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## CONTENTS ISSUE 97

### EDITOR’S NOTE
02 DOMESTICITY AND THE LANDSCAPE
Professor Paul Kotze, Editor

### NOTES AND NEWS
05 PRACTICE NEWS
SAIA executive, Ms Su Linning

06 HERBERT MAURICE JOHN PRINS: UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, GOLD MEDAL
Constitutional Court Judge Edwin Cameron and Professor Nnamdi Elleh

### BOOK REVIEW
10 A STUDY IN THE “TECTONIC” CULTURE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
Mr. Johan N Prinsloo

### PROJECTS
12 A GRAMMAR OF EARTH AND SKY
Dr Alexandra Dodd

22 A SCREENWRITER’S RETREAT
Mr. Jason Temlett

30 CARE, PLACE AND THE SOPHIA GRAY LAUREATES: ARCHITECTURE AS AN ART OF LIFE PART 2
Dr Hendrik Auret

40 HOUSE WISSE, MONAGHAN FARM
Professor Paul Kotze

### TECHNICAL
50 “I LIKE AN ARCH”
Mr. Michael Louw

### END NOTE
52 HUMANITY’S HABITAT: LIVED VS BUILT ENVIRONMENT
Mr. Kgao Bonaventure Mashego
Recently, humankind has been treated to the first-ever generated images of Black Holes, estimated to be 55m light years away from earth. It took years of research, countless hours of work and eight telescopes spread over four continents to generate these images.

The smallness and fragility of earth has also been symbolised by the now famous “Earth Rise” photograph taken from the Apollo 8 space mission. When we contemplate the almost impossible concept of celestial space, we also need to understand the reality of time. We now know that the oldest form of animal life stems from 558m years ago and, before that, there was the earth with an even longer geological history.

In comparison to this, the space of domestic architecture and urbanity is minute and relatively short-lived. In many ways, it is really negligible. But this is what we, as humankind, have and what we need to care for, for our mutual survival as a species.

The recently released United Nation’s report on the state of the natural environment contains alarming news. This report makes clear the loss of natural life on earth; forest clearance has become a crisis and we have lost about half of the area covered by natural ecological systems. A million animal species are at risk of extinction. Land degradation has reduced productive land by 23 per cent. Pollinator loss is placing the production of food at risk. We see and experience the effects of climate instability as droughts and climate fluctuations are commonplace.

All of these factors that erode the basis of life are due to human action and inaction.

All indicators point towards the fragility of all the systems that support human life on earth. We can hardly escape this planet — so we must make do with what we have.

We need fundamental transformative change in how we build and how we live on earth. Yet, when we scan building activity locally and internationally, we can barely detect such a change of attitude. Mainstream building activity seems to be happily cruising along, oblivious of the impending crash.

Luckily, there are inspiring, but largely lonely, voices like South African-born architect Allen Schwarz, who through his life’s work in Mozambique points all of us in a different direction. He is successfully demonstrating how, despite very demanding circumstances, life and nature can be improved in a sustainable and poetically beautiful manner while ensuring human dignity by creating objects of such profound meaning that it should become the standard of measure internationally. Yet, so few seem to take notice of this readily accessible example. Maybe we are all waiting for the international world to instruct us to do so.

We have the cultural expression, geometry and a considerable knowledge base to effect this fundamental transformation towards making meaningful domestic space in the landscape. Domestic space must be the most common functional space on earth — so we’d better be starting to get it right.

This required transformation of our largely exploitative attitude towards nature and the landscape can only change if we approach the making of our architectural environment with the “duty of care” so convincingly argued for and described by Dr Auret in his trilogy of articles on the Sophia Gray laureates. It can also only change if we take notice of the fact that Ms Slovo could state from the heart that “after a lifetime away, I have come home”, regarding her new house designed by architect Carl Jacobsz. There is a considerable amount of sad irony in this statement if one considers the fact that the two people — client and architect — stem from vastly different backgrounds. The client has returned from political exile while Jacobsz grew up in the Free State veld and may be oblivious of such struggles. Yet these differences did not preclude them from creating a poetic expression for this homecoming. When Mashego writes with strong emotional power of the landscape of his childhood in the “End Piece”, he reminds us that we are all connected to this landscape. We can all foster “duty of care” by acknowledging and dealing positively with our differences so as to cope with the looming environmental instabilities facing us.
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DOMESTICITY AND THE LANDSCAPE

By: Su Linning, SAIA executive, Practice

The backdrop against which architects operate is a multifaceted, hugely intricate, ever-evolving maze of legislation and regulation. Clear guidelines and proper procedures are needed to ensure that one can navigate safely around the pitfalls — old and new — which may be encountered on the way. The Practice Committee is focused on some of the tools required by practitioners on their journey through architectural practice, and is, amongst others, supporting an important intervention around the difficulties currently being experienced by the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications with regard to the proposed amendments to the Act and complications with the application of the National Building Regulations.

The most commonly referred to resource available to the profession is undoubtedly the Practice Manual or, as the re-imagined version is currently referred to, the Compendium of Practice Guidelines (CPG). These new documents are available online to all SAIA members via the member portal. The section devoted to pro formas, section D, has now been populated to a significant degree and comments on the general content, or on specific documents are most welcome.

The SACAP requirement for the terms of engagement with a client to be confirmed in writing can be met in various ways, either by using the SACAP document, the PROCSA agreement, recommended by SAIA for projects with an extended team of professionals, or the SAIA client-architect agreement. Indications derived from the 2018 SAIA Survey of Practices indicated a strong need for a straightforward letter of appointment to engage with one-time clients for residential work or smaller projects. The work on such an agreement — the letter-contract with supporting appendices — is now nearing completion and should be available during the latter half of 2019. Work on a client guide to advise clients on what to expect from an architect is currently being drafted and will be available to prospective clients as soon as it has been finalised.

It is also anticipated that the results of the 2019 Survey on the state of the profession and on architectural fees will be available online in June. With 20 per cent participation again this year, we are confident that the data will add further to our understanding of how the South African economy has impacted on the state of architectural practice over the past two years.

The Commonwealth Association of Architects’ publication Planning for Rapid Urbanisation — Survey of the Architectural Profession in the Commonwealth, presented at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2018, reveals several critical shortcomings experienced in many Commonwealth territories. The three key findings of the survey were:

- A critical lack of capacity in a number of Commonwealth countries, many of which are rapidly urbanising and are among the most vulnerable.
- A corresponding lack of educational and institutional capacity to grow the profession fast enough.
- A perceived weakness in built environment policy ... in terms of standards, implementation and enforcement.

The South African Government is a signatory to the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It chaired the Africa Union’s Agenda 2063, defining a 50-year vision for Africa and it has developed a National Development Plan (NDP) for South Africa, with the overall focus on people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnerships.

Tomorrow’s cities are being planned today! The South African architectural profession and SAIA members are ready and eager to contribute to a more sustainable future, a fairer future, a more secure future and a more prosperous future for all South Africans.

CONTRIBUTORS

MR. JASON TEMLETT is a graduate of the University of the Witwatersrand, School of Architecture and Planning (SoAP). Mr. Temlett has taught previously in the United Kingdom. He has a background in fine art and he was the 2015 winner of the SoAP ‘Louis Michel Thibault Prize for History of Architecture’ best project.

ALEXANDRA DODD is a writer and editor whose work takes shape at the intersection between literary, visual and archival cultures. She is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow in the National Research Foundation SARChI (South African Research Chair Initiative) in Social Change at the University of Fort Hare.
HERBERT MAURICE JOHN PRINS: UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND GOLD MEDAL

By: Constitutional Court Judge Edwin Cameron and Professor Nnamdi Elleh (on behalf of the University)

Herbert Prins is a distinguished architect and one of South Africa’s most eminent authorities in the field of architecture, design and heritage. He is renowned for his work in heritage objects conservation, a relatively new field, for which the modalities of practice are still being established.

Prins served at the forefront of the development in this area long before historic conservation became a popular word in the discipline, and his contributions in the field both in South Africa and abroad are evident. At the age of 91, he continues to actively and energetically contribute to public interest projects in Gauteng and beyond.

A Wits graduate, Prins qualified as an architect in 1952 and holds a five-year professional Bachelor of Architecture degree, a Masters of Architecture qualification and a Diploma in Town Planning. A dedicated teacher, he practised as a full-time architect and then served as a faculty member in the Wits Department of Architecture for 26 years, serving as head of department, a member of Senate and a member of the board of the faculty. At Wits, he was responsible for developing the Mining and Geology Building and the former Medical Library and the Medical School in Esselen Street, Johannesburg. He also developed the master plan for the Science Campus and the Physics Building at the then University of Natal.

Prins focused his energy on heritage conservation in the later years of his career and worked as a heritage consultant on several major projects including the restoration of the Reserve Bank in Pretoria; the restoration of the Pretoria Railway Station, which was gutted by fire in 2001; the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication in Kliptown, which commemorates the Congress of the People in 1955; the Newtown Precinct in Johannesburg; and the upgrading of Vilikazi Street in Soweto.

Prins has been an unflagging and prominent activist for the architectural heritage of South Africa, Gauteng and Johannesburg. Since shortly before his retirement from Wits in 1996, Prins has served as a member of the Building Committee of the Constitutional Court and played a key role in the construction of the new Constitutional Court on Constitution Hill. Former Constitutional Court Justice Kate O’Regan lauds his attention to detail and deep commitment to the constitutional project of building a society to free the potential of all South Africans, a view with which former Constitutional Court Justice Edwin Cameron concurs. He adds that Prins’ views are “knowledgeable, authoritative and compelling and bring a truly vast array and depth of architectural, design, aesthetic and cultural-historical wisdom and knowledge to the work of the Court”.

Post-World War II, Prins also played an integral role in planning the centre of Harlow New Town in Essex, England, amongst several other major projects.

A registered member of the South African Council for the Architectural Profession, Prins is also an associate member of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He has been awarded the Gold Medal of Distinction from the South African Institute of Architects, the Gold Medal of the Simon van der Stel Foundation (now Heritage South Africa), the Gauteng Institute for Architecture’s Honorary Life Membership Award and is a lifetime member of the South African Institute of Architects.

Due to his noteworthy contribution to heritage preservation and architecture, his professional and academic distinction, and his exceptional contribution and service to society, it is with great honour that Herbert Maurice John Prins is presented with the University of the Witwatersrand’s Gold Medal.
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A STUDY IN THE “TECTONIC” CULTURE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

By: Johan N Prinsloo, landscape architect and lecturer, Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria

Julian Raxworthy book Overgrown: Practices Between Landscape Architecture and Gardening focuses on both landscape architecture theory and horticultural practice

“T
here is something peculiar about the weather; it is never quite right” laments Karel Capek in his comical calendar describing the frustrations and pleasures of The Gardener’s Year. The plot of this little book1, set in Prague, will be familiar to anyone who has pottered with plants: gardening is a love-hate relationship between man and vegetation. Plants are fickle, and seemingly suicidal.

The gardener sweats and swears in the sun for the sake of seeing growth, and hacking it back. The onlooker may admire the budding flowers and sheared shrubs, but knows nothing of the broken backs from all the raking, mowing, pruning, (smiling), sawing, hoeing, weeding, (weeping), watering, clipping, sowing and sweeping (laughing). Gardening is hard work (interrupted by joy) like parenting or owning a dog. Aesthetic judgements, botanical knowledge and know-how inform the gardener’s actions, thus forming the garden. When the gardener dies, the garden becomes overgrown.

The recognition of that special relationship between garden and gardener is at the heart of Julian Raxworthy’s book Overgrown: Practices Between Landscape Architecture and Gardening (2018). The book evolved from his PhD2 and experience as a tradie3 gardener and architect in his native Australia.

It is a polemic of the variety that architects will recognise. In Studies in Tectonic Culture (1995),4 Kenneth Frampton argued for architecture to descend from lofty abstractions and hubristic image-making to the very substance of building: materials and how they are joined. The work of Peter Zumthor is exemplar of the tectonic, a word derived from the Greek tekton, the carpenter; wood begets form. The main material of landscape architecture is plants, leading Raxworthy to coin “viridic” (from Latin viridesco, meaning “becoming green”) in the process of “seeking the kind of fundamental relationship between plants and landscape architecture that the tectonic has acquired for architecture” (p135).

It is in the “becoming” where the similarity between architecture and landscape ends. Metaphor may give bricks mouths to speak with, but they speak not. A garden is more like a society than a structure: a community of living beings (including the gardener) that share resources within a bounded territory steered toward some vague and varying vision. The vision of the landscape architect often takes the form of drawings that represent a fixed moment in the future — a mature landscape formed by a regime of maintenance. The will of the gardener to respond to the change caused by growth is suppressed by the dictatorship of the drawing. Overgrown is a welcome attempt to challenge the status quo by theorising how the “dynamic tactile relationship” (p135) of garden practice can enrich the practice of landscape architecture.

It does so by walking us through six case study gardens that each focus on a different aspect of the viridic. Loosely, the emphasis shifts from object to subject: from the fluctuating formality of the French Renaissance garden at Château de Courances to the politics of maintenance at the Museum Insel Hombroich in Germany. In between, architects, in particular, may be interested in the discussion on the architectonic use of plants by modernist Dan Kiley at Saarinen’s Miller House, and Sítio Burle Marx — a garden that left two of my architect colleagues breathless. Raxworthy concludes with a manifesto for the viridic. It shakes us to see the obvious: plants ought to be treated differently from bricks. As the tectonic is an antidote to architectural gimmickry, the viridic may prove to become an antidote to the hyper-reality of landscape urbanism.

The value of the book reaches beyond its central argument: it serves as an introduction to both landscape architecture theory and horticultural practice. Raxworthy has also ennobled the role of gardeners as agents in the making of landscape. ■

FOOTNOTES

1 Capek, K. 2002. The Gardener’s Year. New York: Modern Library. [The original in Czech was published in 1929. The English translation by M. and R. Weatherall was first published in 1931.]
3 Australian slang for tradesman.

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A GRAMMAR OF EARTH AND SKY

By: Dr Alexandra Dodd, University of Fort Hare

Arising out of his travels, his intuitive sketches and his lifelong immersion in architectural theory, Martin Kruger’s buildings respond to their varied contexts in ways that are at once grounding and liberating.

"UNDERSTANDING THE ART OF MY ART IS TO HAVE ONE FOOT IN HISTORY AND THE OTHER FOOT IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY. THIS THE FUNDAMENTAL PREMISE OF MY PHILOSOPHY. I DON’T WANT TO ENGAGE ONLY IN MODERNISM, OR TO DEFINE MYSELF AS A POST-MODERNIST; I WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN THE TOTALITY OF THE ARCHIVE OF ARCHITECTURE AND CITIES AS REFERENCE FOR THE WORK THAT I AM INVOLVED IN.” — MARTIN KRUGER
Martin Kruger is a draughtsman, painter, architect and urbanist whose work blurs the boundary between art and architecture. His sketches, paintings and etchings are a vital tool in articulating his designs for buildings and the open spaces between them. In the same breath, cities and structures infuse the abstract chromatic dreamscapes in his paintings.

For almost a decade, he worked in partnership with Pedro Roos as one-half of the award-winning practice KrugerRoos. But since 2005, Kruger has been working independently, allowing for a more intuitive and embodied mode that has given rise to immaculately crafted contemporary Cape farmsteads, like De Wildehoek (2005–2012) and Le Poirier (2014–2018), among other striking projects.

Arising out of the homegrown historic idiom of the Cape vernacular, these farmsteads speak an emotive new language. A decisive palette of colours and elemental materials maximises contrast, emitting an aura of mildly austere serenity. There is no loose blending of optic fields here. Rather, the spatial zones of the structures and their surrounding context have been meditatively demarcated — composed, as if concrete materials were music.

The grounded solidity of the supporting walls transmits a sense of calm and stability. Earthed and substantial, they will stand their ground through the storms. Yet, step through the dramatic arched threshold into the interior, and you have entered a vast gallery of light, height and space. Sunlight beams in through a variety of deep-set apertures and transparent planes that punctuate the solidity of the surrounding structure with sculptural rhythm. The room takes flight.

“Architecture awakens with light and shadow. You have things that are heavy and grounded and of the earth, but then you allow the light to come in. The moment you have light a building attains life. Calvino speaks about gravitas and lightness,” says Kruger, who dreams of, one day, translating Italian writer Italo Calvino’s Invisible Cities into Afrikaans, and making etchings to accompany the text. [The book explores imagination and the imaginable through prose-poem descriptions of 55 cities by an explorer, Marco Polo, many of which can be read as parables or meditations on culture, language, time, memory — the key threads of human experience.]

**FOLLOWING THE LOGIC OF THE LINE**

It is not at all surprising that Kruger’s buildings and spatial plans begin as sketches. “The only way for me to understand something is to draw it,” he says. “When you draw, a lot of things come up. It surfaces things … sometimes things are so unknown and they reveal themselves as you work.”

From the drawings of our ancestors on cave walls to Raphael’s drawing of the Pantheon in Rome; Le Corbusier’s drawings, watercolours and paintings; the mostly unrealised building plans of the Italian Futurists, which captured the idealism of the movement; or the paintings and drawings of Iraqi-British futurist Zaha Hadid, there has always been a fertile relationship between drawing and architecture. To draw is to see, to learn, to understand. English art critic, novelist, painter and poet John Berger talked about the psychological importance of the connection between the eye, the brain, the hand, and the paper — that it is a spiritual thing.

In architecture, the finished work is costly and time-consuming, so it is crucial to resolve the design as fully as possible before construction commences. Today, the vast majority of architectural drawings are created using CAD software for three-dimensionality, productivity and speed. Not so for Kruger’s drawings. He is an impassioned advocate of the analogue. “We’re often so busy that we don’t listen or see properly. But life is about finding out. Why are you here? What difference are you making?”

Drawing is the praxis by which he explores these questions. “In Italian, disegno means to draw or design,” he says. And the word’s meaning extends beyond the literal idea of draughtsmanship. Since the Renaissance, disegno has...
been understood to be the intellectual principle/method that underlies the visual arts, putting them on a par with literature and music. It implies both an ability to make the drawing and the intellectual capacity to invent the design. It is the imaginative and intellectual core of this process that gives disegno its characteristic gravitas.

But, there’s a more instinctual aspect to it too — that thing of simply following the loose, liquid logic of the line as a form of subconscious drift. “I’ve always had the ability to draw,” says Kruger. “When I was a child, my father had an encyclopedia with illustrated drawings and that inspired me to start drawing. I begged my parents to go to a school that offered art; they didn’t allow it, but I carried on drawing anyway. Drawing was an inward escape for me — quite a private thing.”

EARLY IMPRINTS: THE CITY AND THE CAPE
Kruger was born in Paarl and grew up in Boksburg on the East Rand of what is now Gauteng. “I have childhood memories of travelling on the train to the OK Bazaars on Commissioner Street [in central Johannesburg] to do the family shopping — helping my mother with the paper bags — because there weren’t plastic bags then.

“Coming out of suburban Boksburg at the height of apartheid, those train trips into Johannesburg were how I first saw who South Africans were. It was how I first experienced the activity of the city and it really made an impression on me. There’s a quote by [American architect] Louis Kahn that strikes a chord with me: ‘When a little boy walks through the city, he knows what he wants to do with the rest of his life’. Later on, as 16 year olds, my twin brother and I would take the train to Hillbrow and walk and walk through the streets, checking things out with friends.”

His childhood connection to the Cape also made a strong impression on him. “My mother’s family hails from Stellenbosch. They were Rouxs, of Huguenot stock, and owned the farm Libertas on Adam Tas Road, as well as a beautiful farm opposite it. As children, we used to travel to the Cape through the Karoo for holidays, so my awareness of things came through the Cape, where I was born and where the family was. I have clear early memories of the oak trees in Stellenbosch, which is still one of my favourite places,” he says.

“Dorp Street is one of the most beautiful streets because of the oaks and the white buildings set on the street. I also saw District Six as it was [before the forced removals] and, in some senses, Dorp Street is similar to how District Six used to be in the sense of both places being quite urban. The buildings don’t announce themselves, they are directly adjacent to one another, making up the “urban wall”, as Norberg-Schultz (Genius Loci) call it. Several of the buildings I’ve done have a Cape quality — they’re contemporary designs but they have that imprint.”

These two early imprints — the farm-style buildings and majestic trees of Stellenbosch, and the bustling life of the city streets — remain perennial influences for Kruger whose designs integrate distilled elements of both. Core to his architectural philosophy is the idea that “all buildings are cities and the city a big house. It has different parts — piazzas and streets that connect things.”
A MIND-OPENING EXPERIENCE

Kruger later went on to study architecture at the University of Pretoria, which was “a mind-opening experience”. He was taught by Schalk Le Roux, a scholar of Islamic architecture, and Carl (Gus) Gerneke, who had worked at the South African embassy in Lebanon — a real character and a notable raconteur. “Both of them were well-travelled and infused us with ideas of urbanity,” he says. “After being at school and in the cadets and then being a soldier, I had been disciplined to follow the rules, be up early, be there first … suddenly I was exposed to an entirely different way of thinking.

“When I studied architecture, post-modernism was very much at its height with its critiques of what Modernism had done to the world. Take Le Corbusier,” he says. “I love his drawings, but he had some really bad ideas about the city. He propagated the post-war idea of the modern city as a tabula rasa — a series of skyscrapers with parks. It was the building as a machine. The traditional city structures were lost.”

Revisiting his childhood connection to Johannesburg, Kruger’s thesis was an urban project sited at Diagonal Street, one of the city’s oldest and most eclectic precincts, with its Victorian and Edwardian buildings, prismatic glass skyscraper designed by Helmut Jahn, Indian retailers and African herbalists’ shops.

ITALY, SPAIN AND THE SOCIAL LIFE OF BUILDINGS

In 1982, Kruger embarked on the first of many journeys to Europe with his twin brother and friends. “We rented a car in Amsterdam and travelled throughout Europe, looking at architecture and cities. Learning through literature and fellow students’ travels was an amazing adventure. I wasn’t just looking at buildings; I was trying to understand the pulses of different cities and parks and precincts and how it all works together.” The Iberian and Italian landscapes and the work of Hertzberger, Bofill, Giancarlo De Carlo, Le Corbusier, Carlo Scarpa and Piano & Rogers left an indelible impression on him as a young architect.

“Encountering De Carlo’s built work in Urbino made me realise that architecture has a huge responsibility to its context. You can’t just do what you want. You need to think about your neighbours — will you be welcome in the neighbourhood once you’ve completed your building? Are you sensitive to others? If you respect these questions you can make buildings that don’t announce themselves in a way that destroys the context.”

Italian architect, planner, writer and educator Giancarlo de Carlo (1919–2005) was a fierce critic of Modernism and a key figure in the discourse on participation in architecture. He was active in the Italian anti-fascist resistance as well as the post-war Italian anarchist movement and never separated architecture from politics. “Much of De Carlo’s built work is located in Urbino, a small Italian hill town for which he proposed a master plan between 1958–1964, which has slowly been implemented over the past 40 years. His interventions

“ALL BUILDINGS ARE CITIES AND THE CITY A BIG HOUSE. IT HAS DIFFERENT PARTS — PIAZZAS AND STREETS THAT CONNECT THINGS.” — MARTIN KRUGER

in the form of new buildings and renovations have been carefully inserted into the built fabric and pay close attention to the social life of the town. His work at Urbino and elsewhere shows enormous respect and care for heritage whilst being open to technological advances and is characterised by an emphasis on the responsibility of the architect and the necessary relationship between practice and theory.”

After graduating, Kruger lectured part-time and collaborated with architects Llew Bryan, Schalk le Roux and the Bannie Britz/Michael Scholes practice, among others.

UYTENBOGAARDT, URBANISM AND CAPE TOWN

Several years later, Kruger heard Roelof Uyttenbogaardt speak at the Institute for Architecture in Johannesburg and pursued a powerful impulse to go and study for a Masters of Urban Design and City Planning with him at the University of Cape Town. “I came to UCT in 1990 as an Afrikaner from Pretoria. It was just after Mandela had been released and Afrikaners were considered to be the skunks of the world at UCT. I didn’t even want to speak Afrikaans there. Other Afrikaners would sometimes

4 Drawing for Guggenheim Helsinki Competition Entry. 5 Painting by Martin Kruger. Mario Todeschini, Photographer. 6 Etching and photograph by Martin Kruger.
whisper in Afrikaans. It was quite intense,” he says. “I studied with Uytenbogaardt in my second year and he was quite a spiritual teacher — very poetic in the way he spoke.”

His thesis, Culemborg Black River Parkway: City of Cape Town, Development Framework, was an exercise in urban density. “It was all about the need to make our cities more compact so that the poor are not forced to live on the periphery but live closer to the city. I proposed a new high-density people’s waterfront that was part of District Six and Salt River/Woodstock. It was where the railway tracks are now and would have been serviced by the train. We made diagrams and drawings, which illustrate the linkages and relationships between structures and spaces in the city — different densities, from the informal to urban.”

After graduating in 1992, Kruger established his own practice in Cape Town. He was involved in conservation in Stanford, Paarl, Cape Town and Stellenbosch and worked with Uytenbogaardt on urban design projects for the Cape Town 2001 Olympic Bid and for the Culemborg (the site of his thesis), as well as participating in a competition for the Olympic Stadium with Pedro Roos, in which they were placed among the 10 finalists.

Among other residential projects, Kruger completed the Southwinds Farmstead, Klein River Estuary, Hermanus (1993–1996). This award-winning project is an early example of one of Kruger’s contemporary interpretations of Cape architecture, a standout feature being its floating roof.

TEXTURE AND MEMORY: THE URBANISM OF DISTRICT SIX

While lecturing part-time at the Cape Technikon, Kruger initiated and co-authored — with Jake De Villiers, Marco Bezzoli and Rafael Marks — the exhibition and book Texture and Memory: The Urbanism of District Six in collaboration with the Cape Technikon Urban Housing Unit. “I had visited District Six as a child and as a student, and I remembered it being such a vibrant place. The forced removals were a form of urban genocide — they killed a vital part of the city; they wiped it out. And the Technikon [located in the District Six area] is such an awful building, so I felt that we needed to make a contribution and discover what District Six was about, understand the way it was destroyed. Working with the students, we did all these land-use maps showing the rich diversity of typologies — flats/apartments, terraced houses, semi-detached houses — tracing the urban fabric of the time.”

PARTNERSHIP AND INDEPENDENCE

In 1996, Kruger formed Studio KrugerRoos with Roos. “Pedro had worked with Glen Gallagher and I had studied with Uytenbogaardt — and they had both studied with Louis Kahn in Pennsylvania when Kahn was professor at the School of Architecture there,” says Kruger.

During this time, the studio was involved in numerous competitions, research projects, public buildings, houses and farmsteads. “It was a big, dynamic partnership and many talented young architects worked for the practice.” Projects included a mixed-use building at Melrose Arch in Johannesburg (1998–2002) and the farmstead and farm buildings (including the packing shed) at Nieuwe Sion (2000–2005), and a 70-hectare table grape, nectarine and soft citrus farm in Simondium. In response to this project, Gus Gerneke writes: “The architects re-established the traditional werf by positioning the new house on its original site opposite the office-barn, creating an axis: the werf defined by low white walls. One is struck by the subtle formality of the buildings and werf, allowing different vistas of the Boland landscape. The Nieuwe Sion Farmstead is a contemporary, subtle rendering of the Cape vernacular — an apt design at ease on an intensively cultivated historic farm.”

They worked in collaboration with Lucien Le Grange and ACG Architects on Cape Town City Council’s UniCity Chambers and Executive Offices (2000–2004). “The municipality’s offices are housed in one of those boer en beton concrete buildings and we wanted to make a new language for it by putting a lighter steel structure on the roof. The cone is quite dramatic. It is made out of steel...
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and it has fins of polycarbonate, which we lit up digitally. It was initially intended as a weather vane.” This building was featured in *The Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary World Architecture* in 2004 (and the BP Head Office in the subsequent edition).

The practice won several design acknowledgments, most notably, the award-winning BP Head Office (2003–2006), which “dignified the ethos of sustainability through the holistic integration of an enlarged spectrum of design determinants”5; the University of Pretoria Law Faculty and Library (2002–2006), with its effortlessly detailed use of steel and glass creating spaces of transparency where students and staff move freely while remaining part of the larger campus6; and the Early Childhood Enrichment Centre at Brown’s Farm, Philippi (2001–2004), which “stands proud, immobile and rooted” establishing a civic infrastructure and creating a central meeting place and acts as a symbol of community.

Roos left the practice in 2005 and since then Kruger has been working independently, partnering with others when projects call for collaboration. “The way I work now is very different from having a practice driving you like a machine. That machine is often dependent on developers with money who don’t have regard for the city. I’m interested in a more meditative form of practice. Clients are often pushing, pushing to get things done, but when you slow things down, other things develop; wisdom comes to you. I’m interested in what the site wants to become. Viewed in this light, the client almost becomes a patron for the realisation of the project,” Kruger says.

Since going solo, Kruger has completed several major projects including the Graça Machel Residence (2005–2008) where the design was dictated by the topography, a staggered façade imitating other Cape examples, such as District Six and the Bo-Kaap where the slopes express a staggered façade imitating other Cape examples, such as the Hilton Hotel in Windhoek (2008–2011, in collaboration with Jaco Wasserfall); the first phase of the Freedom Plaza mixed-use precinct, which is reinventing the CBD of the Namibian capital; De Wildehoek Farmstead (2006–2010), a magnificent home, entrance gallery with vaulted ceiling, studio and horse stable (with sliding African Mahogany shutters) on the slopes of Chapman’s Peak in Noordhoek for artist Wilma Cruise and her husband John; Le Poirier Farmstead (2015–2018), an immaculately elegant pear orchard farmstead with decorative arches, steel pergolas, recycled pear wood insets and patterned black tile floor inlays inspired by the refined materiality of Carlo Scarpa’s designs; and the Du Noon Community Health Facility, Killarney Gardens (2010–2013), with a design concept based on a legible “city” structure of diverse public halls, spaces and small courtyard gardens, which was nominated for the 2019 Aga Khan Award.

ÁLVARO SIZA, MONASTERIES AND COFFEE SHOPS

Like Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza, Kruger often works in coffee shops. “You become anonymous and you can just draw,” he says. “I am constantly busy exploring ideas in notebooks as well as exploring architectural theory about the city, learning through architecture and through other people’s work.” Located in the Old Cape Quarter in De Waterkant, his studio bookshelves house an enviable collection of magnificent books on art, architecture and urbanism.

“I relate to Siza’s approach to drawing. He makes these illustrative diagrams, then the diagrams get built into models and the models get constructed. Models in the studio assist with resolving details for junctions, or with initiating concepts, testing scale. He works in a very organic way and his buildings reflect the geological lines of earth, like archaeological excavations. Siza spoke about the monastery as an idea and about how the building and its courtyards can be used for so many different functions later. His buildings have a meditative, monastic quality about them.”

TEMPORAL INTEGRATION

Kruger’s ethos also strongly reflects the influence of Spanish post-modernist Rafael Moneo, who he calls his “urban tutor”. “I love Moneo’s writings on the city. He is a phenomenal teacher.” Throughout the late 1990s and into the 21st century, Moneo has designed many museums and cultural spaces and is known for designs that seamlessly incorporate both contemporary and historically referential elements. For the National Museum of Roman Art, Mérida (1986), he used Roman building techniques, materials and proportions, including a series of brick arches [Forum Romanum] that create a walkway through the main exhibition space.6
The dramatic use of arched entryways is also a definitive feature of some of Kruger’s designs, notably Birkenhead Brewery, Le Poirier and Wildeboek Farmstead. “The threshold is an important element for me — it’s that whole entering something new,” he says.

Favouring temporal continuity over radical rupture, another of Kruger’s key influences is the aforementioned Italian architect Carlo Scarpa, who is credited with bringing decoration back into architecture. Lovingly attentive to texture and detail, Scarpa is best known for his instinctive approach to materials, combining time-honoured craft with contemporary manufacturing processes. Influenced by materials, landscape, the history of Venetian culture, and Japanese restraint, Scarpa’s renovation of the Museo Castelvecchio (1964) balanced old and new, revealing the history of the original building where appropriate.

“Scarpa brought Modernism into the Classical World — and made it new,” says Kruger. “Whereas Modernists like Corbusier hated classical buildings — they wanted the tabula rasa, the new, the modern, just concrete and glass stripped of decoration — Scarpa worked with both. And that’s where my architecture wants to be. Architecture has existed for thousands of years and there is beauty in everything. There is beauty in Cape architecture and in Cape ways of making — the scale and morphology of things. But most of the new developments being done in Cape Town have nothing to do with it.

“Developers often push things in ways that are destructive. Everyone is being gentrified out of Cape Town and it’s destroying the heart of the city. For me, that is sadness. The things that were allowed in the 1960s because heritage values weren’t held … they could have done a better job of saving the old city.” To this end, Kruger is currently involved in urban conservation efforts to block the development of the Lutheran Church Precinct and the historical 18th-century urban block between Strand, Buitengracht, Waterkant and Bree Streets.

PAINTINGS, ATMOSPHERES AND ENVIRONMENTS

Drawing is not just a design tool for Kruger. He starts drawings all the time and sometimes his drawings give rise to paintings. His paintings, in turn, are evocations of the imagined cities that are the inspiration for his buildings. “Paint is unlike anything else. It has its own unique energy. While in process, the painting sometimes speaks to you about what it wants to become. This applies to architecture as well. If I think about Uytenbogaardt and Kahn, they both spoke about the place knowing what it wants to become. It’s almost like a spirit waiting to take form. In December, I did a painting of Notre Dame. And now I find it interesting how fiery it looks.”

Like his drawings, Kruger’s paintings are layered, occupying a mysterious space between abstraction and representation, depicting environments that hover between reality and fiction. “Building up the layers is a very meditative process,” he says. “I’m drawn to the idea of the palimpsest — the idea of writing over the traces of pre-existing texts, layering over paintings.”

Modern and ancient, built and organic structures occupy the same indeterminate visual plane. Although urban in feel, his paintings have a natural, elemental quality about them. Their chalky, matte textures and parched luminous colours emulate the matte surfaces common in nature. “I walk in Newlands forest at least once a week to feel that sense of being in a cathedral of trees,” says Kruger. “And I think of trees as being part of the architecture of the city. They are like columns.”

Trees and buildings coexist within the frame. Like the paintings of Paul Klee, these works evoke the structures and mystic geometries that underlie natural and built environments. “Like the earth itself, cities are in constant transformation. We modify and transform things. We use the earth to make architecture. Buildings take on the scale of mountains, while in nature we find skyscrapers made by termites.”

END NOTES

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A SCREENWRITER’S RETREAT

An architecture of heuristic exploration and tectonic response: House Slovo is expressed as a sensitively regionalist response and by a principally responsible design. Although initially perhaps perceived as “simple”, House Slovo’s layers of resolution are revealed rather as sophisticated simplicity.

By: Jason Temlett
Rising above the Highveld, House Slovo opens up to vast expanses of natural light and rolling untouched vistas. After decades of urban city living, a return home from London to South Africa naturally appealed to the client. As an exercise in the roles successful architecture can play, the design of Shawn Slovo’s house goes in some way towards repairing the client’s complicated relationship with the country of her birth.

The house and its function sit in direct dialogue with the landscape, reconnecting the nature of everyday living with the senses of belonging and place.

BAFTA award-winning screenwriter and daughter of freedom icons Joe Slovo and Ruth First, Shawn Slovo moved to London at the age of 14 when her family was forced into political exile in 1964. Despite having inherently complex and ambivalent feelings towards South Africa, Slovo expresses having always had a sense of loss and longing to return one day.

“THE LONGING TO BE BACK UNDER AFRICAN SKIES, NEVER WENT AWAY.” — SHAWN SLOVO

SHAWN SLOVO’S VISION

Slovo wanted a welcome London respite, envisioned as a screenwriter’s creative retreat; a home purposefully designed to recharge and reconnect with the freer spirit of our open African landscape, people and spirit of place. A home — an archetypal sense of belonging — conceived where space and atmosphere could visually and physically lead and flow into each other to create a peaceful, harmonious and creative living experience; a place of comfort and refuge from the world, reinterpreted within a contemporary context as immersive architecture that would imbue a sense of escaping to the bushveld. She yearned for unencumbered living, the fluidity of space and movement acting as a restorative relationship, a sanctuary of reconnection creating a fluidity of thought and being.

Seeking this, Slovo envisioned a peaceful refuge from the world, enjoyment of the splendour of natural beauty, a home archetypal of comfort, safety and belonging, and a retreat that would become a writer’s sanctuary.

Although first seduced by the Cape, it was living in harmony with nature that won Slovo’s heart, a peaceful escape imbued with bushveld beauty.

Drawn to the warm golden daylight, expansive vistas of the unspoilt rolling African landscape, dotted only by Nguni cows, towards the distance of the Magaliesburg Mountains, the eco-ideals and ethos of Monaghan Farm sealed the deal for Slovo and a site was snatched up.

Identifying an appreciation of sensibility and aesthetic, the design process began, partnering with Johannesburg-based architects C76AD.

The sociopolitical implications of modern private estate living notwithstanding, Monaghan Farm is in many ways dialectically impressive. Setting itself apart from other housing developments, Monaghan Farm has espoused a mission of eco-ideals and an impressive respect and restraint to building on the land, only three per cent of the farm will ever be built on.

Designing for the complex client and place relationship, coupled with the almost unmissable opportunities the picturesque site presented; would require an architectural response formed by, and linked inextricably to both. Disregarding the influence of any architectural style or the temporality of trend, C76AD approached the design without any preconceptions.

Principal architect of C76AD Carl Jacobsz explained that the factors influencing the architecture were the implications arising from the environment and context, architectural responsibilities of sustainability, and the cultural experiences of a South African lifestyle. How can a building be naturally contained by its surroundings in a way that distils a meaningful response to place, architecture, nature and modernity?

ARCHITECTURAL APPROACH

Time was invested in understanding the client’s specific needs and defining the brief, researching the above-mentioned aspects to respond appropriately to them and to avoid forcing any predetermined aesthetics or gestures. Exploring the story of place rather than attempting to reinvent it, informed the critically regionalist and pragmatic approach: blending with site, careful selection and use of materials, the iterative process of discovery and craft, and the adaptation to flexible living comfort. Principled placemaking was articulated through this formal and programmatic response; the sensitive design concept resolved through insightful architectural detailing.

1 View from the north-eastern deck from the natural pool. Sliding timber screens open to unveil views of the eastern valley from the main bedroom. 2 Section A-A through living room.
Regionalism at a very local exploration, House Slovo is a design of contextualised intervention, built to be both adaptive and accommodating with clarity of materiality, space and form. A design focused on space, uncomplicated and where simplicity of structure meets the purity of its context; refusing design complication in order to bond the built with the natural, but also paring back the clutter of modern life. Form should follow function, the design signature being dictated by being at one with land, location and planned programme, reinforcing the latent potential of site subtly.

THE DESIGN
Approaching from the north, the house lays unobtrusively low in the veld, the main entrance following a long stone walkway that reaches out into the tall grass, a strong journey of architectural promenade moving from the open undefined veld towards the striking view of the house sitting anchored into its site.

As object within, above and of the landscape, the house is optimally lifted and orientated to capitalise on the surrounding views, opening programmatically northwards to frame a focus on the contiguous natural setting. Exploring prototypical features of vernacular architecture, technical detailing is used to integrate efficiency and appeal; the simple form of House Slovo belies its thoughtfulness. This is not an archetypical box with a pitched roof. At times reminiscent of the early Prairie works of Frank Lloyd Wright, or the architectural sleekness of the homes of Albert Frey, the house unfolds in a softer way to its context similarly to works by Neutra and other early modernist houses of California.

The house seems to grow out of the hills itself, touching the earth lightly and extending east to hover above the 6m sloping site, reducing the intervention’s impact and disturbance. Formed as a linear mass, the outer materiality of the house becomes lighter along the west-east Axis, where the (seemingly) floating lightweight steel structure is anchored, almost organically, by heavy stone walls.

A relatively simple rectilinear form of sweepingly long horizontal parts, interior spaces are arranged intuitively yet inventively, aligned along the main datum, following the lay of the land. Two planted courtyards cut through the cubic volume to create glazed pockets of intimacy and light, a blurring of inside and out, vertical elements that reinforce continuity to site. Personal spaces of privacy and withdrawal, the bedrooms and bathrooms have been placed at either end of the building, the envelope connecting private thresholds to public as axes of circulation device — an organisational pattern flowing around the tree courtyards to the central, open plan living areas — a layered and varied experience of interconnectedness and assembly of spatial qualities. Each puzzle piece of the building fits neatly into place.
Handled with authority, the building presents a powerful presence on the hillside while also paying respect to it. A convincing architectural amalgamation perhaps representing the aspiration of the client externally, while the interior offers insights into her personality.

Tailored to fit the client’s living, the interior is surprisingly compact and hardly any space is wasted. Efficiency in space use penetrates the whole house. Openings are placed along the south-north axis to provide passive ventilation and cooling, while clerestory windows and the monopitch roof provide plenty of natural light and sheltered overhangs. From within, the house spills out onto decked patios. Along this northern facade, flexible timber and glass sliding sections open to the undulating hills and towards the open sky, maximising spatial comfort while connecting interior and exterior space. This delineation of solid and void interweaves layers of transparency, reinforcing the idea of thresholds transitioning towards endless space, the remarkable vistas and presence of context optimised from almost every vantage point. The screens soften the long linear facade and break down the horizontal scale of the building; the rhythmic repetition of materiality and tones echoing the landscape.

**JACOBSZ IS ALSO INTERESTED IN THE CRAFTING OF AN ARCHITECTURE THAT IS MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS WHERE CONSTRUCTION AND MANIPULATION OF SPACE FUNCTIONS AT A HIGHER LEVEL BECOMING POETIC.**

A private writing niche was specially designed — a peaceful workspace, positioned as a personal statement due to its importance in the client’s lifestyle. This study area extends from the hovering east wing as a cantilevered box, floating above the ground with views down the eastern valley ... an invigorating space for inspired writing.

The client’s culture of open-plan living shaped the programme organisation and hierarchy of function — a sequence of layered function and a visual deconstruction of materiality and weighting progressing along the length of the building that connects the house’s activity outwards and the natural environment inwards. It is a synthesis of materiality conjoining the stereotomic solidity of stone to the gentle lightness of the steel frame.

Jacobsz achieves a design sophistication by way of a multileveled approach to space making, designing organisation in plan, while simultaneously conceiving space in section. Jacobsz is also interested in the crafting of an architecture that is more than the sum of its parts where construction and manipulation of space functions at a higher level becoming poetic. This tectonic praxis as a signature of C76AD’s work is continuing here.

**THE PASSIVE DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

The house has been designed with sustainable principles throughout, and a number of key “green” decisions have produced excellent architectural results. The centrally lined internal courtyard spaces wrap around trees from below to form tall volumes of external space that provide interconnecting greenery, as well as shaping ideally-timed light and shade throughout the year.

Almost all of House Slovo could be recycled and reused. Experienced in using reclaimed building materials, (2018 GIFA & SAIA Merit awarded for “138 Jan Smuts”) the architects saw steel — a traditional material already found elsewhere on the older farm.
structures — to be an opportune structural approach that would also inform a suitable aesthetic language. The steel used could be easily disassembled and repurposed, while the stone is a low-costing waste product, locally sourced from mining dumps.

While London and the UK may often be stereotyped as cold, wet and dreary; South Africa has its own climatic challenges to address: Monaghan farm can hit summer highs of up to 40°C and can drop below 10°C in winter. Natural and passive solutions were designed and implemented to maximise the house’s thermal performance throughout.

The roof, of course, plays an integral role in the house’s overall design. Retaining its rectilinear geometry, it has a 3m-overhang angled towards the north, both cleverly shading the house and the outside living areas from the sun’s heat; while later in the year, allowing the sun to heat the house throughout winter. The two courtyard openings act as atrium light wells, funnelling down the eastern morning sunlight to the living area and kitchen. Because of the site’s natural opportunity and importance placed on the surrounding views, large openings run along the north facade. Double glazing is used throughout, with light further moderated to meet comfort by the flexible use of timber screens. These sliding screens can be opened or closed at will, adjusting desired levels of light, enclosure, cooling and privacy. Similarly, the sliding screens act as a security barrier, allowing rooms to be left open during hot summer nights.

All rainwater falling on the roof is harvested and stored in tanks to the site’s south, irrigating the garden and filling the pool. A dappling of sunlight permeates through the building layers, an interplay of light and shadow changing throughout the day moving through the house over the course of the day, as do the reflections of the nearby pool and natural pond’s water.

Here another clever passive principle is in play, as the natural pond water in front of the house causes a refreshing breeze to the outside living areas by means of simple evaporative cooling.

Complementing the strong lines of the architecture, an informal approach is taken with the completely indigenous landscaping left to grow naturally and allowed to organically enhance the sense of surrounding wild nature — there are no manicured lawns or planted gardens. Fish and water lilies flourish in the pond, while cows are left to graze freely. The lifecycle of the design intervention has been carefully considered to cause minimal change; everything has been approached in a way that, in the future, all could potentially return to a preserved original state.
"WE BORROW FROM NATURE THE SPACE UPON WHICH WE BUILD." — TADAO ANDO

"We borrow from nature the space upon which we build" - Tadao Ando

In keeping with the natural feel of the design, simple and modest finishes were selected to enhance the interior/exterior relationship. A disciplined, pared-back approach creates a cohesive elegance. The raised timber decking and sliding screens are warmly complemented by the surrounding natural vegetation and the cool dark steel is reflected in the slate-coloured stone. Humble corrugated sheet roofing matches that of the old existing farm buildings.

REGIONALISM AND EXPRESSION
The continued importance placed on authentic design expression and the connection to localised culture fuels the ongoing search for a regionally relevant and contextualised South African architectural identity. Regionalism responds to the above through reinterpreting the built environment in a self-conscious way, inherently formed by and inexplicably linked to its own context. Climate, topography, materiality, history and culture have all been grounded by the design approach taken by House Slovo’s architect and client.

Finding new and alternative approaches to contemporary living, House Slovo is a modern dwelling rooted in its locale that responds to self-critique and raw understanding, rather than naiveties of style or trend. Directly responding to place, the house finds itself pushing the boundaries of modernity and tradition, experimenting within the vocabularies of new expression and tectonic exploration.

13 Main living room and kitchen with a view towards the north. The high-level windows allow for passive cooling of the space. On the outside lower level, the natural pond allows for cooled air to flow into the house and it draws many varieties of wildlife for the observation of anyone using the living room.

14 View from the guest bathroom into the entrance courtyard, which separates the main house from the living room.
“AFTER A LIFETIME AWAY, I HAVE COME HOME.” — SHAWN SLOVO

A moment of synchronicity, intention and execution stated through the language of architecture. Programmatically ordered and shaped in tune with the veld wildness, the house becomes a respectful mediator between living and landscape — an augmenting architectural expression evoking the enhanced spatial experience of a particular locality. Diluted with natural light and open space, the built intimacy of a permanent, private home is in a simple, honest, yet generous harmony with the natural atmosphere and presence of place.

It is the care and pragmatism of the design that has shaped the house’s expression. Architectural aspects of the structure display the hallmarks of beautifully resolved design where contemporary architecture acts as both exploration and expressive identity.

REFERENCES:


The discipline of technical detailing, coupled with the responsive, maturely styled expression comes from a deep insight into the culture and responsibility of architecture. This is where the beauty of House Slovo is celebrated.

An encouragingly holistic example of responsible design, principled approach and sensitive regionalism, House Slovo can be viewed as a confident expression of contemporary South African architecture.

Consciously crafted, House Slovo personifies a “homecoming”; best summed up by the client Shawn Slovo after settling in, who simply stated: “After a lifetime away, I have come home.”.

PROJECT TEAM: HOUSE SLOVO

CLIENT: Shawn Slovo
ARCHITECTS: C76 AD
Principal architect: Carl Jacobsz
Project architect: Dan de Kretser
CONTRACTOR: BLUE CUBE CONSTRUCTION
Conway McCraenor
ENGINEERS: C-PLAN ENGINEERS
Cassie Grobler
STEEL CONTRACTOR: ESTEE AUTOMATION
Jurie van der Westhuizen
KITCHEN & CABINTRY: OPTIMA KITCHENS
Adolf Conradie
POOL & POND: WETLAND POOLS
Anthony Philbrick
CONTRIBUTORS: Warren Wilson & Anna Bailey
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: C76AD & DOOK
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This essay is the second in a three-part critical curation of the work of the first 30 Sophia Gray Memorial Lecture and Exhibition laureates. The first essay focused on the way human life may be architecturally appreciated and safeguarded as an “art of care”. The second essay aims to notice the diverse ways in which architecture practised as an art of care, in the hands of the Sophia Gray laureates, open new ways to approach architecture as an “art of life”. The third essay will further develop this line of enquiry by using the art of life to re-envision the nature of masterful architecture as a “focal practice”.

At the heart of the architectural art of care dwells the desire to design buildings captivated by the ways of life unfolding amid the region’s munificence. This was also the ultimate goal of the Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926–2000): to transform his “art of place” into “the art of the experience of living” (2000:356). In his more succinct Norwegian terms — stedskunst must become livskunst (1995:183). Norberg-Schulz, in a handwritten archival document (n.d.), outlined his understanding of the life-place relationship as follows:

- Life takes place.
- Place is intrinsic to life.
- Life demands an appropriate place.
- Place means to be between earth and sky (Norberg-Schulz, n.d.).

The art of care proposes the following supplement:
- Life means to be between birth and death as care.
- Care is intrinsic to making places appropriate to life.
- Place and life are drawn close in care.
- Life takes place as care.

The art of place, re-imagined through the art of care, makes it possible to envision architectural livskunst as the concerned and careful poiesis of the life-care-place totality; a regioning in which care draws life and place close, life happens as mortal emplaced care, and place is lived as a spatiotemporal "region of concern". Indicative of the hermeneutic circularity German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) ascribed to human existence (1927:315-316), human beings live as care in places delimited by care. In architectural terms, livskunst aims to build this reciprocal regioning. The following sections will curate the contribution of the Sophia Gray laureates in search of moments revealing a clearer view of what practising architectural livskunst entails.

**DESIGN, LIFE, THE SHARED AND THE UNIQUE**

The findings of the first essay suggest that the laureates have mastered the capacity to interpret unique concerns in a way that elicits a sense of shared
An unfolded view of the interaction between ways of life and an art collection in the living room of House Roodt (photograph by author).

captivation. It could be argued that buildings eliciting shared captivation are “general” in that they find ways to embody, as Glen Gallagher said “the spirit of man rather than the spirit of a particular man” (1993:4). However, the art of care proposes that making uniqueness shared is not necessarily a question of suppressing the particular in search of the “universal” (Gallagher, 1993:4), but of overcoming the unthinking hegemony of “how things are usually done” by means of restraint. Heidegger saw restraint as the “ground of care [that] first grounds care as the steadfastness that withstands the ‘there’” (1938:29-30). It is not that restraint is “prior” to care, but that care is revealed particularly luminously in restraint. Simply put, restraint creates the conditions, the silence needed for listening, and frees mortals to consider the munificent of that which is always already. For instance, Ora Joubert’s “blue book” (2009) and the new “yellow book” (2017) might be hefty tomes, but despite their exuberant colours they actually display a remarkable level of restraint in terms of curation, layout and concision. The result is not minimalist, but a kind of parsimonious abundance responding to the depth and richness of South African architecture.

1An unfolded view of the interaction between ways of life and an art collection in the living room of House Roodt (photograph by author).
Fundamentally, the art of care “grants permission” to practise the restraint necessary for noticing existing relationships of concern — between new and existing, architect and place, and even art collections and established ways of life. For instance, consider House Roodt. To design one’s own house is a quagmire of aspirations and illusions about who one wants to seem like, but Anton Roodt found a novel way to avoid this naval-gazing quicksand. Inspired by the art dealer, Dawid Ras, he decided to take the art collection he already owned, that is the works that he (and his family) had already selected and gathered, as the impetus for design. Instead of designing a “gallery”, he hoped the design could “allow one to move through the house and enjoy the art from different viewpoints” (Roodt, 2016).

Essentially, he was re-imagining family life by focusing on the art they already admired. The works of art, chosen before the idea of a new house was on the cards, thereby served as uninhibited moments of restraint and clarity that could facilitate “[designing] from the inside out” (Roodt, 2015:26). Yet the resultant space (Figure 1), despite originating from a very particular art collection, is not beyond re-appropriation by future homeowners.

In a broader sense, it is by noticing the very uniqueness of care that restraint opens ways to rethink the notion of place as a shared identity. Too often blanket terms like “South African architecture” have been used to describe a thoroughly diverse milieu. Once more, good intentions are succumbing to Robert Venturi’s “easy unity of exclusion” instead of reaching towards the “difficult unity of inclusion” (1966:16) and ironically leading to an impoverishment of emplaced nuance and microclimatic responsiveness. Architects would do well to remember, as Noero put it, that “architectural identity ... is place-based and not nationally derived” (2007:25). Drawing near the region of concern, therefore, calls for a reciprocal interaction of reverent restraint, the rarity of emplaced care and the...
overwhelming abundance of place, made common in the wonder of shared captivation. Design becomes a form of integrated awareness fuelled by a profound and personal dedication to the place and the lives of its people.

THE ROLE OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

What role may architectural theory play in awakening this kind of dedicated awareness? In general, the laureates displayed a clear antipathy towards “theory”: Jack Barnett (1991:31) cautioned architects “to beware of anyone or any manifesto that offers sweeping solutions to society’s many intractable and complex problems” and Noero claimed that “it is in the making of architecture that we create theory” (2007:25). VDMMA enforced this distinction by identifying themselves “as architectural ‘do-ers’, rather than ‘theorisers’” (Van der Merwe, 2008:10). Mikula shared this distrust of theory and preferred “quite words, not flamboyant oratory” (Raman, 2005:12).

Thus, the appropriateness of the format of Mikula’s Sophia Gray “lecture” as a discussion. Even OMM promoted the idea that the role of architects depends “less in what we say, and more in what we do” (OMM, 2007:21) and Revel Fox was quick to remind of the “fallibility of human theories and opinions” (1997:32). For the most part, experienced practitioners such as Louis Karol and Glen Gallagher also made calls for sobriety rather than theories. Some laureates may even be offended by attempting to appropriate their contribution for theoretical aims when they themselves, like Jaco Wasserfall, fail to see a “strong theoretical framework” (2010:31) guiding their designs. In the published memorial lectures, only Walter Peters voiced an explicitly positive stance towards theory when proposing that theory serves as “scaffolding” (2009:55) for a building. After construction, the scaffolding is removed, and it becomes the task of the historian “to extricate the thought behind the product, to distil same and to make this available to others by way of publication” (2009:52).

Despite this generally “dismissive” stance towards theory, practitioners should not be blind to the possibility that theoretical insight may enhance design awareness; the capacity to notice what, why and how one designs. In fact, taking the time to put a Sophia Gray exhibition together is itself a massive event of contemplation and “noticing”. Moreover, the positive feedback received over the years from practitioners reflecting on the value of curating and exhibiting their work has played an important role in the recent introduction of the “practice-based” and “design-led” PhD courses at the Free State School of Architecture. If I might be so bold, while most laureates are not actively espousing a theoretical position, it has not kept them from practising an art of care. Care, as an ontological concept, is prior to any theory, ethos, stance or practice. From the perspective of the art of care, there is little sense in driving a wedge between theoria and poiesis. Mortals think, design, write and make as beings of emplaced care.


MAKING REGIONS OF CONCERN

The works of the laureates display a deep sensitivity towards place. However, in the light of the extensive literature study conducted, it is clear that the laureates gave more attention to aspects of space and place than time in their lectures. This is a very general observation, but is corroborated by the fact that many laureates attached great importance to the idea of “timelessness” in architecture. The notable exception might be the memorial lecture by OMM, who accorded time equal standing in their plea to borrow instead of possess “materiality, space and time” (OMM, 2007:14-17). Of course, the architectural propensity to favour spatial above temporal aspects is not a uniquely South African tendency. The Finnish architectural theorist Juhani Pallasmaa (b. 1936) proposed that our contemporary global situation “has an especially frustrated relation to time” since time has been “instrumentalised and commodified” (1995:309). Human life has been estranged from human mortality. That is why it is easier for architects to think in terms of the “material existence” of architecture, instead of the “life and human situation that take place” there (Pallasmaa, 2007: 190). However, if livskunst is a priority, then architects, in the same way they aim to turn “limitless space” into “distinct places of human significance”, must also “make endless time tolerable by giving”
duration its human measure" (Pallasmaa, 2007: 189). This is where the art of care hopes to contribute a deeper appreciation for the poetic depth of lived time and mortal making. It is not a question of whether care or place — time or space — is more significant or primal from an architectural perspective. Human life is entangled in a "regioning" with both as a region of concern. In Afrikaans, it is helpful to think of the word "surroundings" as an omgee-wing.

One way in which this regioning between place and care has made itself visible is in Peter Rich’s extraordinary line drawings that create an “empathetic relationship” between architect and setting (Fischer, 2011:6). It is as if the architect, by sketching and then interpreting the sketch (Figure 2), lives himself into a moment of emplaced care. Instead of "objectifying" places, the empathetic sketch draws near the place as a spatiotemporal region of concern composed of spatial relationships, ritualistic events and ways of dwelling. Rich’s human figures, while stylised, are involved in their places. They belong within the identity of the place.

In contrast, when architects disrespect the identity of place by unthinkingly copying foreign voices into established places — who can forget Ora Joubert’s renouncement of “Tos-Afrikaans” (Burger, 2006:41) — dwellers are architecturally confronted by a double debasement: “the commodification of the beauty and dignity of [the region’s] histories and, secondly, the absence of true imagination and innovation” (OMM, 2007:16). The audacity shown by some of the laureates to publicly condemn the inappropriateness of certain imported styles — and some styles are deeply problematic from (at least) a climatic perspective — is commendable. Yet one could also make the argument that the unquestioning appropriateness of styles is merely another facet of the “fallenness” and “absorption” Heidegger ascribed to mortal care. The work of the laureates often shows the rare and revelatory moments of “resoluteness” (1927:298-301) that Heidegger was trying to inspire in his audience, but one of the most challenging aspects of Being and Time is the realisation that, for the most part, people “fall prey” to lives absorbed in unquestioning “average everydayness” (1927:43). This is not, however, a “negative” (in moralistic terms) aspect of mortal existence. In fact, in his later work, Heidegger promoted the value of listening to the situation, however, “fallen” it may appear and finding creative ways to "let be" (1951:149) the gifts embedded in the lived regioning of care and place. The art of care straddles the fine line between the listening restraint of “letting-be” and the revelatory daring of “resoluteness”. As such, it creatively longs to appreciate the ways in which things always already matter to people while simultaneously opening the practice of architecture to more ways of mattering.

THE ART OF CARE STRADDLES THE FINE LINE BETWEEN THE LISTENING RESTRAINT OF “LETTING-BE” AND THE REVELATORY DARING OF “RESOLUTENESS”. AS SUCH, IT CREATIVELY LONGS TO APPRECIATE THE WAYS IN WHICH THINGS ALWAYS ALREADY MATTER TO PEOPLE WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY OPENING THE PRACTICE OF ARCHITECTURE TO MORE WAYS OF MATTERING

MORE WAYS OF MATTERING

Being an architect matters in many ways. Consider the contribution of Sophia Gray. Besides being a mother of five she also “conducted the finances of the diocese, organised and recorded its synods and meetings, and maintained its chronicles and correspondences” (Peters, 2009:48). Some may deride this as a superficial way of interpreting Heideggarian care, but surely care, as “an implicit criticism of all theories of detachment” (Polt, 1999:79), would tend to err on the side of being involved? One of the best contemporary examples is Paul Mikula who has also acted as “director of factories; manager of a nonprofit house building company and a farm (which eventually became a teaching farm); trustee of the Bartle foundation; creating, building and for a while, running the Bat Centre; and project director of the Urban Foundation. Work which included resettling inhabitants of typhoid-afflicted Inanda, getting the powers that be to issue work permits and allocate land, organising a building material supply yard and running a community newspaper” (Raman, 2005:16). In addition, one could point to the editorial concerns of Walter Peters whose care is evident in the pursuit of clarity, conciseness and academic rigour. Lastly, one should not overlook the important role played by others like Phill Mashabane, Anton Roodt or Al Stratford (amongst others) who have served on various public bodies concerned with regulating the built environment.

It is not that the traditional concerns of architects are less valid, but again the art of care cautions that a certain level of broadminded humility is needed when considering the role of architects in society. A view evident in the way Peter Rich’s Alexandra Interpretation Centre aimed to be “an architecture choreographed by the architectural team, yet written...
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and performed by the inhabitants of Alexandra” (Hall, 2011:23). Unfortunately, stimulating this “performance” is neither obvious nor inevitable.

For instance, consider a recent doctoral study by Madelein Stoffberg that analysed Stan Field’s Ubuntu Centre to measure the degree of correspondence between “spatiality as conceived by architects and perceived by users” (Stoffberg, 2015:12). One aspect of the survey consisted of showing photographs of spaces in the centre to community participants who were asked to sort images into “predetermined categories” (Stoffberg, 2015:79). A particular image puzzled the researcher. The photograph, named UB4, was of an office in the Ubuntu Centre. While appropriate and serviceable, the space is hardly inspiring, but community members kept identifying this image as one with strong symbolic connections. It was only later, upon conducting interviews, that Stoffberg realised participants were moved by the poster on the office wall depicting one of the children who were part of the Ubuntu Education Fund programme and who had gone on to graduate from university. The image of her graduation spoke to the cares of the community in a very direct way that architectural space making, and the “sculptural elements” (Stoffberg, 2015:210) architects often expect people to experience as meaningful, find hard to emulate. Another example is the “unforeseen symbolism” of Guedes’ Saipal Bakery — an unruly expression of Stiloguedes with its “convulsive walls” and “contorted” sections — that eventually became popular due to its shape reminding the bakers of a Portuguese loaf (Guedes, 1999:20-21).

This is not to say that the quality of architectural spaces is insignificant, or that we need only bedeck walls with inspiring images, but it also serves as a reminder that successful built and urban spaces find more ways to draw near to the cares of communities than can be architecturally “predicted”. Sometimes the most appropriate solution may not even involve building. Yet this realisation should not smother the most appropriate solution may not even involve building. Yet this realisation should not smother any strong symbolic connections. It was only later, upon conducting interviews, that Stoffberg realised the “lived situation” for future reference. Bannie Britz succinctly described the deep realisation underpinning the work of such architects as “architecture is not about buildings, but about people” (2009:10). Moreover, as Pancho Guedes so poignantly enquired in his satire of Louis Kahn’s architectural fables: “How can buildings become what they need to become, some pretty, some dark, others ugly, some fat and clever — real like people?” and slightly more accusatory “when will architects start wanting people in their buildings?” Only then will we be capable of “an architecture plunged into people, an architecture the size of life” (Guedes cited in Gerneke, 1999:30).

Towards the Art of Life

I experienced the architectural celebration of existing ways of life most strongly in a rather fortuitous setting. As a student, I attended the Global Studio organised as part of the 2004 International Union of Architects Conference in Istanbul and somehow found myself accompanying Peter Rich and his son Robert on a few urban explorations. Every now and then, when they found an “interesting urban space”, they would start pacing out the area and drawing/documenting the “lived situation” for future reference. Bannie Britz succinctly described the deep realisation underpinning the work of such architects as “architecture is not about buildings, but about people” (2009:10). Moreover, as Pancho Guedes so poignantly enquired in his satire of Louis Kahn’s architectural fables: “How can buildings become what they need to become, some pretty, some dark, others ugly, some fat and clever — real like people?” and slightly more accusatory “when will architects start wanting people in their buildings?”

The Art of Care is Concerned with Those Ineffable Moments that Transform Architecture into Something that Approaches “The Size of Life”

The art of care is concerned with those ineffable moments that transform architecture into something that approaches “the size of life”: the moment “when a group of grandmothers arrived at a Hector Pietersen Museum community meeting with newspaper clippings they had kept for almost 25 years” (Mashabane & Rose, 2014:12); when Guedes gives the title of “Stiloguedes masterpiece” to the doll’s house he designed for his daughter (1999:21); in the exuberant sketches of Hannes Meiring and the moments of life captured by Rich; or in the swashbuckling way that the architect of the Mossel Bay Maritime Museum also sailed in a replica of Bartolomeu Dias’ caravel from Portugal to Mossel Bay as first mate, thus taking personal responsibility for the delivery of the project’s centrepiece — a commemorative voyage for which Gavie Fagan “taught himself Portuguese” in order to converse with the crew (Fagan, 2016:154). When architects design as stewards of this kind of lived sensitivity they practise livskunst.

Viewed through the lens of the art of care, architectural livskunst represents the most appropriate form of architectural mastery. Architecture that finds its authenticity (Afr: lewensegtheid) through serving, enriching and drawing near mortal life itself. As Willie Meyer wryly admitted: “There is no shame or pity in architecture losing if life wins” (n.d.:12).
VIEWED THROUGH THE LENS OF THE ART OF CARE, ARCHITECTURAL LIVSKUNST REPRESENTS THE MOST APPROPRIATE FORM OF ARCHITECTURAL MASTERY

WORKS CITED


END NOTES

1. As mentioned in the first essay in this series, the term “regioning” is a neologism used by Bert Davis to translate the dynamic nature Heidegger implied with the German term das Gegnen (Heidegger, 1945:73); the lived reciprocal relationship between beings of care, regions of concern and mortal ways life. Conceptually, the second and third essays in the series will build on the philosophical exposition presented in the first essay.


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A house in the veld, a house in the sun.
House Wisse is a home that endeavours to embrace the beautiful landscape where it is situated. It is designed to integrate with its immediate surroundings while framing and capturing distant views towards the surrounding valleys and “kopjes”.

The sloping site is respected and is experienced as one circulates through the home, gently dropping from level to level. One’s relationship to the natural ground level continually shifts between being upon, within or proud thereof.

The strong connection with the landscape is further emphasised through breaking down the mass of the building and staggering the plan, thereby weaving the landscape and house together. The narrow volumes of the house ensure that one’s eye is always drawn outwards whether it be into an intimate courtyard or towards the vast distant views.

The architecture looks to passively control light and temperature. This is achieved through creating a thoroughly insulated envelope (floor, cavity wall and ceilings) and relying on simple principles of cross-ventilation as well as deep roof overhangs and louvred screens and shutters as shading devices. The sliding shutters allow one to adapt and modulate the spaces based on the time of day or year.

The expression of these lighter filigree elements contrasts with the heavier masonry, steel and concrete elements. Although the material palette is restrained, a range of textures are explored within one material, for instance, the concrete finishes range from board-formed to off-shutter and polished. This honest and varied approach leads to the visual richness and character of the spaces.

The natural pool with its planted filter zone serves to further integrate the home within its natural setting and the water tank that sits alongside the pool, and under the deck, has a capacity of 40 000 litres of harvested rainwater.

House Wisse, or “Sonvanger” as its inhabitants affectionately call it, is a home where they can leave their troubles at the door and where one is invited to connect with nature through observing the subtle shifts of its daily and seasonal rhythms.
‘SONVANGER’
A HOUSE IN THE VELD, 
A HOUSE IN THE SUN

By: Professor Paul Kotze, (Honorary Staff Member) School of Architecture & Planning, University of the Witwatersrand

A CONTEXT FOR HOUSE WISSE
Monaghan Farm is a gated community situated amongst the undulating landscape, northwest of Johannesburg and southwest of Pretoria/Tshwane in the Lanseria area. The most prominent view from the area is in a north-westerly direction towards the Magaliesberg and the Hartebeespoort Dam. It is fairly “hidden” in that it does not border directly onto any major arterial route. There are no big and prominent signage boards that proclaim its whereabouts. The gatehouse, contrary to general custom, is even fairly modest. It is, however, fairly close to Lanseria Airport. This might be the only noise intrusion in the general and characteristic quietness of the estate. »
There is huge variety in the various architects’ approaches to form making, material usage and the application of colours from the pre-approved colour palette.

As an experiment in the usage of professional architectural design in the creation of value in terms of aesthetics, cultural and monetary relevance for a select group of people, it is surely worthy of more analysis and research. It is in complete opposition to the manner in which normal South African urban environments are created. The everyday urban environments in the country are usually far more ‘messy’ and contradictory. Here the possibility of value creation and destruction are just about equal, despite the fact that building regulations are applied. The compliance to the regulations is enforced so arbitrarily that a near “free-for-all” condition exists.

Then there is this distinct difference between the environment at Monaghan Farm and the general South African architectural and urban context. The one operates on the basis of the choice of social and economic exclusion — in the other more “normal” world, the barrier of social and economic and social exclusion is less pronounced, but it still exists. In the one, conscious architectural design and pre-determined design requirements and parameters are the guiding forces of architectural form making to ensure the aura of physical quality of the built fabric. In the other, conscious architectural design by professional

The Jukskei River, which meanders along in a general north-west direction, and its fairly pronounced valley constitute the most prominent and memorable spatial entity of the estate. This is the major collective space that, together with the relatively large open areas between the various residential clusters, ensures the dominance of natural space over manmade architectural forms. In this idyllic environment, nature dominates. All actions are focused on ensuring the tranquillity that nature can induce.

In many ways, it is a utopianist settlement.

Nature, design controls and enforcement, coupled with many regulations regarding sustainability, create this idealistic and very beautiful environment.

The design controls governing the Monaghan Farm development might be unique in South Africa. Here, only pre-approved registered architects may design the buildings according to relatively strict design controls. These controls have to do with, for example, the building height above natural ground level; plan form; materials; colour; outside artificial lighting; sustainability regarding energy usage and generation; water conservation and storage; and plant material selections among others. Despite any fear that these controls might induce a homogenous architectural

1 View across the natural pool looking east. 2 Viewed from the east. 3 Viewed from the north. 4 Cross Sections.
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architects are few and far between, but design is present. This kind of design is mostly design by the “thousand designers”, which for some is known as vernacular design. It follows its own logic and patterns and it is also worthy of being taken seriously. There is also some relationship between the two traditions and one can inform the other. In contrast to the “normal” South African built environment, Monaghan Farm exudes a sense of calm, control and quietness, where nature dominates. It speaks to the select few who would like to have their lifestyle expressed in a particular physical manner.

AN INTERPRETATION OF HOUSE WISSE
The best and most memorable qualities of House Wisse are contained in its “ordinariness”. Maybe, no architect and their clients would like to be remembered for the creation of an “ordinary” building. Specifically, also when it has been realised in an environment where all buildings, from the humblest utilitarian building to the most important and ambitious, have been designed by architects. In such an environment, the competition to create the best and most impressive object could be fierce while it could also give rise to much empty architectural posturing. Serman, however, kept his cool and focused on creating a relatively humble building that was carefully and thoughtfully designed and crafted without attracting undue attention to itself.

That is the ultimate compliment that any architect and their client should receive. House Wisse, with its quiet logic and dignity, will create, over time, much meaning and delight for many generations of its inhabitants and visitors.

In addition, this building has the ability, for this reviewer at least, to evoke memories of the experiences of other buildings with much larger and longer-term international reputations, without Serman ever having made any conscious reference to such buildings. This might be the ultimate compliment to a younger and highly talented architect just finding his feet in the world of building.

Like some architects, Serman worked purposefully with the plan, section, light, volume, tectonics, materiality and route in the design of House Wisse.

The view from the site is towards the northwest — towards the profile of the Magaliesberg on the horizon. This is one of the most treasured views in the whole of the Gauteng province. It imbues any site with this rare view with a sense of value, memorability and maybe a sense of longing and belonging. It provides a “sense of place” to any such site that is unique in the province. Serman uses this “treasure” sparingly, and in doing so he greatly enhances its value.
Any visitor or inhabitant would enter House Wisse from the “back” on the southeast. This view, and maybe the ultimate goal of the house being situated there, is completely shielded by all of the main movement routes through the building. There is a main movement route perpendicular to the main spatial masses of the building that contains all the required functional areas. This route is knowingly focused on the spectacular view and the ultimate goal of the site and yet, it is completely cut off from it. On plan, this connective route becomes narrower and wider in conjunction with the functional masses it traverses, only to be completely blocked from the view at its conclusion. The wider areas of this route coincide with the courtyard spaces between the longitudinal masses of the house. The views into the courtyards created by the architect connect the viewer to the immediate outside environment away from this ultimate view. This “ultimate” or conclusive view towards the Magaliesberg is only available to the family from their main communal spaces where they would also entertain guests and from their bedrooms.

The building also had to be kept within the allowed height limitations. That had the effect that this main route connecting the main parts of the building had to follow the gentle slope of the site by means of a few strategically placed steps. These steps, again, heighten the expectation of finally seeing and experiencing this ultimate view. The nett effect of these clever spatial manipulations by Serman is that when finally confronted with the view, it is far more rare and valuable. It is not overwhelming, but it is precious. Precious in the sense that any visitor or inhabitant would never grow tired of it, and thus not see it or not appreciate it any more. It is by means of these highly controlled views from and into the building that the house is anchored into the nearly limitless natural surroundings. The building thus creates a sheltered space for family life within the context of Monaghan Farm, providing almost no physical boundaries or spatial limitations.

The route through House Wisse is obviously accompanied and amplified by the section of the building. The crescendo of the spatial experience of the building coincides with the family’s main space, namely the lounge and dining room with the more informal sitting area right next to it. Here every device has been used to focus on the celebratory view to the northwest as well as the courtyard to the southeast. It creates the experience of the simultaneous sensory perception of the limitless as well as the limiting reality of nature. This experience “fixes” the inhabitants in their immediate spatial context. There is a certain lightness to the structure that encloses this part of the house. It creates memories of a tent-like enclosure that is only pitched there for the time being. We are also reminded then, of the temporariness of architecture when measured against the reality of time and space of the universe. In contrast, the more private spaces of the house are far more protective of its inhabitants.

In the more public areas of the house, the movable screens and glass doors become a real symphony.
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of the manipulation of light. Here the *sonnevanger* (suncatcher) that the owners refer to when speaking about their house is gloriously in action. In many ways, these have become a sundial, denoting time and season. The screens, for this reviewer, are reminiscent of those to be found in abundance in North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and down the coast of East Africa. They are obviously there to control sunlight and to provide a sense of physical security. It is, however, by means of their intriguing patterns of light and shade that they track the movement of the earth and of the sun. In this way, it fixes the building constantly within, not only its local setting, but also within its celestial position.

**CONCLUSION**

“The sunlight did not know what it was before it hit a wall.” – Louis Kahn

“Architecture doesn’t give light, it takes away light. It creates shade.” – Sverre Fehn (1987)

Light, in the case of House Wisse, has become the object of memory and delight; even if Serman did not intend it to be so from the start — that is what he has created quite brilliantly.

In House Wisse, light not only centres it on its place on earth, but it also delights and, moreover, it explains the tectonics and intention of the design in a most poetic manner. Light draws attention to the materiality of the building. The small pinpoint shapes of light created so beautifully inside the home are also in direct contrast to the more all-pervasive light outside — be that day or night. House Wisse is similarly defined by its shadows and not necessarily by its physicality or its ultimate form. It is a building that is just quietly "there" — not pretending to be that which it is not. This is its greatest achievement.

**LIST OF PROFESSIONALS/CONSULTANTS AND CONTRACTORS**

- **Architect:** Robert Serman Architects
- **Engineer:** Eric Wisse
- **Main contractor:** JD Construction
- **Water heating (hydronic underfloor and domestic):** EcoSmart
- **Landscaping:** Acton Gardens
- **Natural pool:** Wetland Pools
- **Concrete floors:** Polkon
- **Aluminum doors and windows:** RLWA
- **Decking and louvres:** Deckcon Projects
- **Kitchen:** I-Can-Design
- **Built-in cupboards:** Alfa Kitchens
- **Lighting:** Glo-Lighting
- **Photography:** Papercut Photography

**END NOTES**

1 House Wisse received a Regional Award for Architecture from the Gauteng Institute of Architecture in 2017/2018.

very obvious quote that springs to mind when one thinks of a brick barrel vault is Louis Kahn’s famous conversation with a brick: “When you are dealing, or designing in brick, you must ask brick what it wants, or what it can do. And if you ask brick what it wants, it will say, ‘well, I like an arch’. And then you say, ‘but, uh, arches are difficult to make. They cost more money. I think you can use concrete across your opening equally as well’. But the brick says, ‘oh, I know, I know you’re right, but you know, if you ask me what I like, I like an arch.’” He goes on to say that “if you’re dealing with brick, don’t use it as just a secondary choice, or because it’s cheaper. No, you have got to put it into absolute glory, and that is the only position it deserves. If you’re dealing with concrete, you must know the order of nature, you must know the nature of concrete, what concrete really strives to be. Concrete really wants to be granite but can’t quite manage”.

At De Wildehoek, the different construction materials’ inherent strengths were accordingly celebrated: steel portal frames were used for their structural efficiency with cutouts in the webs to minimise the amount of material used. Concrete was used for the ring beams that distribute the portal.
frames’ point loads and tie the structure together, and for an additional layer over the barrel vault to allow for increased support and a homogenous surface for waterproofing. Brick was used for its aesthetic qualities, and because it likes an arch. The klompies2 were laid on a layer of sand before the concrete was cast, and once the temporary formwork was removed, the sand was scraped out and the bricks were pointed from below. The gutters on either side are partially made of glass to admit light onto the artwork below and the downpipes are concealed in the columns that support the barrel vault.

In this case, the humble brick was put into the position it deserves: it supported the concrete during casting and it acts as permanent shuttering, but it also forms the internal finish of the building’s central spine. The klompies’ deep red colour provides a sense of warmth while their surface finish and size (which is smaller than imperial or modular bricks) provides texture for the vaulted surface. Kahn (or “the brick whisperer” as he is sometimes referred to) would most probably have been pleased.

PROJECT TEAM
Architects: Martin Kruger Architects | Urbanists
Structural engineer: Brendan Botha
Photography: Brendan Botha and Mario Todeschini
Text and compilation: Michael Louw

END NOTES
2. These are smaller bricks that are based on traditional Dutch klompjes, which were often shipped to South Africa as ballast.
The first time I remember engaging the discipline was back in my prospective year, applying for admittance to architecture school. One of the portfolio requirements was to produce a drawing or an impression of an entrance to my favourite local building. I chose to paint a church entrance — a chapel where my father once ministered — in a small town called Lydenburg in Mpumalanga. I drew it from memory, and mostly from my familiarity with church buildings where I had spent half my childhood.

Now an adult and developing my career, I do not think my fascination came from impressions of the built structure — the stone-brick walls, the colourful mosaic windows, the iconic spire and the bell tower of many missionary churches that dotted the rural districts of the province I grew up in. When I look back, it is the journey that fascinated me because my family had to travel to these districts every other Saturday for my father to deliver the service the following Sunday morning.

Along the way, as we wound through the mountainous terrain of Mpumalanga, I would glimpse with the eyes of a boy child, the greens and greys and blues of cliffs and terrifying heights, forests and streams, and of the lonely roadside and sweeping view in the distance. At times, the scenery would be covered in mist, and whenever the transport stopped for a break, we could hear the wind whistle.

Then there was the moment of arrival: the unravelling of the small town and township after a long voyage, each time unfamiliar to my eyes. I recall the welcoming strangers who gathered on our arrival at the local chapel. I recall the temporary lodgings that were provided, some welcome and some not, but always with a sense of pilgrimage once we got to stay in them. It was a feeling of placelessness because I would soon miss belonging in one place. Journey became the place, became home... that material progression and oscillation between different physical states. To this day, I am less moved by the building, but rather from the change of the landscape and the context in which it stands — all due to my family's evangelical journeys during those years.

I have often defined myself as an enthusiast in the processes of literature, art, film, and architecture — where professional practice and creative visualisation of "lived" environments converge. I use the term lived, in place of built, because an environment is a habitat before and after it is shaped by humanity. Humans live, more than they build, and the majority of them do not get to build, as far as the profession is concerned. They simply inhabit, and if they get to build, I see that process as more of an adaptation than building. Therefore, if I have to recall a space that shaped my upbringing or my aspirations, it has to be more than any spatial singularity that is complete. It has to be more than a building, it’s the landscape, because I lived in the landscape more than I spent time under a roof and because a landscape is always under construction, progressing and stagnation over time — booming ahead of its time.

Why is it important to think about a space that shaped your upbringing when talking about landscape architecture? Because experience is invaluable, the places and spaces we have been to, the people we’ve lived alongside with, the languages, and the spirit of the times are all a substance of living. Seeing a landscape from that lens is seeing the subject and content of society, transcribed on a vast object that contains their existence as a collective. Therefore, for me, the one habitat that can house humanity all at once — and humanity must work together to preserve it and their survival — is the landscape.
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