

# HOUSE 'KLEINE SCHUUR' PARKTOWN, JOHANNESBURG

for **SCOTT DRIMIE**  
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## Citation

There are not many buildings in the relatively young city of Johannesburg that can be classified as 'old'. The number of buildings that can be viewed as 'important' for architectural and socio-cultural reasons are miniscule in relation to the total built fabric of the conurbation. This fragile heritage plays only a small part of the daily life of its inhabitants. Its role is so small and insignificant that most, generally, believe that this fabric can be allowed to follow a natural path into oblivion or that the salvageable materials/structures should be used for the very different requirements of newer generations and the conditions dictated by the quest for survival.

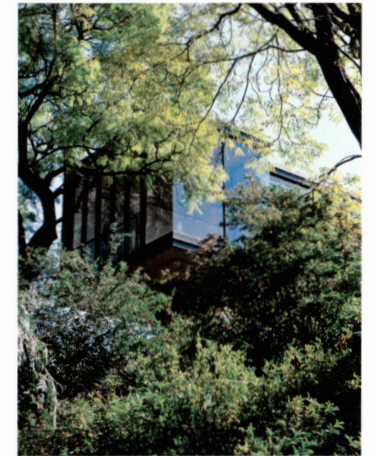
When the owners of a building and, in this case their architect, step in to creatively stem the tide of attrition – society should take note. When it is done with such elegance and careful thought – those interested in the values inherent in the built environment and the architectural profession, should celebrate.

Kleine Schuur was designed in 1910 by Sir Herbert Baker for Dennis Santry, who was a satirist working for the *Sunday Times* and the *Rand Daily Mail*. This house, situated on the southern edge of the Parktown Ridge, was named Kleine Schuur in a satirical gesture to the house Groote Schuur in Cape Town, which was built for Cecil John Rhodes and was also designed by Sir Baker. Francis Fleming, Baker's partner, later prepared the design for alterations to Kleine Schuur.

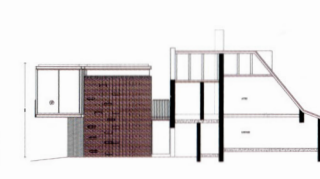
The original double-storey house, built in the materials and solid craftsmanship of the time, reminds one of the Arts and Crafts style of some typical English country cottages. Its symmetry is reinforced by its elevation, and steeply pitched broseley tiled roof that has dormer windows and prominent chimneys. In plan, this symmetry is reinforced with a central room stretching from the northern to the southern façades. Adjacent to this beautifully proportioned room, the more private and service accommodation is to be found. The house was placed right on the edge of the ridge in order to visually connect the north-facing garden with a magnificent southerly view over central Johannesburg. The architect, Nabeel Essa, worked carefully with this legacy and fabric in order to add the required new accommodation, to rationalise and modify older accretions, and to effect internal re-arrangements. This was done with great sensitivity, applying also the principle that the 'old' will remain so, while the 'new' will also reflect the sensibilities of its time in order for the combined whole to reflect its total history, both physically and socio-culturally, as far as possible.

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**QUANTITY SURVEYOR** QUANCO  
**CONTRACTOR** MDC CONSTRUCTION  
**LANDSCAPE DESIGNER** BRENDON EDWARDS  
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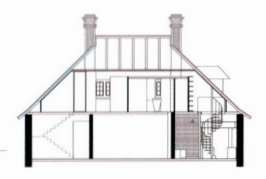
Inside the original house, service areas like the kitchen and bathrooms have been rationalised and updated. A new spiral staircase has been introduced to enable easier access between the ground floor and the loft. On the side of the garage, further rationalisation of existing accommodation followed. It was with the new addition in this area of the existing buildings that the architect really excelled in making a memorable contribution to the whole. This new room, with its bare concrete floor and ceiling and its crisply detailed floor-to-ceiling windows and sliding-folding doors, is a tour de force belying its small scale. The cantilevered window box is made 'weightless' by the vertical garden that covers and hides its support structure and the accommodation that might be behind it. The vertical garden emulates the steeply sloping and heavily forested 'wildness' of the garden on the southern part of the property. It also contrasts with the more serene and classically ordered north-facing garden on the other side of the buildings. The views created from this room draw attention to the old house, as well as to the city. The longest and most prominent wall of this room is covered with an enlarged version of one of Dennis Santry's satirical drawings – most probably created in the loft space of the original house, where he worked for most of his life. The shape



SOUTH ELEVATION



SECTION CC



SECTION AA

of, and views from, this room also bring to mind the qualities of the 'noble' central room of the original house.

The qualities created in this new addition, coupled with the way that the changes were effected to the older parts

of the house, ensure that space-time and social continuities are embodied in the structure and felt throughout. In this way, both 'new' and 'old' sets a context for the next generations that might inhabit the house. Kleine Schuur also sets an example for society, as well as the architectural profession, of how to deal with such a fragile historical legacy in an inspired and careful manner.