

Constitutional Court, Braamfontein

by OMM Design Workshop

The Constitutional Court forms part of the Constitutional Hill development on the Braamfontein Ridge in Johannesburg. Intended as a symbolic new public place for the city, it also breathes new life into the surrounding precincts of Hillbrow and Braamfontein. Together with the Human Rights Commission, museums and the historic prison, the Constitutional Court has already become an important tourist attraction for the city. An international competition for the design of Constitutional Hill was held, and OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solution's scheme was chosen as the winner out of 185 received entries.

One of the architects' objectives was to integrate the "impenetrable prison precinct into the Johannesburg city grid." (*Makin, 2004*) Movement and connection across the site was important to connect Hillbrow and Braamfontein. Another important aspect was the interweaving of past and present. Bricks of demolished prison buildings were retrieved and re-used, and stair towers of the old prison were incorporated into the design. (*Makin, 2004*).



Figure 5-1 Constitutional Court at dusk. (*KZN, 2004*)

The Constitutional Court consists of the foyer, the gallery, the court, law library and administration, and judges chambers. The Precedent Study focuses on the public foyer and gallery. Both these spaces become showcases for South African artists, with artworks that were incorporated into the design of the building.

The foyer was designed as an abstraction of a tree canopy: "The shade of a tree as a place of communal gathering" (Makin, 2004) Light falls through glass splinters in the concrete flat roof to create dappled light. Columns are arranged seemingly randomly at angles to reinforce the tree image. Round columns turn square halfway and are decorated with splashes of colorful mosaic.

In the design of the Constitutional Court the architects managed to involve artists in the decoration of architectural and functional elements. This includes small artworks as part of the shading device on the Western façade, the above-mentioned mosaic work on structural concrete elements, as well decorative walls and doors.

Relevance:

The idea of artist involvement in the design and building process is a wonderful aspect of the Constitutional Court Design. This could enrich spaces and detailing. The ideal would be to involve artists as early as the concept stage of design, to create the opportunity for a true integration of artworks into the built form. The effective larger design team would however have time and cost implications, but it is a powerful idea with vast potential. Creating elements that are left 'blank', so to be decorated, is used in the City Building scheme.



Figure 5-2 Mosaic detail. (Roos, 2004)

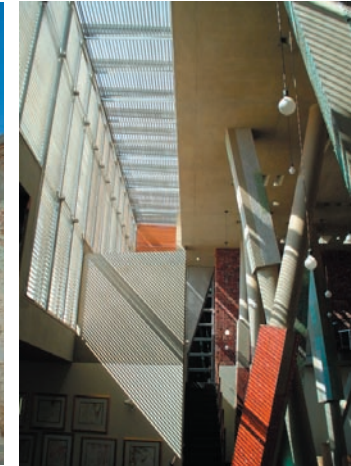


Figure 5-3 Filtered light and column detail (Roos, 2004)



Figure 5-4 Decorative sun-screen panels on Western Facade (Roos, 2004)



Figure 5-5 Remnants of demolished building incorporated in the design (Author, 2004)

Rosenthal Centre for Contemporary Arts, Cincinnati by Zaha Hadid

The Contemporary Arts Centre (CAC) is Pritzker Prize Winner Zaha Hadid's first major building in the United States. The museum is an urban building, in scale and appearance. It functions as a place to house artworks, but also breathes life into the surrounding city.

The design creates a new energy in the area, with an unmistakably contemporary and dynamic appearance. The "boxy outcroppings above the sidewalk" (Russel, 2003) seem to strain against the boundaries of the site. The concrete and slate finish and the irregular shapes bring a new aesthetic to the existing building fabric. Despite this the scale of the building and the simple planes and finishes seem appropriate for a contemporary city building. It sits comfortably between the existing structures, and becomes a new landmark in the Cincinnati cityscape.



Figure 5-6 The Arts Centre in its surroundings (Halbe 2003)



Figure 5-7 Concrete outcropping above the sidewalk (Halbe 2003)

The interaction at street level is where the design becomes exciting. Hadid calls it an “urban carpet”:

“The surface of the street flows into the building and curves up into a dramatic vertical circulation, creating a continuous zone, L-shaped in section, of urban activity” (*Domus*, 2003). The idea of a vertical urban space and the dissolution of boundaries is manifested in a very simple way, and the architecture grows out of the street. The glazing at street level connects the interior and the street with uninterrupted views, contradicting the solid masses of the upper floors. In this way the street is not left behind on entry and the connection remains.

Relevance:

Whether the expressive and abstract shapes are suitable, and whether the building functions well as a museum is not important for the purpose of the study. The very tangible way in which the connection with the city is made is what makes this a good precedent for an urban scheme. Hadid manages to bring a new object to the city, that appears to have grown naturally out of the site's existing fabric.



Figure 5-8 The “Urban carpet” connecting interior and exterior (*Halbe*, 2003)

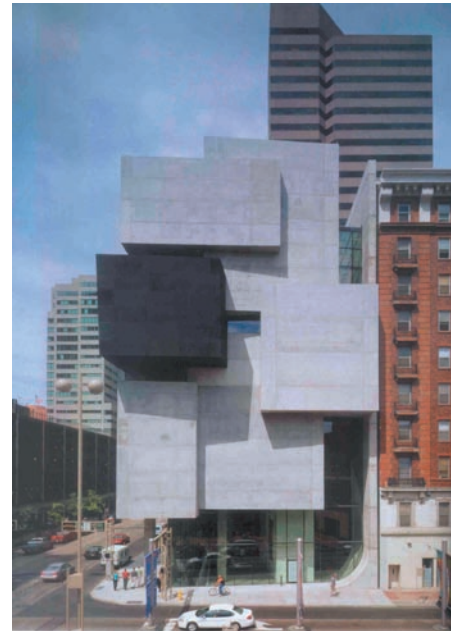


Figure 5-9 Simple planes of Hadid's Art Centre (*Halbe*, 2003)

Rosebank Arts and Crafts Market, Johannesburg

by Kate Otten Architects

Craddock Avenue passes between Rosebank Mall and the Zone Shopping Centre. Previously lined with informal traders, it was seen by Rosebank Mall as a security risk and deterrent for potential clients. The Mall purchased the portion of road from the city, and the Arts and Crafts Market was constructed in its place to “meet the needs of the developers, the informal traders and the greater community at large” (VAN WYK, 2001).

The building functions as an interiorised street, and is filled to the brim with Crafts from Southern and Central Africa. A total of 70 trade stalls fill the 650 sqm ground floor, while the 350 sqm top floor is used as a formal trading space and coffee shop. (VAN WYK, 2001) Craddock Street's direction of movement dictates the movement and organization through the building. Light falls into the double volume space through polycarbonate roof sheeting, and is filtered through a reed ceiling, reminiscent of North African streets. The overwhelming amount of crafts and the cramped stalls somehow seems just right for an African Market.



Figure 5-10 TCraft market interior
(Author, 2001)

Figure 5-11 The Craft market
under construction (Otten, 2001)

The building aesthetic is well suited to the function. It is an attractive building that depends on its appearance to attract visitors. The detailing is playful and exciting.

Unfortunately the building missed an opportunity to interact with its surroundings. Despite the fact that the façade to the parking area is aesthetically pleasing, it does not have a single door or opening that allows access from this side of the building. Movement is limited in the direction of the street axis. One could conceive an active edge, as opposed to the current approach of turning its back on potential clientele. It also seems that a market may want to expand and contract at certain times. This could easily have been part of the functioning of the building, but the chance has now been lost. The area around it seems somehow neglected, as if a measure of control, which is, from one viewpoint, contradictory to the nature of traditional African trade.

Relevance:

The Rosebank Arts and Crafts Market is a 'pretty' building, and the detailing is uniquely South African and arguably perfect for its function. The idea of an internalised African Street as a concept for the Market is a powerful one with potential that can be tapped. The realization of a need for expansion and contraction for an Arts and Crafts Market came through the precedent study.



Figure 5-12 Playfull Detailing (Otten, 2001)



Figure 5-13 Facade to the Parking lot (Otten, 2001)