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KZN Amafa & Research Institute,
195 Langalibalele Str,
Pietermaritzburg

Dear Madam/Sir,

OCEAN TERMINAL, Durban

I am writing in connection with the proposed demolition of the Durban Ocean Terminal, to which I strongly object.

I am in receipt of the 'Heritage significance statement' prepared by Lindsay Napier & Paul Dekker dated 31 May 2021 (Napier) and the 'Durban harbour heritage scoping report' prepared by Rennie Scurr Adendorff dated 5 October 2022 (Scurr), to which my comments, below, refer.

I believe the significance of the architecture has been under-rated in both of the above heritage assessments; the extent of its segregationist planning misunderstood; and include additional comments for a more comprehensive evaluation.

1. Architecture and the significance of the Ocean Terminal

Le Corbusier provided the principal source of design inspiration. With approaches from North Africa and South America in the 1930s, and in pursuing new directions in his architecture, climate became a major preoccupation of his, although few projects were realised.

However, two of his works are particularly relevant to the design of the Ocean Terminal, the House at Mathes, 1934-5, with inward-sloping 'V' roof and gutter along the centre to sluice off the rain, i.e. a butterfly roof; and the unrealised apartment building in Algeria, 1933, with *brise-soleil* sun-protecting screen, flange walls and curved solarium crown.

The Ocean Terminal building is a giant *tour de force* of Mathes and Corbusier's High Court in Chandigarh, 1951-5; and the administrative tower derived from the prismatic Algerian building but poised on colossal concrete tapered V-poles, descendants of his Cité de Refuge, a Salvation Army hostel in Paris, 1929-33 (and simultaneously applied by Crofton & Benjamin in Farringdon, 87 Cato Rd, and Haven Court, 1959-60, Durban).

In comparison with concurrent developments on the scale of the Ocean Terminal, Johannesburg railway station, 1956-59, or that in Cape Town, 1960, the Ocean Terminal is unrivalled in design; stands head and shoulders above the few examples of late Corbusian architecture in South Africa, and the degree of artistic integration and affirmation of South African modern art possibly unprecedented.

The Ocean Terminal is thus not deserving of 3A grading (Napier), and with the finding of both buildings as "of the modern movement masterpieces in South Africa" (Scurr) not Grade 2 or Provincial significance either, but, with respect, and as the sole example of such building type with multi-function, this building is eligible for consideration at national level, Grade 1.

Its appurtenances, Schoeman's Bridge of similar creative design, L Shed and M Shed (MHA Building) are integral with the Terminal complex and cannot be separated. In addition, at age 60, all these buildings have weathered exceptionally well in that harsh environment, and for interest, the architects of KZN voted the Ocean Terminal the 6th most important building of 20c Durban (*KZNIA Journal* 1/2000).

2. As Apartheid was implemented in phases, architects had to apply the prescripts accordingly, the first being the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (1953). For example, besides ablutions, SA railway stations had segregated counters, waiting areas, bridges and platforms.

All our airports, Durban, Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha today), Cape Town and Bloemfontein, were built in the mid-1950s and included segregated restaurants and ablutions, as too did Eros, the

municipal airport of Windhoek, 1958, and also the Ocean Terminal in Durban. In all other matters the process was unified.

It was a decade later, 1965, when for topographic reasons the JG Strijdom airport was built 40km east of town, today Hosea Kutako International, that due to our tortured history the whole of the functioning in the terminal building was duplicated, from check-in to boarding, despite black passengers being virtually non-existent, and the aircraft of the monopoly airline, SAA, never segregated. The Ocean Terminal was saved such absurdity.

For interest, Strijdom terminal building, of the mould of Saarinen's TWA at Idlewild (today JFK, New York), lies mothballed. Whether it will experience a Cinderella awakening as e.g. an hotel like its precedent remains to be seen.

The publications of the Ocean Terminal do not indicate any distinction made for passengers of first class, which without doubt would have existed, no matter how surreptitious. For interest, Anhalter Bahnhof, one of the historical railway stations of Berlin, included separate waiting rooms and facilities for no fewer than four classes of ticket holders.

3. The demise of the use of the Ocean Terminal

Passenger aircraft flights did not put paid to Union Castle shipping services (Napier; repeated by Scurr). It was the jet aircraft because now Europe could be reached overnight.

As an example, in 1953, propeller aircraft to Europe took 4 days with numerous refuelling stops including three overnight. Interestingly, the first refuelling stop of BOAC (British Airways today) from Cape Town to London was Victoria West, which airport terminal was designed by the same architect as Eros in Windhoek, WW Wood.

4. Polish professional team

In including an obituary for Michal Zakrzewski (Zak) in *KZNIA Journal* 1/2000, the Durban engineer, Milek Masojada, now also late, explained that the clients, SAR&H, would not entrust the

project of such formidable scale and complexity to a small practitioner.

Having himself escaped WWII Poland in 1942, Zak had continued his studies and embarked on an academic career in London prior to accepting a position at the University of Natal in Durban in 1947 and commencing practice in 1952. Consequently, he recruited skills from among fellow Polish refugees he had met while in exile or through their networks. In that way the architects Jurek Brejowski, Witek Gessler and Janusz Warunkiewicz joined the team, as did Masojada, a student of Zak's at Natal. However, contrary to the anonymous internet obituary, Warunkiewicz, whom *The Architectural Review* identifies as "architectural assistant" (March 1963) had probably not come for any Polish stand (Napier) of which SA only had the Rand Easter Show to offer.

The Ocean Terminal is the most significant of the eloquent Polish contributions to modern South African architecture, created by a coterie, which besides the aforementioned, would include the engineer Jurek (Zank) Zietkiewicz and architects Maciek Miszewski, Roman Soltynski etc, who after WWII opted for South Africa, although Max Polikansky, here considerably earlier, should not be omitted.

5. Publications on the Ocean Terminal

The regular publication, *Public Works of South Africa*, featured L Shed in Nov 1959 and the Terminal in Jan/Feb 1962, which should also be consulted, and as the anodised aluminium doors of the Ocean Terminal were a novelty, *Architect & Builder*, January 1964.

Coverage in *The Architectural Review* of March 1963 was possibly a result of the visit to South Africa by its editor, [Sir] Nikolaus Pevsner, in November 1961, and indeed appears to have been the exception in the long silence (Napier) that followed the Commonwealth issue of October 1959.

Yours faithfully,



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