

# Architecture as a political tool for change

[Design](#), [Architecture](#)



## Red Location Architecture as a Political Tool for Change

*Could you speak about the context of the project-Port Elizabeth as a Port City and New Brighton as a Township?*

Port Elizabeth sits on the East Coast of South Africa and interestingly enough it was one of the first topographic points to be discovered by the Portuguese, on their geographic expeditions to the East. The metropolis sits on a big bay called Algoa Bay and offers great entree to the backwoods of South Africa.

It was truly given form in colonial footings by the 1820 Settlers but in the 20th century became the Centre of car industry of Africa and most of the world's major auto makers had assembly lines in Port Elizabeth. So it is a tough minded industrial town. You could state it is much like a company town, a spot like Detroit. It is a topographic point that ne'er had any industry to back up it, other than a port and the motor auto industry.

In the last portion of the 20th century it was the site of a great trade of internal battle, chiefly led by the trade brotherhoods, which were mostly responsible for the ruin of apartheid. You could state that the autumn of the apartheid authorities was made touchable by the opposition mounted within the state and it was the trade brotherhoods in Port Elizabeth who mostly shaped that.

So it is an industrial town with a strong and proud trade brotherhood history. It has had its ups and downs like all industrial metropoliss have had. The context of New Brighton so, is that it provides most of the labor for the car industry. The people who live there are ferociously proud. Obviously trade

unionism and trade brotherhood civilization is really much portion of the manner they see the universe and Red Location is an of import Centre in New Brighton. It is in a sense one of the few sites of battle in the state where trade unionism is really strongly marked.

The metropolis was best characterized by the early work of Athol Fugard, which were all set in Port Elizabeth. The plants truly dealt with a tough sort of urban Centre, where people struggled for endurance and managed to do sense of lives that were truly devastated by apartheid, and assorted other things.

It is a great metropolis but it is a metropolis that has ever had an unsure hereafter. The people are truly great, because most of them have merely knownadversity, so they don't have the same sort of outlook that people from Johannesburg, Cape Town or Durban might hold. They are much more down to earth and much more able to set up with less, with a batch more temper. I think it is one of the nicest metropoliss to work in.

*What is the significance of Red Location?*

Red Location was the first settled urban black community in the whole of South Africa, and it came approximately, oddly plenty through the Boer War. The edifices that comprised Red Location in 1902 really came from an Afrikaner concentration cantonment. At the terminal of the Boer War, the barracks were dismantled and were so taken to Red Location and re-assembled to originally suit a battalion of British soldiers, who shortly moved out. The first African black households so moved in.

So it is historically of import because it was the first African black community in the state. And for this ground it really became the Centre of the rational and cultural life of New Brighton, which grew to a community of, what is today, approximately half a million people. You had great figures like George Pemba, the creative person, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba and Ernest Malgas among others who are really of import people in our history who came from New Brighton.

It was besides a site of battle. In the late 1940s the battle against apartheid intensified, many of the leaders of that battle came from New Brighton and peculiarly the Red Location country. Things like the first resistance, armed MK cell existed in Red Location. The first inactive opposition against the base on balls Torahs was mounted in Red Location, led by Raymond Mhlaba, which took topographic point at the Red Location railroad station. So there were a figure of important events that truly mark Red Location as a national site of battle.

What for me is most interesting is this really self-contradictory inversion, where you have a set of infinities [ the barracks ] which were constructed for the captivity of Afrikaner adult females and kids. They were efficaciously concentration cantonments. About 30 five 1000 Afrikaner adult females and kids died in those concentration cantonments. Then after the Boer War they were re-assembled in a black country, where black households lived. So with the rise of Afrikanerpatriotism, you have Afrikanders, efficaciously incarcerating black people, in assorted different ways, in the same set of infinities.

So those edifices have gone through a figure of different battles. And in a manner it is a strong metaphor for this state, that in a manner, everyone in this state has fought for their freedom at one phase or another.

So the thought with Red Location was that it would be the ideal topographic point for a museum, which would cover truly with rapprochement. Where you could convey together the histories of the Afrikaner people and the histories of the black African people and show that they both suffered in different ways at different times, under different groups and governments. So it was in a manner about speaking about a existent signifier of rapprochement. It wasn't merely one group against another.

So the alone conditions of Red Location lent itself fabulously for a museum. Second Ernest Malgas, Raymond Mhlaba and Govan Mbeki wanted to happen some manner to maintain the memory of Red Location alive so that future coevalss would be able to understand what people had suffered, under apartheid.

So in a self-contradictory move, we thought, what better topographic point in Port Elizabeth than to utilize Red Location as the new cultural Centre of the metropolis. You have the site of battle that you so conveying people from different parts of the metropolis, to prosecute in cultural activities, where you have a museum which negotiations about all these different battles of a whole scope of different people.

And that is how the whole thought was born, which is a antic manner of believing about spacial transmutation. It truly reaches deep into the manner

in which people feel about their universes if you confront them with all these different histories. So that was the purpose that lay behind it and we are now seeking to do that into a concrete world.

*Could you describe the cardinal thoughts for the Museum and how the histories of Red Location or South Africa were represented in the Memory Boxes?*

The thought of the memory boxes was bound up with the inquiry of how to do a museum in modern-day South Africa that would be directed towards, a populace that may hold ne'er been into a museum before.

How could you describe the modern-day museum that would be accessible to a populace that might hold no construct what a museum is? And that's where the thought of the memory box came from.

It is something that we all know. It is bound up with the thought of standing for the yesteryear and which goes all the manner back to the Boer War concentration camp. One of the jobs with the concentration cantonments was that while, thirty five 1000 Afrikaner adult females and kids died an equal figure of black adult females and kids besides died in the camps. At the terminal of the Boer War, Emily Hobhouse wanted to do a memorial that would memorialize the agony of adult females and kids in the war. The Afrikaner patriots so, got clasp of that thought and they removed any mention to black adult females and kids and made the Vrouemonument, which became this powerful symbol in the rise of Afrikaner patriotism. So

they efficaciously rewrote history and excluded black adult females and kids in order to fulfill their peculiar nationalist involvement.

So I didn't want the Red Location museum to reiterate the same thing for black people, where the museum would state the narrative of the black people subverting the white people and so it would merely be a narrative about black triumph over white people. There were many white voices that had to be heard and there were many adult females that were involved. So I wanted to travel off from the meta-narrative, because when you tell a individual history you exclude excessively much, which is what the Afrikaner patriots did. So the memory box became a manner of interrupting up narrative of history into a series of episodes which are bound up about subjects to make with battle instead than a series of additive events. So it was both a political thought and a spacial thought.

*The new edifices within the precinct, and peculiarly the Museum, have a really distinguishable architectural linguistic communication. How did the physical and or political context of Red Location give signifier and form to the edifices?*

There were two things which I thought were of import. Firstly it was 1998 and the whole inquiry of what constituted public architecture and how public edifices be represented in the state was up for inquiry. There was, in a sense a antic chance, for this new beginning of doing new civic architecture and realising that, at that point in clip, the linguistic communication of the civic architecture of the yesteryear would be inappropriate for doing civic edifices of the hereafter.

One of the most interesting exercisings of that clip was the Constitutional Court, which truly had to make with a edifice which was a mixture of a whole batch of different things. And, in a manner, one could state that was a really clear representation of the thought that we are a really assorted heterogenous society and that the public edifices we make should reflect that. That was one attack.

I took a more political attack and truly wanted to give look to the epic histrions of the trade brotherhoods. In most parts of the universe the saw-tooth roof is seen as a symbol of topographic points where people are exploited and I thought possibly in South Africa there could be a different reading of it-that it could read as a topographic point where the battle was fought and won and that it could be a topographic point imbued with virtuousness.

This thought was proved to be effectual in three ways. First that it was a omnipresent signifier found throughout South Africa, it was symbolically associated with trade unionism and thirdly it was an effectual manner of ventilating and conveying visible radiation into the edifices.

So for the competition I designed seven or so edifices, and decided that the linguistic communication which would keep the edifices together, would be the thought of conveying visible radiation in through the roof, but the roof signifier would be changed and adjusted to accommodate the programmatic demands of the infinite below.



*The edifices have an inexplicit relationship to the street, made touchable through the interaction of people with the frontages. Could you elaborate on this?*

Well the urban scheme was to make an ten, a cross-road, which is the most straightforward signifier of tagging an urban infinite. One of the things I didn't want to make was to make public unfastened infinite, because public infinite has to turn and organize itself over clip, you can't do it immediately.

But it seemed to me that the best public infinite in South Africa is the street and the manner in which life happens along its borders. So what we did at Red Location was to reenforce the thought of street and where we make bigger infinities we merely created indentures in the edifices which come straight off the street.

This is nevertheless a comparatively new thought for public edifices in South Africa. The metropolis has for a long clip held the position that all public edifices had to be behind fencings. We confronted them on this and they were good plenty to give us the spell in front. And it has worked. Other than the uneven scratch here or at that place, the edifices have been good looked after by the people. So it seems to be a reasonably good scheme for doing public edifices.

For me the most successful move we made was the diagonal cut across the forepart of the museum because people really travel right into the infinite of the museum even though it is outside it still becomes portion of their day-to-day lives. They are really straightforward thoughts, it is non rocket scientific

discipline, but we seem to hold lost these things as designers because we make things excessively complicated, we move excessively far off from what is so obvious to us.

Then on a smaller graduated table the thought was to line the walls of the edifices with seating, shadiness and trees. One of the loveliest things I have seen take topographic point during summer eventides is outside the archive edifice. The seats that line the wall have a series of visible radiations above them and between them you have small dark infinites and I have seen about eight twosomes sitting in these darker pools, sitting at that place and spooning. This is like, their topographic point where they could acquire together, and I thought, this is merely the best thing that architecture could be-this topographic point where immature people can come to snuggle.

*The edifices have a house order, made explicit by the usage of the concrete frame. Be it the purpose to do the edifices adaptable or to suit multiple utilizations?*

That's a slippery 1. It was ne'er the purpose to do the infinites adaptable or mutable. That said, the museum is really frequently non used as a museum. A batch of the people sing the museum are go toing talks, book launches and even wine tasting. So the museum has become something much more than a museum but has become a Centre for community engagement the place of black intellectuals.

So I think if you make infinites that have a strong order and that order has a good proportion I think it can ever accommodate to alterations in usage over

clip. I think when you have fragmented infinities, which are strictly shaped by programmatic usage it becomes about impossible to adapt. But built-in in the design of the edifices is an overarching order and a system of proportion that would impart themselves to other utilizations if need be. They can be kicked around, they are robust.

*What informed the stuff picks?*

In general footings, when I make an edifice one is ever confronted with a million picks and you have to somehow bound yourself. What seems to do the most sense in making that is to merely utilize what is locally available. The metropolis has a authorization that all public edifices are required to hold a 50 % local labour constituent which meant that we had to plan edifices which were non overly-complex in their devising. We used concrete block which was made by the contractor. The pine is Tsitsikamma pine, which is a really beautiful wood from the nearby Tsitsikamma wood.

The other thought is truly a didactic 1. To state to the people who live in Red Location that we must travel off from this thought of sing where you live as a 2nd rate topographic point, but instead that stuffs used in your environment are baronial stuffs and when used decently can truly be used to do rather beautiful things. So it is non about the stuffs itself but how one uses them. And so it empowers people, to gain that if they build out of concrete block and pine they can really do truly nice palisading systems. So it is non about demoing up the sort of poorness but instead working with what is omnipresent to the country and promoting it to give it a signifier of pride and regard.

I frequently get asked by co-workers or other designers whether possibly people in Red Location would prefer the edifices to not be made with concrete block, pine and steel sheeting? But I have never thought of it in that manner, so long as they are put together in a pleasing mode. We as in-between category citizens seem to transport those biases more than anyone else.

On more micro graduated table there was a sense of seeking to happen a linguistic communication of stuffs that would reflect people's relationship with them. So the material that people would touch would be made from soft warm stuffs and the material that they didn't touch would be made out robust stuffs such as concrete, so where people would sit we would utilize lumber and line the walls with rug. So it was reasonably straightforward in that sense.

*The edifices are truly rather large, could you discourse this?*

One of the first unfavorable judgments we received about the museum was that it was excessively large and that the graduated table was incorrect. That it didn't transport a human graduated table. I have ever been rather amused by that thought, because somehow the thought of human graduated table, is something that worlds can make. But it isn't that. Human graduated table can be present in immense edifices, it is more about accomplishing the right proportions and composing of the parts.

One of the jobs with townships is that they have excessively much of one sort of graduated table, there is no alleviation at all from these individual

narrative edifices, so the thought of edifice large edifices in a township is great because you so acquire a apposition of graduated tables.

But one ever has to convey the graduated table down through the composing of the elements. It is the same thought as a Gothic cathedral, which has a monumental graduated table and as you move closer and closer you see more and more item, until you can finally follow the lineation of a saint which has been carved out of rock, with your fingertips.

It is that sort of grading of edifices which we don't have any longer, which is my job with say the work of Frank Gehry, who I think is a great designer, but his edifices have no graduated table. One could construct them at half the size and it would read in the same manner. I think that comes from the computing machine because the computing machine doesn't have a graduated table, and that's a great job we face.

*Last, you work a batch by manus. What is the significance or importance of this, both in your personal work and for architecture as a whole?*

I think through the act of pulling. There is nil that the computing machine can make that can replicatethat sense ofcontrol that you have by pulling by manus. Whenyou draw by the manus you connect with your head and your bosom, and it is an action that you can command. It has immediate graduated table, because you have a splanchnic connexion between your manus and your encephalon. So I truly believe it is of import. I think it is get downing to be rediscovered, you see in architectural diaries that are get downing to print tonss of drawings by designers, which is good.

It has besides got to make with a lesson I learnt from Pancho Guedes. He taught me that one should ne'er finish a drawing, but instead redraw and redraw and it is through the act of redrawing that the thought becomes more crystalline. I one time found Pancho redrawing a program he had worked on twenty old ages ago, and he was merely seeking to acquire it better and better, and that's how you learn.