

# Turbine Hall is a fitting winner



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The Colosseum Award, a new category of the Halala Joburg Awards, was given to the Turbine Hall Square development for its preservation of the city's heritage.

**T**URBINE Hall Square has been recognised for its successful restoration and contribution to preserving the heritage of the inner city.

"It went from a sinkhole to a frontrunner of progress," says Joanne Millan of Thabiso Consulting, the project managers of the second annual Halala Joburg Awards. A project of the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA), the awards were made on 11 June.

Turbine Hall Square won the Colosseum Award, a new Halala category; the awards celebrate those projects that are improving the inner city.

"The Turbine Hall Square development gave a massive boost to inner city renewal and provided significant impetus to the Newtown regeneration project," says Millan.

According to Neil Fraser, the urban consultant who champions the inner city, the development is successful because it fulfils some basic requirements, including the tenant - AngloGold Ashanti - and investor being willing to work with and follow the spirit set by the heritage authorities, and its heritage status.

Many elements from original structure and the demolished sections have been retained in the redevelopment. New structures have also been incorporated. New work was painted while the old parts of the building were left as is, and every transition between old and new was emphasised with diagonal elements.

"The project is agreed to carry weight, it has landmark status, is seen as a gateway to the city and a counterpoint to the iconic



*Giving impetus to Newtown's regeneration*

Nelson Mandela Bridge," explains Millan. "The developers and architects created a wonderful blend of architecture and new green-thinking models of construction, shaped an incredible combination of creativity and conservation and used exciting materials which both challenge and please while preserving the historical interest and integrity of the site."

Cecil Skotnes, the late artist, made the floating trophy for the Colosseum Award. The award went to a joint venture between Francesco Rivera and Fernando Cardosa, the managing director of the Tiber Group and Barry van Wyk, Renalia development manager of Turbine Hall Square.

## History

Turbine Hall is on Miriam Makeba and Jeppe Streets. It is a listed heritage site salvaged by private sector investors. In 1990, the city council sold the property to Turbine Square (Pty) Limited for R22,1-million. Nedcor and Tiber Bonvic now jointly own Turbine Square.

For many years this neglected building was home to squatters, during which time the building suffered structural damage. The squatters were relocated in 2000 and in 2004, AngloGold Ashanti, the gold miner, decided to set up its global headquarters in a portion of Turbine Hall. The building was originally part of the Jeppe Street Power Station, which supplied electricity to the burgeoning city.

"In the early 1990s, the property was largely mothballed due to Eskom's surplus electricity capacity, resulting in the city's reduced use of its thermal power stations," says Van Wyk.

By 2000, more than 300 squatters occupied the building. They were relocated by July of that year, all rubble was removed and the site was used as an evening facility for launches such as Mini South Africa and AngloGold Ashanti.

## Redevelopment

The redevelopment project started in June 2005 and was completed in three phases by June 2009.

"The building subscribes to a three-dimensional philosophy with respect to its interior space plan. This means that organisational adjacency within the building can be achieved between floors via internal stairs as well as on a single floor. Coupled with the atrium arrangement, the overall effect is one of a highly integrated work space," Van Wyk explains.

The architecture allows steel structures to borrow freely from the raking beams and connections evident in the existing structure. The soaring spaces of both the existing and new architecture, he adds, relate harmoniously to each other.

"The massing of the buildings takes strong clues from the existing Turbine Hall as a 'hard' edge to the city streets, re-interpreting the structural rhythm and the strong tide-lines in the Jeppe Street facade. The complex forms a semi-public courtyard on the eastern side, which is bounded by the new wing, the South Boiler House, as well as the Reserve Bank building on the south.

"The courtyard is realised as a mounded garden, creating a surprising green space or 'soft' interior within the city. The garden acts as a social and geometric focus for the complex and counterpoints the tough industrial environment of the interior."

The complete development is an interesting mix of old and new. Its three components consist of the AngloGold Ashanti head office, which is in the new building and was created specific to the company's needs. The South Boiler House is another component that now houses offices that were inserted within the existing steel structure; and the final component is Turbine Hall, which is an insertion of the complete new building.

"Care has been given in the design to exploit the visual axes inherent in the planning and to couple this with a layered approach to



*Turbine Hall Square, a landmark in the inner city*

the public spaces," Van Wyk says, "which adds richness to the experience of the building and enhances its apparent scale and complexity."

## Colosseum Award

The Colosseum Award originated a few decades ago when a group of Joburg residents fought against the demolition of the old Colosseum building, which was situated west of Carlton Centre.

During the debate around destroying the building, demonstrators set about trying to get funding to buy it and convert it into an opera house, or alternatively to convert the Civic Theatre into an opera house and the Colosseum into a theatre.

The heritage consultant and architect, Herbert Prins, discovered that conserving the building was possible.

He said he approached the developers of the building with sketch designs they were free to use. Peter Wharton-Hood, the managing director of the Prudential Insurance Company, however, commented: "We were not prepared to look at the work of an architect who came to us touting for work."

Prins consulted legal advice and took the Prudential Insurance Company and Wharton-Hood to court for defamation for this statement. The case was resolved out of court and Prins was paid damages. He used that money to provide a heritage award, suitably called the Colosseum Award.

According to Prins he gave it this name, "not to be nostalgic about something lost, but rather to use the name symbolically to honour those who value heritage more than the Prudential did when it demolished the Colosseum".



*Conserving the building*

## The Colosseum

General GC Smuts opened the Colosseum on 4 October 1933. The commission to design the building was initiated by IW Schlesinger, who moved from the United States to South Africa where he established and pioneered industries, including filmmaking through African Mirror; and theatre and cinema through African Consolidated Theatres. He was also involved in the establishment of radio in South Africa.

The architects associated with the design of the Colosseum building included P Rogers Cooke, HW Spicer and W Timlin. Timlin created the cinema's décor, which was referred to as "outside-in" or atmospheric theatre design, recalls Prins, because it emulated an outdoor space.

Cinema patrons sat in a space that resembled a medieval town square surrounded by fantasy-like medieval buildings, he adds. Above was a simulated night sky with twinkling stars and wafting clouds. Atmospheric cinema was quite rare, in South Africa and the rest of the world.

## Judges

The Joburg Heritage Trust paired with the City's department of arts, culture and heritage and the JDA to administer the award.

The Colosseum Award was adjudicated by chairperson of the award, Herbert Prins, the heritage consultant; Eric Itzkin, the deputy director immovable heritage in the City's directorate arts, culture and heritage; Yusuf Eshak, the chairman of the Provincial Heritage Resources Agency of Gauteng; Irene Mafune from the City; and Henry Paine, the architect and heritage consultant.

The chair adjudicator, Prins, recused himself from this round of voting because of his involvement as a heritage consultant on the project.

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