

INTRODUCTION

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fig.01.01



fig.01.02 Church street, ca. 1952



fig.01.03 Church street, ca. 1983



fig.01.04 Church street, ca 2004

01 INTRODUCTION

01.01 PROLOGUE

The emerging town of Piet Retief has been described by many as the 'Gateway to Swaziland and the KwaZulu-Natal Coast'. (Piet Retief: 75 jaar van vooruitgang 1959, p.1) It was founded in 1883 by Anton van Wielligh and named in memory and honour of the famous Voortrekker leader who was killed by the Zulu leader Dingaan in 1836. The town is situated in Mpumalanga – "place where the sun rises" - and lies on the boundaries of the beautiful and majestic Swaziland.

(Figure 01.01) It is envisaged that, in future, Piet Retief will become the headquarters of the rapidly evolving industrial development in the Lowveld (Piet Retief: 75 jaar van vooruitgang 1959, p.2), as it is renowned to be at the heart of the largest wattle-bark producing area.

Tourism can be described as the movement of people who converge on an area for recreational purposes. They explore and experience the culture, the specific activities and generally enjoy all that is offered by the individual communities. Tourism is presently the main area of growth in our economy, offering many opportunities.

Piet Retief is integrated as part of a major tourist route that connects KwaZulu-Natal with Swaziland and the Kruger National Park. This means that a considerable amount of tourists inevitably pass through the town without adequate available accommodation or restaurants to satisfy their needs. Therefore, a definite market for accommodation of large tourist groups can be identified.

This thesis focuses on the design of a lodge and all its components, which include accommodation, exhibition spaces, conference facilities, restaurants, public services, fishing dams and a certain amount of cottages. Regarding accommodation, the proposed lodge would be able to provide for large groups of people, but would still adhere to the more private needs of those individuals who prefer to travel alone.

The design of the lodge will be a priority. However, it is initially necessary to include pilot or starter projects that are capable of sustaining the development financially. Adequate spaces that would be able to facilitate these starter projects and thus form an important part of the design process, are therefore a necessity. It is important to retain the cultural identity of the surroundings. Therefore, the lodge will aptly be called "Mkhonda", meaning 'Spoor' in the Zulu language. (See Appendix 08.01.1)

Within the last few years, sustainability and ecological responsibility has become a significant consideration in development, as the importance of a self-sustainable development cannot be ignored. In essence, this should guide every aspect of future designs.

Sustainable building practices and appropriate technologies guide the design process in terms of the use of local materials and labour; construction techniques; and resource and waste management. The design includes sustainable principles to create spatial balance and harmony for interior and exterior spaces, environmentally friendly yet functional infrastructure and materials, low maintenance, ergonomic solutions, and respect for our environment and resources. The ideal is that visitors are educated in an informal way through experiencing unconventional construction methods and design approaches.

In essence, this thesis will focus specifically on continuously emphasizing respect for the site, its users and generally integrating a more holistic approach.

01.02 PROBLEM STATEMENT

01.02.1 Accommodation

In the eastern parts of South Africa, a typical voyage will include a visit to the Kruger National Park, Swaziland and KwaZulu-Natal's coastline. Piet Retief can, for this very reason, be described as the perfect halfway stop. (Figure 01.10a) Whether traveling via Nelspruit or Swaziland, the route will inevitably include Piet Retief.

The area has a fragmented guesthouse industry which, over time, has had a great impact on the future of the hotel industry. Currently, only one hotel is set to accommodate a busload of 45 to 60 tourists at a time. As a sign of the changing times, large tourist groups tend to exclude this option of accommodation and would rather pass through the town to find other, more favored, exclusive hotels or lodges. Most of the time, these lodges are located in Swaziland and are situated around 100km from Piet Retief, which means added travel expenses and unnecessary time consumption. Further complications are the derelict condition of the roads and the fact that one has to pass through two borders, which often cause delays.

A definite need can be identified to provide of accommodation catering for both small and large groups of local and foreign tourists. The accommodation should attract people and provide them with a unique experience true to Piet Retief, its people and the activities that are taking place in the surrounding areas.



fig.01.05



fig.01.06



fig.01.07



fig.01.08

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fig.01.09 Church street, ca. 2004

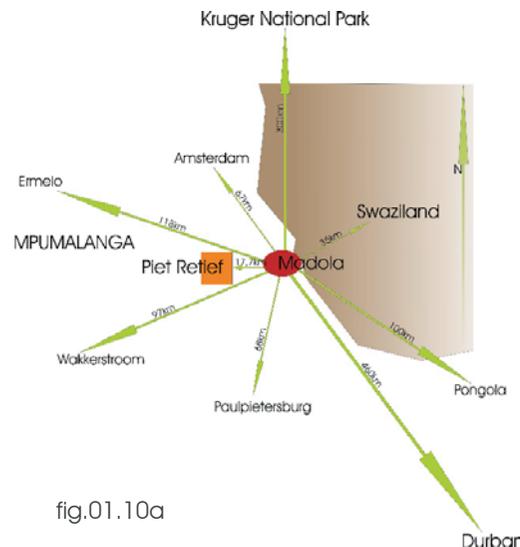


fig.01.10a



fig.01.10b



fig.01.10c

01.02.2 Road Structure

In the early and mid 1900's, Piet Retief had ample rail and transport facilities. This catered mainly for wattle bark, mining timber and tobacco exportation. (Piet Retief: 75 jaar van vooruitgang 1959, p.2) Unfortunately, the utilization of this railway line has decreased considerably, causing an increase in the current amount of heavy vehicles on the national roads in area. As a result, the road conditions deteriorate up to the point where an alternative road has been proposed. This aims to provide travelers with a convenient, well-kept road that links the Kruger National Park with KwaZulu-Natal and will pass within a range of 10km from the farm Madola, which is the proposed site. (See Appendix 08.01.7)

01.03 THE SITE

Piet Retief is situated in the south of the Mpumalanga province and lies approximately 330km south-east of Johannesburg and Pretoria. (Figure 01.10a) The proposed development site is on a farm outside Piet Retief called Madola H.T. – 154 Portion 5. The farm is about 128 hectares in size and is located 17km east outside of town on the Mahamba road towards the Mahamba border post. (Figures 01.10b&c) The farm offers various unique experiences in terms of natural plant growth, topography and water resources. It also plays host to a small indigenous forested area. (Figures 01.05 - 01.08, 01.11, 01.12)

01.04 CLIENT AND CLIENT REQUIREMENTS

CLIENT

The client, Gemsbou Beleggings CC, presently based on the farm Madola, is concerned with the production of an extensive variety of products. This includes timber (the manufacturing of poles, planks and furniture), wine, liqueur, preserves, cheese, pickled and dried mushrooms. Gemsbou Beleggings CC will supply the preliminary costs of various pilot projects. At a later stage, the project will be joined by selected farmers in the area who wish to partake in such a project.

CLIENT REQUIREMENTS

The client is open to building lenient on site, but stipulates that the design should make use of natural, locally obtained materials so as to ensure a sustainable development. This is based on the principles of best practices and appropriate technologies. As much as possible, building costs should be kept to a minimum. Local labor should be utilized and the overall design should include waste management and re-use of materials. The only fixed requirement is that the design should include an area or building that is relatively close to the existing house in which pilot projects and the current production of farm products could continue.

01.05 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this thesis is to design a lodge based on best practice design principles that focus on the use of local, value-adding. The focus should be on energy conservation, local food production, community upliftment and a new, sustainable design approach. As there are very few activities in the Piet Retief district that cater for the social needs of the local community, a place of enjoyment that can also enhance the quality of life in Piet Retief is envisaged.

01.06 FEASIBILITY & PROJECT PHASING

In order for the project to be financially viable, the development is divided into different phases. It is necessary to determine pilot projects that can sustain the development at first and, as the project starts to thrive economically, next phases will be introduced. Each phase should theoretically sustain the next one. The different phases entail the following:

Phase 1 (current activities):

1. Sawmill
2. Timber processing (timber products & timber treatment)
3. Mixed farming
 - I. Berries
 - II. Livestock (cows, goats, chickens)
 - III. Agricultural crops
 - IV. Silviculture
 - V. Wild & cultivated mushroom processing

Phase 2

1. Farm Factory functions:
 - I. Brewery
 - II. Winery
 - III. Cheese making
 - IV. Captive use of farm products
 - V. Retail outlet
 - VI. Coffee shop
2. Manager's cottage
3. Mushroom cultivation area
 - I. Spawn laboratory
 - II. 3 mushroom growing rooms
 - III. Solar dryer



fig.01.11



fig.01.12

Phase 3

1. Fishing dams
 - I. Dam 1
 - II. Dam 2
 - III. Trout dam
2. 12 private cottages (Kloof)

Phase 4 (MAIN PHASE)

Lodge that includes:

1. Accommodation
 - I. 6 family cottages
 - II. 6 semi-private cottages
 - III. 6 private cottages
2. Restaurant & Kitchen
3. Public & private swimming pool areas
4. Reception & offices
5. Lounge
6. Conference facility

Functions:

- I. Showroom /exhibition space for local artists
- II. Conferences
- III. Showroom
- IV. Theatre
- V. Weddings, entertainment, etc
- VI. Meeting room