

introduction

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD OF STUDY



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ADAPTIVE REUSE AS AN INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL DEVICE

Some in the architectural community roughly define Adaptive Reuse (AR), or simply Reuse, as “*the process that adapts buildings for new uses while retaining their historic features.*”

“It is to prolong the period from cradle-to-grave for a building by retaining all or most of the structural system and as much as possible of other elements, such as cladding, glass, and interior partitions. Reuse, readaptation, and reappropriation of existing or built structures has remote historical precedents. In antiquity, durable, sturdy structures of stone and masonry outlived empires and often changed program many times. In modernity, the desire to preserve historical buildings and neighborhoods emerged in many Western countries out of various romanticist, nationalistic, and historicist streams. Today, the imperative to extend the life cycle of a structure is related to various sustainability goals: sprawl minimization, preservation of virgin materials, and energy conservation.”
(O’Rourke & Norris 2002)

In terms of philosophy and practice, interior architecture is a discipline highly involved with the remodelling and repurposing of existing buildings. It has an important role to play in the sustainable reuse of the built environment and breathes new life into spaces and places that have a history and existing character but which,

because of changes in the urban fabric, social or economic pressure, fashion or simply change of ownership, require a new existence and identity.

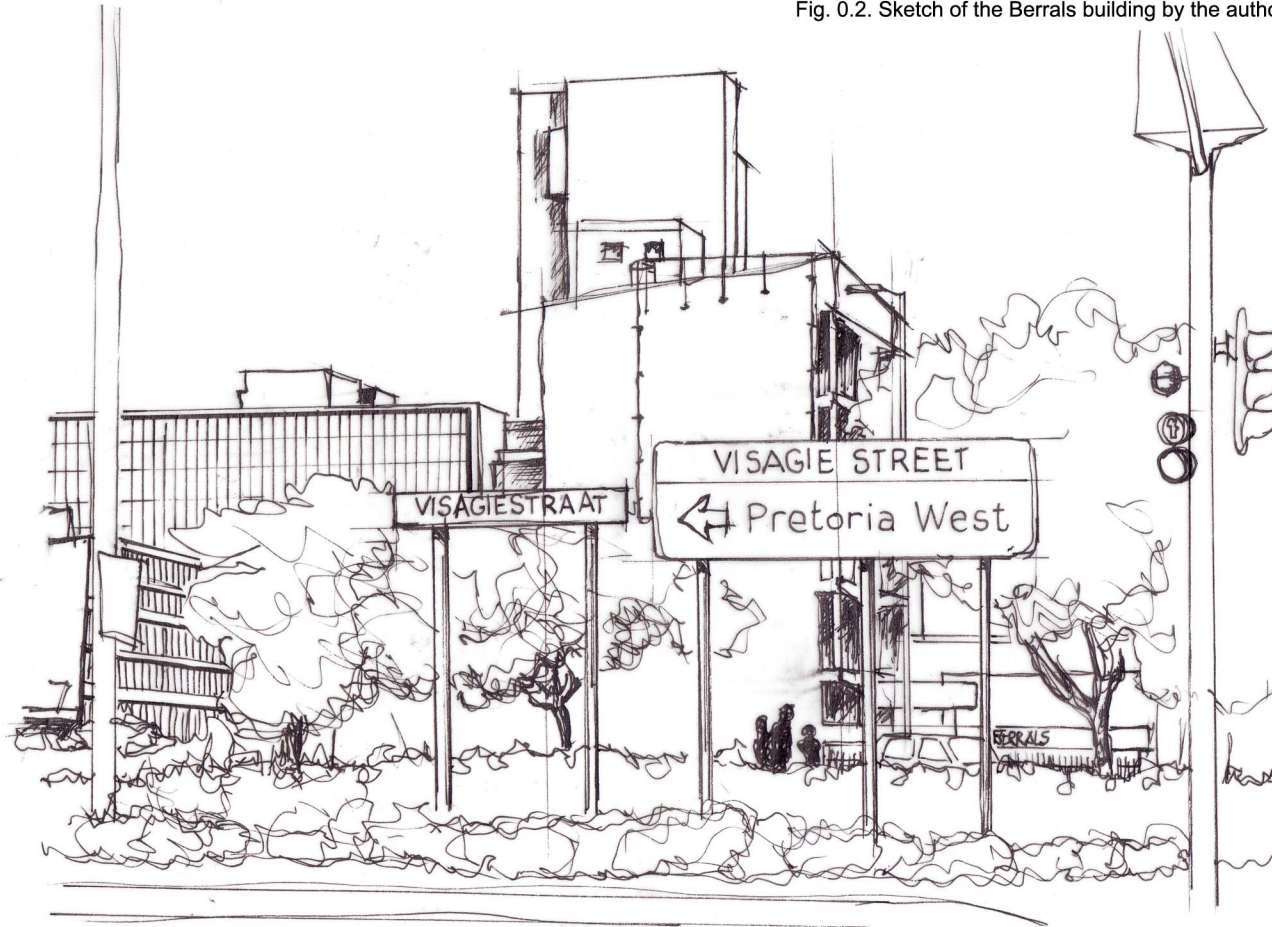
Ada Louise Huxtable writes in *Lesson in Healing the City’s Scars* that “*What we need is continuity... historic preservation is not sentimentality but a psychological necessity. We must learn to cherish history and to preserve worthy old buildings... we must learn how to preserve them, not as pathetic museum pieces, but by giving them new uses.*” (Woodstock 1988:vii)

Change is an inevitable part of life and it should be celebrated rather than regretted. Change does not require a total abandonment of the past; instead it can be enhanced by introducing the past as part of its new identity.

In order to achieve this transformation the designer must understand the contribution that history has provided, and use this to create a design proposal that - as well as fulfilling the practical and aesthetic requirements of the design brief - understands, respects and engages in a dialogue with the existing building.

There are excellent reasons for employing old buildings in new situations rather than simply demolishing them and starting afresh. In the first

Fig. 0.2. Sketch of the Berrals building by the author



place the materials and energy locked into an existing building comprise a form of financial and environmental value that would be expensive to replace. But, perhaps as important, their use enriches our experience by creating a tangible link between the past, present and future.

With existing buildings there is always evidence of the forms, materials, craftsmanship and details present of its original construction, as well as the additions and alterations that it acquired over time. These create a richness and vibrancy with which the designer can work in the creation of the design scheme. The form and proportions of space, the shape and positioning of windows, and the surfaces created by materials and structures, all contribute to what is referred to as the *genius loci* – the spirit of the place.

It is the interior architect's responsibility to recognize the spirit of a place, use the qualities and opportunities that it offers to renew existing spaces, while preserving its historic features as part of its identity.

