



Part 5 Client overview

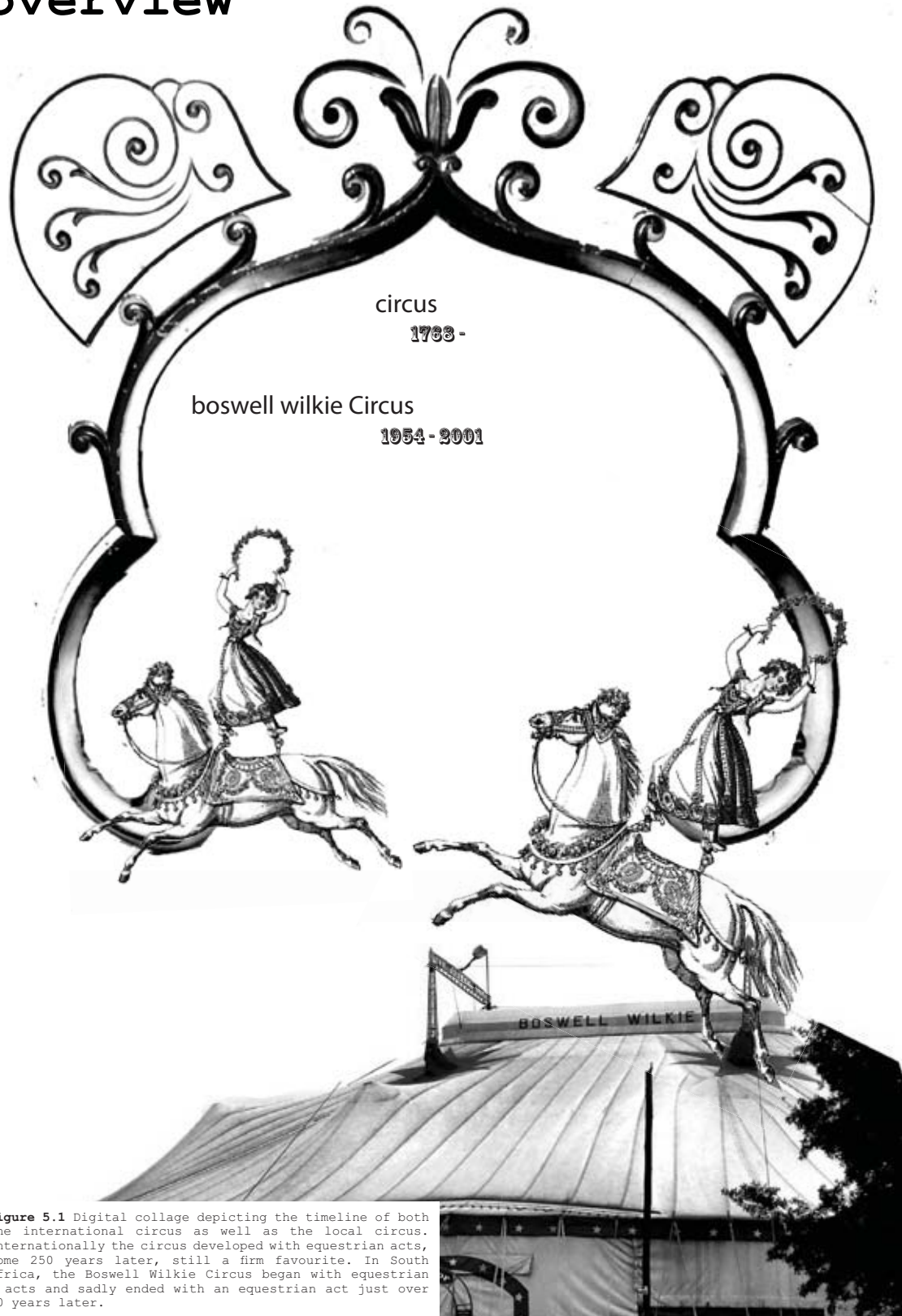


Figure 5.1 Digital collage depicting the timeline of both the international circus as well as the local circus. Internationally the circus developed with equestrian acts, some 250 years later, still a firm favourite. In South Africa, the Boswell Wilkie Circus began with equestrian acts and sadly ended with an equestrian act just over 50 years later.

extending the skin



5.1 Introduction

Currently the Capitol Theatre building is owned by the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality and used as a private parking. Public access to the building is limited to the Kariba Restaurant and Tshwane Cultural centre which both occupy the entrance foyer, and to the male and female ablutions situated within the Grand Foyer. Public access to the Auditorium and parking behind the TPA wall is prohibited. In order to pump-plan the theatre, a suitable tenant needs to be chosen; one that can fully utilize the potential of the space. Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality as the owner of the building will provide funding for the Tshwane Cultural Centre as well as the Boswell Wilkie Circus in order to train people in both craft and performing arts.

Tshwane Cultural Centre already established in the Entrance Foyer of the Capitol theatre, the centre provides a platform for local artisans skilled in beading, sewing and millinery to trade goods. Some of the artisans affiliated with the centre will transpose part of their business to the Capitol in order to aid people in developing skills.

The Boswell Wilkie Circus is the anchor tenant of the auditorium, using it as a practise arena and performing both in the auditorium as well as the *extended interior*. Suzie Wilkie current owner of the Circus is to establish a school for those that aspire to become performers; special interest will be taken in children that are disadvantaged. "Don't beg, perform, I have made a few people world-class international performers" (Suzie Wilkie, 2009).

A design will be developed for the Boswell-Wilkie Circus. Even though the Circus becomes the resident tenant of the space, the intervention must still be flexible enough to accommodate other functions such as:

- Minor theatrical productions
- Car launches
- Fashion shows
- Conferences
- Club events
- Music events

5.2 Overview of the Circus

Verse:

When the pill your doctor gave you
Turned your cold to the grip
When a stitch to save nine others
Comes apart with a rip
When the rats invade your attic
And start leaving your ship
Follow my tip - come away on a trip

Chorus:

Just join the circus like you wanted to
When you were a kid
Climb aboard before it moves on and you'll
Thank your lucky stars you did
Go to bed in Cape Town and wake up in Pretoria
Pack your roll, your brush and your comb
And get-ready to roam
And get-ready to stray
Bless your soul you'll never go home again
Boswell-Wilkie Circus is here to stay!

Instrumental:

I joined the circus as I wanted to when I was a kid
Climbed aboard before it moved on and you
Bet your life I am glad I did
Went to bed in Cape Town and woke up in Pretoria
Packed my roll, my brush and my comb again
Ready to roam again, show me the way
Bless my soul I will never be the same again
On the day I joined the circus
The famous Boswell-Wilkie Circus
Step right this way and join the circus
Just keep in step and follow the band
And join the circus like you wanted to
Boswell-Wilkie Circus will come your way.
(Boswell Wilkie Circus Program: 1997)

The circus has its origins in England, developed in the 18th century by Phillip Astley, a



former cavalry Sergeant-Major turned showman. Upon retirement, Astley used his knowledge of training horses as a form of entertainment. Astley established a riding school in London, where he would teach in the morning and perform in the afternoon. During this time, commercial theatre in London was developing and Astley would open up the circular arena inside the school to the public. This arena he termed the circus, naming an idea derived by other 'trick-riders' (Circopedia.com, 2009). The circus ring allowed the audience a perfect view of the performers (Figure 5.2), as the horses cantered around the ring. In the late 18th century, Astley, now more famous for his circus than his school began to incorporate other 'fantastic' acts into his show. From this school, students became competitors and established circuses in Russia and America. Performances were initially given in permanent buildings whose flamboyant nature rivalled that of theatres. The travelling circus developed in the United States in response to a demand to make circuses more accessible. Due to the fact that it is a visual performing art, language barriers are easy to bridge thereby making it applicable to and enjoyable for everyone. Early circus companies, realizing this, embarked on extensive international tours (Circopedia, 2009). This established a global circus family within a global phenomena before the concept became commonplace. As the interest in exotic animal's increased, zoological exhibitions became part of the travelling circus, and the exotic animals were incorporated into the shows shortly thereafter. According to Circopedia (2009) the travelling circus reached its height of popularity between the two world wars but remained established and popular in permanent buildings within large cities.

In 1975, Prince Rainier of Monaco created the International Circus Festival of Monte-Carlo, which on an annual basis would hold the 'Gold and Silver Clown Awards', an equivalent to the Oscars in the film industry. This was followed in 1977 by Paris's World Festival of the Circus of Tomorrow, created to showcase and promote a new generation of circus performers, mostly trained in circus schools (Circopedia, 2009)..

The circus in South Africa is relatively young compared to that of its international counterparts. Originally from New Brighton, England, W H Wilkie arrived in Durban complete with his circus. Wilkie's Great Continental Circus took South Africa by storm, featuring top class international artists. A travelling circus from the beginning, red and yellow trucks made an annual tour around the country. In 1972, W H Wilkie bought the shares in Boswell Circus and the Boswell Wilkie's Great Combined Circus was formed. Due to the size of the circus, railway travel became the main means of transport for the performers and animals. In the 1980's, the Wilkie's son established his own circus and the two amalgamated in the late 1980's. The Boswell Wilkie Circus is currently headed by Suzie Wilkie, the daughter of W H Wilkie. Born into the circus, Suzie Wilkie began performing at the age of three and continued up until the circus's last performance in 2001 (Circus.co.za, 2009). Schooled at a boarding school, she returned to the circus during the holidays, going to whichever town they were performing in. Since 2001 Suzie Wilkie has attempted many performances, but as a result of their location and the expense of advertising, performances have not always been well attended (Suzie Wilkie, 2009).

According to Suzie Wilkie (2009), the circus began to decline in the early 1990's as a result of: travelling costs, maintenance costs, payment of international acts, as well as a surge in animal rights, even though the Wilkie Circus insisted that all their animals were part of their circus family and were treated very well. Location also became a problem. With the expansion extending the skin



Figure 5.2 The interior of the Cirque d'Hiver during an equestrian performance.



Figure 5.3 Performer from Beijing Circus performing for Boswell Wilkie Circus



Figure 5.4 Suzie Wilkie

of cities over the decades, the circus was forced to set-up further away from the city. With the expense of advertising, many people did not even know the circus was performing in town. In 1994, when the no animal Chinese Circus joined the circus, the public stayed away due to the lack of animal acts.

In 2001, the Boswell Wilkie Circus performed their last show in Alberton, to a tent full of circus fans. During this closing performance, interest in the Circus soared once again, as people realised they might never see the circus travelling around the country again. The revenue generated, however, was not enough to bring the return of the travelling circus. Suzie Wilkie (Figure 5.4) describes the circus as a global family; that no country has a specific circus tradition can be attributed to the fact that circus companies have always, and continue to travel the globe sourcing various acts. In her opinion, the Boswell Wilkie Circus is dormant and when suitable it will return. Still part of the international circus family, Suzie Wilkie continues to judge at various circus competitions around the globe (Figure 5.7).

5.3 Conclusion

The decline of the circus has reduced its identity to that of only a thought. Most children know what a circus is, but have never experienced the actual event. Opportunities for performers and aspiring performers have also declined. The need for a social circus in Gauteng is great; one such circus is Zip-Zap in Cape Town, "but they have sponsorship to help them aid children, if I could find a sponsor it would be a privilege to start A Boswell Wilkie Circus school", (Suzie Wilkie, 2009). Trainers train children, and some have the possibility of becoming world class performers (Figure 5.5). Suzie Wilkie (2009) believes that children should perform, not beg, although the intention of the social circus is for it to be accessible to everyone. The Capitol Theatre is ideal for a social circus or circus school. Boswell Wilkie is the tenant required to establish such a school. In collaboration with an outreach programme from 'Cirque du Soleil' known as Cirque du Monde, staging circus workshops jointly with community organisations that reach out to youth.

"Cirque du Monde is unique since it is based on a pedagogical approach that brings together artistic expression and social intervention. The programme calls for the involvement of circus artists who wish to use their talents from a social perspective, and social workers who want to integrate circus arts into their initiatives with youth" (Zip-Zap, 2009).

With its established name, experience and dedicated owner, the Boswell Wilkie Circus can once again begin to recruit its staff and also source international acts. Being housed in a building within the CBD will help establish the school in the community, not only of the city, but beyond its borders. The circus school will also be able to collaborate with the Tshwane Cultural Centre which employs local craftsmen, such as tailors and bead workers. People can be trained in these crafts and assist in the making of costumes for the performers. With its various clients, Capitol becomes a joint initiative to reintroduce the fantastic and empower people.



Figure 5.5 South African act from the Boswell Wilkie Circus



Figure 5.6 Flying Trapeze performers from Beijing Circus performing for Boswell Wilkie Circus



Figure 5.7 Global Boswell Wilkie Circus family comprised of local and international acts. "I have many friends all over the world, some I have seen after twenty years at international circus events" (Suzie Wilkie, 2009)