

DIGEST

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2008 PICA AWARD WINNER



ST GEORGE'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL ART CENTRE AND SCIENCE CLASSROOMS, CAPE TOWN

Architects: Visser Thomas Architects | Project Team: Jane Visser; John Bethell; Victor Johnstone | Structural Engineers: Marwaan Firfirey at Orrie Welby-Solomon | Quantity Surveyor: Mishal Kamodien at Bernard James & Partners | Contractor: Shahied Salle at Status Africa Construction cc | Photographer: Don Bayley

The architects were briefed to design two science classrooms and an art centre as well as a future theatre for this historic school campus. In order to identify the best sites for these functions, they analysed the way the existing campus functioned. The team came up with various options for solving traffic flow (separating vehicles from pedestrian routes), preserving the dramatic views of the mountain, keeping the activities of the school in a sensible layout and amplifying the landscape of fields below the mountain. These options were discussed with the school and a master plan was agreed on. This master plan produced the sites for the art centre and science labs.

ART CENTRE CONCEPT

There were three existing 1940s houses along the entrance driveway to the school. These looked oddly residential, so it was decided to link them up along their backs with a wide passage that acts as an exhibition space, to the three new art classrooms. The passage is lit from above by skylights and is on three levels (to take up the sloping levels of the land). The roof is effectively a massive concrete roof gutter which enabled the team to link up to the existing three houses with the minimum of disturbance. The new block has a monopitched roof with south lights. A wall of timber windows faces north

and an overhang protects this façade from overheating. Trees will grow to provide further shade and visual interest. A curved ceiling makes the most of the effect of light coming into the space. Storerooms are located between the classrooms.

MATERIALS AND CONSTRUCTION

The new art rooms were built as an economical steel portal frame structure with infill panels of fibre-cement and windows (timber) on the outside and brick on the inside (to accommodate shelving and pinboards). The gallery link is a concrete roof and the floor is simply brick paving on compacted earth (as a cost-saving measure).

SCIENCE CLASSROOMS CONCEPT

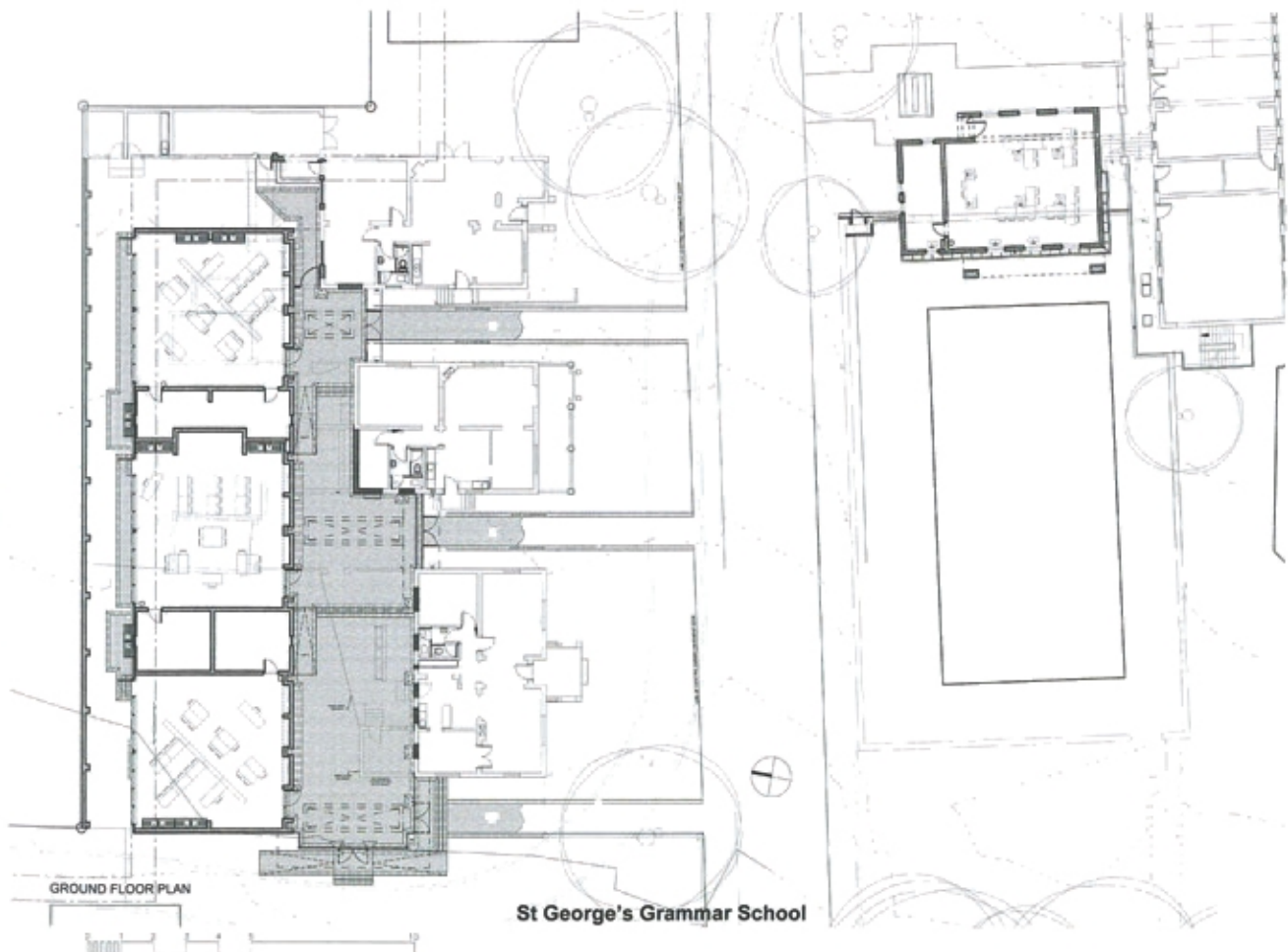
The school has a beautiful pool with a long view of the mountain. The architects decided to replace the wall at the top of the pool with a double-storey block housing the two science classrooms. These classrooms link with the existing walkways and are sited between the upper and middle schools (who will use them). The architecture was designed as a simple foil to the pool and, by being white masonry with traditionally proportioned openings, relates to Bloemendal, the historic Cape house on the campus. Shutters provide shade and a pergola structure is still to be added and planted. ■



north elevation



south elevation



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

St George's Grammar School