

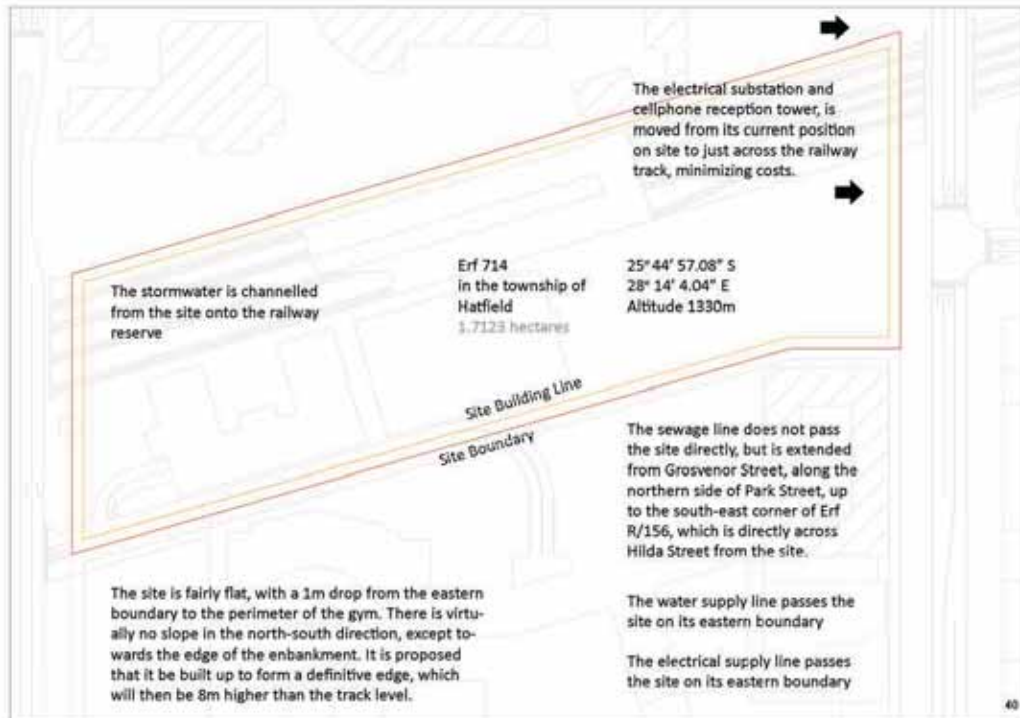
Context

Site Information

Owner:
Together with Erf 6/620 (north side of track) it forms part of the rail reserve, which is owned by the government (SARCC) and managed by Intersite.

Pretoria has a very mild climate, but extremes of -6°C and 36°C have been recorded. Temperatures are ranging from 14°C to 28°C on average in the summer and 4°C to 19°C in the winter with frost overnight during the coldest months of June and July. It falls within the summer rainfall area and precipitation is normally in the form of thunderstorms of which the biggest delivered 160mm in one hour. Normally the rainfall is 120mm/month during the peak season in December and January and 670mm annually, with an average of 87 days of rainfall per year. During the rainy season there is a moderate discomfort level experienced from the humidity.

According to information from the South African Weather Service



40

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT PART C

Precedents

The Indabox design project has a very distinct civic nature, namely that of being functional and filled with meaning at the same time, which has its own way of making spaces. For this reason I investigated the following projects.

As the site is one of the busiest transport nodes in South Africa, with nearly 70% of Sowetons using it, the government decided to formalize it through a design that would at the same time serve both as a gateway to Soweto and a well functioning terminus. A public catalyst for the development of urban spaces.

The design incorporates a promenade from which the observer experiences movement in both directions. Thus the arcade was created that provides the structural spine onto which all the functions are attached e.g. the street traders, ablution amenities and offices. It is these functions that spatially differentiate the arcade, which is essential as its length is vast. Added to this are the landmark structures positioned at main public entry points that ensures a sense of orientation and grants a center of attention for the artwork by locals. This also helps to foster a sense of identity and ownership by the users.

The arcade was formed by the use of sculpturally formed elements to avoid monotony, given the length and scale of the site. Concrete was the chosen material as it is virtually maintenance free and very robust, which is essential to any built structure that is totally exposed to harsh climatic elements and possible vandalizing of the structure. The empiricism evidently played a great role in the design process.

The functionality of the structure was unmistakably of paramount importance in the designing thereof. The question is just how functional is it?

The material used and the way it is manipulated does not relate to the everyday use of the structure, namely being an efficient shelter. There are very few concrete benches and it will be too cold to sit on them during winter and the structure does not provide adequate protection against cold winds. During the summer the roof overhang will not provide sufficient protection against rain, resulting in wet commuters and seeping benches. There is also a lack in the solar design, as the sun does not penetrate the inner courtyards during winter and yet will unwelcomingly penetrate along the arcade during the season between the two equinoxes when there is still a relatively warm climate. Furthermore the vendor facilities are accommodated in enclaves that is hidden away from passersby and for which they probably have to pay rent, rendering it ineffective to the users thereof as one can perceive from the fact that few of these stalls are open.

I was left with the impression that this building is not a fully successful attempt at a functional modern design.

The site was chosen for its intense symbolism of suffering during the Apartheid years. A legacy that left a city and its people fragmented and segregated. The new building was thus to bring healing to parts of the city, as to render it accessible, safe, amenable and dignified for the benefit of its entire people. Its location however seems to detract from its accessibility to the passerby and it thus becomes a place that has to be specifically visited, and not an everyday reminder of the message it encapsulates.

The focus of the hill is the Court itself. The building theoretically contradicts the inaccessible and offensive jail buildings of the previous autocratic state, of which remnants are juxtaposed with the new on the square and inside the foyer. The public foyer and Court Chamber located in the south wing is directly accessible from Constitution Square and leads further to the north wing, via the internal stairs that links these areas and functions as gallery space. The potential of the space leading to a climatic experience is however lost with the visitor finding himself at a dead-end at the supposedly public library, which is not inviting at all. You then have to turn back empty handed, and walking past the inaccessible offices, of those who are to protect us, you can not help but to feel as if salt is rubbed into your wounds of disappointment.

The 'openness' of the Court represents the transparent democratic society called for in the Constitution, and yet one wonders who will be the select few to actually attend these all important court cases, in view of the number of seats actually available.

The material used exists of a limited and basic palette borrowing forms and strategies of both modern and preceding – declaring the 'pastness' of both. The concrete is exposed and unanimated. The carcass of the building is of plastered brickwork and glazed curtain walling. The additional patina of in-situ work by artists and craftsmen adds to the detailing one finds throughout the building, responding to what seems to be an innate human desire for elaboration and the instinct to relate human size to building size. More is thus more in this very expressive building.

The whole design is loaded with meaning, as it intentionally promotes the values that should be upheld by all South Africans. Because the designers understood what they wanted to say, it guided their thinking in the use of semiology and semantics to uncover the meanings intended in the design. But perhaps much of the meaning is lost to the ordinary man on the street, except the very obvious? It could be that this building is just a monument for the benefit of the thinking man.



Baragwanath Public Transport Interchange and Traders Market
Soweto, Gauteng
Urban Solutions Architects and Urban Designers



Constitutional Court and Constitution Hill
Johannesburg, Gauteng
OMM Design Workshop & Urban Solutions Architects and Urban Designers

Design Approach

You employ stone, wood and concrete, and with these materials you build houses and palaces; that is construction. Ingenuity is at work. But suddenly you touch my heart, you do me good, I am happy and I say: "This is beautiful," That is Architecture. Art enters in.

Le Corbusier



Taking the examples of airplanes and automobiles, Le Corbusier attributed the beauty achieved in its design to its production as a solution to a clearly defined need. Hence, the house as a 'machine for living in'. On the other hand, he believed that neither the man in the street, nor even the architects themselves realized what architecture was truly all about; namely the ability of it to emotionally move a person, much more so than just a mere construction of elements. It is clear that humans design things to fulfill a need that is both physical and emotional - solving a practical problem in an aesthetically pleasing way.

In terms of architecture, Leupen et al (1997:13) states that the basic concern is with a given program and a location. Added to that would be the fixed precepts and demands of the culture or convention, and finally the design must satisfy conditions of usefulness and construction.

Glenn Murcutt (Beck and Cooper, 2002:11) is of the opinion that anyone can design; it is more a matter of investigating and understanding the issue, and pursuing the problem until you make an appropriate discovery. He believes that by being a perceptive observer each of us could learn and achieve much more.

"Nature does nothing in vain, and more is in vain when less will serve; for nature is pleased with simplicity, and affects not the pomp and superfluous causes."

Sir Isaac Newton's Principia

The words of Mies van der Rohe, "beinahe nichts", reverberates down the passage of time. These words seem to have been birthed from a long struggle with the design process and reducing it until ...

almost nothing remains,
except the essentials,
the beauty of complexity.



Design Concept

"A soapbox is a raised platform on which one stands to make an impromptu speech, often about a political subject. It is also used to express concerns or to release frustration. The term originates from when speakers would stand on a wooden box meant for holding soap. Hyde Park, London is known for its Sunday soapbox orators, who have assembled at Speaker's Corner since 1872 to discuss religion, politics, and other topics. A modern form of the soapbox is a [website] blog ..."

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soapbox>

The 'soapbox', or timber crate, is easy to recognise. You immediately know that it is used for storing and carrying a variety of things. It has other uses too. You can stand and sit on it, use it as a table, all the while turning it around on its sides for different effects. It is so simple, even a child can use it without ever having seen one before - it is thus not intimidating. And it is also easy to make one yourself. Even though just an unpretentious 'simple old box', it is very effective and strangely beautiful.

SIMPLICITY FUNCTIONALITY HUMILITY

It is especially true for a civic building, that legibility (aesthetically and functionally) would enhance the user's experience of it as 'friendly' and encourage future interaction. The normal 'behaviour' of civic buildings reflect a superior attitude of indifference. Perhaps it is time to rather reflect humility.

The simpler the construction method and materials, the more cost-effective the building will be, which is always a factor. It increases the availability of materials and labour, which can rather focus on mastering simpler skills. The more natural the materials are, the less humans have interfered and produced polluting waste by-products. Furthermore, it can be dismantled and erected at another location. Alternatively the materials can be used again in a different manner with the least amount of modifications, as it is standardized. Once it has lost its usefulness altogether, the material can be recycled into other forms. The material choice also influences the user's emotions and most people relate timber with something comfortable and approachable. Aesthetically the eye should follow lines without disturbances, casually considering the building, and finding it more interesting as time passes.