
LINES THROUGH TIME

Contents

CONTENTS	9
FOREWORD	11
PREFACE	13
INTRODUCTION	17
MANFRED HERMER AND THE MAKING OF A JOHANNESBURG ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE, 1945-65	25
FOUR THEATRES	63
BETWEEN FORM AND FUNCTION	121
PONTE AS PIVOT	155
SITUATED PRACTICE	207
AFTERWORDS	255
BUILDING MINDS: THE ARCHITECTURE OF EDUCATION	257
EVOLUTION OF THE OFFICE ENVIRONMENT	275
CYCLES: THE RHYTHM OF CHANGE IN ARCHITECTURE	337
INDEX OF IMAGES	359
MANFRED HERMER GROSSKOPFF PARTNERSHIP TIMELINES AND COMPANY NAME CHANGES	361
Notes on Contributors	365

LINES THROUGH TIME

In recognition of our founders, whose vision set the course,
all who have shaped our progress,
and the dreamers yet to come, who will carry GLH forward.

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Lines Through Time
GLH Architects 1945 – 2025

Editor
Federico Freschi

Editorial Assistance
Xavier Huyberechts
Briget Grosskopff

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Authors
Rodney Grosskopff
Clive Chipkin
Briget Grosskopff
Katherine Munro, University of The Witwatersrand
Sarah Roberts, University of The Witwatersrand
Hannah Le Roux, University of Sheffield and University of The Witwatersrand
Federico Freschi, University of Johannesburg
Lesley Lokko, African Futures Institute
Guy Trangoš, University of Johannesburg
Xavier Huyberechts, GLH Architects

GLH Architects
3rd Floor, GLOBAL HOUSE
28 Sturdee Ave, Rosebank
Johannesburg, 2196
www.glh.co.za

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GLH ARCHITECTS
1945 – 2025

EDITED BY
FEDERICO FRESCHI

CONTENTS

FOREWORD 11
Rodney Grosskopff

PREFACE 13
Clive Chipkin

INTRODUCTION 17
Federico Freschi

1. Manfred Hermer and the Making of an Architectural Practice 25
Katherine Munro, University of the Witwatersrand

2. Four Theatres: The 'Alex' (1951), the Bloemfontein Civic (1957), the Johannesburg Civic (1961) and the Market (1976) 63
Sarah Roberts, University of the Witwatersrand

4. Between Form and Function: Decorative Programmes in the Buildings of Manfred Hermer and GLH & Associates 121
Federico Freschi, University of Johannesburg

3. Ponte as Pivot 155
Hannah Le Roux, University of Sheffield, University of the Witwatersrand

5. Lines, Threads, Traces: Key Influences, Moments and Movements in the Work of GLH 183
Lesley Lokko, African Futures Institute

6. Situated Practice: Sustainability and public value in the post-apartheid work of GLH Architects 207
Guy Trangoš, University of Johannesburg

7. Afterwords
Building Minds: The Architecture of Education 257
Briget Grosskopff, GLH Architects

Evolution of the Office Environment 275
Xavier Huyberechts, GLH Architects

Cycles: The Rhythm of Change in Architecture 337
Xavier Huyberechts, GLH Architects

Index of Buildings 358

Manfred Hermer Grosskopff partnership timelines and company name changes 360

8. Notes on Contributors 365



Rodney Groskopff, 1963.
GLH Archive.

FOREWORD

Rodney Grosskopff

Founder

I remember it well, the first day I walked into the office.

A Dickensian affair in Volkskas Gebou, 55 years ago. Not for half a second did I think that I would spend the rest of my life being part of this incredible dynasty, a dynasty which I hope will endure for many more years.

Only like-minded people build dynasties. Be it accident, need, or association which throws them together, it is their common cause that plaits the ropes that bind them together.

The story of GLH is the tracing of the threads that came together to form those bonds. I am conscious that I am one of those fibres, a dull string against which the rich colours, of some of the finest, brightest, most creative architects could shine.

The underlying principles, which for me shine through the life of the practice, is the passion to add value, to go beyond the bounds of the brief to produce some thing better than the client ever expected.

Never break a promise, be on time, within budget, and above all take ownership of every problem. That was the discipline adhered to, then, now and into the future.

I suppose the company's success must ultimately be attributed to the trust in the talents of young generations of architects, giving them the freedom to grow and stepping aside when they have bit firmly between their teeth.

This from the sidelines brings me great joy.



PREFACE

Clive Chipkin

An architectural practice that provides historical continuity over many decades is a rare phenomenon in Johannesburg's urban history. GLH's longevity and growth patterns offer us a valuable case study to observe forces of change.

I have known three of the principals in this practice: Manfred Hermer, Mannie Feldman and Rodney Grosskopff. Hermer, the founder, was distinguished, reticent, pre-occupied; an architect with an enviable reputation for reliability. I noticed another quality. EM Forster in a short story entitled 'The Eternal Moment' describes two companions: "She, a kind of radical; he, a kind of aristocrat." Hermer, too, was 'a kind of aristocrat.' In 1945 he came out of the Second World War as a major who had served in the East and North African campaigns. Mannie Feldman too was an ex-serviceman who had served in the SAAF as a navigator and as aircrew in the early days of Israel's formative air force. He was 'a kind of radical.'

Rodney Grosskopff, the younger man, was the representative of a new, post-war generation. He learnt modernity from his University of the Witwatersrand lecturer Julian Beinart and he learnt pragmatism and reliability from Hermer. It was Grosskopff who was destined to become the mainstay of the practice and the principal architect. Building on the past, he took the firm into the future.

What do we observe in the considerable body of work produced by this practice?

Where I have described examples in the past they were based on the familiarity and immediacy of my generation – the milieu of post-Second World War modernism changing over the decades. Modernism, yes, even the sidelining and rejection of utopian values, and then what the architect Tony Farrell (2013) calls "a reassimilation of modernism." We see all these responses in the GLH portfolios.

Johannesburg Building Boom in the 1970s. Museum Africa Archive.



Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse, *Ponte City looking west,* 2008. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery.



The long perspective of this practice contains important examples of Johannesburg's changing architecture. First, post-Second World War modernism from Hillbrow to Braamfontein and beyond, then on to the new Civic Hill eclectic modernism at the Civic Theatre, with its decorative colonnade looking to Brasília and to New York's more sedate Lincoln Center. On the edge of Hillbrow, Ponte's signpost tower, followed by the new age of corporate atrium space derived from John Portman's internal promenade at the Hyatt Regency, San Francisco.

We see these spatial wonders at the Nedbank in Sandton and at the Standard Bank in Rosebank. The Nedbank complex reflects, too, the entry of postmodern classicism, while the subsequent return of modernism – the "reassimulation" in Farrell's words – occurs at the Standard Bank complex in Rosebank.

The sites of the various projects reveal seismic shifts in Johannesburg's urban geography. The earlier work is all in the centrifuge of historic Johannesburg. The later work shows major changes of urban identity to the second CBD at Sandton on what was once the distant northern periphery, and more recently to the Gautrain metro nodal point in the new Rosebank where a designed urban forest demonstrates the age of heightened ecological awareness.

I read these examples as powerful registers of urban change; an invaluable record of Johannesburg's architecture over seven decades.

Johannesburg, 2015

INTRODUCTION

Federico Freschi

University of
Johannesburg

2025 marks the eightieth anniversary of GLH Architects, a Johannesburg-based architectural firm whose longevity and enduring legacy place it amongst a handful of firms in the South African context to have survived the vicissitudes of shifting political regimes, economic downturns, urban transformation and profound societal shifts.[1] Over the course of eighty years GLH has established itself as one of the foremost South African architectural firms, each decade being characterised by a number of landmark buildings and projects that serve as important markers of the social, cultural and political contexts in which they were produced. As such, they remind us of the importance of the built environment in giving shape and substance to our needs of the present and our ambitions for the future. Set against the backdrop of the turbulent and relentless change that characterises both the history of Johannesburg and the South African building industry over the last eighty years, this book acknowledges the importance of GLH's historical legacy in shaping the present, while reflecting also on its role in rising to the challenges of designing for the twenty-first century.

1 Other South African firms that have maintained continued practice – whether under their original name, a modified version or through successor names and mergers – include: Bild Architects, founded as Burg, Lodge & Burg in Pretoria in 1904 (Artefacts n.d.a.); Osmonde Lange Architects & Planners, founded by William Prescott Osmond and Barry Lange in East London in 1936 (Artefacts n.d.b.); and SVA International, established in Pretoria in 1943 as Stauch and Partners in 1943 (SVA Architects n.d.). KMH Architects in Cape Town claims to be "one of the oldest architectural practices in continuous business in the world" (KMH Architects n.d.) reportedly having been founded in Cape Town by John Perry in 1912; however, at the time of writing, I have not been able to independently verify this claim.

The practice was founded by Manfred Hermer (1915-2010), who launched his career in the 1930s at the prominent Johannesburg-based firm Cook and Cowan. Hermer's journey into independent practice evolved through a series of partnerships, beginning as part of a team, transitioning to collaborations with partners and ultimately establishing Manfred Hermer Architects in 1945, the practice that formed the foundation of what is today known as GLH Architects. Over the years, the firm's evolution has been reflected in its changing names, each marking a new era of collaboration rooted in both professional respect and friendship: Manfred Hermer and Grosskopff, Manfred Hermer Grosskopff and Lombart, and eventually Grosskopff Lombart Huyberechts and Associates (GLH). The essays in this book chart the foundation and growth of the practice, and reflect critically on the meaning, effects and affects both of some of the firm's significant built projects and the environments and contexts in which they were produced.

In Chapter One, 'Manfred Hermer and the Making of an Architectural Practice, 1945-65', Katherine Munro takes a longer historical view offering an account of the formative two decades of GLH and focusing on the pivotal role of founding architect Manfred Hermer. Drawing on archival material, memoirs and interviews, she reconstructs the emergence of the practice in the context of Johannesburg' rapid postwar expansion and its embrace of modernist architecture.

Munro situates Hermer within the evolving educational and professional context of the time, tracing his journey from a part-time architecture student at Wits and apprentice at Cook and Cowen, through wartime service and into private practice in the mid-1940s. She explores Hermer's early projects – including apartment buildings, hospitals, clubs and civic infrastructure – noting his deft negotiation between budgetary constraints, functional design and technical innovation. The combination of pragmatic efficiency, formal restraint and occasional boldness, she argues, gave Hermer's buildings a distinctive character well suited to the aspirations of the rapidly evolving city.

Munro argues that Hermer's greatest legacy may lie not only in is architectural output but in the organisational and relational culture he established. Through long-standing partnerships with clients, collaborators and staff – most notably his enduring alliance with Rodney Grosskopff – Hermer cultivated a professional ethos based on trust, loyalty and continuity. By the mid-1960s,

with a growing portfolio of landmark buildings, the firm had consolidated a reputation for reliability and quality, laying the institutional and creative foundations that would support its expansion in subsequent decades. Munro's chapter thus frames the early history of GLH as a case study in how architectural practice can take root and flourish through a blend of personal vision, professional discipline and civic engagement.

In the second chapter, 'Four Theatres: The 'Alex' (1951), the Bloemfontein Civic (1957), the Johannesburg Civic (1961) and the Market (1976)', Sarah Roberts offers a detailed analysis of four significant theatre buildings, all shaped by the design sensibilities of Manfred Hermer and, in the case of the Market Theatre, Rodney Grosskopff. Drawing on extensive archival material, Roberts examines how these theatres reflect broader shifts in performance practice, from conventional proscenium-based staging to more experimental and inclusive spatial configurations. She situates the building not merely as containers for theatrical production but as active participants in the evolving discourse of South African theatre-making. She considers each project both in terms of its commissioning conditions and practical considerations as well as the ways in which the buildings negotiated questions of public access and audience demographics.

Roberts concludes with a deep reading of the Market Theatre in Newton, a repurposed Edwardian market hall. She shows how, under Grosskopff's direction, the architectural transformation of this space facilitated a new performative idiom, one that supported socially engaged, anti-apartheid theatre and gave rise to a repertoire of original South African work that has become canonical. Across all four case studies, Roberts argues that GLH's theatres are not merely architectural artefacts but dynamic social structures that reflect and shape the political and cultural imperatives of their time. As such, they provide a critical lens through which to understand the entangled histories of space, performance and public life in twentieth-century South Africa.

In Chapter Three, Hannah Le Roux examines the architectural and urban significance of Ponte, the iconic cylindrical high-rise in Johannesburg, designed by Manfred Hermer and Rodney Grosskopff and completed in 1976. More than a landmark, she argues, Ponte functions as a "pivot," both literally in its circular form and metaphorically as a point of transition in the

city's urban, economic and social landscape. Drawing on architectural theory, urban planning discourse and archival material, Le Roux explores the multiple register in which Ponte functions as a pivot, whether structurally, spatially or metaphorically. She traces the tower's hybrid typology, combining a high-rise residential form with a car-oriented shopping centre base to a moment of profound transition in Johannesburg's urban development, when the inner city began to be reconfigured by new modes of finance, mobility and infrastructure aligned more closely with American urbanism than with inherited colonial paradigms.

The construction of Ponte, Le Roux argues, marked the consolidation of a new model of architect-developer-financier collaboration and prefigured the centrifugal dispersal of capital towards emerging suburban nodes. She situates the building within this realignment of social and spatial dynamics, identifying the Soweto Uprising of 1976 – the year of Ponte's completion – as a critical rupture that redirected development away from the urban core of Johannesburg. The building's subsequent decline, partial abandonment and eventual partial rehabilitation mirror the broader cycles of disinvestment and reinvestment that have characterised Johannesburg's inner city. Ponte's iconic status, she suggests, derives less from the formal resolution of its design than from its capacity to absorb and express the contradictory forces shaping the city.

In Chapter Four, 'Between Form and Function: Decorative Programmes in the Buildings of Manfred Hermer and GLH & Associates', I examine the evolution of ornamentation and surface articulation in GLH's projects, tracing how decorative strategies have been used to navigate the shifting terrain between aesthetic ambition and functional necessity. Beginning with early projects such as Our Parents Home (1945) and the Alexander Theatre (1951), where patterned brickwork and sculptural reliefs enriched otherwise utilitarian forms, I highlight Manfred Hermer's sensitivity to the expressive potential of architectural surfaces. This sensibility matured in later works like the Johannesburg Civic Theatre (1962), which adopted the sculptural language of Brazilian modernism to create a seamless integration of public art into the building fabric. I argue that Hermer's sensitivity to ornament – whether in façade detailing, sculptural integration, or material articulation – and willingness to collaborate with artists contributed to the firm's ability to create meaningful urban landmarks.

I conclude by showing how contemporary projects build on this legacy through the incorporation of large-scale artworks and sculptural facades by leading contemporary artists. I show that the persistence of ornament in GLH's work has always operated beyond mere aesthetic gesture, functioning instead as a strategic and evolving response to context – one that allows the firm's buildings to convey meaning, engage the public realm and reflect the layered histories and shifting aspirations of Johannesburg.

In Chapter Five, 'Lines, Threads, Traces: Key Influences, Moments and Movements in the Work of GLH', Lesley Lokko presents a layered interpretation of GLH Architects' eighty-year history, framing the firm's legacy as a complex narrative interwoven with the political, cultural and architectural evolution of Johannesburg itself. Drawing on personal interviews, archival materials and critical theory, Lokko explores how GLH's work reflects enduring tensions within South African architecture: between local specificity and international influence, aesthetic and commercial imperatives, and mythic narratives of the city's past and its imagined futures. She argues that GLH's trajectory – from its early modernist civic landmarks to its later corporate and environmentally responsive projects – illuminates the broader struggles of a profession negotiating questions of identity, context and cultural meaning in a society marked by profound change.

Through the organising metaphors of "lines," "threads," and "traces," Lokko maps a genealogy of ideas, values and stylistic shifts across three generations of leadership at GLH. These include the austere high modernism of its founding years, the client-oriented pragmatism and postmodern stylings of the 1980s and 1990s, and the environmentally conscious and contextually attuned projects of more recent decades. Yet for Lokko, the firm's legacy is not reducible to a stylistic lineage or chronological survey. Rather, it is constituted by an evolving "creative myth" shaped by relationships, as much between mentors and successors as between architecture and the larger cultural and political forces the define its meaning. GLH's significance, she concludes, lies not only in its architectural output, but in the traces of continuity, adaptation and purpose that give its body of work coherence, relevance and emotional resonance with the turbulent story of South African modernity.

In the final chapter, ‘Situated Practice: Sustainability and Public Value in the Post-Apartheid Work of GLH Architects’, Guy Trangoš explores the architectural responses of GLH within the decentralised, ecologically strained and increasingly securitised urban landscape of post-apartheid Johannesburg. Tracing six recent project – including corporate campuses, a cultural institution and an off-grid eco-lodge – he identifies two defining strands in the firm’s contemporary practice: a sustained commitment to environmental sustainability and a strategic engagement with public space. Rather than relying on formal bravura, GLH’s recent architecture is characterised by sensitivity to site, user comfort and long-term environmental performance. Through both high- and low-tech solutions, the firm’s buildings address energy, water and material efficiencies, while advancing design strategies that enhance public accessibility and mitigate urban exclusion.

Trangoš argues for this body of work as being a form of “situated practice,” one that resists the exclusionary tendencies of Johannesburg’s private developments and instead fosters more human, inclusive and sustainable environments. From early post-apartheid optimism to the challenges of ongoing urban fragmentation, GLH’s projects exemplify a thoughtful negotiation between architectural agency, social responsibility and ecological resilience. Foregrounding the most recent projects in the firm’s eight-decade legacy, Trangoš positions GLH not simply as a chronicler of Johannesburg’s architectural history, but as an active contributor to imagining its possible futures.

Concluding the volume, the afterwords by Briget Grosskopff and Xavier Huyberechts, directors at GLH Architects, offer personal reflections on the evolution of key building typologies within the firm’s portfolio. Grosskopff reflects on the design of educational spaces, drawing on the firm’s extensive experience in creating learning environments that balance functionality, adaptability and a deep sensitivity to context and human experience. Huyberechts first traces the transformation of the corporate workplace from the cellular office typologies of the late twentieth century to the open, flexible and environmentally responsive spaces of recent decades, and situates GLH’s approach within a broader cultural and technological evolution in how and where we work.

He then reflects on the recurring patterns that have shaped GLH's practice, from shifts in residential, healthcare and hospitality design, to more personal cycles of experimentation and renewal embodied in both partners' homes and the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings. These practitioner perspectives offer a valuable complementary lens through which to understand the firm's evolving design ethos, one that aligns both with the generational narrative arc outlined by Lesley Lokko, and with the principles of situated, socially responsible practice explored by Guy Trangoš. In this way, Grosskopff and Huyberechts reinforce the central concern of this volume: the capacity of architecture to respond meaningfully to the changing conditions of modern life.

More than merely a commemorative account of a long-standing architectural practice, the chapters in this volume trace an eighty-year evolution of work that registers and responds to the shifting demands, ambitions and complexities of a society in constant transformation. From modernist civic monuments to ecologically attuned corporate campuses; from the experimental space of theatre and performance to the contested iconography of urban high-rises, the firm's trajectory encapsulates a uniquely South African negotiation between continuity and change, form and meaning, aesthetics and ethics. In tracing GLH across eight decades, this book illuminates the firm's capacity to engage critically and creatively with the broader socio-political landscape in which it is embedded. As South Africa continues to reinvent itself, the GLH story offers valuable insight into how architecture might imagine and support more sustainable, inclusive and resonant urban futures.

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MANFRED HERMER AND THE MAKING OF A JOHANNESBURG ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE, 1945-65

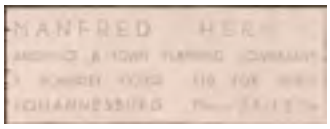
Katherine Munro

University of Witwatersrand





Johannesburg in the 1960s,
before the construction
of the highway.
Museum Africa Archive.



1948 Ralph Green
Manfred Hermer

M:P

1968 Manfred Hermer
Alec Hodge
Richard Waller
Mike Woeber
Rodney Grosskopff

MHP

1965 Manfred Hermer
Rodney Grosskopff

MH FG

1970 Manfred Hermer
Rodney Grosskopff
Mannie Feldman

MH G

1974 Manfred Hermer
Rodney Grosskopff

MH &G

1990 Manfred Hermer
Rodney Grosskopff

MH C&L

1990 Rodney Grosskopff
Pierre Lombart

MH C&L

2000 Rodney Grosskopff
Pierre Lombart
Arlene Shaw
Briget Grosskopff
Xavier Huyberechts

GL H&L

2003 Rodney Grosskopff
Pierre Lombart
Arlene Shaw
Briget Grosskopff
Xavier Huyberechts

GLH Architects

2015 Xavier Huyberechts
Briget Grosskopff
Louise O'Raw
Leon Fourie
Naina Jivan

Logos and managing members.

The evolution of the practice as seen through its changing logos, 1948-2015.

The story of GLH is a story of a successful architectural partnership growing with the city of Johannesburg and seizing the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the dramatic post-Second World War expansion of the city's business centres. Initially concentrated in the older inner city, the firm was also ready to spread its architectural footprint into the residential and business suburbs to the north, in Hillbrow, Killarney, Illovo and Rosebank, and the newer more distant areas to the north of the city. The story of GLH thus meshes with the ready acceptance by the city of a diversity of modernist architecture. It is the dynamic combination of accessing finance in the growing city, exercising disciplined, tight budgets, and erecting practical workman-like structures with a touch of technical innovation that anchored the growth and stability of the firm.

In design, the interplay of international and South African influences enabled this firm to make an enduring contribution to the shaping of the ever-expanding landscape of the city. In this chapter I survey and explore the first two decades of GLH, covering the period 1945 to 1965. In setting out to find the roots of the practice I aim to answer the key question about what foundations and scaffolding were set in place to enable it to grow and thrive over eight decades.

The firm was founded by Manfred Hermer (1915–2011), who plays a central role in its history. Although his name is no longer part of the GLH acronym, he was the driving force behind establishing the practice. I first encountered Manfred Hermer as the author of a book on Pageview (Hermer, 1978), which captured with some nostalgia the demolition of the old shops and loss of lifestyles of 14th Street, Pageview, as the apartheid government imposed the Group Areas Act on old areas of Johannesburg. With his delightful, coloured illustrations, Hermer captured a moment and wrote his work into Johannesburg history as the pre-apartheid character of Pageview – which, along with its adjacent suburb Vrededorp was known as 'Fietas' – disappeared.

Hermer's *The Passing of Pageview* is a fine and well-appreciated tribute to a part of lost Johannesburg, but it is his work as an architect on the wider cityscape that we must engage with. It was surprising to discover that Hermer and his architectural practice have been relatively little documented in the architectural literature. Doreen Greig, in her comprehensive survey of South African architecture published in 1971 includes Hermer's Brenthurst Clinic, the Johannesburg Civic Theatre and the Durban Ice Drome as noteworthy modern buildings, but none of these earned an illustration in her book. It seems that in spite of its size and success, it is a firm that has operated under the radar. Hermer is perhaps best remembered as the architect of an old-age home, Our Parents Home (first completed in 1945, with further



The Passing of Pageview, drawings by Manfred Hermer (Ravan Press, 1978).



A whimsical self-portrait doodle by Manfred Hermer, sketched in Johannesburg in 2003.

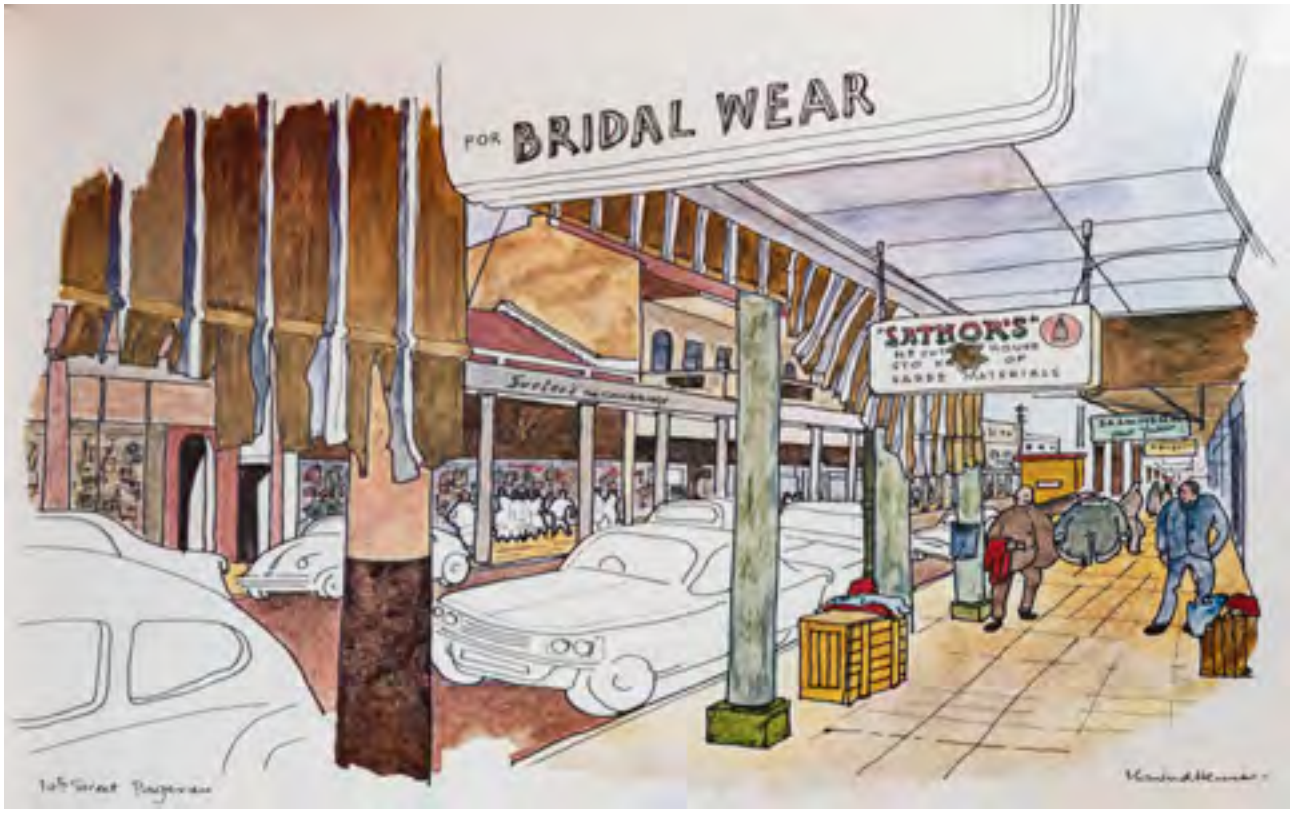
additions in 1965), while his work as the designer of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre is consigned to only a brief mention by Clive Chipkin in *Johannesburg Style* (Chipkin, 1993: 310).

Manfred Hermer

Hermer was born in 1915, the son of Carl – a watchmaker and jeweller – and Sarah Freda Hermer. His parents were Jewish immigrants from Latvia who came to South Africa in the early twentieth century, settling first in Volksrust – where Hermer was born – and moving later to Rustenburg. He completed his schooling at Rustenberg High School, after which he studied architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) part time from 1933 to 1937, earning a Diploma in Architecture (awarded in 1937) at a time when the diploma was the more popular and affordable form of professional training and education (Bryer 1977: 10-11). He registered as a practising architect with the Institute of South African Architects (ISAA) in 1939, and continued to practice until he retired in 1990. He subsequently emigrated to Victoria, Canada, where he died in 2011. Despite his absence from the literature, Hermer clearly had a long and distinguished career, and made an indelible imprint on Johannesburg through his ever more frequent commissions and prestigious design projects.

In Chapter Five, Lesley Lokko recounts Hermer's anecdote about how a schoolmaster, a Mr Poorter, recognized his talent for drawing in woodwork class and advised his father, "You should make him an architect" (Hermer n.d.: 10). Thereafter there was no question of any other possible




FOR BRIDAL WEAR
"SATHON'S"



The Passing of Pageview,
drawings by Manfred Hermer
(Ravan Press, 1978).



Wits University in the 1930s.
Museum Africa Archive

future career. Hermer opted for part-time studies at Wits because it offered the opportunity to combine working in an architectural office on a system of day release and night-time study. As a result of family connections[1] the eighteen-year-old Hermer joined the firm of J C Cook (1878-1955) and M Cowen (1902-1990) in 1933. Over a five-year effective apprenticeship he acquired enormous practical experience in this very busy Johannesburg practice. Hermer (n.d.: 11-12) described Cook as a "dour, bushy-eyebrowed, unsmiling and forbidding figure" whom he came to respect deeply. He described Maurice Cowen in turn as "a young man who had been with Mr Cook for some time and had recently become a partner" (Hermer n.d.: 12).

1 Hermer mentions in his unpublished memoir that his mother's brother, Abe Graff was a civil and concrete engineer and a partner in the leading firm of A S Joffe and Co., and that these family connections opened the door into employment with Cook and Cowen.

Cook and Cowen was a well-known and successful architectural firm in Johannesburg in the 1930s. After South Africa abandoned the gold standard in 1932, economic recovery and the rising price of gold brought confidence and a building boom to Johannesburg, with building styles strongly influenced by the modernism of cities like New York, London and Miami. The years between 1933 and 1938 were ones of optimism, confident investment and expansion. Reinforced concrete and steel framed buildings provided the technical capacity, and expanded the possibilities, for designing and erecting what has come to be identified as Art Deco, characterised by vertical lines, curved edges, extravagant decoration, and geometric forms. One of the earliest and most striking of the style is Obel and Obel's Astor Mansions (1931) in Johannesburg, in Jeppe Street.[2] Gilbert Herbert (1975: 85) describes Cook and Cowen as the most influential of the firms in practice in 1933-34 because of the sheer bulk of their buildings in the city, but criticises their work as variable in quality and not whole-heartedly in the mainstream of the Modern Movement. Herbert argues that there was a period of transition from Modern Movement to International Style in the 1930s. Nonetheless by the beginning of 1934 the Cook and Cowen partnership was at work on fourteen major projects in Johannesburg. During the years that Hermer worked for the firm, the staff complement varied from seven to seventeen.

The influence of the Wits School of Architecture

Architectural education was well established in Johannesburg by the 1930s. Classes in Architecture and Building were offered by the Transvaal Technical Institute as early as 1905, and the practice of part-time classes for students who were also assistants in architects' offices was established. Indeed, this was fairly common practice: Geoffrey Eastcott Pearse (1885-1968), who was to become the first Professor of Architecture in South Africa in 1921, himself pursued this part-time programme of work and study in Johannesburg between 1903 and 1907. From 1911 the South African School of Mines and Technology (the successor to the Transvaal Technical Institute) began to offer a four-year academic course and a four-year period of practical and professional experience, which was required by the newly established Association of Transvaal Architects. In 1922 the University of the Witwatersrand

2 See Freschi (2019) for a discussion of the stylistic evolution of Art Deco in Johannesburg.

enrolled its first students, with the chair of Architecture being filled by Pearse. Although it was possible to study full time, most students were part time. By 1925 both a five-year, part-time diploma course as well as a five-year, full-time degree programme were offered.[3]

The staff at Wits became legendary for their inspirational teaching and innovations – men such as W G McIntosh (1904-1968), John Fassler (1910-1970) , W Duncan Howie (1913-1974), Arthur Stanley Furner (1892-1971), Rex Distin Martienssen (1905-1942) and the artist Willem de Sanderes Hendrikz (1910-1959), who lectured in Fine Arts. Between 1922 and 1940 the school produced thirty-nine architects with degrees and eighty-two architects and quantity surveyors with diplomas. Although a relatively modest output, it certainly met a demand in the city for locally educated professionals. The fact that more than double the number of graduates emerged with diplomas was indicative of the close alliance between the city of Johannesburg and the University that had grown out of this demand. As Hermer (n.d.:12) put it, by the end of his five years of diploma study he was "almost ready to go out into the world and set up practice on my own".

The 1930s was a period of intense debate about architectural education. This erupted at the Second Congress of the Institute of South African Architects held in Johannesburg in 1936, when diehard architectural traditionalists vociferously attacked the new ideas coming out of the universities. As Herbert (1975: 176) describes, it was a fight about new versus old, academic education versus practical pupillage, traditionalism versus modern progressivism, and urban sophistication versus provincialism.

While working for Cook and Cowen, Hermer met Ralph Green (1907-1974), the chief draughtsman. He describes him as "a heavy-set, blonde, bespectacled man with considerable design skills" (Hermer n.d.: 12). Green had graduated from Wits with a diploma in Architecture in

3 By the 1930s the School of Architecture at Wits offered a progressive curriculum comprising courses in Architectural Design, Geometrical Drawing, Freehand and Life Drawing, Arts, Ancient Life and Thought (or a Modern Language), Land Surveying, Building Construction, the History of Architecture, the Theory of Structures, Sanitation and Hygiene, the Strength of Materials, Interior Decoration and Furniture, and in the final year, Specifications, Estimates and Quantities, and Town Planning and Professional Practice. In 1940 the Department of Architecture and Quantity Surveying was reformed as a Faculty of Architecture. By 1941 accreditation and recognition by the Architects' Registration Council of the United Kingdom gave full recognition to Wits degrees, diplomas and certificates, which made Wits graduates eligible to practice in the United Kingdom (Bryer 1977).





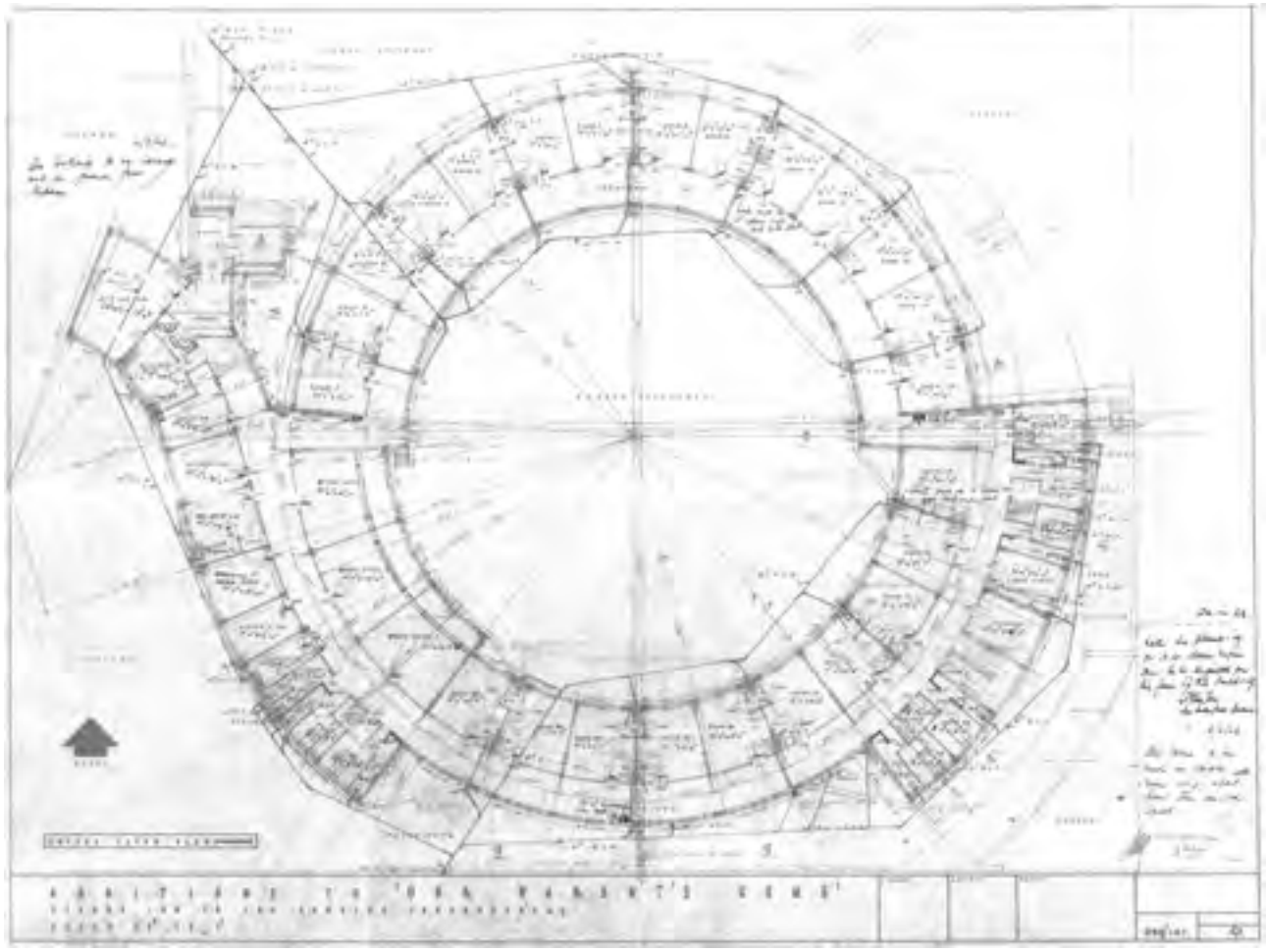
Above: Rodney Grosskopff, portrait bust of Manfred Hermer, c.1987. Unglazed clay, 50.5 x 22 x 39 cm.
Above right and below: Manfred Hermer, Division Signal Officer of the South African Corps of Signals in Cairo, 1943.



1932 and in 1937 Green opened his own practice with a friend, Alan Harris, forming the firm Harris and Green. Shortly thereafter, when Hermer qualified, he was invited to join the new Harris and Green practice. The Harris and Green partnership was a small one, and there were only three employees in addition to the two partners: Felix Fels, Manfred Hermer and a secretary. The partners did not get on and within a year Green and Harris separated. Thus at the end of 1938 two new architectural firms emerged, Green and Hermer, and Harris and Fels (Felix Fels having made the decision to partner with Harris).

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, Hermer enlisted in the South African army in 1940. Recalling his wartime experiences (Hermer 2007), Hermer noted that, like other Jewish young men in South Africa, it was his duty to oppose Germany and to volunteer to 'go up north.' After basic training in Potchefstroom, Hermer was sent to (then) Rhodesia where he was attached to an Indian Division, followed by service in the Third Reconnaissance Battalion in North Africa as a Division Signal Officer. He served in the South African Corps of Signals and was involved in the battles at El Alamein and Bariya. His active service ended as a captain and he returned to Johannesburg in 1943 and in the same year married Lesley Lazarus (1920-2003). Still in the army, he was stationed at the Mines Brigade Headquarters in Johannesburg, where he was involved in training new soldiers. At the same time, he was recovering from a jaw operation (required to treat a wartime injury) performed by Major Jack Penn, a renowned plastic surgeon. Penn had established a clinic at Brenthurst, the Parktown home of Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, to treat soldiers with disfiguring war injuries. As we will see, this connection with Penn would later play a significant role in Hermer's professional life.

Hermer was discharged from the army at the beginning of 1945 with a disability pension. In his memoir he describes the resumption of his profession: at the beginning of 1945 he was approached by Henry Bernstein, a Johannesburg businessman, to add "as many floors as the law would allow" onto the Balmoral Trading Company, a building in Johannesburg owned by Bernstein. Ralph Green had also been discharged from the military and had opened an office. Hermer joined him. There is a reference in the archives of the Johannesburg Historical Foundation to work on an office extension at 74-76 Nugget Street for James Thompson attributed to the Ralph Green and Hermer partnership, circa 1943. Another friend, Birch Bernstein of Anglo-Vaal, commissioned Hermer to extend a factory, Rostra Printers, 16 Heidelberg Road, VillageMain, which was owned by the Anglo-Vaal group.





Above: Our Parents Home, 1945.
Below: Aerial view of Our Parents Home, 2022.

In 1945 Ralph Green and Manfred Hermer were invited to design a Jewish old-age home, Our Parents Home, in The Gardens, Johannesburg. Hermer continued to work on this complex over two decades. Chipkin (1993: 310) argues that Hermer was influenced by architects such as Lubetkin and Maxwell Fry, married to the odd combination of Martienssen's innovations and his experience of the Cowen and Cook practice. The complex comprised a series of separate residential blocks overlooking communal dining and lounge facilities leading onto a central lawn. The hallmark features of Hermer's work begin to emerge as a modernist mix of functional, practical, buildings with a modernist-infused theory and experience. This is evident in this building in the textured finishes in brickwork on the colonnaded stoep. The use of natural light, with generous sized windows allowing for penetrating sunshine, gives an African airiness and presence. Gardens and trees are an integral part of the design. The home is meant to be welcoming and less institutional, and we see these ideas applied later again in Hermer's hospital designs.



Manfred Hermer offices in the Volkskas Gebou, Central Johannesburg, across from Beyers Naude Square Museum Africa Archive.

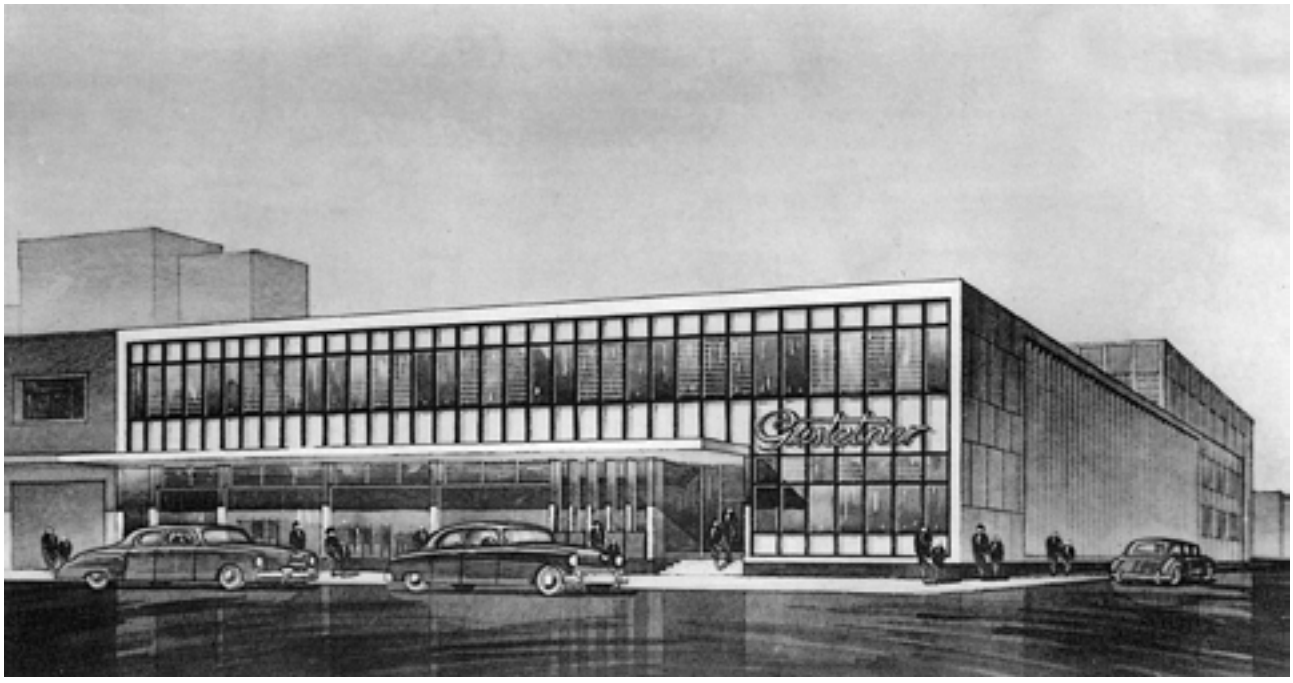
The Green-Hermer partnership did not last long. Hermer (n.d.) explains his break with Green by saying that Ralph Green was uncommunicative and something of a loner, and very soon wanted to practice on his own and preferably without any staff. Hermer left Green and established his own professional practice in Somerset House in Fox Street, converting a flat into an office. He called on an old friend and colleague from his days at Cook and Cowen, Alec Hodge, to join him. Alec Hodge was also a Wits graduate who qualified in 1936 and registered with the Institute of South African Architects in 1939. He remained with the Hermer practice for over thirty years until his death in 1968, but consistently refused a partnership and preferred to remain on a salaried basis.

Hermer was the principal architect in the new practice he established. Between 1953 and 1969 his offices were in downtown Johannesburg at 511 Volkskas building in Market Street. It was only in 1974 that the firm had moved to the suburbs to their own building at 32 Gleneagles Road in Greenside. From the outset Hermer established a tradition of attracting good staff that remained with the firm and served with loyalty and commitment.[4]

Eric Maurice Meyersohn, another Wits graduate (qualified and ISAA registered in 1944) worked for Hermer and left to establish himself in London. Hermer subsequently formed a partnership with Meyersohn in London, but this venture did not endure as the Hermer practice could contribute little to a London firm.

4 Hermer's memoirs pay tribute to his dedicated staff. His personal secretary, Olga Reznik, served for nearly forty years, with many other employees remaining with the firm for decades.

Gestetner Building
Marshalls Extension, 1952





Below left, Manfred Hermer and Rodney Grosskopff 1971.
Above right, Manfred Hermer and Rodney Grosskopff honoured at Selwyn Segal, 1976.



Rodney Grosskopff

Rodney Grosskopff (2015) describes the forty-four-year-old Hermer that he met when he joined the practice as a young man in 1959 as “a tall, intimidating, reserved man who listened with great care and attention, but was a poor conversationalist.” Nonetheless, Grosskopff remembers Hermer as the man who had the greatest influence on his ideas and architectural philosophy. Today the bust of Hermer – sculpted by Rodney Grosskopff circa 1980 when he attended art classes run by Bill Ainslie at the Johannesburg Art Foundation – still keeps fatherly oversight in the foyer of the GLH offices.

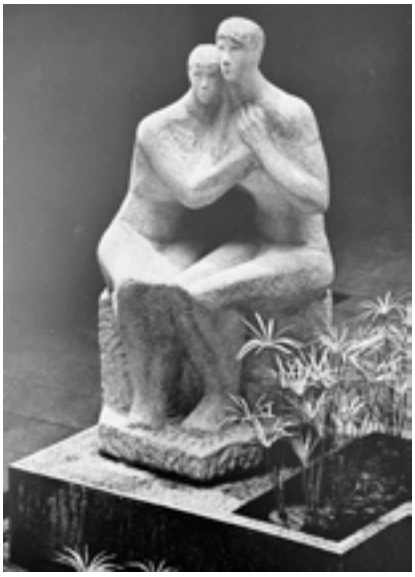
In his memoirs, Hermer comments on the enduring relationship with the young Rodney Grosskopff, who joined him as a recent school leaver, and, like Hermer, studied part time at the University of the Witwatersrand. There was another family coincidence in forging the link between Hermer and Grosskopff: Rodney’s father was a patient of Hermer’s brother, Benjamin, who suggested that the artistically talented young son of Grosskopff senior should call on his brother Manfred, the architect. Hermer recognized something special in Grosskopff and by 1965 had placed him on a partnership basis. Hermer notes that this was not before he had attempted collaborations and partnerships with other architects in London (Maurice



Meyersohn), Durban (Frank Carrington), Welkom (Roy Lyall) and Cape Town. These ventures did not succeed for various reasons: the different skills and interests of partners; problems of distance, disagreements about the relative differential contributions of each partner to local business and the fact that not all commissioned work went into a 'partnership pot'. These side partnerships and associated relationships raises interesting questions about the problems of managing work in other locations and the tension between the successful management of home city commissions and projects undertaken in other centres or even spreading abroad. Hermer and Grosskopff, however, remained in partnership for forty years until Hermer's retirement in 2005.

In the post-Second World War context it was a slow, hard grind for a new firm to obtain the architectural commissions and consistent work. Rodney Grosskopff (2015) recalls that in the early days most of the buildings were 'one offs'. Nonetheless, over the years Hermer's practice developed the capacity to design structures and buildings for a variety of functions. The ever-increasing scope of the practice encompassed offices blocks, factories, theatres, apartment blocks, hospitals, private homes, shopping malls, a country club, hotels, banks, service stations, corporate headquarters and even an ice drome. The firm's ethos was that no commission was either too large or too small to commit to. Increasingly, the firm displayed a certain edginess, a risk-taking appetite that was in tune with the post-war sprit of Johannesburg as a city recreating itself, ever expanding, and breaking boundaries with new suburbs, new commercial hubs and new shopping centres emerging.

Grosskopff (2015) further recalls that there was never a time when the practice had to lay off staff because of a lack of work. A rigorous approach of 'form follows function' characterised the firm, which soon distinguished itself through its specialist expertise as one that could be relied upon to place the client first, present effective and workable designs, and solve problems with flair and imagination. Each project remained within budget. The view of the partners was that the practice should never grow beyond the capacity for each project to be under the personal oversight of a partner. So successful was this approach that by the mid-1960s the drawing office staff averaged between ten and fifteen architects and draughtsmen.



Ernest Ullman, *Young Love* 1963, travertine.



Mutual Square,
Rosebank, 1963.

Grosskopff also writes about the value of a Wits architectural education and the influence of Julian Beinart, who joined the School of Architecture at Wits in 1959, where he served for six years before moving on to the University of Cape Town. According to Grosskopff, Beinart believed that it was an architect's duty to teach the world how to live. "Buildings can and must be more than simply enclosures, they have to say more. They must answer spiritual and atavistic needs" (Grosskopff n.d.). This was the philosophy that resonated with Hermer's views and imbued the approach of the firm.

A commercial practice

The firm has always had a commercial orientation and largely worked for the private sector. Johannesburg has been the main location for its work, although there have been ventures in Durban, in Cape Town, in Accra, Ghana,

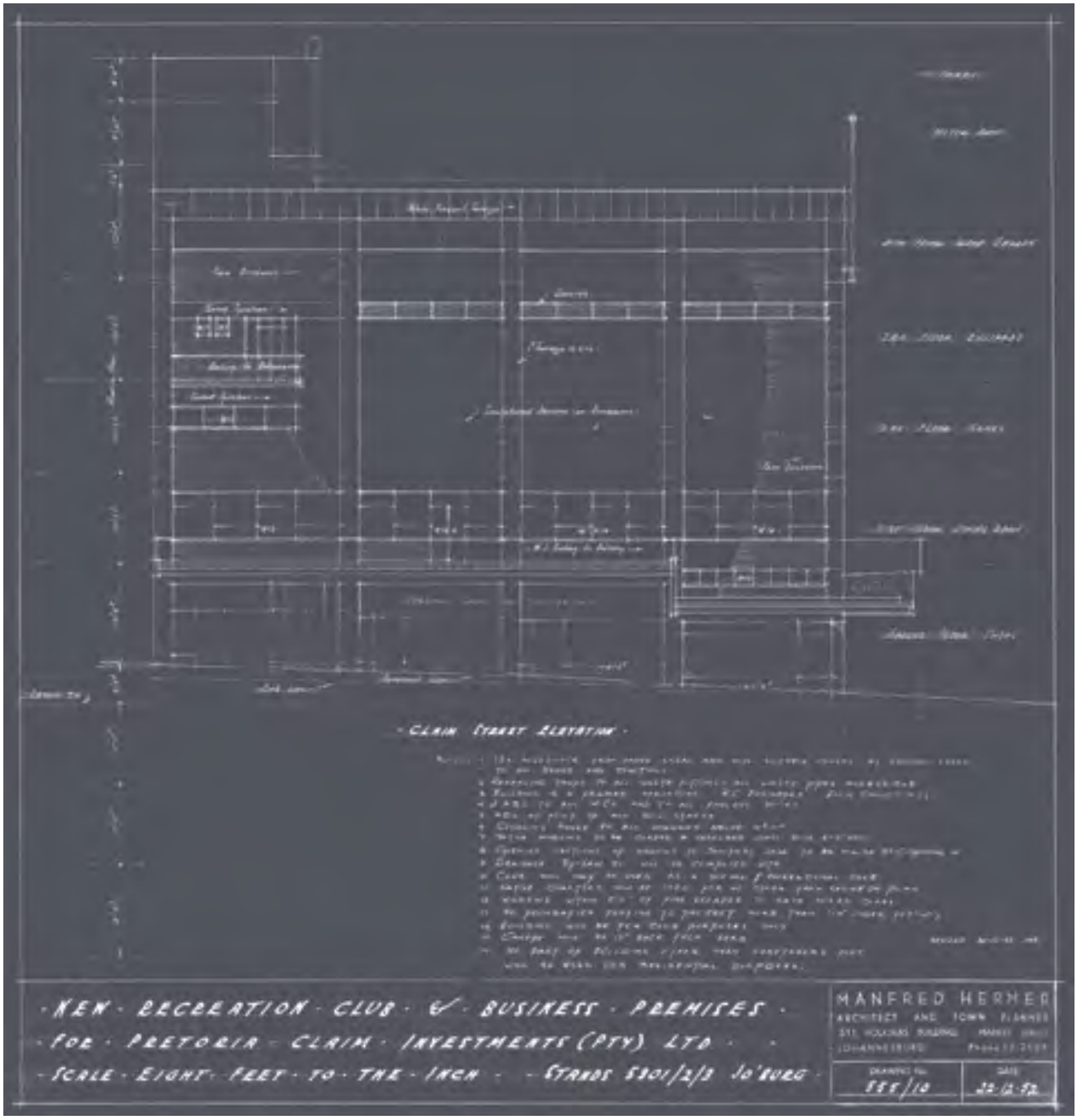
and Ashkelon, Israel. Work for national and provincial government was limited to some school buildings[5] and a couple of telephone exchanges.

Hermer recognized the value of networks, community engagement, and a genuine commitment to social causes in building lasting business relationships. While connections through the synagogue, repertory theatre, sports clubs, Freemasons and ex-servicemen's leagues provided professional opportunities, it was his ability to listen and form lifelong friendships that set him apart. Despite his personal and professional success Hermer seldom entered competitions or sought publicity for his work – an exception, as discussed below, is the Reading Country club in Alberton.

5 In 1951 Hermer published an article entitled 'The Planning and Equipment of Halls for Senior Schools' in the *South African Architectural Record* (Hermer 1951). It is difficult to determine whether the article was aimed at promoting the firm and its capabilities or simply a report based on experience.

Michael Meyersfeld, *Madonna and Child*, photographed in the Summit Club basement swimming pool area, 2012. Archival selenium carbon pigment Quod Tone print. Paper size: 104 x 89 cm; image size: 80 x 60 cm. Edition of 15.





The Summit Club cross-section, 1952.

As noted above, Hermer's designs were influenced by modernist principles, evidenced in his functional, practical, light-infused plans and constructions. Social welfare and a decent standard of living from kindergarten to old age grew out of German social democratic thinking. Another strand in his thinking, according to Chipkin (1993: 310), were the modern ideas about special-needs housing and nursery school buildings drawn from social reform thinking of Britain of the 1930s.

The Reading Country Club, Alberton was another early project, dating from 1949. Six firms of architects were invited to compete in a limited competition, with Norman Hanson[6] appointed as the assessor. Positioned at the foot of some low hills, the long club house gave a view over the golf course, making provision for a bar, lounges, and reception area and change rooms. The technical challenge of dealing with soggy clay was solved with piling concrete foundations to a depth of eight metres. It was a simple, unpretentious, functional design to match the needs of a relaxed club. Materials such as hardened face-bricks, slasto and terracotta tiles together with rough-cast painted walls add to the country ambience.

Another recreational centre, the Summit Club (1952) in Claim Street Hillbrow included an indoor, heated swimming pool in the basement that drew on borehole water in the centre of Hillbrow. A pool of this type was a novelty for the period and served the densely populated high-rise neighbourhood. The club also provided facilities for squash, badminton, table tennis and billiards, with shops positioned on the ground floor. Lily Sachs's distinctive decorative sculptures, combined with Hermer's clean, simple lines and modular approach inspired by the post-Second World War International Style, gave the building its unique character. Together, their work transformed the club into a recognisable landmark. Despite the demographic changes of Hillbrow in the last three decades, the Summit Club has survived, even if its recreational function has now become one of 'adult entertainment.' Nonetheless the building was awarded a blue plaque by the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation in 2015 commemorating its origins, design and history.[7]

The Weil and Aschheim Garment Factory building in Siemert Road, Doornfontein was an important commission for Hermer in the mid-1950s. In 1952 Weil and Aschheim had become a public company and commissioned the lavish new factory, which at the time was said to be the largest dress factory in the country, employing over 700 people.[8] The site was an awkward one, consisting of a rough rhombus with the appendage of a triangle. Hermer's





Above: Ernest Ullman, *Mannequins*, bronze, 1968.

Below: Weil and Asheim, Doornfontein 1967.

6 Norman Hanson, (1909-1991) prominent Johannesburg architect of the 1950s , studied architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand from 1925 to 1931. After graduating in 1932 he entered into partnership with S N Tomkin and N I Finkelsein. He was a friend of Rex Martienssen and Gordon McIntosh, and was part of the Transvaal Group, influential in introducing the modern house and modernist architectural styles to South Africa.

7 The soundness of the structure meant that additional apartment floors could be added to the original five-storey structure. This was done in 1965, with Jack Kampal as the architect.

8 For more information on this project see Anonymous 1955.



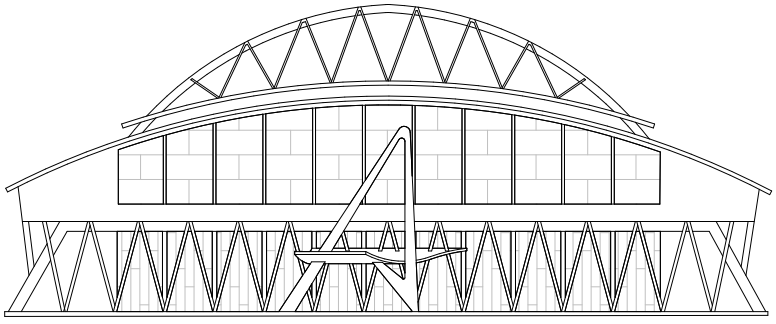
Weil and Asheim, Doornfontein
1967.

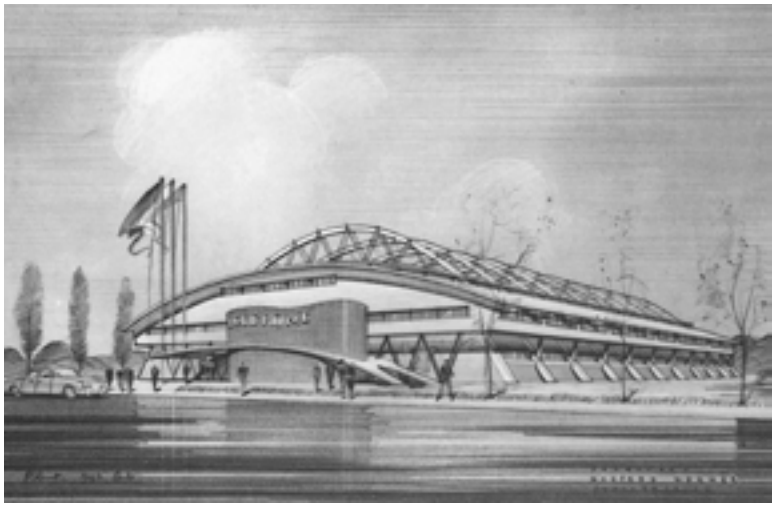
design incorporated a large showroom, a working factory area for garment workers, staff facilities, storage areas, parking, offices, directors' offices and a board room. It showed all the hallmarks of a Hermer building, being modern, lightand stylish, with attention paid to quality materials and finishes. The latest glazing techniques were used to front the building enabling light to be increased and decreased as required for different purposes and at different levels. The success of the project, with its distinctive granite columns and white terrazzo spandrels, led to the commission for the Cape Town Burlington Hosiery Mills (1958).

The Durban Ice Skating Rink, constructed in 1955, was an experimental and innovative structure. Commissioned by the Durban City Council, the project was managed in partnership with the Durban office of Frank Carrington, but the design was all Hermer. The Ice Drome's distinctive feature was its elegantly arched, reinforced concrete roof supported by a lattice of mesh steel trusses, with extended geometric buttresses below. Hermer tackled the challenge of creating both a striking aesthetic and a strong volumetric presence by designing a series of parabolic arches soaring 19.8 meters high and spanning 48.8 meters. Hermer (1955: 3-4) described the building as unique for its time and a first in the country, representing "a perfect example of combined architectural and engineering design."[9] It was original, experimental and innovative, and as noted above, given a mention in Greig (1971: 111).

Hermer's friendship with the plastic surgeon Jack Penn (renowned, as noted above, for his war-time reconstructive

9 An earlier antecedent could well have been the design of the Canadian Quebec Coliseum (1949) as there is a letter on file from the Engineer Institute of Canada attaching a descriptive article.









Above: Manfred Hermer with a model of the Durban Ice Drome, and Hermer (left) and team on site during construction, 1955.
Left: Durban Ice Drome 1955, GLH Archive.





Above and below: Durban Ice Drome 1955, GLH Archive.



Brenthurst Clinic 1965, GLH Archive.



Rosebank Clinic, 1986, GLH Archive.



An architect's impression of Hillbrow's new hospital-to be known as the Rand Clinic - on which work has started at the corner of Bruce Street and Banket Street. It will have 90 beds.

surgery) led in 1955 to the firm's first private hospital commission of note, namely, the Brenthurst Clinic on Clarendon Place, which opened in 1959.[10] The hospital was positioned between Clarendon Place and Park Lane, with an L-shaped design to create a sound barrier against the traffic of the main thoroughfare. Sound proofing, air conditioning, centralised sterilisation, central heating, a mix of general and private wards, an integrated garden, well-equipped operating theatres and a light-filled foyer were all state-of-the-art, carefully planned features of the building.

As private medicine combined with the entrepreneurial flair of a pharmacist-turned-businessman such as Barney Hurwitz, there was a shift in hospital designs in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s.[11] Middle-class patients and private specialists, increasingly reliant on the trend towards medical aid finance, expected good operative and recuperative facilities. Following the success of Brenthurst Clinic, Hermer's practice built up its very considerable specialist expertise in the design of private hospitals in South Africa (as well as projects in Israel and Ghana). The private hospitals designed or redesigned and expanded by the practice included Parklands and St Augustine's in Durban, the Rand Clinic, the Garden City Clinic and Milpark Hospital in Johannesburg.

Hermer's practice also designed a number of apartment blocks in Killarney, Illovo, Berea and Hillbrow, which from

10 Penn mentions the advice and influence on the design of the Australian architect, Sir Arthur Stephenson (1890-1967), a RIBA medallist and world authority on hospital design who was knighted for his work in hospital architecture.

11 Hurwitz came to own twenty-seven private hospitals in various parts of the country, many of which were designed by Hermer and his team.



Milpark Hospital, 1994, GLH Archive.



Garden City Clinic, 1986, GLH Archive.

the 1950s became the increasingly popular flatland areas of Johannesburg. Following on the initial pioneering efforts of entertainment mogul I W Schlesinger and his popular Whitehall court, designed by John Moffat (1924), Killarney in particular became popular as a more spacious, luxurious and prestigious flatland area than Hillbrow. Apartment blocks in Killarney were not as high rise as Hillbrow, being four to five stories and consisting of between thirty-five and fifty apartments, with more generous interior dimensions and enclosed passageways set back off of communal gardens. Influenced both by contemporary American architectural design and the work of the Brazilian modernist Oscar Niemeyer, these residential blocks were appealing because of their modernity, comfort and convenience, away from the high-rise density of Hillbrow and Berea.

After the Second World War, Hermer rapidly became one of the favoured architects practising in Killarney, the first commission being the fifty-two unit Chelston Hall (1950) on 4th Street. There was a further burst of expansion with new blocks being developed in Killarney in the 1960s, and Hermer was the architect of Sloane Square, a smaller block with only thirty-five units, as well as Sevenoaks. These Killarney apartments shared certain characteristics: they were on a generous scale with gardens at front or rear and entered via enclosed and protected corridors (often an apartment had a front and back door). They had sun-filled balconies with generously proportioned rooms and servants' accommodation was located on the roof.

Hillbrow, by the 1960s, was South Africa's most densely populated suburb. It had been proclaimed as a suburb in 1895 but within fifty years had become Johannesburg's high-rise apartment and hotel area, with a cosmopolitan flavour. Hermer's early residential venture into Hillbrow/Berea was Aintree Court, on the corner of Tudhope and O'Reilly roads. By 1965, the firm was designing apartment buildings at an extraordinary pace to meet the growing demand for housing. As Grosskopff (2015) recalls, they were producing apartments "until they were coming out our ears." This surge was driven by the young generation of the 'swinging sixties' moving out on their own, as well as an influx of skilled immigrants, many accustomed to urban living in Europe and elsewhere. The 1960s was another boom decade, with the added advantage of zero to low inflation. Returns were guaranteed. Money could be borrowed at eight per cent, and the more units put on a site the better the return. Grosskopff (2015) explains that the viability studies followed a template: a study could be turned out in a morning and developers were investigating



Sloane Square
Hillbrow, 1960s.



Sevenoaks
Killarney, 1960s.



Chelston Hall
Killarney, 1950.



Aintree Apartments
Killarney, 1968.



Killarney prior to the construction
of the highway
Museum Africa Archive.



every vacant stand in Hillbrow. Apartments were required to face north, as planning laws decreed that all residential units needed to face natural light. Grosskopff adds that the economics of the investment pointed to the importance of a balance of bachelor apartments (the best returns but the most transient of tenants), and one-, two- and three-bedroomed apartments (the worst yield, but the most permanent of tenants).

1965 marks the end of the first two decades of the practice, and it was in that year that Grosskopff became a partner. Hermer (n.d.) comments that by that date the pattern of the practice had been firmly established, with the Hermer Grosskopff partnership seeing the fruits of their commitment to the city and the country. Their clients were among the most substantial trading and investment companies in South Africa. A study of the early years shows that the balance of flair, hard work, loyalty and partnerships with clients, fellow architects and the construction industry that characterised the firm was shaped by the personality of one man. He had the talent and capacity to find the next client and to ensure that the next commission moved seamlessly from tentative idea, to drawing board, to feasibility study, to a completed edifice that stood the test of time. By 1965 major showcase achievements were the theatres (the Civic Theatre, the Alexander Theatre and the then Bloemfontein Civic Theatre), a number of apartment blocks, a pioneering Ice Rink, Our Parents Home, the Brenthurst Clinic, and some impressive offices and factory buildings. In 1965 the most daring and ambitious project, Ponte, lay in the future. The firm's first two decades had laid the foundation stones for a leap of ambition and creativity in the 1970s and beyond, with new partners and connections.

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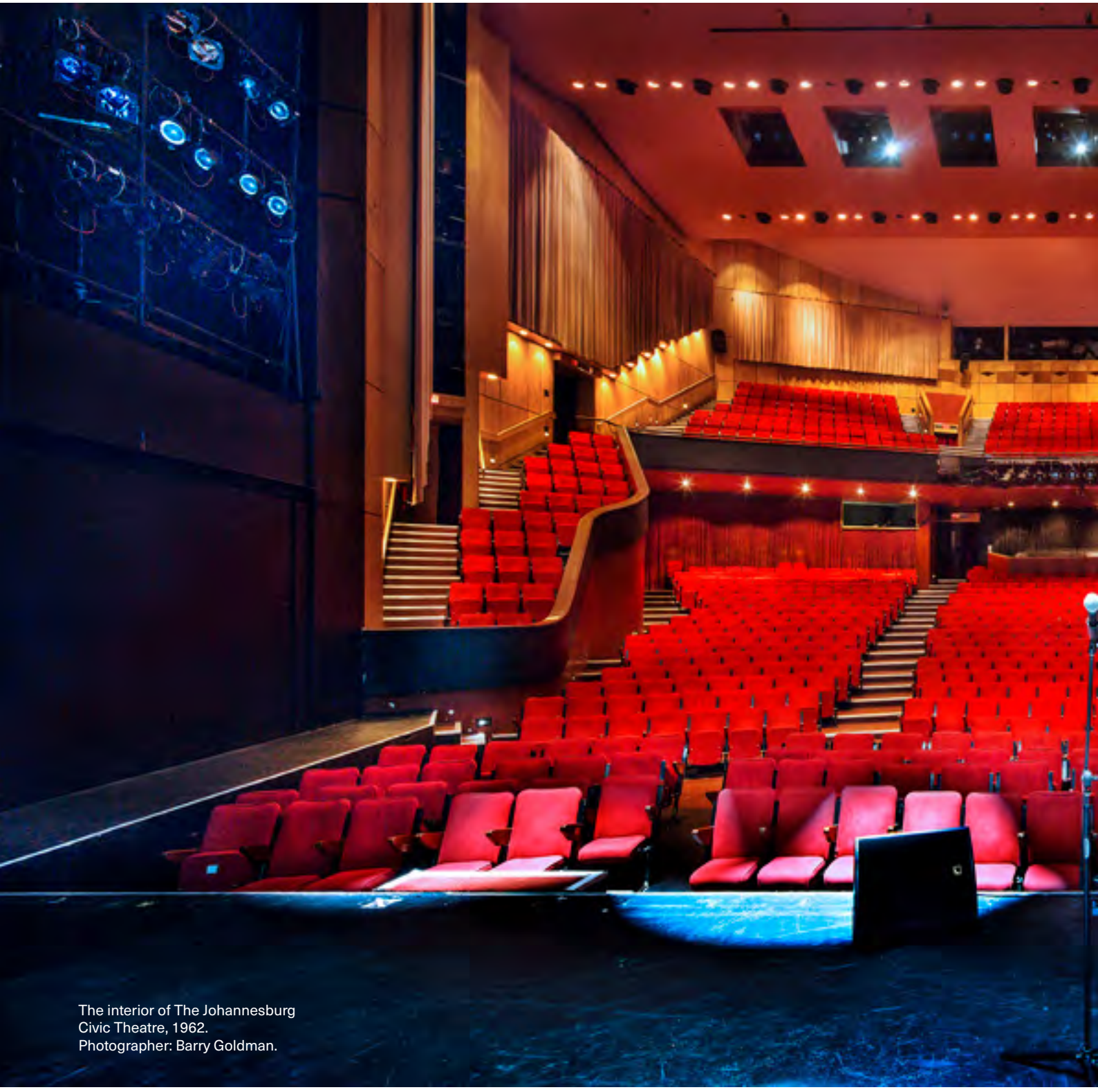
The Summit Club. 1966. Architect and Builder, November: A51.

FOUR THEATRES:

Alexander Theatre (1951) Bloemfontein Civic Theatre (1957) Johannesburg Civic Theatre (1961) Market Theatre (1976)

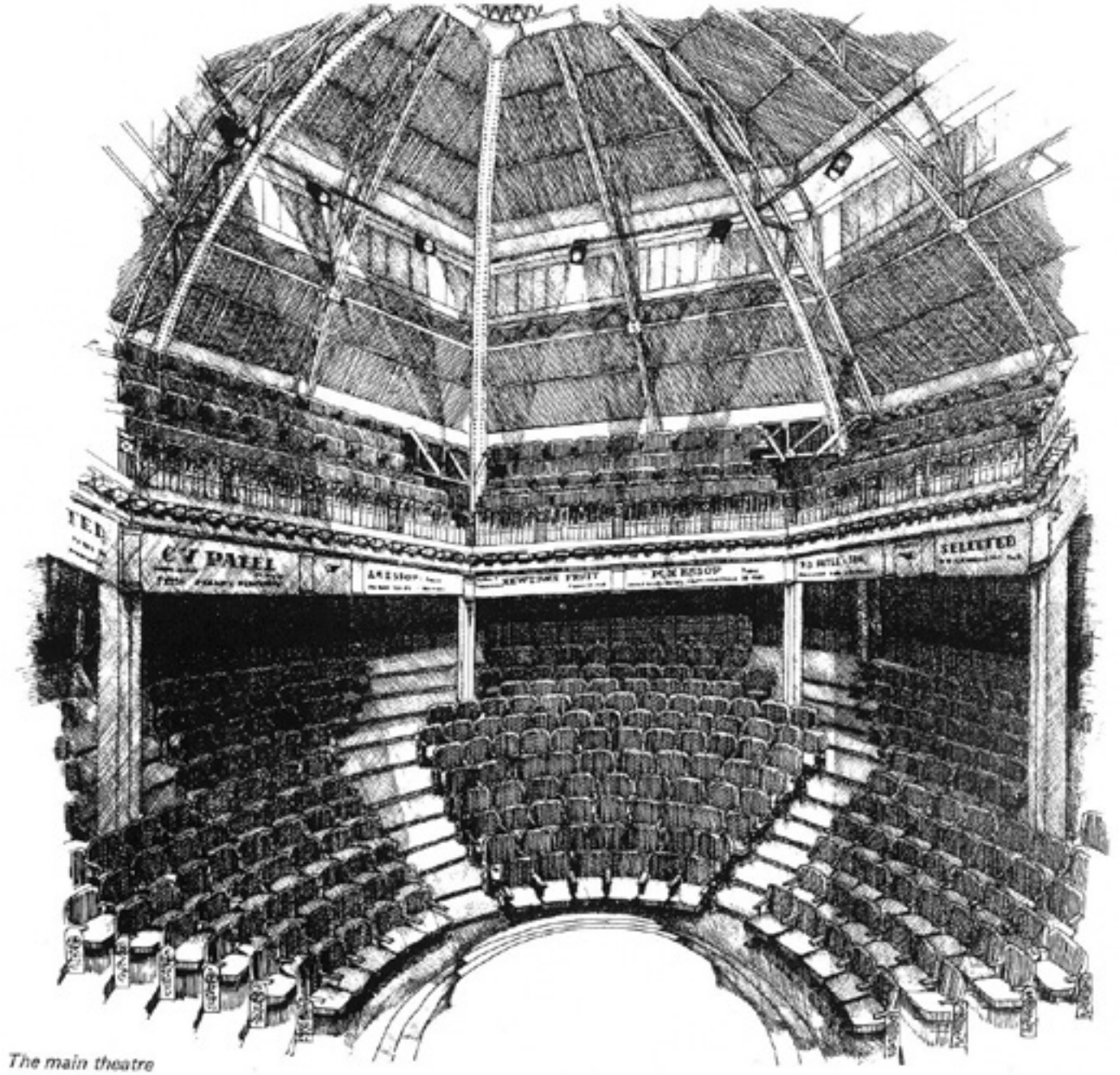
Sarah Roberts

University of the Witwatersrand



The interior of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre, 1962.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.





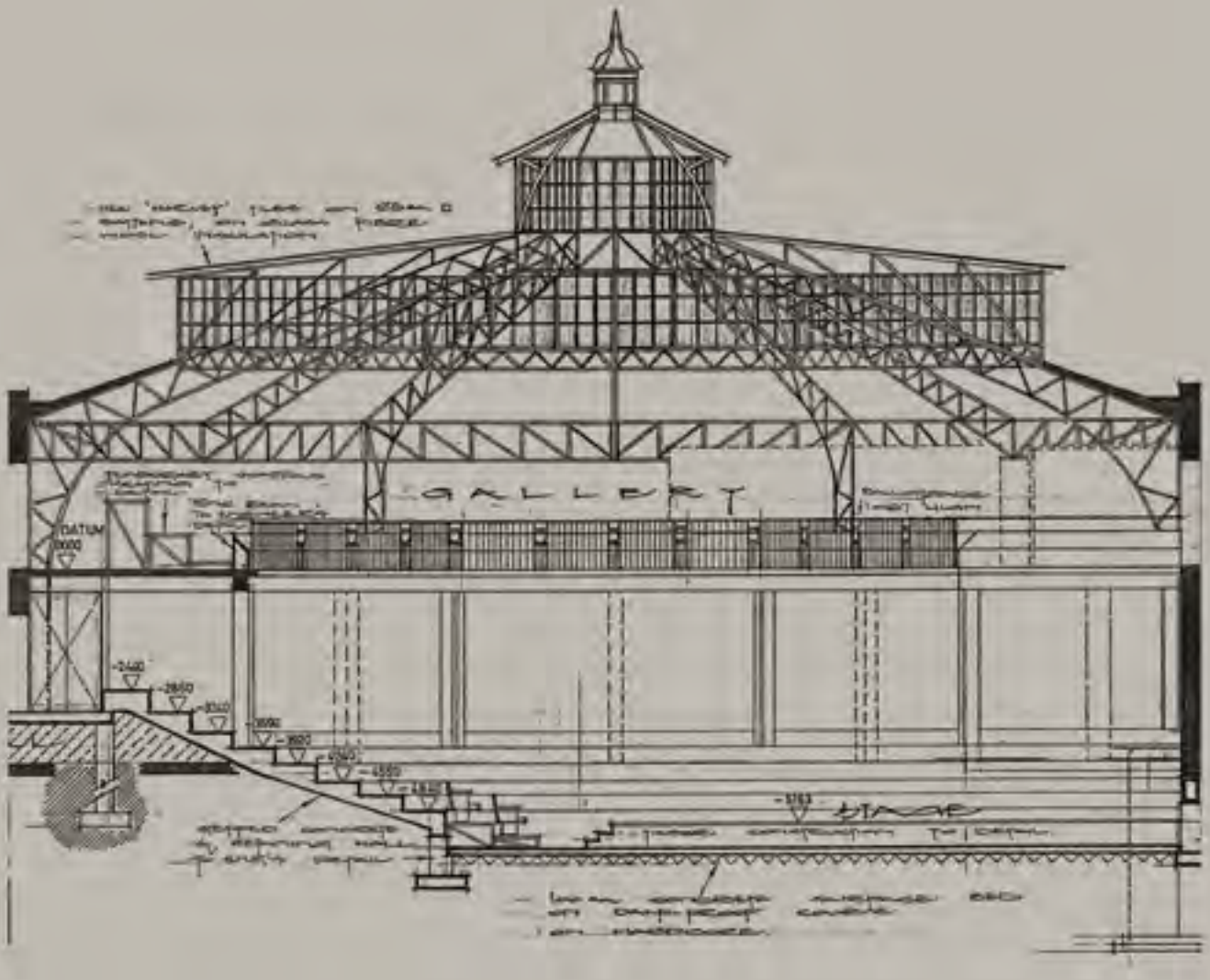
The main theatre

A pen-and-ink drawing by Rodney Grosskopff of the interior of the Market Theatre, 1974. GLH Archive.

Few South African architectural partnerships can supply drawings and materials that archive emergent theatre-making as thoroughly as GLH in the works of Manfred Herman and Rodney Grosskopff.[1] Marking the urban landscape as public structures, their theatres articulate shifts in performance paradigms: first, regarding spatial configuration, they map the move from the proscenium to the thrust stage with corresponding auditorium configurations tending toward the presentational mode; second, in terms of occupation and use, the buildings play a prominent role in forging a professional theatre practice out of the amateur tradition; third, in relation to artistic policy and audience demographics, the buildings, their sites and respective repertoires are closely associated with the display of — and then the challenge to — the hegemony of the Western drama/literary tradition through promoting hybrid inter-cultural collaborations and performance forms.

These trends culminate in all that the Market Theatre stands for in terms of its architecture and use, namely the intertwined accomplishments of fostering original South African works that appealed to broadly socially inclusive audiences in the context of heightened political tension and state prohibitions.

1 Hermer's final words about the commission of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre are a modest recognition of this phenomenon: "The design and carrying through to completion of such a theatre is a privilege given to few Alec Hodge and my staff, am grateful to the city council for this opportunity" (1962:76).



Section through the main Market theatre, 1974. GLH Archive.

In his influential landmark text, *The Empty Space*, director Peter Brook (1968:18) writes: “theatre is always a self-destructive art, and it is always written on the wind [...] In the theatre every form once born is mortal; every form must be reconveived, and its new conception will bear the marks of all the influences that surround it”. Brook’s emphasis on the ephemerality of ‘theatre’ in the sense of the live encounter between theatre-makers behind the scenes, the performers on stage and the audience is thus inscribed in the evolving structure of the ‘playhouse’ itself.

Theatre buildings, in their geometry and proportions, as container and on their own terms as public structures, endure as expressions of particular cultural formations: considerations of space, history and context are powerful determinants of design practices and tensions between adhering to tradition and advancing innovation in theatre design just as they are also an index to the cultural identity of specific groups commissioning that structure.

Consequently, any assessment of the value of these buildings is an opportunity to revisit accounts of the commissioning, funding, mandates, design challenges and solutions which offer a rich perspective of the driving forces that enabled the construction of new theatres and sustained their artistic programmes.

In this chapter, I contextualize Hermer’s three proscenium theatres and their continental style auditoria in relation to the identity of those commissioning and funding the construction, as a precursor to focusing on three distinctive features of the buildings themselves: the judicious treatment given to size, proportion and proxemic relations between players and audience; the prioritization of acoustic considerations as a signature of Hermer’s designs; and a distinctive and increasingly marked manipulation of light as a material definition of the theatre’s identity. Grosskopff’s project of designing the 1975/6 transformation and reconstruction of the Newtown market-building into what has arguably become South Africa’s most celebrated theatre, nationally and internationally, introduces a complex set of considerations of relations between theatre makers, the stories they elect to tell and their audiences along with the associated issues of the funding, managing and administering the use of the building, by whom and for whom. The acclaim granted to both the works produced and the continued significance of this iconic building as a heritage site urges an analysis of the extent to which its geometry and texture are integral to facilitating an emergent popular tradition.

It is not only through looking at the buildings, architectural renderings and photographs that we can understand what each of Hermer's theatres accomplished and their roles in the urban cycle of entropy and renewal. The repository of documents about them provides valuable insights into contextual cultural practices and this source material invites response and consideration. For example, in the souvenir brochure produced for the gala opening of the Johannesburg Civic, Manfred Hermer incisively observes:

> For the architect faced with the problem of designing a theatre the whole concept depends on the type of stage considered to be the most suitable for the particular purpose to be achieved. The design starts at the place where the audience and the performers confront each other, usually the proscenium frame, and resolves itself into a series of decisions regarding actor and audience relationships. The traditional concept of a rigid separation of the audience from the performance no longer exists to the same degree in contemporary theatre. The action is nowadays bursting through the proscenium 'picture frame' on to side stages and forestages in which the audience completely surrounds the actors (1962:73).[2]

Apropos designing the Alex some ten years earlier, Hermer (in Hoffman 1980:104) had this to say:

> Although the theatre is one of the oldest types of building in the world, it nevertheless has developed faster than any other form of building. Whereas the house still consists, in principle, of four walls and a roof, the theatre has undergone great changes from an outdoor stadium with a simple stage and one or two effects machines, to the complex building of today, a building so complex that it may well be argued that few architectural projects present so many problems in design.

The changes to which Hermer refers can arguably be understood as tendencies towards what semiotician, Keir Elam (1991:64) citing psychiatrist Humphrey Osmond calls *sociopetal* and *sociofugal* spatial configurations. The former facilitates social interaction, a relaxed informality and the tone of the encounter encourages social



2 In a chapter entitled "Picture Frames and Proscenium walls" addressing the development of the playhouse in 19th century London focusing on both the iconic Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and the Haymarket, architectural historian Richard Leacroft (1973:170) cites W.J.Lawrence: "For the old fashioned proscenium arch was substituted a gilded picture frame, remote from the footlights, over which the actors were forbidden to step".

The exterior (above) and interior (right) of the Alexander Theatre, Braamfontein, completed in 1951. Photographer: Barry Goldman.





inclusivity if not cohesion; the latter, conversely, isolates and separates, allows for a greater sense of introspection and subjective response. These two polarities are both contained within contemporary theatre practices and its diverging forms and respectively, broadly align with illusionistic and anti-illusionistic approaches to theatre-making.

In their study of Brook's performance venues, Andrew Todd and Jean-Guy Lecat (2003:9) define what they regard as "an essential theatrical form" as "a raw space made for gathering and sharing". Their provisional definition is purposeful and expedient: the term "theatre" explicitly accommodates a range of possible models to challenge the perpetuation of the proscenium and its inevitable association with a bourgeois audience of nineteenth century Enurope, factors such as site and accessibility, the treatment of the façade, foyer, facilities and amenities all frame the experience and perception of the stage and auditorium comprising its inner core. As they put it:


Architect's Big Night at Reps Theatre

Allegations about Boksburg milk scheme "absurd"

Mayors elected

Gas expansion scheme for Eastern and Western suburbs

It is interesting that we remember entering a theatre but rarely remember leaving it. Therefore the first important moment is the arrival, the crossing of the threshold. The true encounter with a space begins when you enter it. [...] In this precise instant many things intervene, including the transition from one kind of acoustic to another, and the atmosphere of the place. You register these things spontaneously, even before analysing them. The senses share in this perception, which is not merely visual, as is often thought. A place is a set of concrete elements bounding the space where life takes place and with its structure determined by its original purpose. The forms, proportions, colours, materials, scents, sounds, all taken together, define the first aspect of a place, its atmosphere and its essence (Todd & Lecat 2003:179).

The 'Alex': the accomplishment of the Johannesburg Repertory Players Society.

Approaching and entering the Alexander Theatre (as a member of the production team or as a member of the audience) is to encounter something of its essence: significantly, the stage door and audience entrance are positioned almost alongside each other in Siemert Street and open directly onto the Braamfontein pavement. Early photographs show the restrained brick façade and clean



The Alexander Theatre, Braamfontein (originally the 'Reps Theatre' for the Johannesburg Repertory Players Society) shortly after completion in 1951. Museum Africa Archive.

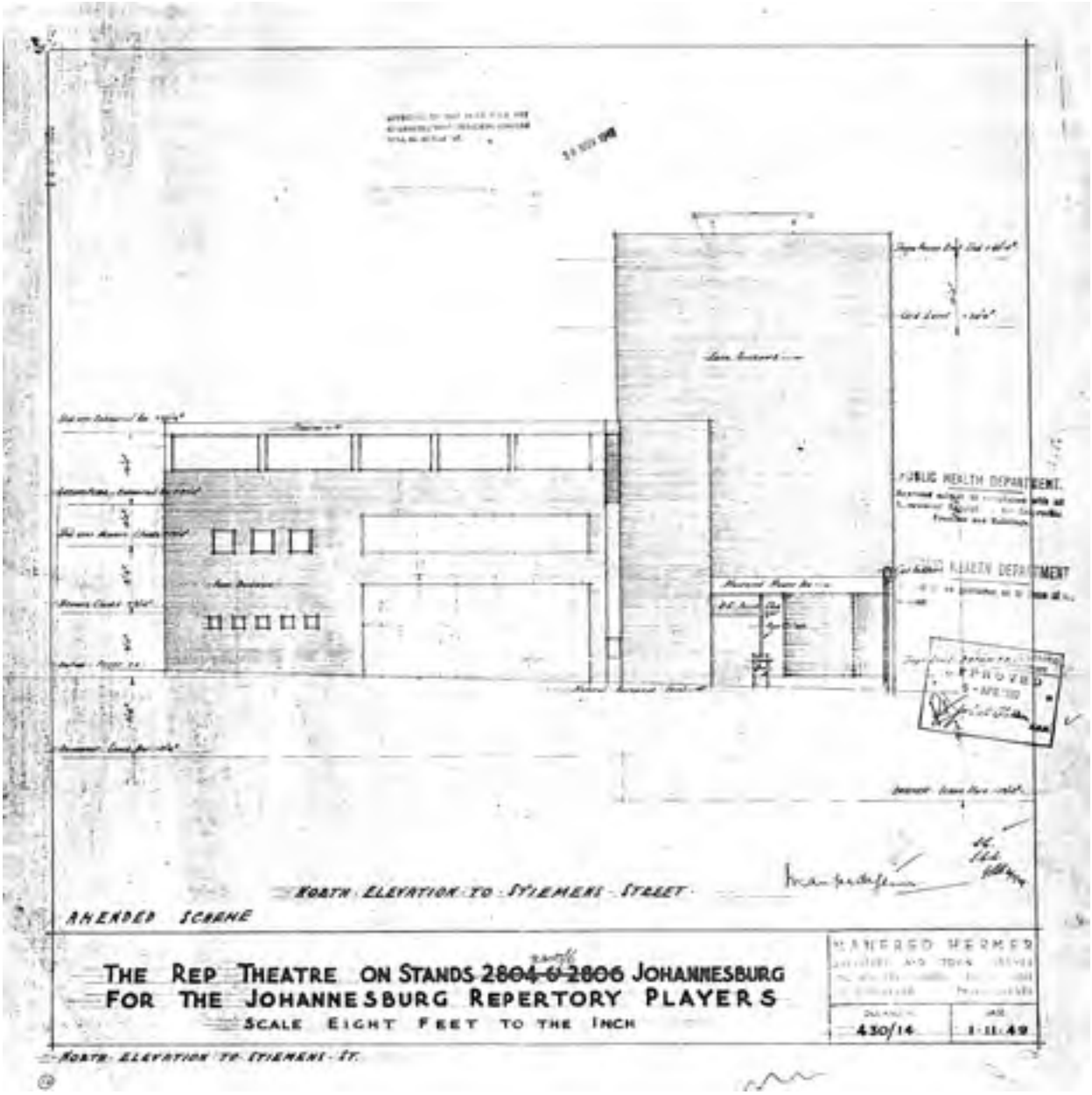
Left: *The Star* newspaper capturing the opening night of the Reps Theatre, November 1951. Manfred and Lesley Hermer are shown greeting the Governor General, Dr EG Jansen

rectilinear properties of the two sections of the building, auditorium and stage with fly tower above, offsetting the striking Broadway style signage proclaiming the theatre's identity. According to Hermer, appointed architect of the project on 31 October 1947, "the Rep's architectural problem can be told in very few words. It was a question of getting a definite amount of essential accommodation on a very small site as economically as possible" (Hoffman & Hoffman 1980: 104). The ostensibly traditional ground-plan does, however, accommodate modernist innovations as the unified auditorium configuration and ornamental restraint attests.

The 'Reps theatre' was intended to provide a permanent home for the Johannesburg Repertory Players Society and also to function "as a paying proposition [...] a theatre for the whole country" (Hoffman & Hoffman 1980:112). The foundation stone was ceremonially laid with convivial celebration on 16th March 1951 with the Administrator of the Transvaal, Dr William Nicol, and the Mayor of Johannesburg, Councillor C.F. Beckett, M.P.C., in attendance. The Hoffmans (1980:113) record that 15,000 invitations had been sent out. The occasion is, nonetheless, described as having been a "very homey affair [...with] refreshments served in the street [...] £10,000 was still needed but an anonymous donor presented a diamond ring as a competition prize". The description gives an insight to the sense of communitas and privilege that initiated the project and saw it through. The spirited ways in which financial setbacks were solved included holding fêtes and dances, selling life membership to the Society and, in a gesture that links individual commitment to the material identity of the building, "selling bricks" (Hoffman & Hoffman 1980:110). The Society boasted (as members and associates) luminaries such as Gwen Ffrangcon-Davis, Taubie Kushlik, Leontine Sagan, Leon



Details of the Broadway-style Alexander Theatre signage, reproduced as artwork on a July 1962 programme for *The Mousetrap*. Museum Africa Archive.



Alexander Theatre, North elevation to Stiemens Street, 1949. GLH Archive.

Gluckman, Vivienne Drummond, Siegfried Mynhardt and Percy Baneshik, suggesting fertile and productive relations between amateurs and professionals. Hermer's souvenir programme statement hints at the discriminatory nuances embedded in nomenclature and the respective status of amateur and professional:

> There are no concessions to amateurs in this theatre because everything that was needed in a well-planned theatre was built into the precincts of this carefully planned house. There will never be any need for improvisations. This is a professional theatre in every sense of the word (Hoffman & Hoffman 1980:118).

Subsequently renamed the Alexander Theatre (in honour of actress and founder of the Repertory Players, Muriel Alexander[3]), the building seated 510 and was opened on November 7, 1951 having cost £67,700. In a clear indication of priorities, the exterior was only partially completed; offices, rehearsal rooms and additions to the stage fly facilities were subsequent projects to be accomplished as funds permitted. Limited resources also precluded bringing out an expert to oversee the installation of the flying system. The task of "putting the system together in spite of never having seen one" fell to Hermer's colleague, Alexander Munro Hodge, who "sorted out nuts, bolts and bits and pieces of metal [...] and successfully assembled the whole involved installation of the grid and galleries" (Hoffman & Hoffman 1980:114).

The modernist style building owes much to a judicious use of material. The elegant resolution of formal and thematic considerations is partly due to Hermer's astute decision to refer to the works of Swedish architect, Sigurd Lewerentz (1885-1975), fêted for his design of Malmö City Theatre (1944) which was regarded by his contemporaries as the most modern and sophisticated theatre in the world. Hermer's response to Lewerentz's creation is suitably unequivocal and economical: "the great lesson taught is that simplicity should be the key note in design" (Hoffman & Hoffman, 1980:104). Indeed, impeccable stylistic integrity and decisive form characterize Hermer's other significant designs of the time, the Gestetner building (1951) and the Durban Ice Drome (1955).

Simplicity and restraint characterize the small foyer with its single significant ornament in the form of a relief sculpture invoking the muses and their arts. The foyer and interior clearly announced the move away from an elaborate gilded frame and decorative opulence. An undated single page drawn from GLH archives records the response of the Hon Mr JH Viljoen (then Minister of Education, Arts and Science) to the design. In his opening address, he expressed his appreciation for Hermer's design in a statement that works hard to embrace something other than conventional expectations of a theatre: "Money was not wasted on ornate design, yet nothing was spared when it came to functional planning."

Hermer's preoccupation with core functional concerns of optimal sightlines and acoustics emerges clearly. He states: "Every effort is being made to enable members

3 Muriel Alexander (1884-1975). Born in Cape Town, the London-trained actress featured in two films of 1921, *The Scallywag* and *The Skin Game* and returned to South Africa after World War 1.





The minimal interior of the Alexander Theatre, Braamfontein. Museum Africa Archive.

of the audience of our own theatre to hear and see everything from every seat in the house" (Hoffman and Hoffman 1980:104). His thoroughly workmanlike means of solving acoustic and sightline challenges is revealingly recounted by Hoffman & Hoffman (1980:104):

> A model is built lined with aluminium or silver paper and small light sources are placed on the stage in the positions of possible sound-spots. The light reflects from the silver walls in the same way that the sound waves would reflect from hard walls. Different sound absorbent capacities are achieved in the model by darkening the silver to the necessary degree. By this means points of echo, dead spots or sound pockets are discovered and the walls of the model are adjusted until the ideal situation is reached...For vision a model of the auditorium was constructed to test the sight lines. A length of thread was attached to a pin to each seat and extended to the stage, the head of the pin representing the eyes of the spectator.



Civic Theatre, 1962.
Museum Africa Archive.



The balanced spatial organization of stage and auditorium of this conventional bifurcated house is as integral to the essence of the intimate picture-frame house that is the Alexander, as its public façade.

The Bloemfontein and Johannesburg Civic Theatres: two small-scale templates for future Provincial complexes?

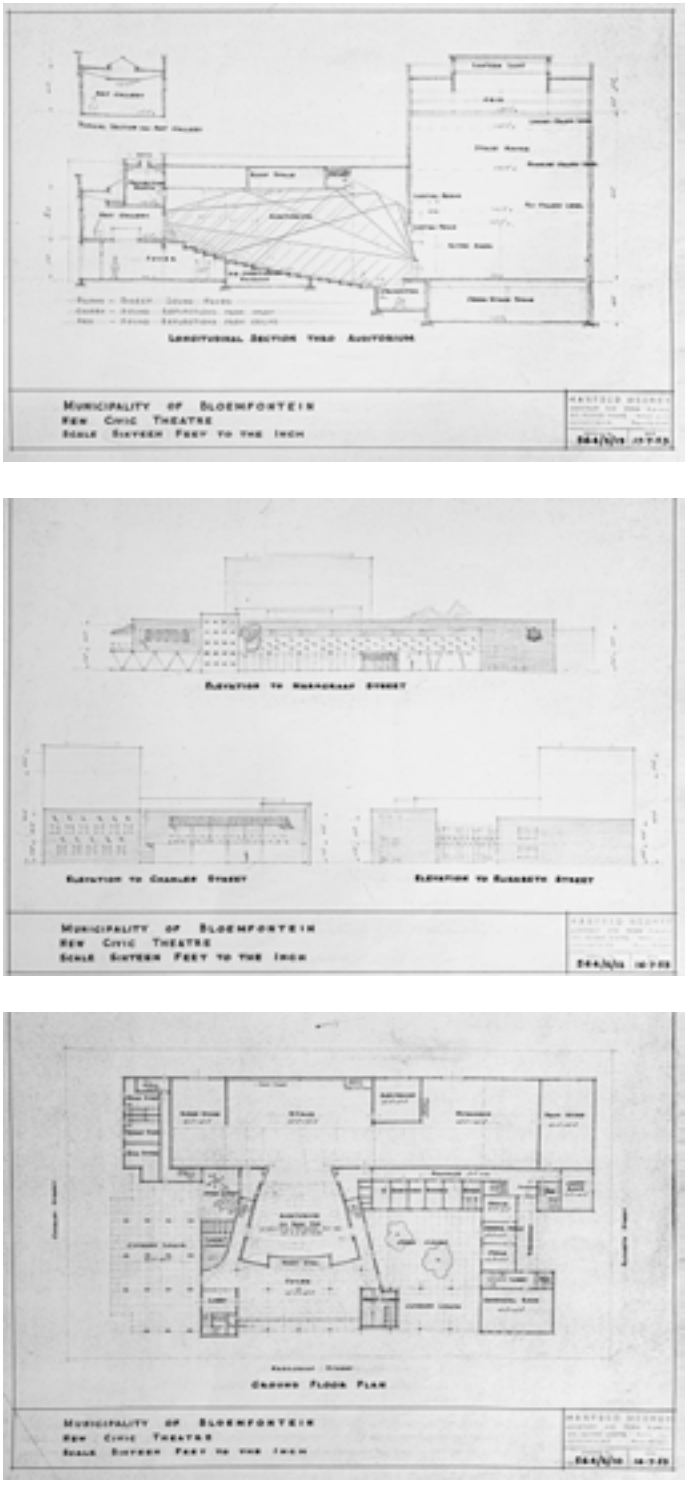
The leading article of the trade magazine, *Limelight* (November 1963), examines ways in which different groups of amateur actors may readily access common facilities and resources. The article is placed alongside a photograph of the newly completed Bloemfontein Civic Theatre. Read in conjunction with a letter published under the pseudonym 'Blikoor' in the *Sunday Tribune* of May 19, 1959, these documents provide some insights to Hermer's accomplishments in his next theatre project. Blikoor describes the building as the "country's most up-to-date intimate theatre" but concludes that it is "a little austere perhaps on the outside." The comment, much like the ministerial pronouncement on the Reps Theatre, reveals a bourgeois predilection for a particular architectural style that conforms to the expectations of patrons rather than theatre-makers.

Blikoor devotes scant attention to infrastructural capacity which we can assess from ground plans: two rehearsal rooms, orchestra pit with a capacity for 36 players, workshop, wardrobe, scene store, dressing room facilities or the theatre's technical engineering. Perhaps this is because of the writer's primary concern with the obligations of the municipality in providing for collective, communal and participatory use in contrast to private or commercial funding. The initiative of the Bloemfontein City Council in providing a venue to serve as a vibrant hub of civic and cultural life appears to have been rewarded by the scope of its opening programme which began on April 15, 1959[4] and ran for four weeks. They comprised *Hellersee*, in Afrikaans, Molière's *School for Wives* in English and an operetta, *Night in Venice* which the letter-writer lauds as "an entirely local effort."

4 The foundation stone was laid on March 28, 1958. Hermer's speech, on presenting the mayor with silver trowel inscribed in Afrikaans and English, paid tribute to Mr Breytenbach, director of the National Theatre, subsequently the first director of the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal, and Professor Inskip, director of the Little Theatre.

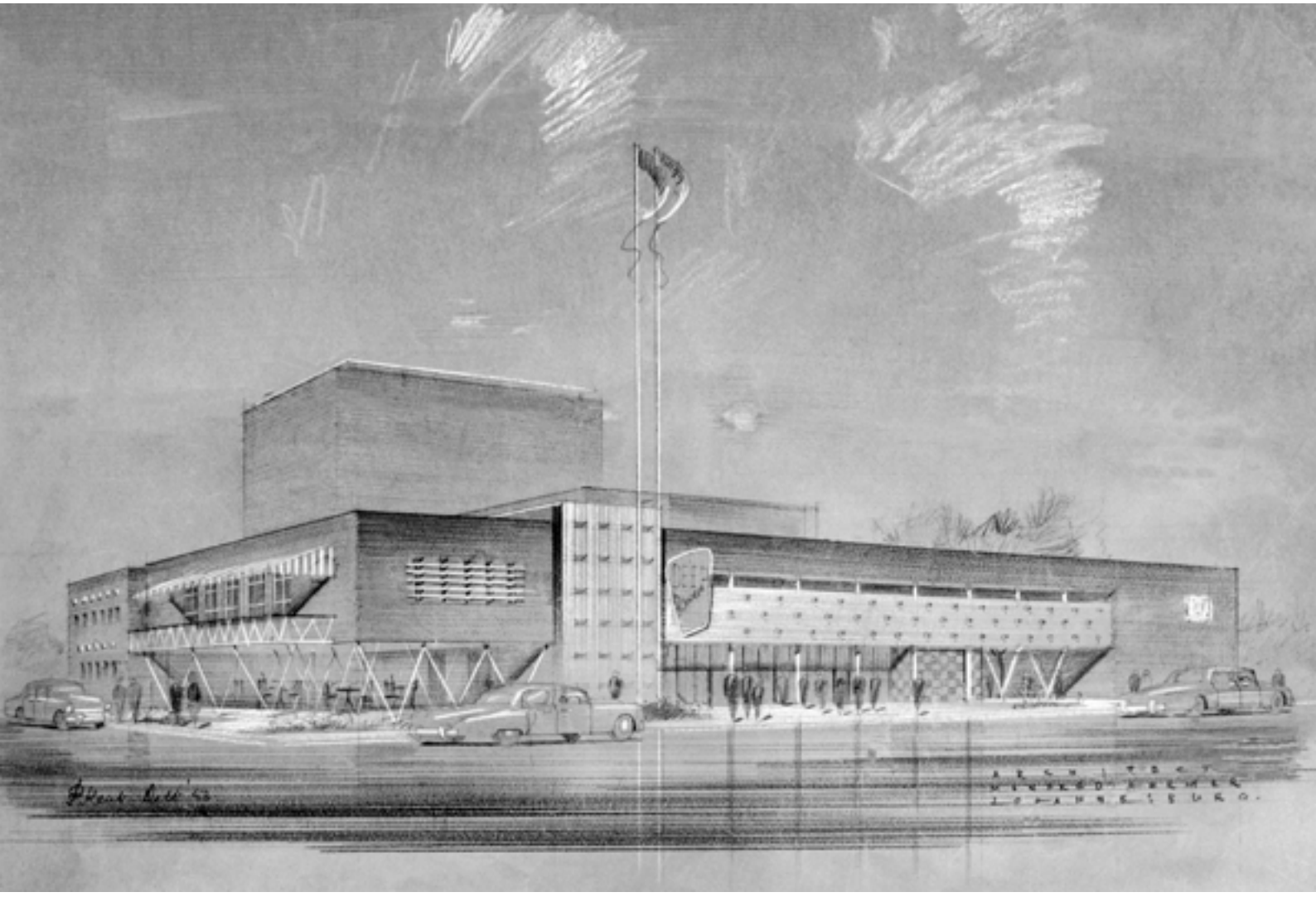
Close scrutiny of the plan and sections of the theatre shows considerable correspondence and affinity in design with the Alex (as the theatre is commonly known) which would allow for productions to transfer readily from one city to the other.[5] But the Bloemfontein theatre differs in a key respect: as the drawings for the ground and first floor show it was designed as more than a receiving house, since it also incorporated production service capacity. The incorporation of the facilities for scenic construction and store, costume manufacture in addition to maintenance, constituted a notable innovation in local theatre design. The vision for how the theatre might serve a local community and its increased provision for the multiple facets of theatre-making suggests that this building might be considered a prototype for the four massive Performing Arts Council complexes in Pretoria (the State Theatre, 1981), Bloemfontein (the Sand du Plessis, 1985), Cape Town (the Nico Malan (now Artscape), 1971) and Durban (the Playhouse, 1986). The Bloemfontein Civic achieved much of what these edifices once accommodated, but on an entirely different scale and under different auspices. Administered by civic rather than state authorities, this intimate theatre is quintessentially human in proportion and happily accommodates both the amateurs and professionals whose interests it was designed to serve.

Hermer's statement in the programme for the gala opening of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre (now in the GLH archives) attests to the scope of his reference and scholarship as much as to his



Plan and section of the Bloemfontein Civic Theatre, 1959.

5 Hermer's acknowledgement of Dr PPB Breytenbach, director of the Pretoria-based National Theatre(1948-1961), as a project consultant suggests that the rationale undergirding the similarity in plan was far more than a happy coincidence but provided a means of testing ways in which productions could tour from one city to another.



Architectural rendering of the Bloemfontein Civic Theatre, 1959.

characteristic modesty regarding his own role as an architect of three of the theatres to which he refers. He begins:

> Germany has built more theatres since the war than the rest of the world put together. This is an almost incredible feat. A small number of drama-faculty theatres have been built in America, while in England only the Chichester Festival Theatre and the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry have been completed since the war [...]. South Africa has in comparison an excellent record. The Johannesburg Civic Theatre is the ninth theatre to be built since the war, the others being the Alexander in Johannesburg, the municipal theatres in Springs, Bloemfontein, East London and Bellville, and the Aula, the National Theatre and the Little Theatre in Pretoria (Hermer 1962:73)



An aerial photograph of Braamfontein in the late 1960s. The Civic Theatre can be seen under construction in the foreground. Museum Africa Archive.





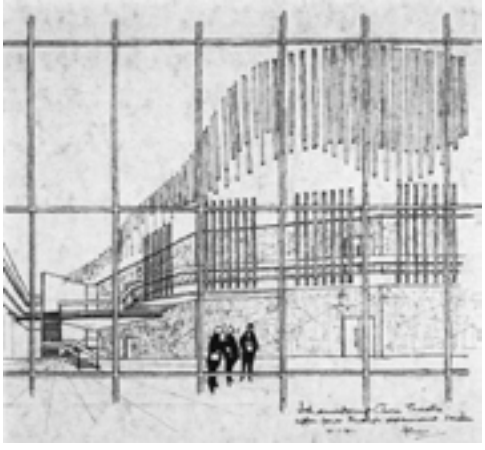
Evening view of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre shortly after its opening in 1962. Museum Africa Archive.





Sensitive to the appeal of arena staging and avant-garde experiments in spatial configuration, he deliberates the aesthetic implications of continued use of the picture frame stage:

> One must remember that a large proportion of the plays performed today were written for the picture stage. In the realm of grand opera, too, the proscenium arch is an essential element in the traditional production of all the standard works (Hermer 1962:75).





His resolution of spacious side stages expands on what he had initiated in Bloemfontein and this plan anticipates the expanded cruciform layout of the Performing Arts Council Opera stages, although it notably lacks the provision of production workshops. Further innovations included the flexible forestage along with two more radical features: firstly, "the walls of auditorium adjacent to the forestage can be moved entirely or in part [...] thereby forming side stages which have advantages in the presentation of Shakespearean and other drama" (Anonymous 1962:19). The second feature of the relatively flexible auditorium as provided for by Hermer appears to be largely untested,

presumably for reasons more to do with turn-around schedules and the ease with which customary use becomes entrenched, rather than any design flaw.[6] Aside from its engineering, specific features of the auditorium merit comment. Hermer's sensitivity to acoustic considerations and optimal sightlines proved decisive factors in delimiting the distance between the stage and the back row of seats in the house. As the SA Architectural Record observes, proxemic relations are enhanced by subtly pleasing material finishes and textures:

The optimum conditions of seeing and hearing indicated a maximum sight distance of 80ft – the limit at which expressions on the faces of actors may be discerned. The auditorium has therefore been planned on a wide fan shape with the back row of seats 80ft from the fire curtain. [...] The auditorium walls are Sapele Mahogany with brandering arranged to give resonance at differing frequencies. The ceiling is partly panelled to repeat the wall treatment and partly finished with flush plasterboard painted dark blue with Sapele dividing stripes (Civic Theatre Johannesburg 1962: 18).

Hermer's appreciation of the constant interplay of light and dark as materials intrinsic to shaping a stage production in space and time perhaps suggested that a continuity

Left: Interior of the ground-floor lobby of the Civic Theatre, photographed shortly after its completion (above), with Manfred Hermer's sketches (below left), 1961. Museum Africa Archive.

A photograph (below right) showing Manfred and Lesley Hermer (left) with Michael Grobbelaar (centre) holding a Civic Theatre programme featuring the starburst motif from the building's façade. This motif was often used as an emblem of the theatre on its programmes during the 1960s and 70s (below left).

6 The Natal Playhouse Drama stage and auditorium (renovation design by Gordon Small) offers considerable flexibility in that it is able to be converted from a proscenium to theatre-in-the-round. Since this is a labour-intensive and time-consuming process, the facility is seldom offered to theatre-makers and seldom implemented.





of effects that could be produced in the auditorium to enhance setting and mood. As though taking on the role of lighting designer, he explains the auditorium finishes: “To create an atmosphere of sparkle and festivity, 440 exposed lamps are set in the sound reflectors of the ceiling and placed against a colour designed to contrast with the patterned, panelled walls” (Hermer 1962:76).

Hermer’s feel for the delicate interplay materials along with the use of contrast and repetition characterizes his treatment of an impressive front façade which gains clarity and gravitas through the contrast with the plane of the spacious piazza in front of it. Restraint and elegance characterize the treatment of the façade which is notably lacking in any form of municipal branding. The skeletal construction of the façade discretely celebrates the vertical plane through a reiteration of lines created by the cast concrete ‘pillars’ that, in their simplicity, evoke something profoundly familiar and deeply symboli. Although, as Federico Freschi argues in Chapter 3, these pillars are formally reminiscent of Lucio Costa’s Alvorada Palace in Brasília, the exact reference remains unclear. By virtue of its transparency, the façade communicates a sense of the life contained within, but this life is only partly glimpsed and shared, the architectural declaration of ostensible open and equal access is deceptive. Right of admission was to be rigidly controlled by legislative strictures of 1965 (that remained in place until 1977) whereby racially mixed casts and audiences were rigorously prohibited. (Hauptfleisch 1997:41). Heralding both State and Civic investment in the new Johannesburg theatre, Dr H.F.Verwoerd’s presence at the building’s inauguration, four years into his tenure as Prime Minister, is impossible to ignore.

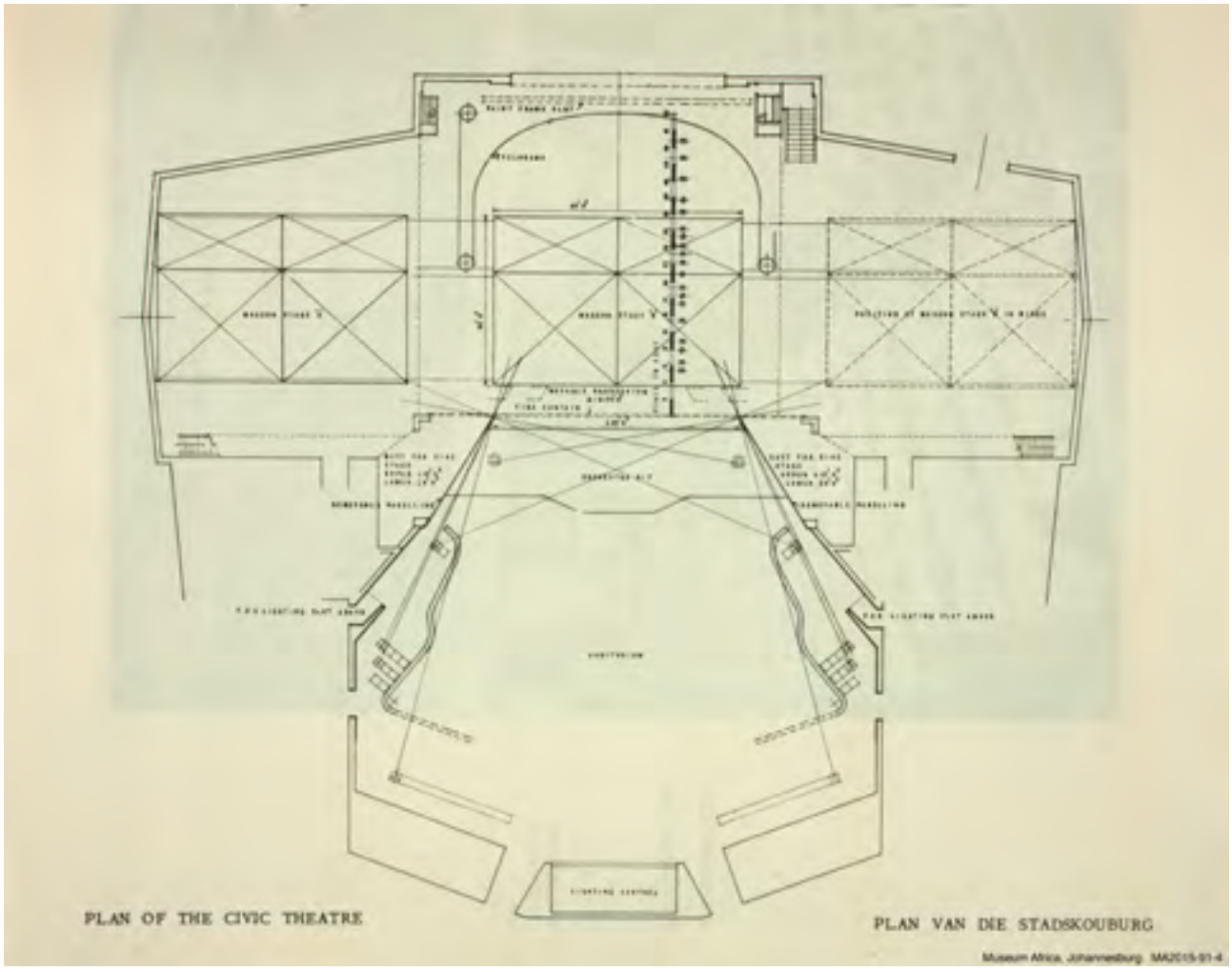
In 1962 Hermer’s stated concern for the Johannesburg Civic Theatre persipaciously refers to its potential occupation and use: “There is as yet no resident company for the building. Let us hope that such a permanent company – or groups of companies representing all the performing arts – will soon be established” (Hermer 1962:76). A year later the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) was formed, but the buildings with which its company of actors is most readily affiliated were to be the Arena, the Alex, the Windybrow and, ultimately, the State Theatre in Pretoria.

In terms that are indifferent to extreme socio-political inequities and segregation, Michael Grobbelaar (General Manager of the Johannesburg Civic 1960-1993) was to write in the gala programme that “The impressive building, commanding a fine view over the city, graces the southern

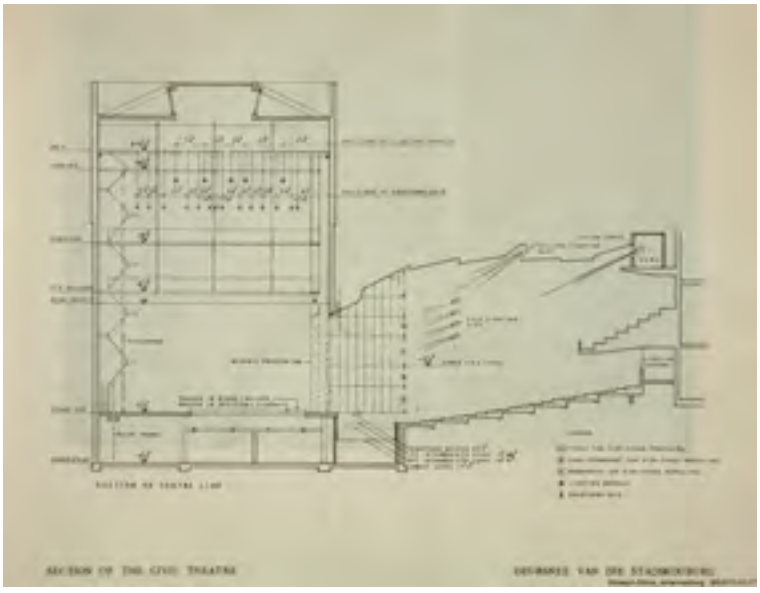


An aerial view of the completed Civic Theatre in a rapidly developing Braamfontein, c. 1975. Museum Africa Archive.









Architectural plans and section of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre, illustrating the spatial organisation of the building, including the arrangement of the auditorium and the stage, 1962.







Photographs of the opening night of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre (below) and a 1964 image of the exterior of the theatre (above) showing Ernest Ullman's sculptural fountain, *The Players*, which was sponsored by Kirchoff seeds. Museum Africa Archive.



The Market Theatre, 1976
GLH Archive.



slope of the Braamfontein ridge like a modern Parthenon. May this theatre become the place where our citizens can meet, relax, gain inspiration and be spiritually enriched" (Grobbelaar 1962:77). The aspiration announced the role that theatre might play in the civic and social life of a privileged minority. This view was to be challenged by a very different theatre, situated in the hub of Newtown and challenging such resources and privileges. This was a theatre that through its location, form and mission actively set out to accommodate resistance and opposition.

The Market Theatre

One of the two men who were to found The Market Theatre, Mannie Manim,[7] had worked two years at the Johannesburg Civic as its first stage/production manager. In an interview with J Brooks Spector (2007:4) Manim says:

> One of the most significant experiences that was to shape my thinking about this country was when, a month or so before the opening and as a young white man in his twenties I had to interview a line-up of black men old enough to be my father for the jobs of stage hand, flyman, cleaners, etc. There were hundreds of them and only about twenty jobs in all. Making those choices was the most difficult thing I had ever had to do [...] from then on, I would do all in my small way to end apartheid.

Reflecting today on the making of the Market, Manim (2015) introduces details worth documenting:

> We were looking for a space, Hermer and I. He was my partner in this, and we met every morning at 6am before he went to the office. We looked at garages, discos, synagogues, churches, all of those kinds of places and discussed where we would put the stage, the foyers ... all those kinds of things. Then there was that phone call to my office in Pretoria ... don't forget, I was working with PACT drama at the time. Maurice Norton, thought that the fruit market was the shape of a potential theatre. We went there almost immediately. We collected a group of city engineers on our way. It was still operating as a market and there they were, all these engineers standing on the

7 Mannie Manim (b. 1941) has been the recipient of numerous national and international awards for his contribution to South African theatre including the distinctive honour of Chevalier des Arts et Lettres being conferred on him in 1990 by the French Government. Mannie Manim 2014.

table with the apples doing 'to be or not to be' like true thespians. Norton and I went up to the gallery and it all fell into place: it was big enough and small enough.

He stressed his personal ties with Hermer, and their working together in the lead up to the opening of the Civic:

> He was a friend, a real friend, and a friend of Oom Breytie,[8] too [...] don't forget he had worked with Barney and me at the Arena in Doornfontein – he designed that too. It is not there any longer, so perhaps people aren't interested in that. But when we were looking for a venue for the PACT Drama youth theatre in about 1968, or 69, with the help of Breytie, we went down to the Tech campus and identified one of those old houses. Hermer did the design for that venue too.

Richard Southern (1977:28), in tracing the development of what he calls "the organised stage" or purpose-built theatres designed to house evolving styles and traditions of theatre-making, pointedly establishes two phases. The first phase, that of "the costumed player" operates fully independently of the need for a permanent architectural base since the primary resources of the actor, namely voice, gesture, appearance and instruments, are all that a professional performer requires.[9] Site, stage and background are what Southern calls "secondary resources" and their formal structuring supports and amplify the performance in providing optimal receptive relations for the audience/spectator. This set of ideas not only helps us in understanding the formation of the group of creative artists constituted as the Company, which predates its residency at The Market, and also returns to the core of the performer's art: the primacy of the interactive encounter between player and audience.

Manim credits Hermer with investing considerable time and care in helping to identify the appropriate site for the new independent theatre venture, but it was Rodney



Artistic director Barney Simon (right) and managing trustee Mannie Manim (left) both played central roles in the establishment of the Market Theatre, 1976. Simon remarked that their intention was "to create a theatre that would echo the energy, the variety, the dangers of the marketplace".

8 P.P.B. Breytenbach (1904-1984 see footnote 6 and 7) was affectionately and widely known within the theatre community as Oom ['Uncle'] Breytie. Awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of the Witwatersrand in 1980, he was an educator, social worker, amateur actor and influential theatre administrator. (PPP Breytenbach 2012).

9 Speaking at the memorial service (November 6th 2007) of the late Patrick Mynhardt (1932 – 2007), veteran actor Louis van Niekerk explained that Mynhardt's last wishes were to make the final journey to the cemetery laid in his coffin tied to the Venter trailer drawn by his reliable old vehicle in the way that the consummate professional and most peripatetic of performers had always lived. (Oom Breytie 2012).

Grosskopff who took on the reconstruction project. In her history of the Company, Pat Schwartz (1988:47) describes Grosskopff's early impressions:

> He was fascinated by the light in the main marketing hall (now the main theatre) [...] He describes as 'the most exciting moment of the entire project' the first moment he saw it. 'It was infused with this incredible light floating in from everywhere. It was very ethereal really because it was shining in little dark nooks and crannies all over the show'.

The extraordinary effect of natural light through the clerestory had made a similar impression on Manim. But along with the remarkable structural feature of the

Old photo of Market Theatre with Newtown Cooling Towers in the background, date unknown. Source: The Heritage Portal.







Johannesburg Market Square before 1900. Museum Africa Archive.



domes,[10] the working needs of a theatre interior were to diminish any continued sense of the impact of the very features that had confirmed the rightness of the building for a transformation into a theatre in the first place.

The move from the Braamfontein Ridge to Newtown invites comparison with the citadel of the *acropolis* (imbued with its aura of order, stability and sanctity) and the colourful, chaotic, living medley of the *agora*. Lewis Mumford (1991:175) in his magisterial study *The City in History* (first published in 1961) defines the *agora* as the "dynamic centre of the city". His account of the *agora* goes a long



10 Schwartz (1988: 48) writes of the domes that "[The] dome upon dome reminds [Grosskopff] of the baking powder tins he loved so much as a child, with their pictures of a tin within a tin, and when he describes them to a non-professional it is with a sense of pure, childlike glee. Writing for colleagues, he puts it more soberly. 'The quadrants are arranged in an octagonal pattern and rise unimpeded through the gallery, past an octagonal clerestory light to meet an octagonal compression ring on which sits a charming octagonal cupola. This is an exact miniature of the main structure which, in its own case, rises to its own tiny octagonal compression ring and in turn finishes in a tiny cupola.'"



Above left and above: Inside the Newtown Market, c. 1900. Museum Africa Archive.

Left: Programme from the opening night of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*, the inaugural performance at the Market Theatre, autographed by members of the cast, 21 June 1976.

way to accounting for the evocative vitality and apocryphal status The Market was to acquire.

> If in the fifth-century economy the agora can properly be called a marketplace, its oldest and most persistent function was that of a communal meeting place [...]in its primitive state, the agora was above all a place for palaver; and there is probably no urban market-place where the interchange of news and opinions did not, at least in the past, play almost as important a part as the interchange of goods.

The Market Theatre's identity arguably extends beyond the purely nominative association with a rich history of communitas and sociability implied by this kind of social gathering and interaction which fuses assembly, exchange and entertainment. Grosskopff's research into the history of Johannesburg's market trading provides a rich seam to pursue historical links between popular entertainment and commercial activities along with early urban planning developments. The spatial organization of the marketplace in its formative phase, geared towards access and

inclusivity as an archetypal sociopetal configuration, appears to have been retained in the 1904 Newtown building and in Grosskopff's design for its transformation into a theatre.

The first performance at the Market Theatre took place on June 21, 1976 in the Upstairs theatre with Sandra Prinsloo[11] (playing Masha) under the direction of Barney Simon in Chekhov's classic *The Seagull*.[12] Schwartz (1988:73) offers a terse account of events five days earlier:

> Barney Simon and actor Peter Piccolo were up a tree in a vacant lot cutting branches for the set of *The Seagull* which was in its last week of rehearsal when army helicopters flew over heading for Johannesburg's black townships. Soweto and Alexandra were in flames ...'If it had not been the last week of rehearsal, *The Seagull* would not have been my choice as an opening production,' says Simon now.

Prinsloo was to leave PACT to play Charlotte Corday in the opening production staged in The Market Main Theatre on October 19, 1976, namely, Peter Weiss's 1964 play *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat, Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the direction of the Marquis de Sade, understandably truncated to Marat/ Sade* (Schwartz 1988:74).[13]

The choice of this play is a telling response to the momentum of surging resistance and township militancy. The final scene calls for the 'actors' of the play within the play to break the boundaries of the fictional frame

11 Sandra Prinsloo (b. 1947) is a multi-award winning actress. In 1985 she took on the title role of Miss Julie playing opposite John Kani and the intimate love scenes between a white woman and a black man caused considerable controversy. In 2014 she was presented with the National Order of Ikhamanga (in silver) for those whose artistic work has benefited South Africa by the South African Government. (Sandra Prinsloo 2015).

12 Barney Simon (1932-1995) was a writer, director and playwright. A close associate of Athol Fugard and Peter Brook, Simon's best known plays include Phiri (1972), Cincinatti (1979) the collaborative projects Woza Albert! (1981), Born in the RSA (1985) and the adaptation of Can Themba's short story The Suit (1994). (Barney Simon 2015).

13 Opening the Upstairs in advance of the Main theatre is a cogent and eloquent expression of a commitment to making work for an audience as a vital preoccupation and a priority over size and scale of the venue. It is as revealing of the values and vision of Simon and Manim as Simon's afterword: "When we began in 1976, we lived in a terrible but deceptively simple time. Today complexity is our given. The world we live in changes every day – marked by State of Emergency, new clampdowns, strikes, stayaways, sanctions and cruel factionalism [...] and to penetrate any kind of truth that speaks for all is virtually impossible (Schwartz 1988:204).



The auditorium of the main theatre of the Market Theatre complex viewed from the stage. 1976, GLH Archive.

in an anarchic confrontation with the audience. This is a startling Artaudian *coup de théâtre* in which *mise-en-scène* triumphs over spoken utterance. The action has interwoven historical incident and fiction to arrive at a point of crisis. There are three interrelated sets of issues bound up in this daringly theatrical and intense image on which the play ends: first, the violation of respectable middle-class notions of theatre and its repertoire of polite entertainment, second, the destabilization of positions of customary socio-political privilege and power, and third, the active celebration of resistance and the role of dramatic writing and theatrical production as a form of activism in which relations between the 'real' and the 'imagined' are confounded categories. The choice of play firmly demonstrates Simon's sense of the value of staging classic narratives as an allegory of immediate and local political issues but equally suggests a template for emergent local dramatic writing. Fifteen years later, as Artistic Director, Simon – celebrated more for fostering emergent local writing than for his continued recourse

to the classic repertoire – concluded the Annual Report 1990/1991 with this assertion:

> Theatre in South Africa is among the most vital and thriving in the world and the world recognizes this. It happens everywhere. Not only in the centres of culture, but where people gather to learn about history and literature, the roots of violence, [...] Because we choose to reflect our country, to tell its stories about itself, the Market Theatre is a meeting place, a training place, a sharing place for people of all cultures and intentions (1991:32).

The key question that might be posed is what factors proved so potently enabling? To what extent does the building, its prior history, its acquisition, design of the restructuring occupy a central position in facilitating the kind of work that elicits such responses? While the open stage and exposed lighting grid annihilate the customary layout of the proscenium stage and its conventional use, surely something other than simple questions of geometrical configuration imbues the institution as an architectural structure with a particular identity? Or, does the unbroken circle of pillars and steel girders so central to the construction of the main hall overtly linking auditorium and stage promote a subliminal connection between performers and audience, giving rise to an unique and

Below and above right:
View of the interior of the Newtown market hall during its transformation into the Market Theatre, showing workers amid the ongoing construction, 1975, GLH Archive.





inimitable performance aesthetics as surely as the main entrance provides non-discriminatory access to those working in the theatre and its patrons alike?

Unlike the three theatres discussed thus far, the proposals for the Market Theatre, effectively a considered work of renovation and transformation, are undergirded by what Lecat (2003:12) would call the "latent core identity" of the building – and that "latent core identity" is a complex social and civic history embedded in volatile exchanges and recorded by Grosskopff in his undated article "Johannesburg Market Theatre". Revisiting the early history of Johannesburg's market trading not only allows for a series of cultural and political statements to surface, but invites identifying parallels between public amenities such as marketplace and theatre. They share concerns regarding situation, ease of access and strategies of crowd management – discreet or otherwise – in addition to complex questions regarding the ownership, lease and administration. The legacy of a robust exchange endures in visible markers of the building and how it functions to serve as signifiers of continuity between past and present. This range of markers – subtle or distinct, structural and 'decorative' – textures the unique experience of the Market Theatre encounter. They include the two wall-mounted round clocks – long defunct as time-keepers

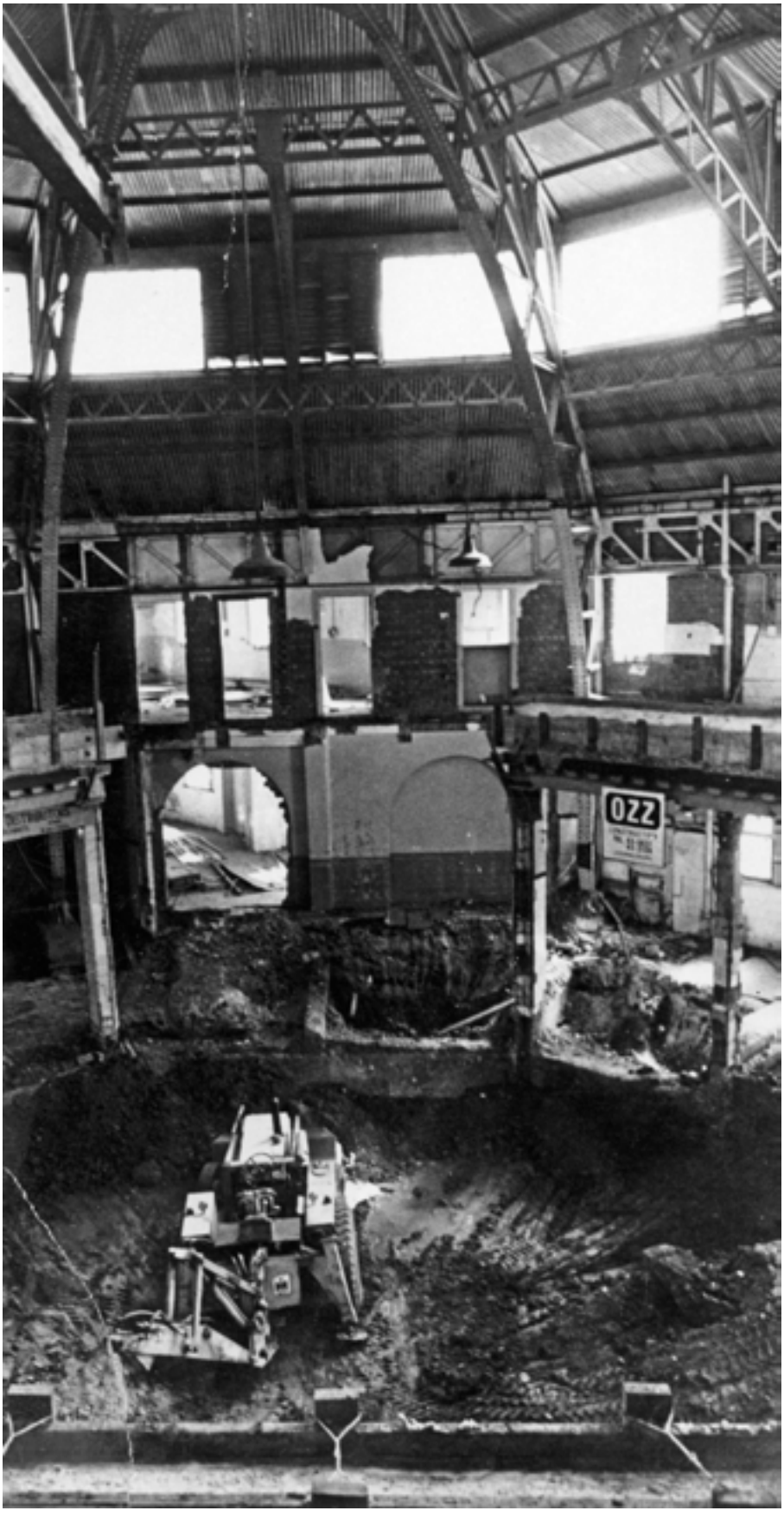
but nonetheless cogent reminders of ways in which time-keeping governs trading hours as much as performances – while the brass bell used to signal the start of trade in poultry and produce is preserved in the foyer and rung by the Front of House manager to summon patrons to their seats. In the main auditorium the history of trading is overwhelmingly present, commemorated in the signage imprinting the identities of early traders on the present, "Patel, Ismael and Essop, third or fourth generation descendants of those early pioneers who joined the first market in Johannesburg soon after its establishment in 1887" (Grosskopff n.d.: 27). To commemorate the renowned veteran actor-activist of the Struggle years, the main stage was renamed the John Kani Theatre in 2014.

In 1904, the building that was to become the Market Theatre was built by Henderson and Gordon to a design supplied by the Town Engineers department. Trading operations began in 1913. Sixty years later, as Schwartz (1988:13) records:

> A bustling, colourful, lively place, the Newtown Market fell silent in 1975 when the growth of the city demanded still larger premises. Threatened, like much of old Johannesburg, with destruction, the graceful building was saved through a combination of determination on the part of some city councillors [...] and the dedication and foresight of a city council official called Maurice Norton.

Johannesburg newspapers had advertised the premises' availability for hire and specifically invited the submission of proposals from theatre managements. One of the key conditions of the lease was that "the historical character of the building should be changed as little as possible" (Schwartz 1988:23). The deadline for submissions to Norton of the City Engineers Forward Planning Branch was December 31, 1974. It was Norton's efforts in researching the history of the building that were to unearth a structural detail ensuring its preservation: "the main arch of the market hall [...] was the longest three-pin arch in the Southern hemisphere" (Schwartz 1988:23).

The Company, headed by Manim and Simon, submitted a tender in which they proposed to advance emergent South African writing and provide a permanent base for actors committed to such work. They pointed out that none of the extant 12 theatres in Johannesburg could boast a similarly committed resident company dedicated to dedicated to nurturing emergent work. In total, three tenders were submitted. The successful Company bid proposed renovation and construction estimated at



Photograph showing earth-moving equipment clearing the interior space of the Newtown market hall during its transformation into the Market Theatre, a project undertaken by Ozz Construction,1975 GLH Archive.



costing R60,000. City Councillor Francois Oberholzer is recorded by Schwartz (1988:28) as defending the decision on curiously worded terms: “We wanted this theatre to be an amenity for ordinary people.” Since legal statutes prohibited fostering racially diverse audiences Oberholzer’s professed commitment to social inclusivity is rendered considerably ambiguous and greater credibility lies in the rationale for awarding the tender to the lowest bid: it implied less invasive renovation and compliance with retaining the historic features of the building as stipulated.

In archiving the life and work of the Company, Schwartz, despite her actor-centred focus, gives considerable weight to the making of the theatre and the key role played by Rodney Grosskopff as architect: “It was his baby and he regards it still with all the affection of a parent for a growing and often difficult child” (Schwartz 1988:47). Grosskopff’s writing conveys a vivid sense of his impression of the building:

> The magnificent east façade is a fruit salad of architectural style consisting in the main of a combination of ‘Banker’s Georgian’ and ‘Edwardian Baroque’ with a sprinkling of Victorian bits and pieces and garnished with alterations in the ‘Municipal workshop’ style.’ If the façade lacks architectural purity, it abounds greatly in charm, yet it has an irresistible sense of majesty (Grosskopff date and source unknown: 26).

He launches the article with a series of unequivocal assertions:

> It has been said that a city that has lost its historic buildings is like a man who has lost his memory. Johannesburg, hardly out of its formative years, not even a teenager by city standards, has almost lost its memory already.
> Without a memory we are without the experience which mellows us.
> Without a memory we are without the upbringing which gives us confidence.
> Without a memory we have not the tradition which gives us pride (Grosskopff date and source unknown: 26).

Both Grosskopff and Gary Zulberg, Managing Director of Ozz Construction contracted to the building, became Market Theatre Foundation members and were actively involved in fund-raising initiatives. Schwartz (1988:65) credits them as being the “ebullient and enthusiastic leaders” of these activities (before and after the opening

The construction of the main auditorium of the Market Theatre nearing completion, 1975. GLH Archive.

of the complex): Grosskopff himself advocated a Saturday morning market which eventually opened in 1984 in the Mary Fitzgerald Square and – mindful of the popularity of *Biltong and Potroast* on television[14] – a competition to find the comedian of the year, with businessman and entrepreneur Tony Factor sponsoring the prize. Comedians performed at no charge and the event was hugely successful as was the benefit concert by (the then virtually unknown) Ladysmith Black Mambazo, which featured, as a supporting act, an equally unfamiliar pair of singers who subsequently achieved considerable renown: Johnny Clegg and Sipho Mchunu (Schwartz 1988:64).

Unforeseen amendments to the design escalated projected costs. Changes were partly due to the unavailability of the original engineering drawings on which to base the designs, and entailed constant revision and the need, as Schwartz puts it, "to design on site" as one particular incident reveals:

> One night, Rod Grosskopff recalls with a shudder, 'the builder phoned up and said: 'something has gone terribly wrong, the costs have gone haywire.' Members of the building team descended on Grosskopff's home that night and by midnight 'they had frightened me to death.' A sociable person, Grosskopff decided to share his fears and summoning Mannie Manim and all available liquid resources – a bottle of Kahlua consumed between midnight and 3am – 'we decided that the budget wasn't so important anyway'. Having decided that, there was no reason not to add a platform up in the trusses for the lighting control and R30,000.00 worth of air conditioning [...] In the end the cost of the job came to nearly R250,000.00 (Schwartz 1988:52).

Financing strategies included negotiating a bank loan and implementing a range of cost-saving initiatives to supplement fund raising activities, but the identity of the building owes much to materials unearthed through resourceful bargain hunting. The creative use of recycled materials was a core tactic in both the construction of

Pamphlet from a fundraising initiative inviting donations of building materials and equipment for the completion of the Market Theatre, 1976 GLH Archive (below) and summary report on funds raised (below right).



Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

Amount enclosed (cheque/postal order**).....
(**please delete NOT applicable)

Date: .....

In order to help build the Market Theatre complex:

☐ I would like to give a bag of nails for	R 1,00
☐ I would like to give a laid brick for	R 5,00
☐ I would like to give a gallon of paint for	R 10,00
☐ I would like to give 10 bricks for	R 50,00
☐ I would like to give a seat/s with my name on it for	R100,00
☐ I would like to give a spotlight for	R250,00
☐ I would like to give a lighting batten for	R500,00
☐ I would like to give an intercom system for	R1000,00
☐ I would like to give the sound installation for	R5000,00

☐ I will reserve my donations until I have visited the Market Theatre – please phone me at my home/business number ..... to arrange a time.

Please indicate which contribution you would like to make. The first 200 donors will be invited to a special Preview Night Party.

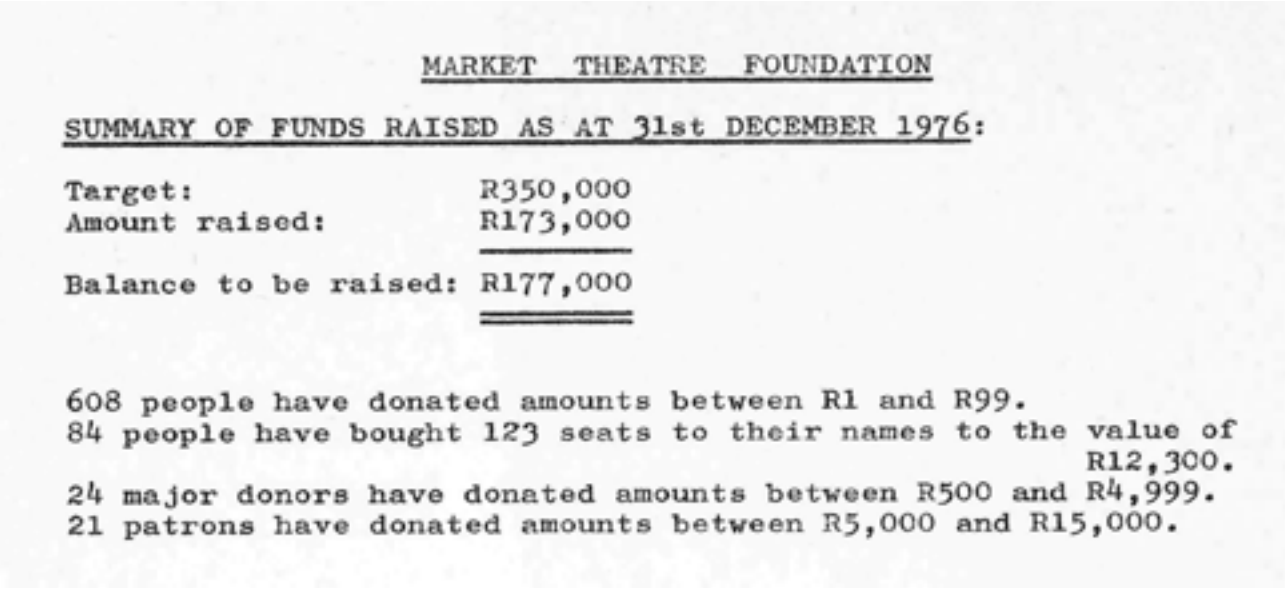
14 The introduction of television had considerable impact on theatre audiences. Its introduction in South Africa was relatively late. John Matisonn (2012: 5) writes; "Thanks to the nationalist Government, South African Broadcasting and telecommunications were backward in ways almost incomprehensible to developed economies .... South Africans first saw television broadcast tests in 1929 in both Cape Town and Johannesburg. After the interruption of World War II, mass implementation worldwide began at the end of the 1940's, but it would be 1976 before Pretoria would risk its polluting effects here."

the building and its furnishing. Grosskopff's pleasure in attending to the details articulating the inherent identity of the building is revealingly recounted:

> The semi-circular windows which frame the Market Bookshop are an example both of that detail and of the anecdotal nature of the creative process. In search of two appropriate windows Grosskopff had been doing a grand tour of every demolisher's yard and junkyard in Doornfontein. Finally he found just what he wanted. So 'I rushed up to The Market and found Barney and as we got there there was this young couple in overalls and T-shirts loading our windows onto the back of a truck.' Devastated, Grosskopff and Simon used all their considerable combined persuasive powers on the couple and then went off to have coffee. When they returned to The Market, they found two windows of the set of six unloaded and left with the couple's compliments. They never found out who their benefactors were (Schwartz 1988:55).

Finishes and furnishings were similarly acquired:

> Apart from technical equipment and original thoughts, there was very little new under the dome of the Market Theatre complex in those early days. Furnishings were hand-me-downs scrounged at the cheapest possible rates from a variety of sources. The seats in the Upstairs Theatre started life in the Adam Leslie theatre in Doornfontein and were acquired by Manim at just under R2.00 each after fierce opposition from a representative of the Bapsfontein Pleasure Resort. They later did duty

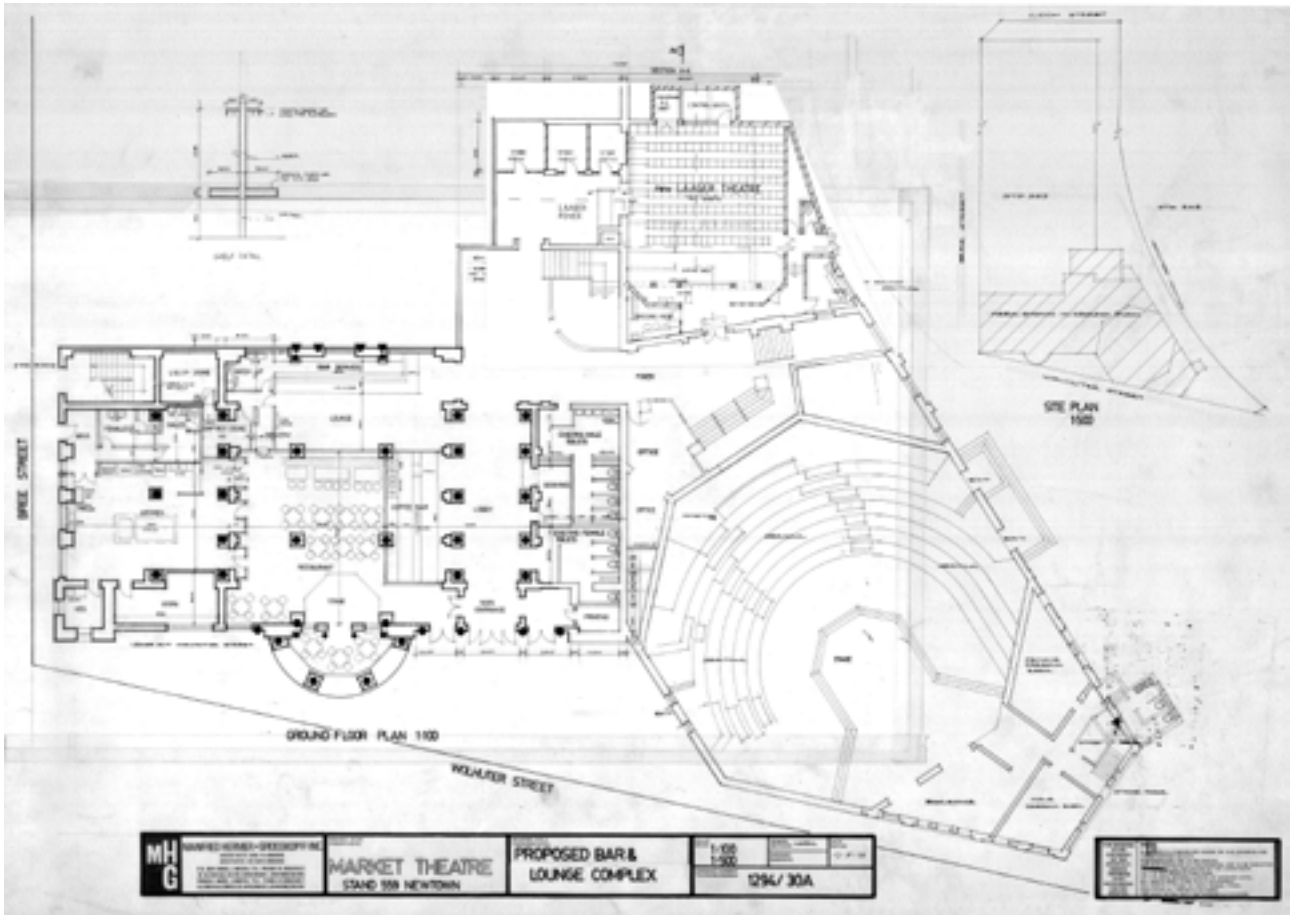


MARKET THEATRE FOUNDATION

SUMMARY OF FUNDS RAISED AS AT 31st DECEMBER 1976:

Target:	R350,000
Amount raised:	R173,000
Balance to be raised:	R177,000

608 people have donated amounts between R1 and R99.
84 people have bought 123 seats to their names to the value of R12,300.
24 major donors have donated amounts between R500 and R4,999.
21 patrons have donated amounts between R5,000 and R15,000.



Architectural site and ground-floor plan of the Market Theatre, illustrating the spatial arrangement of the performance areas in relation to circulation routes and public access points, 1979. GLH Archive.

> in what was to become The Laager. [...] Audiences in the main theatre sat on seats they might have recognized as coming from the Old Capital cinema in Pretoria (Schwartz 1988: 56).

Groskopff's role in accomplishing the transformation from working marketplace to theatre while still preserving and enhancing architectural features of the building cannot be underestimated. Considerable excavation was required in the main hall to accommodate the adaptable thrust stage and surrounding 475-seat auditorium with its optimal rake. The sixteen columns of the octagonal hall not only had to be reduced to eight, but, on discovering that their load bearing integrity had been compromised , a cast concrete beam was laid to take over the role of the pillars (Schwartz 1988:45), which nonetheless continue give the appearance of their supportive function. The horizontal position of the balcony rail in the main theatre is an ingenious response to an edict from Francois Oberholzer which required that the ornate metal handrail be retained (Schwartz 1988:49).

In plan, the Main Theatre configuration closely resembles the popular public theatres of Elizabethan London. Characterized by geometries that fostered qualities of intimacy, the design of the public theatres promoted a frankly presentational style and intermittent use of direct address that acknowledges the presence of the audience as vital participants in the interactive encounter that constitutes socially engaged theatre. Like that of The Market, the architecture of these theatres was rooted in the architecture of everyday life, having evolved from the use of temporary stages erected in public squares or courtyards of an inn or the form of the baiting pit of the Bear Garden surrounded by vertical galleries for spectators. The architecture of the Globe,[15] along with that of other theatres proliferating at the time, might be described as an eclectic mosaic of the hybrid cultural performance practices and pragmatically recycled building materials from buildings that had been partially destroyed by fire. A prominent feature is the provision for a densely compacted audience all within intimate proximity to the action. Utilizing the full capacity of a vertical plane as a viewing space promotes the sense of audience presence, agency and cohesion in addition to ensuring intimacy. For the performer, the steeply raked tiers of seats set in the three rising galleries, one above the other, creates the effect of a 'peopled wall' intensifying the sense of audience presence as a constitutive element of the performance itself.

Architect Rodney Grosskopff photographed at the Market Theatre, 1976. GLH Archive.



Grosskopff's remarkable and unique design articulates a contemporary idiom unconstrained by the objectives which characterize the quaint and curiously Disneyworld quality of 'the reconstructed Globe' (1997)[16] on London's South Bank. The stage and auditorium of The Market is founded on a response to the original form of the extant structure and is manifest in an expression of sustained integrity and lack of pretension rather than contriving to make the correspondence between the proposed local theatre and a historical referent. Nonetheless the congruencies with all that the Globe represents are worth pursuing.The rich heritage of English Renaissance dramatic literature produced by Elizabethan playwrights

15 As Southern (1964: 172) records, there appear to have been "some ten of these playhouses In London" built between 1576 and 1623. *The Globe* was built in Bankside "from timbers of the demolished *Theatre*" (of 1576) and burnt down in 1613 like *The Fortune* which burnt in 1621. Both were rebuilt, *The Globe in 1614* and *The Fortune in 1623*.

16 The reconstruction was commissioned by actor director Sam Wanamaker and based on evidence of the 1599 and 1614 versions of the original. It opened with a production of *Henry V*.


The Johannesburg
MARKET THEATER



has a corollary in the scholarship focusing on its presentation and cultural significance to a distinctly heterogeneous audience in the public theatres. Since none of these theatres still stands scholars interpret the scant clues to account for these structures, among them The Globe. Evidence suggested by the de Witt sketch, the Roxana and Messalina prints and references within contemporary plays along with fragments from the Fortune and the Hope contracts, is at times contradictory but nonetheless allows for a range of determinations to be arrived at with some certainty.

Within the unified enclosure of the Elizabethan theatre, an open thrust stage projected boldly into the pit area and was backed by the façade of the 'tiring house' which served as a permanent backdrop delimiting the spectator's eye and focusing attention on the actor. Two doors in this facade provided for entrances and exits, while the hidden area behind accommodated a properties store and costuming area. The octagonal inner core of the stage and auditorium both partially roofed, has an obvious point of affinity with the octagonal plan of The Market with Shakespeare's "wooden O" (Henry V1.i.13), having as its focal point a raised wooden stage. The tiring house facade corresponds with the rear wall of The Market stage behind which the two dressing rooms are situated. The two large arches on the lower level and four smaller open doorways on the balcony level contain small areas upstage of these openings which allow partial visibility invoking the minstrel gallery above the stage and the far more controversial feature of the Elizabethan 'inner stage.' The retention of two of the original sixteen pillars of the market hall not only provides an optical link and sense of continuity between auditorium and stage, but further reinforces the correspondence with one of the dominant features of the de Witt drawing of The Swan (1596): two pillars support the roof and partially cover the playing area. These pillars would appear to have been the only vertical elements on an otherwise open stage.

The Market main stage, although the auditorium is arranged in just a little over 180 degrees rather than a near complete circle with the stage as part of its continuum,

A ballpoint pen drawing of the exterior of the Market Theatre by Rodney Grosskopff, c 1986. GLH Archive.

remains largely an open stage with no permanent masking features or wings. The theatre with its capacity ranging up to 520 seats and a back row no more than 13 metres from the stage, retains a sense of intimacy and the unity of stage and auditorium is accentuated by the exposed steel girders integral to its structural integrity.

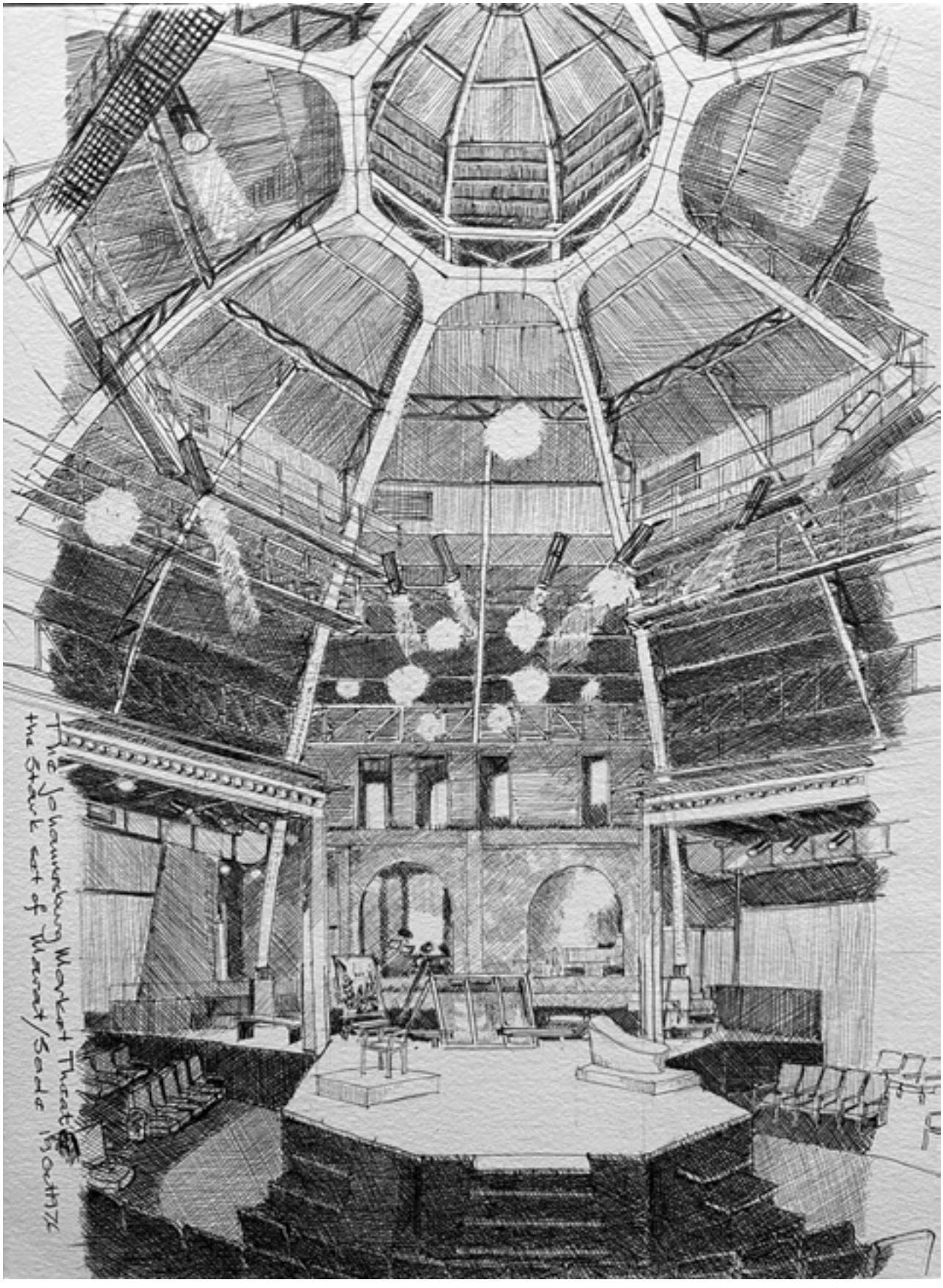
Performance and design conventions integral to proscenium theatre tend to stress the pictorial plane, since the frame so readily not only accommodates, but actively promotes, spectacle rather than the actor-audience relationship at the core of the theatrical encounter. The thrust stage, confusingly labelled *proscænium* in the de Witt sketch, calls for building up the mise-en-scène from the floor manipulating pathways of animate and inanimate elements of this stage sculpturally rather than pictorially, suggestively rather than literally and ever mindful of the multiple sightlines from the auditorium. Propositions for treating the open thrust stage as a proscenium, through either permanent conversion or temporary treatment, (in my opinion) verge on a fundamental betrayal of the integrity and the challenge that the thrust configuration offers.

Lecat (2003:116), an expert in identifying and refining alternative performance sites, asks:

> Can we fix up a place and perhaps embellish it without losing any of the atmosphere which embeds the human beings who have lived there in time and their own culture? [...] it is necessary for each place to preserve its identity even in its modifications. [...] When visiting an old space, it is interesting to reflect on what has to be destroyed, altered, or preserved. The concept of preservation implies that the history of architecture should be understood as a collection of cultural experiences that need to be preserved. Any change has to respect certain rules.

The Market main stage, like its management, administration and naming, has undergone a series of subsequent renovations aligned to processes of transformation and democratization. It behoves us today to register the extraordinary sensitivity of the initial design and the work it facilitated. Lecat's propositions were clearly guiding principles for Grosskopff's acknowledged and nuanced transformations of a heritage site and invites reflection on the extent to which these principles have continued to inform the subsequent revisions to the building.

A drawing of the Market Theatre main stage by Rodney Grosskopff, ballpoint pen on paper, 1976. GLH Archive.


The Johannesburg Market Theatre
the Stark art of Marcel Soede 1980 1977

Continuities and Discontinuities.

Today, the producers and performers, theatre makers and technicians responsible for commissioning these culturally significant buildings are perhaps little more than names to most theatre patrons and even theatre practitioners. Nonetheless, the structures imagined and built to the specifications of Hermer and Grosskopff endure, albeit further renovated and modified to realign with current needs.[17] This quality attests to the unique fate of the structure and design of theatres, as Lecat (2003:193) puts it:

> Although in general the architecture of monuments and cities roots man in space and time, the architecture of the theatre – which is comprehensible only from the standpoint of life – retains a living presence only as long as it submits to continual modifications. That is the responsibility of those occupying a space, those who give it life and use it...

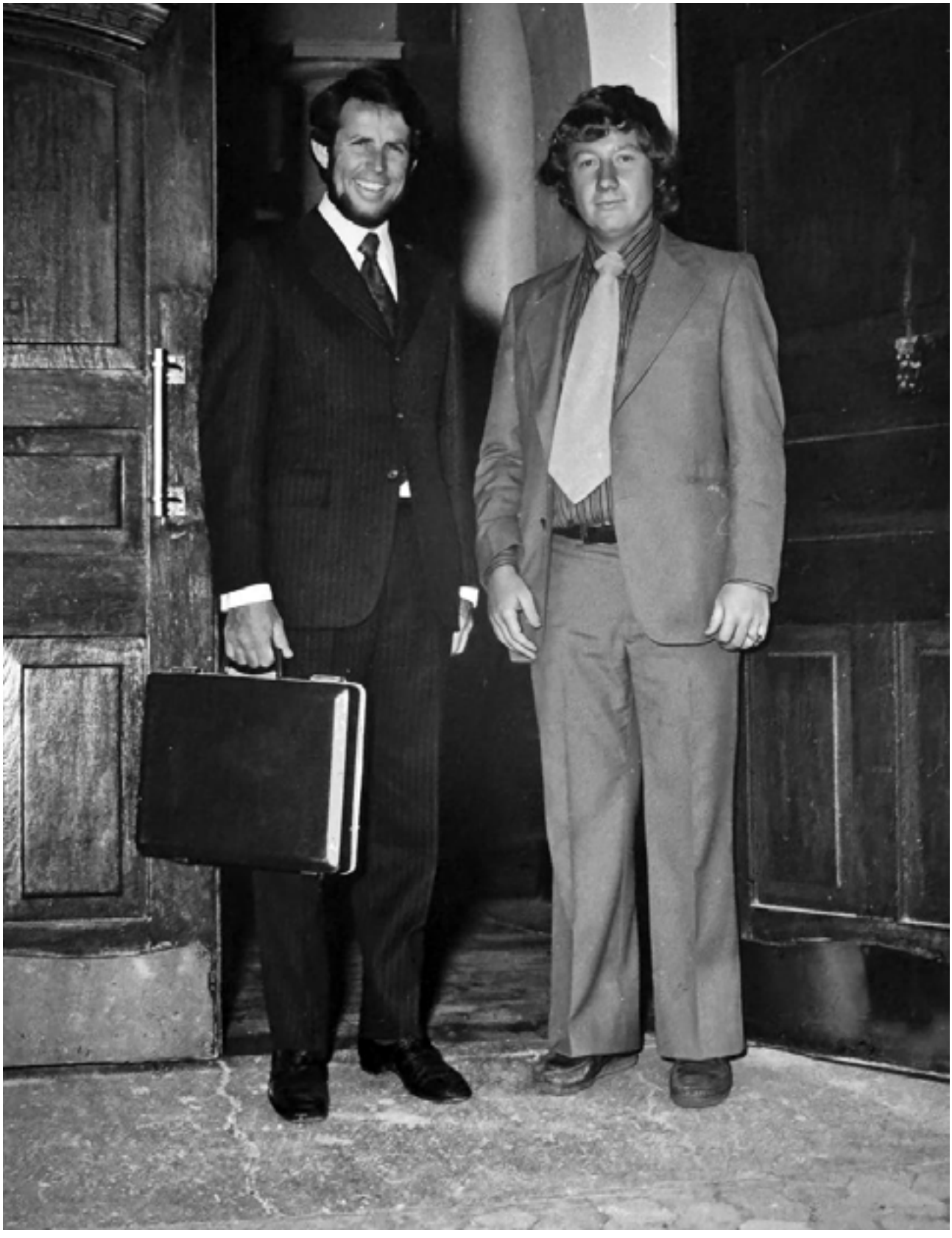
Revisiting the rationale and challenges behind the construction of these theatres invites one to draw several conclusions regarding their design and function. First, the theatres were imagined then built as a response to an extraordinary need on the part of a collective or community deeply committed to a particular notion of theatre and willingly engaged in securing the site and raising necessary funds for construction. This shared determination provided the impetus for collective fund-raising initiatives and support, augmented by municipal – rather than state funding – for both the construction of the theatre and resourcing future productions. Second, the vitality of their respective repertoires (or artistic programmes) is not only an index of continued patronage by a particular target audience but also offers a way of defining these ventures as community arts projects with none of the pejorative connotations that have subsequently accrued to the term setting 'community initiatives' in opposition to 'professional practice'. Third, the vibrant life of all four theatres at their inception and initial phases is an integer of compound factors of site, design and construction with regard to what these factors promote in terms of audience access on the one hand and style of presentation on the other.

17 The Johannesburg Civic Theatre underwent major renovation in the mid 1980s to align with the engineered stage of the State Theatre complete with two side stages and a rear stage. The fundamental layout of the auditorium remained unchanged. Parking areas and the façade were completely re-designed. It reopened in 1992.

Finally, both Hermer and Grosskopff (as architects of the projects) played profoundly significant roles in determining both presentation and reception modalities promoted by the relations between stage and auditoria. Both architects were finely attuned to the distinctive mission and identities of each particular community's vision. Their investments in their respective projects suggest not only the will and capacity but gratification in being immersed in the specific cultural and theatrical project and their design solutions at the forefront of asserting a new identity in theatre architecture in façade and interior treatments. Through very different strategies both liberated the stage from its elaborate sculptural proscenium frame and defined the auditorium as an undivided egalitarian whole. Their individual absorption with the minutiae of the theatre event combined with their nuanced appreciation of what the theatre as an architectural structure may represent (in historical, cultural and political terms) begins to explain ways in which these structures endure and accommodate today a different life and use from that initially imagined. Their buildings are material monuments to the possibilities embedded in the interpersonal allegiances of creative collaboration undergirding the work of theatre-makers and their ephemeral offerings.



An aerial view of Newtown, showing the location of the market prior to becoming the Market Theatre. Source: *Newtown from Above - Seventy Golden Years*, 1886-1956.



Architect Rodney Grosskopff and Gary Zulberg, MD of Ozz Construction, 1976.

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BETWEEN FORM AND FUNCTION:

Decorative Programmes in the Buildings of Manfred Hermer and GLH & Associates

Federico Freschi

University of Johannesburg



Kariba House, Delvers Street Marshalltown,
Mosaic Façade by Armando Baldinelli 1959.

Manfred Hermer established the practice that was to become GLH and Associates at a time when the principles of the International Style were firmly entrenched, both internationally and in Johannesburg. Indeed, according to Norman Hanson, by the 1940s, "In terms of general populations, South Africa could show more good representative buildings of the International Style than any other country in the world" (Martin 1994: 10). As other writers in this volume have noted, by the time he opened shop Hermer had clearly imbibed the lessons of the University of the Witwatersrand's (Wits) School of Architecture, whose enthusiastic embrace of European modernism by Rex Martienssen and his colleagues in the 1930s established the Transvaal Group1 at the forefront of the architectural vanguard of the day.

Nicholas Patricios (2000: 231) argues that the Transvaal Group, although influenced by Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, primarily "owed their allegiance to Le Corbusier" whose five principles of modern architecture were the guiding ethos of the uncompromising modernism they espoused. Although the "infallibility" (Herbert 2013: 150) of Le Corbusier would be questioned as the group matured and the identity of the Wits School of Architecture evolved into the 1940s, this ethos was sufficiently entrenched to leave a lasting imprint on a generation of architects who studied there. Not least among these are the vaunted principles of increased access to light, air, and space and a free, unadorned façade as the utopian cornerstones of a democratic, salutary architecture emerging from the destruction of two world wars.

1 The Transvaal Group, dubbed thus by Le Corbusier – *'le groupe Transvaal'* – on receipt of a copy of their publication *zerohour,* is the name by which the group of young, Modernist architects led by Rex Martienssen (1905-1942) at the Wits School in the 1930s, is known. The group (what Gilbert Herbert, 2013: 150) describes as a "loosely constituted alliance" rather than a formal association) included Norman Hanson (1909-1991) and Gordon McIntosh (1904-1983) at its core, with John Fassler (1910-1971), Bernard Cooke (1910-2011), and Duncan Howie (1910-?) as important members.

Hermer was no exception, and there is something in the formal elegance and functionalist restraint of his early buildings – Our Parents Home, the Alexander Theatre, the Gestetner Building – that that marks him as a man of his time. This is particularly evident in what Clive Chipkin (1993: 310) describes as his "modern ideas coming in from a new egalitarian Britain, ideas themselves imbued with Swedish and Weimar social values". These values are most clearly expressed, as Clive Chipkin and Katherine Munro note in this volume, in Our Parents Home in Orchards (1945), one of his first major commissions with his then-partner Ralph Green. The Corbusian emphasis on sun, space and verdure, with its utopian, ostensibly socialist underpinnings, are clearly the guiding principles of this project, the stylistic corollary of which is a formalist disdain for the notion of the building as a decorated form. Nonetheless, the formal severity of the structure is somewhat tempered by the presence of surface enrichments, not least the checker-pattern brickwork on the northern façade. Chipkin (1993: 310) has ascribed this to an emerging regionalist sentiment, what Lefaivre and Tzonis (2007: 216) characterise as South African architects' efforts in the 1930s and 40s "to create a modern architecture, which as much as it was 'western internationalist', also demonstrated serious efforts to design within the framework of the region, as the concept 'region' was defined at that moment".





The façade of Our Parents Home (1945) showing checkerboard brickwork with mosaic spandrels.

While Hermer's decorative brickwork may be seen to betoken an incipient regionalism in the mould of the Pretoria school[2] it must also be understood as a post-Second World War reaction to the formalist dogmatism of the 1930s and the pursuit of a contemporary sensibility. Ultimately, the self-conscious development of a regional style was to find more traction in Pretoria during the 1950s than in Johannesburg, where architecture tended more to formal responses arising from rampant (sub)urban expansion and emerging technologies than an enduring interest in engaging with, climate, available materials and notions of 'authenticity'. Rather, I suggest that what Hermer brings back into play from the outset is a subtle engagement with the decorative that has continued to be an abiding aspect of the firm's ethos. In this chapter I discuss this notion in relation to projects executed at the beginning of the firm's eighty-year history and show how this established a set of design principles that continue to inform the ethos of the practice today.

2 The dominant style of post-Second World War suburban Pretoria, Pretoria Regionalism is characterised partly by its use of regional materials and sensitivity to landscape, and partly by a self-conscious modernity inspired by contemporary Brazilian architecture, with generic 'African' inflections. The work of Norman Eaton (1902-1966) epitomises the style.

Hermer, architectural ornament and modernity

Until the twentieth century, architectural ornament was regarded – implicitly but widely – as the necessary condition of important buildings, both civic and corporate, thereby affirming architecture's status as a form of public art. This assumption was upended by the advent of the Modern Movement, whose utopian vision embraced the notion of a clean slate upon which the values of the machine age could be projected. In this context, ornament came under suspicion, seen as incompatible with the seriousness of modern architecture. Mies van der Rohe, a leading advocate of an architecture of *beinahe nichts* – almost nothing – warned that "ornament is dangerous precisely because it dazzles us and tempts the mind without proper reflection" (Gombrich 1979: 17). His position echoed that of Adolf Loos, who had famously declared in 1908 that "ornament is crime." For both Loos and Mies, it seems, ornament represented a kind of contamination, threatening the ideological purity of the workers' revolution in Loos's view and the aesthetic purity of the machine in Mies's. These convictions, adapted to local circumstances and economic forces, shaped the ethos of the Wits School in the 1930s and guided the practice of the earnest young architects it produced in the 1940s.

On the surface of it, Hermer's engagement with the decorative in the immediate post-Second World War period may seem therefore somewhat anomalous, but I suggest that it is attributable to three, interrelated things: First, to his training and the effect on this on his nascent architectural sensibility. The avant-gardism of the Transvaal Group notwithstanding, the roots of the Wits School of Architecture lay in the eclectic, traditional, and classicist approach of its first professor, Geoffrey Pearse (1885-1968).[3] The evidence of this was abundantly evident in the neoclassical architecture of the campus[4], while the principles of classical design and proportion – with its canonical rules of order and ornament – were still

3 Gilbert Herbert (2013: 148) argues that Pearse's role in the "revolution" that "transformed South Africa from a provincial backwater into one of the leading forces of avant garde architecture outside of Europe" was a "permissive rather than active one".

4 After an extensive fire damaged the Central Block at Wits, which includes the Great Hall, in 1931 the interior was remodeled by the firm of Williamson and Cowin and completed in 1936. The stylistic disparity between the atavistic façade, an archaeological restatement of its classical sources, and the clean-limned, Modern Movement interior bring into sharp relief the tensions between 'tradition' and 'modernity' both at the Wits School of Architecture, as well as in the broader architectural rubric of the day.

Above and below: Frank and Hirsch Building, Lilian Ngoyi Street, Central Johannesburg 1953.



inculcated in students (and would continue to be so for some years. In Chapter Five, Lesley Lokko quotes Rodney Grosskopff's reminiscence of his experience as a student at Wits in the 1950s as being characterised by producing "endless drawings of Corinthian columns").

The second aspect to consider is Hermer's experience of working as an apprentice with the influential and successful firm of Cook and Cowen, who were stylists par excellence. As Katherine Munro shows in Chapter One, when Hermer joined the firm in 1933 Cook and Cowen were at the height of their powers, working on fourteen major residential and commercial projects in the city. In addition to the headquarters of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, Broadcast House, these included a number of apartment buildings like Dunvegan Chambers, Dorchester Mansions, Stanhope Mansions and Lusam Mansions. All of these buildings are characterised by their modernist styling and flamboyant



Wim Botha, *Blastwave* (2010) steel construction covered with black lacquer meranti wood.

Nedbank Group Head Office Phase 2, 2010.

Art Deco ornamental detailing.[5] Cook and Cowen clearly understood the principles of corporate architecture in terms of the notion of return-on-investment – their buildings were sophisticated, fashionable, client-focused and attractive to tenants; elements that ensured the firm's success during the competitive building boom of 1930s Johannesburg, and which Hermer would in time make the cornerstones of his practice.

Third – whether by dint of training or innate sensibility – Hermer seemed to have from the outset an awareness of the social significance of architecture, and an implicit understanding that its symbolic forms are as significant as its practical functions. Put differently, Hermer seemed to understand that architectural ornament6 – far from being mere surface embellishment designed "the sake of visual pleasure" (Trilling, 2001: 6) – is, in fact, integral to the building's capacity to convey social meaning.

5 In the case of Lusam Mansions this is expressed in continuous facebrick coursing, which is not unlike that of Hermer's Alexander Theatre.

6 I use the term 'architectural ornament' (sometimes interchangeably with 'decorative programme') in its widest possible sense to include all applied, built, or otherwise integrated elements or enrichments, including freestanding and/or fixed artworks, that contribute to the overall aesthetic effect of a building.







Implicit in his, and the firm's subsequent and ongoing engagement with decorative programmes, is the contention therefore that decoration plays a significant role in the construction and experience of the visual fabric of the built environment. Since urban experience is predominantly visual, the interplay between the decorative programmes of buildings and the social narratives they embody plays a significant role in shaping a city's identity. Buildings come to function therefore not merely as utilitarian structures, but as markers of space and time – anchors of meaning that exceed their practical purposes.

Marco Cianfinelli, *Transpiration I*, 2016. Rosebank Towers, Rosebank. Taking inspiration from the parallels between the complex organic structures of the tree and the neural network, *Transpiration I* explores the cognitive process - from sensory perception, through process and, finally, to expression. The title itself points to the process by which water is transported through the tree, from root, through the trunk and is ultimately transpired through the leaves. But, at the root of the word is the term: 'transpire', which alludes to the ways in which things come to be known.



This has its theoretical implications: the abstract, often idealised concept of space that underpins architectural thinking is inevitably disrupted by the presence of form. While space may be physically bounded by architectural elements – walls, floors, ceilings – it is, in its essence, intangible, defined less by structure than by the accumulated layers of use, memory and cultural habit. Once infused with these, what was once an indifferent void becomes place: concrete, lived and subjective. I suggest – and Hermer appeared to intuit – that ornament plays a vital part in this process. Though often overlooked or dismissed as merely decorative – peripheral to the 'serious' concerns of structure – it in fact anchors the building within its context, offering visual cues that connect it to temporality and location. In doing so, ornament participates in larger cultural conversations about identity and belonging, contributing to the imagined or real sense of ontological rootedness. GLH's judicious use of ornament, I contend, is an important contributing factor to the longevity of the firm, inasmuch as it has enabled it over the course of seventy years to construct a meaningful sense of place and identity for its clients.

From Hermer & Green to GLH & Associates – shifting typologies of ornament

The typology of the firm's engagement with ornament has, predictably, shifted over time. Broadly, it can be divided into three categories: surface decoration, building-as-sculptural-form, and the incorporation or display of freestanding and/or individual artworks. Interestingly, these typologies are not necessarily confined to certain time periods, and they often overlap, appearing together in the same project. The formal incorporation of decorative brickwork into the façade of Our Parents Home has already been noted and establishes Hermer as an architect who is interested from the outset of his practice in symbolic form. The use of brickwork coursing also characterises the façade of the Alexander Theatre (1951), which has been celebrated, as Sarah Roberts notes in Chapter Two, for the simplicity, restraint and clarity of its design. The foyer of this building is decorated with a low-relief sculpted panel by Lily Sachs. Neoclassical and Italianate in style, it shows



Alexander Theatre, 1951.

three lutenists set against an architectural backdrop.[7] In the context of the Alexander Theatre, the panel is at once an independent artwork and yet also integrated into the fabric of the building's interior. It functions in this context symbolically both to evoke the theatrical muses, as Sarah Roberts argues, and to offset the formalist severity of the theatre's functionalist design. Indeed, the reference to architectural structures in the work seem at once to play tribute to the memory of the classical conventions – both architectural and theatrical – that the new building reinterprets and reimagines for a contemporary audience.

Lily Sachs was also responsible for the four relief panels on the Summit Club in Hillbrow (1952). Set into the façade of the building's podium, they are a clear example of the period of the first typology. In his foreword to this volume Chipkin notes that this kind of applied sculpture can be attributed to the legacy of an exhibition that had been held at Wits in the late 1940s on the 'Art of Architecture', a section of which had focused on external sculptural elements. As I argue above, this betokens an interesting shift away from the purism of the 1930s and suggests a renewed interest in the potential of symbolic forms

7 Lily Sachs (1914-2003) was born in Johannesburg and studied painting at the Witwatersrand Technical Art School under Maurice van Essche, and later at the University of the Witwatersrand. She continued her training in Paris at La Grande Chaumière, the Académie Julian, and with André Lhote (1947), and later studied sculputre under Moses Kottler. Also active as a photographer, she won the Johannesburg Photographic Society's Beret Award for her study of Edoardo Villa, as well as several awards in London salons. She was married to Teddy Sachs, vice-chairman of the Johannesburg Repertory Players Theatre.





The Summit Club, 1951, originally a sport and recreation club in Claim street. Decorative panels by Lily Sachs.

to lend both visual interest and social significance to modern buildings. The iconography of the Summit Club figures – sportsmen in various stylized attitudes (a tennis player, a diver, a runner and an archer) – resonate directly with the building's original function as the home of the Hillbrow Sports Centre (and are more than a little ironic in the context of the building's current function as an 'adult entertainment centre and hotel'). Like the Alexander Theatre's musicians, Sachs's neoclassical figures hark back to the somewhat didactic styling of public art of the 1930s. As with the Alexander Theatre panel, these sculptures seem anachronistic; a figurative presence participating somewhat awkwardly in the overall programme of formalist abstraction of the assertively modern architecture.

Brazilian inspiration, African modernity

By the time of the next major project of the late 1950s, the Civic Theatre, it seems that this tension between the figurative and the abstract had been resolved. In Hermer's original conception[8] the building exemplified a broader architectural shift during the period towards Brazilian modernism that was particularly pronounced in Johannesburg and Pretoria, and which Hermer had evoked in the dramatic sculptural form of the Durban Ice Rink (1955). As I have argued elsewhere (Freschi 2020) for South African architects during the 1950s, Brazilian modernism offered a potent visual language to express both climate-responsive design as well as a stylish affirmation of a modern sovereign state. In Pretoria the stylistic conventions of Brazilian modernism – expressive concrete forms enlivened by slender pilotis, decorative airbrick screens, glazed tiles and mosaics – became what Roger Fisher calls "an expression of newly independent statehood" (Fisher, 2000: 229). Concentrated initially on the University of Pretoria campus, this stylistic approach gained momentum as it spread throughout the city and

8 In the mid-1980s the Civic Theatre was substantially remodeled to increase the capacity of the backstage facilities and technical areas, raise the height of the main theatre, and upgrade electrical work and heating and cooling systems. Unfortunately, much of Hermer's original façade was destroyed in the process to be replaced by a soulless box of dark, reflective glass, with Ullman's sculpture being repositioned to make way for an over-scaled porte-cochère. Some of the columns survive on the east and west facades – the latter of which also has remnants of the Korzennik panels – but the restrained monumnetality and elegance of the original building has been entirely destroyed.





Detail of the Civic Theatre starburst façade (left), which was featured on the souvenir programme for the tenth anniversary of the opening of the theatre in 1972 (left).







Above: Ernest Ullman, *The Players*, 1964, bronze, Civic Theatre, Braamfontein (above).

Above right: The invitation to the unveiling of the sculpture *The Players* at the Civic Theatre. The sculpture was sponsored by Kirchhoff seeds, 1964.

its suburbs, eventually coming to be known as 'Pretoria Regionalism.' In Johannesburg, Brazilian architectural ideas were readily absorbed into the urban fabric, but without the ideological associations they carried in Pretoria. Their presence was most discernible in the rapidly densifying inner-city neighbourhoods of Hillbrow and Berea, where formal quotations from the repertoire of Brazilian architecture came to define a new mode of metropolitan living, what Nikolaus Pevsner would famously call "a little Brazil in the Commonwealth" (Gerneke 1998: 218).

Manfred Hermer's Civic Theatre, completed in 1962, brings into play these Brazilian references to achieve a compelling play between mass and lightness. As I argue elsewhere (Freschi 2020), its hovering form and sculptural clarity draws on Oscar Niemeyer's Palácio de Alvorada (Palace of the Dawn), the official residence of the President of Brazil and one of the major architectural projects of the purpose-built capital city of Brasília. Like the Alovarada Palace, the theatre building appears to be suspended in a frame of slender, tapered columns connected to each other by horizontal members in a 'starburst' effect, achieving an effect of refined, sculptural monumentality, appropriate to its function as a civic landmark and cultural institution.

The building is further enlivened by several decorative elements that contribute to its symbolic and aesthetic presence. In addition to *The Play Makers*, a sculpture fountain by Ernest Ullman prominently situated at the main entrance, the building's western façade features a sequence of abstract geometric forms in sand-moulded concrete by the sculptor Mickey Korzennik (1930-2015). Discussing this work in his autobiography, Korzennik does not elaborate on specific iconographic references in this work but credits the Sardinian-born American sculptor Constantino Nivola (1911-1988), whose sand-casting





Relief sculptures in sand-moulded concrete by Mickey Korzennik on the plinth of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre, 1962.

techniques impressed him with their scale, material character and simplicity (Korzennik 1998: 32). The sand-casting technique, by its nature, produced a rough, tactile finish that, when used in conjunction with abstract motifs, evokes a 'primitivist' aesthetic. This modernist primitivism, ostensibly drawn from indigenous African visual languages, became, as John Peffer (2009:21) observes, "a recurring theme among modernist artist[s] in South Africa" at mid-century in their efforts to forge a distinctively (South) African modernism.

Such ideas gained traction in 1960s Johannesburg, informing the work of, amongst others, artists such as Cecil Skotnes, Sydney Kumalo, Edoardo Villa, Cecily Sash and others. Although Korzennik maintained a formalist orientation drawn from the example of Nivola, his designs for the Civic Theatre, with their textured surfaces and earthy tones, anticipated the rising popularity of 'African'-inspired visual forms in Johannesburg's architectural ornamentation during this period. As I have argued elsewhere (Freschi 2020), within the broader idiom of Hermer's Brazilian modernism, these elements quietly signal a localised architectural identity: cosmopolitan and forward-looking yet embedded in a specific cultural and material landscape.

The Johannesburg Civic Theatre, Civic Boulevard in Braamfontein, 1962.



Hidden in plain sight – a continuing tradition

As other writers in this volume have noted, the firm's existence over eighty years provides an opportunity – rare in the context of Johannesburg – of being able to reflect on the contribution of one architectural practice to the evolution of architectural form and typology in this city. In this essay I have argued for the importance of a decorative tradition, broadly defined, established by Hermer early in the existence of the practice in constructing a particular urban, cosmopolitan identity for Johannesburg. Looking back over eighty years, we can see how Hermer's principles of integrating decorative elements with the form of the building have continued to inform the design ethos of the practice in its mission to forge a cosmopolitan identity – at once, as Guy Trangoš argues in Chapter Six, urban and urbane – for its clients. To see how this has played out in the recent past and how it anticipates future trends, I look in conclusion at three examples completed in the past two decades.

In general form and appearance the Nedbank Campus in Sandton, built in two phases commencing in 2002 and completed in 2008, conforms to postmodern trends that began to make headway in Johannesburg architecture from the mid-1980s, what Chipkin (2008: 347) describes as the "splurge" of neoclassical and neo-Art Deco styling that became "the resident house style in the northern suburbs and its office zones" in the 1980s and 90s. He argues that in the context of Johannesburg this return to an ornamental tradition was a consequence of "an urban region addicted to fashion change and the creation of preposterous townscape" (Chipkin, 2008: 328). However, it must also be seen as symptomatic of a universal – and perhaps inevitable – shift towards eclecticism and pastiche as an antidote to the sterile universality of modernism, which by the late 1970s was seen as at best uninteresting and at worst ideologically bankrupt and unsustainable.

This saw a dramatic rethinking of both the external appearance of the building, with a return to applied decorative forms on the façade, as well as an abandoning of the faceless glass skyscraper as the necessary condition of corporate architecture. The merits (or otherwise) of its postmodern stylistic refinements notwithstanding, spatially the Nedbank Campus substantially rethinks the notion of the corporate office block by integrating atriums, gardens and courtyards into its design. This is a decisive break with the hermetically sealed glass box, and a return to the Corbusian principles



Above: William Kentridge and Gerhard Marx, *World on Its Hind Legs*, 2010. Painted steel. Nedbank Group Head Office, Sandton.

Top right: Wim Botha, *Blastwave*, 2010. Steel and timber.

Bottom right: William Kentridge and Gerhard Marx, *World on its Hind Legs*, 2010. Painted steel.





Central Garden between Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Nedbank Group Head Office in Sandton 1998-2010.







Karel Nel, *Field of Value,* 2002. Copper coins, dimensions variable. "Field of Value" embodies Nel's fascination with the interconnectedness of all things, from the geological and cosmic to the spiritual and metaphysical. Nedbank Group Head Office, Sandton.

of sun, space and verdure, but now dressed up in a neoclassical pastiche. The effect is one of grandiose corporate self-consciousness, but at the level of detail – not least in its integration of artworks – the building provides a wealth of visual variety and interest.

This is accomplished in two ways: first, by the incorporation and strategic display of existing artworks, and second by the subtle integration of artworks into the overall programme of the architecture. Dramatically celebrating the entrance to the complex is an example of the former: Karel Nel's *Field of Value* (2002), commissioned especially for the building and installed in the foyer on its completion in 2002. Dramatic in scale and effect, the work comprises three two-storey high glass vitrines, the central panel of which is a shimmering bronze field evoking an infinity sign, which the artist created by attaching ten thousand rands' worth of one, two and five cent copper coins to a folded black wooden background support. Flanking *Field of Value* are two additional vitrines housing a collection of unusually shaped African currencies, copper crosses and forged iron blades, objects that were

extensively traded as well as being used as bride wealth across the continent. These objects belong to Nel's extensive and important collection of African art, and are in keeping with his work, which frequently involves a dialogue between this collection and his own practice as an artist (Nel, 2015). Taken together, the three panels prompt deeper questions as to how value is created in societies, whether economic or cultural, and are thus symbolically appropriate in the context of a bank, with an added gloss of 'Africanism' to reinforce a sense of place.

For such works, dramatically displayed in important threshold spaces, the building functions as a foil against which they are displayed as a carefully curated selection. This marks a shift from the building as decorated to form to the provision of spaces that are conceived as an architectural frame for artworks that are objects of contemplation, no longer subordinate to the programme, symbolic or otherwise, of the architecture. Clearly other imperatives come into play in this context, not least the politics of display regarding the selection of works, and eternally vexed questions of taste and value. In effect, the corporate-head-office-as-art-museum plays an important role in terms of constructing a canon of 'corporate'-sanctioned art that raises questions about what one might term the 'privatisation' of culture. This 'privatisation' of culture implicit in corporate collecting, Marion Dixon (2008: 14) argues,

> Denotes a significant development in art collecting practice, globally and in South Africa. Gone are the days when row upon row of bland naturalistic pictures blended into the corporate landscape. Landscape and wildlife paintings, together with portraits of past chairmen have made way for focused, professionally curated – and often controversial – art collections, some with the added remit to preserve South Africa's and the continent's cultural heritage.

Thus, while the collection and display of free-standing artwork within this context may be seen superficially to be less didactic than integrated decorative elements that promote a particular symbolic reading (e.g. Korzennik's 'primitivist' works at the Civic Theatre as a trope of a kind of South African regionalism), they are nonetheless rich with potential to promote a particular set of cultural values, transposed from the public to the private realm.

The Nedbank campus also shows artworks integrated into the fabric of the building, much like the Villa and Korzennik panels of Hermer's day. But unlike these, the artworks



Installation view of Karel Nel's
Field of Value, 2002.



are integrated in ways that are subtle and elusive; they effectively become part of surface pattern and texture and are thus 'read' as integral to the building, and not necessarily as applied ornament. Typical in this regard is Willem Boshoff's (b. 1951) *Windfall* (2001), in which 160 pieces of odd-shaped, engraved granite are set amongst the slate flagstones of the walking areas of the main foyer of the building, across different floor levels. Typically of Boshoff's work, which engages in a deceptively playful way the complex conceptual space between language, image, and meaning, the blocks are engraved with arcane words, selected from the artist's "dictionary of difficult English" (Boshoff, N.d.). These words explore and complicate the sense of a 'windfall' as a coming into unexpected good fortune: eighty of them deal with wind, and eighty with words related to monetary issues; the 'wind' words sandblasted in shiny black lettering onto grey granite, and the 'monetary' words in matte grey on shiny black granite. For the artist,

> The strange words must create the idea of messages on scraps of paper carried in from above and beyond. The stones have accidental shapes ... and are scattered across the floor of the walking area as if blown in by the wind – like sparsely shed leaves under a tree, or like thinly sprinkled salt on food – a windfall (Boshoff, N.d.).

Effectively hidden in plain sight, these seemingly random blocks may go unnoticed to all but the most observant viewer in the hustle-and-bustle of a typical workday. Nonetheless, their presence attests to a belief on the part of the architects in the power of the visual to imbue the building with a subtle but nonetheless palpable sense of the poetic.

A similar trend of artwork disguised as part of the fabric of the building underlies the incorporation, on a much grander scale, of sculptural façades in two other recent, large-scale corporate projects: the ABSA Tower West (2010) and 90 Grayston Drive (2014). For the ABSA Tower West block the artist Marco Cianfanelli (b. 1970) was commissioned to produce a large-scale artwork that is integrated directly into the fabric of the building, functioning as a light filter and sunscreen on its west façade. Entitled *Inner City, the City Within* (2010), the work consists of reflective, perforated stainless steel panels,9 which, when viewed from a distance, produces an image



Willem Boshoff, *Windfall*, 2001. 168 carved Zimbabwe black and Rustenburg grey granit tiles. Dimensions variable. Nedbank Group Head Office, Sandton.

9 According to the artist, the screen comprises more than 230,000 perforations, was assembled with approximately 15,000 nuts and bolts, and weights nearly three tons (Cianfanelli, 2011).

of a city street scene (the 'inner city' of the title), with figures appearing to walk along the various levels of the building as if along bridges suspended above the street ('the city within'). According to the artist (Cianfanelli 2011), the image "is a representation of the city and the daily activities of the people that inhabit it", while the larger figures superimposed at the levels of the catwalks create "a relationship between the image of the city and the people that work in the building". Ultimately, as the artist puts it,

> The use of light to create tension and play with what is interior and exterior, public and private, abstract and familiar, serves as a commentary and reflection on the bank's role in society, particularly in the digital age (Cianfanelli 2011).

The play of light and shade on the screen also determines what parts of the image are highlighted at any time of day, thus creating a dynamic interface between the building and its surroundings. Like the sculptural elements on the façades of earlier buildings this imagery functions essentially to insert the building into a dialogue with the city, one that promotes it as urbane and cosmopolitan. Unlike the earlier examples, however, this screen is at once functional and decorative, static and dynamic. It presents the building as a beacon not only of new technologies, but also the changing social patterns and identities of the city.

Gerhard Marx's (b. 1976) *Wind Topographies* (2014) on 90 Grayston lies somewhere between the conceptual poetics of Boshoff's engraved granite paving blocks and Cianfanelli's construction of an urban imaginary. At a glance, the main north façade of the building makes it appear to be a neo-modernist glass box floating above a marble-clad podium, raised on slender pilotis. On closer analysis one realizes that the glass curtain walls are decorated with an alternating pattern of lines that flow up and around the building in concentric waves. These lines are Marx's artwork, which, like Boshoff's engraved stones at the Nedbank campus, are hidden in plain sight, thus effectively converting the entire building into an artwork. Etched into the glass, the lines trace the movement of wind over and around the building thus making visible, as the artist puts it, "the invisible effect that the building has upon its immediate environmental and climatic context" (Marx, 2014). At night, the glass curtain wall with its subtle swirls of pattern is illuminated with changing colour washes of





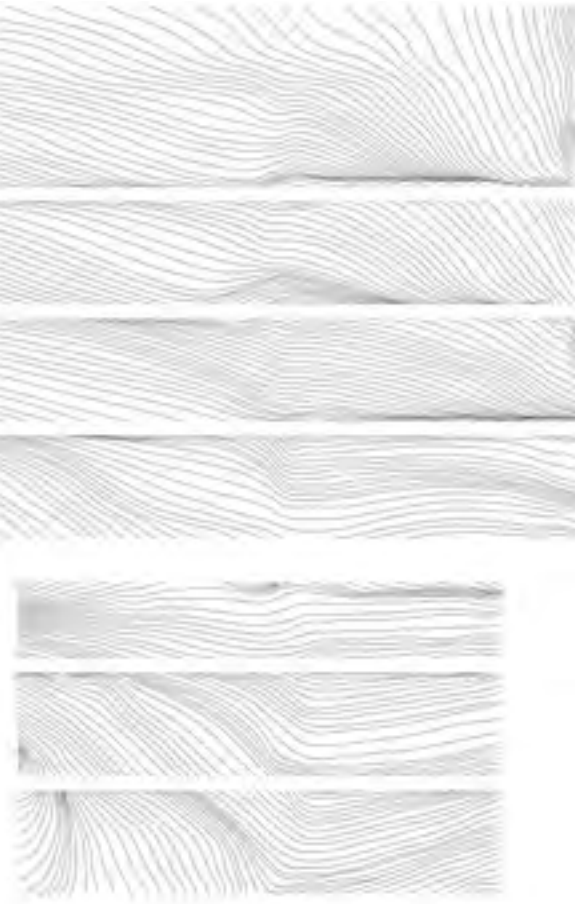
Marco Cianfanell, *Inner City, the City Within*, 2010. Perforated stainless steel. Dimensions variable. ABSA Towers West, Sandton



Above: *A drawing of Wind Topographies*, Gerhard Marx, 2014.

The lines on the exterior of this building map the surface-friction created by air as it flows up and pushes against its surface. Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) was used to analyse wind flow across the surface of the building, generating a theoretical streak-line pattern. This pattern simulates how wind would move particles over the building's surface. This drawing indicates these simulated flow lines.

Below left: 90 Grayston's kinetic facade. Photographer: Philip Schedler



90 Grayston Drive. 2015.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.



LED light,[10] further reinforcing the tension between the visible and the invisible; presence and absence.

While the subtle interplay of form and function in ABSA Tower West and 90 Grayston has its antecedents in Hermer's interest in refined sculptural forms, which similarly embraced the imaginative power of of art to imbue the building with symbolic and contextual resonances, here they suggest a much more subtle and elusive play of signifiers. Enabled, as they are, by sophisticated new technologies, these buildings-as-artworks are very much a product of their time, and indeed their 'real' meanings – like the 'primitivism' of the Korzennik panels at the Civic Theatre and all that this signifies for the white South African imagination of the city in the 1960s – will emerge over time.

10 According to the developers, Redefine Property Ltd., these washes "can be programmed to represent the colours of a specific corporate identity" (90 Grayston 2014: 24), thus enabling the building to become an active participant in its tenants' branding.

Conclusion – between form and function

In the final analysis, the engagement with the decorative – played out as fine balance between form and function – that has characterised eighty years of GLH's existence links the firm's important projects to a deep history of the social and symbolic meanings of buildings that go far beyond their functional value as structures. Through the decorative, we can trace how questions of taste, fashion, style and identity become deeply inscribed in the buildings as cultural artefacts of their time, and as such are inherently bound with constructs of the imaginaries of time and place. In the context of Johannesburg, they are imbricated in the city's perpetual – and perpetually shifting – imagination of itself as new and modern, with a protean ability to reinvent itself each decade.

Bevis Hillier (1996: 16-27) provides a useful definition of architecture as both a "thing" and an "activity" and thus takes cognisance of both the physical, functional nature of built structures implied by the term, as well as the formal, aesthetic elements that the architect brings to bear on such structures. In this chapter I have shown how this tension between 'thing' and 'activity' – form and function, as it were – is most evident in the imaginative space of the building-as-artwork, as exemplified by the work of Manfred Hermer and GLH and Associates. While these are the attributes that link the building most closely to matters of fashion and style, they are also the elements that ultimately give form and substance to the architects' and their clients' desires for the present and ambitions for the future.



Manfred and Eduardo Villa.
GLH Archive.

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PONTE AS PIVOT

Hannah le Roux

University of Sheffield and
University of the Witwatersrand



Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse,
Ponte City from Donald Mackay Park,
2011. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery.





Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse, *Core Staircase, Ponte City*, 2008. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery.



Like it or not, Ponte, the bold cylindrical tower on the edge of Hillbrow, is probably the design for which the practice of Manfred Hermer and Grosskopff[1] is most known. Yet Ponte, for all the stories and images set in and against it,[2] is not the design apex of the practice's oeuvre. It is, simply, pivotal. In the sense that the term is used in construction, a pivot is the still axis around which things turn. A pivot is only incidentally a thing itself, usually a cylindrical element grounded in something fixed. But a pivot is significant in architecture as a support for the phenomenon of change: the change of a direction of movement, usually, but also the still point for shifting faces as they react to circumstances.

Ponte as pivot. This text describes the multiple and overlapping transitions that hinge on it, from the urban, economic, political and demographic shifts around 1969, the year of Ponte's conception, to the 1976 Soweto uprisings. Ponte was designed at a particularly intense moment of change in Johannesburg and beyond. The intangible supports for urban growth accelerated at this time, so shaping an exponential leap in scale in the city, upwards, outwards and in its density.

1 At the time of the design, in 1969, the practice was known as Manfred Hermer, Feldman and Grosskopff. Mannie Feldman who was involved in Ponte and credited in particular with the design of the base, left the practice by September 1972 (Grosskopff 2012).

2 Apart from Subotsky and Waterhouse's masterful photography project (2014), these representations and interventions include the *Wallpaper* article by Robert Silke (2005), site specific artworks by Stephen Hobbs (1999), a base jump by Edgar Gaiao (Jacobson 2007), the film *Africa Shafted* (Martens 2012), novels by Norman Ohler (2012)and Joanne Richards (2003) and most recently, the DlalaNje project run by Nickolas Bauer and Michael Luptak out of Ponte's former mall (Bauer 2015).

Ponte can also be seen as an expression of the pivot as an architectural element, given literal form in the cylinder of the building and the rotational movements that this form creates. While the city before it is expressed as a grid, a more or less even matrix of opportunities extruded up through the building block of the planned building stand and its multiples, Ponte's plan is a cluster of circles or a 'Nucleus', as its shopping centre was aptly called, points of new urban eruption that make their own logic beyond the planned boundaries of the city. Ponte is also a pivotal work in the practice's oeuvre, as Manfred Hermer and Grosskopff realigned their practice through the experience of this mega-project in relation to new sites, clients and partners. In this respect, the project marks the scaling up of the relationships between architects and developers that were established in the 1960s, and the corporatisation of both designer and financial agents in the shaping of the city. Ponte, by being all these things at once, is a building that broke with the past and established new roles for architecture. This great significance is somewhat ironic for a building that appears neutral in its details, even bland, in most aspects of its design beyond the first big gesture.



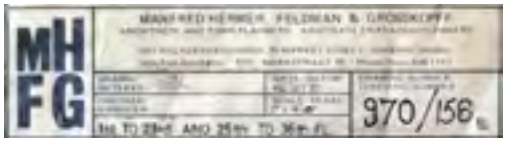


Above and left: Aerial view of Ponte from the east. Source: Infrastructure Photos. GLH Archive.

Ponte's site was a rocky southwards sloping triangle of land, assembled and largely bought for the project from the Ponte family. This point is where the tight grid of the inner city roads softens as they weave up and along the Yeoville ridge. Just before Ponte's construction the cutting to the north Harrow Road[3] was elevated and became a ramped flyover that smoothes out the falls to the south and speeds up the traffic. Saratoga Avenue, the road running along the south of the site, is part of a network of east-west connectors demarcated in the city grid in the 1960's to break through the gridlock of urban roads, using traffic lights to ensure traffic flows from Pageview to Ellis Park. While the cityscape south and west of Ponte conforms to the ZAR grid,[4] composed of block shaped buildings that reflect the grid's multiplications of fifty-by-fifty foot squares, Ponte marked a rotational freedom out of this Cartesian tightness.

On an early location plan for Ponte, the parking is indicated in its own tower and linked to the northern entrance by a looping element called The Tube. This internal street with cars below and the mall above was the singular focus of architectural expression at a detail scale. Roofed with inverted concrete U channels,

The Practice title block logo for Ponte drawings changed to MHFG, Manfred Hermer Feldman Grosskopff for a brief period.



3 Harrow Road is now called Joe Slovo Drive.
4 The Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) as the state and land distributor in the area where Johannesburg was founded laid out and sold small stands to investors in 1886, forming the core of the town centre (Chipkin 1993).



Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse, *Untitled*, 2008. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery.





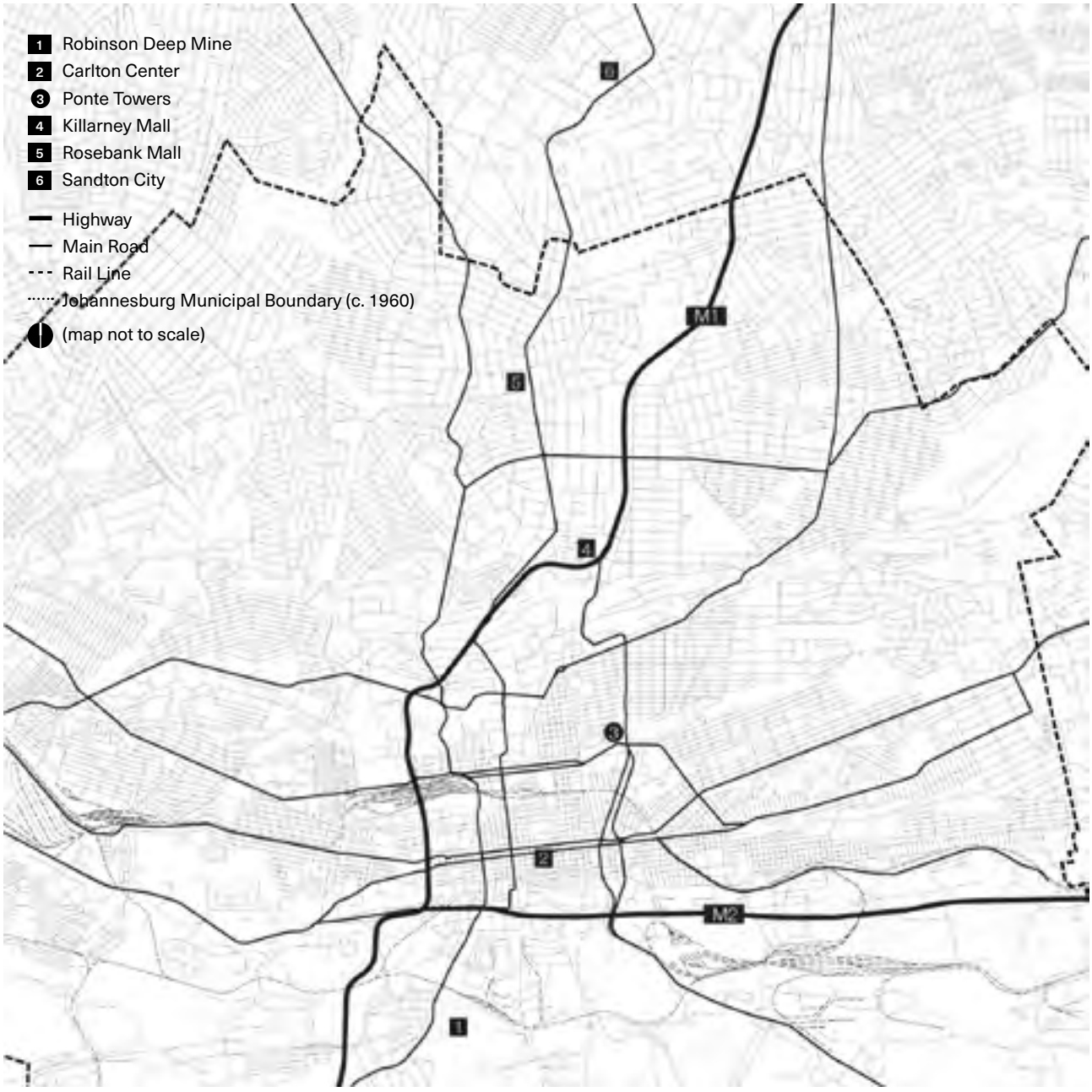
(From left) Arthur Forbes, site manager, Ivan Black, Nasbou MD, Rodney Grosskopff, architect, Stewart Chayes, designer . . . Ponte has captive customers for commerce.

Live in Ponte— and never go out

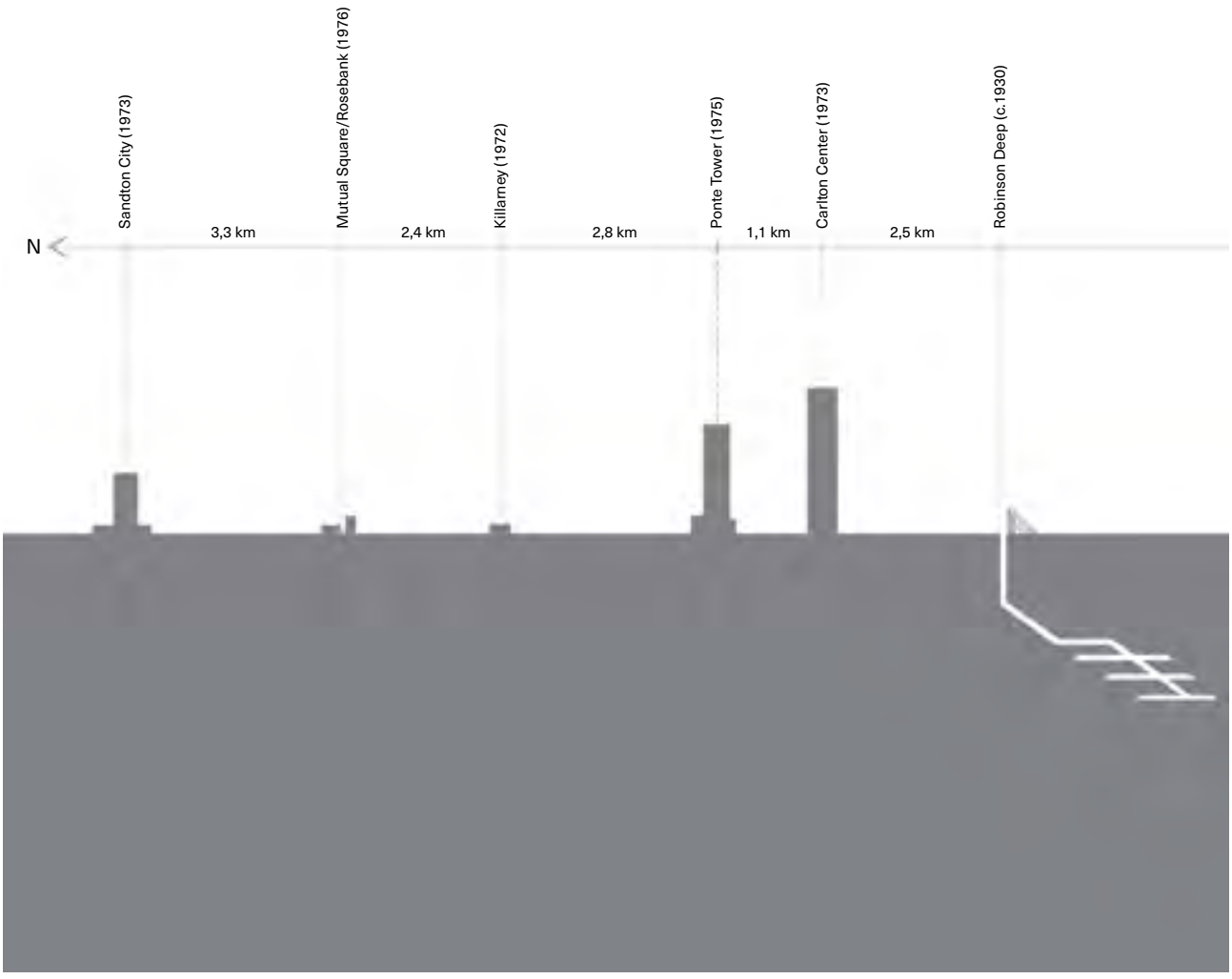
interspersed with skylights, views to the interior and tilted slabs, it dramatised the experience of rotation around the base of the building. The sculptural qualities of this route were eliminated by the later shopping mall design[5] but remain dormant as a skeletal ruin to be excavated some day in the future.

As it was, one entered and exited Ponte primarily by car, turning off Saratoga or an upper street, Lily, into the curves of the parking lot or the ramps spiraling between the seven-level drop. The effect is immediately disorientating. Once parked, visitors transitioned in six tight lifts or a stairwell rising in the foreboding shaft to the entrance level, a sunken plaza with interspersed shops and glimpses of the hillside. The wide views belong to the apartments. From the upper levels, they reach right over the ridge towards the expansive north of open veld that stretched beyond the new Hyde Park Corner to the north, as well as to the south and east where, ten years later, Eastgate Shopping Mall would open.

5 The Canadian interior designers, DI Design Consultants, who were working on Sandton City at the time and were independently appointed to Ponte altered the architects' proposals for the mall which were much more modest in scale and covered over much of this structure (Grosskopff 2015).



Johannesburg central and northern suburbs with Ponte and malls. Laura Bridgman.



Johannesburg building heights
and distances. Laura Bridgman.

In the combination of a car-oriented shopping centre base and a vertical tower, Ponte's design hybridised two trends. The first was the tendency of developers to build up within the grid at an exponential rate, most lately in the first mega-project of the Carlton Centre (1967-1972), which established fifty storeys as a vertical aspiration. Some new buildings went as high as the mines had gone deep, and the funds to build them came from gold. The other was the laissez-faire sprawling out of the city that would mark the city's second century. The mall and the carpark, the ramps and road engineering that pivot at Ponte's base are the generic supports for this expansive project. A decade earlier, an impressive team of American consultants including transport engineer Lloyd Reid and Maurice Rotival, a Yale professor of Planning, developed a motorway plan that proposed opening the city to the periphery through the raised M1 and M2 freeways. Bridge 6 in the Heidelberg interchange was completed in 1972 and linked these freeways to the new Harrow Road flyover that would connect in turn, some three years later, to the new Ben Schoeman highway and so on to Sandton and Pretoria (Mandy 1984:64).

As Chipkin (2008: 149) has noted, this new urban infrastructure shifts its point of reference from European and British models to North American ones. While the cylindrical tower of Ponte, as captured in the 1981 image from the south east, rolls up the three dimensional grid of Tygerberg, the highest of the Berea's Bauhaus-inspired superblocks, and column of the JG Strijdom Tower[6] (Johannesburg's slimmed-down version of London's 1966 Post Office tower into a hybrid form), it is also a younger sibling to the twin towers of Bertrand Goldberg's Marina City in Chicago, completed in 1967 (French 2008). The shift to American urbanism was to generate an unresolved fluctuation between sprawl and high rise developments, the latter championed by city planner Tony Marsh and realtor Harry Gottleib (Mandy 1984:65), as well as the influential academic and planner Wilfred Mallows (Mallows 1968; Chipkin 2008: 141-181).

Ponte was twice the height of earlier residential blocks, and required new financial arrangements to float the capital required for an innovative, five-year long construction process (Silverman 2014). Its original backer, Miodownick, an expanded syndicate of some of the most successful Jewish landlord families who

6 Now known as the Telkom Tower.



Aerial view of Ponte from the east, 2019.
Source: Infrastructure Photos.

had built much of Hillbrow and Berea in the 1960s, transitioned in the process to a full-blown consortium with Nasbou.[7] With Santam Bank joining the team the way was opened to new allegiances that could bring political and financial resources to property development.[8] The project team, with architects and developers at its core, pioneered the procurement route from concept to capital to construction that was to lead the way for most of Johannesburg's subsequent property developments.

7 The shareholders in Nasbou investment group are listed in Planning and Building Development (1975: 15) as Santam Bank, Japheth International, Miodownik, Amalgamated Hotels, Berzack-Hillman Investment, Alf Blumberg and Monbou Limited.
8 Grosskopff (2015) recalls that Mercabank were the link between the project and large-scale Afrikaner capital.





Construction of Ponte in progress, 1974. GLH Archive.

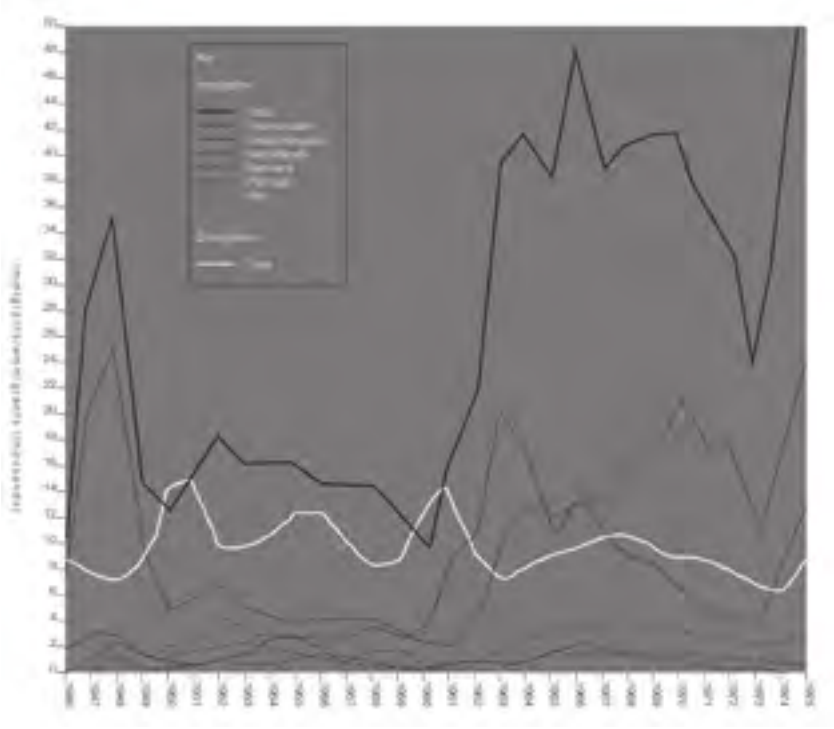
Rodney Grosskopff, the one member of the partnership of architects who saw it through the full process, highlighted in his recollections how important financial viability was to the modelling of Ponte (Grosskopff 2012). Capital was borrowed at 8% and the return on the rentals was calculated at 10,29%. Like the apartment blocks in Killarney, the mix of apartments was, as Katherine Munro notes in Chapter 2, designed to balance between quick returns and building an established community reflected the transitions happening at the same time, at a larger scale, between the ways that finance was locked into the city.

Major gold mines of Witwatersrand operating at minimal capacity	—1977—	National Housing Commission recommends phasing out of rent control
Soweto uprising	—1976—	Rosebank development increases (The Zone Mall)
Barbican Center Towers (London) completed	—1975—	Ponte Tower completed: Building Construction and Allied Workers Union (BCAWU) formed
	—1974—	
Global oil crisis	—1973—	Carlton Center completed; Sandton City completed
Trellick Tower (London) completed	—1972—	Johannesburg motorway completed; Killarney Mall completed
President Nixon cancels direct convertability of the US dollar to gold	—1971—	Price of gold: R0.916/gram
	—1970—	Trust Bank Center completed; Standard Bank Building completed
Anglo American Property Services Incrorporated	—1969—	Nasbou incorporated
	—1968—	
	—1967—	Prof Mallow delivers “Highrise” lecture
President Verwoerd assasinated	—1966—	
	—1965—	Braamfontein overpass completed
Marina City Towers (Chicago) completed	—1964—	Height allowance given to buildings with reduced footprint in Johannesburg CBD
Anglo American Industrial Incorporated	—1963—	
Mandela arrested	—1962—	
South African Rand introduced	—1961—	Price of gold: R0.804/gram; Verwoerd introduces “assisted passage” immigration scheme
Sharpeville massacre	—1960—	Sentech Tower (Brixton) completed
	—1959—	
	—1958—	
	—1957—	
	—1956—	
	—1955—	
	—1954—	American engineers hired to consult on Johannesburg Highway
	—1953—	The Queen Elizabeth Street Bridge completed
	—1952—	Johann Rissik Street Bridge completed

Timeline illustrating major construction projects in Johannesburg (1952–1977), contextualised alongside key national and international political events and significant moments in architectural history. Laura Bridgman.’

In the period leading up to Ponte's construction, which ran temporally and spatially parallel with the establishment of Johannesburg as a mining town, developers considered buildings as a stable support for the city's primary functions, and often locked capital into them over the long term. The Carlton Centre, built between 1967 and 1972, was the high point in terms of its scale of urban investment. The Carlton Centre development was place bound, using the newly formed Anglo America Property Services company (Amaprop) to transfer mining profits from the Free State goldfields to the heart of the inner city where much of Anglo American's earlier investment lay (Mandy 1984; Chipkin 2008). Ponte's location on the northern edge of Johannesburg's mining town and the routes out to the northern and eastern suburbs marks this transition between two genres of investment. Ponte was a free-floating risk, conceived of as a self-sufficient but mobile community, magnetic in its huge scale and multiple in its locational advantages for tenants. Its abundant parking and its siting between the east-west connector of Saratoga Avenue and a link to the M1 and M2 was critical in this respect. It was not where it was, but what it connected to, that was important. By the end of the 1960s, white collar work opportunities were already evenly split between the existing CBD, with its mining houses and small businesses, and the emerging periphery of larger scale industries and retail centres (Moodie 1969).

The imagined tenants of Ponte were drawn from the cosmopolitan pool of Hillbrow, where the main streets were lined with clubs and cafés such as Bella Napoli, Café de Paris, Café Zurich and the Fish Hook. This community of people, imagined in Ponte's promotional material as stylish, white and both single and family groups, included immigrants to the city from the United Kingdom and Europe, as well as expatriates from colonial towns and estates elsewhere in Africa following their independence in the mid-1960s. Between 1962 and 1972 over four hundred thousand white immigrants were enticed to the country through the South African embassies in London, Cologne, the Netherlands, Portugal and Italy (The Christian Institute 1974, Donsky 1989). Ponte, for this demographic group, was often the point of mobility, the transit between the homeland and the suburbs which they gazed upon in three cardinal directions from their windows. Their next moves, to the Latin eastern suburbs of Bedfordview and the south, to the more



Graph showing South African immigration and emigration statistics, 1946-1975. Source: Laura Bridgman.

Anglo Kensington, also to the east, or the northern suburbs, would be to rented garden flats, townhouses or stand-alone family homes.

The rear view from Ponte, partly obscured by the location of the lift shafts on the sun-baked west elevation, was over the city centre towards Soweto. Growing horizontally as fast as Ponte went up, this township housed the potential labour force of black South Africans effectively kept out of the market by the immigrants housed in Hillbrow's tower blocks. While the initial construction of Soweto had been supported by the mining industry as a way of housing its workers outside of male hostels, this *raison d'être* had declined with the closure of the mines from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s. The nature of Bantu Education, along with other forms of apartheid control such as job reservation, and the active recruitment of skilled white artisans from Europe, was such that township residents could not easily find alternative opportunities for work. By June 1976, the year that Ponte finally opened, the tensions in the township erupted in political uprisings. The consequence was far reaching for South African politics. For the property industry, it marked the end of new developments in the inner city.[9]

9 Chipkin (2008: 293) notes that the negative impact of the 1976 uprisings on property growth was followed by a series of "mini-booms" between 1978 and 1983, buoyed by a rising gold price.



With the commercial growth of the city increasingly on the northern and eastern perimeter, Ponte's pivotal position on the edge of the CBD no longer held a strategic location for work and leisure opportunities. The Nucleus mall shrunk to a few shops (Grosskopff 2012; Silverman 2014:15) as the new centres of Rosebank, Sandton, Northcliff and Eastgate grew. For the architects, too, the completion of Ponte marked a shift in direction. Their field of operation largely expanded with the city away from its centre to the new suburban nodes, with projects such as Bruma Lake, Rosebank's Mutual Square re-development and numerous hospitals. Their exceptional late work in the old city centre was the Market Theatre. As Sarah Roberts shows in Chapter Two, The Market was effectively a conscious attempt to make place for interracial interactions, supporting the re-definition of the inner city as an unsegregated zone in the city. With this demographic shift, the area around Ponte and, by the late 1980s the building itself, was inhabited by black tenants (Morris 1999).

Typologically, however, Ponte did not spin off any further work for the practice.[10] The race towards height as a marker of significance that began with the Carlton Centre and brought two communications and dozens of inhabited towers to the city centre came to a sudden halt after the 1976 Soweto uprisings. Instead, the subsequent projects of Manfred Hermer and Grosskopff, now with new partners, moved, as Lesley Lokko notes in Chapter Five, towards different values. The less dramatic projects to follow elaborated the design of the facade, landscaping and the interior, all understated aspects of Ponte.

Ponte's significance must lie in its bold break with the past, as it is exemplified by the inner city and its grid and alignments to geography, rather than to the placeness-ness of capital. This break is characterised not only by the building's ambivalent placement in relation to the foundational mining belt but with its openness to transnational references, its capital flows and clusters, and its ongoing support of demographic diversity. These qualities are not incidental in Ponte's status as Johannesburg's most iconographic building (even when branded with a giant Coca Cola sign). The scale of Ponte reflects the scale of ambition on the part of all its communities, the city planners, architects,

Left: Installation view of Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse, *Interior Windows, Ponte City*, 2008 - 2020. Lightbox constructed in aluminum with LED lighting. Digital latex print on polyester opal medium, Diasec facemounted. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery.

10 The architects had hoped at one stage that there would be a similar tower on the far side of Harrow Road, on Yeoville Ridge, creating an urban gateway (Grosskopff 2012).

developers and residents to break with the city's limits and speculate on different futures. This quality seems to have been embedded into the building's fabric. In 2015, following its earlier hijacking[11] and the subsequent, and failed, speculative redevelopment as luxury flats, the demographic of Ponte has regained the profile of aspirant, transnational young families and single people for which its flats were first designed. There is again a supermarket, a restaurant, childcare and other services at the base. These tenants are mostly from Africa, however, and they look for opportunities ever further across the metro than their predecessors.

In his discussion of the buildings that most interested the Italian historian, Manfredo Tafuri, the architectural theorist Anthony Vidler identifies a preoccupation with buildings that are important as moments of change. These "architectural structures inserted as critical ruptures with the past and shifters of significance for the present" (Vidler 2008:78) function much like Ponte did. They force a realignment of building with other things, whether political regimes, economic opportunities or symbolic values. By occupying such a position, Ponte gains its significance as the pivot in Johannesburg's identity shift from a tightly structured mining town to a fluid metropolitan region, both embedded in and oiled by the city's planned, financial, social and engineered infrastructures.



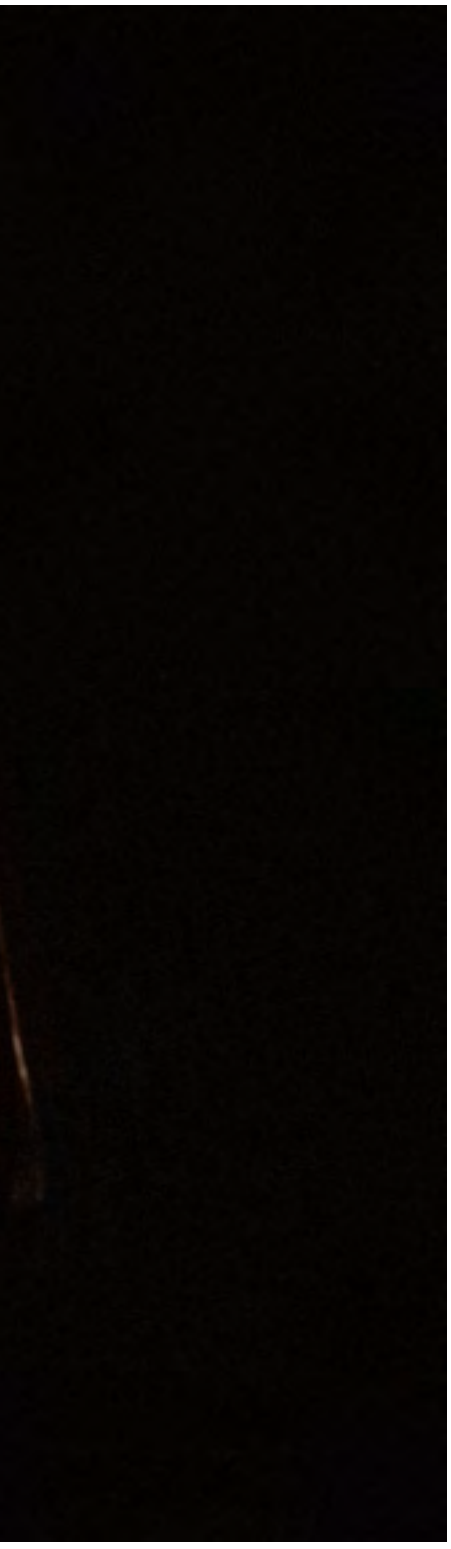
11 The hijacking of Ponte seems to have taken place in the mid- to late 1990s and was resolved in 2003, when all non-paying tenants were evicted prior to a 2007 proposal to renovate and sell apartments. This scheme collapsed in the 2008 financial crisis and instead, Kempston Group were ceded the building which they run as a rental property.)



Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse, *Ponte City from Yeoville Ridge*, 2008. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery.



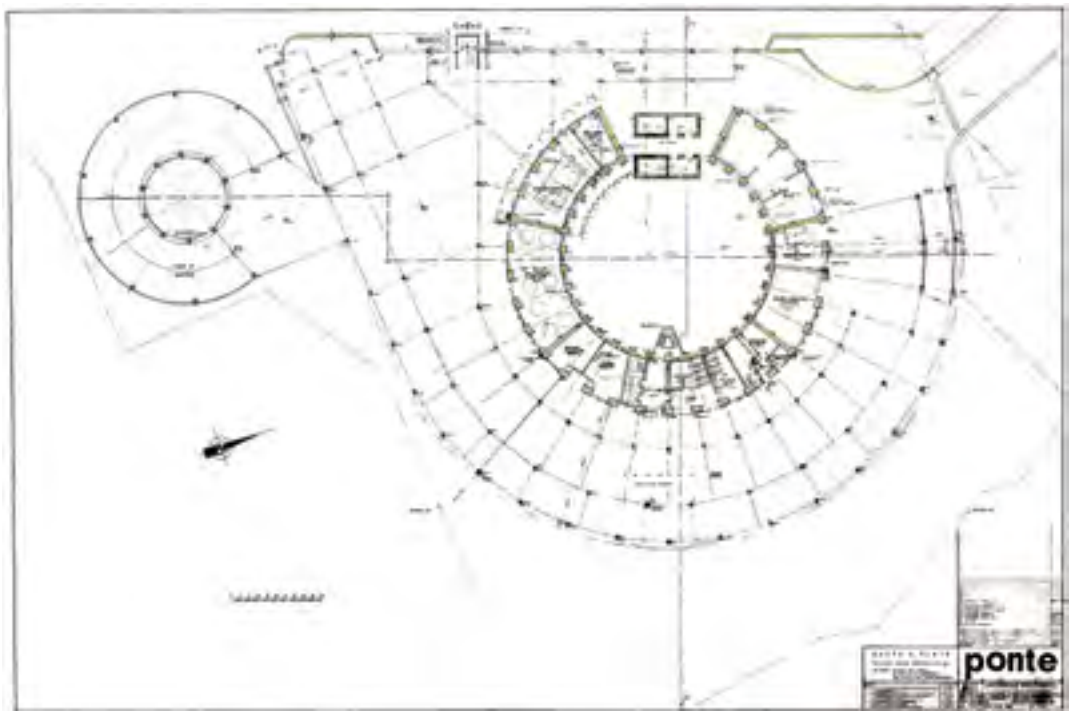
Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse, *View of Ponte City from Yeoville Apartment, Ponte City,* 2013. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery.



Acknowledgements

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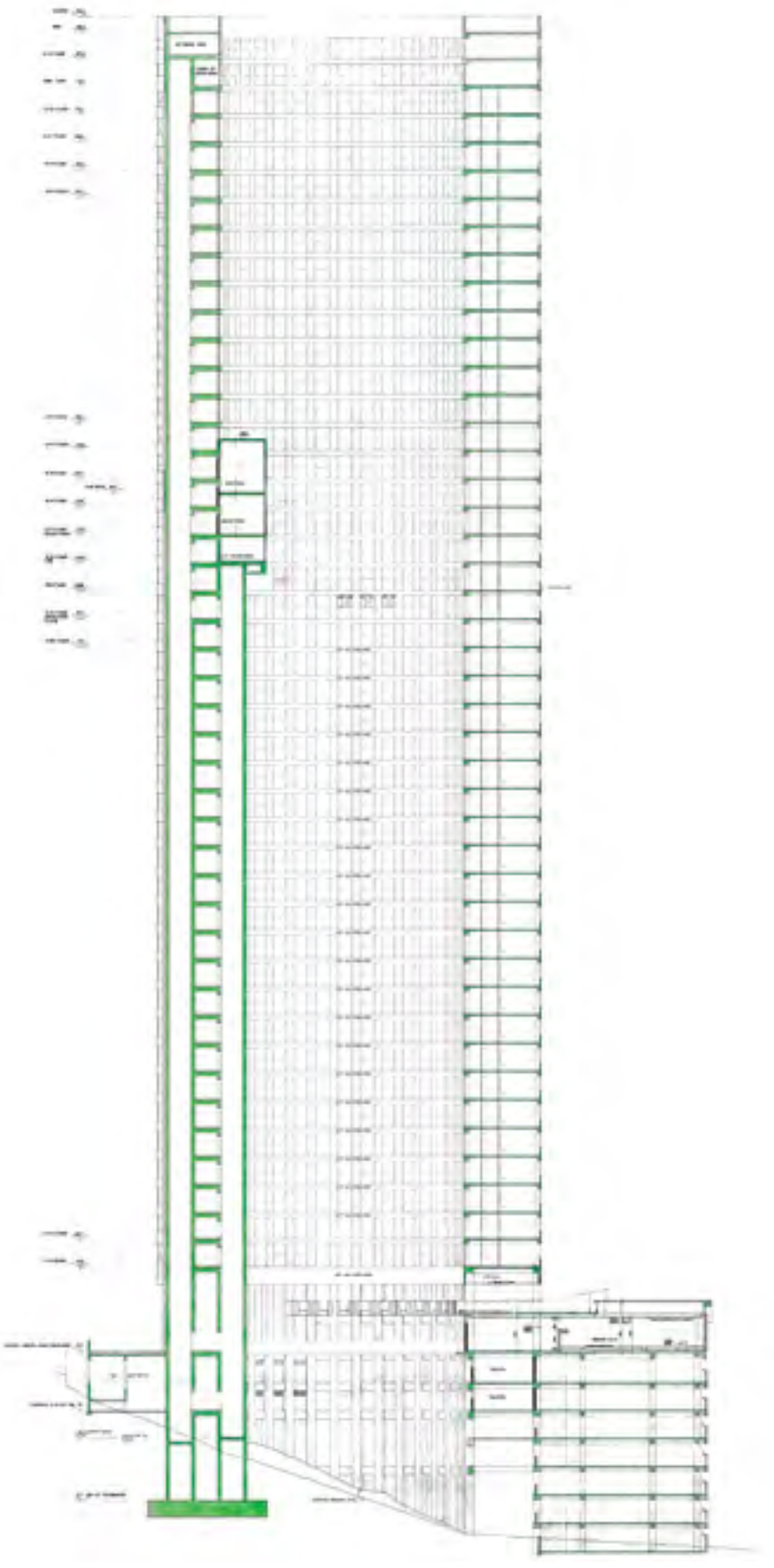
The photographs by Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse included in this chapter are drawn from their collaborative project Ponte City *(2008-2014), in which they documented both the building itself and the everyday lives of its residents. The reproduction of these images is made possibly with the kind permission of Goodman Gallery.*



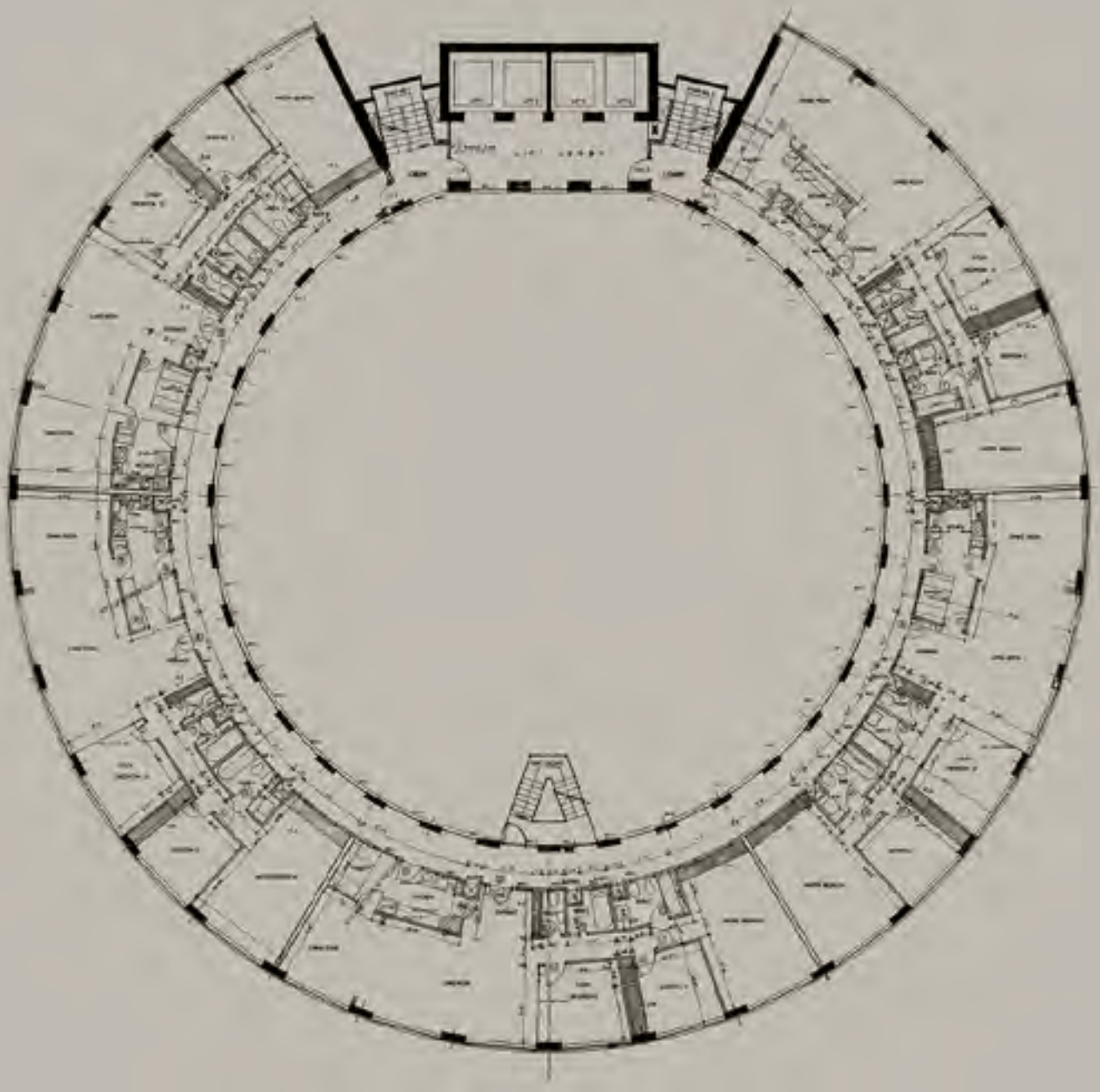
Plan of the core of Ponte building,
showing the ramp and parking, 1969.



Ramp layout plan of the Ponte building,
showing circulation through the core and
access to parking, 1969.



Section through the Ponte building, showing the tower structure and concrete elements, 1969.



Typical floor plan layout of the Ponte building, showing arrangement of apartments around the central core, 1969.





Dr Charles Ferreira, Managing Director of Mercabank and Deputy Chairman of Nasbou, Mr I Block, Managing Director of Nasbou, Mrs Neppe, His Worship the Mayor of Johannesburg, Clr. Max Neppe, and Mr Cyril Reid, Executive Technical Director of Nasbou, at the topping out ceremony on Ponte's 54th floor earlier this year.

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LINES, THREADS, TRACES:

Key Influences, Moments and Movements in the Work of GLH

Lesley Lokko OBE

Founder and Chair, African Futures Institute
Accra, Ghana



Eighty years in the lifespan of any architectural firm is a long time, representing at least three generations of involvement, at multiple levels, from design ethos to business model. In South Africa, I believe it is safe to say that few firms have reached that benchmark without major changes in name, style or output. That Grosskopff Lombart Huyberechts (GLH) has managed to weather the storms and sunrises of the past century, and emerge, changed-but-intact, is testament to several factors. Some of these ostensibly have little to do with architecture – for example friendship, loyalty and family – but have nonetheless hugely influenced both the history and work of the firm. Unexpectedly, perhaps, these were also key touchstones in the way I, as an outside 'eye' in more senses than one, was influenced to approach the task of writing about their legacy.

The British architect and architectural historian, Jonathan Hill (2012: 174), describes outstanding architects as "exceptional storytellers, weaving a narrative that completely convinces the designer as well as the users." Sir Denys Lasdun, another British architect (albeit more of the last century than the present one) once remarked, "each architect must devise their own creative myth" (Lasdun 1965: 271). Creative architects have always looked to the past to imagine the future, examining the architecture of earlier times, not to replicate it (or so one hopes) but to understand, interpret and transform it, revealing its relevance and place in the present. Similarly, a city, like an architect, also requires a creative myth; one that allows its citizens to understand it collectively, and to shape and imagine its future. The much-used but often ill-understood term *genius loci* – the spirit or genius of a place – is an idea that originated in classical antiquity

Johannesburg in the 1970s. Manfred Hermer's offices were in the Volskas Gebou, 74 Albertina Sisulu Road, opposite Beyers Naude Square. Museum Africa Archive.

and has influenced architects for centuries.[1] In the case of Johannesburg, a city that has always had multiple and often contradictory *genii loci*, the strange and often uncomfortable fusion of past, present and future myths about the city has had a profound impact on its architects, who have found multiple ways to live, literally, within its contradictions.

'May you live in interesting times' is an English expression masquerading as a traditional Chinese proverb (or curse, depending on your viewpoint). For a South African firm of architects, 'born' in 1943 at the height of the Second World War, witnessing the National Party's rise to power in 1948 and the formalising of apartheid, expanding as a practice through the political turbulence of the 1970s and 80s, and emerging into the pre-liberation dawn of the 1990s, the past eighty years have indeed been the most interesting of times. It is difficult to think of a parallel place or time in which so much of what has defined our modern world has happened. Not least, the end of peace in Europe for the second time in forty years and the slow dismantling of the European empires, beginning with India in 1947 and culminating in the 'winds of change' speech given by British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to the South African parliament on 3 February 1960. The opportunity to add my own interpretation of the work of GLH over the past eighty years seems a unique and interesting opportunity to uncover their 'creative myth' and place it in the context of a remarkable slice of twentieth-century history. The title of this essay is 'Lines, Threads, Traces.' For different reasons, the title and the image it evokes seem to me to be an apt way – or place – to begin.

Lines

In Chapter One Katherine Munro gives a full account of how the Manfred Hermer Grosskopff partnership began its working life in 1943, with founding partners Manfred Hermer and Ralph Green, some twenty-two years before Rodney Grosskopff became a partner in 1965. In Manfred Hermer's moving and detailed though unpublished memoir, dictated to his daughter in 2015, a stark image of lines comes alive. He writes of being "terrified"

1 Used here in the sense of Christian Norberg-Schulz's (1980) argument, that spaces are both concrete *and* imagined, made up of built reality ('place') but also shaped by the events that 'take place' within it. This combination makes up the genius loci or 'spirit' of a place.



Black pen drawing of the Hotel Gounod, Nice, by Rodney Grosskopff, July 1992.



Ponte shortly after completion, 1975. GLH Archive.

> ... especially when producing drawings. His [Mr Poorter, his schoolmaster's] only concern being that the lines should be faintly drawn and only lined in when all the preparatory changes and rubbing out had been approved. I took the greatest care, in my own interests of self-preservation, to draw the lines so faintly that they were barely visible. This pleased him greatly and one day, in my presence, when he passed my father's shop, he said, 'You know, your son's drawings are outstanding; you should make him an architect.' From that day, it was accepted without any further discussion that I was to be an architect (Hermer 2015: 8).

In a telephone conversation with Rodney Grosskopff (26 January 2015), when asked what he made of the title

'Lines, Threads, Traces', he replied, "Well, it all begins with the line, really, doesn't it? As an architect, the line is the beginning, the root of everything. All ideas proceed from the first line." As a student of architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), he recalled producing "nothing but endless drawings of Corinthian columns, either in pencil, charcoal or watercolour" (Grosskopff 2015). And then along came South African-born Julian Beinart, a young lecturer, fresh out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the first line was drawn - or crossed, according to Rodney Grosskopff. "He taught us how to think" (Grosskopff 2015). Up to that point, said Grosskopff, "We simply redrew things, from classical columns to pediments. Suddenly this young man from overseas forced us to question what we did" (Grosskopff 2015). From one great European tradition (Classicism) to another (Modernism) the line connecting South Africa, all the way at the foot of the continent, to the United States via Germany and the Bauhaus, was inked in.

But what of another set of lines, those traced out on the ground? What are some of GLH's most iconic projects of the 1960s and 70s, which really inked out the firm's position in the landscape of South African firms? One must begin with Ponte City Tower, the subject, as Hannah Le Roux shows in Chapter Three, of more documentaries, commentary, hand wringing and critical enquiry than almost any other residential project on the African continent. The South African architect and academic Lindsay Bremner (2014: 15) writes of "Ponte as Geological Agent", tracing another line through architecture, urbanism and geology, where "all of Ponte's material components . . . the 52,000m^3 tons of concrete incorporating 2,600 tons of steel . . . can be traced through complex economic, cultural, technical and social sieves." It is a powerful image, particularly when juxtaposed against some of the firm's coterminous projects – the Market Theatre, for example, one of Grosskopff's personal favourites, according to our conversation in January 2015, or the Johannesburg Civic Theatre – neither of which has achieved anything like Ponte City's notoriety or renown. However, the image (that of Ponte City's rising and falling material fortunes) raises another interesting question and yet another set of lines.

Architecture, as anyone who has been either front-of-office (design studio) or back-of-house (client) knows, is a long game, a *very* long game. It takes time. Not simply in the concept-drawing-to-building sense of the journey but in the sense of its wider place in the culture and politics of its time. Edward Said, the influential Palestinian American



GLH Architects' current offices in Global House, Rosebank, designed by the firm in 2012. GLH Archive.

literary critic and philosopher, was one of the first to point out what now seems obvious: that culture, in its Arnoldian sense of "the best that has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold, 1869: 5), is always inextricably linked to the larger political, social and even economic forces of its time. More than a century before Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) appeared, Matthew Arnold, one of nineteenth-century Britain's most prominent social commentators wrote *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) where he recommended culture as "the great help out of our present difficulties, culture being a pursuit of our total perfection ...turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically" (Arnold 1869: 7). Although Arnold (and indeed Said) did not go so far as to include architecture explicitly in their definition of 'culture', in South Africa, where architecture has played such a crucial role in the shaping of a cultural milieu, both built and ephemeral, it is almost impossible to look at the firm's considerable

output over the past half century without considering a number of key issues: one, the cultural aspirations of the firm at the time of design, both concept and construction; two, the degree to which the firm managed to "turn a stream of fresh and free thought upon [their] stock notions and habits" (Arnold, 1869: 7) and finally, those projects that managed to embrace the climate of change that has characterised post-independence South African architecture in unexpected and even poetic ways.

Threads

A thread, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is both a long, thin strand of cotton (or 'other' fibre) and a theme or characteristic running through a situation (such as a piece of writing). A visit to the Johannesburg offices of GLH provided an unexpected opportunity to view the threads of the work of the firm over the past fifty-odd years. I was there to interview Briget Grosskopff, Rodney Grosskopff's daughter. As she led me from the pristine boardroom, a series of tall boards caught my eye. Stacked against the wall – sentinels in the space where GLH's twenty odd employees, associates and partners go about their creative business – were three display boards charting the firm's major projects from the 1940s onwards. There it was: the thread – or rather threads, for there are several – that tie the firm together from the very beginning, eighty years past, to the present. It was a unique way to experience numerous projects simultaneously and chronologically, and to take in, in a long, sweeping glance,



Architect's Model of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre, 1962. GLH Archive.

what was at least a partial understanding of the firm's creative myth(s), which are the point of departure of this essay.

Intentionally or otherwise, over the span of eighty years, there appear to be three dominant 'myths' at play, all of which can be traced directly to the firm's aspirations, and which have found expression in differing degrees of success. In the first instance, beginning in the 1940s, one recognises immediately, as Federico Freschi discusses in his text, the classic high Modernism of the period. The stark brick façades of the Alexander Theatre and the linear balletic lines of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre embody the stripped-back purity of language and vision typical of International Style architects, who, at the time, were largely practising 'over there' in Europe and America. Although examples of the International Style could be found in places as diverse as Brazil and Buffalo, its cultural heart lay in the European and American metropolitan centres where young disciples studied and practiced and whence they departed to spread their work(s). The same thread that bound Alvar Aalto in Finland to Arieh Sharon in Israel also connects Venezuelan Carlos Raul Villanueva to Max Policansky, Rex Distin Martienssen and Manfred Hermer in South Africa at the tip of the continent: young, ambitious and white (in a cultural rather than racial sense). As their names suggest, these were men who were steeped both in the classical European traditions (of which Modernism was simply the latest) and driven by a desire to see the ideas and tenets of Modernism spread from the centre (Europe and America) to the furthest parts of the globe. Whilst emulating the formal mannerisms and vocabulary of the era, the South Africans carved their own niche, a regional international style, rooted in a spare and rather severe Lutheran vocabulary.



Rodney Grosskopff and Pierre Lombart, 1989. GLH Archive.

In the 1980s and early 90s, however, another thread begins to emerge: the architect-as-developer and project-initiator, a move that resulted in a more stable economic footing for the firm. Pierre Lombart, a Belgian national, joined the firm in 1984 (becoming a full partner in 1990) and a different design ethos and sensibility takes hold: functional, efficient, client-centred and fashionable. The emphasis on client satisfaction and the prized ability to bring in projects on time and on budget paid off: several important commercial and corporate commissions were won in the 1990s, amongst them the Hollard corporate headquarters in Parktown and the enormous Nedbank headquarters in Sandton. The projects of the 1990s and early 2000s are examples of Postmodernism, the functional language of corporate headquarter projects almost anywhere in the



JH Smilg Executive Centre, Kerk Street, Johannesburg, 1994. Photographer: Barry Goldman.

111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 1993. Photographer: Barry Goldman.



world at the time, but particularly dominant in South Africa. In his article, 'Defining a Relevant Architecture in South Africa' Paul Sanders (2000) wrote that "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 materials contrasts." In this context, Pierre Lombart brought to the firm a first-hand, authentically *European* Postmodernist sensibility that saw the firm's hold on several important clients strengthen. In a curious way, 'context', for GLH, seems to have been both the firm's Achilles heel and its unexpected medium of reinvention.





ABSA Towers West,
Johannesburg, 2013.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.

The appointment in 1997 of Arlene Shaw and, three years later in 2000, of Briget Grosskopff, saw the emergence of another thread with a different aesthetic: as robust and corporate as the projects of the 1990s and early 2000s, but with a markedly lighter touch. This is expressed in the Vodacom projects, for example, including the 1997 Vodaworld Complex and Conference Centre in Midrand. At the end of 2003, another Belgian, Xavier Huyberechts, joined the firm and the new aesthetic direction of the firm began to take firm hold. In the ABSA Towers West, the self-consciously Postmodern heaviness of the Edward Nathan offices in West Road receded, to be replaced by a lighter elegance, evident in the long, curved façade with its offset balustrades and shades. The five partners (Rodney Grosskopff, Pierre Lombart, Arlene Shaw, Briget Grosskopff and Xavier Huyberechts) each brought something slightly different to the mix: a stronger 'South African-ness', clear in the Standard Bank Global Leadership complex in Rivonia, completed in 2007, and most markedly in the Vodacom SSIC project, completed in 2011. Here the use of materials and massing makes deliberate reference to the colours and textures of the South African landscape giving the building a sense of being properly rooted in its immediate context and surrounds.



Rodney Grosskopff (back centre), Xavier Huyberechts, Briget Grosskopff, Pierre Lombart and Arlene Hunkin, c. 1999. GLH Archive.'

In 85 and 90 Grayston Road in Sandton, the pared-back elegance of the projects suits their surroundings well. These latter-day headquarters and office blocks have drawn from their neighbours to work within the prevailing idiom. Now, again, as in the 1940s and 50s, perhaps, the firm's work begins to take on a less self-conscious contemporaneity. 'Green' credentials, the new 'science' of contemporary practice, are highlighted, as is their neo-Modernist aesthetic. The Modernist civic and cultural buildings of Hermer's day were, in their own way, cutting-edge icons of a particular European/American agenda, transplanted to (but admittedly little changed by) their African context. In the same way, the projects of 2015 and beyond belong to the hermetic corporate world of Sandton, the faux city seeking its own city-ness. As 'other' parts of Johannesburg begin to reassert their urban identity, most distinctively Braamfontein, it will be interesting to witness the firm's ability to reassess its own aspirations, both in terms of its internal design culture and the wider ambitions of Johannesburg-as-world-class-city as a whole.



Vodacom Corporate Park,
Midrand, 1998.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.



South Africa is – and always has been – a series of almost intractable binary contradictions: First World/Developing World; simultaneously revolutionary and reactionary; outward-seeking as well as curiously inward-looking. In the threads that have emerged over the firm's eighty-year lifetime, we can see how it has consistently navigated the balance between engaging with South Africa's evolving context and aligning with the corporate and commercial spheres of contemporary practice. Its portfolio reflects a thoughtful approach to buildings of cultural significance – such as theatres, museums, and places of worship – while maintaining a structured and clearly defined architectural language. The firm's emphasis on qualities like satisfaction, efficiency, sustainability, and value has shaped its identity, ensuring a focus on refined, purpose-driven design that aligns with its established ethos.

In the 2020s a new confidence seems to have settled over the office space, evidenced in the frankly exemplary diversity of its staff: young/old(er); rookies/veterans; CAD-jocks and cutting knives; Black/white (admittedly a broad-brush category if there ever was one but in the context of South Africa, an important observation); male/female (at last count, the practice employed ten women architects out of a total practitioner workforce of 20). What difference will this 'difference' make? One must wait and see. Another thread is waiting to be pulled, stitched, formed and shaped.





Above right: Vodacom Campus, Midrand, 1998. Right: Vodacom SSIC, Midrand
Photographer: Barry Goldman
Left: Standard Bank Global Leadership Centre, Morningside, 2007.
GLH Archive.







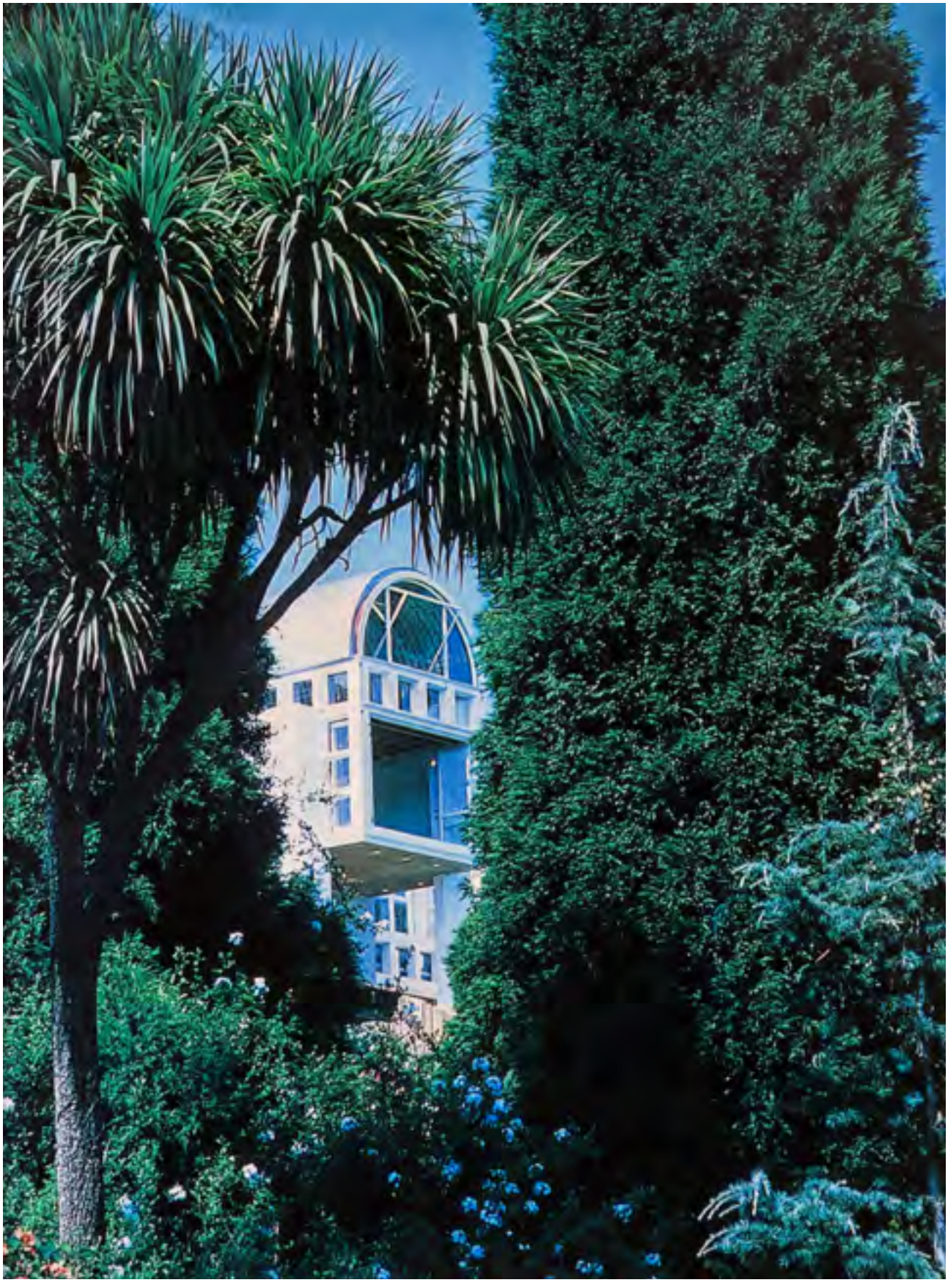
Directors of GLH Architects, 2023. From left to right, Leon Fourie, Louise O'Raw, Xavier Huyberechts, Naina Jivan, Briget Grosskopff. Photo: Tony Korsten, *Asset* magazine.

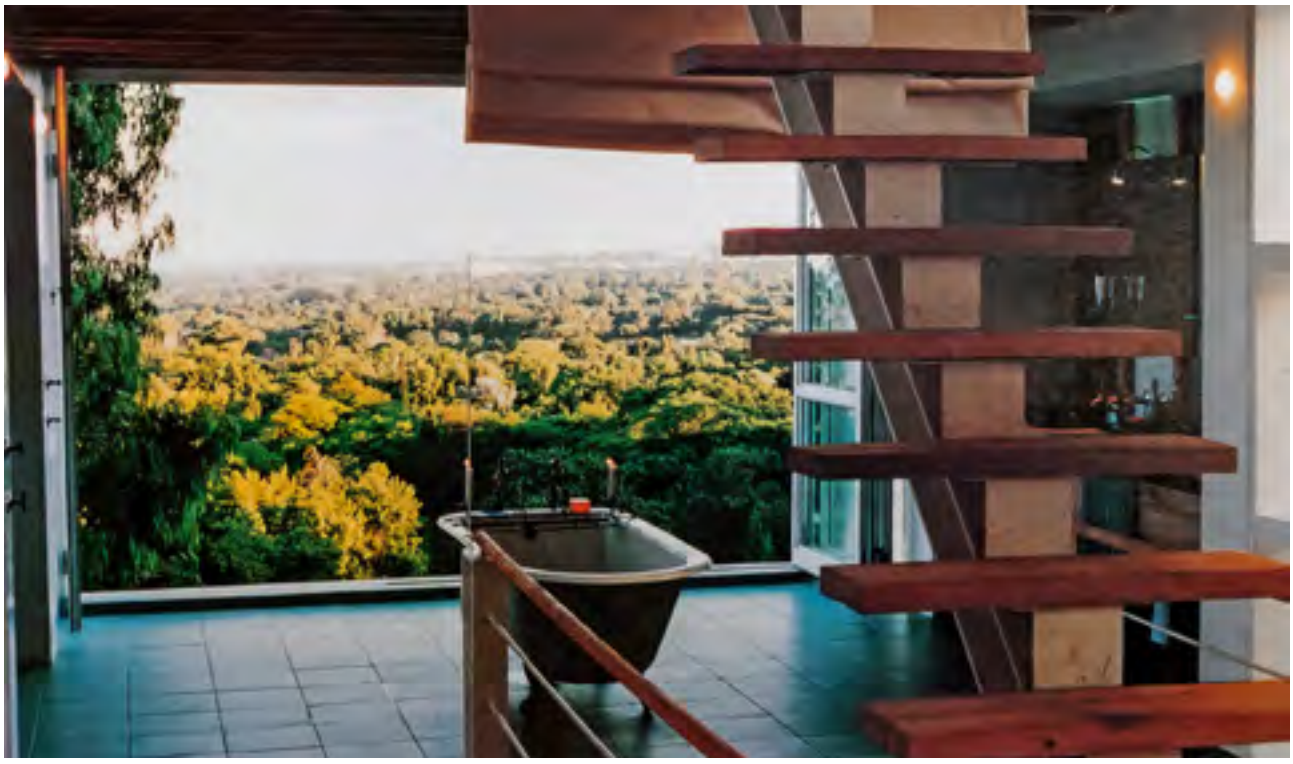
Traces

The renowned Serbian performance artist Marina Abramoviç, in an interview with the British journalist Sean O'Hagan (2010), famously and surprisingly declared, "even now, I have traces of the good little girl. When I am not performing, for instance, I am really very quiet and ordinary."

One of the pleasures of being both architect and novelist is the occasional and occasionally overwhelming temptation to be both simultaneously. As a novelist, one looks for traces everywhere, in every word, sentence, glance, gesture; mining each moment for clues that may lead elsewhere. I would be lying if I said that the potential for fiction of almost Shakespearean proportion was not uppermost in my mind when I drove along Oxford Road to meet Briget Grosskopff. As the lift took me silently up to the third floor, I wondered how to phrase the most clichéd question I simply could not avoid: what was it *like*, being both daughter and heir? Briget's answer was unexpected. "We're a large firm by South African standards," she said, "but we've always felt like family" (Grosskopff, B, 2015). It is not often that words such as 'custodian' or 'heritage' are used to describe anything as mundane and essentially *corporate* as a firm of architects, but the more we spoke, the more aware I became of the traces of personal histories present in the firm's lineage; a sense of responsibility to a vision and ethos conceived eighty years ago, in another time and place, but which has survived, albeit in different ways, into the present.

“The past is a foreign country,” wrote L.P. Hartley in 1953, “they do things differently there” (Hartley, 1953: 1). South Africa today is a very different place to the one in which Manfred Hermer began his partnership with Ralph Green in 1943. Yet things aren’t done perhaps quite as differently as Hartley suggests. In their own words, according to the firm’s website, GLH Associates describe “a deep love of architecture” as being the driving force behind the practice’s work. Lines, threads and traces of the same appreciation for buildings, forms, materials and clients can be seen running through the three ‘sentinel’ boards, evident in the photographs and in walking around the buildings themselves. In Manfred Hermer’s memoir, a single line stands out: “The one who was to have the greatest effect on my life was Rodney Grosskopff. His loyalty is boundless and our friendship continues to this day” (Hermer, 2015: 15). I risk sentimentality. Loyalty, friendship, passion and love are equally curious sentiments in the feast-or-famine, boom-or-bust world of contemporary architecture. But perhaps that is the key, not just to building the *firm*, but to building a legacy in the more emotive sense of the word.





House Lombart, Forest Town,
Johannesburg, 1996.
GLH Archive.




CUP
Ke Yonsi

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Nedbank Head Office
135 Rivonia Road, Sandton, 2000.
GLH Archive.

SITUATED PRACTICE:

Sustainability and Public Value in the Post-Apartheid Work of GLH Architects

Guy Trangoš

University of Johannesburg



Constant change

Johannesburg has seen monumental change and significant growth in the past half-century since the construction of the iconic Ponte Tower. The city's inner-city remained a diverse and thriving place through dramatic demographic and income shifts. By the mid-1990s, commercial decentralisation had taken hold (see Murray 2011; Goga 2003; Bremner 2007). Old inner-city buildings were no longer suitable for changing corporate tastes that sought shorter travel times, ubiquitous parking and park-like office settings (Beavon 2004). The city's growing population, increasingly mismanaged buildings and economic uncertainty further fuelled corporate flight. Many businesses left the inner-city in a series of waves, each contributing to the greater decentralisation of Johannesburg into a city with multiple economic nodes. In a sense, this has been a march northward, first to Braamfontein, then the suburb of Parktown, Rosebank and Sandton, and today, Midrand hosts many new corporate head offices. The outward expansion of Johannesburg has become enmeshed in the southern expansion of Pretoria, forming a city-region of multiple urban nodes. These further fragment an urban landscape still defined by racial and economic segregation and the stark differences between leafy, well-to-do suburbs and dense, under-resourced townships. Within this indeterminate and splintered urban form, multiple parallel realities slip past one another daily.

Aerial view of Sandton looking north along Rivonia Road, 2025. Source: Infrastructure Photos.

Through the post-apartheid urban change enacted in the Gauteng City Region since the early 1990s, architecture has, as it had during apartheid, played a major role in the spatial restructuring of urban form. In significant ways, the decades since democracy demonstrate a slow retreat of urban policy as a major determinant of urban spatial growth (McKechnie 2023). Indeed, significant spatial policies such as the City of Johannesburg's Corridors of Freedom, social housing expansions to township areas such as Lufhereng or Diepsloot, and the Gautrain demonstrate targeted strategies. Still, the city's high-value commercial and residential development was guided primarily by major property development companies. Their influence drove the major decentralised patterns we see today into clustered commercial nodes and private estates. A security mindset pervaded these approaches as property developers responded to the insecurities of wealthy residents and major corporations during this post-apartheid transition (Bremner 2007). Over time, these approaches embedded themselves in the status quo, and Johannesburg became a harsh expression of securitisation. Architecture was a major force in entrenching the new forms and materials of the post-apartheid city.

In decentralised nodes like Rosebank, Sandton and Midrand, major new office buildings turned inwards away from the street. Indeed, in Sandton and Midrand, these former smallholding-dominated peri-urban areas had limited pedestrian activity. This was exacerbated rather than remedied by new development, which created enclave islands, each distinct in the urban fabric. The Investec campus (Rinaldi MacDonald/ Koseff Van der Walt, 1980/1997 respectively) and Sasol offices (Paragon Architects, 2016) in Sandton and Waterfall Estate in Midrand evidence this.

In Rosebank, an older urban fabric replete with numerous pedestrian malls and thoroughfares saw radical change as courtyard shopping centres such as Mutual Arcade and Rosebank Mews were torn down or radically altered, its fine pedestrian scales enfolded into singular mall management regimes. The effect of this hardening of edges between buildings or precincts and the public realm further exacerbated post-apartheid urban exclusion.

At the same time, South Africa experienced a major power generation crisis, as our reliance on ageing coal-powered infrastructure came home to roost. The construction of new mega-coal-fuelled power stations and their forerunners has had a detrimental effect on the quality of our air (Wright 2025). This, combined with a

30 Baker Street, Standard Bank, Rosebank, 2015. Source: PhotoSauce Photography.




2 PYBUS
2 PYBUS



345 Rivonia Road, 2009.
Photographer: Peter Hassall.

global increase in greenhouse gas emissions, has brought the effects of climate change to bear on the world in devastating ways. In Johannesburg, clients and developers have prioritised energy-efficient approaches to building, often due to increased electricity costs and grid unreliability (Kemp 2024). However, truly sustainable approaches in architectural design – the kind we need to improve our wasteful reliance on environmental systems – are more elusive.

In this complex and shifting post-apartheid terrain characterised by developer speculation and insecurity, the retreat of municipal urban management (see Jantjies 2024), and climate change, GLH & Associates Architects continued to be major players in the architectural expression of a contemporary Johannesburg. This volume demonstrates that GLH has a long and ingrained history in Johannesburg. Their built work spans almost every major epoch and typology in the city's history since the firm's founding in 1945. Since 1994, the practice has developed diverse projects in the city, including The Johannesburg Ballet Studio in Braamfontein, The Hollard development and Villa Arcadia heritage project in Parktown, St. Theresa's School in Rosebank, and the Standard Bank Art Gallery in the inner-city. In Rosebank and Sandton, GLH has had a major influence. In Sandton, important projects include Nedbank Phase I and II, ENS, 345 Rivonia Road, Empire Apartments and Hotel, 85 Grayston Drive, 2 Pybus Road, 90 Grayston Drive and 90 Rivonia Road.



Far left: 2 Pybus Road, 2019.
Left: 2 Pybus Road, atrium ceiling
Source: Infrastructure Photos.



The Tyrwhitt Apartments,
Tyrwhitt Avenue, Rosebank, 2019
Photographer: Ryan French.

In Rosebank, GLH built the Firs, 8 Parks Boulevard, Rosebank Towers, 199 Oxford Park, Standard Bank, 5 Parks Boulevard and Ikusasa, among others. GLH built an expansion to the Multichoice campus in Randburg, another decentralised node, as well as components of the major Vodacom campus in Midrand. Across these sites, GLH has designed their own variants of the now-common Johannesburg corporate typologies: the office park and the low-rise office block.[1]

Across these projects, GLH have demonstrated a critical and innovative response to corporate and developer demands. Specifically, their recent buildings significantly engage with environmental sustainability principles and public realm improvement. This chapter examines six case study projects built by GLH during the last quarter-century. I have focused my analysis on two areas: the first concerns GLH's approach to sustainable design, and the second examines their general approach to the varied public realms in which they have built major projects. Both sustainable design and the design of public-private interfaces and public realm upgrades are major contributors to Johannesburg's progressive ecological and social transformation. I argue that GLH has made major strides in these two areas, and as a result, their buildings make consequential and constructive contributions to Johannesburg's urban fabric.

1 Geographer Keith Beavon attributes the emergence of the office park and low-rise office block to "[...] firms wishing to operate in low-rise, areally extensive and energy efficient buildings" (2003: 181). Formerly suburban areas offered the space for these. In addition, global trends away from congested city centres with inadequate parking, and systematised large floor-plan approaches to office layout and management influenced the form of Johannesburg's commercial evolution (Vivian 2012).





Department of Statistics Campus, Salvokop, Tshwane, 2016. Photographer: Barry Goldman.





Sustainable design

As a city founded primarily on extracting and processing gold, Johannesburg's businesses, residents and municipality have not prioritised the ecological context in which the city has grown (Culwick Fatti 2021). The mining industry specifically radically transformed the Witwatersrand landscape, polluting its ecological systems with numerous toxins and waste products (Bobbins and Trangoš 2018). The scale of this waste landscape is evident from space, stretching across the city from west to east.[2] As mining in the city declined, the services sector grew, and new commercial landscapes appeared. Given South Africa's reliance on coal power, the built environment in Johannesburg is a major energy consumer and the large shopping malls and office complexes that emerged in many decentralised nodes were no exception. Reliant on artificial lighting and mechanical ventilation, they were major electricity consumers. As greater awareness of the effects of human-driven climate change came to light globally, and South Africa began load shedding, architects felt increased pressure and responsibility to design buildings that reduced their reliance on electricity and use materials with fewer embodied costs.

2 Since the world's largest gold bearing reef was industrially mined at what became Johannesburg from 1886, significant landscape transformations have occurred. These include the creation of a significant mining waste landscape that stretches roughly 100km across the Witwatersrand from west to east. This landscape was again re-mined both formally and informally from the 1990s onwards (see Bobbins and Trangoš 2018; and Knight 2018), the effect of these operations are massive in scale.

Nedbank Group Head Office,
135 Rivonia Road, 2010.
GLH Archive.

GLH was among the city's first architecture practices to experiment with new and innovative sustainable technologies. Still, as I present through three case studies, the Nedbank Campus in Sandton, the Vodafone Site Solution Innovation Centre in Midrand and the Witklipfontein project in the Free State, their approaches spanned the high and low tech, each responding to diverse contexts.



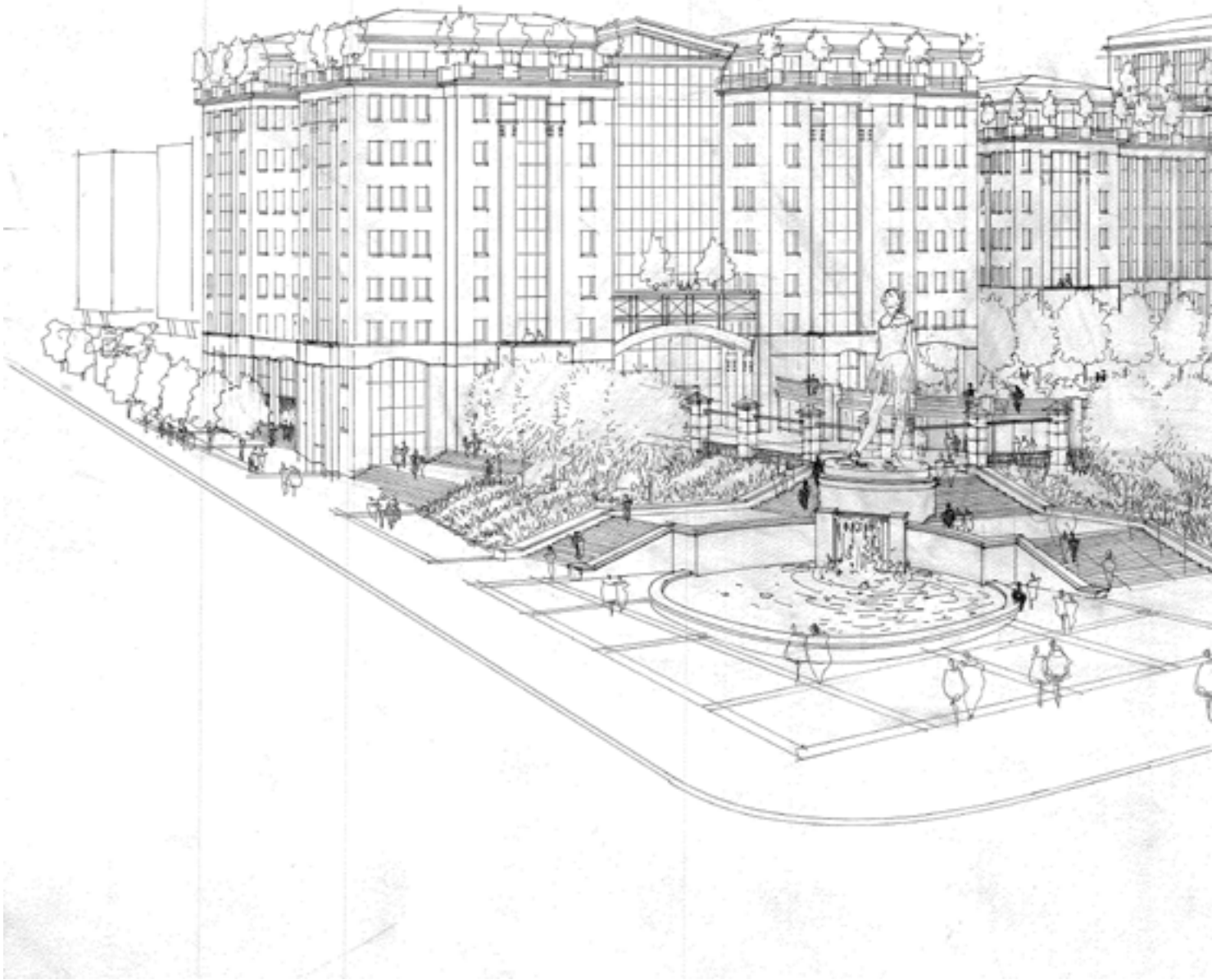
In 2001, GLH completed the Nedbank Phase I project. A major development in Sandton, the scheme combined the bank's many departments into one urban park-like setting. The project was a forerunner to Phase II, which was completed in 2010. The second phase extended the first, adding 40,000m2 to Nedbank's Sandton presence. It followed a similar seven-story, H-plan format, clad partly in sandstone and glass. Both phases embody a commercial classicism, banking rootedness and stability in a Sandton now increasingly dominated by major banking and investment company headquarters (GLH Architects n.d.). Nedbank Phase II was a major project for GLH, not just because of its scale and complexity, but because the building was the first in South Africa to be Green Star Certified, receiving four stars.[3] Nedbank Phase II contains its own blackwater treatment plant and rainwater harvesting systems, which provide recycled water for the building's non-potable uses. It is finished with low-VOC materials and coatings and has efficient sensor-based lighting and temperature modulation (GBCSA n.d.-a).[4] Unlike older buildings in Sandton, Phase I and II embrace natural lighting, cross-ventilation and the integration of parks and planting in outdoor spaces and atria. 60% of office spaces have a view of the outdoors. On the Green Building Council score sheet, particular recognition was given to the building's water treatment and management, its internal environmental quality and its reductions in emissions.

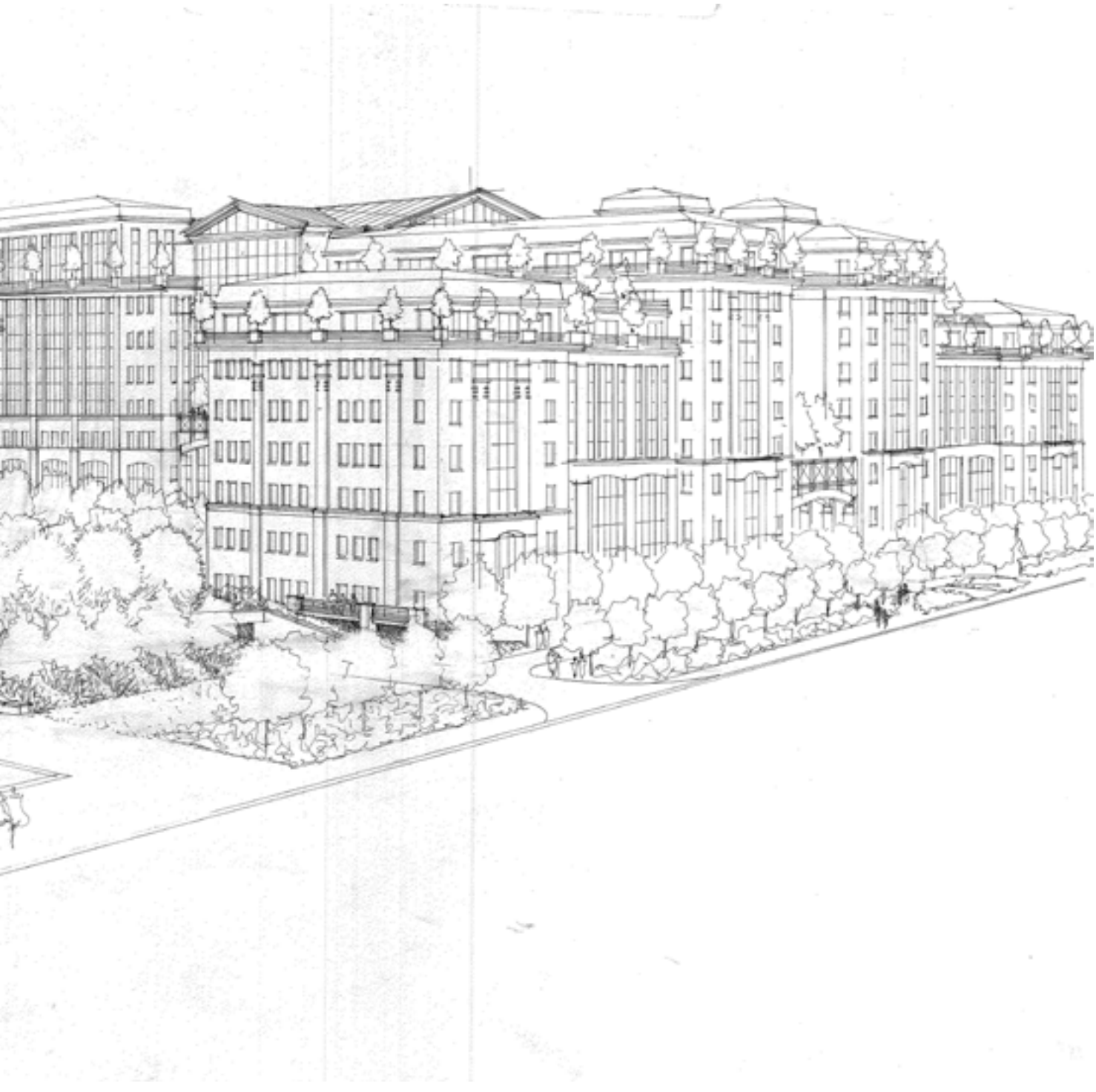
3 The Green Star rating system is administered by the Green Building Council of South Africa and established in 2007, in response to the country's growing environmental pressures, energy crises, and rapid urban development. Adapted from Australia's model, it provides a voluntary framework for assessing and rewarding sustainability in the built environment (GBCSA n.d.-c).

4 Low-VOC materials have low levels of volatile organic compounds compared to others, meaning that they are generally healthier as they release fewer chemicals into the air (see EPA n.d.).



Left and Above: Nedbank Group Head Office, 135 Rivonia Road, 2010.
Photographer: Peter Hassall.





Nedbank Hand Sketch by Xavier Huyberechts, 1998. GLH Archive.

Also completed in 2011 is the Vodafone Site Solution Innovation Centre (SSIC), located in the Vodacom office complex in Midrand, Johannesburg. The SSIC was recognised as the first building in South Africa and the Southern Hemisphere to achieve a 6-Star Green Star certification (GBCSA n.d.-b). The building was conceptualised as a prototype for Vodafone Group's global innovation agenda. The completed building is a working facility integrating sustainability technologies across architectural, electrical, mechanical and environmental systems (X. Huyberechts, personal communication, 2025). The building has a narrow floorplate centred around an open-air courtyard with a rainwater-fed pond and constructed wetland, maximising daylight and ventilation. Over 90% of the usable area achieves a daylight luminance of 250 lux, with full external views throughout, facilitated by high-performance glazing, automated blinds and deep facade overhangs (GLH Architects n.d.). The building is cooled passively through a gabion rock system that pre-cools incoming air, while a solar-powered absorption chiller supplies radiant heating and cooling through a thermally activated slab.





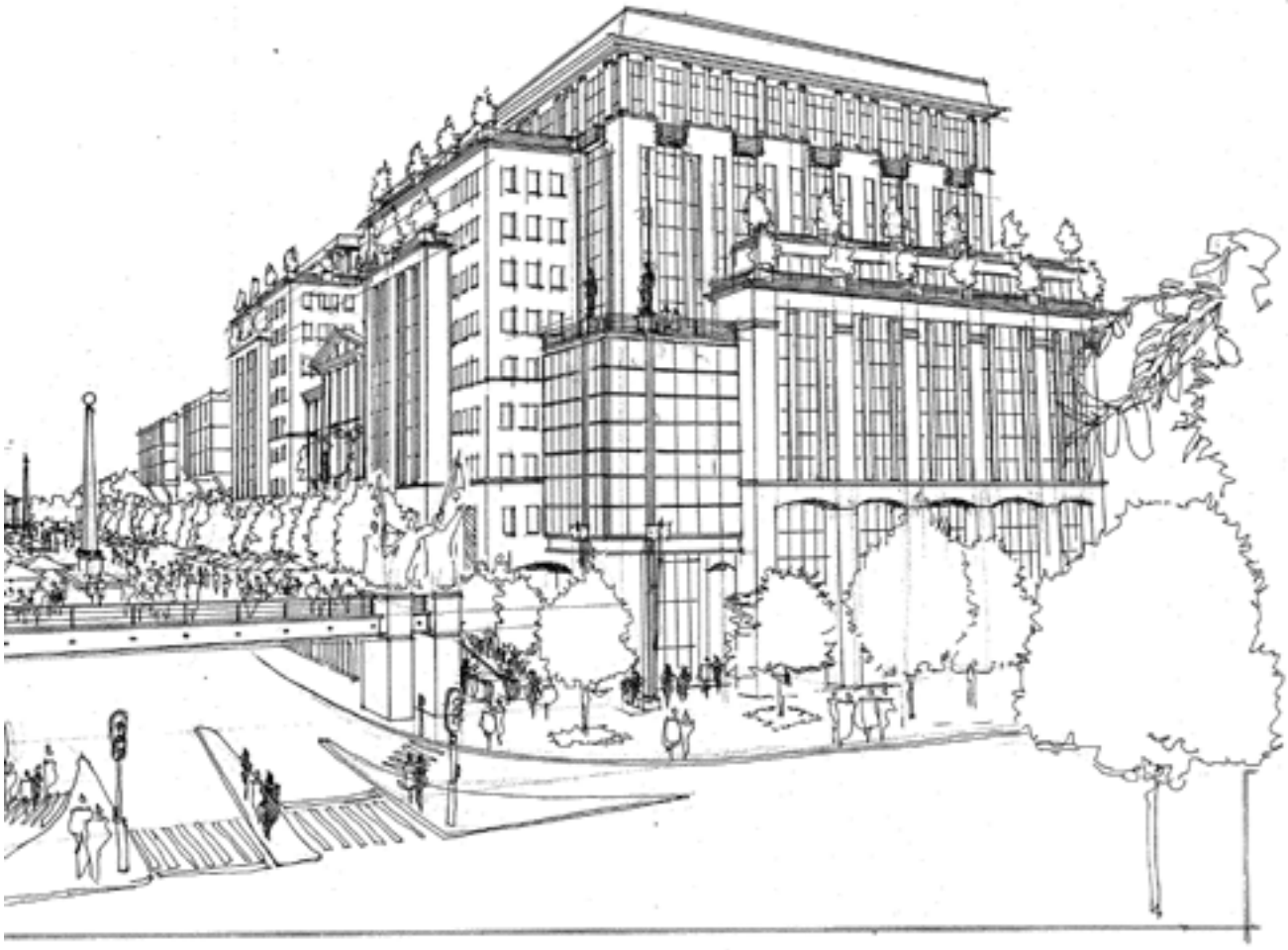


Above right and below: Vodafone Site Solution Innovation Centre (SSIC), Midrand, 2011. Photographer: Barry Goldman.

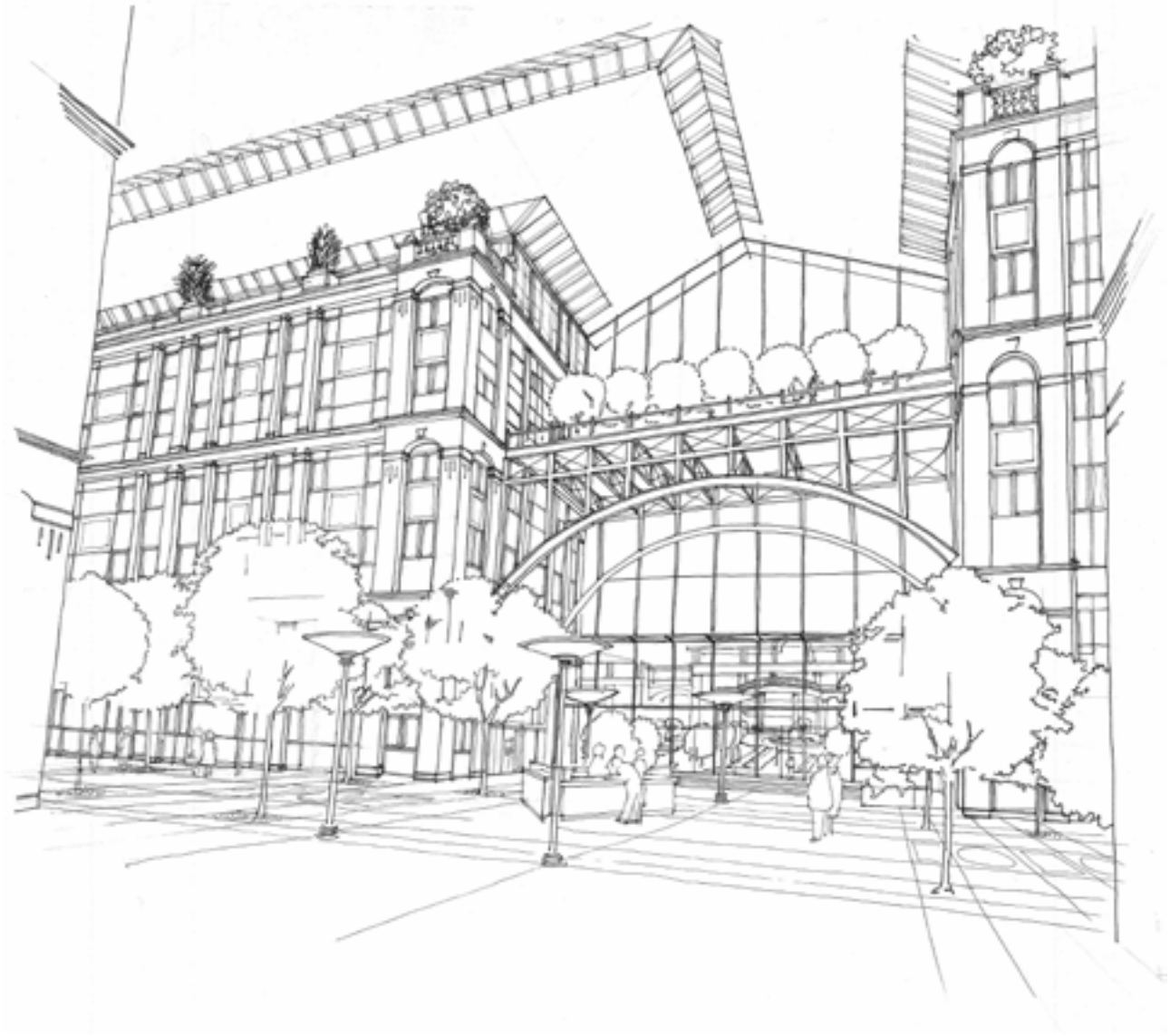
Above: Vodafone Site Solution Innovation Centre (SSIC) Cooling Plant, Midrand, 2011. GLH Archive.



The SSIC generates twice its required energy through a photovoltaic array. Water-saving features include low-flow fixtures, greywater recycling for irrigation and toilet flushing and rainwater harvesting (GLH Architects n.d.). Materials prioritise low embodied energy, with extensive use of recycled steel, FSC-certified timber and concrete with over 60% cement replacement. The building is also designed for disassembly and adaptability, improving its long-term sustainability. The surrounding garden reuses site-excavated material and recovered urban infrastructure.



Nedbank Hand Sketch by by Xavier Huyberechts, 1998. GLH Archive.



Nedbank Hand Sketch by Xavier Huyberechts, 1998. GLH Archive.



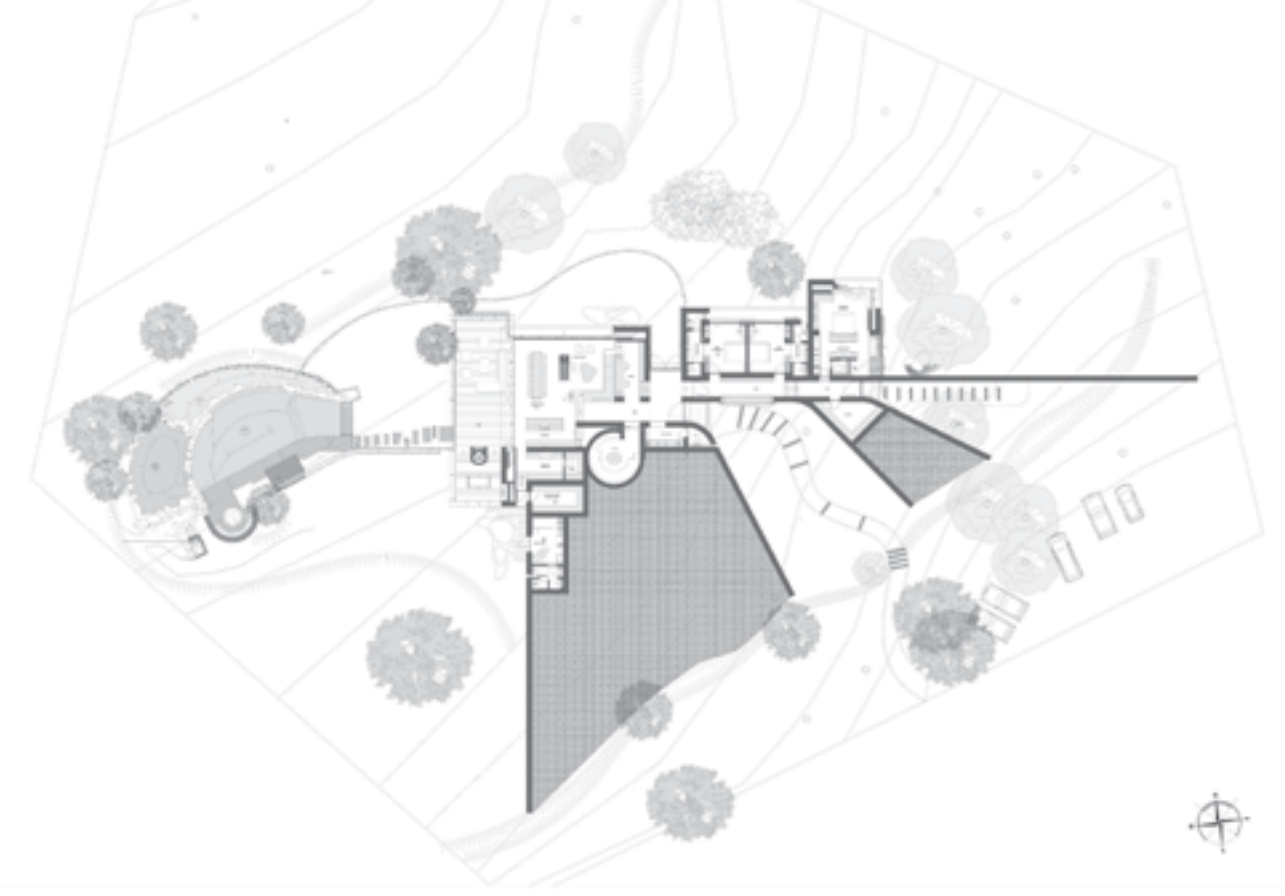
Witklipfontein Eco Lodge, Vredefort Dome, 2018.
Photographer: Elsa Young.



The third project driven by sustainability principles is the Witklipfontein Eco Lodge (2018), built for GLH Director Xavier Huyberechts and his brother, Damien Huyberechts, in the Vredefort Dome region of the Free State. While this is not located in Johannesburg, the project notably demonstrates an evolution in the practice's approach to sustainability. The design is drawn from the surrounding landscape, and the building is nestled within and beneath the terrain, minimising its visual footprint and deepening its integration with the surrounding environment. This approach combines traditional construction methods such as rammed earth and sandbag walls to produce an innovative and grounded dwelling. The lodge's spatial arrangement is oriented to maximise panoramic views, blurring interior and exterior boundaries.

A key feature of the lodge is its exploitation of the region's high diurnal temperature variation, often exceeding 20°C, through thermal mass. Thick stone, adobe, rammed earth, sandbag walls, and a planted roof regulate interior temperatures passively (X. Huyberechts, personal communication, 2025). The building is constructed with minimal cement, favouring natural and recycled materials such as off-cut granite flooring, repurposed scaffolding timber and earth-and-straw plaster. Glazing is generous

Left: Witklipfontein Eco Lodge, Vredefort Dome, 2018. Photographer: Elsa Young
Below: Site Plan. GLH Archive.



but fully operable and shaded by adjustable timber shutters, allowing for natural ventilation and control of solar gain. Further sustainable innovations include a subterranean dome, natural swimming pools, an on-site wastewater treatment plant, solar water heaters and photovoltaic energy systems (GLH Architects n.d.). The design deliberately revives and modernises low-impact construction techniques, challenging common, fast, cement-intensive approaches.

Despite the contextual specificity of GLH's sustainability-driven projects, important transferable principles emerge. These include a limiting resource dependency, improving human-environment relationships and a willingness to adapt material language to site conditions. Notably, GLH's work underscores that sustainability is not an aesthetic or technological end but a design ethic that can scale through both high-tech systems and low-tech material logic.

The Witklipfontein Eco Lodge, though unique in its rural and experimental context, makes one consider a revival of low-impact construction techniques within urban and peri-urban Johannesburg. Often dismissed in commercial developments, these methods offer clues for future low-carbon typologies.

In reviewing these three emblematic projects of the diversity of GLH's forays into sustainability-driven design, it is evident that despite being one of Johannesburg's larger and more corporate-oriented firms, GLH approaches each project with a sensitivity to its site and specific client demands. It appears difficult for an architecture practice to switch between a major corporate banking precinct of over 100,000m^2 to an innovative sustainability showcase project or a passive and environmentally embedded building far from any urban centre. However, examining each project more closely, it is evident that very simple sustainability principles are at play in all three: managing







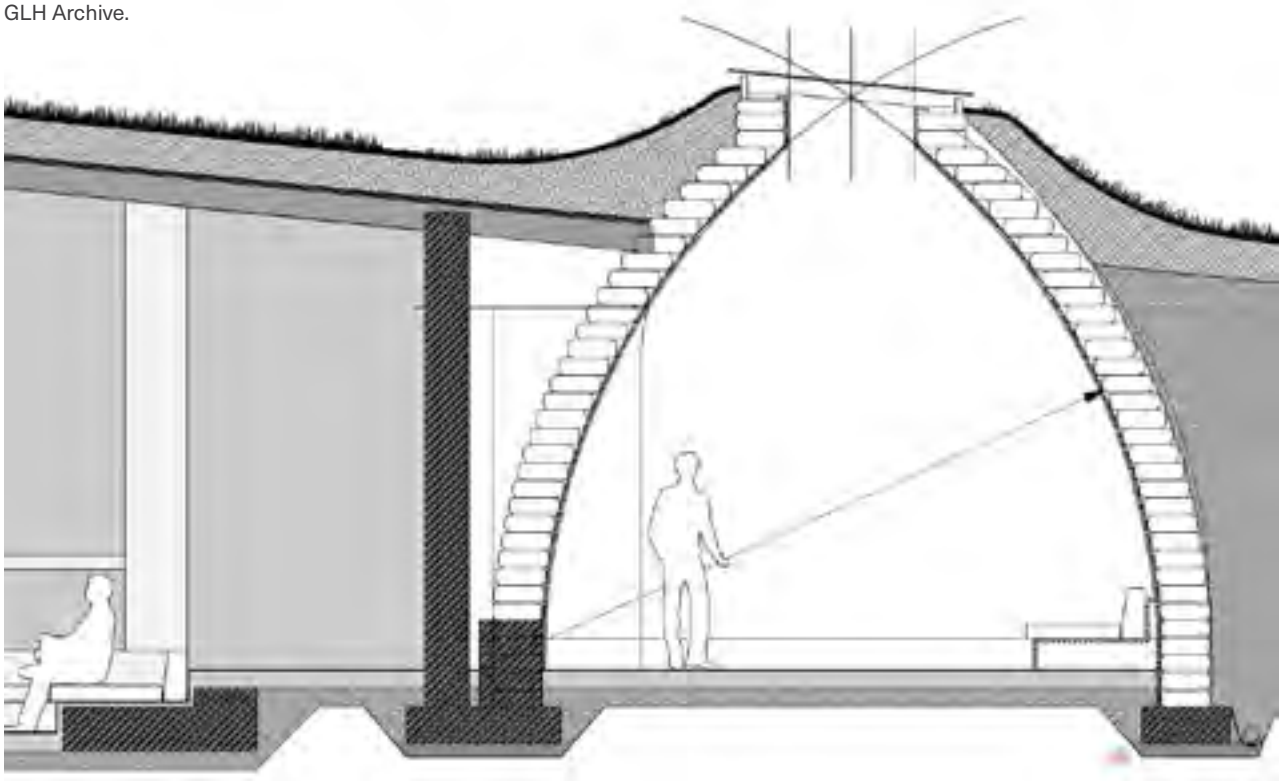


Witklipfontein Eco Lodge, Vrederfort Dome, showing adobe construction taking place on site (right) and competed (below), 2018. GLH Archive.





Left: Witklipfontein Eco Lodge, Vredefort Dome, 2018.
Vaulted entertainment room with earth-bag walls.
Photographer: Elsa Young.
Below: Entertainment room section.
Below: Stone wall along passageway.
GLH Archive.





water collection and use, building connections between the inside and outside, orientating buildings efficiently, using innovative materials (be they sandbags or double-glazed ventilated facades) to support efficient temperature regulation, and understanding buildings as complete systems all serve a diversity of applications, be they with project-specific material and technological resolution.
In discussion with Xavier Huyberechs (2025), the GLH Director noted that corporate buildings always require air conditioning due to the number of people who use them. Large buildings therefore need to be technologically innovative in their use of air conditioning, as it is not viable to do without it completely. He describes that each project starts with a meeting of project consultants who each describe the leading sustainability solutions in their fields, and ways are then found to include these, or aspects of them, in the project.





Witklipfontein Eco Lodge, Vredefort Dome, 2018.
West-facing patio blending into the bushveld.
Photographer: Elsa Young.

The importance of sustainable building approaches is obvious given global climate change. However, a major driver for GLH in realising sustainable buildings is improving the lived experience of each building for its daily occupants. Working in a building with strong connections to the outdoors, with light and temperature regulation tied to the position of the sun and human movements throughout the day, improves an employee's experience, and this assists in their job satisfaction and organisational commitment (An, Colarelli, O'Brien, & Boyajian 2016). Despite this, GLH has noticed a relationship between economic upswings and decline cycles and attendant client willingness to use more effective (and often expensive) sustainable technologies in their builds. For example, the ventilated double-glazed façade used at Standard Bank in Rosebank or 90 Rivonia Road in Sandton has not been implemented again since the economic downturn of the COVID pandemic, despite its clear environmental benefits (X. Huyberechts, personal communication, 2025). A challenge GLH has faced regarding sustainable materials and technologies is the scalability and transferability of strategies from one project to another. While Witklipfontein and the Vodafone SSIC projects, for example, offer innovative proving grounds for sustainable strategies, their technologies are so specific to their individual contexts that they cannot be easily replicated in large commercial builds. However, principles such as rainwater capture and water treatment, solar gain management, low VOC and recycled materials and reducing air conditioning requirements all offer useful and beneficial outcomes across different projects.



Witklipfontein Eco Lodge, Vredefort Dome, 2018.
Vaulted entertainment room with earth-bag walls.
Photographer: Elsa Young.





Witklipfontein Eco Lodge, Vredefort Dome, 2018.
Above: Main entrance.
Right: Dining room.
Photographer: Elsa Young.





Johannesburg Ballet
Studio, Simmonds Street,
Braamfontein, 2004.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.



Public realm upgrades

As GLH has taken a leading role in contributing to the construction of Johannesburg's many decentralised commercial nodes, it has done so with a strong focus on designing buildings with a smaller burden on our environment and buildings that improve the urban environment they come to define. Johannesburg's commercial expansion, as introduced in this chapter, has largely followed greenfield expansion, where peri-urban areas (usually farms or smallholdings) see major development into a new commercial node. This model has been mall-anchored in the past half-century, where large shopping centres are part of the initial development offering (Beavon 2003). More recently, the development of Waterfall City has seen an entirely privatised city replete with schools, hospitals, a major mall, commercial districts and an artificial lake built in Midrand, the furthest north of Johannesburg can expand before it becomes Tshwane. This major development and many commercial buildings in these development nodes problematically embrace their privatised origins and turn their backs on the public realm, opting to create exclusionary oases instead of inside layers of perimeter security. In Midrand, this appears as a long line of electric-fence-lined fences or walls, which make pedestrian movement onerous and circuitous. In more publicly active areas like Rosebank or Sandton, these approaches have created barriers that keep the public away from building edges, their harsh boundaries belied by the planting and lighting may make these edges appear more welcoming than they are.

To this end, the second major contribution that GLH has made to Johannesburg's contemporary urban fabric are buildings that embrace and attempt to give back to the public realm. The buildings I will discuss showcase subtle and meaningful urban gestures, which create more inclusive and active public spaces. While private buildings still have secured interfaces with the public, in these projects, the intention was for this hard line to soften and retreat, enabling a degree of public space to mediate the public-private boundary instead of defining it harshly and aggressively. While, like sustainability, public space is an important feature that permeates many GLH projects, I have chosen three projects from different decades to demonstrate quite different public realm strategies. The first is the Johannesburg Ballet Studio, completed in the early 2000s. I then introduce the Standard Bank Campus in Rosebank, completed in 2012, and the Ikusasa building, finished in 2022.

As a critical component of the early 2000s Braamfontein Theatre Precinct redevelopment, the South African Ballet Theatre, today known as Joburg Ballet, is part of a significant cultural corridor that connects Newtown, the University of the Witwatersrand campus, and Constitution Hill (Joburg Ballet 2022). The initiative, funded through a public-private partnership between the forestry and paper company Sappi and the City of Johannesburg, aimed to consolidate and enhance public space while strengthening cultural infrastructure in the city (GLH Architects n.d.). While building a home for a burgeoning institution was the main goal of the project, its location adjacent to the Johannesburg Civic Theatre in the city's first decentralised commercial node, Braamfontein, meant that it had to connect to the well-established public network crossing the neighbourhood. Ultimately, the new Ballet Studio formed part of a cohesive spatial and programmatic ensemble, including ysa reimagined public piazza and the landscaped park.

Set above an eight-level subterranean parking garage shared then by Sappi and theatre patrons, the piazza mediates Braamfontein's ridge and the pedestrian flows across Simmonds and Ameshoff Streets. Conceived as a circular intervention turning around the former road intersection, the space is framed by planters for sitting on and formal paving lines aligned with former street axes. A water feature descending along the Ameshoff axis and distinctive lights—matching those used at Constitution Hill and the Nelson Mandela Bridge—establish spatial continuity (GLH Architects n.d.). Adjacent Sappi Park offers a quieter, shaded green space, designed to accommodate pedestrian movement, buffered from surrounding traffic by berms and trees. Its central axis terminates in an outdoor stage, extending the theatre's presence into the landscape.

Anchoring the northern edge of the precinct, the Ballet Studio building is a two-storey pavilion with a simple arched roof. Its fully glazed southern elevation forces a relationship between dancers rehearsing and the public realm beyond, strengthening the reciprocal relationship between performance and urban life. Implicit in the Ballet Studio design is a complete embrace of public life and the urban fabric that the studio integrates within and gives back to so intentionally.



Johannesburg Ballet Studio,
Simmonds Street, Braamfontein, 2004.
Photographer: Babur Yakar.







30 Baker Street, Rosebank, 2012. Photographer: Stephen O'Raw.

The Standard Bank Campus in Rosebank, built almost a decade later, was designed with a similar intention. The new building was constructed on a consolidated site, replacing smaller buildings with one large and cubic glass form. This now prominent feature of Rosebank was built with a rugby-field-sized public piazza to the north, which replaced many of the trees removed on the site but also connected this major building, through a central movement spine serving its roughly 5,600 employees, to the more pedestrianised malls and public thoroughfares of central Rosebank. The campus was strategically located for optimal access and visibility, being proximate to major transport arteries, including the M1 highway and the Gautrain (Mhlanga 2011).

Public-facing programmes—including a restaurant and conferencing centre—activate the ground level, while upper floors are punctuated with pause areas and meeting rooms that overlook the atrium. Escalators form the spine of vertical circulation, enabling informal interaction and visual connectivity (GLH Architect n.d.).

At Standard Bank, like at the Ballet Studio, GLH integrated an architectural strategy rooted in urban pedestrian connection to the surrounding context. The Standard Bank Park was perhaps one of the most significant public gestures any corporate building in Johannesburg has made recently. However, since its initial completion, the bank's unease with a major public park as part of its new building was palpable. The subtle landscaping of the park, away from the pavement through layers of planted walls, and a general lack of visibility into the park's central spaces made it feel private. This and the constant presence of security guards entrenched a sense of unwelcome. In September 2023, an Extinction Rebellion protest took place in the bank, calling for it to cease financing for coal-powered energy (Mutsila and Evans 2023). In late 2023, much of the public park was fenced off, rendering it private for bank employees only. The project embodies an architectural ambition to reshape corporate development in Johannesburg. While significant strides were made, the intricacies of public space rendered the park too complex for the bank to manage. It remains to be seen whether the fence will ever come down and reconnect the public realm as intended.

On the opposite northern end of Rosebank, as it becomes Dunkeld, the private property development firm Intaprop has developed what it calls the Oxford Parks precinct. The development has supported numerous new buildings, conceptualised as a northern extension of the Rosebank commercial node, all within a cohesive urban development scheme that actively promotes open pedestrian connectivity and transit-oriented development (Intaprop 2023). Unlike Melrose Arch to the east, this mixed-use development aims to integrate into the surrounding urban fabric. Located on the current edge of the precinct, Ikusasa—meaning *Future* in Zulu—comprises 7,500m^2 of office space over four floors and accommodates Anglo American's Global Services division. In response to the developers' and tenants' aspirations for sustainability and urban integration, GLH designed Ikusasa as a visible and performative element within the broader public realm (GLH Architects n.d.).

The building's long east and west facades are modulated with solid stone panels that double as structural solar panel supports, angled at 10 degrees to maximise solar exposure. This formal rhythm mediates climatic performance and gives architectural expression to the building. In contrast, the north and south elevations are largely transparent, utilising high-performance double glazing and shaded with horizontal louvres and cantilevered balconies. Corner 'wings' provide both functional and aesthetic protection from low-angle sun, while internal comfort is enhanced through automated sun-control systems.

Public engagement is central to the project. The massing steps back at the prominent street corner, forming a recessed forecourt contributing to the precinct's layered, interconnected public spaces strategy. This gesture, echoing adjacent developments, forms a micro-piazza that softens the urban edge and supports pedestrian activity. With all parking underground, the street interface is uninterrupted, reinforcing a human-scale environment and aligning with precinct-wide guidelines promoting permeability, landscape integration and public life (Intaprop 2023).





Aerial view looking south from Oxford Parks, Rosebank, 2024. Source: Infrastructure Photos.



7 Parks Boulevard (Ikusasa)
Oxford Parks, Rosebank, 2022.
Photographer: Sarah de Pina.



GLH's urban strategies show change and development over the past two decades, as the firm grappled with Johannesburg's different and changing contexts. Instead of a standardised approach to public space and public-private mediation, GLH actively sought to make lasting positive impacts to the urban environments in which these case studies were designed and built. The Ballet Studio embraces an inner-city urban optimism just a decade after the end of apartheid. The project celebrates the inner city much like its contemporaries, the Nelson Mandela Bridge, and Newtown's first major urban upgrade. The Standard Bank Campus extended this optimism in public space to restructure an increasingly privatised and corporate Rosebank. Drawing on the enthusiasm of Johannesburg's first underground rail network, the Gautrain, built adjacent to the property, with a station diagonally opposite, a major public space contribution was the right response. However, as greater post-COVID insecurity in public space ensued and the City of Johannesburg entered an ongoing phase of significant urban mismanagement, the bank saw this space as a security liability. Finally, Ikusasa provides an excellent example of an architect working with a developer who understands managed public space is a major asset. The building has a generous public interface, creating a small corner piazza open to the city and its users. Ikusasa embodies a new optimism for Johannesburg, refreshingly without the walls or fences that have come to define so many other commercial developments across the city's diverse and fragmented nodes.





5 Parks Boulevard, Oxford Parks, Rosebank, 2022. Photographer: Philip Schedler.

Sage optimism



In marking 80 years of GLH Architects, I have demonstrated how the practice continued in the post-apartheid era to shape Johannesburg through responsible and innovative responses to complex and varied urban environments. Since the late 1980s, Johannesburg has seen radical structural change characterised by increased investment insecurity, spatial dispersal and fragmentation and significant privatisation and securitisation. Moments of optimism countered this insecurity as strategies for inner-city development, improved public transport options, and new developer-driven commercial, arts and culture precincts emerged. GLH has been present in almost all these moments, designing and building architecture that responsibly seeks the best outcomes for the clients, the environment and the various publics that share these spaces. Across their recent portfolio, GLH have not participated in the one-upmanship that has characterised Johannesburg's development, as developers and architects vie with one another to produce the most iconic – and often outlandish – buildings. Instead, GLH has shown its success as an architecture practice in the comfort of a building's users, its reduced impact on our shared environmental systems, its appropriate siting in an urban landscape and its responsiveness to a client's needs.

I used two measures to assess and explain GLH's approach to contemporary architectural design in Johannesburg. These include how GLH engages sustainability and how GLH responds to the public realm. Both factors are of primary importance in a city where a clean energy supply is elusive and environmental degradation visible, and where the public realm has become more divided and buildings more exclusive in their use, signalling a deepening of spatial socio-economic inequality. Regarding innovative sustainability practice, I examined the Nedbank Campus in Sandton, the Vodafone Site Solution Innovation Centre in Midrand, and the Witklipfontein house in the Free State. The latter is not an urban build in Johannesburg but embodies an evolution in GLH's sustainability approach. All three projects use innovative and highly contextually specific approaches to sustainable design, from their material choices to the passive and active systems that support their functioning. When examining projects with a strong public-private interface, I looked at the Ballet Studio in Braamfontein, the Standard Bank campus in Rosebank, and the Ikusasa project in Rosebank. All three of these projects have



Oxford Parks Precinct,
Rosebank, 2022.
Photographer: Philip Schedler.

strong sustainability credentials, with the Standard Bank building being extremely innovative in its use of orientation and double facades specifically (Davie 2014). However, these projects all grappled with complex public-private interfaces. Instead of merely blocking out the public (at least at the outset), they designed high-quality spaces to embrace and mediate public activity.

Given this positive urban legacy, GLH is considering its future in Johannesburg and its role in this intricate environment. The practice is currently in its fourth generation of leadership. As it looks to the fifth, Xavier Huybrechts noted that continued success for the practice and the city lies in the marriage of the old and the new. Young staff bring innovation to the practice; they understand advanced technologies, virtual tools and contexts, have 'crazy' ideas and revolutionary ideals, while older staff bring experience in project viability, commerciality, a sense of the city's evolution and the success of certain ideas and approaches over others (X. Huyberechts, personal communication, 2025). It is perhaps this constant tension within a leading practice like GLH that greases its continued innovation and evolution: aware of the immense challenges we face as global uncertainty and climate change become entrenched, but optimistic that innovation and hopefulness can make better environments for us to inhabit and share with the rest of the city and its non-human ecosystems.

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Author's note:

Small portions of this chapter were developed with the assistance of ChatGPT, an AI language model developed by OpenAI. The tool was used to support research summarisation, text editing, and the formatting of references. All content was reviewed and finalised by the author.

AFTERWORDS

BUILDING MINDS: THE ARCHITECTURE OF EDUCATION

Briget Grosskopff

GLH Architects



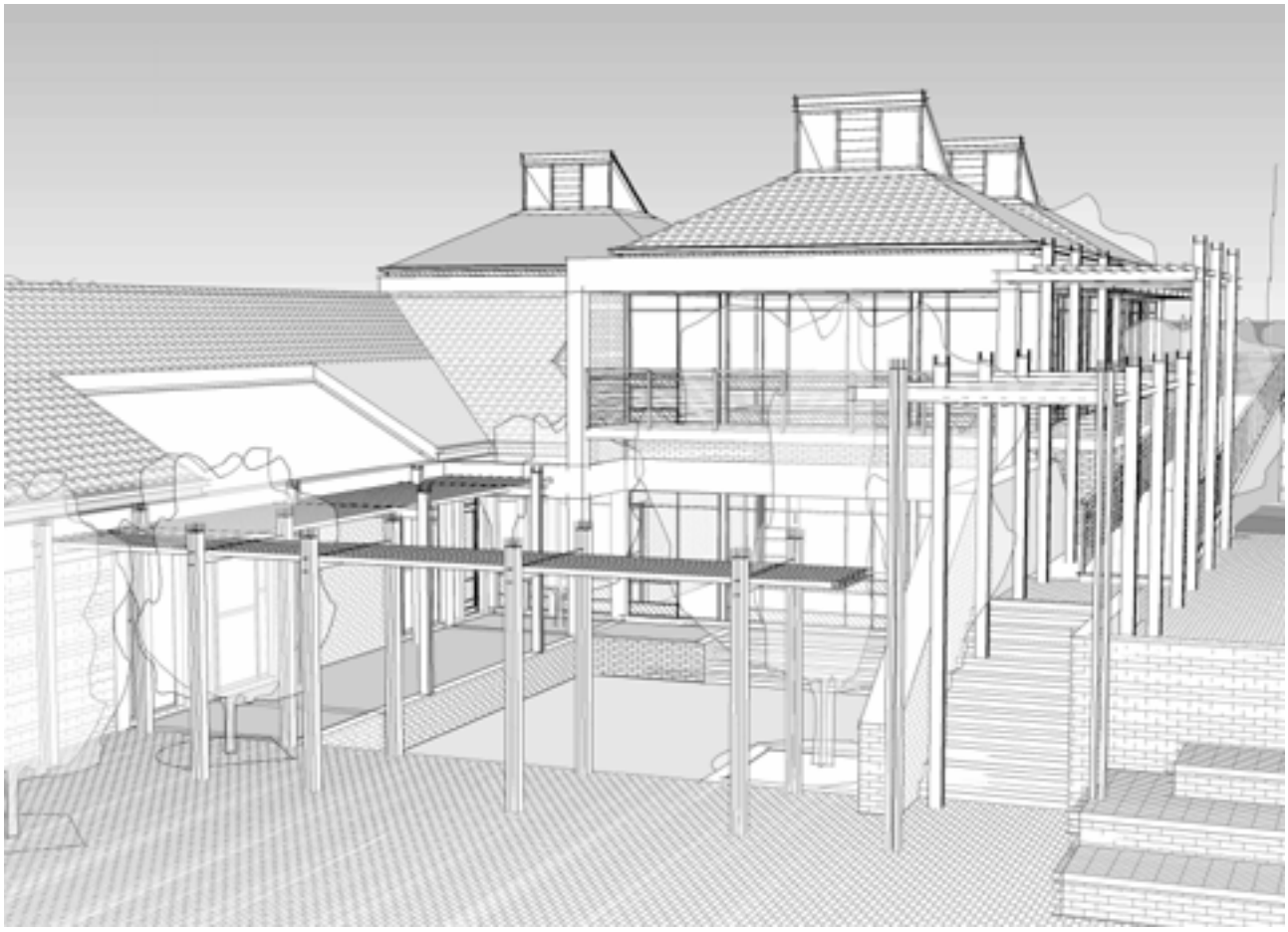
The design of educational institutions has long been a significant component of the GLH architectural portfolio. Significant early examples include King David School in Sandton, designed by Rodney Grosskopff in 1983, and the Standard Bank Global Leadership Centre, a training centre for employees, which was completed in 2006.

More recently, GLH has contributed to the architectural development of Saheti School in Bedfordview and St Theresa's Convent in Rosebank with extensions to both in 2017 and 2013 respectively. For the last fifteen years, we have been working in collaboration with Flansburgh Architects, a Boston-based firm which specialises in school design, on the American International Schools (AISJ) in Johannesburg and Pretoria. As part of this collaboration, GLH were the Architects of record for the following projects: The AISJ Aquatic Centre and Dining Commons (2013), The AISJ Theatre and Arts Courtyard in and the Tree House gym in 2018. The balance of the projects for the AISJ were undertaken by GLH Architects based on the Flansburgh Masterplan.

AISJ Campus
Photographer: Infrastructure Photos, 2020.



Above: Saheti School, 2016.
Photographer: Infrastructure Photos
Above right: Saheti School Drawing, 2016, GLH Archive.



Designing a school is not merely about creating a series of classrooms; it is about shaping the foundation of a community. Schools are places where children grow, learn, and discover how to engage with the world.

Given that many scholars can spend upwards of seven years in the same educational environment, it is imperative that these spaces are adaptable and nurturing, supporting their development into active members of society. From an architectural perspective, facilities for children allow the architect to make use of design elements not always used in other conventional buildings. These include a sense of whimsy and playfulness; a variety of forms, textures and colours; appropriate changes of scale, and adventurous use of graphics and symbols that can guide and educate. Architecture can encourage imagination and a child's wider interpretation of their surroundings (Oberholster 2018).



Above: theatre
Above right: internal courtyard
Below right: main facade
Photographer: Barry Goldman.







AISJ - Theatre and Arts Courtyard (2016)

The AISJ Performing Arts Centre is a 525-seat theatre integrated with classrooms around a central courtyard that doubles as an outdoor learning and performance space. Externally, the building combines stone, glass, steel, plaster, and aluminium, while its timber-clad interior creates a warm yet functional blacked-out theatre. Designed for flexibility, pivoting doors link the theatre to courtyards, while rotating panels, an adjustable proscenium, and tailored acoustics adapt the stage for music or drama. Technical features include overhead catwalks, LED lighting, a perimeter tech balcony, and a sliding orchestra pit. The centre serves as both a teaching facility and community venue.





Above left and right: gym main entrance.
Photographer: Stephen O'Raw.
Below left: aerial view.
Photographer: Raber Aerials.







Above left: gym entrance.
GLH Archive.
Above right: gym.
Photographer: Grant Difford.

AISJ Gymnasium (2013)

The gym facility at AISJ, often referred to as the "Treehouse Gymnasium," is a modern athletic centre designed to support a broad spectrum of sports and fitness activities. It includes a 1,115 m^2 double gymnasium, a 84 m^2 weight room, and a 65 m^2 dedicated fitness room.

The building is bright and airy, featuring glass walls and a sweeping folded roof that brings in natural light and supports circulation and flexibility. This gym underscores AISJ's commitment to athletics and physical education as part of its holistic school programme.




4
3



AISJ Aquatic Centre (2013)
Above: fabric shading detail
Left Above: external view
Left Below: internal view
Photographer: Stephen O'Raw.

The architecture of educational facilities has undergone a profound transformation since the 1960s. During that era, educational buildings were often designed with a focus on efficiency, control and uniformity. The goal was to manage large groups of students with minimal disruption, prioritising discipline over engagement (Doucet 2017). Schools were much more administration and teacher-centred, where students were seen to be as passive recipients of knowledge. The architecture of this time mirrored this approach, with a singular directional and fixed perspective reinforcing the notion of instruction being tailored to the group rather than the individual.

Starting in the 1990s and continuing into the 21st century, the focus has shifted dramatically toward child-centred education that caters for a child's needs and interests, underscored by the recognition that not everyone learns in the same way.

This has led to design that allows for collaboration between students and a more flexible environment that nurtures the individual (Parnell and Patsarika 2019).

Technology has played a transformative role in this shift. Traditional classrooms, once dominated by blackboards and textbooks, have given way to dynamic learning environments equipped with monitors, tablets and laptops. The emphasis has moved from passive, individual learning to active, collaborative engagement (Fisk 2017).

GLH has embraced this change, integrating spaces that support group work, digital learning, and interdisciplinary exploration. As George Couros (2015) a leading educator in the area of innovative leadership and teaching and learning, aptly puts it, "Technology will never replace great teachers, but technology in the hands of great teachers is transformational." Along with a change in teaching philosophies, the built environment has evolved to reflect social responsibility focused on a more universal approach to learning, climate change and sustainable development.

Natural light and ventilation have been shown to improve concentration and well-being (Fisk 2017). Furthermore, there is an increasing focus on holistic education. Schools now incorporate spaces for occupational therapy and individualised learning support within mainstream environments. Inclusive design features, such as sensory rooms, wheelchair access and universal toilets, support diverse learners (Pasenidou 2024). This integrated approach fosters a sense of belonging and promotes the overall well-being of every student (Lawal et al. 2025).





Above: mezzanine view
Above right: main entrance
Left: mezzanine view
Photographer: Infrastructure Photos.



AISJ Elementary School Library (2019)

Once a modest, unnoticed structure, the AISJ Elementary School Library has been reimagined as the campus's celebrated learning hub. Bold glazed entrance portals welcome students and connect the library to key circulation paths, while natural light and landscape views animate the interior. A central atrium, framed by slatted arches, houses exhibitions and vertical circulation via stairs or a playful spiral slide. Reading nooks, mezzanine book levels, a makers' workshop, green room, and performance space create a rich learning environment. Outside, an amphitheatre steps into the landscape, while a link bridge integrates the library with the wider campus.



Recognising these shifts, our recent projects reflect a growing emphasis on inclusive design principles. For example:

- Wheelchair-accessible circulation routes have been incorporated to ensure mobility throughout multi-level buildings.
- Sensory rooms and quiet zones have been designed for neurodiverse learners who may require calming environments.
- Acoustic treatments help accommodate students with physical, visual and auditory impairments.
- Universal restrooms and therapy spaces are integrated into mainstream school layouts to support dignity and independence.
- Flexible classroom layouts allow for reconfiguration to suit different learning styles and group sizes, promoting inclusion without segregation.

As UN Secretary -General Ban Ki-moon stated, “Inclusive education is not a privilege. It is a fundamental human right” (Ki-moon 2015). Accessibility is no longer a secondary consideration. Rather, it is a fundamental aspect of educational architecture.

GLH remains committed to designing schools that are inclusive, forward thinking, and responsive to the diverse needs of learners and educators alike.

Left: AISJ Media room.
Below: AISJ Image makers space.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.





AISJ Theatre, 2016.
Source: Flansburgh Architects.

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EVOLUTION OF THE OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

Xavier Huyberechts

Director – GLH Architects



As GLH Architects marks its eightieth anniversary, it is timely to reflect not only on the landmark buildings that have shaped our identity, but also on the evolving typologies that define our core portfolio. Over the past four decades, few building types have undergone as profound a transformation as the corporate office. In this chapter, I offer a personal reflection on the changing nature of the workplace, drawing on my experience as a director at GLH and our longstanding involvement in the design of high-end commercial buildings for some of South Africa's leading institutions. From the early days of cellular offices to today's flexible, sustainability-driven workspaces, I trace how our approach to office design has adapted in response to shifting technologies, workplace cultures and urban conditions while remaining grounded in a consistent architectural ethos.

Global House, 2010.
Left: the double facade at the north-west corner
Below: solid mass of the western facade
Photographer: Stephen O'Raw.



From Cellular Offices to Open Plan Workspaces

Until the early 1990s, the office environment was strongly hierarchical. Most companies followed a cellular model: individual offices for managers and senior staff, with support or secretarial staff often working in open plan areas along passages. This resulted in buildings that were narrow – typically 10 to 12 meters wide – with long, sometimes dark corridors and small individual windows. The size and location of one's office symbolised rank within the company, reinforcing corporate hierarchies.

The 1990s marked a turning point with the rise of open-plan office design. Open layouts allowed for denser floor plates and fostered collaboration. However, cellular offices remained necessary for executives, confidential work, or specialized tasks. This gave rise to the popular '70/30 ratio', with 70% of staff in open plan and 30% in enclosed offices. In practice, because cellular offices were much larger, the division of actual floor space was closer to 50/50.



Above: Vodacom Corporate Park, 1998. Right: Vodacom Renaissance Park, 2003. GLH Archive.

The Vodacom Era: Buildings for a New Age

The early 1990s also saw the arrival of mobile telephony in South Africa, driven by Vodacom under the leadership of Alan Knott-Craig. His singular focus was on launching and growing the company. Once a concept for a new building was approved, he would often say, "See you at the opening." The responsibility for turning vision into architecture fell squarely on the shoulders of the architects.

One of GLH's most iconic projects was Vodacom's first head office, built on a narrow site fronting the highway. The design featured a central glass pyramid flanked by two symmetrical wings, each terminating in a distinctive 'C' shape. Along the outer curve of the 'C,' cellular offices lined up with individual windows, while the inner side opened into clear-glazed open plan areas, bathed in natural light from a large, vaulted roof.

Here, the contrast between the two working environments was striking: cellular offices had suspended ceilings concealing services, while the open plan stretched from slab to slab, creating extra height. Combined with abundant glazing, indirect up-and-down lighting and a bright ceiling plane, the open plan space achieved a light and airy atmosphere that was unusual for its time.



The Rise of Flexibility and the End of Hierarchy

With the arrival of Generation Z, the definition of ‘workplace’ has expanded dramatically. Staff now operate from homes, coffee shops and even beaches. The office is no longer the only locus of work; instead, it must accommodate a spectrum of users, from permanent, desk-based staff to nomadic workers and hybrid employees.

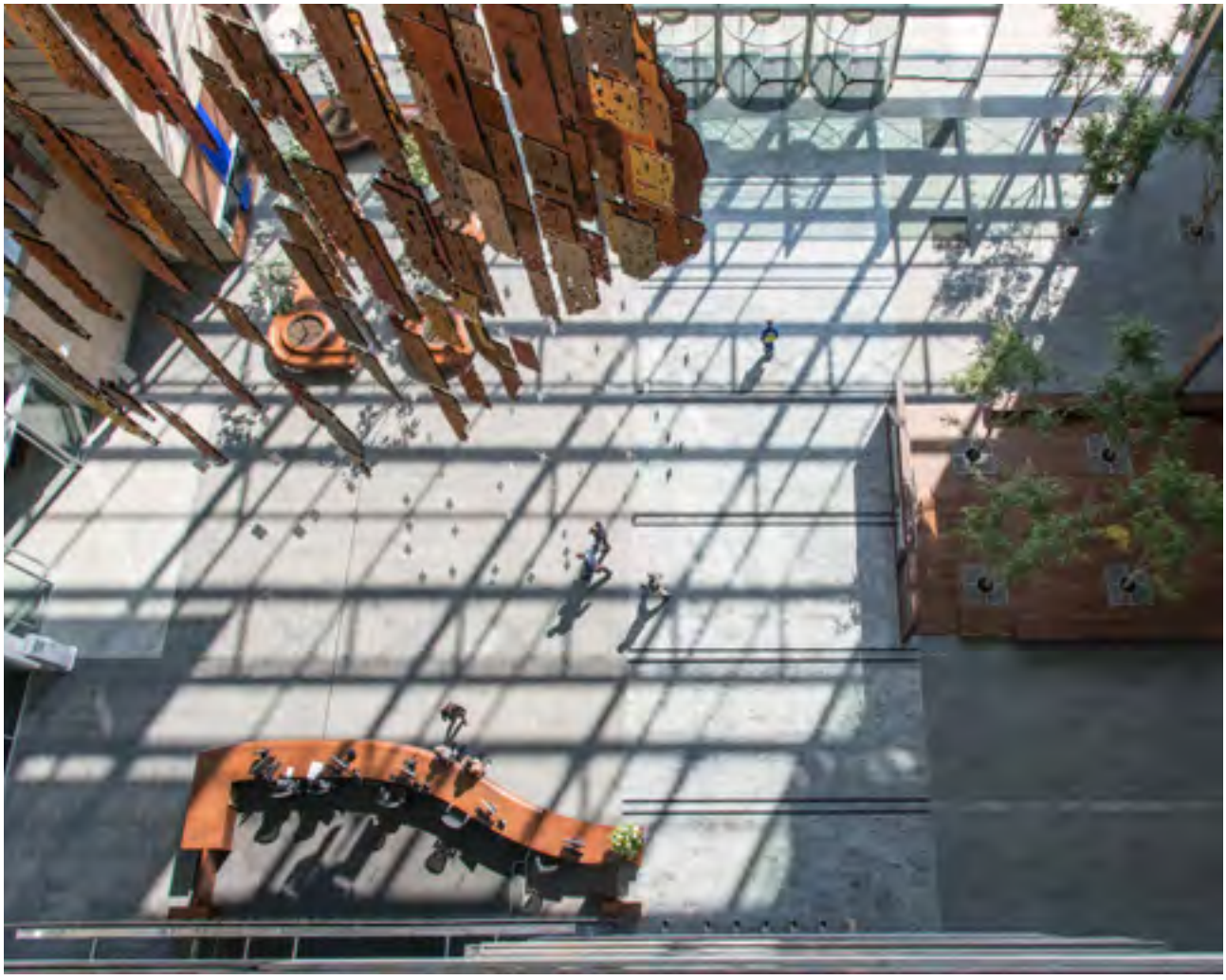
This cultural shift has also dismantled hierarchies in office planning. A defining example is the Standard Bank Rosebank building, where no cellular offices exist, not even for executives. Everyone works at non-allocated open plan desks, choosing their workspace each day based on the task at hand. The building offers a variety of desk types, from larger semi-divided workstations to long shared tables for mobile staff.

The open plan is supported by a rich mix of secondary spaces: meeting rooms of different sizes, private booths, informal lounges with low or standing tables and quiet areas for individual focus. This ecosystem of spaces encourages cross-collaboration, sparks innovation and creates a workplace that adapts to people, rather than the other way around.[1]

1 1 The experiment undertaken by Chiat/Day in New York in the mid-1990s – often cited as one of the earliest attempts at a ‘virtual’ or radically non-territorial open-plan office – offers a useful point of comparison. Although architecturally innovative, the scheme was widely criticised by staff for eroding personal agency and a sense of organisational belonging, ultimately leading to its abandonment. The case is now broadly understood to have demonstrated the importance of balancing spatial openness with opportunities for privacy, identity and differentiated modes of working. Contemporary workplace design, including the present example, has largely absorbed these lessons, developing more nuanced, hybrid environments that support non-hierarchical cultures while still accommodating diverse patterns and rhythms of work. See Dix (1994) and Berger (1999).

2 Claims about the relationship between environmental quality and creativity are necessarily contextual, but there is a substantial body of research linking access to natural light, fresh air and spatial clarity with improved concentration, wellbeing and lower rates of absenteeism. Studies in environmental psychology and workplace health consistently show that daylight and perceived spatial openness can support productivity and positive organisational culture, while overly enclosed or artificially lit environments correlate with fatigue and stress. While such effects cannot be universalised, they suggest that careful attention to brightness and spatial freshness can support (rather than determine) creative work. See Pan (2024) and MacNaughton et al. (2017).

Above right: reception.
Photographer: Stephen O’Raw.
Below right: site plan.
GLH Archive.




Offices
West Block
Multi Volume
Atrium
Multi Volume
Atrium
Offices
East Block
Multi Volume
Atrium
Legend
Meeting Room Areas
Common Areas
Back of House Areas
Primary Circulation
Office Areas
N



Principles for a Quality Working Environment

Through these decades of evolution, GLH has developed core design principles that consistently enhance workplace quality: First, we ensure natural light penetration: Unlike the dark tinted-glass towers of the 1980s, we strive for unaltered daylight reaching deep into office interiors. Early glare issues on computer screens have been resolved by technological advances, enabling brighter and healthier environments. Second, we are at pains to enable a visual connection to the outside, with views providing moments of mental pause and contribute to wellbeing. Third, we focus on integration of greenery, with internal parks, planted atriums and gardens bringing nature into the workplace, with the aim of supporting calm and creativity. Finally, we strive to create fresh, bright spaces: Such environments can stimulate new ideas, improve productivity, and reduce absenteeism and turnover.

Ultimately, quality workplaces foster a sense of belonging. They strengthen loyalty by creating environments where staff feel valued and connected.

Innovation with Double Façades

The pursuit of natural light led GLH to pioneer the use of double façades in South Africa. A typical system consists of an inner glazed wall, an air cavity with operable blinds, and an outer protective glass skin. Linked to meteorological sensors, the blinds automatically adjust to block direct sunlight while reflecting soft daylight deep into the workspace.

Left: Standard Bank, 2012. Photographer: Stephen O'Raw
Below left: 199 Oxford Parks (BPSA), 2018. Photographer: Infrastructure Photos
Below middle and right: 90 Rivonia Road, 2015. GLH Archive.







Different applications of the system include:

- **Ventilated double façades:** Wide cavities allowing maintenance access, used in projects such as Global House and 90 Grayston (IBM).
- **Adaptive blind systems:** For Vodacom's SSIC building, blinds moved bottom-up to maximize views while shading upper glazing.
- **Sealed, compact double façades:** At Standard Bank Rosebank, GLH collaborated with engineers to develop the world's first air-conditioned double-sealed façade. Layers included low-iron outer glass, an argon-filled double-glazing unit for insulation and a narrow cavity with fully automated blinds. This bespoke solution provided exceptional daylight quality while meeting the demands of South Africa's climate.

These innovations allowed buildings to 'breathe light' while minimizing solar heat gain and glare.

Atriums: The Social Heart of the Workplace

Atriums have become central to creating corporate community. They function as interior streets or squares where people meet, eat and interact. Examples include the Nedbank and ABSA buildings where internal streets connecting different parts of the company, and Standard Bank Rosebank with its bustling central square, complemented by two quieter atriums that open offices to light while controlling east–west sun exposure. By carefully balancing liveliness and calm, atriums embody the identity and culture of each company (Rice, 2023 and Jones, 2024)

Green Spaces and Biophilia

Urban head offices often stand in dense districts, yet GLH has consistently introduced greenery to create 'green lungs' within the city. In the Nedbank complex two large internal parks provide staff with quiet, restorative spaces in the middle of Sandton. A fronting garden at the Standard Bank building in Rosebank welcomes both staff and the public, offering respite and connection to nature. In GLH's experience, these interventions reinforce the idea that productivity is deeply linked to wellbeing.

From Office Parks to Integrated City Living

The 1990s and early 2000s favoured suburban office parks, Vodacom being a prime example. These developments provided space and parking but often lacked integration with city life.



Standard Bank Atrium with
Sculpture, 2012.
Photographer: Stephen O'Raw



Employees on lunch break
Photographer: Stephen O'Raw

Today, the trend has shifted toward mixed-use urban districts such as Oxford Parks in Rosebank. Here, offices, restaurants, retail, hotels and housing coexist within a compact, pedestrian-friendly environment. Parking is concealed underground, while office floors rise above active street-level retail. This creates vibrant, human-scale neighbourhoods where staff can move seamlessly between work, leisure and living.

Such developments represent the future of city-making: workplaces no longer isolated but fully integrated into the urban fabric.

Conclusion

From cellular offices to flexible, mixed-use urban environments, the workplace has undergone profound transformation over the last four decades. At GLH, we have been privileged to shape this evolution, experimenting with light, space, nature and technology to create offices that reflect the spirit of their companies while enhancing the lives of their users.

Workplaces are no longer static hierarchies but dynamic ecosystems of collaboration, innovation and wellbeing. In this ongoing journey, architecture plays a crucial role, not only in designing buildings, but in shaping the future of how we live and work in our cities.

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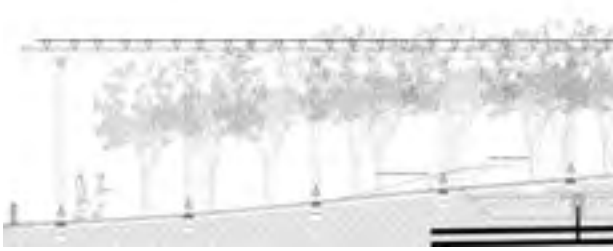
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Vodafone SSIC, 2011.
Above: dusk view of the building and walkway.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.
Right: longitudinal section.
GLH Archive.









Above: lush veld gardens.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.
Left: entrance walkway.
GLH Archive.

Vodafone Site Solution Innovation Centre (2011)

The SSIC is South Africa's first 6-Star Green Star SA building, serving as Vodafone's global hub for innovation, experimentation, and monitoring. Designed as a sustainable living building, it integrates seamlessly with its landscape, centring on a narrow floor plate around an open-air courtyard with a rainwater pond and wetland.

A fully glazed façade maximises daylight, while automated blinds and overhangs control glare. Fresh air is pre-cooled in gabion walls, radiant heating and cooling is provided via a solar absorption chiller, and 292 photovoltaic panels generate double the building's energy needs. Water-saving strategies include greywater treatment, rainwater harvesting, and efficient fixtures.

Materials are sustainably sourced and designed for disassembly, with recycled steel, FSC-certified timber, and high cement-replacement concrete. The building demonstrates cutting-edge sustainable design, earning multiple awards and acting as a public showcase of low-energy, innovative construction.





Statistics South Africa, 2016.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.







Left: main entrance.
Right: internal atrium.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.

Statistics South Africa Head Office (2016)

The design of the new Stats SA head office symbolizes the Department's role in South Africa through its form, reflecting the process of gathering, processing, and disseminating information. The building's architecture echoes the ridged Tshwane hills and graph-like structures.

At its core is The Drum, an African symbol of communication and knowledge. Positioned at the northern entrance, it marks the site and invites gathering. Inspired by the 77,000-year-old Tally Stone, The Drum features mesh artwork derived from tally marks, filtering light and emphasizing the Department's legacy of data recording.

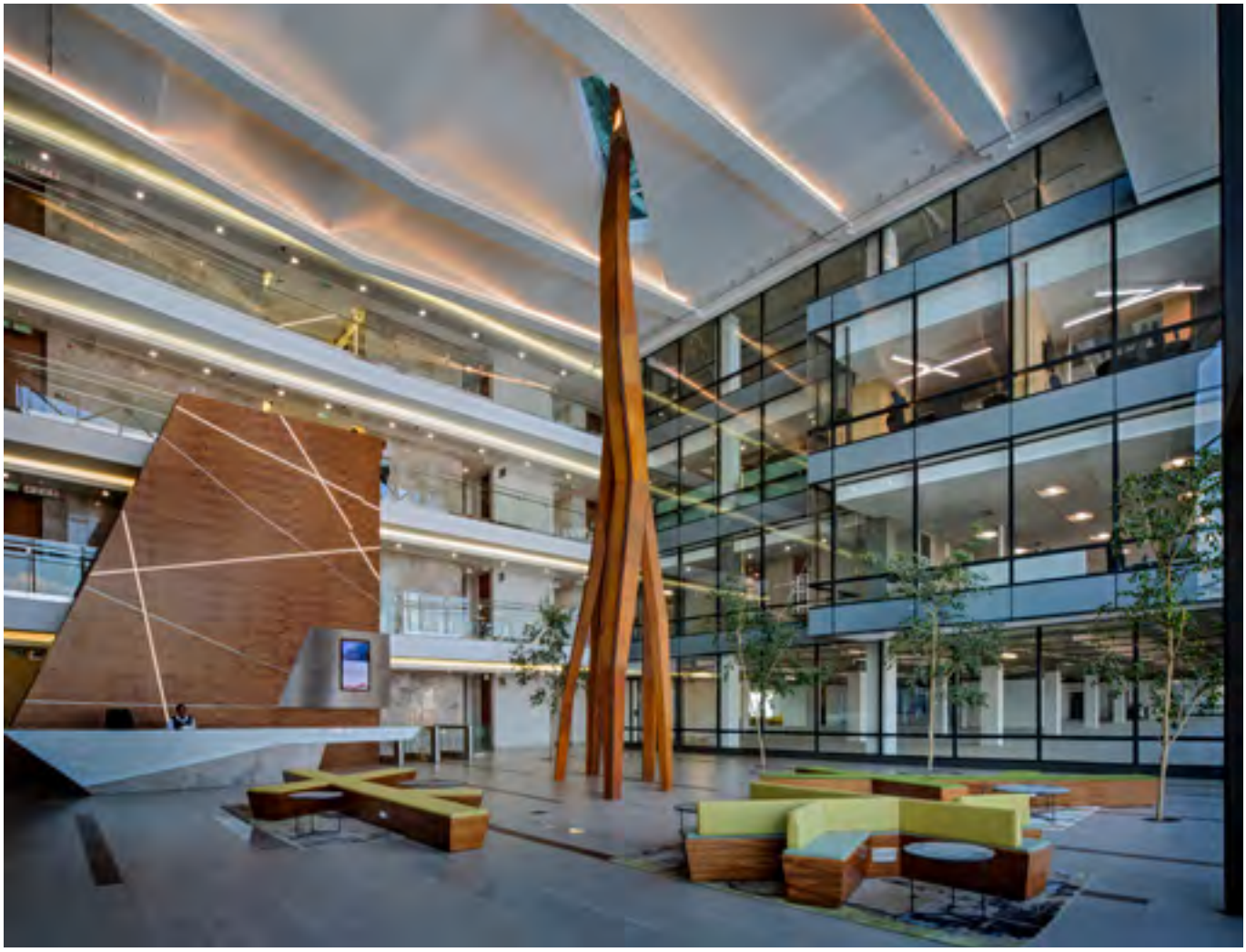
The Main Building combines The Drum with Five Fingers—wings extending from a central atrium, connecting spaces and activities. These "fingers" stretch into the landscape, linking the campus, city, and community. The Data Production Centre and Heritage Court extend this architectural theme, reinforcing integration, communication, and place.



Statistics South Africa Head Office, 2016.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.




SEBANK TOWERS



Rosebank Towers (2016)

Rosebank Towers is located on the northern edge of the Rosebank CBD, just off Oxford Road, opposite the Hyatt Hotel and The Firs, with excellent access to public transport. At fourteen storeys above ground—including one basement and seven parking levels—the building is the tallest in the area, establishing a strong presence and identity.

A facetted, folded façade creates a dynamic, easily recognisable form, contrasting with surrounding buildings. The curtain wall system combines energy-efficient glazing with composite spandrel panels, while portions of the north façade feature brick and plaster with thermally efficient strip windows that wrap around the east and west courtyards. Terraces with planting on multiple levels soften the form. The base, housing parking, is deconstructed to reduce scale and integrates with street trees through stone-fragmented panels and louvred openings, providing natural ventilation to the parkade.

Left: view from the Firs, opposite the road.
Photographer: Philip Schedler.
Above: one of the high level private atriums
Photographer: Barry Goldman.



Rosebank Towers, 2016.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.







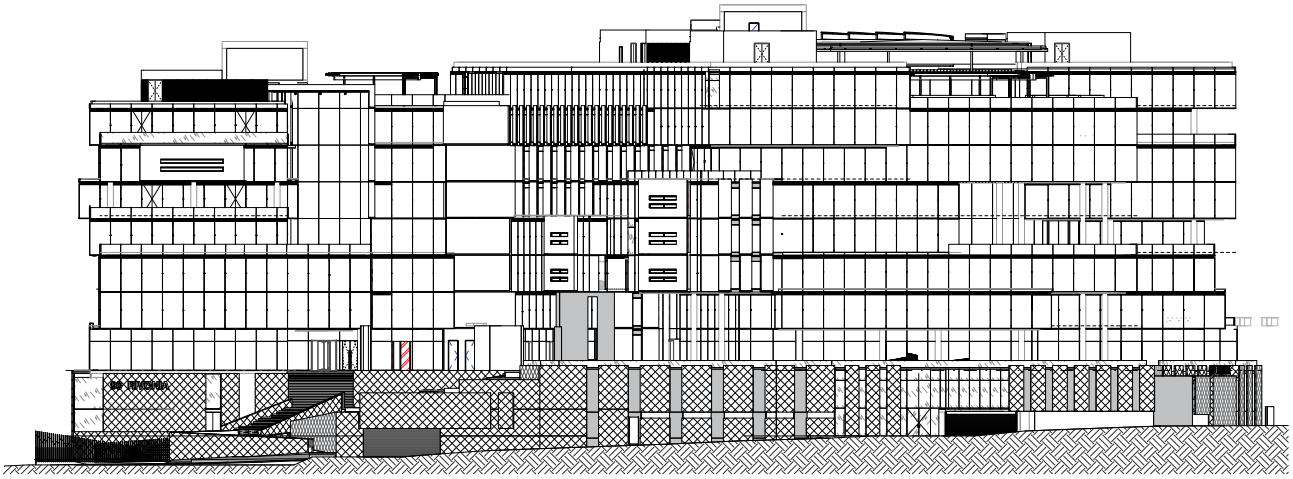
90 Rivonia Road (2015)

Located at the prominent corner of Rivonia Road and Katherine Street, this landmark office development occupies one of the highest points in Sandton's CBD. Seven floors of parking support eight storeys of offices to the south and seven to the north, organised in an E-shaped plan with a strong eastern spine and three north-facing wings. A generous atrium addresses the corner, while terraces and landscaped podium gardens connect the building to Sandton City and the Gautrain.

A triple-volume entrance leads to multi-volume atrium spaces, meeting centres, and glazed observation lifts. Upper levels include staff facilities with panoramic terraces. The double ventilated façade with automated blinds ensures abundant daylight and comfort, paired with stone panels that ground the modern, timeless design.

Above: Atrium
Photographer: Brendon Salzer.
Left: view from Rivonia Road & Sandton Drive.
Photographer: Philip Schedler.







Above: Northern elevation. GLH Archive.
Below: View from Rivonia road. Photographer: Philip Schedler.
Left: View from piazza. GLH Archive.





199 Oxford Road (2018)

As the first building in the Oxford Parks Precinct, 199 Oxford establishes the character of a sustainable, pedestrian-focused mixed-use district linking Rosebank and Illovo. The six-storey office and retail building occupies a prominent corner site, with a modern yet understated façade of clear glass and natural stone.

Ground-level retail and recessed entrances activate the street while providing pedestrian shelter. A glazed atrium with observation lifts connects inside and out, serving as a hub for reception, lounges, and circulation. The east façade's double-skin system with motorised blinds tracks the sun, ensuring comfort and transparency throughout the day.

Flexible L-shaped office floors with a central core and dual lift banks allow efficient subdivision or single-tenant use.

Above: view from Oxford Road.
Left: entrance.
Photographer: Infrastructure Photos.


ENTRANCE
EXIT



7 Parks Boulevard (2022)

Ikusasa—Zulu for Future—offers 7,500m² of office space over four floors for Anglo American's Global Services division.

The design expresses sustainability visibly, with solar panels integrated into the architecture rather than concealed. Long east–west facades are protected by a rhythm of stone panels aligned with panels angled for optimal sun capture, while north–south facades use double glazing, shading wings, balconies, and horizontal screens. Automated blinds further ensure comfort and glare control.

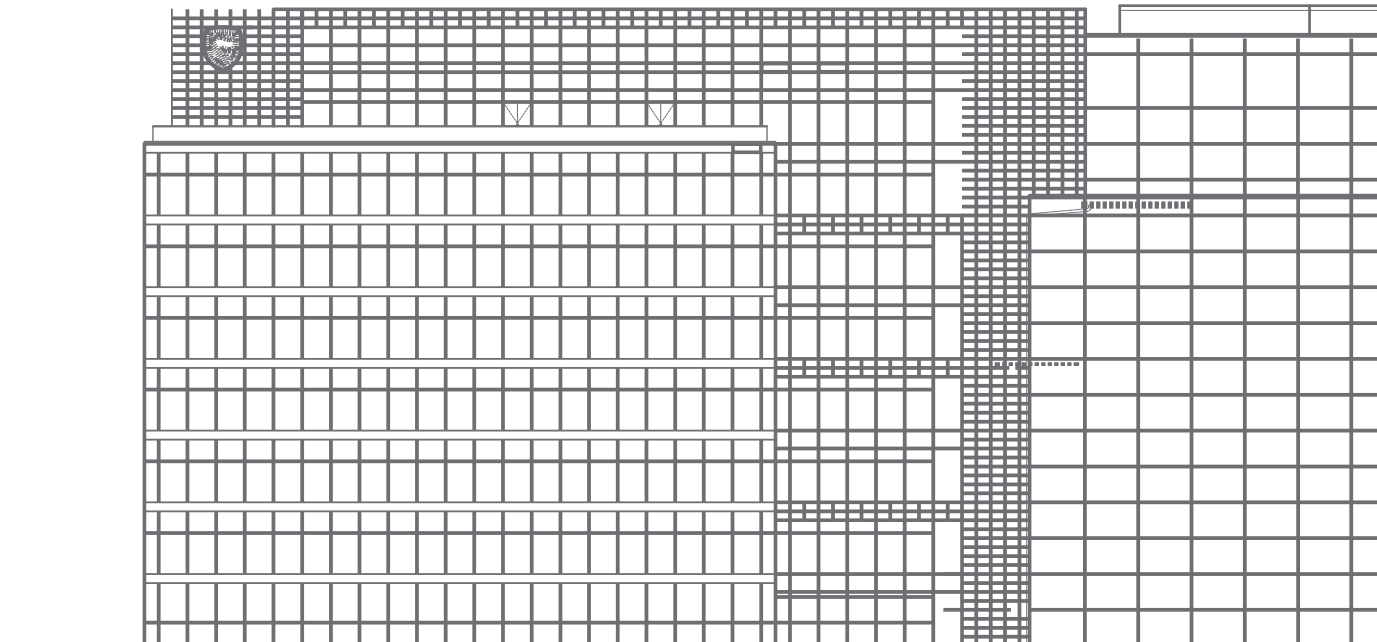
At street level, the building sets back to form an inviting corner piazza that complements the precinct's public spaces. Subterranean parking preserves the pedestrian scale, with landscaped links between buildings creating a connected, human-focused environment.

Above: view from Parks Boulevard and Eastwood Road.
Left: close-up of balconies.
Photographer: Philip Schedler.

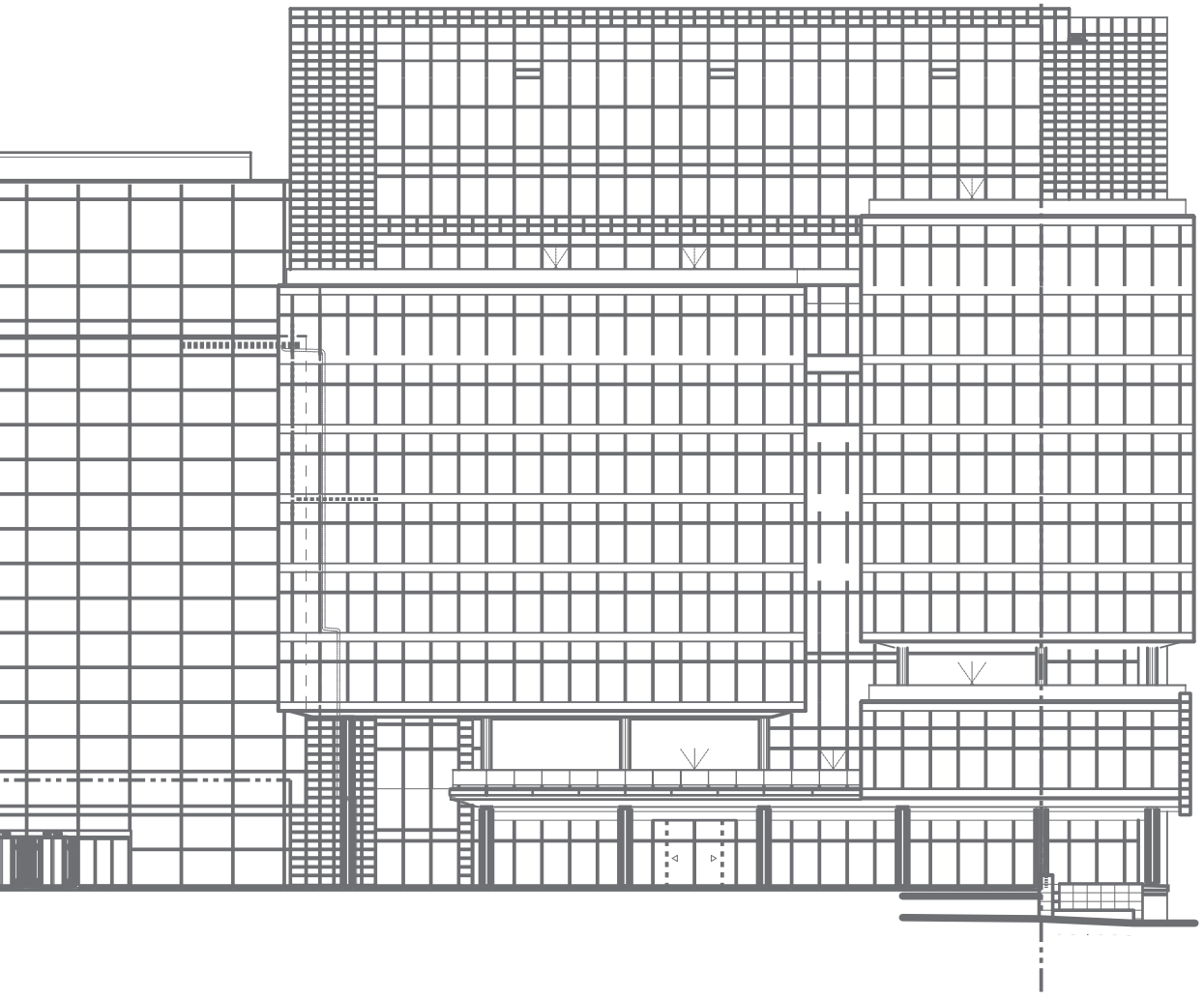




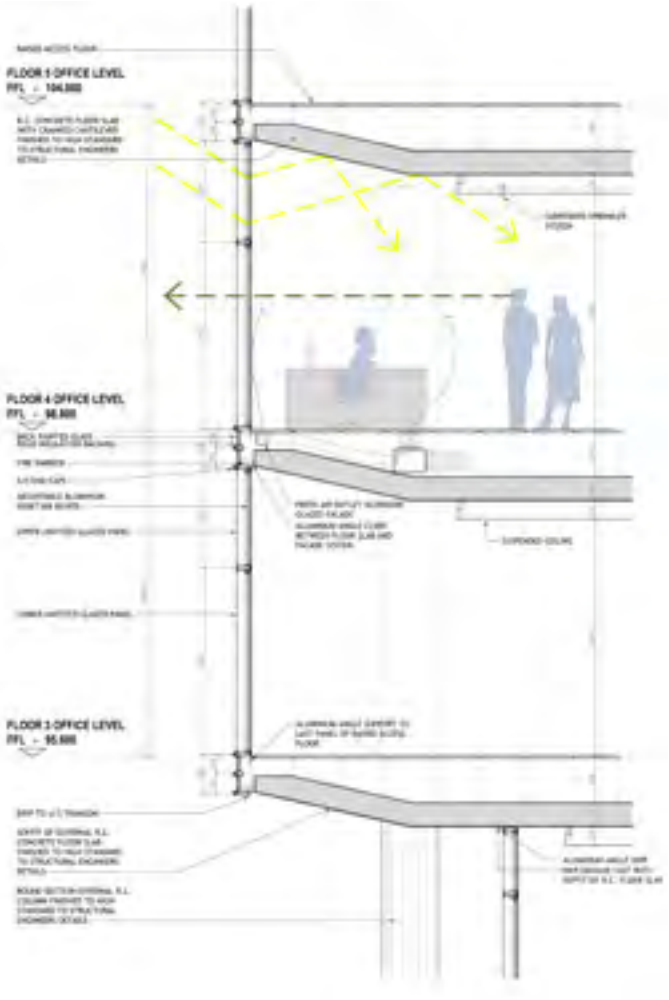
30 Baker Street, Rosebank, 2012.
Photographer: Stephen O'Raw



North elevation







Standard Bank, 30 Baker Street, Rosebank (2012)

Occupying a prominent city block at the highest point of Rosebank, the new Standard Bank campus offers exceptional access and visibility, close to the M1, Gautrain, and BRT routes. The design balances contextual sensitivity with the bank's need for a distinctive, productive workplace.

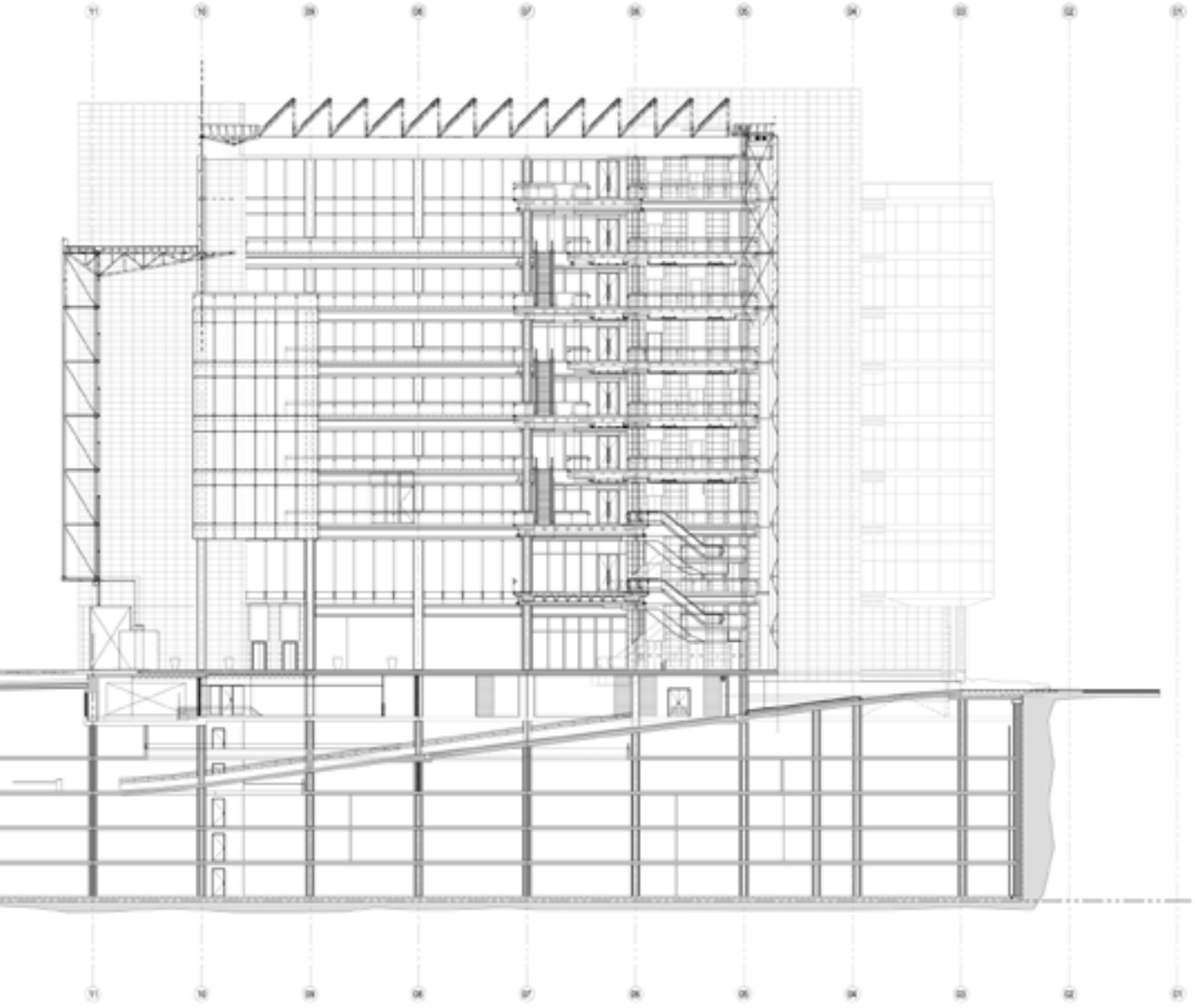
A central axis defines the layout, with a generous public piazza to the north and two large office buildings to the south, standing nine and eleven floors above five super-basements. A multi-volume atrium links the two blocks, extending the energy of the piazza indoors. Escalators animate the atrium and encourage informal interaction, while restaurants, meeting centres, and pause areas activate the ground and upper levels.

The architectural language is modern and clean, with double façades, crisp stone cladding, and expansive glazing that convey openness. North–south orientation and sustainable technologies earned the project a 5-Star Green Star SA rating (Design and As Built).

Left: close-up of the double facade
Photographer: Stephen O'Raw
Above: double facade detail
GLH Archive.



Longitudinal section





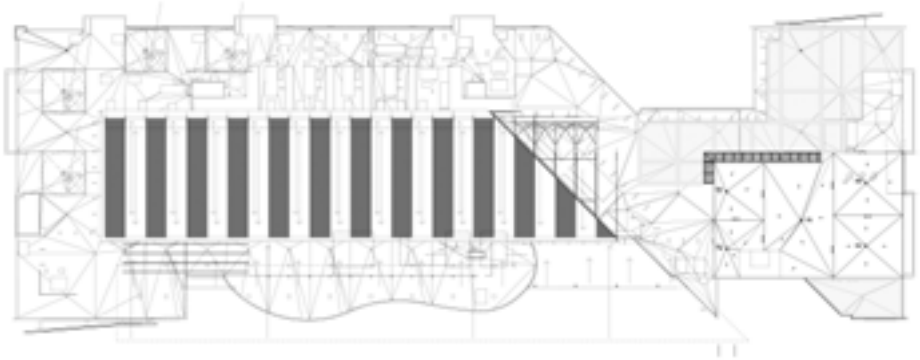


Left: The light-filled atrium viewed from the ground. 2012.
Photographer: Stephen O'Raw
Above: Site Plan, GLH Archive.





MultichoiceCity, 2015
Photographer: Barry Goldman









Multichoice Headquarters (2015)

At the corner of Republic Road and Bram Fischer Drive in Randburg, the Multichoice Headquarters makes a bold urban statement with sweeping roof planes and a façade of glass, steel, and stone. A multi-volume atrium, flooded with natural light through an advanced ETFE roof, forms the building's heart, with floating bridges linking offices and encouraging interaction.

Sustainability drives the design, achieving a 5-Star Green Star SA rating through innovations such as automated pixelated blinds that track the sun. Connected to the wider campus via tunnel and bridge links, the building reflects Multichoice's spirit of innovation, collaboration, and connectivity.

Above: public atrium.
Photographer: Grant Diffiord Photography.
Above left: Roof plan & ground floor plan.
Below left: ETFE skylight.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.





MultichoiceCity, 2015.
The dynamic glass facade facing Bram Fischer Drive. Photographer: Barry Goldman.


85 GRAYSTON



Left: view from Grayston Drive.
Photographer: Philip Shedler.
Above: atrium under construction.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.

85 Grayston Drive (2015)

Situated on the north side of Grayston Drive, 85 Grayston is highly visible from multiple approaches, bounded by a recessed residential building to the east and Stan Road to the west. The building features a prominent base housing parking, articulated with dark and light tiling, frameless louvers, and angular glass elements. Pedestrians enter via a street-level lobby on Stan Road, leading to shuttle lifts that connect to the elevated main reception.

The four-storey atrium floods the space with natural light, framing informal lounges, trees, and access to the main lift bank. Office floors wrap around the central core and are linked by a bridge across the atrium, with upper levels capping the space to expand usable area. Exterior geometries, combined with planted elements, balance the building's bold urban statement with natural softness, integrating the structure into the city environment.


90



Left: view from Grayston Drive.
Photographer: Philip Schedler.
Above: internal atrium.
Photographer: Gareth Gilmour.

90 Grayston Drive (2015)
Winner of SAPOA 'Best Commercial Building'

90 Grayston Drive is a striking addition to upmarket Sandton, designed to combine a distinctive architectural identity with sustainable, environmentally responsible principles. Despite its narrow street frontage, the building commands attention through a sculptural façade of stacked glazed cubes in varying planes.

Stone, steel, and a movable metal screen at the lower level animate the exterior, enhancing light, reflection, and the contrast of solid and transparent elements. Horizontal structural lines and tailored treatment of each façade respond to location and function, while the north-west corner features a vertical glazed shaft that visually links street level to the atrium and office spaces above, clearly marking public access.





90 Grayston Drive, 2016. Kinetic facade at the main entrance. Photographer: Philip Schedler





90 Grayston Drive, 2015.
Left: looking down the private multi-volume atrium towards the public atrium.
Above: The floor of the private atrium, looking towards the shuttle lifts.
Photographer: Gareth Gilmour.


Barloworld



Barloworld (2024)

Ingrain, part of the Barloworld Group and a leading African producer of starches and glucose, occupies a refurbished 10,000 sqm head office in Isando, Johannesburg. The upgrade modernised a brutalist concrete building, preserving its geometry and exposed surfaces while introducing softer, contemporary elements. A textured northern façade and high-volume aluminium-aerofoil entrance give the building a refreshed corporate identity.

The design prioritises flexibility and wellbeing, featuring open-plan offices, cellular spaces, collaborative hubs, pause areas, and wellness zones. Materials reference the company's industrial roots, combining exposed concrete with timber slats, textured finishes, integrated planting, and acoustic treatments. Glazed partitions maximise natural light, and curated artwork reflects the company's manufacturing heritage. The result is a functional, flexible, and symbolic workspace that embodies Ingrain's innovative spirit.

Left: Entrance & porte cochère.
Above: Ingrain laboratory.
Photographer: Anthea Pokroy

CYCLES: THE RHYTHM OF CHANGE IN ARCHITECTURE

Xavier Huyberechts

Director – GLH Architects



Architecture, like life, moves in cycles.

For architects, opportunities often emerge in waves. One defining project puts a practice on the map, leading to a chain reaction of similar commissions. A new building type or a fresh idea sparks curiosity; innovation is noticed, copied, and refined. With each repetition, expertise grows, until the moment familiarity risks becoming formula. Then, as Christopher Alexander (1979) notes, the cycle must end, and a new one begins.

In South Africa's dynamic and still-developing economy, these cycles are particularly visible. Market trends rise and fall in waves, from office booms to residential surges, from hospital expansions to hotel revolutions. Each wave starts with a void in the market, a need waiting to be met. A few visionaries seize the moment; success follows, and suddenly everyone wants in. But when the trend saturates, values dip, property developers retreat and the building industry must wait for the next tide to turn. [1]

To endure across eight decades, an architectural practice must not only master these cycles but also anticipate the next one. Our longevity as a firm has depended on the ability to recognise when an era is closing, to experiment in the interlude and to lead confidently into the next wave.

Embassy Towers, 2018.
Photographer: Infrastructure Photos.

1 The 1990s suburban migration in Johannesburg followed a global pattern of post-industrial decentralization, paralleled in cities like São Paulo and Los Angeles. See Graham and Marvin (2001).



In this section I reflect on some of those defining cycles:

- the evolution of residential architecture from high-rise towers to suburban enclaves, and back to luxury apartments;
- the pioneering hospital cycle that reshaped private healthcare across the country;
- the hotel wave born of entrepreneurial disruption;
- the quieter but essential cycles of personal experimentation, in which the partners' own homes became laboratories for new ideas;
- and finally, the cycles of life of buildings themselves, as heritage structures are re-born with new purposes.

Each cycle mirrors a point in time, whether social, economic, or architectural. But it also reflects a constant truth: the built environment is never static. It evolves, adapts and renews itself, just as GLH has done.

I. The Residential Cycle – From Towers to Suburbs and Back Again

Nowhere are these cycles clearer than in the story of Johannesburg's residential architecture. From the bold optimism of the inner-city towers of the 1970s to the suburban withdrawal of the 1990s and the rebirth of urban living in the 21st century, GLH has been present at each turn. We have continued to shape the city's skyline, adapting to its shifting social landscape and continually reimagining how people live together.

The Era of High-Density Towers

The 1970s were marked by rapid urban growth in and around the Johannesburg Central Business District. Suburbs such as Berea, Hillbrow, Killarney and even Illovo saw an unprecedented surge in high-density apartment buildings. This was largely a response to the aspirations of a growing urban middle class eager for a more cosmopolitan lifestyle than conventional single-family housing could offer.[2]

As the preceding chapters show, GLH Architects, then under the leadership of Manfred Hermer and Rodney Grosskopff, played a defining role in the architecture of this era. The firm's projects contributed significantly to the

The Capitol on Parks, 2017. Photographer: Infrastructure Photos.

2 See Stadler and Dugmore (2017) on Hillbrow's growth from its early establishment, its high-rise boom, racial integration under apartheid and its later social challenges

skyline, none more dramatically than Ponte City (1975), the tallest residential building in Africa and an enduring, if controversial, urban landmark. Ponte symbolised both the ambition and the challenges of high-rise living in Johannesburg, marking the high point of a period when apartment towers defined modernity.

The Suburban Shift of the 1990s

With the political and social transformations of the early 1990s, Johannesburg entered a new era. The birth of a democratic South Africa coincided with a mass migration of the white middle class out of the city centre and into the northern suburbs.[3]

This shift gave rise to a different kind of residential typology. Rather than vertical towers, the focus turned to townhouse complexes and gated communities, invariably surrounded by tall walls and later by electric fencing. These developments reflected both a desire for security and a new lifestyle ideal centred on privacy and exclusivity.[4]

The spectrum of these suburban enclaves was wide: At one end, luxury estates organised around golf courses offered manicured landscapes and a sense of seclusion. At the other, hyper-dense townhouse clusters packed residents so closely together that neighbour could practically reach out from their first-floor windows to shake hands.

GLH, though deeply engaged in shaping the city in earlier decades, had only limited involvement in this phase. Apart from Esprit Estate in Wendywood (2009), the firm devoted much of its energy during this period to hospitals and commercial office buildings, areas where it became increasingly recognized.

A Return to Apartments – Innovation in Sandton

GLH's re-entry into high-end residential development came with a commission from Messrs Cohen and Basson, who sought to create a landmark luxury apartment project in Sandton. The result, The Emperor (2008), was more than

3 While strongly linked to the dismantling of apartheid, 1990s suburban migration in Johannesburg nonetheless followed a global pattern of post-industrial decentralisation, paralleled in cities like São Paulo and Los Angeles. See Graham and Marvin (2001).

4 These suburban forms also reproduced existing patterns of spatial inequality, linking the desire for privacy to longer histories of segregation and uneven development in South African cities. See Murray (2011).



The Emperor, 2008.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.



just another residential tower. Rather, it was a conceptual departure that reimagined how apartment buildings could function in Johannesburg in the twenty-first century.

Our design for The Emperor brought together luxury residential living and hotel-style services, creating a unique lifestyle experience. In addition, the project introduced an innovative apartment layout typology. Instead of long central corridors, the building employed six separate lift stacks, each serving a small cluster of apartments directly. This arrangement allowed units to span from the south to the north facades, maximising natural light and cross-ventilation, while also enabling expansive views. Safety regulations were ingeniously resolved by pressurised lift shafts serving as fire escapes, supplemented by a secondary escape route for each unit. In addition, the elimination of communal corridors not only enhanced privacy but also offset the additional costs of extra lifts, balancing innovation with commercial pragmatism.

The Emperor established a template that GLH would refine in subsequent projects, including The Regent (2010), Metropolis (2016) and Embassy Towers (2018). Each development built upon the lessons of the previous one, pushing the boundaries of design and luxury.

Embassy Towers, in particular, set a new benchmark. Clad in white marble, the building exudes a timeless elegance while offering an unprecedented array of amenities: fine dining, a spa, serviced offices, private dining rooms and a state-of-the-art gym. It redefines the standard of urban luxury in Johannesburg and remains a reference point for high-end apartment living in the city.

Beyond Johannesburg – Expanding Horizons

Success in Sandton spurred GLH to expand its residential portfolio beyond Johannesburg, extending to Pretoria and Cape Town, and venturing into African cities further afield.

Proposed projects in Accra, Ghana and Lagos, Nigeria ultimately did not come to fruition, but they laid important groundwork for GLH's continental reach. Today, we continue to engage with opportunities in Côte d'Ivoire, Rwanda and other countries, positioning ourselves as an influential voice in shaping modern urban living across Africa.

Embassy Towers, 2018.
Photographer: Infrastructure Photos.

II. The Hotel Cycle – Reinventing Hospitality

As Johannesburg's urban life evolved, so too did the ways people travelled, worked and socialised. The early 2010s saw a new kind of hospitality emerging, one that was flexible, entrepreneurial and design driven. GLH found itself again at the start of a cycle, translating an ambitious business vision into a new architectural language for hotels.

This cycle began with Marc Wachsberger, a young entrepreneur with a disruptive vision. Marc saw an opportunity to deliver four- and five-star levels of service at three-star prices. This approach has challenged the existing hospitality industry and quickly established The Capital Hotels as a major player.

For GLH, the challenge was to translate this bold business idea into a design language that combined style with economy. Our solution was both clever and flexible:

Firstly, room layouts were generous, avoiding the cramped feel of 'micro-hotels' that have become the norm elsewhere. Secondly, adaptability was built into the model: every second unit was designed as a suite with kitchen, living room and balcony, thereby enabling reconfiguration into two- or three-bedroomed apartments if required. Marc Wachsberger summed it up programmatically: "If the hotels don't work, we can always sell the buildings as apartments." Thirdly, each hotel incorporated the same key features that would attract both business and leisure guests: a conference facility, a stylish restaurant, a compact gym, and a pool. Finally, the experience was anchored in three essentials: 'a good bed, a great shower and an unforgettable breakfast.'

Through smart, resourceful design, we helped create an identity for The Capital Hotels that blends efficiency, comfort and aspirational lifestyle, enabling the brand to grow rapidly and disrupt the local market. Between 2014 and 2018 we built The Capital on Empire (2014), The Capital on the Parks (2017)and The Capital Menlyn Maine (2018). We were planning a few other hotels with Marc Wachsberger when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the hotel industry badly and it became cheaper for him to buy existing hotels and transform them (including The Pearl in Umhlanga , Zimbali Hotel, and 15 on Orange in Cape Town), rather than building new ones. This cycle has passed for us but - given the constant rhythm of architecture – is likely to recur.



The Capitol on Park, 2017.
Photographer: Infrastructure Photos.

III. Laboratories of Living – Personal Homes as Experiments

Parallel to the public cycles of commissions and markets ran another, more intimate rhythm, that of private experimentation. Throughout its history, the partners of GLH have used their own homes as testing grounds for architectural ideas. Free from the constraints both of clients' expectations and commercial pressures, these homes become laboratories for innovation. They are spaces where structure, light and landscape can be explored in their purest form.

Rodney Grosskopff

Early in his career, Grosskopff built innovative houses, culminating in his Westcliff House (2001) lifted on stilts above a rocky slope. The design preserved the natural terrain and celebrated the landscape rather than altering it, pioneering elevated living on the ridge.

Pierre Lombart

Lombart's Forest Town House (1998) pushed experimentation further. Accessible via a slanted funicular lift, the home spans a steep slope with dramatic double and triple volumes, open interiors and terraced gardens. Raw, honest materials, including scaffolding plank floors, sanded brick, window blocks, and corrugated iron, blur the line between refined and experimental design.

Xavier Huyberechts

On a fully treed Houghton plot, I created a House Huyberechts (2005) as both laboratory and manifesto, demonstrating architecture that responds sensitively to the highveld climate while remaining minimal and connected to nature.[5]

The Highveld's crisp winters, warm days and summer thunderstorms demand careful management of sun, shade, and airflow. Openable windows in double-height volumes capture winter sun and heat, while mature Jacarandas provide summer shade. A passive and seasonal energy strategy uses cross-ventilation and stack effect to allow for natural cooling, with night-time openings storing cool air for daytime release.[6]

5 The Houghton House (2005) demonstrates passive climatic adaptation to the Highveld region; see also Holm, D., *Energy-Efficient Housing in Southern Africa* (CSIR, 2000).

6 For more on Johannesburg's Highveld ecology and climate-responsive design, see Gasson, B., 2012. *Urban Energy Transitions in Johannesburg by B. Gasson*. s.l.:Witwatersrand University Press.

House Huyberechts. Garden view of the northern facade. Photographer: Elsa Young







The house is a minimalist box, carefully sited among five large existing trees to avoid their removal. Its northern façade opens fully to the garden while the double-volume living space blurs inside and outside. Smaller functional zones of living, dining, kitchen, office, TV nook and lobby flow together and create the impression of a grand continuous space without excess.

With a restrained palette of white walls and natural wood, the home is calm and luminous. Light, shadow and framed views of the garden and sky shift throughout the day, creating a space that is both intimate and expansive. House Huyberechts demonstrates the interplay of architecture, landscape and climate, balancing elegance, practicality and environmental responsiveness.

House Huyberechts.
Left: Living spaces blend with the northern gardens
Right: the main entrance with transparency from the south.
Photographer: Elsa Young



IV. The Cycle of Buildings – Repurposing Heritage for the Future

Just as architectural styles and markets move in cycles, so too do the buildings themselves. Each structure follows a rhythm of birth, maturity, decline and, if fortunate, renewal. The adaptive reuse of historic buildings allows architecture to transcend its first purpose, proving that even as cities change, the past can find new relevance.

One of the finest examples of our commitment to the repurposing of historic buildings is Arcadia House and its estate, transformed in 2005 into the Hollard Insurance Head Office Campus.

Arcadia House is a true jewel of Johannesburg's heritage (Davie 2018). Built in 1910 by Sir Herbert Baker [7] for the Randlord Sir Lionel Phillips and his wife Florence, the house stands as a quintessential example of Baker's domestic architecture, as grand as it is harmonious with its setting on the northern ridges of Johannesburg.

Set on an expansive property on the northern slopes of Parktown Ridge, Arcadia originally enjoyed sweeping views across what is now known as the world's largest

7 Sir Herbert Baker (1862–1946) was a key figure in shaping South African architecture, designing residences such as Stone House (Parktown), Government House (Pretoria), Pilrig House (Parktown), Northwards (Parktown) and national monuments like the Union Buildings in Pretoria.

man-made urban forest. At the time of its construction, it is said that elephants and other game could still be seen roaming the surrounding veld, a reminder of how recently the city had emerged from wilderness.

The estate's stately tranquillity was later disrupted by the construction of the M1 highway between 1962 and 1974, which sliced through the lower half of the property and left the house unexpectedly exposed to the modern city below.

In the mid-20th century, Arcadia took on a new social role as the Johannesburg Jewish Orphanage, a use that introduced numerous additional buildings across the site. Yet, remarkably, the original house remained untouched and still visible in all its grandeur upon the ridge.

By the 1990s, after years of neglect and abandonment, we identified the potential of Arcadia and proposed it as a new home for the Hollard Insurance Group, then seeking a headquarters that reflected its forward-looking yet human-centred identity. Ideally positioned between the old Johannesburg CBD and Rosebank, with high visibility from the M1, the site offered both historical depth and urban prominence.

However, the task was far from simple. The heritage classification of the property required a delicate balance between preservation and redevelopment. We engaged in

Left: Hollard Main elevation.
Below: Dining room.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.



extensive consultations with the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation (JHF) and the local conservation community, notably under the guidance of Ms Flo Bird,[8] the leading heritage advocate in Johannesburg.

From an initially bold, modernist concept, the design gradually evolved into a sensitive architectural response, one that respected Arcadia's historical character while accommodating Hollard's contemporary needs.

At the heart of the campus, Arcadia House was meticulously restored and repurposed as the central meeting and reception space, housing the board chairman's offices and the company's art collection. Every original room was retained and carefully refurbished, reviving its former elegance after decades of wear and damage. Integrating modern services, cabling and air-conditioning without compromising the building's heritage integrity was an architectural challenge that was successfully overcome. The result is a magnificent and serene centrepiece, perfectly suited to its new life as a place for meetings, functions and sunset receptions on its gracious arched terrace, overlooking uninterrupted city views.

The new office and parking buildings were designed to be architecturally subservient to the historic house, respecting its visual dominance on the ridge. Key historic features – including the Jacaranda-lined Avenue, the old stables, and one of the orphanage buildings – were preserved as tangible layers in the property's long and storied history.

8 The Johannesburg Heritage Foundation, founded in 1985 and led for decades by Ms Flo Bird, remains one of the most influential advocacy groups in protecting the city's built heritage.





The landscaping plays a vital role in the success of the campus. Mature trees, indigenous planting and the rocky natural terrain of the ridge create a tranquil, park-like environment where staff can work close to nature in a setting that feels restorative, grounded and inspiring.

Today, Arcadia at Hollard Insurance stands as a model of adaptive re-use. It is a project that honours the city's architectural heritage while demonstrating how thoughtful design can breathe new life into old structures and ensure their relevance for generations to come.

Above: Hollard Colonnade.
Left: dining room.
Photographer: Barry Goldman.



House Huyberechts.
Photographer: Elsa Young.

GLH at 80 – Continuity through Change

The story of GLH Architects is one of adaptation, renewal and enduring relevance. Every era brought new challenges, from the optimism of Ponte City to the precision of Embassy Towers, from hospitals and offices to heritage restorations and hotels.

Across these decades, the firm's guiding strength has been its openness to change. Each cycle – whether market-driven, conceptual or personal – has left a layer in GLH's collective knowledge, informing the next wave of innovation.

In this sense, architecture mirrors life itself: cyclical, experimental and always evolving. What endures is not the permanence of any single building, but the continuity of curiosity. For the past eight decades our firm has been characterised by the will to explore, to adapt and to build with relevance for both the present and the future.

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INDEX OF IMAGES

ABSA Towers West (2007) 149, 194, 362
AHJ Investments (1948)
AISJ Aquatic Centre (2012) 266-7, 363
AISJ Theatre (2014) 273
Alexander Theatre (1951) 71-77, 131, 360
Alexandra Secondary School (2016)
Anerley Road,7 (2010)
Baker Street, 30. Standard Bank (2010) 211, 244-5, 281, 362
Ballet Theatre & Sappi Park (2004) 240, 243, 362
Bloemfontein Civic Theatre (1958) 80-1
Bolton Road, 38 (1994)
Brenthurst Clinic (1959) 52
Capital at Menlyn Maine, The (2014)
Capital on Empire, The (2013)
Capital on Park, The (2015) 347
Cheslton Hall (1951)
Commissioner Street, 111 (1992) 193, 361
Department of Statistics South Africa (2014) 293-5
Durban Ice Drome (1955) 50-1, 360
Edward Nathan Head Office (2005)
Edwardian Toilet Pavillion (1994)
Embassy Towers (2015) 339, 344, 363
Emperor, The (2005) 343, 362
Firs Refurb, The (2008)
Fisherman`s Village Bruma Lake (1992)
GMS General Medical Supplies (2012)
Garden City Clinic (1987) 53, 361
Global House (2012) 190, 276-7
Grayston Drive, 85 (2013) 326-7, 363
Grayston Drive, 90 (2014) 150-1, 328-33, 363
Great Park Synagogue (2000) 362
Hollard Phase I & II (2004) 352-5, 362
House Huyberechts (2006) 349-51, 356
House Lombart (1995) 202-3
Inanda Country Club (2014)
JH Smilg House (1985) 193, 361
Johannesburg Civic Theatre (1962) 64, 78, 82-3, 84-5, 90-1, 136-7, 360
Krugersdorp Hospital (1987)
La Roche Westcliffe (2007)
Leroy Merlin, Greenstone (2016)
Market Theatre (1976) 92-117, 361

Metropolis on Park (2014)
Microsoft Kenya (2018)
Microsoft Nigeria (2017) 363
Microsoft Head Office, Johannesburg (2004)
Multichoice City (2012) 320-1, 325, 363
Multichoice Customer Care Centre (2009) 322-3
Mutual Square (1979) 45, 165
Nedbank Phase I & II (1998-2010)
Our Parents Home (1945) 39, 124-5, 360
Oxford Road, 199 (2016) 306-7
Park Inn Hotel (2009)
Park Lane Clinic (1997)
Parks Boulevard, 5 (2022) 349, 263
Parks Boulevard, 7 (2021) 308-9, 248
Parks Boulevard, 8 (2022)
Peermont Global Head Office (2009)
Ponte Towers (1972) 14, 156-181, 361
Pybus Road, 2 (2018) 212-3
Regent, The (2007)
Rivonia Road, 345 (2007)
Rivonia Road, 90 (2013) 283, 302-3, 363
Rosebank Clinic (1986) 52, 361
Rosebank Towers (2014) 129, 298-301, 363
Saheti School (2017) 260, 363
St Teresa's School (2012)
Standard Bank Art Gallery (1989)
Standard Bank Global Leadership Centre (2005) 198, 362
Stoneridge Mall (2018)
Summit Club (1952) 46-7, 132-3, 360
Thrupps Centre (1991)
Tyrwhitt, The (2019) 214
UTi Pharma (2011)
Union Hospital (1982)
Villa Arcadia (2004)
Vodacom Cape Town (2011)
Vodacom Corporate Park (1998) 196-7, 278-9, 362
Vodacom Renaissance Park (2003)
Vodafone Site Solution Innovation Centre (2011) 222-3, 290-1
Vodaworld (1998) 195, 362
Weil and Asheim (1985) 48-9, 361
Witklipfontein Eco Lodge (2016) 226-239
Zandfontein Clinic (1988)

MANFRED HERMER GROSSKOPFF PARTNERSHIP TIMELINES AND COMPANY NAME CHANGES

Green and Hermer

1943



Our Parents Home 1945

Manfred Hermer Architect and Town Planner

1945











Alexander Theatre 1951
Bloemfontein Theatre 1958
Johannesburg Civic Theatre 1962 Summit Club 1952
Durban Ice Rink 1955

Manfred Hermer and Partners

1965



Frank and Hirsch

Manfred Hermer Feldman and Grosskopff

1969 to 1972



Ponte 1972

Manfred Hermer & Grosskopff Incorporated

30 August 1974



Market Theatre 1976

Manfred Hermer & Grosskopff CC

31 December 1985











Weil and Asheim 1985
Rosebank Clinic
Refurbishment 1986
JH Smilg 1985
Garden City Clinic
Refurbishment 1987
Milpark Hospital
Refurbishment 1987

Manfred Hermer Grosskopff and Lombart CC.

September 1990





111 Commissioner Street
1992
Park Lane Hospital
Refurb 1997

Rodney Grosskopff
Pierre Lombart
appointed

3 July 1997






9 Arnold Road
Vodaworld 1998
38 Bolton 1994
Vodacom Corporate Park 1998

M H G & L Architects CC

November 2000



Great Park Synagogue 2000

Grosskopff Lombart Huyberechts and Associates

June 2003




Ballet Theatre 2004
Hollard Phase 1 2004

Grosskopff Lombart Huyberechts and Associates

February 2005





The Emperor 2005
Fairgrounds Office Park Botswana
Standard Bank Global Leadership Centre 2005

Grosskopff Lombart Huyberechts and Associates

April 2006







Nedbank Phase 1 & 2 2010
ABSA Towers West 2007
345 Rivonia Road Refurb 2007
Hollard Phase 2 2009
Standard Bank 30 Baker Street 2010

GLH Architects and Associates

March 2011






Vodafone SSIC 2011
85 Grayston Drive 2013
AISJ Aquatic Centre 2012
90 Rivonia Road 2013

GLH Architects and Associates

February 2014






90 Grayston Drive 2014
Rosebank Towers 2014
MultichoiceCity 2015
199 Oxford Parks, BPSA 2016

GLH Architects and Associates

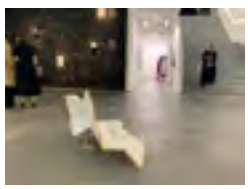
June 2017




Microsoft Nigeria 2017
Saheti School Refurb 2017

GLH Architects and Associates

November 2018



5 Parks Boulevard 2022
Stoneridge Mall Refurb 2018
Goodman Gallery London
Embassy Towers 2018

GLH Architects and Associates

May 2024





Anvil Road Refurb, Barloworld 2025
Trilogy – Menlyn Maine 2024
Standard Bank Art Lab 2025

Notes on Contributors

Federico Freschi is Executive Dean of the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg. He previously served as Professor and Head of College of Te Maru Pūmanawa | Creative Practice & Enterprise at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand. An art historian with a particular interest in the intersections of art, design and architecture, he has published widely, including as co-editor of *Troubling Images: Visual Culture and the Politics of Afrikaner Nationalism* (Wits University Press, 2020) and *The Politics of Design: Privilege and Prejudice in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and South Africa* (Otago Polytechnic Press, 2022).

Lesley Lokko is the Founder and Chair of the African Futures Institute (AFI) in Accra, Ghana. She was formerly Dean of the Spitzer School of Architecture at the City College of New York, and the founding Director of the Graduate School of Architecture at the University of Johannesburg. She was the Curator of the 18th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia in 2023. In December 2022, she was awarded an OBE for services to architecture and education. She has published widely both as a novelist and on contemporary architecture.

Katherine Munro is Honorary Associate Professor in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand, where she previously held senior academic and leadership roles, including Dean of the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management. She researches and writes on historical architecture and heritage, serves on the Board of the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation and is a docent at the Wits Art Museum.

Sarah Roberts was formerly Associate Professor in the Division of Theatre and Performance at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. An academic and practitioner, her research encompasses improvisation, ensemble practice and actor agency. A multi-award-winning production designer, she is widely recognised for her work on landmark South African productions such as *Sarafina!*, *Sophiatown* and *Nothing but the Truth*, as well as for designing the stage for Nelson Mandela's 1994 presidential inauguration.

Hannah Le Roux is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture and Landscape at the University of Sheffield and a Visiting Associate Professor in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her work revisits the modernist project in architecture and considers how its transformation through the agency of Africa presents a conceptual model for contemporawry design.

Guy Trangoš is Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Architecture at the University of Johannesburg and a practising architect. His research investigates the intersections of urbanisation, society, technology and infrastructure, and his publications include *The Spatialities of Radio Astronomy* (Routledge, 2023). He has held academic positions at Harvard GSD, Wits, LSE Cities and the Gauteng City-Region Observatory, and has over fifteen years' experience contributing to award-winning architectural, research, curatorial and graphic projects.

Xavier Huyberechts qualified in Belgium at the ISA St Luc in Brussels as Architect and Urban Designer. He joined GLH in 1994, became a partner in 1997, and the senior member in 2005. Xavier leads the practice as the principal designer where his meticulous eye for detail and design is critical in every project. His experience includes a range of commercial, residential, and mixed-use schemes, and his skill as an architect and urban planner are brought to bear in all his work. Xavier is a Professional Architect registered with SACAP and SAIA.

Briget Groskopff qualified at the University of the Witwatersrand with degrees in both Architecture and Fine Arts. She joined GLH in 1994 and became a partner in 1997. Her background and interest in the arts provides the practice with valuable insight and creativity in design. She has a range of experience in commercial, healthcare, educational, performing arts, and gallery projects. Briget is a Professional Architect registered with SACAP and SAIA.

2025 marks the eightieth anniversary of GLH Architects, a Johannesburg-based architectural firm whose longevity and enduring legacy place it amongst a handful of firms in the South African context to have survived the vicissitudes of shifting political regimes, economic downturns, urban transformation and profound societal shifts. Over the course of eighty years GLH has established itself as one of the foremost South African architectural firms, each decade being characterised by a number of landmark buildings and projects that serve as important markers of the social, cultural and political contexts in which they were produced. As such, they remind us of the importance of the built environment in giving shape and substance to our needs of the present and our ambitions for the future. Set against the backdrop of the turbulent and relentless change that characterises both the history of Johannesburg and the South African building industry over the last eighty years, this book acknowledges the importance of GLH's historical legacy in shaping the present, while reflecting also on its role in rising to the challenges of designing for the twenty-first century.

Edited by Federico Freschi
Rodney Grosskopff
Clive Chipkin
Katherine Munro
Sarah Roberts
Hannah Le Roux
Federico Freschi
Lesley Lokko
Guy Trangoš
Briget Grosskopff
Xavier Huyberechts

GLH Architects

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