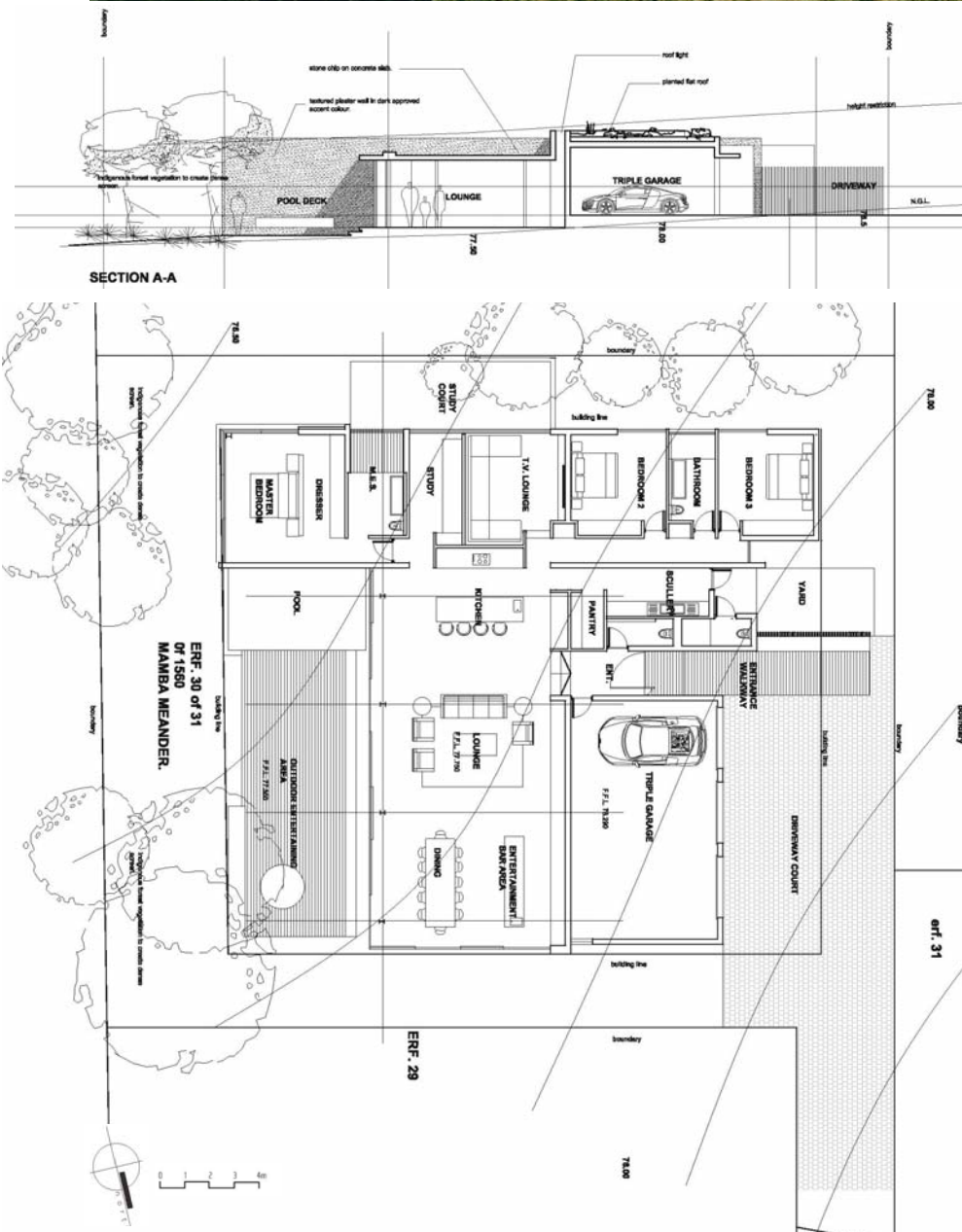


## AWARD

### 2013 KZ-NIA Awards for Architecture programme Residence in Mamba Meander, Hawaan Forest, Umhlanga JAY & NEL ARCHITECTS (PROJECT ARCHITECT: PAUL NEL)

*On its constricted panhandle site, and stepped in response to its setting, this house maximises the space available for habitation, both inside and out. The living space, conceived as a veranda, is generous and expansive and opens directly to the exterior. While in the genre of a Miesian pavilion, this house provides its occupants with an experience of retreat.*

The brief was to design a "loft-type space for effortless living where the boundaries between inside and out were non-existent" on a panhandle-site of the residential estate for a "lock-up and go" lifestyle. The finishes were to be "raw and industrial, yet luxurious", which resulted in off-shutter roofs and polished concrete floors, with exposed steel posts and slatted timber panelling. The architects acknowledge the inspiration of Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth house at Plano, Illinois, 1945-51.



AWARD  
RESIDENCE, HAWAAN FOREST





## SPECIAL MENTION

### 2013 KZ-NIA Awards for Architecture programme Restoration and conversion of the original church building at Centocow Mission Station ROBERT JW BRUSSE ARCHITECT

*The jury commends the assiduousness of the structural restoration, the conservation of extant fabric as the primary concern and the concomitant mentoring programme.*

In 1886 the Trappists based at Mariannhill Monastery west of Durban, acquired property on the southern banks of the Mzimkulu River in south-western KwaZulu-Natal to establish a mission station. The church, designed by Br Nivard Streicher, was built 1890–4 but became redundant in 1910 when the new and larger church was built at right angles.

A century later the Ingwe Municipality identified the building as a significant monument, suitable for a gallery of the works by renowned artist Gerard Bhengu, a son of Centocow.

But for corrugated iron, the original church was built of locally procured stone, timber and clay and the bricks were hand-made on-site. Strangely the building is without any foundations and cement mortar was only used for pointing.



Restoration was guided by authenticity. If not structurally unstable walls were simply re-pointed, however where walls were bulging, the bricks were numbered and the walls demolished and rebuilt on new foundations. In this process, the tower was temporarily suspended while its base was re-built.

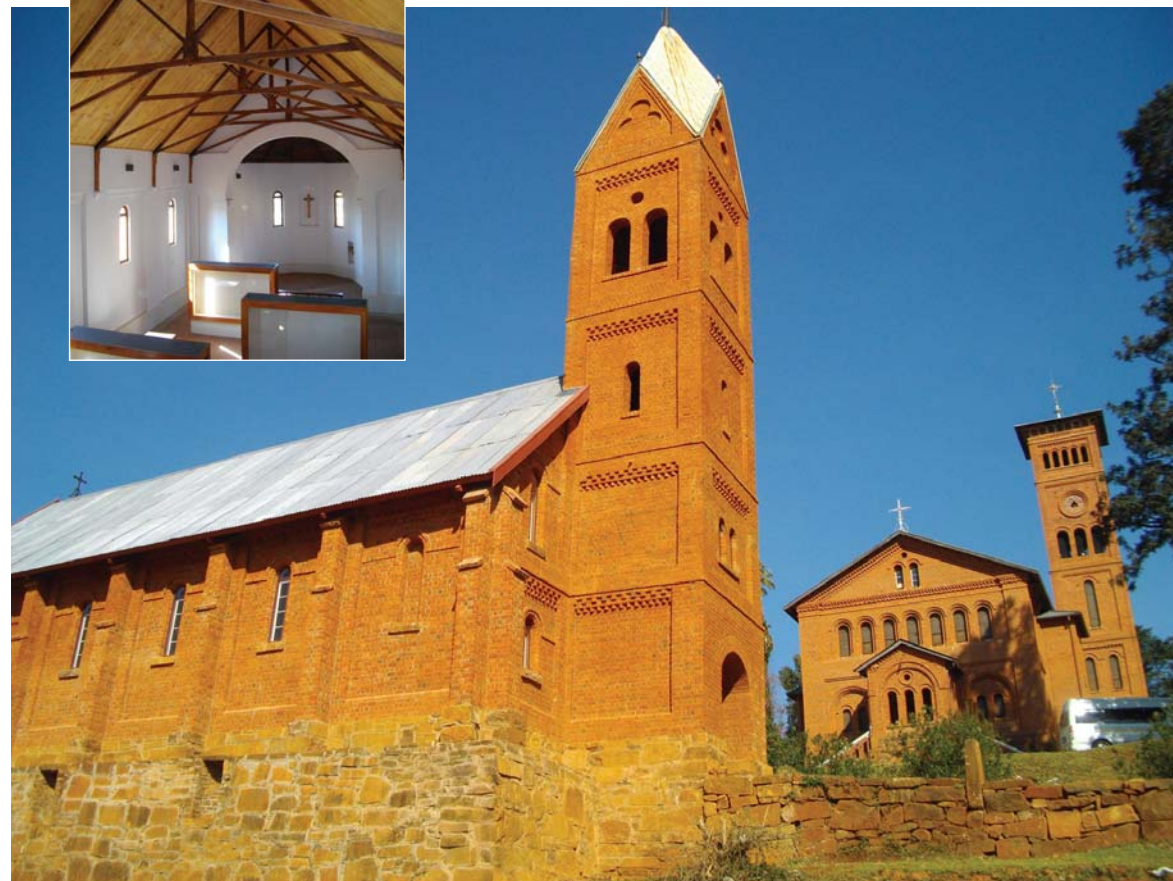
Only where necessary were the yellowwood rafters replaced in part or in whole, but a new boarded ceiling was added for insulation. The corrugated iron sheets were removed, pickled and re-galvanised which increased the gauge from the original 1.2mm to 1.6mm. The floor was relaid with brick pavers.

All doors had to be replaced, guided by photographic evidence, but only minimal window frame

replacement was necessary. For the security of the art collection, a parallel sheet of safety glass was set in a metal frame outside the original window, yet distanced from the reveals.

Unusually, the architect provided for the participation of heritage internships of which three KZ-NIA members availed themselves.

*Readers are also referred to KZNIA Journal 2/2012. –Editor.*



## SPECIAL MENTION

### 2013 KZ-NIA Awards for Architecture programme Holiday Retreat, Luthuli private game reserve, Hluhluwe KOOP DESIGN

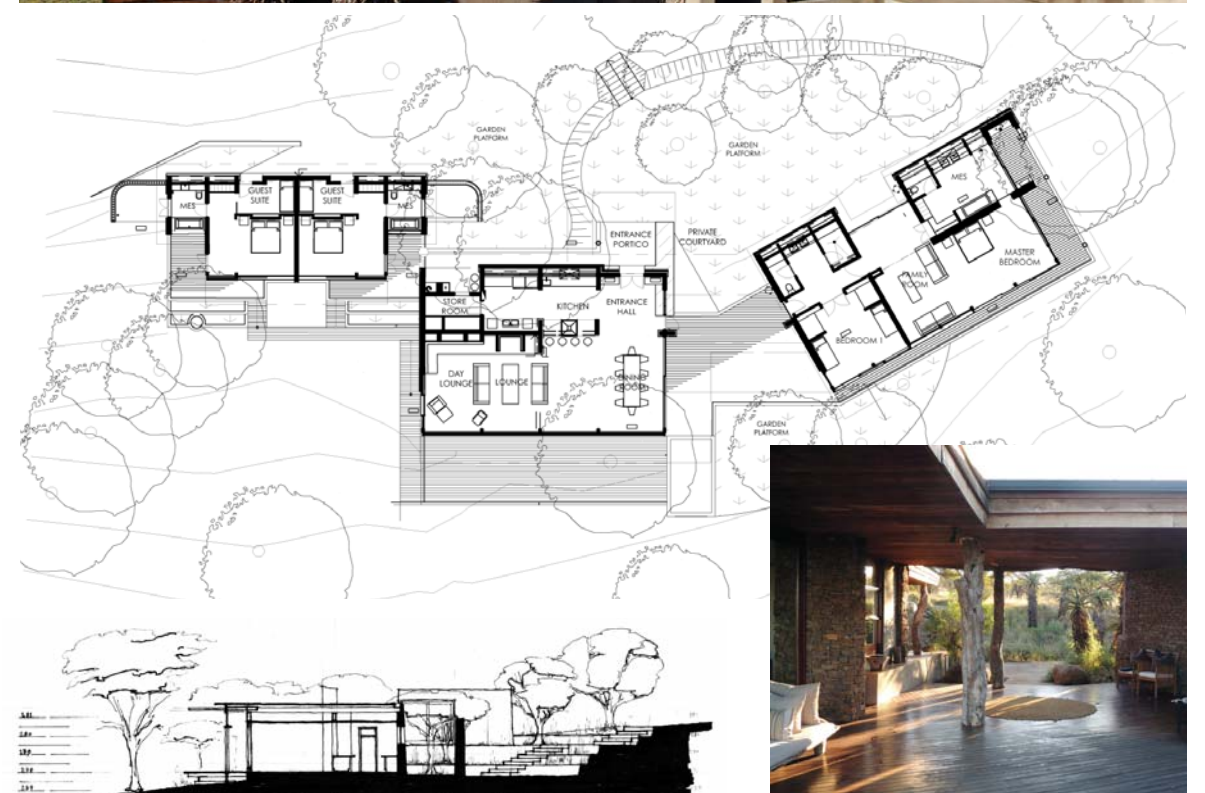
*This retreat to accommodate up to three families was built on an extant serviced platform. Priority was placed on an intimacy with the site and its bush landscape and the exploitation of views into the reserve, which issues are well dealt with.*

The architect was briefed to design a holiday home to cater simultaneously for three families or one alone, on an existing serviced platform, the legacy of a failed development.

The solution saw three detached pavilions distinguished by

function, living, family and guest bedrooms, designed to blend with the environment yet opening to decks to enjoy panoramic views of the bush landscape and the distant mountains.

The spaces between the pavilions capture the benefits of north orientation; existing trees were conserved and determined design decisions such as the line of acacias at the guest bedrooms which define outdoor space. As far as possible materials were locally sourced and due to the low occupancy level, the use of passive energy prioritised.







## SPECIAL MENTION

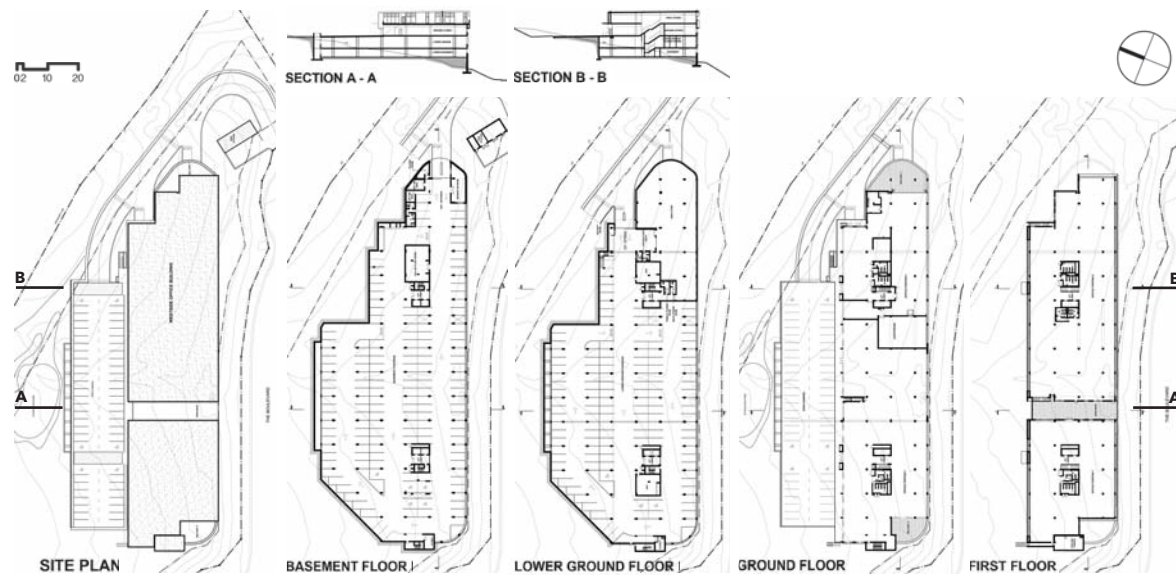
2013 KZ-NIA Awards for Architecture programme  
**Westside Office Park, The Boulevard, Westville**  
**JAY & NEL ARCHITECTS (PROJECT ARCHITECT: DEAN JAY)**

*Singular in its intent as a variously tenanted office environment and spare in its materiality, this building, with carefully considered composition, is a demonstration of serene, uncomplicated architecture.*

The brief for this office building called for multi-functionality, catering for single or multiple tenancies, and the architect's objective was to reconcile enjoyment of the expansive views,

design with climate, and the provision of exterior spaces on the steep and restrictive site.

The solution has a white perforated box, to shade but not impede views out, atop a parking structure, greened and landscaped to ameliorate the scale at street edge. The landscaped courtyard with attenuation pond on the north incorporates the existing vegetation along the N3 freeway.



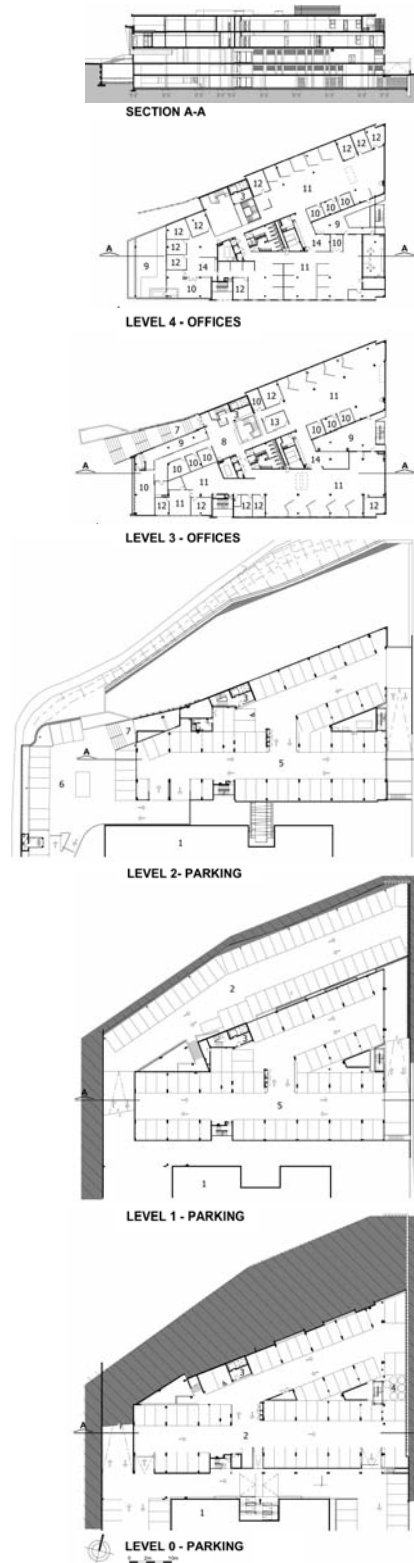
## SPECIAL MENTION

2013 KZ-NIA Awards for Architecture programme  
**New Head Office for CHEP, 7 Westville Rd, Westville**  
**PATON TAYLOR ARCHITECTS**

*On a steep, wedge-shaped site, this head office building had to project its status while providing an inspiring internal working environment which, with deft planning, the complex has achieved.*

The site chosen for the head office of an international equipment pooling company was a parking lot of a well-located shopping centre undergoing a considerable upgrade and expansion. Access was pre-determined and the entrance had to fit within an acute angle of the triangular site configuration, which, much like a veranda, accommodates a terraced staircase to the double-volume entrance atrium where all internal pedestrian paths cross.

The design was governed by "responsible design principles" e.g. having daylight penetrate the depth of the building, the use of shading devices where appropriate, energy efficiency air-conditioning and electricity including lighting, water saving measures and rainwater harvesting.



- KEY:**
1. Westville Junction Shopping Centre
  2. Shopping Centre Parking
  3. Lift Foyer
  4. Tank Farm
  5. Office Staff Parking
  6. Office Visitors Parking
  7. Stair to Main Entrance
  8. Reception
  9. Outside Entertainment Area
  10. Meeting Room
  11. Open Plan Offices
  12. Cellular Offices
  13. Hot Desks
  14. Canteen



## EMERGING PRACTICE | JOY BRASLER ARCHITECTS

JOY BRASLER  
ARCHITECTS

JOY BRASLER ARCHITECTS was established in 2004. Prior to this Joy, a graduate of Natal, was employed at Protekon Architects, a quasi-governmental department focussing on the delivery of mess and ablution and truck wash facilities to the port. Freshly out of university, exposure to the scale of projects and mentorship provided by Dave Stromberg was invaluable, both in terms of professional practise and humanitarian focus. Thereafter, Joy spent five years working as in-house architect to Cecile and Boyd Interior designers. Experience gained in the formulation of project teams and execution of projects such as Singita Lebombo and various high end residential projects, has formed the basis of a practise focussing on the delivery of collaborative solutions which resolve the requirements of the client with a response to landscape and setting in terms of technology and budget. Contact with this industry and exposure to the emotive qualities of interior design and its ability to directly affect the qualities of the architectural experience, provided new areas of research and development and has perhaps led to a differentiation for the practise in the marketplace. Work published in magazines led to new work.

Early projects were run entirely out of a purpose designed office floating above a forest in Joy Brasler's garden, an arrangement which allowed proximity to family life. Accommodating a staff of up to five people, valuable early lessons were learnt in terms of project management, resourcing, and client

liaison. The difficulties of maintaining a predictable cash flow while various projects stopped and started, together with mounting family responsibilities, led to the preferred practise of collaborating with skilled partners on a few selected projects as a reliable means of delivering highly detailed homes and leisure products. Recently Iain Sherman, also a Natal graduate, has joined this collaboration, in conjunction with Jacques Viljoen, a Free State graduate. The arrangement has allowed the practise to compose and deliver projects based on the needs of the project and the interests and strengths of the partners.

The approach to any design begins with an information gathering exercise: the requirements of the brief (both in feel and the accommodation schedule), the possibilities of the site, available technologies and delivery mechanisms are thoroughly investigated in order to determine the preferred solution. Various technologies and responses are tested for suitability against agreed criteria. Responses from the client and project team are assessed and integrated into the preferred solution. In this way the final solution is understood by all parties as an appropriate response to the brief. The design response of the practise varies based on the range of stakeholders/environments and the particular skills in the office.

Current projects include a tented camp in Namibia, a hospitality concept for St Verde in the midlands, and various houses in Zimbali on the North coast.



Tswalu Kalahari Game Reserve, alterations, 2009.



Widenham House.



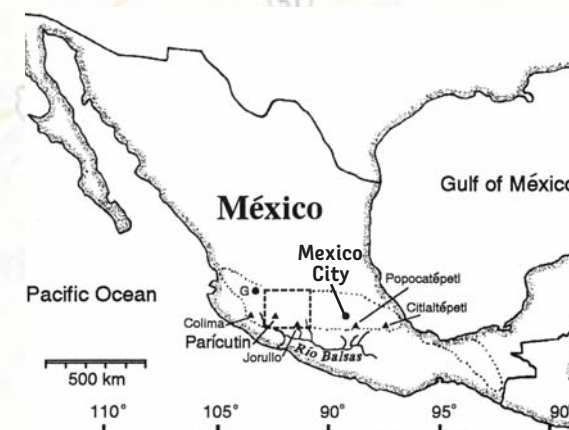
House Rossi, Plettenberg Bay, 2009.



## TRAVEL DIARY | MEXICO CITY

## inclusive, respectful, enabling

AT THE APEX OF THE ASCENT from Buenos Aires at sea level to Mexico City at 2 240m higher (Johannesburg is 1 753m), the plane breaches the rim of mountains that encircle the city and the vast plain of agriculture at a massive scale transforms, through increasingly dense settlement, into one of the biggest and oldest cities on the planet (21.5 m people).



Like most airports, Benito Juárez International started life on the outskirts. But now it is almost literally in the centre. Rather than leading onto a highway, the exit sign takes you directly into the grain.

Much more like Paris or Barcelona than Sao Paulo, Rio or Singapore, Mexico City is almost ubiquitously between two and six floors high. It is experienced as a seemingly endless network of continuously active tree-lined streets, parks as green oases within this density and plazas, either linear in the middle of wide treed street medians or in various sizes of more formal hard-surfaced public gathering spaces. The main public space is the Zocalo, measuring 240 x 240m.

The encircling mountains include two snow-topped volcanoes, icons of the city and to its residents, who are known at Chilangos.

The pointy one is called Popocatepetl and is often active, distributing dust over the surrounding landscape and small villages. He's the man. More elongated and lying on its back, long flowing hair rolling into the surrounding foothills, is Iztaccihuatl. She's the woman.

This is the tip of the iceberg of an endless depth of relationship between Mexicans, the land, spirituality and the City, all completely connected to each other.



Clockwise, top left:

**Mexico City** surrounded by mountains and volcanoes.

The 'individual transport system' in a tree-lined street.

Public sculptures in tree-lined Reforma Street.

Public sculptures in tree-lined Reforma Street.

Public sculptures in tree-lined Reforma Street.



### being mexican

In the 15 hundreds, the Spanish arrived in Latin America for the same reason Europeans arrived in Africa or Asia. Mexico gained independence from Spain through a War of Independence (1810 to 1821). This was followed, one hundred years later, by the Mexican Revolution (1910 to 1920). In sequence, and almost exactly 100 years later, this loosely corresponds to our separation from Britain (1910) and our National Democratic Revolution (NDR) in 1994. The period was characterised by the transition from a rural to urbanised country without breaking the connection (MX currently 78%, SA 62%), the establishment of important national institutions as the framework of a modern society and radical redistribution of land and other key levers of the economy. The concept of 'Mestizo' – people of undefined but mixed cultural heritage and decent – was used by post-revolution governments as a third strategic instrument in the formation of a unified Mexican identity. Transforming the pre-revolutionary polarisation of indigenous Indians and Spanish Colonists, upward of 60% of Mexicans now consider themselves Mestizo.

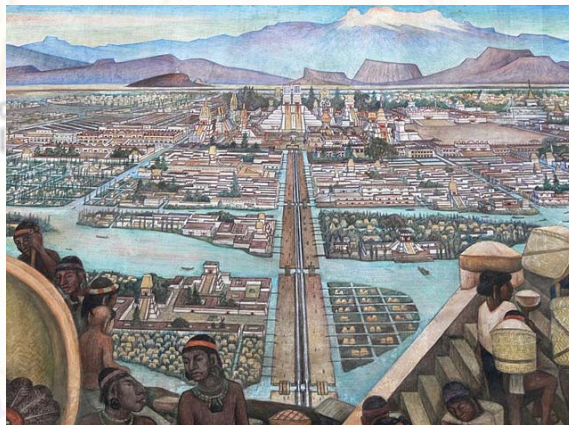
### land & city

Whether the Mayans who occupied and ran an integrated economy across about nine current central American countries, the Teotocanians from around current Mexico City, the Zapotecas, Nahuatl, or any other pre-colonial civilisation culminating in the Aztecs, indigenous Mexicans were urban. They built cities by first shaping the land, then building either heavily and permanently or lightly and impermanently on that made topography. Mexico is a culture of the land, of terraces, of mass and of agriculture, shaping what exists, and solidity.

Modern Mexican architecture, from Luis Barragan or Pedro Ramirez Vazquez to the current generation of Alberto Kalach or Mauricio Rocha, emerges from this same essentiality. All projects

A depiction of an Aztec market in Tlatelolco, a borough of current Mexico City, then called Tenochtitlan.

Below:  
National Museum of Anthropology.



seem to begin with, then transform and represent the physical site, topography, materiality, context and light. Crossing the spectrum from a sparse abstract contemporary composition of succulents in a hard monastic courtyard, to lush subtropical gardens dripping from urban terraces, vegetation is inherent in the conception of almost all urbanity and architecture. Alberto Kalach won an invited international competition to design the new National Library because he conceived of it 'as' garden, with all the metaphors of growth and fertility that go with that, rather than 'in' garden.

### spirituality

Catholicism was the forward 'hearts and minds' propaganda effort of the colonial mission to conquer. Like the integration that resulted in the Mestizo population, Catholicism has become fused with indigenous belief systems to generate a new authentically Mexican blend.

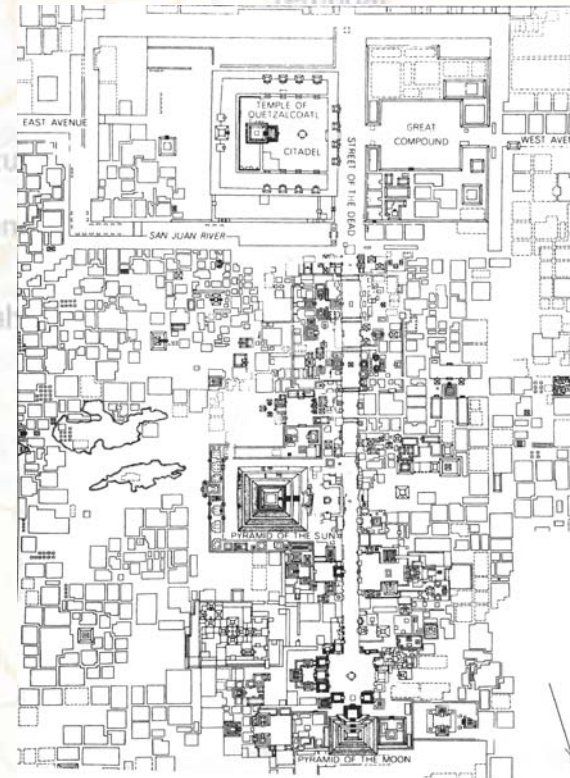
The commemoration of Our Virgin of Guadalupe is, for example, far more important than Christmas Day. For weeks in advance of December 12th, it's extraordinary to see people along the sides of freeways and on the city streets, walking in groups led by someone carrying a pole with an ornately framed image of the Virgin. Many sleep on the side of the road on their way to the cathedrals where they gather in her memory. This process of syncretism, the combining of seemingly contradictory beliefs, is another manifestation of the underlying theme of productive and progressive transformation of apparent opposites into new practices and identities.

### architecture & urbanity

One of the first two places I visited was The National Museum of Anthropology in the middle of the 685ha central city park called Chapultepec (Chapul = grasshopper, and Tepetl = hill, therefore Grasshopper Hill). If it were square, it would be 2.6 x 2.6km. New York's Central Park is 339ha. The Museum consists of three independent buildings around a rectangular courtyard, one end of which is covered by a massive umbrella supported on a single column and providing weather protection between the buildings.

The symbolism is clear – one integrated and autonomous nation made of many parts, linked by overarching and unifying protection. This sense of independence and autonomy is key to Mexican identity. They regard themselves as the 'cultural' fathers of Latin America to their south, but they are ambiguous about their northern neighbours, not least because of their inherent cultural mismatch. US citizens are referred to as Gringos which, although of uncertain fact, Mexicans say comes from the term 'green-go', in reference to the green uniforms US troops wore in the American Mexican war in the mid-1800s. As an ultimate expression of autonomy, the Mexican Constitution prohibits their armed forces leaving Mexican territory without a declaration of war.

The second visit was to Teotihuacan, a pre-Columbian (pre-colonial) city located about 50km NE of Mexico City and established around 100BC. Organised around a 2.5km long main trading street with a pyramid complex at its end, and some more along its length, with dense courtyard-typology residential settlement from the centre to the planes and hills around it, the city is astounding in scale, structure, cohesion and enduring condition. Even more astounding is that history has made it across the long bridge of time and is alive, real and integrated in the many many layers of contemporary Mexico.

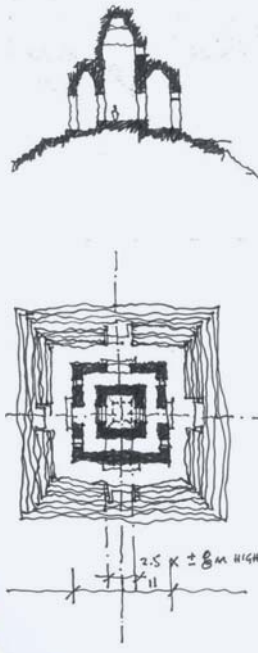


### behind

Until the massive population explosion in the '60s, San Angel was a colonial holiday village outside the perimeter of the city, frequented by city dwellers on weekends – now it's much closer to the centre than to the edge. Driving down Insurgentes Avenue (commemorating revolutionary Insurgents), the inner city arterial that crosses North-South across the whole of Mexico City, I couldn't match the gritty, busy, intensity all around me with the image of a tranquil village oasis. With a smile I was told it was 'detrás': all the beauty is 'behind'. I later learned that this applies equally to the urban environment as it does to architecture, food, conversation, cultural expression in music and art.

Not only was San Angel, with its central square and park 'behind', so was the courtyard of the National Museum of Anthropology, the ceremonial and residential courtyards of the Teotihuacan city and the patios of almost every Mexican house, pre-colonial, colonial or contemporary.

'Behind' defines the primary typology from which much of Mexico City, as an example of almost all other Mexican cities, is



Top left to right:

Teotihuacan. Site plan and view from the Pyramid of the Moon.

Above:

Temple at Mayan City, Yucatan State.

Below:

A middle class vecindad.

built. It implies a structured layering of public to private that, in addition to providing the continuous edge of the public space called a 'Street', in contrast to a 'road', also defines the inner-most private spaces of the individual houses located much deeper inside the city blocks. At the smallest scale, it's the patio, the courtyard at the centre of a single house, then the 'vecindad' (refer wiki), then the street, then the neighbourhood plaza or park, then the main city square or park.

### comparison

Because urban structure reveals economic, social and cultural structure, I find myself comparing all this to our colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid settlement pattern and wondering if the contrast doesn't perhaps also have something to do with our contrasting senses of national identity and autonomy, industriousness, unemployment rate (MX 5.0%, SA 25% or 40% depending on information source), economic strength and growth (MX 4%, SA 2.5%), and ethnic integration or what our government now calls Social Cohesion (MX Mestizo, SA racial autonomy).

They say things happen in threes. Could the intentions of our 1910 independence and 1994 NDR have more chance of becoming real if we had a third, National Spatial Revolution, if we recognised the importance and potential of spatial structure in building a Nation, an equitable and fertile economy, cohesive society, and progressive and evolving culture? If, instead of more and more disconnected low-intensity 'investment' that primarily serves private interests and entrenches division, we started to construct cities that serve and enable the public interest through connectivity?

In contrast to our own cities, my enduring feeling of Mexico City is that its spatial structure fundamentally includes, respects and enables. It is an inspiring example of how architecture and urbanism can be powerful tools to reconstruct our broken society through transforming its broken settlement patterns into integrated spatial systems that provide real, accessible and equitable opportunity.

Andrew Makin

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