

The following year a crack spanning the width of the canopy appeared on the brink of the curve, allowing water into the structure. The Administrator said: "The crack is a normal development and is definitely not a continuation of the structural difficulties which held up completion".

Cracks continued to appear and a R20 000 copper cover was placed over it to hide them and bind the structure. Seepage under the copper cladding reacted with the foam concrete blocks and formed a mild acid base. This in turn ate further into the concrete until it formed stalactites from the cracks on the inside of the cupola.

A city council architect, who cannot be named for professional reasons, said that the cupola was basically an "anti-structural" design.

"Cable supports and reassurances from the Provincial Administration notwithstanding, it is an architecturally unsound design and a clear case of megalomania triumphing over good engineering sense.

"That whole square is a fiasco. It was never designed to attract the public to sit around and enjoy the sunshine. With the new Volkskas building looming over it and the vast expanses of marble, it is as cold and draughty as a mausoleum."

Another architect said: "It is galling to have the province spend thousands of rands propping up this modern ruin, but refusing to preserve the western facade of Church Square. Despite more than 30 years of neglect by the province, they are at least still standing — and they form a harmonious whole with the other buildings surrounding them."

Mr Konya said the same criticism could be made of the R52,5-million which the province was spending on the Opera House complex next to the Strijdom Monument.

"That entire city block is now just a jumble of concrete. Ten years ago it was a charming market square with cobbled alleys, hundreds of little stalls and life.

"Given a facelift, the market

could have been changed into a fleamarket with craftsmen's stalls, artists' and fresh produce stalls. Combined with the spicy Indian shops which lined Prinsloo Street, where the Legal, General and Federated Insurance building is now, the whole area could have become similar to Chinatown in San Francisco or Portobello Road in London.

"Unfortunately, Pretorian cultural pretensions demanded an imposing edifice for an opera house."

The City Council architect said: "Pretoria is basically a garrison town and the laager mentality which produced the Voortrekker Monument is obvious in the blockhouse style of the opera house (State Theatre, Pretoria).

"Not only did the State Theatre contribute to the death of Strijdom Square, but it was built with an overhang on the Church Street side of the Strijdom Square, which aesthetically demands the demolition of the historic Sammy Marks building across the road.

"This means that virtually the only old buildings left in town will be on Church Square. The Verwoerd Square, opposite Strijdom Square, will be entirely in the modern idiom."

Professor D Holm, of the architectural faculty at Pretoria University, said: "Too many of the modern buildings are built on the false assumption that only the inside of the building is important. Only a few hundred people have to work inside, but hundreds of thousands are confronted with its ugliness."

He added: "Also, diversity is being built out of the city centre. The small businessman who could afford the rentals in the older buildings is being forced out because of the high rentals in the skyscrapers.

"With its attractive surroundings, its out-of-doors climate and its old buildings, careful re-use and restrained but imaginative urban planning could have made Pretoria one of the beautiful cities of the world. Instead it is becoming one of the ugliest — lifeless and cold, forgetful of its past."