



5

PRECEDENT STUDIES



Figure 5.1: Entrance area to the Court foyer (Author, 2011).

5.1 CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

by omm design workshop

Johannesburg, South Africa

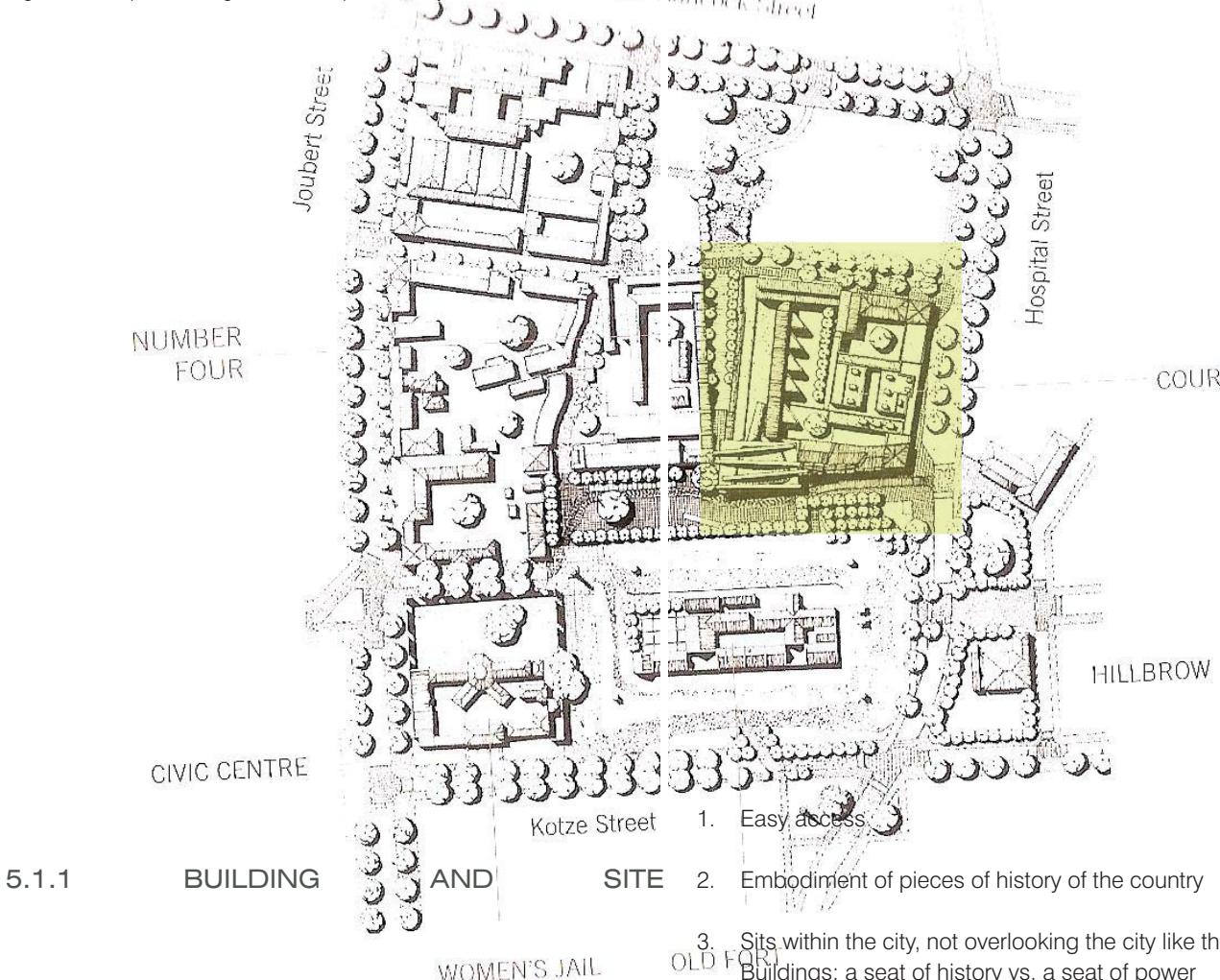
2001-2004

The Constitutional Court of South Africa in Johannesburg is situated on an old fort complex dating back to the late 1890s. The fort, over the years, changed into a prison (until 1983), and other buildings were also constructed on the site, for example, the Women's Jail precinct.

The prison could be interpreted as a division between poverty-stricken Hillbrow and the affluent western suburbs of Johannesburg (Law-Viljoen, 2008). Demolition was started in 2001 and the Court was inaugurated on Human Rights Day in 2004, where its inherent visions were revealed: to celebrate the ideals of a progressive constitution, to commemorate and to give visible form to the idea that all people are equal before the law (Law-Viljoen, 2006: 8).

The Court's underlying theme and conceptual departure point is that of "Justice under a Tree". This theme came from the traditional notion of "imbizo", which refers to the gathering of groups of people to discuss or interact, specifically with issues concerning the law, in informal court situations in rural villages around South Africa. Apart from the communal element of gathering under a tree, the Court suggests another strong relationship with the traditions of the nation. Craftsmanship is visible throughout the building and its surroundings, in the form of architectural elements like lighting, surface treatments, signage, accessibility elements, circulation elements and furthermore purely aesthetic elements, that all contribute to- and enhance the theme.

Figure 5.2: Site plan showing Old Fort Complex. Law-Viljoen, B. 2006.



Furthermore, the historical value of the site and hence its heritage value, posed an opportunity for reinterpreting the existing fabric into a building that stands for all people, and is made by the people themselves, with people from different cultural backgrounds contributing to the cultural encoding within the building.



5.1.2 CRAFT AND DESIGN

Most buildings now, are conceived in the human imagination but realized through systems (architectural, industrial or economic)... few traces of human intervention (craftsmanship).

(Law-Viljoen, 2008)

The logo is an image that conveys the ideas of the constitution, and its materiality is present throughout the whole building.

The idea of the tree is also noted in terms of structure and tactility: the “animation” of the building.



Figure 5.3: Court Logo (Law-Viljoen, 2006).

The Constitutional Court shows traces of this human touch that are not as visible anymore as in past building traditions.

Making by hand is emphasized as an equal to technological methods of production, and not as its inferior.

The Court, at its inception, hoped to illustrate some signs of “making”.

(Law-Viljoen, 2008).

Materials used are local, indigenous and connected to the site: concrete in particular is prominent in the structure; ceramics in the treatment of surfaces and the interior; glass in the transparency and connection to the outside; steel in the connections and details within the building in order to convey its relationship with the other modern materials; and finally timber, implemented in a way that suggests the natural world within the building interior. Climate- and site-specific solutions were sought after by the architects and they tried to reinterpret this national building in a local and intimate way that would connect with its users and visitors. The incorporation of the hand and craftmaking is visible in the architecture and the symbolism of the building and it is the author’s opinion that this was done very successfully without being pastiche.

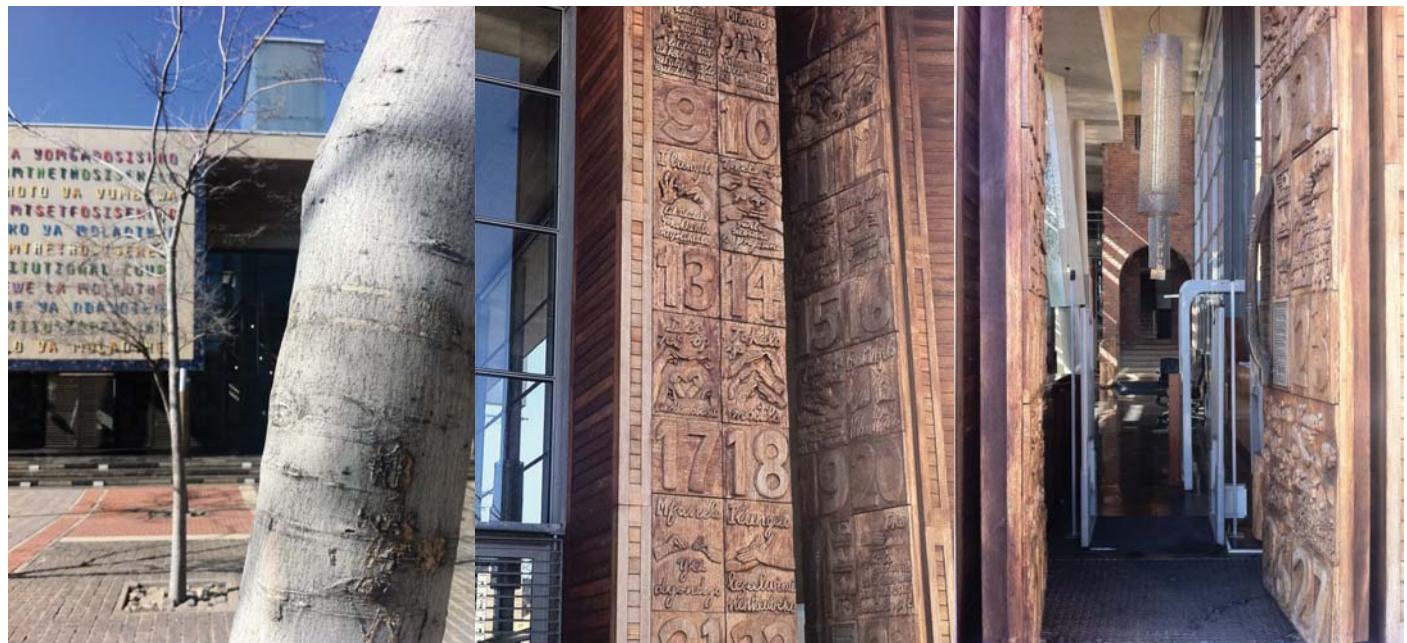


Figure 5.4: Signage and front doors to the Court (Author, 2011).

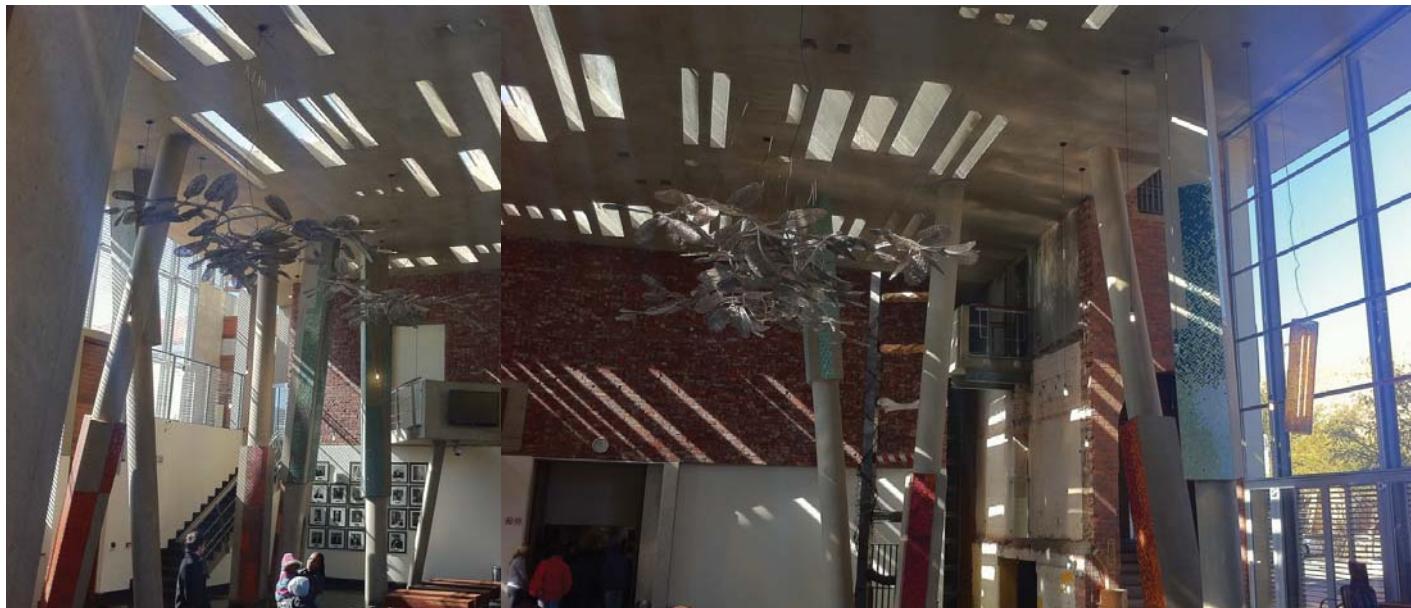


Figure 5.5: Foyer illustrating the theme (Author, 2011).

I used parts of these trees, such as seed pods, thorn shapes and leaf shapes to inform the patterns that were made up in the ceramics and bits of tile.

Jane du Rand

Foyer Columns of the Constitutional Court, Johannesburg, South Africa

5.1.3

PARTS TO THE WHOLE

A.

FOYER AREA

The foyer area of the court boasts 18 slanting columns that are made of concrete and partially covered in mosaics by ceramic artist Jane du Rand, whose studios are situated in Durban. The surface treatments were inspired by the theme of "Justice under a Tree". It was important to retain the concrete connection with the building envelope from the floor to the ceiling, hence it was therefore decided to cover only the square parts of the columns. Some of the square parts are situated on the lower part of the columns and others on the upper parts: sky and earth columns, as the artist called them, are each covered in relevant mosaics and colours, reflecting the landscapes that inspired them.



Figure 5.6: Foyer columns by Jane du Rand (Author, 2011).

B.

LIGHTING

The lighting in the building was craft-inspired, particularly inspired by the craft of basket-weaving in the rural villages of the country. Material choices were considered with specific relevance to the idea of complementing the building and reinterpreting traditional methods of making, in a contemporary way. Recycled strips of aluminium, aluminium cable and brass were woven into hanging lanterns and tree-like reflective elements, going hand-in-hand with the original concept. Basketry is taken out of its context and reinterpreted in the setting.

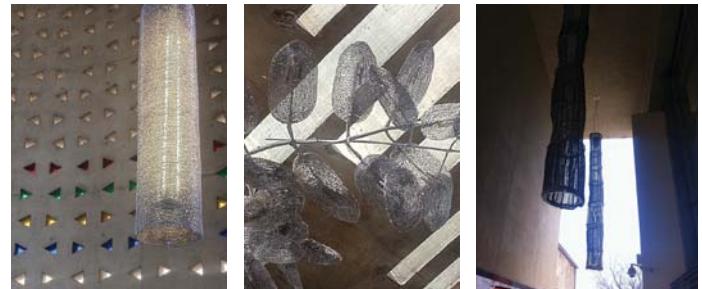


Figure 5.7: Lighting elements alluding to craft elements (Author, 2011).

C.

SURFACES

Doors and stairs are treated in a similar way, with the allusion to weaving and "Kente cloth". This is visible in their texture and aesthetics, but is replaced with metals rather than the actual cloth. Furthermore, the judges' chambers denotes nature in the carpet treatments, taken from images of light passing through trees. Nguni cattle hides suggest status, used solely for the judges' benches. The recognizable beaded flag in the courtroom was made by women from the Eastern Cape



Figure 5.8: Doors and floor treatments (Author, 2011).



Figure 5.9: Court Chamber showing materiality and production process (Law-Viljoen, 2008: 86).

D.

COURT

CHAMBER

The surface treatment and articulation of the Court Chamber suggest a subtle awareness to detail, without the element of authenticity being very prominent, without being pastiche. Law-Viljoen (2006) suggests that pastiche refers to "a little bit of this and a little bit of that", without sensitive articulation of elements that might be traditional or connected to a specific culture. The beaded flag alludes to traditional beading but at the same time it does not symbolise a particular ethnic style. The Nguni hide on the judges' benches represents status, symbolic in its use. The element of craft is not only visible in the product, but also in the fact that the Africa Art Centre in Durban comprised the team that made the flag over a series of months.

Therefore, handiwork was the main production approach to many of the elements in the building, inspired by the local climate and traditional methods of production.

E.

FAÇADE

TREATMENTS

The building's exhibition gallery runs along the western facade, making the sun's rays a potential threat. This problem was solved by incorporating sun screens, to prevent the sun's rays' penetration and heat build-up, but also to add a certain aesthetic sensitivity to the facade. Each panel tells a story- the architects interviewed people from around the site and incorporated their stories in the design of the facade. As a whole, the panels allude to weaving once again, without being a direct translation of the craft, with the implementation of different materials. This facade also seems to serve as a branding element.



Figure 5.10: Sun screens by Lewis Levin Architects (Author, 2011).

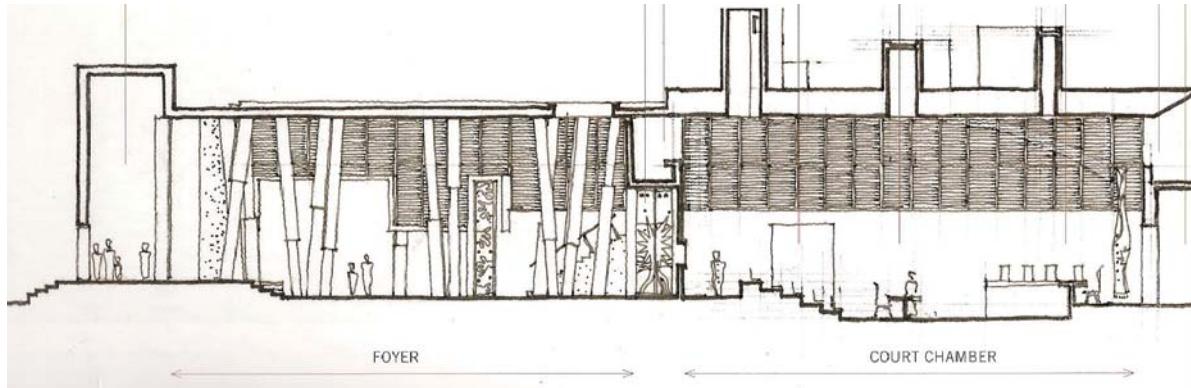


Figure 5.11: Concept development section: west-east (Law-Viljoen, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The easily-recognisable facade, with triangular glass inserts is both a symbolic- and functional element. The colours represent the South African flag and the sloping nature of the triangles' sides are for water run-off.

The author is of the opinion that this treatment of coloured glass in a building's facade, that represents the building's culture in some way, is a stylised version of the rose windows implemented in numerous Gothic cathedrals. No ethnic interpretation of South Africa is visible, but a stylised version of what the country stands for.

The court represents an amalgamation of craft and design and this was done sensibly and with relevance to the context.

The most prominent features of the Constitutional Court are the aspects of craft and its relationship- physical and symbolical- with architecture and interior design. These relationships manifest themselves in the building envelope and in the interior spaces, giving the spaces a unique symbolic character and quality. Furthermore, the fact that the handmade receives prominence in the building, allows one to understand where the designs came from and what their deeper meanings are. Crafters from the African Art Centre in Durban, Lewis Levin Architects, artist Willem Boshoff, pot-maker Jabu Nala, graphic designer Garth Walker, local ceramicists and linguists comprised the production team of the Constitutional Court, contributing to its regional character, encouraging local education in craft and design and integrating local crafters and designers from all creative spheres.

The author is of the opinion that the idea of craft as an integral part of design, in this case, was carried out meticulously; without resulting in kitsch and unrealistic spaces. The court illustrates that craft can become design and not merely a decorative part of it.



Figure 5.12: Facade with triangular inserts (Author, 2011).

5.2 SESC FABRICA POMPEIA

by Lina Bo Bardi

São Paulo, Brazil

1977-1986

SESC Pompeia is situated in the heart of São Paulo and is a cultural and leisure centre, with sports facilities and other public leisure facilities, including gathering spaces, workshop studios for painters, ceramicists and weavers, a photography laboratory, a music studio, theatre, foyer, beer hall, restaurant and library area for free time. Furthermore, exhibition spaces form a large part of the design and planning, letting in large amounts of light and allowing for gathering and lingering.

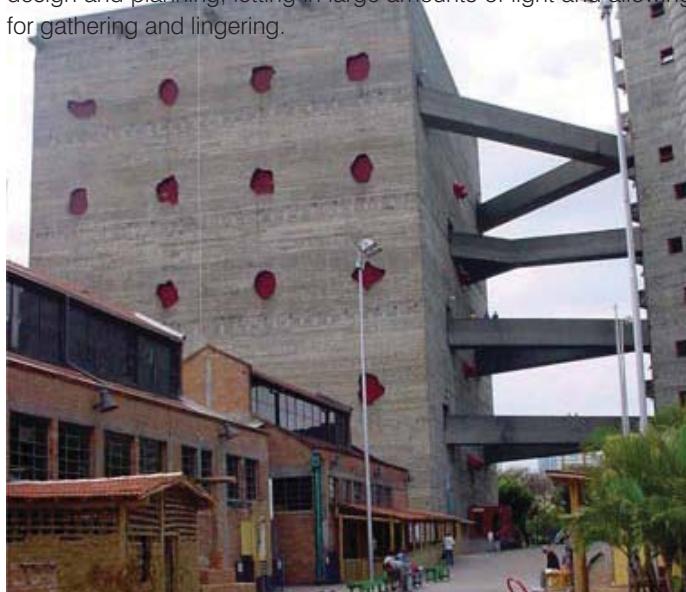


Figure 5.13: SESC Pompeia (Lima, 2006: 264).

Lina Bo Bardi is an Italian-Brazilian architect, whose work is very recognisable from the late 70s to early 80s, particularly in São Paulo, Brazil. She is an example of an architect who is culturally conscious of her design decisions. These decisions are especially visible in the SESC Pompeia in São Paulo.

The anthropological- and cultural character of architecture is sought after in her work as well as the idea of "hybridising" modern and vernacular architectural elements (Lima, 2006: 257). The main idea behind her methodology is basically "arquitetura pobre" or simple architecture, visible directly in her use of materials that are unpolished and hence simple in nature. This meticulous use of material application is not accidental, but the architect consciously adopted this approach by appropriating materials in a way that represents how they were used in Brazil in creative and sustainable ways.

Criticism towards Bo Bardi's work was often directed at the harshness of her buildings and spaces that come across to some as bare and uninventing.

The hybridisation of elements refers to the incorporation of brutalism of the city of São Paulo and the crude nature of Brazilian design. Her work, in trying to define Brazilian modernism, can be seen as the formalisation of Le Corbusier's ideas (Lima, 2006: 258).



Figure 5.14: Plan of SESC Pompeia (Blanc, 2003 : 60).



The author believes these holes, being some of the noted elements at first glance, are imperative features as a kind of introduction to the building, moving from outside to inside. The idea of the modern aesthetic is in evident contrast to what is visible here, but the immediate materiality and regional character uses the modern as precedent, not in shape or form, but in cultural significance and validity. This notion is strengthened by her statement: "Brazilian architecture can only be achieved when... it drew inspiration from the intimate poetry of the Brazilian land" (Lima, 2006: 260).

Her aesthetic solutions for her construction methodology of her buildings, had much to do with how Mies van der Rohe approached construction, and she used the brutalist vocabulary of São Paulo in the 1960s to inform her choices on construction issues. In contrast to her attachment to regional and contextual materials, she explored with other materials like rubber, granite and basalt mosaics (Lima, 2006: 259).



Figure 5. 15: Windows of basketball court (Lima, 2006: 258).



Figure 5.16: Window showing timber trellis (Lifestyle, Art and Design, 2011).

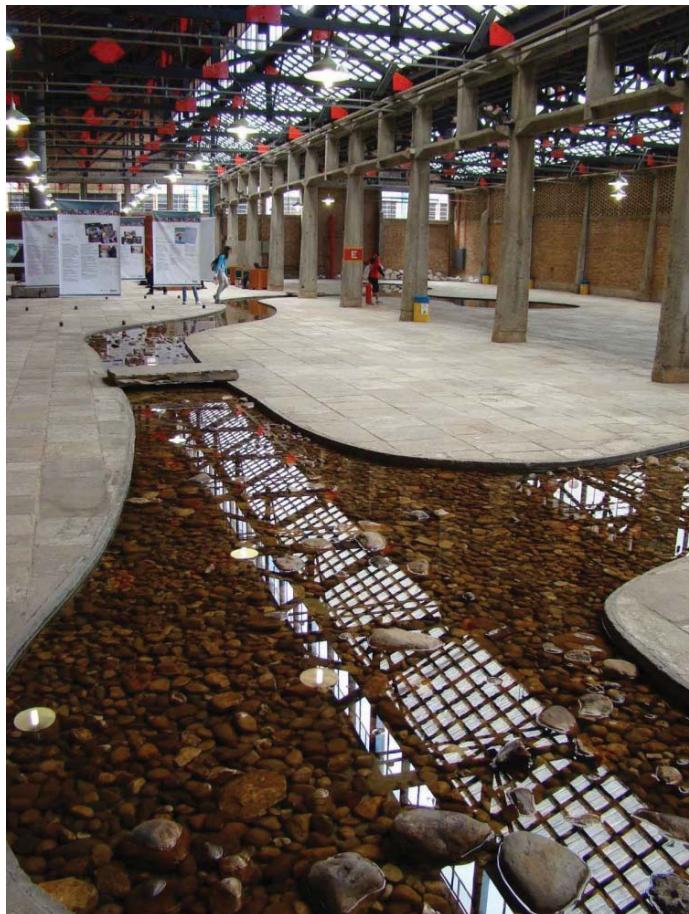


Figure 5. 17: Interior of SESC Pompeia (Kok, 2011).

The interior of the cultural centre represents this hybridisation of different cultural elements embedded in the city of São Paulo.

Large cut-out holes in the wall are more than what they seem. They do not just control light and air, but represent a kind of “ambivalent threshold” according to Lima (2006). The tension lies between the rational nature of the modern and the spontaneity of the city and its everyday occurrences.

They are elements that frame the hilly São Paulo, complementing their aesthetic as one crafted by hand. They are deep-cut holes in a thick concrete, emphasising and enhancing their context as well as the seeming rough nature of the building. This “ambivalent” threshold, strengthens her approach to design, taking the immediate physical- and cultural surroundings into account.

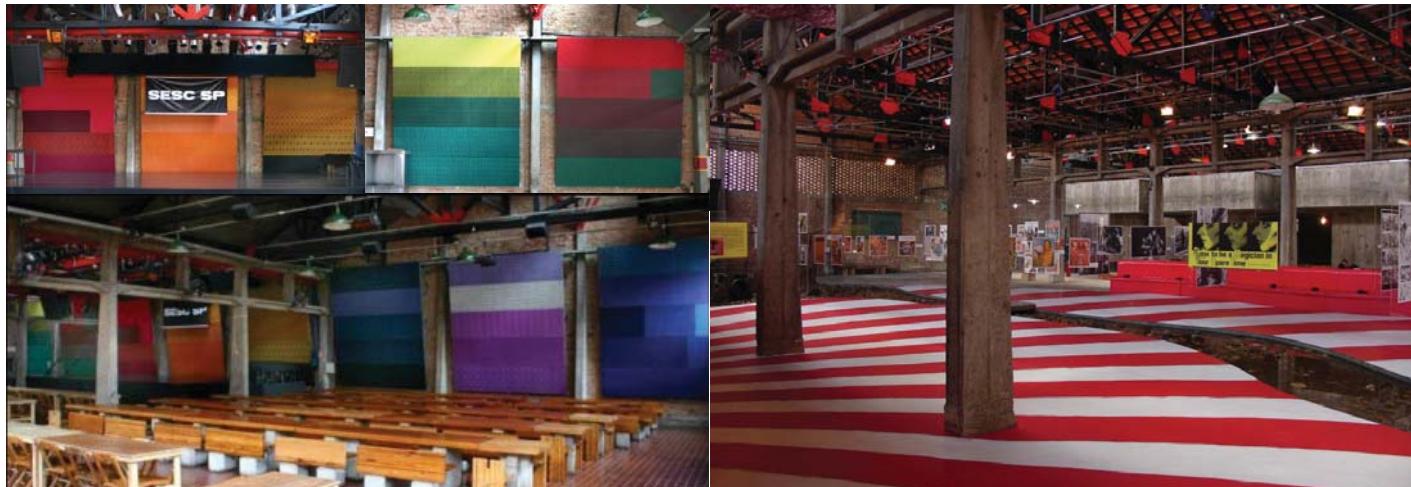


Figure 5.18: Interior SESC Pompeia: fabrics made on display and exhibition/ leisure area (Gebrian, s.a.).

Furthermore, the idea of the human body and body-hand relationship in building production, is visible in small subtleties in the interior spaces, in order to make these more intimate: small gathering spaces for games, meticulously-detailed trellises on the windows and partitions, and the introduction of textured pools. These elements make the larger, open spaces, less intimidating and more inviting. The building's subtleties and details that represent an informal, casualness of everyday life, is in contrast with the roughness of the built fabric.

The interior spaces were intended to represent, in some way, everyday life in the city, without exaggerations of surface or decoration. Concrete surface was cleaned and maintained, exposed in all means possible, to highlight her idea of the brutalist nature of the city as well as showcase the material in its purest form. The spaces she designed were often occupied and appropriated in informal and spontaneous ways, with people organising their own personal and private activities. The old factory that was reinvented, allowed Bo Bardi to define the structure as an existing lived space, which had to be preserved. She took the idea of this existing lived space as departure point for her design and construction (Lima, 2006: 264). This meant that she merely "added" relevant cultural elements to the building, in order to facilitate more cultural activities, in the author's opinion.

Her approach to design was an exemplary exercise of translation between craft, art, architecture, ethnography, and culture through a way of thinking and practising that was at the same time political and poetic.

Zeuler Lima in "The faces of Janus: modernism and hybridisation in the architecture of Lina Bo Bardi"



Figure 5.19: Designated leisure- and flexible spaces throughout SESC (Blanc, 2003: 63).

The old horizontal brick factory became a contrasting- as well as integrated element in the design of the new SESC culture and leisure centre. She used materiality in particular, in order to separate as well as link the two opposing structures. The interior spaces show how concrete was used carefully in order to separate or distinguish between the different programmes taking place within the building. This is visible in the elevated, suspended and open library in the foyer area.

Bo Bardi's sections illustrate how she manipulates space in order to separate programmatic elements within the existing factory "shed". Below is a longitudinal section through the studios, illustrating the utilisation of the existing trusses and windows to let in light, whilst dividing studios into "pod-like" elements that are separated by a mere plane, not reaching the ceiling.

CONCLUSION

SESC is an example of a leisure and cultural centre allowing the integration of artists- painters, craftspeople and performers- in a stimulating environment that is conducive to the activities taking place inside. Floor treatments are vivid, encouraging activity and movement. Columns are space-defining elements left untouched in terms of materiality, but designed to an extent that indicates symbolism. The regional character, as in the Constitutional Court, is reinterpreted in a subtle way, evident in the window treatments, the existing materiality left as is for the majority of exposed space and the use of regional materials contributing to aesthetics, but more so to the idea of local production by local craftsmen and the use of local materials and construction methods (Portal SESC, 2009).



Figure 5.20: Detail (Lima, 2006: 263).



Figure 5.21: Stairs in museum (Lima, 2006: 263).

Apart from the simplicity of the SESC Pompeia, Bo Bardi's simple use of materials and construction methods are visible in other projects like the Museum of Art, Sao Paulo, as well as the Unhao Estate on the seafront near Salvador, which was converted into a museum. Bo Bardi used the existing 16th century buildings as opportunities for creating the museum. She emphasised the simple structure by creating a link between old and new, in the form of an imposing staircase, with unimposing and appropriate joints. She was inspired by traditional ox carts around the area and based the joints of the stair to the existing wooden columns, on these simple joints (Lima, 2006: 262).

Heritage concerns are evident and she suggests a subtle approach to the interior, whilst making a big statement.

The proposed crafts centre in the inner city of Pretoria has the opportunity to be as daring, if not more, because the interior is simple and unassuming due to its seeming lack of character. The interesting column grid will allow for playfulness in the space-making process.

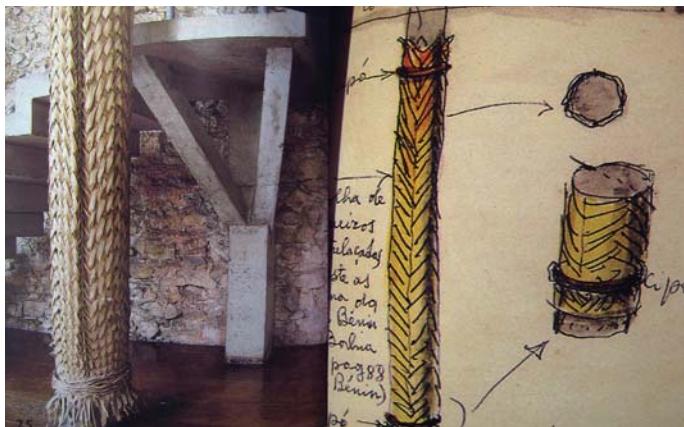


Figure 5.22: Bo Bardi's conceptual treatment of columns (Angelidakis, 2009).

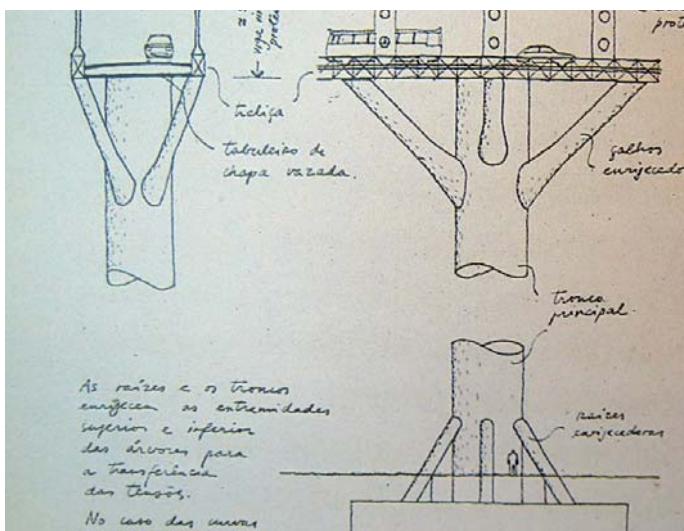


Figure 5.23: Columns treated as natural elements (Angelidakis, 2009).

Column treatments were done to activate spaces and more importantly to have people interact with spaces in an intimate way. She did this by adding texture, through fabric, to her designs.

Furthermore, her approach to load-bearing elements can be compared to Antoni Gaudí's Sagrada Família, where trees and columns are one and the same.

Concepts of fabrics integrated in large spaces and the idea of 'tree skyscrapers' make the spatial experience surpass that of the immediate modern, as it goes beyond the pure and suggests a playfulness and fantasy (Angelidakis, 2011). She used curtains and drapings as means of creating shelter, something she implemented as part of her European heritage, derived from the word "parangole", which suggests fabric that could provide shelter. The nature of the factory as a light shed with heavy concrete horizontals and verticals, kept to a sensible minimum, proved to complement Bo Bardi's treatment of surface.



Exhibition methods in the Museum of Art, São Paulo were kept simple and minimalist in terms of material use and structure.

These “totem” elements were used to exhibit paintings, without taking away from the painting, and blurring the boundary between wall and the object on display. The concrete block anchors the glass sheet, and together they are exemplary of the simplicity of modernism.

The author deduces that Bo Bardi wanted the public viewers to experience the paintings individually and intimately, without the formalised layout of traditional paintings on traditional walls.

Figure 5.24: Exhibition elements by Bo Bardi for MASP (Angelidakis, 2009).

5.3 AFRICAN CRAFT MARKET

by Kate Otten Architects

Rosebank, Johannesburg

2001

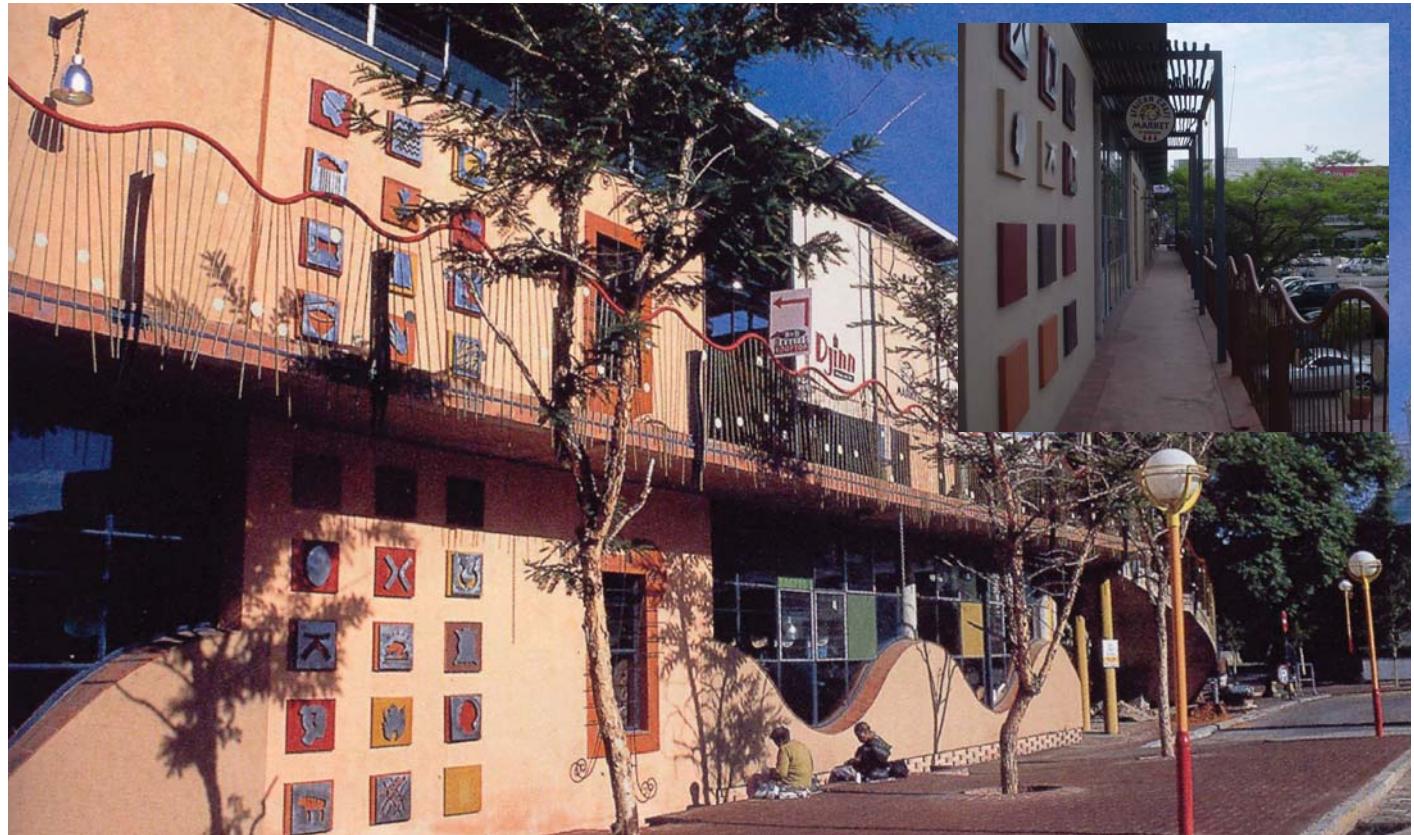


Figure 5.25: African Craft Market, Rosebank (Knoll, 2001: 1).



The African Craft Market in Rosebank's inception was welcomed with interest and surprise, as the idea of a "formalised" market was a controversial aspect in terms of the location of this market in Rosebank, an affluent neighbourhood in Johannesburg. The building, by Kate Otten Architects, has however proved to be successful, as the crafters are flourishing in this new environment (Knoll, 2001).

Its success is partly owed to the tourists traveling in and out of the area. Traders from different parts of Africa sell their crafts here and their needs are considered to a great extent, the architect made a point of this. Among the crafters' requirements were elevation (ample hanging display space for their works, shelter (in contrast to the exposure to the elements when they were trading outside), good lighting and finally, marketing (Knoll, 2001).

The building is themed- Otten wanted it to be an "African building, wrapped with decorative fabric... light, patterning, textures and colours" (Otten, 2001). Mosaics were done by Marco Cianfinelli and the idea is for the building to become a fabric. Symbolism derived from African headdresses (the towers) and Acacia trees make the building an attraction as well as authentic to the surroundings.... "all the architectural elements work towards the interpretation of the urban space" (Knoll, 2001).

Materiality is evident in terms of their regional character (see Figure 5.25): welded steel undulating balustrades, durable interior finishes, earth-coloured masonry surfaces, the predominantly steel structure painted blue, wattle rods finished in a natural varnish and positive and negative imagery cut from stainless steel plate. (Lipman, 2001).





REFLECTION

In terms of the implementation of craft as surface treatment, embellishment and a vehicle for architectural symbolism, the African Craft Market in Rosebank allows for tourists and locals to become familiar with African craft objects on a very tactile- and aesthetic level, very quickly. The boundaries between exterior and interior are blurred and again the use of regional materials are prominent.

The need for flexible spaces for the crafters selling their products has been addressed to a large extent, one of the problems the crafters had prior to the erection of the building. A marked element that is still prevalent to the author that needs addressing, is the working environments, large open spaces, not catering to the public and private needs of the craftsmen.

Craft as a part of the architecture versus craft as object, need to be considered more in the designing of such a centre in terms of visual comfort. In the opinion of the author, the Constitutional Court allows for craft to be combined in the building's production process, whereas in the Craft Market in Rosebank, the physical application of craft seemed to happen as an added-on element. Although the retailers make a better living compared to before, the spatial environments from a design point of view, as experienced by the author, are not conducive to the individuality of each craftsman.

Figure 5.26 (left): African Craft Market balustrade and interior of coffee shop (Lipman, 2001).



5.4 DUDE

CIGAR BAR

by Studiomake

Bangkok

2011

The Dude Cigar Bar by Studiomake is an example of sophistication in craftsmanship, in the opinion of the author. The use of materials in the spaces are representative of the target market, in this case, a niche market, catering to an affluent area in Bangkok.

The user or visitor to the bar is given a glimpse of what is inside, by means of a brick wall. This wall as an element on an intimate scale, allows for the threshold from inside to outside to be blurred, making the interior easily accessible. Furthermore, this wall alludes to texture, particularly that of woven fabric. Selected bricks are angled and they seem as if they pivot, sitting lightly within the larger wall. This gives the impression of lightness, in contrast with the heavy quality of structural masonry walls. The nature of the exposed faces of the bricks is in harmony with the idea of a woven fabric that is raw and unfinished or unaltered, losing its original qualities.



Figure 5.27: Dude Cigar Bar brick wall detail (Studiomake, 2011).



5.5 CONTEMPLATING THE VOID

Interventions in the Guggenheim Museum Conceptual Proposals

New York City, NY
February to April 2010

250 Artists, architects and designers were invited to do proposals for reimagining the atrium void within the Guggenheim.

5.5.1 ART TRAP by MASS STUDIES

The proposal by Mass Studies for the Guggenheim void was a reaction to the traditional movement within a museum space, where congestion usually overpowers the movement through the museum. Furthermore, the void (atrium) was treated as an iconic element in the building.

"Art trap" aimed to make the experience of art a more intimate one and at the same time, allow the Guggenheim itself to be seen as an icon of its time.

The ramp and the void are separated by a textile membrane that allows people to become a part of the atrium for two different experiences- the circulation and the atrium as artwork. Openings in the atrium wall force people to pause and look out onto it.

The people become the exhibition in the wall, hence, a part of the architecture.

Finally, the fact that spectators climb into a membrane gives the idea that the membrane is dressing them (Designboom, 2010).



Figure 5.29: Section through Guggenheim void and ramp (Designboom, 2010)..



Figure 5.30: Interaction in atrium (Designboom, 2010).