

at 60

11 Diagonal Street — "The Diamond"

Mabhida



Constitution Hill



Zeitz MOCAA Museum

ARCHITECTURE

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UNSIGHTLY

Brian McKechnie on the best and worst SA buildings



Circa Gallery



The top six

Moses Mabhida Stadium

"Can you feel it? It is here!" Almost 10 years later, these words stir the sense of excitement, possibility and ubuntu of the 2010 Soccer World Cup. The Durban stadium captures the 2010 spirit in a crisp, timeless structure, artfully woven into the city fabric via 6km of pristine beachfront promenade.

Circa Gallery

An awkward leftover site at the edge of the Rosebank CBD was transformed by this gallery, a building that is simultaneously iconic and restrained. Its undulating steel facade hugs the corner, creating a visually interesting and permeable urban edge, while beckoning patrons to explore the spaces within.

11 Diagonal Street — "The Diamond"

Helmut Jahn's unashamedly modern, mirrored masterpiece in Joburg perfectly captures the glamour of the 1980s. The blue glazed "diamond" (created to be the head office of De Beers) embraces the chaotic city surrounding it, refracting vignettes of Diagonal Street and the endless sky above, in its elegant jewel-faceted facades.

Zeitz MOCAA Museum

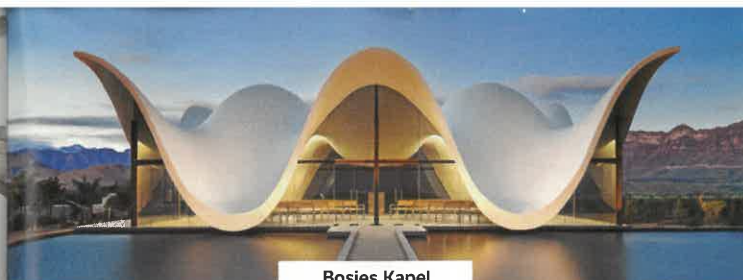
This Cape Town structure is closer to an artwork than a building in the traditional sense. The cathedral-like gallery entrance is carved from the cellular concrete tubes of an abandoned 1920s grain silo, freeing a contemporary space from within the historic structure. The off-shutter industrial concrete exterior ties the building to the V&A Waterfront complex, while a viewing deck on the top floor offers vistas across the city and all the way to Robben Island.

Constitution Hill

This beautiful precinct, seat of the court responsible for enshrining and upholding our constitution, is built within the confines of the former Old Fort prison in Joburg. Former Constitutional Court judge Albie Sachs summed it up perfectly: "A new Constitutional Court rising there would dramatise the transformation of SA from a racist, authoritarian society to a constitutional democracy. A more South African centre of repression and hope could not have been found. Above all, it had history. This wasn't just a neutral space — this was a space of intense drama, of human emotion, of repression, of resistance. And here was the chance to convert negativity into positivity."

Bosjes Kapel

This crisp, ethereal structure echoes the rolling contours of the surrounding Breede Valley in the Western Cape. The sculptural design, inspired by Psalm 36:7 (*How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings*), and the natural locale transform cues from traditional Cape Dutch architecture to create a contemporary SA icon.



Bosjes Kapel



144 Oxford Road, The Leonardo and Joburg General Hospital

The bottom six

The Leonardo

Africa's new tallest building (11m taller than the Carlton Centre, constructed in 1973), is a study in missed opportunity. The Sandton skyscraper is located in a district with vacancy rates already hovering at around 40%. Rather than looking forward, or taking cues from contemporary design, the edifice is an awkward post-modern pastiche balanced uncomfortably atop the Sandton citadel.

The Pearls of Umhlanga

The Dubai-esque tower gives zero consideration to the Umhlanga Village context, and permanently pollutes the beachfront with its cold grey shadow.

Montecasino

This depressing casino, disguised as an Italian peasant village, introduced the large-scale Tuscan fungal infection to Joburg. Like a bad cocaine addiction, northern Joburg can't get enough of it. Complete with cardboard painted skies and plastic ducks, the complex is inexplicably named after a monastery southeast of Rome, Monte Cassino, that was sacked by the

Lombards, ravaged by an earthquake and eventually, in 1944, bombed by the Allies.

Joburg General Hospital

This monolithic concrete eyesore is today known as the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital. The abomination to architecture and city planning lurks over the Parktown Ridge, at the periphery of Joburg's skyline. The structure remains an indelible scar of the brutal apartheid regime.

Sibaya Casino in Durban

Another depressing casino. This time disguised as an overscaled Zulu beehive dome. An insult to vernacular SA architecture, Zulu culture and sighted people in general.

144 Oxford Road

The banal polished glass amoeba in Rosebank adds a new chapter to the parable of disappointment marring the edges of Oxford Road. The visually dispiriting structure adds nothing to the otherwise active, walkable, urban fabric that characterises the suburb. ✕

McKechnie is a heritage architect in practice in Joburg

MUSIC

1960s

The Jazz Epistles — Jazz Epistle Verse 1

The first album recorded by a black SA band, and with a lineup — including Kippie Moeketsi; Dollar Brand, now better known as Abdullah Ibrahim; Jonas Gwangwa; and Hugh Masekela — that, with the hindsight of history, qualifies as a super-group. Recorded a couple of months before the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, it imbued American bebop with a local sensibility. Noted jazz writer Gwen Ansell described it as a statement of modernity, staking black jazz musicians' claim to the cities of SA. It was the only recording by the Epistles, before most of them fled into exile and carved out international solo careers.



1970s

Dollar Brand — Mannenberg — Is Where It's Happening

It's impossible to hear the lilting, evocative opening of *Mannenberg*, the title track of the 1974 album by Abdullah Ibrahim (released under his old name) without a pang of nostalgia. For some, it's a sound that marks one of the moments when Cape jazz invented itself as distinct from its international brethren, underscored by the shouted words "Oh Mannenberg! Jy kan na New York gaan, maar ons bly hier in Mannenberg", that close out the largely instrumental opening track. For others, it's the soundtrack to the political struggles of the 1980s, when Basil Coetzee and Robbie Jansen (who both played on the album) used the song at political rallies.



1980s

Brenda and the Big Dudes — Weekend Special

You can't overstate the love SA fans have for Brenda Fassie, and especially for the extended single mix of *Weekend Special*. A song about being a married man's part-time lover, it strikes a forlorn chord, while at the same time giving you the all-important groove to fight the melancholy. But the whole album is a fabulous amalgam of soul, disco and the huge personality of Fassie, underpinned by the slick power of the Big Dudes, up to then the backing band for Blondie & Pappa. Above all, *Weekend Special* is a warm, encompassing album, and it gave us our own "Madonna of the townships".



1990s

TKZee — Halloween

When TKZee released the single *Shibobo* just before the 1998 Soccer World Cup, featuring a collaboration with Bafana Bafana's Benni McCarthy, it became one of the fastest-selling singles in SA history, and made TKZee famous across Africa. *Halloween* itself is generally lauded as one of the great SA and kwaito albums, and earned Zwai Bala, Tokollo Tshabalala and Kabelo Mabalane four SA Music Awards. It's an album bursting with passion and joy, credited with rejuvenating kwaito. The smash hits like *Diala Mapantsula* and *Mambotjie* are still hauled out at parties today, and *We Love This Place* is probably the most hopeful SA song you'll ever hear.



2000s

BLK JKS — After Robots

On their debut album, Joburg band BLK JKS burst out with a heady, confusing mash-up of styles including, but never limited to, jazz, prog-rock, kwaito, dub and mbaqanga. It's the sound of unfettered indulgence and fearless experimentation, and isn't shy to incorporate and mutate a host of international rock references. There's a wild playfulness to guitarists Lindani Buthelezi and Mpumi Mcata, and the songs career from chugging rhythm to crazed solos in a way that screams freedom. It might be too simple to see *After Robots* as a case of the empire sings back, but it is an album that transforms the alt-rock of the West in the same way that Zambian Zamrock changed 1970s rock.



2010s

Derek Gripper — One Night on Earth

A lot of SA music is about reworking the traditions of the West and making them locally relevant. But there's another strand which speaks to the music of our fellow Africans, and Gripper is a master of this. *One Night on Earth* pays homage to Malian masters such as Toumani Diabaté and Ballaké Sissoko, with their songs, originally played on the kora, a fiendishly complex 21-string instrument, rewritten for six-string guitar. The result is both hauntingly beautiful and culturally energising, and has led Gripper to share famous stages such as Carnegie Hall with greats like Diabaté and guitar legend John Williams, who said he thought it was "absolutely impossible until I heard Derek Gripper do it". ✕



Roper is a director of Code for Africa, and former editor-in-chief of the Mail & Guardian