

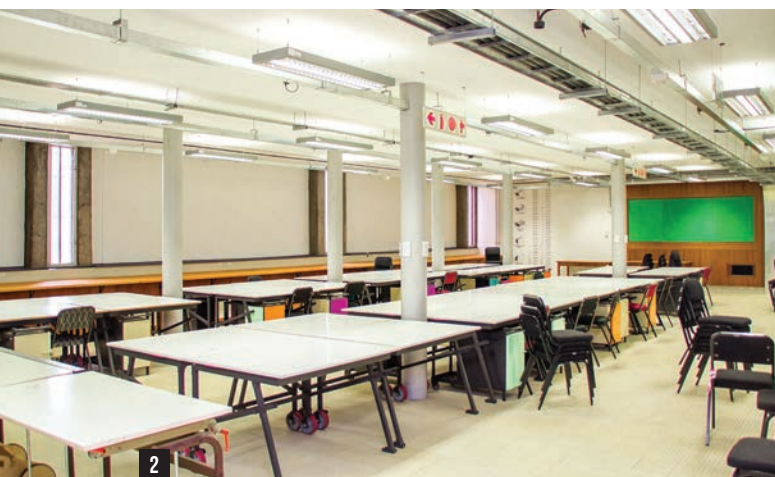


# CELEBRATING 75 YEARS

By: Professor Arthur Barker, Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria

*The University of Pretoria's Department of Architecture has developed into one of the world's top architecture and built environment educational institutions.*

## OF EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE



## IN 2017, THE QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS BY SUBJECT REPORT PLACED THE DEPARTMENT THIRD IN AFRICA, AMONG THE TOP 25 IN THE BRICS COUNTRIES AND, SINCE 2016, IN THE TOP 200 ARCHITECTURE AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMMES IN THE WORLD

On 1 March 2018, the Department of Architecture at the University of Pretoria celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The department has grown from humble beginnings in 1931 as an associated department of the University of the Witwatersrand to a fully-fledged and independent Department of Architecture and Quantity Surveying in the Faculty of Mathematics and Science.

It has developed, under a number of headships, into a major player in the School of the Built Environment located in the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology. In 2017, the QS World University Rankings by Subject report placed the department third in Africa, among the top 25 in the BRICS countries and, since 2016, in the top 200 architecture and built environment programmes in the world.

Academic departments are generally defined by the visions of the universities and faculties in which they reside, the composition of the student body, the skills of full- and part-time staff, and the philosophical and pedagogic directions of programme leaders and heads of department. This is none more so than in this department, fondly known as Boukunde (Building Science). Adriaan Louw Meiring (1904—1979) served as the first head until 1966. His appointment of a small group of like-minded teaching staff — Hellmut Stauch, Norman Eaton, Gordon McIntosh and Robert (Bob) Cole Bowen — fostered the regionalist architectural direction that constitutes the quintessential Pretoria School. Save for a brief Post-Modernist interlude during the 1980s, the three guiding principles highlighted by Prof Dieter Holm (1936—), head from 1986 to 1996, still guide the department's pedagogy. The first is a respect for the landscape, the second, an independence of stylistic ideologies, and the third, a proficiency in building science, an understanding of materials and the evolution of detail. These principles were reinforced in the 1990s with the introduction of an ecosystemic approach to design, inculcated in the curriculum by Prof Roger Fisher (1951—) who served as acting head on a number of occasions. "We think ecosystemically — that is to think of a system as nested, each as part of a larger system, made up of sub-systems and a part of a supra-system [...] Where there is fit between context and design response, there is fitness."<sup>1</sup> All of these influences and directions have been initiated and interpreted, to a larger or lesser extent, by the various heads of department.

The tenure of Alewyn Burger (1933—), from 1964 to 1987, was marked by strong management, effective teaching practices, and the inculcation of a strong studio culture in a larger sociocultural and political

context. From 1996 to 2004, Prof Schalk le Roux (1945—) led the department with his focus on South African architecture through cultural landscape conservation practices, reinforced during the five-year period that Prof Karel Bakker (1956—2014) led the school, until his untimely death in 2014. From 2005 to 2008, Prof 'Ora Joubert (1959—) instilled excellence in design tuition, while reconsidering architectural identity and the synergy of academia, practice and the broader public. In 2015, Prof Chrisna du Plessis (1965—) took over the reins and, with her strong research background in resilience and regenerative practices, has brought the direction of the department full circle, reinforcing its Pretoria School legacy.

Apart from architecture, the character of the curriculum at the department is also enhanced by the unique synergy of subsequent degrees offered in interior architecture and landscape architecture (the only architectural learning site in the country with this combination of academic programmes), as well as three specific research fields that guide the structure of the honours course: Environment Potential, Heritage and Cultural Landscapes and Human Settlements and Urbanism.

An important part of the research endeavour at the department is its architectural archives, established over 50 years ago and currently curated by Johan Swart. It houses close to 80 significant physical and digital collections representing Norman Eaton (1902—1966), Gordon McIntosh (1904—1983), including *zero-hour* originals of 1933, John van de Werke (1904—1980), Philip Nel (1943—), Glen Gallagher (1935—2010), Jan van Wijk (1926—2005), Gustav Schmickl (1903—1977), Herbert Prins (1927—) and Alan Lipman (1925—2013). Staff members have actively pursued sourcing and managing collections and producing research. Notable book publications are the 1998 *Architecture of the Transvaal*, edited by Roger C Fisher, Schalk le Roux and Estelle Maré, and Roger Fisher and Nicholas Clarke's *Architectural Guide: South Africa*, published by DOM Publishers in 2014, and which received a 2015 Gauteng Institute for Architecture (GifA) Merit Award for Research Documents. Prof du Plessis' 2015 book, *Designing for Hope: pathways to regenerative sustainability*, won an AfriSam Award for Research in Sustainability, while *Eclectic ZA Wilhelmiens: a shared Dutch built heritage in South Africa*, edited by Karel A Bakker, Nicholas J Clarke and Roger C Fisher, received an Award of Excellence from the South African Institute of Architects in 2016. In 2017, another SAIA Award of Excellence was given for NZASM — *Footsteps along the tracks: the identified extant built* >

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1 Boukunde entrance. 2 3rd year studio. 3 Atrium. 4 New fire escape to eastern edge.



*residue of the Nederlandsche Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorweg-Maatschappij (1887-1902)*, researched and written by Nicholas Clarke and Roger Fisher. Numerous articles have been published in journals such as the *South African Journal of Cultural History*, *South African Journal of Art History* and, of course, *Architecture South Africa*, including those on local architects such as Prof Arthur Barker's (1961—) studies on the architecture of Gawie Fagan, Thomashoff + Partners, Marguerite Pienaar (1977—) and earthworld architects and interiors, and Marguerite Pienaar's studies on Norman Eaton.

In 1993, the department celebrated its Golden Jubilee, and an annual architectural students' congress was held on campus with the theme "Place making in Africa", while Prof Bakker curated an alumni exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum that ran from 7 to 25 July<sup>2</sup>.

The department also has a proud history of graduating PhD students and awarding honorary doctorates. Prof Holm was the first to receive a PhD in Architecture from the department in 1984, followed by the first PhD in Landscape Architecture by Willem van Riet (1942—) in 1988. Over the last seven years, the department has awarded 20 PhDs, including those to current staff members Prof Barker, Dr Carin Combrinck (1968—) and Dr Nico Botes (1968—). The first *Philosophiae Doctor Honoris Causa* in Architecture was bestowed by the department on Amancio (Pancho) Guedes (1925—2015) in 1998. In 2000, Gabriël Theron (Gawie) Fagan (BArch 1952) received the TuksAlumni Board's Laureate Award, while in 2003, a *Philosophiae Doctor Honoris Causa* in Landscape Architecture was conferred on Peter Walker. In the same year, the Chancellor's Medal was awarded to Gawie Fagan while Jan van Wijk (1926—2005) received the TuksAlumni Board's Laureate Award. A number of Medals of Honour for Architecture from the *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns* [South African Academy for Science and Arts] have been awarded to department alumni. The first recipient in 1956 was Prof Meiring, followed in 1995

by Samuel Pauw (1936—2016), in 2004, by Daan Kesting (b.1933—), and in 2002, by Prof Schalk le Roux. In 2014, the medal was bestowed on Prof Hans Wegelin (1940—), with Pieter Mathews (1967—) being the 20<sup>th</sup> recipient in 2018.

Students of the department have received a number of accolades over the years. In 2001, Jaco Booyens (BArch 1996) became the first UP graduate to be awarded the prestigious SAIA biannual Rome scholarship to study at the British School in Rome. Ruann van der Westhuizen's MArch (Prof) thesis, "A public bathhouse" (2009), was one of the final eight winners of the Hunter Douglas Awards in the biannual Archiprix International competition, announced at the ceremony held on 9 June 2011 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. His project was also nominated as a participant's favourite. In 2011, Calayde Davey, MArch (Prof) 2010 and PhD Environmental Design and Planning, Kansas State University 2015, won the Africa and Middle

East Region's Holcim Next Generation Award for post-graduate students. In 2014, Heidi Boulanger (née Van Eeden), MArch (Prof) 2013 and 2014 Corobrik national winner, took fourth prize in the regional Holcim Awards 2014 Africa Middle East, and in 2017, she won the first prize in the LafargeHolcim Foundation Sustainable Construction Awards in the Africa Middle East Next Generation category. In 2018, she received a grant from the LafargeHolcim Next Generation Awards Lab to pursue her research on integrating production facilities for construction material into rural communities, creating new urban nodes. In April 2018, Renée Minnaar won the Corobrik Architectural Student of the Year first prize, marking the eighth time the department has received this accolade, Braam de Villiers of earthworld architects and interiors being the first from the department in 1995.

### CHANGES FOR THE BETTER

The Boukunde building has undergone a revamp during the past year and a half, after initial construction in 1961 (designed by Meiring & Naudé Architects) and substantial alterations and additions in 1973 by Daniël de Beer. The new alterations have been conceptualised by Thomashoff + Partners as "The Boukunde Living Laboratory" with the intention of laying bare the bones of the making of architecture, while fostering social learning spaces and future proofing for the next decades of architectural education. This is one of six strategic priority areas for Prof du Plessis that set the vision for the future of the department. The second is the establishment of the Unit for Urban Citizenship, which will develop the scholarship of civil engagement and participatory development within the context of a complex emergent African urbanism. Thirdly, the department needs to shift to digital space to respond to the needs of industry and the students. A fourth priority area is re-education to deal with the changing nature of the architectural profession. Archive accessibility is the fifth key area involving the digitisation and the improvement of facilities, which is currently being undertaken. The last priority area is the strengthening of international collaboration that has already begun with the department's involvement in local and international research projects, such as with TU Delft, Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden, and Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

The official opening of New Boukunde, together with the publication of a commemorative book to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, will take place early in 2019. The publication will be a record of antecedents, foundations, memories, pedagogies and alumni achievements, and will be available for purchase directly from the department. ■

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Fisher, R. and Clarke, N.J. 2011. RED in architecture – an ecotropical approach. *Architecture South Africa*. September/October:20.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/articles.php?artid=388> [accessed 17 October 2018]

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