

# ARCHITECTURE

JOURNAL OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

**SOUTH AFRICA**



## HOTELS AND RESORTS

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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2010  
RSA R24.95 (incl VAT) Other countries R21.89 (excl VAT)

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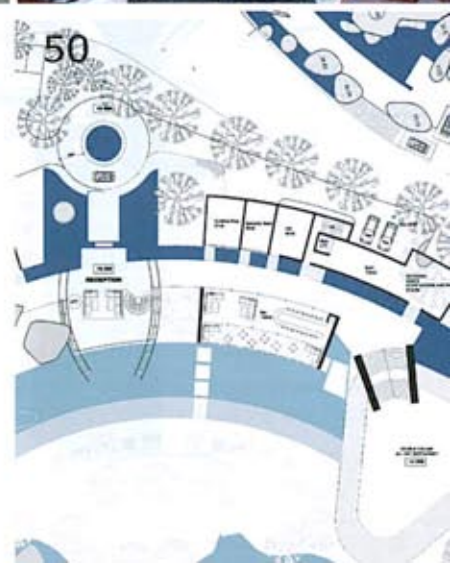
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# HOTELS

## THE MOST CURIOUS BUILDING TYPE

THE BEGUILING PROMISE of the 2010 FIFA World Cup has produced a new generation of infrastructure and buildings in South Africa. Among the bounty of new highways, rapid transit systems, terminals and stadiums, are now 7 492 new and existing 'graded' establishments including hotels, offering 107 119 quality guestrooms to business and leisure travellers. Architects of these hotels have tested their hand at this most curious of building types, a building type with a radical spectrum of public and private functions and strictly polarised spaces and routes for services and the served.

The anatomy of a hotel requires that the front of house (FOH) areas accessible by the public and guests are planned, detailed and furnished to create a very specific and highly marketable guest experience. This experience, from arrival to sleep, is emotive, receptive, reassuring and discreet. It is specifically developed to project the hotel brand/vision and it guides the design in every detail. Simultaneously, the back of house (BOH) functional areas inaccessible by the public or guests are rational, disciplined, clinical and unambiguous.

The FOH and BOH, separated only by self-closing doors, are polarised but essential to the experience and the function of the hotel. The public and guests, featured in finely-lit, scent-imbued spaces, are shielded from, yet supported by, the often frenetic activity of the BOH kitchen preparations, housekeeping procedures, deliveries, collections and staff arrivals and departures at every hour of the day and night.

While the BOH is efficiently and discreetly linked to services to and from the hotel, the FOH is generously connected to the public

realm for an easy flow from street to reception for people and luggage. At this interface, one can freely enter the hotel lobby to look, to linger, to enjoy the architecture, the art, and to claim a respite from the bustling street or long dusty road. Hotel foyers and food and beverage (F&B) venues provide ample opportunities for the public to meet, greet, refresh, promenade, network, dine, dance, entertain, marry and celebrate. Hotels are among the most public of building types. After the dark tide of apartheid, hotels particularly in Johannesburg are becoming the chosen social venue for the successful African business community.

Hotels are inversely among the most private of building types. Guests pass from the public domain through increasingly secure transitions to the exclusive refuge of their guestrooms. The design of the hotel provides for the most intimate of human activities of relaxing, abluting, seducing and sleeping.

The design of a hotel should provide for this broad range of public and guest experiences, but in a way that is intimately evocative of the specific context of the site. The light and colour, texture and rhythm of the local topography and culture are part of the brief for the design of the building and the experience it creates. The architecture and interior design of a hotel illustrate the locale and make it tangible to the public and guests.

Well-designed hotels provide a stimulating yet unencumbered experience, offering a sense of place and lending visual memories to be recalled as precious souvenirs. South African architects have scored the goal of providing superb hotels at all grades for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. This issue of *Architecture SA* provides a glimpse of some of the most memorable. **FA**



Danger Point Hotel - Fynbos Villa



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# DANGER POINT HOTEL

## GANSBAAI

DANGER POINT IS a barren, rocky spur of land close to Hermanus which has been renowned as a shipping hazard at least since the *Birkenhead* struck its reef in 1852. Past the present coastal townships, it has been subdivided into long, narrow allotments, one of which was designated as a hotel site. It is an unpromising site for a hotel – exposed, with no beach or safe swimming and without the typical amenities of a resort hotel such as a golf course or wine estate. Shark boat tripping, whale watching and a lighthouse (custodian of the peninsula's maritime history) are the only nearby distractions.

But the uncompromising nature of the site was felt by the developer and architects to be compelling in its own right, so the brief that evolved was to enfold the visitor into an appreciation of its distilled experiential qualities. This brief was investigated principally as a study of landscape, but also considered environmental issues and questions of geographical identity.

Greening the hotel was essential for reasons of necessity and of desire. The location is relatively remote and the bulk service requirements of a hotel are high, whereas the small local authority has very little spare capacity. Furthermore, the types of visitors envisaged increasingly demand green accreditation, while conference organisers insist on it. Green

certification is sought by the usual devices such as combined grey/rainwater harvesting and solar water heaters, but besides this add-on kit approach, a more reciprocal relationship with site was intended. By locating all service areas below grade, or through the manipulation of the ground plane to approximate this, the gross consumption of land surface is reduced. The sea villas to the front of the site are also largely concealed by these means, and the planted roofs mitigate the consumption of land while minimising rapid rainwater runoff and increasing thermal mass.

The prehistory of the Point is, as is much of the coastline, of strandloper inhabitation – the frontal dune consists largely of perlemoen shell deposits. The recent historical significance of Danger Point is its presence as one of a series of rocky shoals forming a barrier to the development of trade with the East. From the sea it is a significant landscape feature – a remote way-point and a marker of trade routes – with powerful connotations of adventure and exploration. The scheme responds to these references through circumspection – overt references are avoided and the hotel is cast as a kind of neutral backdrop, a stage on which these references still echo. This same approach is carried forward in the landscaping concept below.



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There are some suggestions, however, of these histories: the canting columns of the hotel foyer suggest the posts of a dilapidated fishing pier, one of many abandoned whaling stations along the coast. The mounds over the sea terraces suggest the gradual sedimentation of discarded artefacts, and also play on the theme of the sea cave.

The response to landscape was developed by reading it as a junction between mountain and sea, characterised by weathered sedimentary rock formations overlaid with windblown sand. From this reading a concept developed in which the hidden layers of stratified rock formation, presently visible only on the coastline, were exposed. The landscape elements used were intended to embody the characteristics of layering (strata of rock, sand, shells, vegetation), weathering (erosion, wind-pruned vegetation), capturing (tidal pools, trapped shells, boulders) and nurturing (growth, fauna). The temporal qualities of the coastline suggested a dynamic landscape engagement, while the contrast of the static rock formations and the ever-changing littoral informed the landscape response to the site.

The ideas of tidal water trapped, bits of shell and rocks wedged between weathered crevices and large rock outcroppings scattered through the landscape were used to develop the major theme of the hotel – its sequence of elevated tidal pools. In so doing, the coastal edge, separated from the hotel by a public dirt road, was in effect raised up to the main level of the hotel. Routes between the component parts of the hotel were conceived as areas cleared of windblown sands (dune) to expose the hard underlying rocky surface of the sandstone rock formations. An endemic planting palette was utilised, so that the villas are embedded in dune fynbos vegetation.

The design of the interior spaces is intended to perpetuate the themes developed in the landscaping design through juxtapositions – of land and sea, cold and warm, wet and dry – which are made tangible to the visitor. Tactile contrasts between hard, glossy surfaces and soft, warm surfaces, views of the cold, threatening sea from the warmth of guest rooms, dark areas alternating with light areas and scale changes between large and small design elements are all intended to sustain an active engagement with site. **F3**

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- 1 Foyer with rock pools in foreground
- 2 Site plan concept
- 3 Long section
- 4 Borrowing of landscape by raised sea pools
- 5 Hotel foyer
- 6 Tidal imagery
- 7 Sea terraces

#### PROJECT TEAM

Landscape Architects: Tarna Klitzner (as part of KALA)  
 Interior Architects: Source Interior Brand Architects  
 Environmental Consultants & Mechanical Engineers: WSP Engineers SA  
 Planners: Nuplan Africa  
 Project Managers: HNV  
 Bulk Services: KV3  
 Client: Southern Right Developments

#### REFERENCES

Parts of text provided by Tarna Klitzner and Evon Smuts-Rogers.  
 3-D visualisations by Reality Zone.