

HERITAGE STATEMENT

submitted in terms of

Section 41 of the KwaZulu-Natal Amafa & Research Institute Act, 2018, and
Section 34 of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25 of 1999,
for the total demolition of the structures on Lot 1387,
33 Moodie Str cnr McKenzie Str, eMkhomazi (Umkomaas).

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Fig. 1. View from east of the villa
on its large site at 33 Moodie Street
corner Mackenzie Street.

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Executive summary

The double-storeyed villa on Lot 1387 sits off-centre on its large site, which consists of two original lots subsequently consolidated.

There might historically have been a demand for such low developmental density, but after being recorded as partly occupied in 1997, this villa has now been unoccupied continuously for a number of years. By contrast, the property diagonally opposite has been densified with townhouses, which is the type of development a site so well located relative to the Indian Ocean today calls for.

With such densification in mind for the subject property, conserving the villa would most likely render it an empty villa, uninhabited because of the generosity of its spaces, and unfortunately, due to its compact planning around the central staircase, neither readily horizontally nor vertically subdivisible into two units, and it is certainly unwarranted as an administrative or service building. Besides, the space between the villa and Moodie Street precludes new development, while that between villa and side boundary unnecessarily constrains development.

Finally, this assessment finds that the villa is of low heritage significance despite of which the owners are prepared to appropriately repurpose salvaged materials and elements in the redevelopment and thereby retain some tangible memory of the old.



Fig.2. Map of Umkomaas with heritage resources by street address widely dispersed (Old South Coast Road Survey, 1997/8).

33 Moodie Str
cnr McKenzie
Str, eMkhomazi.

2. Location

The settlement of Umkomaas, named South Barrow until 1924, owes its origins to the harbour built in 1865 for the export of sugar. Although the harbour proved a failure, the coastal village took root. The town plan dates from 1897, the year in which the South Coast Railway from Durban reached the settlement.

A gridded layout of long streets and short cross streets was grafted onto the undulating promontory lying between the mouth of the navigable uMkhomazi River and the Indian Ocean, and defined blocks with 10 lots, 2 deep and 5 wide.

Barrow Street marks the ridge which runs east-west; Moodie Street runs parallel, lower down on the south; and the site in question lies on the corner of the cross street, Mackenzie Street. Between this block and the ocean lies the golf course.

3. The villa on 33 Moodie Street

The villa originates from ca. 1940 and the property carried the name Pierrefitte. The origins of the French name are speculative, but Pierrefitte-sur-Seine is the name of a northern suburb of Paris. The name could point to Franco-Mauritian ownership, perhaps associated with sugar farming, but this could not be substantiated.

The design was, clearly, for a discerning client, who commissioned a professional architect and a skilled building contractor, but in the absence of any municipally approved drawings the identity of neither party could be revealed.

3.1. Site layout

The villa was positioned off centre across two original lots of Moodie Street at the corner of Mackenzie Street. Pedestrian access commenced at the crossing of the two streets while horses or vehicles would enter on the western end of Moodie Street, between the villa and the original outbuilding, which lined the street boundary. The villa was then misaligned with the cadastre of the streets to directly face the cardinal points, which allowed the principal habitable rooms the benefits of the favourable east and north sun. The prized north-east orientation was given over to loggias on both floors from which to overlook the large property and enjoy distant views over the Ocean.

3.2. Exterior

The hipped roof is covered with Marseilles tiles, the external walls are of clay facebrick bedded in lime mortar, with special shaped 'single bullnose of narrow radius' bricks to every corner. The sole interruption to the double storey walls is the plastered course with cornice, which marks the position of the first floor. The building is elevated on a ventilated plinth, with the suspended floors

Fig. 3. Site plan clearly showing the villa placed off centre and outbuildings that line the street and side boundaries respectively at left.

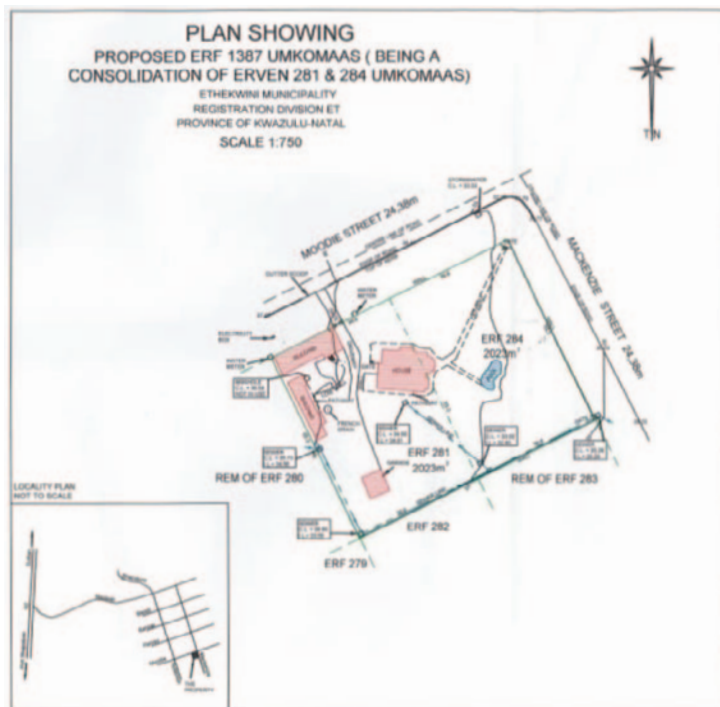


Fig. 4. East elevation of the villa on 33 Moodie Street.





of timber, probably Oregon Pine, on piers and joists. Instead of attached verandas, the building has loggias on each floor, integrated in the design, from which views of the Ocean can be enjoyed. The sash windows are of leaded lights ie small sections of glass supported in lead comes.

The outbuildings line the western end of the boundary on Moodie Str and a return along the western side boundary. These are much altered and partly desecrated.

3.3. Interior

The villa of double storey is entered from the west, which access two palms mark. To either side of the generous staircase (ahead) lie the dining room (right) and living room (left), each with a bay window facing east and north respectively, and



the hallway stretches to give access to the east-facing loggia, as too does the living room. On the upper floor bedrooms follow that pattern, also with bay windows, and in regard access to the upper loggia.

French doors filled with coloured or stained glasswork to Art Nouveau designs open to the verandas on both floors, and the four examples are identical, which identifies the artistry as not custom designed but [mass] reproductions of a type.

Above left & right:
Fig.5. Vehicular entrance to 33 Moodie Str between the villa (background, centre) and the outbuildings (right) that line the western end of the street boundary.

Fig.6. View from inside the property. At left is the desecrated portion on the western side boundary; at right the obverse of the portion lining Moodie Street.

Left: Fig.7. West elevation.



Fig.8. Wooden three-legged newel staircase.



Fig.9. The large Art Nouveau window illuminates the staircase.



Fig.10. Detail of the Art Nouveau glasswork to a French door.



Fig. 11. The view from the upper loggia. Note the rounded bricks of the pillars.

Fig.12. Note the special bricks at top and bottom of the balustrade apertures.



Fig.13. One of the two extant light bowls, possibly originally gas lit.

Right: Fig.14. Living Room chimney surround of prefabricated concrete blocks, which would have been ordered from a catalogue.

Fig.15. Chimney surround in dining room. The suspended timber strip flooring is most likely of Oregon



4. The surrounding environment

The street boundaries of 33 Moodie Street are marked by a ‘castellated’ facebrick wall of more recent date, and the site is treed, profusely along Moodie Street.

In conclusion, the surroundings lack the substance for consideration as a conservation area or heritage overlay zone, and there is therefore no need for the articulating of design indicators for any proposed new development.



Fig. 16. View from the pedestrian entrance on the corner of Mackenzie Street (left) up along Moodie Street i.e. the north aspect of the subject site. The Fever trees would have been planted more recently.



Fig. 17. Obverse view from inside the property with Moodie Street (at left) and the villa (right).



Fig. 18. The somewhat delapidated premises immediately opposite on 32 Moodie Street seen from Mackenzie Street.



Fig. 19. The property diagonally opposite on north, has been densified with townhouses, which is the type of development the subject site, so well located relative to the Indian Ocean, today calls for. Mackenzie Street at right; the junction with Moodie Street is marked by the Stop sign ahead.



Fig. 20. View eastward from the subject property on McKenzie Street across the golf course to the Indian Ocean.

5. Heritage assessment updated

5.1. ‘Old South Coast Road (R102). Survey of buildings of architectural and/or historical interest, 1997/8’

Based on the survey of 1997/8 carried out by the author hereof, the villa on 33 Moodie Str was deemed ‘significant’ and therefore included as a Listed Building of KwaZulu-Natal due to its identification as an “important example of a building type” (p. 69) and recommended also for entering on the National Register.

Having gained access to the property and the interiors of the villa after well-near three decades, which was formerly not possible, the above summary requires qualification.

The villa might remain an “important example of a building type,” but more particularly of the Arts & Crafts revival during the Union Period [of South Africa]. However, to find faux chimney surrounds and reproductions of Art Nouveau glasswork internally, has not enhanced the building’s significance. Neither has disuse, which is responsible for the deterioration of the fabric noted in 1997 as “good” but now in need of substantial repair and restoration, beginning with the roof structure. Besides, priorities in residential densities have changed, and with the injunction for development to address sustainable social and economic benefits, the days of a villa as a typology are now limited.

5.2 Incorporation into a new development

There is, nevertheless, at least one other villa, doubled storeyed and of facebrick, in the same position on next block westward, corner Moodie and Robinson Streets. This has sash windows and appears to be of later date, but importantly, it occupies only half an original lot.

With densification and new residential development intended for the subject property, the reuse of the historical villa has had to be explored, obviously on a smaller piece of dedicated land, like that afore. However, the generosity of the rooms leaves the subject villa generally too large for single family occupation, and due to its compact planning around the central staircase cannot be easily subdivided into two units, neither horizontally nor vertically, and it is certainly unwarranted as an administrative or service building let alone a janitor's base. Besides, the limited space between the villa and Moodie Street precludes any development there, while that between villa and side boundary unnecessarily constrains development.

5.3. Significance in terms of legislated heritage criteria

The question to be answered is whether outside of protection by Amafa, the structures on 33 Moodie Street could be considered for formal protection in terms of NHRA Section 34(2).

The criteria herefor is set out in Section 3 (3):

“a place or object is to be considered part of the national estate if it has cultural significance or other special value because of

- (a) its importance in the community, or pattern in SA's history;
- (b) its possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of SA's natural or cultural heritage;
- (c) its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of SA's natural or cultural heritage;
- (d) its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class of SA's natural or cultural places or objects;
- (e) its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group;
- (f) its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period;
- (g) its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- (h) its strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in the history of SA, and
- (i) sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in SA.”

While (i) is not in any way applicable, and similarly (b), for all other criteria except (f), the structures on 33 Moodie Str possess minimal or low levels of cultural significance. The Art Nouveau glasswork constitutes moderate significance under (f) and these and other artefacts the owners are prepared to carefully remove and repurpose where appropriate in the new development.

In summary, having inspected the villa, it is a less “important example of [its] building type”. While it could be integrated in a new development, the scale of its

spaces is out of kilter with today's demands and the building does not allow for sub-division to achieve such. Furthermore, its positioning on site negatively impacts redevelopment. Finally, given the finding of minimal or low levels of cultural significance, the site is today ineligible for consideration of either provincial heritage status or formal protection in terms of NHRA Section 34(2).

6. Recommendation

Following on from the above, and the injunction for development to address sustainable social and economic benefits, it is recommended that KZN Amafa and Research Institute issue a permit in terms of Section 34(1) of NHRA to allow for the total demolition of the structures on Lot 1387 at 33 Moodie Street, uMkomasi (Umkomaas).

There are, however, building materials and components that should be saved for repurposing in the new development or depositing with an historical building materials bank in terms of Section 48 (2) (b). These include the Art Nouveau glasswork; the newel staircase; the two extant light bowls; selected leaded windows, clay bricks especially special bricks and Marseilles roof tiles.



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Acknowledgement

The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful assistance of Mrs Joyce Sunker.

Declaration

Walter Peters is an emeritus professor of Architecture, an architectural historian and conservationist, and an accredited member of the Association of Professional Heritage Professionals.

This is a professional appointment free of any conflict of interest.

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