

# Exhibition Review

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## *Modern Movement and the City - An exhibition from the Architecture Archives of the University of Pretoria*

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### Introduction

The hope is that the archive will continue to play a valuable role in the preservation of artefacts, the promotion of post-graduate research, the teaching of architectural design and history, support for professional practice projects, the training of students in conservation skills, and the fostering of local and inter-national heritage collaborations (Barker *et al.* 2016:9).

The Architecture Archives of the University of Pretoria (AAUP) contain a vast and under-explored collection of historical architectural drawings that represent the development of the Modern Movement in the South African context. A selection of highly significant drawings were recently uncovered by the AAUP curator and presented as a formal exhibition entitled *Modern Movement and the City - An exhibition from the Architecture Archives of the University of Pretoria* (hereafter referred to as 'Modern Movement and the City').

The exhibition (see Figure 1) exposed original archival drawings to a broad public audience, a unique gesture in the South African architectural scene that aimed to showcase the AAUP collections and contribute to current discussions across urban, architectural and historical themes. The selected archival drawings were positioned as a central feature of a larger exhibition reflecting on Pretoria's urban planning and architectural history. The drawings contributed to a reappraisal of both the historical genesis and future development potential of iconic twentieth century architectural projects, while encouraging the audience to engage with the archival drawings related to these projects as tangible historical artefacts worthy of preservation in their own right.

Published by



Exhibition review



FIGURE **Nº 1**



Visitors viewing the 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition at the AZA '18 conference at 012 Central in the Pretoria inner city (photo: Emmanuel Munano).

This review introduces the context for the making of this exhibition, discusses the architectural historical content of the exhibition, and reflects on the value of architectural archives relative to the legacy and discourse of the architectural discipline.

## A collaborative project

The goal is to not only to document significant buildings and spaces but also to look at their current role (or lack of it) in the inner city, to help define strategies for its revitalisation and to help bring its rich and interconnected legacy to the attention of the government officials, the heritage profession and the larger public (Marianne de Klerk Architects and Urban Designers 2016:6).

In this endeavour the Heritage centred inquiry is not seen separately from other aspects like the city, housing or the natural environment, but in the spirit of the creation of a sustainable environment within which people may return to and re-inhabit the city, and with Heritage playing a dual role: Historical and social, memory as well as subservience (Bakker & Le Roux 2002:1).

The 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition is the first formal exhibition of the AAUP featuring original architectural drawings. Agitation for the exhibition stems from two sources. Firstly, from the increasing formalisation and activities of the AAUP, and secondly, from the collaborative context created by the 'Redefining Contested Shared Heritage of the TPA Block on Church Square, Pretoria' project (hereafter the 'Contested Shared Heritage' project).

Architectural collections have been housed at the Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria (hereafter UP), since at least the early 1970s. Early collections received at the Department include those of the architects Norman Eaton and Gordon McIntosh (both featured in the exhibition), followed by the drawings and papers of numerous other well-known architects in the region (see Figure 2). Building on efforts over a number of years by a cohort of academics focussed on cultural heritage, the AAUP have recently been formalised with the constitution of an oversight committee and the appointment of a subject specific curator from within the Department of Architecture. The aims of exposing the AAUP collections to a broader audience, fostering collaborative projects and contributing to research (Barker *et al.* 2016:9), were all well served by the 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition.



FIGURE N<sup>o</sup> 2



The storage areas of the Architecture Archives at the University of Pretoria (AAUP), where a range of significant collections of twentieth century South African architecture are preserved (photo: Johan Swart).

The curatorial activities at the AAUP leading up to the 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition (2018) were developed in parallel to the 'Contested Shared Heritage' project (2017-19), a broader research and advocacy project lead by Marianne de Klerk, in partnership with the AAUP curator and funded by the Shared Heritage Programme of the Netherlands Embassy in South Africa. The relationship between the archives and the broader project was manifold. The research project inspired the reappraisal of significant drawings within the AAUP collections, while general information from the archives, such as journal extracts, historical reports and city maps, were also utilised in the broader project and influenced its research trajectory. A good example of the latter is a collection of newspaper cuttings at the AAUP related to the contentious proposals for the redevelopment of Church Square in the 1970s, which was utilised for the first time.

The educational context within which the AAUP is situated was also considered as part of the collaboration, leading to a postgraduate design studio taught by the AAUP curator during 2018 being incorporated in the research process, aligned with the broader project themes, and focusing on the conservation of Modern Movement sites that were identified in the project discussions. Architecture students from UP were introduced to the discussions of the broader project, conducted site visits along with the project team (see Figure 3), and were given access to the archives and other information resources already collected within the project. Historical mapping, architectural documentation and urban design proposals produced by the student teams were in turn integrated into the broader project research and utilised as part of the exhibitions (see Figure 4).

The 'Modern Movement and the City' archive exhibition was developed as a twin to the 'Pretoria Inner City – Formation and Transformation' exhibition by Marianne de Klerk. Together, these two exhibitions formed one of the major outcomes of the 'Contested Shared Heritage' funded-research project. The overall exhibition utilised a series of custom designed display panels and was conceived with a consistent overall language (see Figure 1). The archive component showcased a chronological series of architectural projects through original drawings, while the inner city exhibition provided an in depth history of Pretoria's urban development using a combination of referenced archival images, text descriptions, as well as bespoke maps and illustrations produced for the project by the project team and the UP students. The two exhibitions were positioned around a central three-dimensional model of the inner city that served as spatial overview of the Pretoria inner city and as a locating device for various sites and projects (see Figure 1).



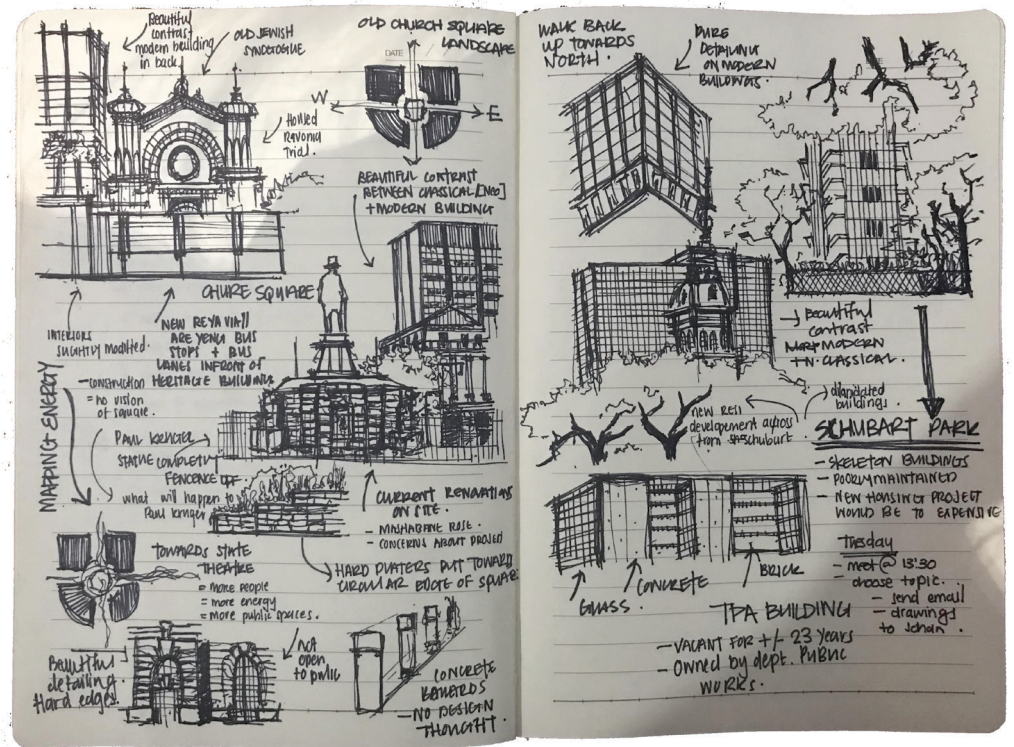


FIGURE **Nº 3**

Pages from the site journal of postgraduate student Carmen Songabau showing observational sketches of spaces in the Pretoria inner city completed within the design studio at the Department of Architecture.

#### Urban Design Toolkit for the Inner City

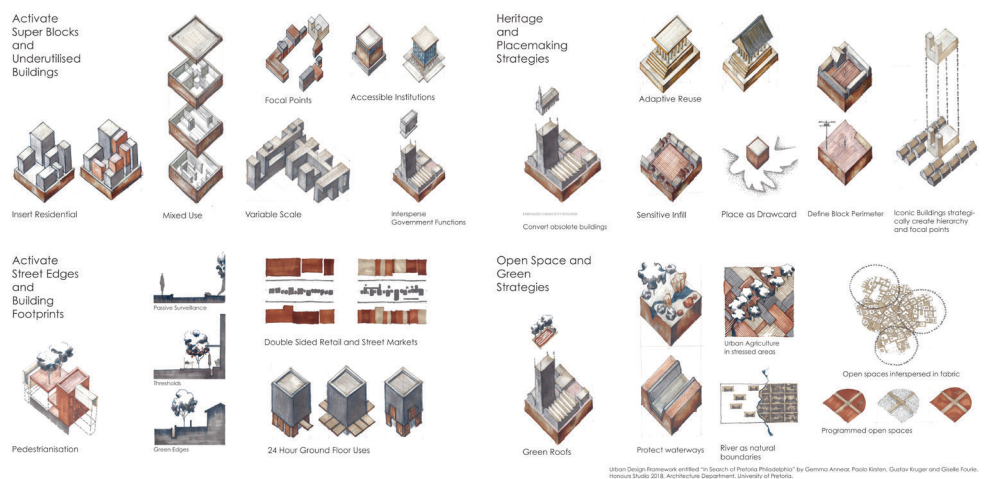


FIGURE **Nº 4**

Exhibition panel from the 'Pretoria Inner City Exhibition – Formation and Transformation' exhibition featuring urban design proposals by honours students Gemma Annear, Paolo Kirsten, Gustav Kruger and Giselle Fourie (image: Marianne de Klerk).



FIGURE **Nº 5**



Audience gathered for a plenary session at the AZA '18 national architecture conference where the 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition was first shown in 2018 (photo: Emmanuel Munano).

The exhibitions were implemented at the AZA '18 conference, hosted in 2018 at 012 Central<sup>1</sup> in the inner city of Pretoria by the South African Institute of Architects (SAIA) in partnership with the Department of Architecture at UP. The exhibitions tied in with the conference theme – WeTheCity: Memory & Resilience – and was seen by close to a thousand delegates and visitors comprising practicing architects, architectural students and members of the public (see Figure 5). The curators also facilitated a panel discussion at the conference titled 'Modernist Heritage and Reimagining of the Inner City' as well as a walking tour to related inner city sites, linking the content of the research project and exhibitions to the main conference programme. The AZA conference is arguably the most important forum for architectural discussion in the local context and provided the critical mass and discursive context that the broader project and the implemented exhibitions required.

## Themes and content

The collections of the UP Architectural Archive are unique in that they are representative of a continuum of architectural production and thinking since the turn of the 20th century, and focus on regional thinking (Barker *et al.* 2016:9).



Pretoria, the administrative capital, expressed in architectural terms the Nationalist government's aspiration to become a progressive New World nation-state. The affluence of the 1960s allowed for building programs which monumentalized these endeavours, and many good buildings in the International Style were constructed (Fisher, Le Roux, Murray & Sanders. 2003:69).

Given the diverse set of agendas related to the broader project context, the 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition was curated to engage with a broad set of themes, such as urban planning history, Modern Movement projects, inner city renewal, architectural conservation, and contested heritage. The variety of collections available at the AAUP allowed the exhibition to reflect on these themes through a lens of architectural representation, while the range of available artefacts enabled the curator to create a narrative of twentieth century architectural development through a series of chronologically sequenced drawings (see Figure 6).

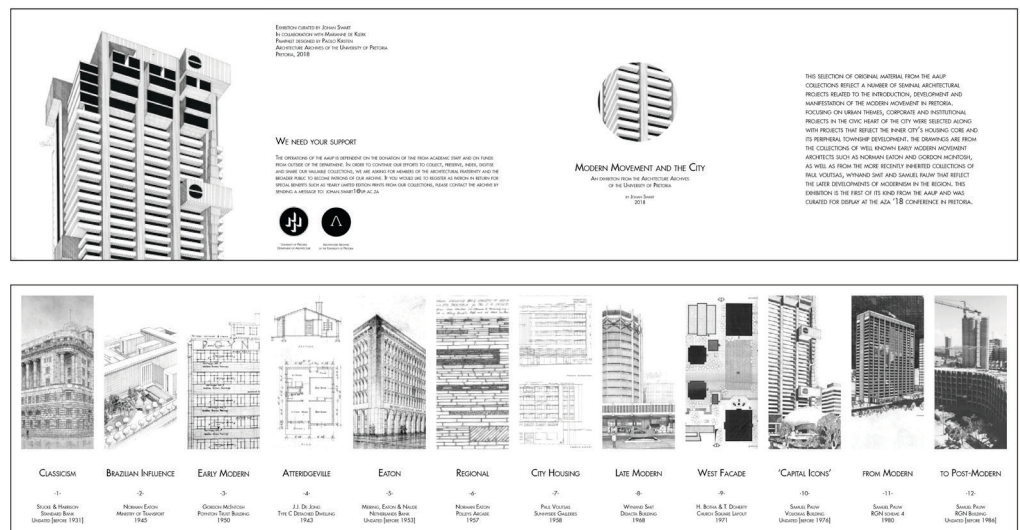


FIGURE N<sup>o</sup> 6

The 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition pamphlet with the outer leaf (above) presenting introductory information, and the inner leaf (below) indicating the thematic and chronological sequence of the exhibited archival drawings.

The selection of original artefacts from the AAUP collections illustrate a number of seminal architectural projects related to the introduction, development and manifestation of the Modern Movement in Pretoria. Focusing on urban themes, corporate and institutional projects in the civic heart of the city were selected along with projects that reflect the housing core of the inner city and its peripheral township development. The drawings are from the collections of well-known early modern movement architects, such as Norman Eaton and Gordon McIntosh, as well as from the more

recently inherited collections of Paul Voutsas, Wynand Smit and Samuel Pauw, that reflect the later developments of modernism in the region.

Pretoria contains a significant layer of Modern Movement buildings, and although the first architects to experiment with Modern Movement ideals in the South African context stem from the WITS School in Johannesburg (see Herbert 1975), these ideals soon found fertile ground in Pretoria. In the 1940s, Pretoria was home to leading Modern Movement protagonists, such as Gordon McIntosh, Norman Eaton and Helmut Stauch, while the establishment of the Pretoria School of Architecture in the 1940s fostered innovative work among a new student contingent. Although first finding its expression in progressive suburban residential projects, the Modern Movement began to shape the urban environment of Pretoria from the mid-century onwards through implemented projects, such as the Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA) building by the firm Meiring and Naudé, but also through often-radical unrealised urban infrastructural visions, such as the Pretoria ring road scheme. This occurred especially through patronage by the largely pro-modernist apartheid state mechanisms towards the second half of the twentieth century; often through large-scale inner city projects that influenced the city's urban structure (see Clarke & Lourens 2015). These developments, along with the segregated state housing developments around the periphery of the city, leaves the city with a layer of contested and contestable Modern Movement heritage that has been debated in studies of South African architectural history by, among others, Hilton Judin (1998) and Lindsay Bremner (2010), and built upon in the 'Contested Shared Heritage' project.

The broader layer of Pretoria's Modern Movement infrastructure, whether revered or contested, faces serious conservation challenges. Although iconic Modern Movement projects have received both academic appreciation and calls for conservation within the broader discourse of architectural modernism (see Fisher 2012; Le Roux 2013), many of the city's Modern Movement icons are unappreciated, badly maintained, or at risk of insensitive redevelopment. Given the recent international attention on Modern Movement legacies, as well as the increase in formal heritage protection for "younger" monuments, the discussion is topical, and local archival projects have an important contribution to make in terms of knowledge, advocacy and heritage practice.

## The drawings interpreted

The fact that architecture in and of the built environment, and architecture in and of the archive, are so utterly different from one another is, of course, the main arguments in favor of both collecting and building architectural works (Kleinman 2002:321).



The latter influences are also reflected in Eaton's drawing style, with for example sans serif stencilled typeface and crisp lines reserved for the rendition of those projects that reflect the Modern Movement (Pienaar 2013:28).

The previously mentioned histories, themes and aspects of discourse were all explored in the 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition through a selection of archival drawings that present narratives and details of Pretoria's Modern Movement. The drawings open up discussions about the (re)appraisal of the represented projects and the often unknown careers of the architects that created them. Each individual drawing that formed part of the exhibition can be interpreted relative to a broader narrative, but can also be described as a tangible historical artefact created by particular architects with specific intent. This following section of the review provides a summarised interpretation of each drawing exhibited, presented chronologically and introduced with the thematic headings that were also used to structure the exhibition.

## Church Square Classicism



FIGURE N<sup>o</sup> 7



Stucke and Harrison; watercolour rendering for the Standard Bank Building on Church Square; undated [before 1931] (source: Architecture Archives at the University of Pretoria AAUP).

The watercolour rendering (see figure 7) of the Standard Bank Building by the firm Stucke and Harrison represents the classical architectural hegemony still lingering in Pretoria's inner city by the late 1930s. The delicate painting captures the weight, depth and finely articulated classical detailing typical of the numerous commercial buildings executed by the firm's clients in Pretoria, Johannesburg, and further afield. The building blends in with the classical architectural language that dominates Church Square (the historical heart of Pretoria), but the design also presents hints of abstractions and Art Deco detailing that can be seen as precursors to the new architecture to follow. The painting is also an important record of architectural representation or rendering that is made to an artistic standard not often replicated in later years.

## Brazilian influence

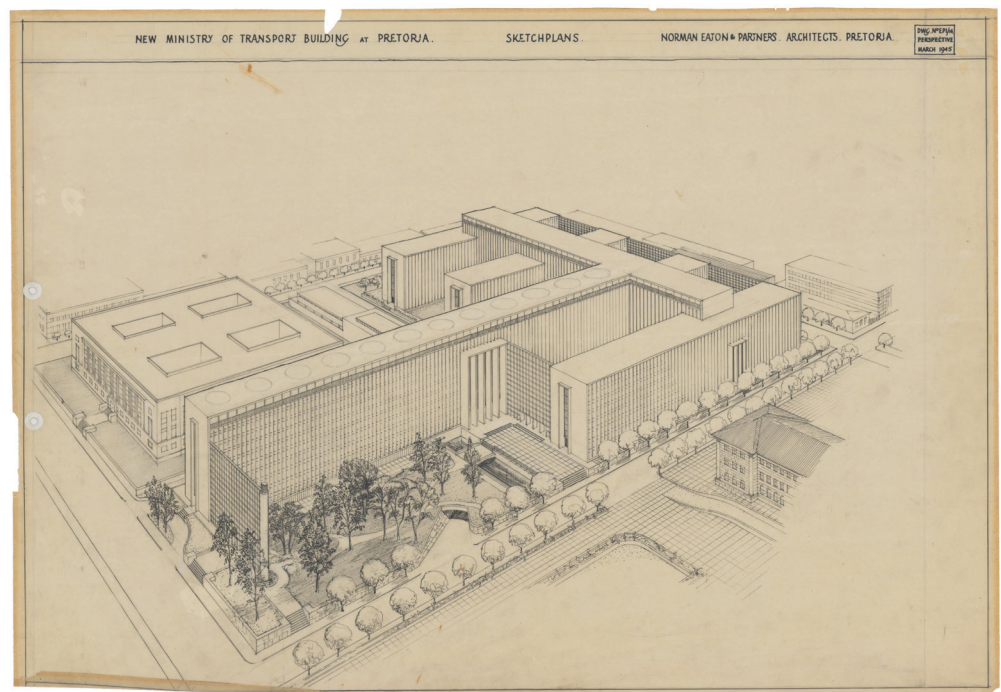


FIGURE **Nº 8**



Norman Eaton; proposal for the unbuilt Ministry of Transport Building; 1945 (source: Architecture Archives at the University of Pretoria AAUP).

In stark contrast to the Standard Bank rendering, Norman Eaton's 1945 proposal for the new headquarters of the Ministry of Transport presents a radical departure from the prevailing neoclassicism of the city. The bird's eye perspective drawing (see figure 8) presents a large-scale complex inspired by Brazilian modernism that would have radically transformed a portion of Pretoria's inner city and set the tone for new

developments had it been built. The drawing is said to have travelled to Brazil and North America where Eaton discussed the design with Oscar Niemeyer and Mies van der Rohe, among others. The value of this drawing lies in the global interactions that it embodies, as well as it being the only architectural evidence of a significant but unbuilt scheme.

## Early Modern

Gordon McIntosh was part of the *zerohour* group in the early 1930s – the earliest protagonists of the South African Modern Movement. The elevation for the ‘Poyntons Building’ represents not so much his progressive earlier work, but rather the commercial implementation of mainstream modernism in the Pretoria inner city. A drawing within the AAUP collections, dated 1950, shows the regular modular concrete structure grid with transparent street edges and alternating bands of brick, protruding concrete slabs and steel strip windows on the upper levels. This type of façade treatment would become the standard for multi-story buildings in and around the city, and the drawing, although simple, can be read as a template for subsequent structures in the further densification of Pretoria.

## Peripheral housing, Atteridgeville

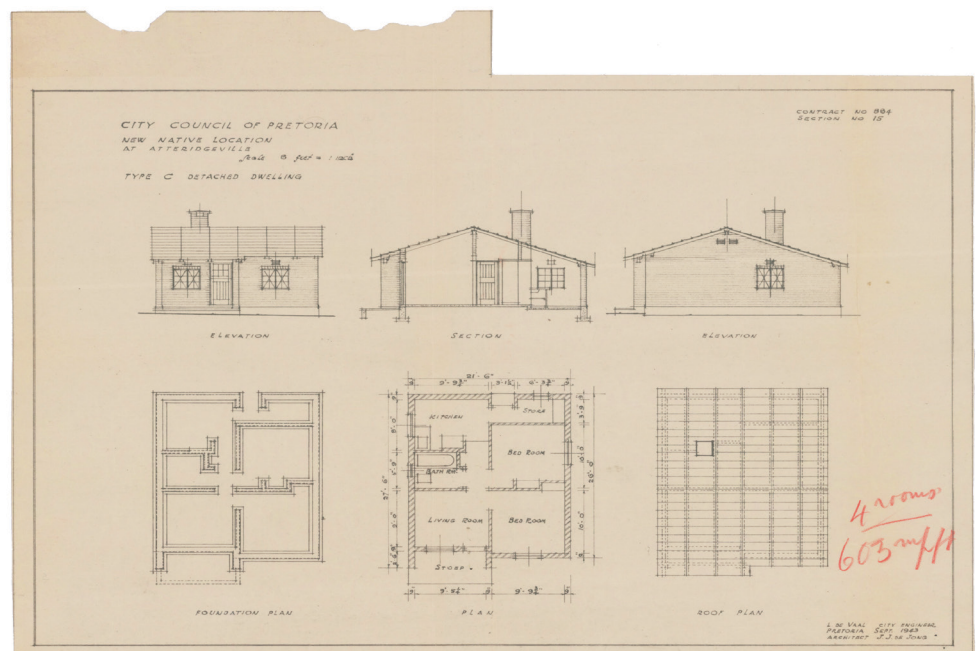


FIGURE N°9

JJ De Jong; type C detached dwelling housing prototype; 1943 (source: Architecture Archives at the University of Pretoria AAUP).



While the ‘Modern Movement and the City’ exhibition focused mainly on inner city projects built within the segregated city’s white centre of power, these projects also need to be understood relative to their inverse – the township housing developments for non-white communities on the outer periphery. This drawing (see figure 9) of a prototype house in Atteridgeville, by JJ de Jong, can be seen as an example of the various housing types that were being developed for townships from the late 1940s onwards. This drawing, among others in the John Cleland collection, bear important witness to the early years of state sponsored low-cost housing development.

## Eaton’s regional interpretations

Another item from one of the most significant collections at AAUP is the eye level street perspective of the Netherlands Bank, which was one of a set of alternative perspectives prepared for proposal to the client. The design shows a sensitivity to context in terms of scale and to climate by utilising vertical and horizontal screens protruding from the façades. The building represents the progression of the local Modern Movement towards a regional approach, implemented on an urban scale. As part of a set of design iterations for this building, a drawing within the AAUP collections presents the design without a street canopy that was present in an alternative drawing, reminding the researcher that built constructions are but one version of numerous possibilities on the drawing board.

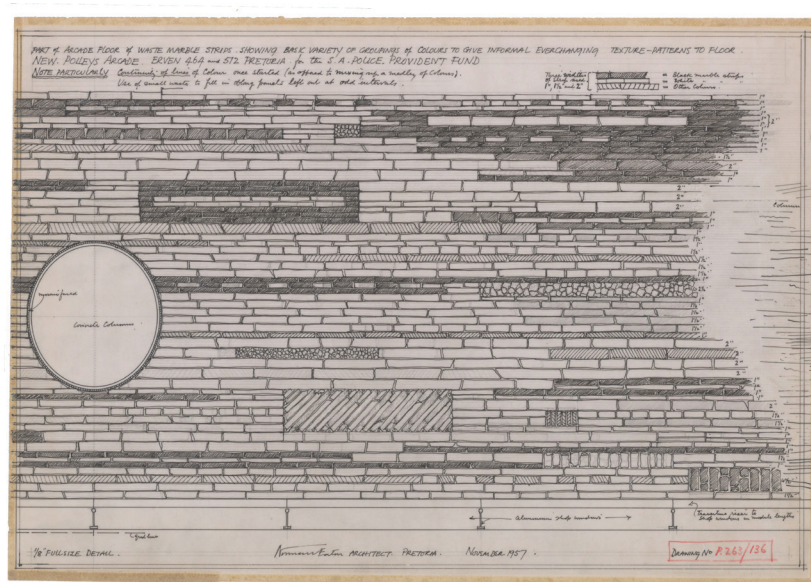


FIGURE **Nº 10**

Norman Eaton; detailed paving layout for Polleys Arcade; 1957 (source: Architecture Archives at the University of Pretoria AAUP).



Polleys Arcade is one of the spaces in the city most loved by architects, and Eaton's drawings of its paving patterns are favourites from the AAUP drawing collections. The striking graphical quality of the drawing manifests the rare and obsessive nature of Eaton's design approach, with each paving stone meticulously considered and represented. The arcade runs through the Wachthuis building, also by Eaton, and is a warm gesture on the public ground floor of a building that was otherwise occupied by the apartheid-era police administration. This drawing (see figure 10) is a reminder of the lengths to which design can be explored on paper towards the promise of specificity and perfection.

## Inner-city housing, Sunnyside

This drawing (see figure 11) of the Sunnyside Galleries project is by the prolific yet relatively unknown Pretoria architect, Paul Voutsas. The elevation shows a rather unique compilation of forms, planes and elements, but are all typically associated with the language of the Modern Movement. Among a large number of similar drawings by the architect, the design shown here relates to Pretoria's urban densification from the mid-twentieth century onwards. High-density residential neighbourhoods, such as Sunnyside, after which the building is named, became commonplace in South African cities from this period onwards, and commonalities can be drawn with housing expansion areas such as Hillbrow in Johannesburg.

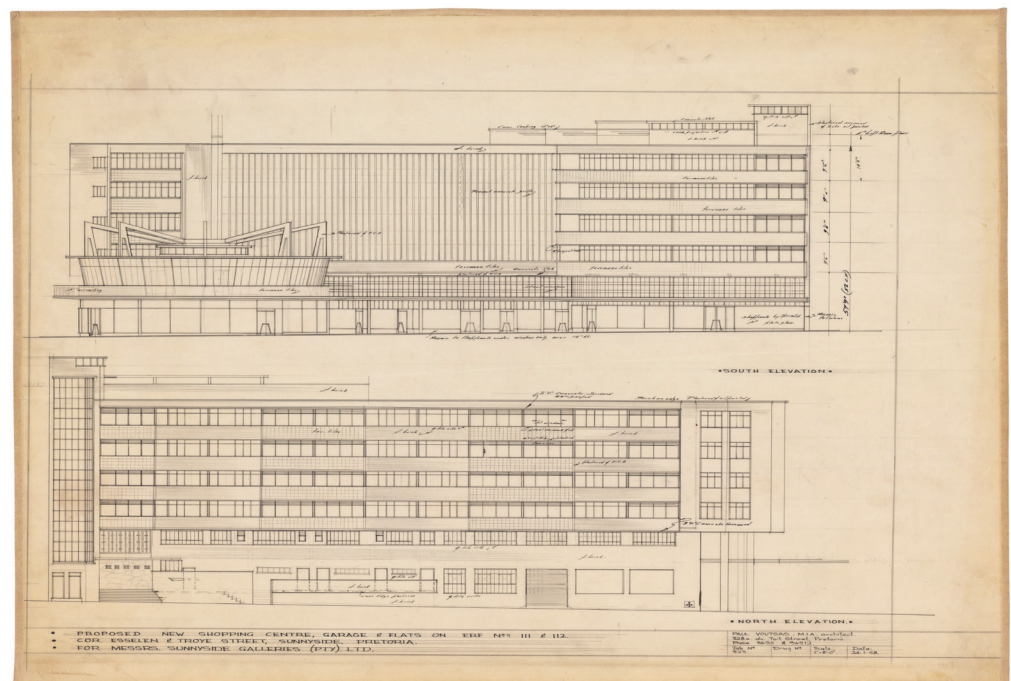


FIGURE **Nº 11**

Paul Voutsas; elevation drawings for Sunnyside Galleries; 1958 (source: Architecture Archives at the University of Pretoria AAUP).



FIGURE **Nº 12**



Wynand Smit; presentation drawing for the Didacta Building; 1968 (source: Architecture Archives at the University of Pretoria AAUP).

The history of the Didacta project is not well known and this drawing (see figure 12) opens up further questions about its planning phases. The perspective drawing includes an ambitious tower component that remains unbuilt, drawn with a daring tectonic structural articulation. The heavy, but floating, base volume introduces a brutalist language that can also be seen in later apartheid state projects, such as the State Theatre, with which the design shares formal similarities. This drawing is the only representation the Didacta building in the AAUP collections but it is illustrative of broader architectural developments to follow in the 1970s. The drawing is likely by the architect Wynand Smit, who designed a number of public commissions, many in partnership with Wynand Viljoen and Chrysos Daneel.

## The West Façade project

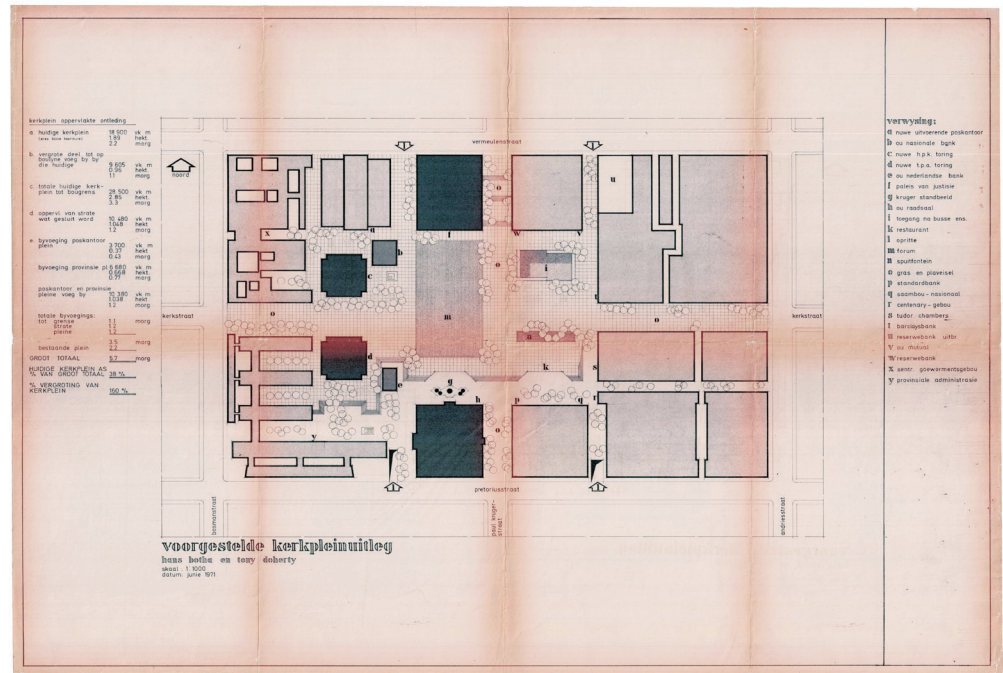


FIGURE N° 13

Hans Botha and Tony Doherty; layout for the proposed redevelopment of Church Square; 1971 (source: Architecture Archives at the University of Pretoria AAUP).

Signed by influential architects Hans Botha and Tony Doherty, this drawing (see figure 13) is one of the most unique in the AAUP collections. It is an urban scale proposal for the complete redevelopment of Pretoria's Church Square, indicating the public space layout as well as the position of two new high-rise towers on the western edge of the square. The West Façade Project, as it was known, was a highly publicised and contentious project, which in its earlier iterations (seen here) suggested the demolition of a number of significant heritage buildings. The proposal builds on the momentum of earlier large-scale projects, such as the Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA) building, seen on plan in the bottom left portion of the drawing. The scheme was eventually abandoned amidst public protest, but the drawing remains as a strong reminder of what the outcomes could have been.





FIGURE **Nº 14**



Samuel Pauw; perspective drawings for the Volkskas Building; undated [before 1976] (source: Architecture Archives at the University of Pretoria AAUP).

The boldness of this perspective drawing (see figure 14) reflects, in architectural terms, the scale of a client's ambitions. The proposal for the Volkskas Bank headquarters was a towering skyscraper that overwhelmed its context and far exceeded the existing height limitations of Pretoria's town planning codes. Both the bank and its architect were closely aligned to Afrikaner Nationalist politics, and the



building, as well as the memorial to JG Strijdom at its base (visible in some of the perspectives from this set), can be seen to reflect this allegiance. This building was part of an urban transformation in Pretoria's inner city, which included the neighbouring and equally monumental State Theatre, as well as an unrealised urban vision for 'Verwoerd Plein' to the north of the site.

## From modern to postmodern

A second project by Samuel Pauw included in the 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition reflects the continued success of his practice during the late apartheid years as well as the turn towards postmodernism that emerged in Pretoria during the 1980s. It is rare to find such completely opposing architectural intentions presented for the same project as can be seen in the concept proposal drawings for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) building in Pretoria. The Samuel Pauw collection contains a set of perspective renderings with four alternative schemes for this development. The drawing for 'Skema 3' (Scheme 3) shows a thin building in a semi-circular shape surrounding a tall central tower that could be read as an abstraction of a Doric column. For 'Skema 4' (Scheme 4), however, a rather monolithic rectangular tower with a rigid and exposed concrete frame structure is presented.



FIGURE **Nº 15**



Unknown Photographer; HSRC Building under construction; undated [before 1986] (source: Architecture Archives at the University of Pretoria AAUP).

The final design for the HSRC project can be seen in this photograph of the building (see figure 15) under construction. It aligns in its language with 'Skema 3' (Scheme 3) mentioned earlier, and can be said to represent a shift towards postmodernism, implemented here on an exceptional scale showing some similarity to the work of Spanish architect Ricardo Bofill. Apart from showing the innovative concrete construction of the RGN building, this photograph also gives more information about other developments in Pretoria at the time. Behind the HSRC building is another Modern Movement icon of Pretoria, the second Poyntons building from the late 1960s, and in the distant background, Pretoria's most infamous high-rise housing complexes, Kruger Park and Schubart Park, can be observed, which were under construction at the time.

## Reflection

Architecture thrives in societies where the work of architects is open to scrutiny and debate, where it is understood that what architects do matters profoundly because it affects the future potential of our cities and ourselves as citizens (Deckler *et al.* 2008:vii).

This built heritage of the city faces destruction unless creative ways are found for the adaptive re-use of these buildings, and their inclusion in the transformation processes of the inner city into a Capital City (Clarke & Lourens 2015:44).

The absence of archival projects within South African architectural discourse has been highlighted by some authors (notably Kotze 2008) and confirmed by the personal experiences of the AAUP curator. It is of some significance that the AAUP engaged on numerous fronts in this collaborative project and installed the 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition on a highly visible forum.

'Modern Movement and the City' attempted to create a broader awareness of significant Modern Movement projects in Pretoria, and especially of the incredibly valuable documentary evidence of these schemes and their designers that have been left to us in the form of architectural drawings and archival documentation. In addition to these aims, the exhibition was also positioned within a more critical discussion of the role of architecture within the political and urban planning legacies of South African cities.

In their introductory remarks to the publication 'Contemporary South African Architecture in a Landscape of Transition' (Deckler *et al.* 2008:vii), the sharpCITY group argue for the value of critical and open debate in architecture. They consider exhibitions such as their own, entitled 'Utopia. Nowhere. Close' (Sao Paulo 2005) to be an

important forum for and informant to critical discussions. In the same publication, Noëleen Murray adds to this view by positioning exhibitions as an important form of practice. Murray holds the 1998 'blank\_Architecture, apartheid and after' exhibition by Hilton Judin as a rare example of an exhibition with a critical position.

Archives and archivists should be playing a more prominent and pro-active role in the formulation of discussions, exhibitions and publications, and the validation of architectural drawings as museum objects by displaying original items in exhibitions. As it stands in the South African context, however, there are no architectural archives fulfilling this role, no specialist curators, funded projects or formal mandates for architectural archiving. The AAUP is attempting to bridge this gap by professionalising its activities and integrating curatorship as part of the scholarly activities and academic mandate of the Department of Architecture at UP.

The conservation of architectural drawings is, however, a highly technical and expensive endeavour. This was highlighted in the 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition, where extreme care had to be taken in the transportation, handling and installation of the fragile drawings. Furthermore, custom designed archive display panels were developed as part of the process, with drawings installed on specially designed paper clamps and covered by a protective glass panel. In an attempt to present a professional image for the archive, the exhibition was also displayed with well-considered branding and graphics, and an exhibition pamphlet was published and distributed to visitors (see Figure 6).

The 'Modern Movement and the City' exhibition proved that the AAUP collections could be utilised to construct architectural narratives for open debate, and that the conservation of drawings can assist in discussions surrounding the conservation of buildings. The archival collections hold immense scholarly potential, with numerous well-known architects represented in the AAUP collections and the possibility of monographs and post-graduate research inherent in each. The aims of continued scholarship and education from the archives can be achieved, but archives must be pro-actively managed, projects must be collaboratively undertaken, and institutional space must be negotiated and safeguarded for the archival endeavour to flourish.

## Notes

1. 012 Central is a series of event spaces in the Pretoria inner city managed by the City Property group.

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