

Context Study

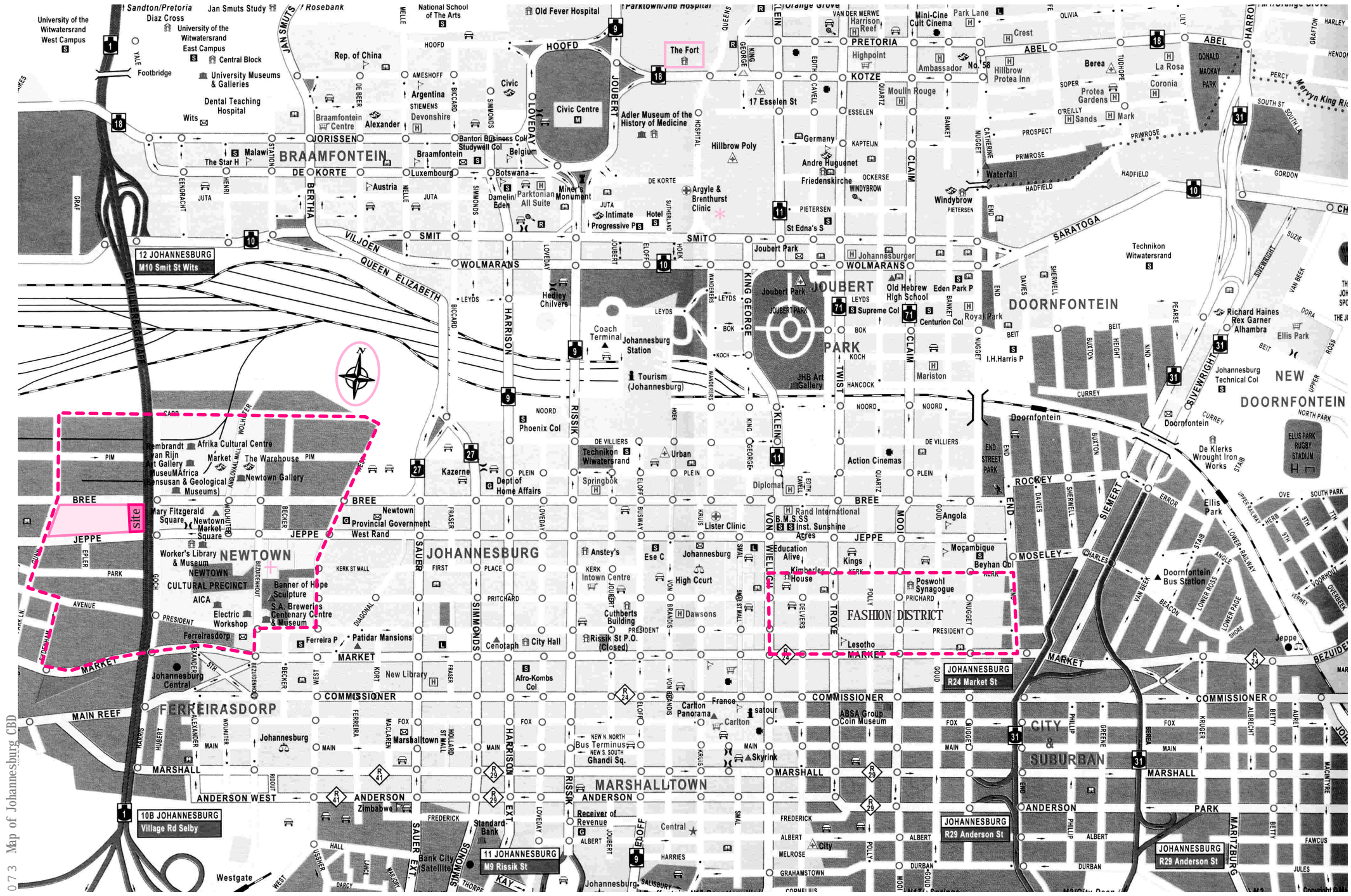
Alike all South African cities, Johannesburg is an apartheid city, not welcoming the variety of social classes of this country. Lisa Findley (2002:53) writes about apartheid-scarred Johannesburg. Beginning in the early 1990's, as the end of apartheid approached, businesses started to move from the once-prosperous CBD primarily to the upper-class enclaves like Sandton, several kilometres to the north... Motivated by both economic and racial fears, the "white flight" from Johannesburg turned into a flood after the first democratic election IN 1994. As businesses abandoned the city, the empty streets became dangerous, leading to more businesses leaving. Many an underused office building now provide a silent backdrop to the informal trading occupying the city sidewalks, while squatters illegally, but openly, occupy others.

Surprisingly, the story of central Johannesburg, a fast-forward version of the declining fortunes of many American cities in the late 20th century, is now moving into the next chapter: redevelopment. City and Provincial governments are committed to long-term investment in urban redevelopment. There is a consensus among decision-makers that the economic and cultural vitality of its cities represents South Africa to itself and to the world. This makes Johannesburg a key player in attracting and maintaining investment and tourism. Consequently, an alliance of government interests, building on the city's efforts to make the downtown both safer and cleaner, are in the process of turning Johannesburg around. (Findley 2002:53)

The Newtown Cultural Precinct is one of 10 mega-projects identified in Gauteng as part of the Strategic Economic Infrastructure Investment Programme, known as Blue IQ. Other projects include the Gautrain Rapid Rail Link, the Gauteng Automotive Cluster, Wadevill Alrode Industrial Corridor, the JIA Industrial Development Zone, the City Deep Transport Logistics Hub, the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site, Constitution Hill, Dinokeng and Kliptown. (Blue IQ website) The Newtown Cultural Precinct is of strategic importance to the Johannesburg CBD because of its potential to promote innovation, culture and tourism (Knoll 2001:21) Follows on page 26



0.7.2. Aerial Photo of Johannesburg CBD



07.3 Map of Johannesburg CBD

* km se site
+ bea se site

0 7 5 Newtowntown Aerial Photo



0 7 6 Metro Mall Main Entrance on the corner of Bree and West Streets



Newtown

The redevelopment of Newtown will involve a mix of public and private investment. A number of impressive infrastructure upgrades, including the Nelson Mandela Bridge that together with an interchange to the M1 south links Newtown with Braamfontein, and the new transport interchange and retail complex, Metro Mall, improve public access and open the area to private investors. Metro Mall was designed by Urban Solutions. The Mary Fitzgerald Square redevelopment as well as upgraded movement corridors like Quinn, Goch, Jeppe, Bree and Bezuidenhout streets are already in place.

The historic area of Johannesburg already has a strong cultural base in the form of a number of memorable buildings, including museums, theatres and galleries, and is well placed to become the cultural heart of Johannesburg (Knoll 2001:21)

Situated in the heart of the Newtown Cultural Precinct, MuseumAfrica is Johannesburg's premier history museum and is housed in what was once the city's first fruit and vegetable market built in 1913.

Its main exhibition is called "Johannesburg Transformations" which focuses on the history of Johannesburg in the 20th century and examines some of the momentous changes that have swept through the city in the last century prompted mainly by the discovery of gold.

Themes covered include the impact of gold on the workers, the emergence of a unique urban culture, the punishing effect of the housing crisis that promoted the emergence of informal settlements across the city and finally, the struggle for democracy and the long walk to political freedom.

The museum also houses the South African Rock Art Museum, the Bensusan Museum of Photography and the Geological Museum. (Newtown Programme April 2004 2 June 2004)

Also housed in the old fruit and vegetable market is the Market Theatre, made famous as the first integrated theatre, playing a pivotal role in the struggle against apartheid through the encouragement of debate and challenging ideas. It is infused with theatrical history, from the posters

0 7 7 MuseumAfrica and Bree Street



0 7 8 Market Theatre



of Athol Fugard plays that premiered there to the Grammy and Tony award-winning musicals like Sarafina.

The Workers' Library and Museum was once a workers hostel, now recycled to educate people about apartheid. The intervention speaks of a mature approach, offering dignity without mummification of the building or its grotesque past. The new mezzanine level and its elegant detailing, floating within the existing building introduces spatial dynamics, offering an appropriate setting for new uses, changing the perception of the mediocre space. Existing generic devices are emphasised to introduce legibility and dignity. Combining elements of its past and dynamic present, the project offers a sanctuary and balm for the workers' soul. The interventions were designed by Alan Lippman and Henry Paine (Architects in association) and were awarded an ISAA Award. (Anonymous 1996:17)

Park Station, an early Johannesburg landmark, has "returned" to the city. The station canopy, designed by Dutch architect Jacob Klinkhamer and manufactured in Holland in the 1890's, is to house the new Transnet Railway Museum. The Canopy is an elegant steel structure, more lightly framed than others of the period and finely detailed. The vaulted spaces are almost cathedral-like. (Brink 1990:29)

Because of its historical significance, the canopy has long been recognised as a building that may house a railway museum. Recently a Transnet site in Newtown was identified as appropriate for such a development. The canopy has been moved but the Museum has not realised yet. It is emphasised in the Newtown Cultural Precinct Urban Framework.

The creation of open space for the enjoyment of people is a vital element in the redevelopment plan. Mary Fitzgerald Square has been chosen as the focus of this as it is spacious and is historically relevant. The square is adjacent to the Market Theatre and MuseuMAfricA. It is named after Mary Fitzgerald, who made an impact on the early history of Johannesburg through her participation in various political and labour movements. (Knoll 2001:21)

A national competition was held for the redesign of the Mary Fitzgerald



Square and adjacent open space. The scheme entered by Urban Solutions was selected. Introducing the curve (or kink) in Bree Street, opposite the entrance to MuseuMAfrica, was considered an important feature of the scheme.

The design connects streets and open spaces and gives priority to pedestrians by treating the streets as public open spaces, providing generous sidewalks without kerbs, pedestrian-friendly crossings and on-street parking. Vehicular access will be maintained, but all spaces will encourage pedestrian movement by vehicular speed reduction elements. (Knoll 2001:23)

Mary Fitzgerald Square has a capacity of over 50 000 people, providing outdoor space for a wide array of activities, including film festivals, concerts, markets, carnivals and exhibitions. The Square itself will be clad in different surfaces and street trees will define the southern edge. Only two types of trees will be used – one for streets and the other for open space. Construction materials will be kept to the minimum: smooth paving stones for pedestrian areas; rough paving for street surfaces. Steel light poles will have the dual function of lighting both streets and buildings and concrete for fixed seating and drinking fountains. The Urban Solutions team kept the design as simple and robust as possible, taking their cue from traditional cities and creating a low maintenance environment. (Knoll 2001: 23)

Site

Through studying the Newtown Cultural Precinct Urban Design Plan, one understands the site better. (A summary is provided in Appendix A.) It is through the Urban Design Plan that the specific site was chosen. The site is indicated on figures 72 to 75. Bree, Goch and Jeppe Streets bound the site's northern, eastern and southern sides. The western side of the site is formed by a proposed textile development industrial facility.

The site was chosen because of the dynamic relationships it has with surrounding features. It is firstly the transitional volume between the public square and the private industrial development, and must include semi-public and semi-private space. The Urban Design Plan stipulates the following: The interior of each block should be considered with importance, as a place within

0 8 8 De Villiers-Graaff Freeway along the western side of Mary Fitzgerald Square



0 8 9 De Villiers-Graaff Freeway and Mary Fitzgerald Square seen from MuseuMAfrica's entrance (tents used for the Africa Day Celebrations.)

its own right. It should form an important ingredient of the semi-private domain of the Newtown Precinct. The development of each site/erf should recognise it as an equally important frontage and respond to it accordingly. (GAPP sa31)

Secondly, its eastern façade will form the backdrop to the elevated highway running alongside Goch Street, but will read by two different users: the pedestrian on Mary Fitzgerald and the motorist on the De Villiers-Graaff freeway. Interestingly enough, the Urban Design Plan considers this specific site's eastern façade to be a Primary Activity Edge (an active ground floor use engaging the public environment) although the freeway is in front of it. The relationship between the freeway and the site can produce an unusual interpretation of Primary Activity Edge.

Thirdly, the northern façade of the entire city block in which the site is located has to relate to the southern façade of Bree Street, comprising mainly of old warehouses, which is deemed to be retained because of its historic value.

Fourthly, the Urban Design Plan stipulates that the site in question must have a hard-edged mandatory building line, a mandatory colonnade or covered walkway and must be a point of architectural accentuation. The site, as already mentioned, has two visual readers on two levels: from ground level to approximately 9m above ground level, pedestrians, and from 9m to approximately 16m above ground level, motorist on the freeway. The mandatory colonnade can be used to divide the eastern façade to form two parallel parts with each a different kind of architectural accentuation.

The site currently has three buildings on it, housing the following businesses: Hair World, Ram's Takeaways & Cafeteria, Mad Max Auto Repairs, and T.J. Panel Beaters. The existing structures will be demolished, but the buildings have informed the scale of the new project as the freeway dwarfs the conventional height of one- and two-storey buildings. As the new project has to be a point of architectural accentuation, a different scale is needed.



0 9 0 Site seen from under the freeway



0 9 1 c/o Bree and Goch Streets



0 9 2 c/o Jeppe and Goch Streets, full view of Ram's Takeaways, Hair World and Mad Max Auto Repairs



0 9 3 View down Jeppe Street

Other JDA Projects

The other large central Johannesburg precinct where the JDA and Blue Q are catalysing development is radically different from Newtown, but more significant to the new democracy, is Constitution Hill. The international competition for the new national Constitutional Court was won by a collaborative entry by OMM Design Workshop of Durban and Urban Solutions of Johannesburg. (Findley 2002:56)

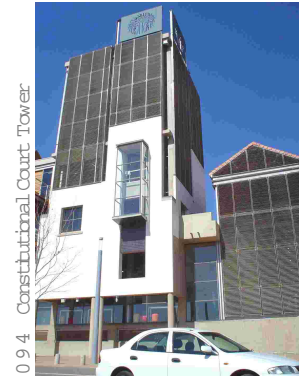
Constitution Hill is the site of Johannesburg's notorious Old Fort Prison Complex, commonly known as Number Four, where thousands of ordinary people were brutally punished before the dawn of democracy in 1994. Many of South Africa's leading political activists, including Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, were detained there.

While the Newtown and Constitution Hill projects will not alone save downtown Johannesburg, they are already having the ripple effect that the JDA and Blue Q had hoped for. Private investment in the central city is increasing. Smaller public and private redevelopment projects, including the JDA's efforts to revitalise garment manufacture in the Fashion District, are in place, while artists and designers are occupying abandoned warehouses. (Findley 2002:56)

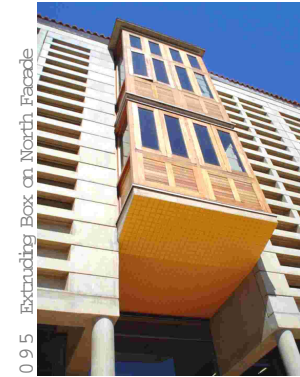
The Fashion District is a project in line with Johannesburg's 2030 economic development strategy. It is in the CBD's eastern sector, an area traditionally associated with the garment industry. The JDA is upgrading the area. (Dhliwayo 2002:1)

A parallel initiative will see intense marketing programmes to help position the fashion district in what the marketing director calls the "Urban Age of African Fashion". Fashion shows have helped raise the profile of the district, allowing young designers to show their works. The area offers training to fashion practitioners through institutions linked to the Department of Labour. (Dhliwayo 2002:2)

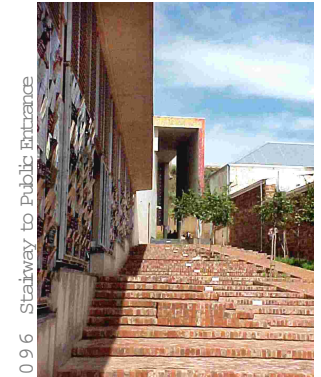
In 1994 the Johannesburg Sewing Centre opened at 109 Pritchard Street. It supplies micro businesses in the district with accessories in small quantities at reasonable prices which only manufacturers would offer. It also



0 9 4 Constitutional Court Tower



0 9 5 Extruding Box on North Facade



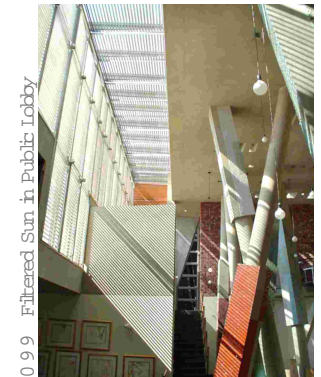
0 9 6 Stairway to Public Entrance



0 9 7 Sun Screens on Western Facade



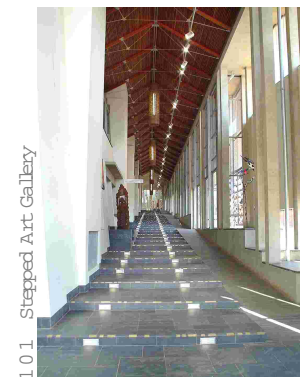
0 9 8 Public Entrance Porch



0 9 9 Filtered Sun in Public Lobby



1 0 0 Slanted Columns in Public Lobby



1 0 1 Stepped Art Gallery



1 0 2 South Facade, Constitutional Court



1.0.3 SewAfrica Building, Pretorius Street



1.0.4 SewAfrica Fashion



1.0.5 SewAfrica Studio



1.0.6 SewAfrica Fashion Show



1.0.7 SewAfrica Interior

supplies dress patterns in six different languages, empowering more people to learn skills and start their own business. (Davie 2003:2)

Lectures are given by final year Fashion Design and Clothing Management students from Wits Technikon. The centre offers a practical three-year fashion design course, with business administration skills as well as a bridging year for students who don't qualify for entry into the Technikon. (Davie 2004:3)

The Fashion Shack will exhibit the products of a "creative hub of young designers" on the ground floor of SewAfrica. Designers will be housed in the building and guided for two-years to develop a viable business plan, with the help of Open for Business, an entrepreneurial and empowerment initiative, funded by the City of Johannesburg, Investec Bank and Technikon SA. (Davie 2004:1) These young designers, some graduates from the Technikon and some from SewAfrica, will rent a package deal in the hub. This will provide space for creating their designs, access to pooled machinery and equipment (which they would not be able to purchase), changing rooms, a display area and administration facilities such as secretaries, telephone, fax and boardrooms. (Davie 2004:2)

The emphasis of the new Fashion District in Johannesburg's CBD is on skills development and relieving unemployment. The JDA is co-ordinating the project. The rental from each designer will sustain the project.

0

3

2