

ARCHITECTURE

An American colleague once commented that you can push a pencil into the ground in Durban and it will grow into a tree. The balmy subtropical climate with its vigorous plant life has left the region with an exceptionally rich ancient history. Apart from Stone Age settlements and Iron Age smelters, when the foundations were dug for the **Mariannhill Monastery** a Sumerian coin up to 3000 years old was unearthed.

The first European settlers arrived in 1824 to trade ivory and hides with the Zulus under King Shaka. Henry Francis Fynn used mangrove poles to erect a wattle and daub shelter on a densely forested beachhead. This spot became the market square and remains the heart of the city (**Francis Farewell Square**).

Hunting wild animals remained a major source of income for most of the 19th century. Many streets, such as St Thomas Road, follow ancient elephant tracks, and Berea Park was originally cleared by Shaka for camping on hunting expeditions.

Enterprising traders ensured that the small settlement thrived next to its natural harbour. One such person was George Cato, who arrived aboard the *Trekboer* in 1838. He was the first mayor and a brickmaker, which allowed him to put up permanent buildings. Later he moved inland to establish a banana farm on what became **Cato Manor**. The brick foundations of his house remain, probably the oldest ruins north of Port Elizabeth.

Settlers arrived at the **Point** and built South Africa's first railway in 1860 to provide transport over the dunes into town. Later that year hundreds of Indian indentured labourers started arriving to work on

sugar plantations. They hoisted prayer flags, which is probably why the area is still called **Bamboo Square**. They also introduced exotic cultures, which remain the hallmark of the city.

Among the Indian settlers was Kistappa Reddy, a bricklayer, who built the **Mount Edgecombe Ganesa Temple** (1898), the oldest 'solid' temple in Africa. He later rose to great heights with the **Narainsamy Temple** (1906) one of dozens of Hindu Temples in and around Durban.

In 1863 the population of the Victorian town was five thousand, with two-thirds European. The first double-storey structure was the **Government Offices and Courthouse** (1865-6), built on the edge of the market square by Peter Paterson, the Colonial Engineer. This utilitarian building with wide eaves and a verandah now houses the **Local History Museum**.

Most buildings were small corrugated-iron cottages with intricate fretwork timber friezes. A handful barely survive in areas such as Marnevale Road, Seaview. The ornate public buildings came in various styles and now provide the finest selections in South Africa. **The Town Hall** (1881-4) by Philip Dudgeon, outside which the young war correspondent Winston Churchill made a famous speech, showed new planning ideas expressed in a controlled neo-Renaissance idiom. Nearby, the **Natal Great Railway Station** (1894), by William Street-Wilson was extended by two storeys in 1903 to incorporate a hotel. The pathetic remnants have now been recycled as offices on a traffic island, crowned by fibreglass, imitation copper cupolas.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi came ashore in 1893 en route to fight a legal battle in Pretoria. His political career was launched at the Pietermaritzburg station, and he eventually built an ashram at **Phoenix**, outside Durban, with his minute corrugated-iron cottage, Sarvodaya, as a centerpiece, (see Bhambayi and Gandhi).

A building boom followed the Anglo-Boer War, as the port reaped the benefits of its new rail connection to the Witwatersrand, an axis that still makes it by far the biggest port in Africa. The Edwardian architects changed to more solid forms of construction. Tuscan-Doric columns replaced verandah posts and neo-Baroque was the favoured style for public buildings, notably the new **City Hall** (1903-6), the contract for which, was won in a competition by Scott, Woolocott and Hudson. A Kimberley mining magnate built his wife a beach cottage called **Atherzton** (1903), in the vernacular style, on the fashionable Florida Road. It was designed by William Emery Roberts the first President of the Natal Institute of Architects. Today this building, and its two neighbours, 303 and 309 Florida Road, all restored and recycled to commercial use, form a group of Edwardian villas set among tropical trees.

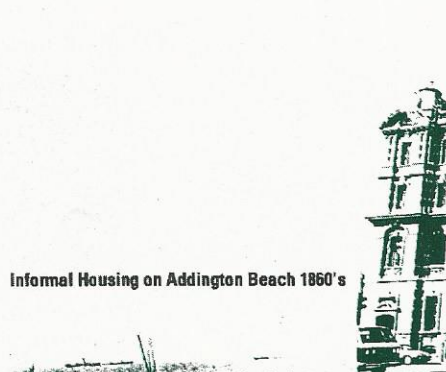
During the **Union Period**, from 1910 until World War II, Durban architects explored widely for styles and idioms to express the confidence of unification. The city was spreading rapidly, swamps being drained and bush cleared. Commercial buildings were designed in the **Union Classical Style**, with its giant orders and heavy cornice treatment, to express security (**Standard Bank**, Commercial Road, and **The**

Hub [1910], West Street, both by Ing Jackson).

Other architects turned to the East for inspiration, copying an eclectic array of Mogul entrances, domes and 'chattris' to respond to the heterogeneous population, see for example the **Jumma Masjid** [1926] by Payne and Payne, the largest mosque in the southern hemisphere. The so-called **Berea Style** was a parochial response to Spanish Revival characterised by hipped roofs with wide eaves, covered in Marseilles tiles, tiled floors, Roman columns and glazed-tile decoration. The prime example is **Quadrant House** (1934) on the Victoria Embankment, designed by AA Ritchie McKinley, reputedly as a naval academy and since recycled into offices by a shipping company. This formula was particularly successful for blocks of flats, notably **Musgrave Mansions**, by the same architect.

The rich ornamentation of **Art Deco** was enthusiastically imported from New York and Paris by the versatile McKinley in the **Enterprise Buildings** (1936), Aliwal Street. Another notable example is **Surrey Mansions** (1934) in Currie Road, by Langton and Barbour. The development of commerce gave rise to the **Colonial Mutual Building** (1931) in West Street, by Hennesy, Hennesy & Co of Sydney, the country's first "skyscraper", with Art Deco images of Africans and beasts.

Fine examples of the **International Style** also remain, especially houses in Glenwood designed by young graduates of the University of Witwatersrand (**House Freed** [1936] by Kallenbach, Kennedy & Turner and **House Kentridge** [1940-1] by



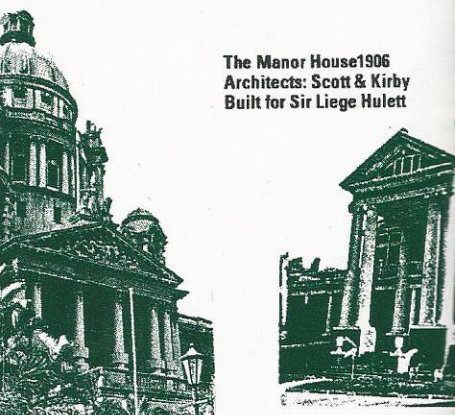
Informal Housing on Addington Beach 1860's



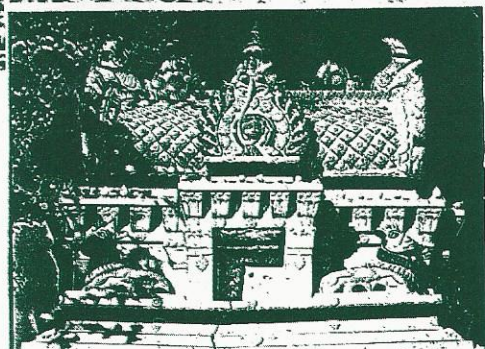
Natal Great Railway Station 1894
Architect: William Street-Wilson



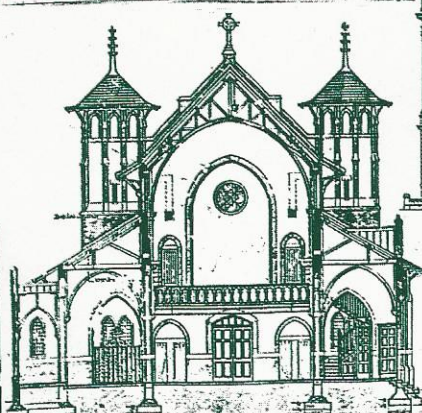
City Hall 1903-1906 Architects: Scott, Woolocott and Hudson



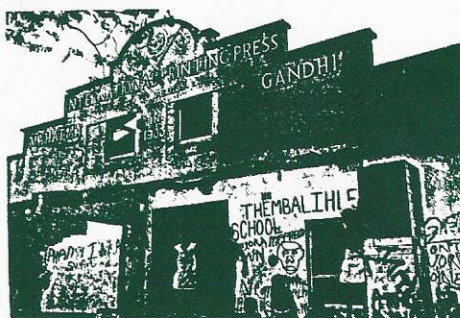
The Manor House 1906
Architects: Scott & Kirby
Built for Sir Liege Hulett



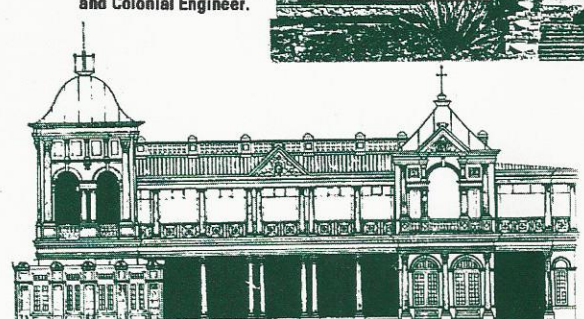
Mount Edgecombe Ganesa Temple
Architect: Kistappa Reddy



Emmanuel Cathedral 1903
Architects: Street-Wilson and Paton



Mahatma Gandhi International Printing Press 1903



Kings House 1902.
Architects: Scott & Kirby
and Colonial Engineer.

Durban Club 1863-1904

Clement Fridjohn, both in Princess Alice Avenue). The finest example, the **Natal Technical College Students Union** (1938), by Ian Park-Ross, was recently demolished after a protracted battle to make way for a freeway.

By mid-century the city had reached its next stage. Hundreds of square kilometres of vleis and marshes had been filled. The Berea had hundreds of Marseilles tiled houses graded upward from cottages to the mansions above: **Kings House** (1902) by Stott & Kirby in association with the Colonial Engineer — recently restored for visiting heads of State — and **The Manor House** (1906), for the Hulett sugar magnates, by the same firm of architects. The latter has also recently been restored, with the 50 bedrooms pared down into professional offices.

Apart from blackouts and huge gun emplacements, World War II was notable for troop convoys, who had their last fling at the **Playhouse** (1931-9) an 'all-Elizabethan experience' designed by P. Rogers Cook, company architect for African Theatres Limited. This building is one of Durban's landmarks and was altered into an opera house and theatre in 1985 (Small, Pettit and Robson).

After the war there was a severe shortage of accommodation for black workers in the burgeoning industrial sector. Indians who had taken over **Cato Manor** were landlords, and with the advent of apartheid the government saw its opportunity to move Africans north to **Kwa Mashu** and Indians south to **Chatsworth**. Row upon row of identical small houses in neighbourhood units demonstrated the advent of modernism. Cato Manor was left as a vacuum. Another interesting influence came

from **Brazil**, a country with similar climactic and social circumstances. Barrie Biermann spent time there as a student. When he built **House Biermann** (1956), with its curvilinear white-painted walls and lush tropical vegetation, semi-circular showers, tiled floors and huge doors allowing total interpenetration of space, generations of students were influenced by this blending of Brazil and the Cape. The imaginative use of recycled materials, such as cast iron, was another feature of the landmark statement. On a commercial front, the same Brazilian flair can be seen in the work of Issy Benjamin, for example **West Point** (1957).

Internationally acclaimed architect Norman Eaton designed **The Netherlands Bank** (1965) in Smith Street. Draped in a ceramic, verdant green brise-soleil reminiscent of the original coastal bush. This constituted a remarkable regional response was a lesson to developers.

More internationally accepted versions of modernism are: **Ice Skating Rink** (1956) by Hermer and Carrington, with its bridge-like, exposed trusses now threatening to fail; the simple concrete, barrel vaulted **Albert Park Restaurant**, the **Tropicale** (1960) by Cameron, Phillips and Diamond, now clumsily recycled into pink painted kitsch; and the **Durban Ocean Terminal** (1960) by MS Zakrzewski and Partners, since converted to offices.

Hans Hallen and various partners rose as a dominant force in the '60s, especially with his low-rise, medium density housing (**Drostdy** [1963], Silverton Road, and **Musgrave Mews** [1963], Musgrave Road). Hallen was later influenced by associates returning from post-

graduate training in the US and importing ideas, such as off-shutter concrete (Danie Theron, Lance Smith). Another important trend started in the '70s with the emergence of an appreciation for the genius loci in Durban. In 1971 the Natal Institute published *Interim Report on Indian Temples in Durban*, and in 1974, as a response to the carnage caused by new developments, *The First Listing of Important Places and Buildings*. This strong lobby has been responsible for important developments such as **The Workshop** (1986), by Bentel Abrahamson in association with Hallen Theron and Partners.

The creative genius of Dookey Ramdarie (see ADA 3) with his pop art **Bus Factory, Terra Cruiser** (1971) and **Ship House** (1981) is an important contribution to the architectural mix.

Hallen and his partners moved into larger projects, notably the award-winning **Huletts Group Offices** (1981), a large inverted verandah house floating over canefields. **The Mangosuthu Technikon** (1975), although strictly an apartheid building, demonstrated the importance of architecture rather than mere shelter in upliftment programmes.

In 1980, research into **informal settlements** by Errol Haarhoff revealed 75000 informal dwellings within a total population of 1,5 million. In 1985, Gandhi's **Sarvodaya** was pulled apart for building materials when a mob invaded Phoenix Settlement. Morris Fynn, a direct descendant of Henry Francis Fynn, was jailed for hacking down beach apartheid signs.

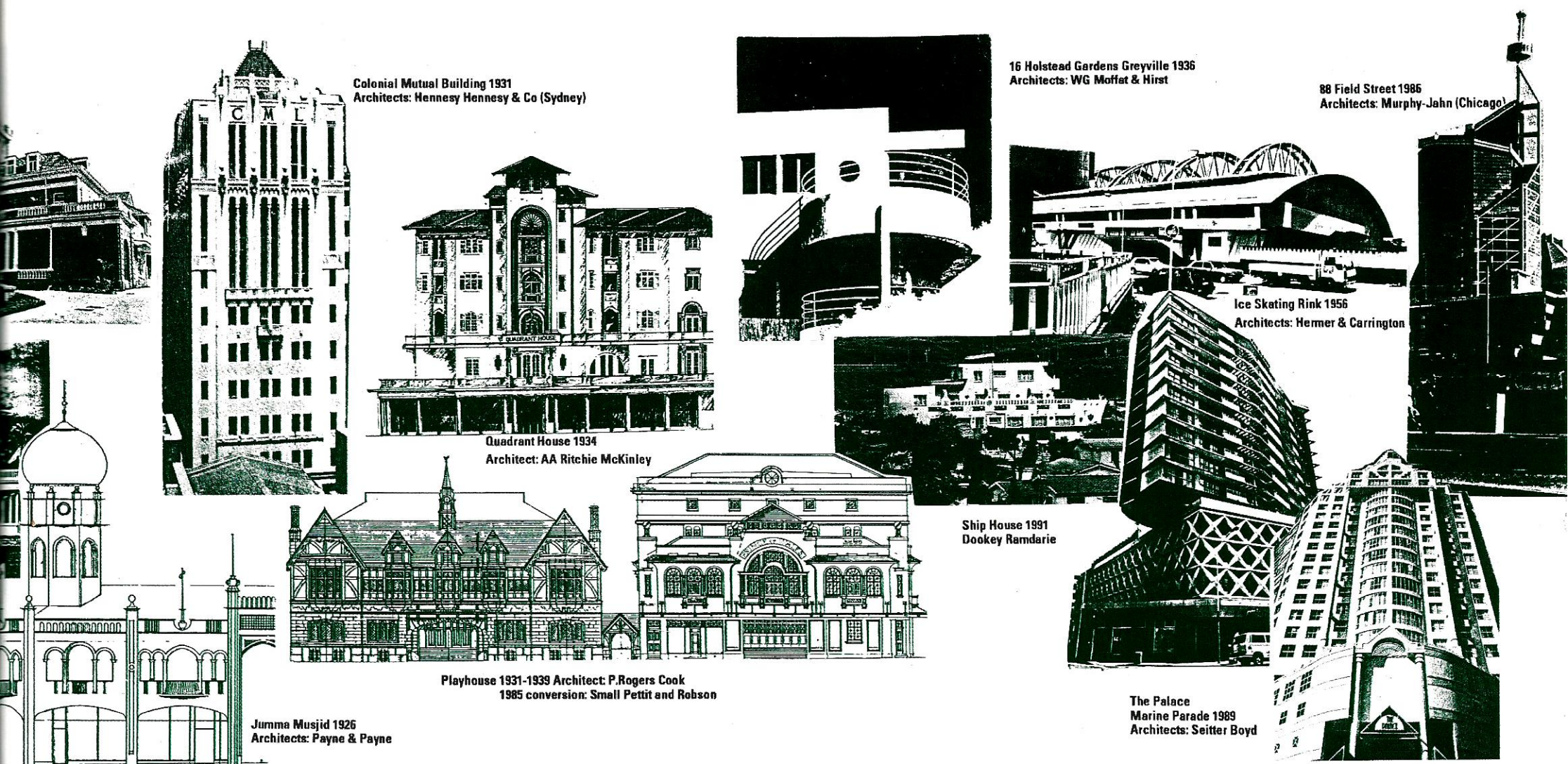
Contemporary overseas styles, such as the ornamented symmetry of

Post-Modernism (**The Palace** [1989], Marine Parade, by Seitter Boyd), and **Late Modernism**, with its highly sculptural control of abstract geometry such as the "decorated shed" of **Action Bolt** (1989), by Elphick Proome, were used during the '80s. **88 Field Street**, by Murphy-Jahn of Chicago, is a direct import. **Deconstructivism** has been limited to student drawing boards.

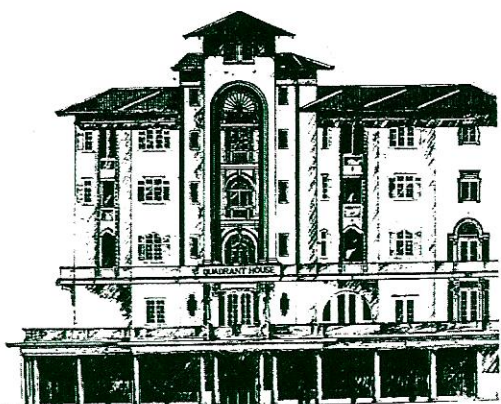
So where are we now? There is still plenty of work — Herman Kallenbach's office tower next to Francis Farewell Square was imploded to make way for a multi-million rand office tower. The city is now drained and agriculturally dislocated to the extent of cutting the Umlaas River through the Bluff so that the silt can discolour the sea, the last hippopotamus shot has been staring balefully out of a glass case in the museum for 100 years, Hans Hallen is in Australia, Errol Haarhoff is in New Zealand, and now one million people live in mud buildings in Greater Durban. Political liberalisation has revealed a highly inefficient city. Squatters are swarming into Cato Manor.

One important little building holds an answer. **Kwa Doti** (Place of Rubbish) community building (1993) off Kennedy Road, by Derek van Heerden, was built to uplift 'scavengers' who operate on the city dump. Carefully detailed on steep land among upgraded shacks it points to the reality of architecture as a process not merely an end product. Buildings change and architects need to change too; to become compassionate, to listen, to share and to survive.

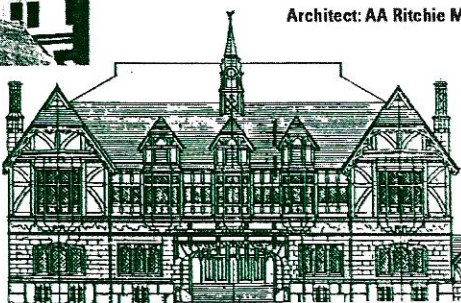
Rodney Harber



Colonial Mutual Building 1931
Architects: Hennesy Hennesy & Co (Sydney)

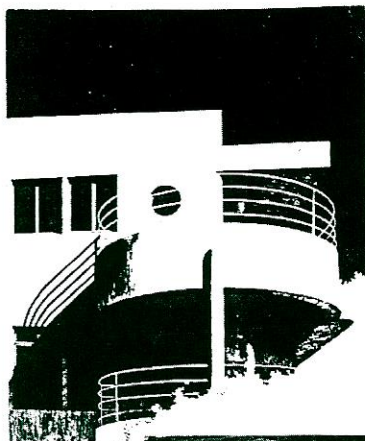


Quadrant House 1934
Architect: AA Ritchie McKinley



Playhouse 1931-1939 Architect: P.Rogers Cook
1985 conversion: Small Pettit and Robson

Jumma Masjid 1926
Architects: Payne & Payne



16 Holstead Gardens Greyville 1936
Architects: WG Moffat & Hirst



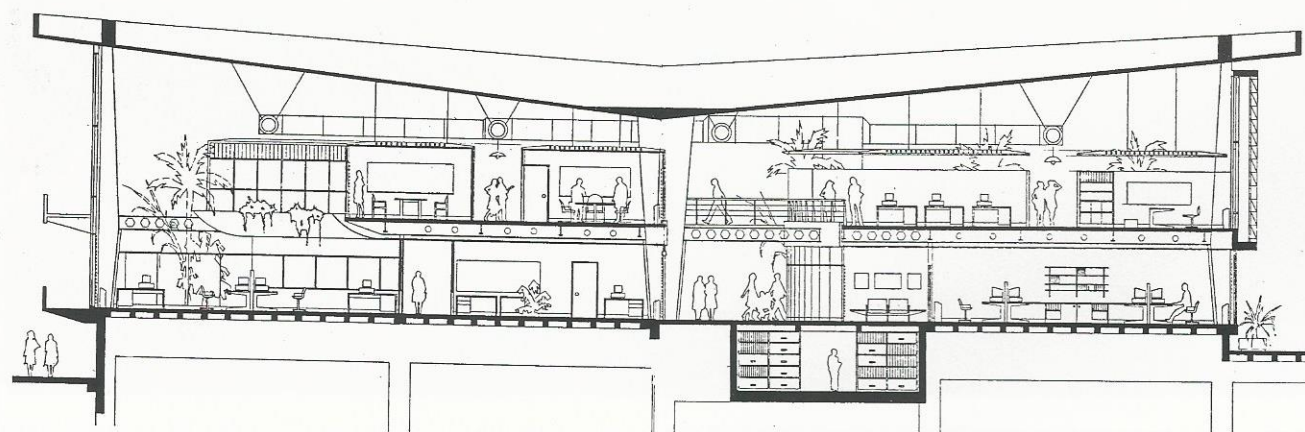
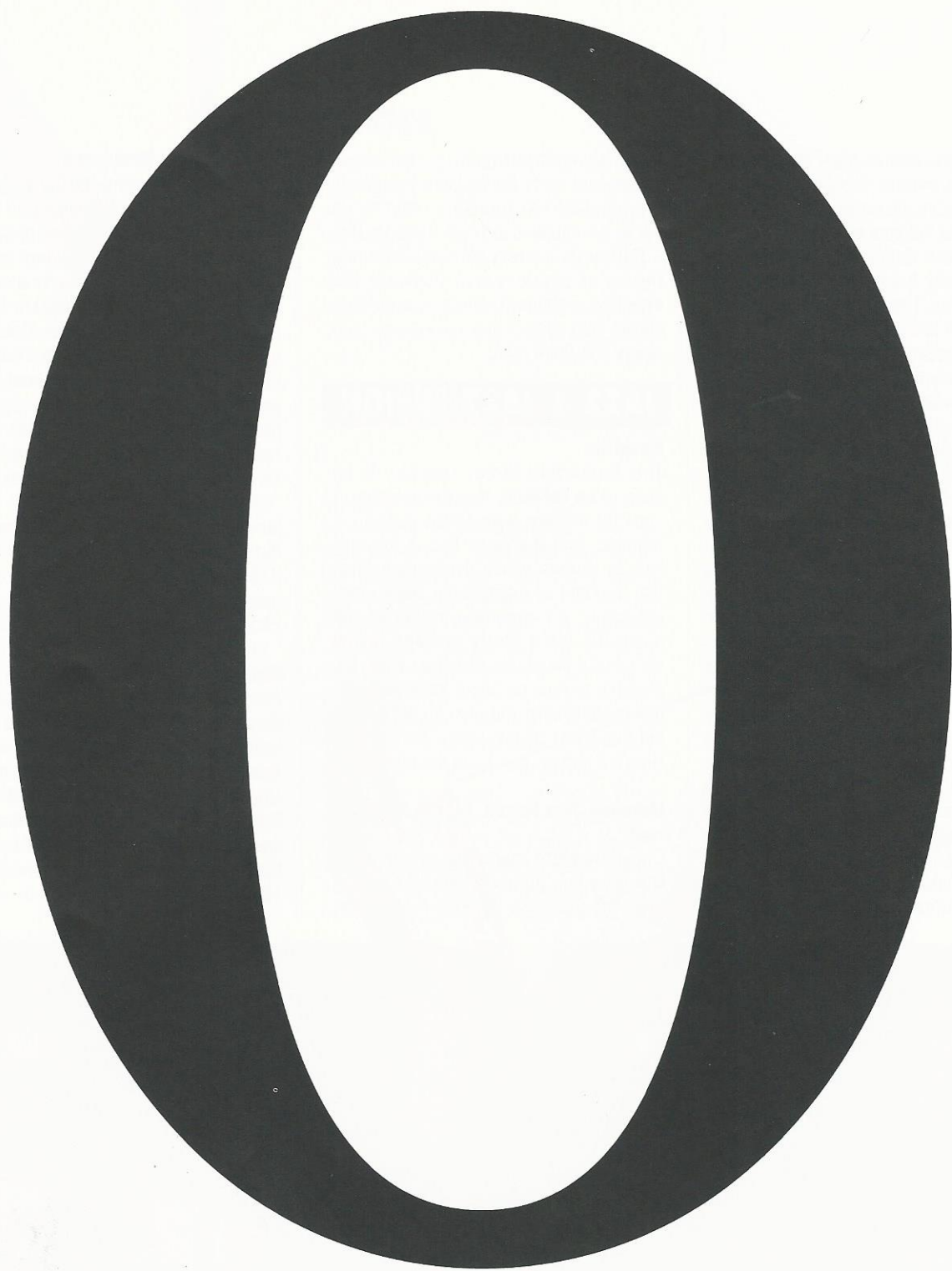
Ice Skating Rink 1956
Architects: Hermer & Carrington



Ship House 1981
Dookey Ramdarie

88 Field Street 1986
Architects: Murphy-Jahn (Chicago)

The Palace
Marine Parade 1989
Architects: Seitter Boyd



Section showing new structural steel mezzanine level inside the off-shutter concrete shell.

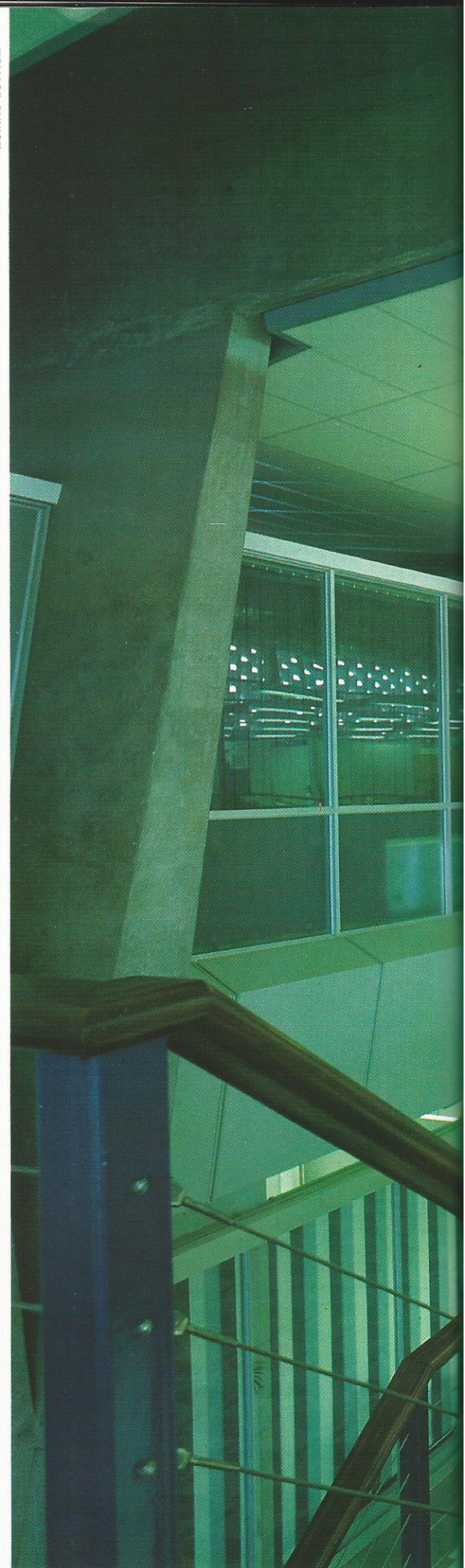
OCEAN TERMINAL REFURBISHMENT

"I built a strong man in concrete", said engineer Michal S. Zakrzewski on viewing architect David Stromberg's alterations to the Ocean Terminal Building in Durban Harbour, "and thirty years later you brought him a beautiful wife and wedded them together". It is not often that one designer compliments another, but the recently completed refurbishment of the old passenger terminal as office accommodation for Portnet, is particularly worthy of praise. Designed in 1960 by Zakrzewski, the Ocean Terminal Building, epitomised the Brasilia style common in many public buildings in South Africa at the time. The nine metre high customs hall the size of a football field, had fallen into disuse with the demise of mailship operations and had become somewhat of a white elephant — nobody knew what to do with the huge hall which had stood empty for a

number of years. Enter Protekon the dynamic consultancy that specialises in the reuse of Transnet's existing buildings. Part of Transnet, they were briefed to find a home for Portnet whose offices comprised a number of buildings scattered about the city. They found that they could convert the terminal building into flexible office space and the old N'shed into a facility for handling the customs and embarkation functions for liners using Durban as a port. As the existing building was a local landmark and of historical interest, the refurbishment took care not to detract from the qualities of the original architecture. A new entrance was added to the original arrivals hall and a new entrance counter provided. The entrance foyer leads into a double volume internal street which is the main access route, either side of which are mezzanine floors linked along their length by three overhead bridges. The curve on the western edge at either

end of the street allows for a range of vistas from the centre of the complex. Priority was given to natural light penetration which was achieved by setting the mezzanine floors back from the perimeter walls. Three-hundred employees now benefit from uninterrupted views to the outside. The interiors of the building have been detailed to create a ship-aesthetic. Hardwood decking and stair treads were salvaged from customs counters and baggage racks, and existing pendant light fittings were refurbished and installed in clusters above the central street. Stainless steel cables and turnbuckles distinguish the balustrades while blue steel I-beams and anodised aluminium fascias complement the off-shutter-concrete, aluminium and glass of the existing customs building. The architectural impact of this scheme is attributed to the effective interplay of the refurbished elements of the original scheme with the practical design and detailing of the new work.

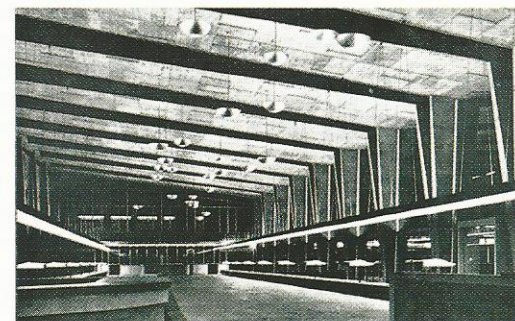
Ronnie Levitan



Ronnie Levitan



The new entrance to the Ocean Terminal Building.



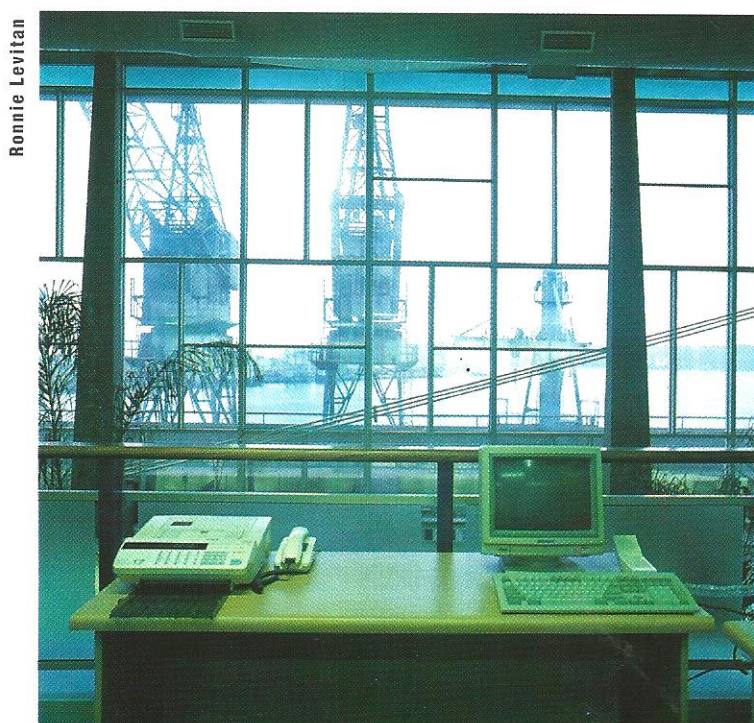
The interior of the Customs Hall before alterations.



View from the mezzanine level above the main access route. The floor is original, as are the refurbished light fittings. New elements are detailed in a sophisticated ship-aesthetic.



The Port Captain's offices, with the terminal hall in the background, part of the original Brazilia style scheme designed by Michal Zakrzewski.



The mezzanine floor is set back from the perimeter walls to maximise on light penetration and to provide views from the workstations.

OLD DURBAN FAMILIES

Can only be spotted by the public at race meetings and polo matches. Younger ones resemble Sloane Rangers; older women, QE2. All can be distinguished from the originals by their flattened Natal vowels which creep through any amount of elocution practice and boarding school. Their metropolis is England, the counties rather than London, and some even admit to connections with Scotland. They regard people from Johannesburg, of similar class provenance, as inferior, rather as the English landed aristocracy regarded people 'in trade'. They are secretly a little envious of Old Cape Families.

There are few entry points for aspirants to the club. Marriage is the most reliable. Nothing that a bit of sartorial adjustment and shoulder-rubbing can't cure. Then there is the 31 Club route. This excludes bad cooks and women whose husbands refuse to dress up as waiters. The thirty-one women raise admirable sums of money for various charities by hosting functions that are mainly for ODFs most of whom were once members of the 31 Club. A few outsiders have been known to slip through. Hilton and Michaelhouse rugby matches offer opportunities as well.

There is some debate about the legitimacy of Old Mauritian Families' membership of the ODF club but generally they are accepted as sufficiently exotic to enhance rather than threaten the lineages of exclusion.

No one is quite sure whether the ODFs are perpetrating their own fantasy of otherness or whether others have invented them as a butt for their own sense of exclusion.

Marianne Meijer



ORGAN

The organ in Durban City Hall is considered the finest in the country. Bought for £3462 in 1884, it is now valued at more than R4 million.

It was shipped from England and when installed in the then City Hall - now the Post Office — it stood 10m high and nearly 10m wide. It was moved to the new City Hall when the building was completed in 1910 and has since been enlarged several times. The instrument has been fitted with a new system of controls that allows visiting organists to select and store different stop settings, making it the most versatile organ of its kind in South Africa.

Marianne Meijer

Don Powell, city organist.