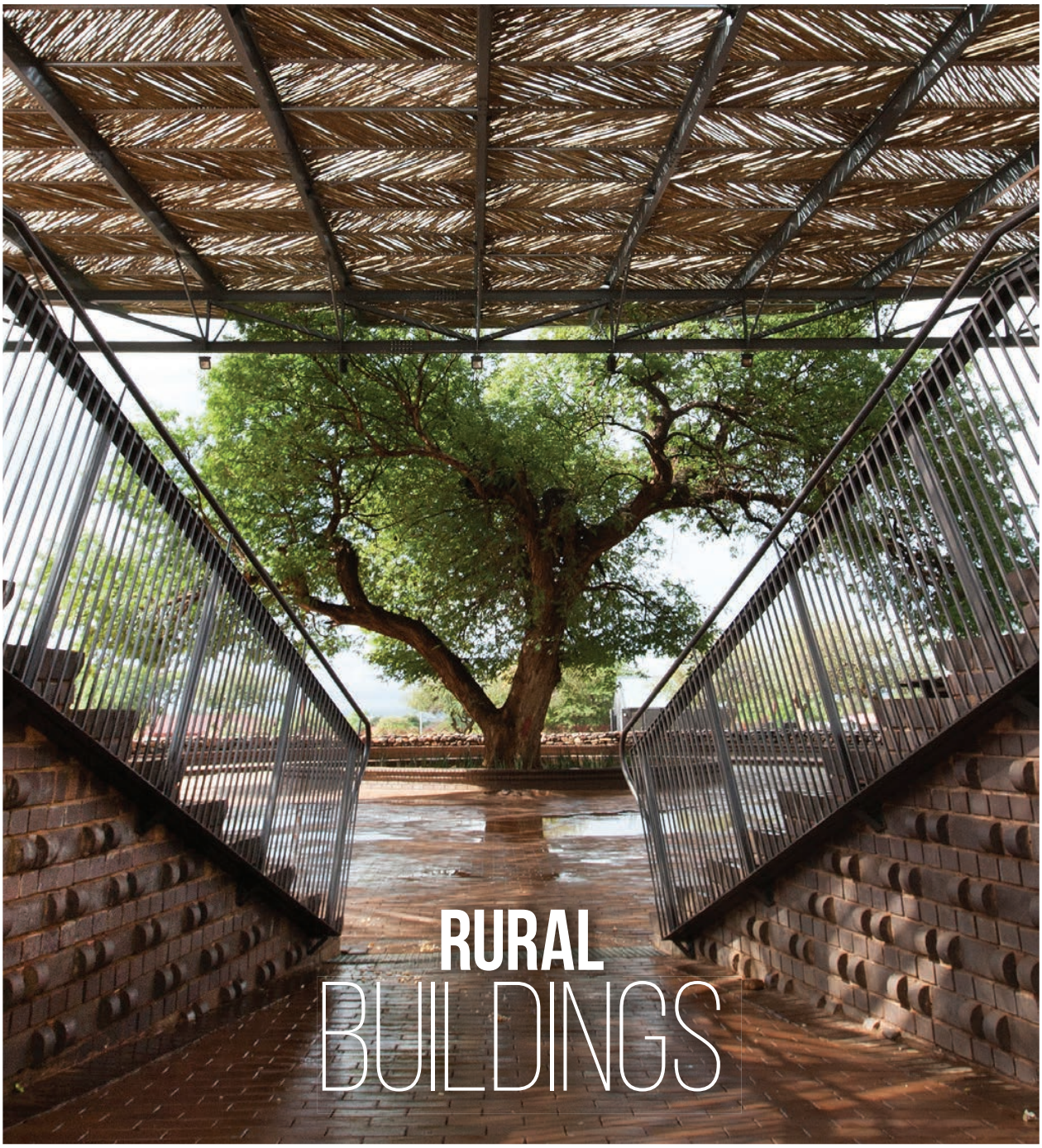
ARCHSA
JOURNAL OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS
ISSUE 84
MARCH APRIL 2017



RURAL BUILDINGS

ISSN: 1682-9387
9 771682 938004 17004
RSA R30.00 (INCL. VAT)

THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS ° SAIA °

BUILDING IN RURAL AREAS

PAUL KOTZE
Editor

'Architecture is an act of producing a thing from a place; it is a production by those who live in the place. Such acts of production connect place and human beings...' - Kengo Kuma, 2014

It might seem contradictory to introduce an issue on building in the rural areas of South Africa with a quote from a Japanese architect, but the above is some of what he has learnt by working in the rural 'unseen' areas of Japan.

Similar sentiments could have also been expressed by Peter Rich, Gawie Fagan, Richard Stretton, Chris Wilkinson, Rodney Harber, Roelof Uytenbogaardt, Kate Otten, Jo Noero, Nabeel Essa, Craig McClenaghan, Ludwig Steyl previously of TC Design Architects and many other local architects. When architects move out of their 'safe' metropolitan areas to design and create buildings in rural areas, they might be at their most vulnerable – or they might be able to renew their approach to their work by distilling it to poetic essentials.

Currently, the pertinent question that needs asking is: where, precisely, is the rural? With electronic communication and the ways in which knowledge is spread, previous intellectual and physical boundaries between the so-called cosmopolitan metropolis and the rural areas have been blurred.

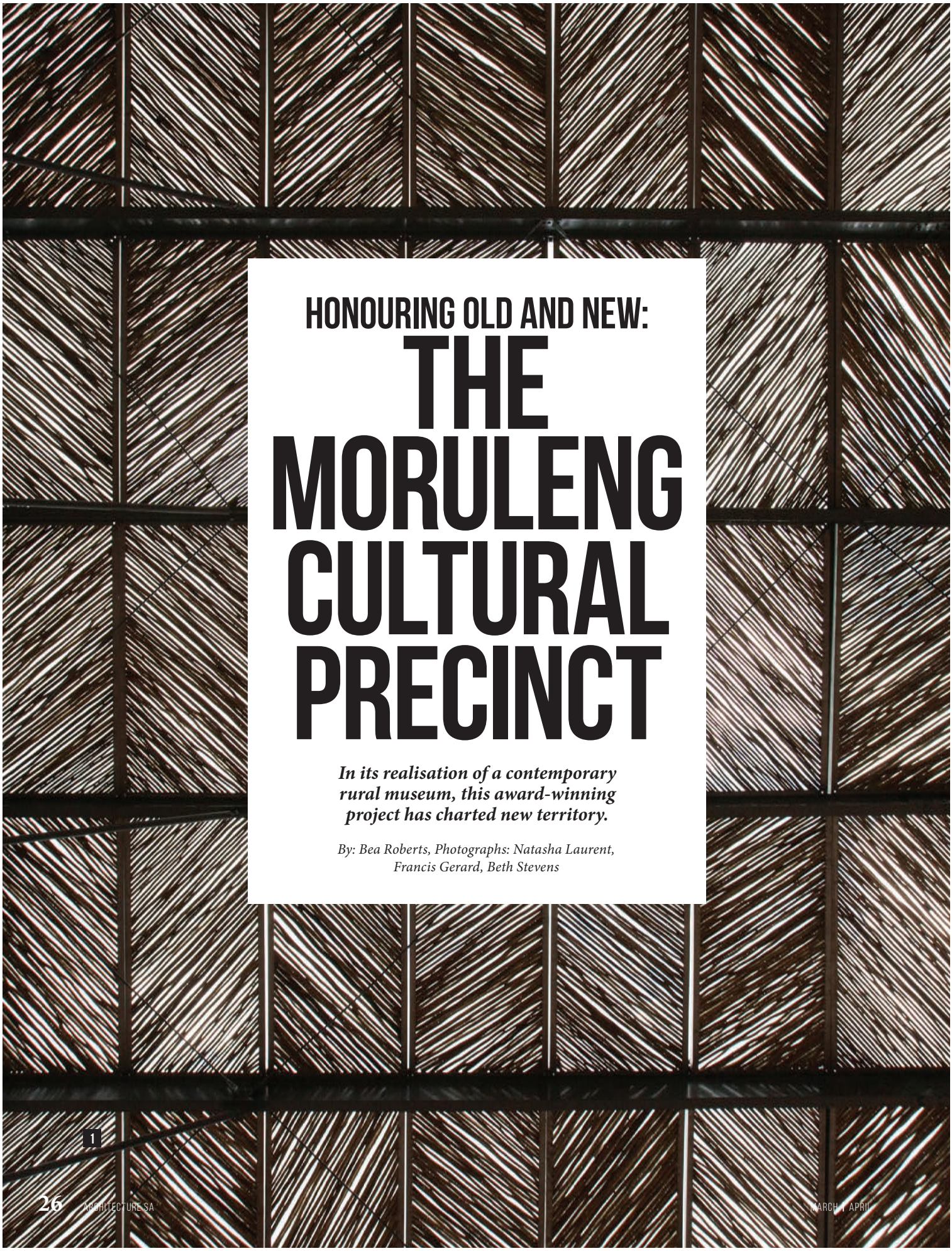
For somebody as thoughtful as Kuma, as well as for many other architects, architectural historians and commentators, this flow of attitudes and perceptions from the world's metropolitan centres to the rural areas is mostly a one-way street while it should be an equitable discussion that goes both ways. It is seen by many as a highly destructive process, which destroys the reality and knowledge of a local architectural culture and place. This destruction is mainly caused by a misplaced quest to reflect the perceived 'advanced' metropolitan architectural ideals without really understanding their underpinnings. Sadly, there is often the concomitant belief in the 'periphery' that the architectural ideas and practices of this bigger world are somehow superior.

Much of the destruction of the 'local and authentic' is based upon the thoughtless, unreflective interaction of these forces. Luckily, however, due to the fundamental changes in the way knowledge is shared across the world, the perceptions of core and periphery – and what is of real architectural value – have undergone similar changes.

Increasingly, quality work done by gifted architects in the rural, peripheral and largely poor areas of the world is challenging the orthodoxies of the developed, rich world. Many architects, both inside and outside of South Africa, have gained international acclaim from the quality of the work they have created in the world's 'forgotten' parts. So it should be. This challenge is not yet very strong; it doesn't really equalise the scales. The might of the developed world's architectural fame-creation machinery is overpowering. The extensive public coverage these architects receive is a self-perpetuating cycle of exposure – and over-exposure – of the same images and projects, over and over. This creates the impression that these works must be 'good'; worthy of emulation.

The architectural publications that need to create the counterpoint to this, as seen from the developing world's perspective, are comparatively small. When the architectural achievements of the global south reach any publication, beyond its own ill-defined borders, it should be celebrated. It might just contribute to the tipping of the scales and the creation of a different narrative. This other story might also expose the gaps and pretentions in the architectural thinking of the developed world, which might have forgotten how to bring architectural relief to the conditions of poverty and bring human dignity to the lives of the 'forgotten'.

Perhaps architects working under these difficult conditions in rural contexts might not think about it like this. But the quality of their work, and the hope it creates, may be the best counterbalance in an unequal world. ■



HONOURING OLD AND NEW:

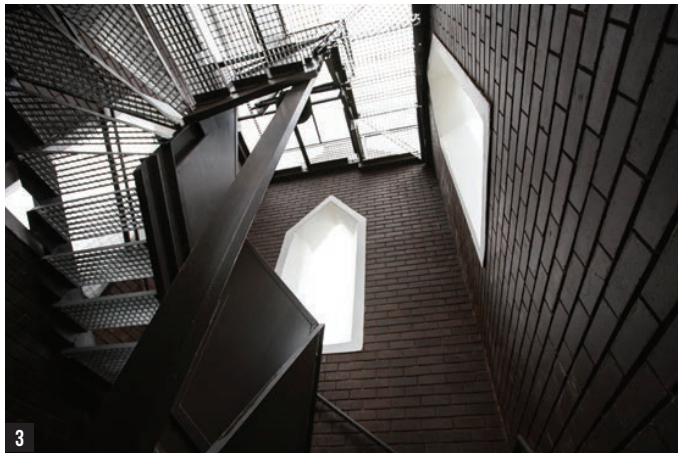
THE MORULENG CULTURAL PRECINCT

In its realisation of a contemporary rural museum, this award-winning project has charted new territory.

By: Bea Roberts, Photographs: Natasha Laurent, Francis Gerard, Beth Stevens

1





Just under 200 years ago, Kgosi Pilane – the chief of a Tswana group called the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela – settled his people at Mmasobudule on the Elands River, in the area today known as the Pilanesberg.

During the reign of Kgosi Kgamanyane, Pilane's son and successor, the Voortrekkers arrived in the Pilanesberg district and started laying claim to the land in that region. With their arrival in the early 1800s came a system of formal land registration. Before then, African law and custom viewed land as belonging to the community, not to any one individual. Soon, settler land claims encroached on the land occupied by the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela and other African communities.

Life wasn't easy for the African communities in the Transvaal. Besides the fact that they were losing much of their land to white settlers, they had to contend with cattle raids, inter-tribal battles and white demand for labour, which was often offset against land tenure. Boers frequently captured black children for indentured labour, and droughts, floods, locusts and disease were regular occurrences. Nonetheless, under Kgamanyane the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela flourished. Although not formally theirs, they had access to large areas of land, and were thus able to grow crops and keep cattle, build towns and buy manufactured items. The tribe increased in number, as did their cattle stocks, but still black people couldn't buy land.

It took farsighted leaders and cooperative missionaries to work out ways of ensuring that black communities secured their ancestral lands. In 1861 Kgosi Kgamanyane moved his capital from Mmasobudule to Paul Kruger's farm, Saulspoort, at Moruleng, on the slopes of the Pilanesberg. In 1869, the Dutch Reformed missionary Henri Gonin bought the farm from Kruger for £900, with the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela contributing half for the purchase. The deed of sale stated that Kgamanyane, his people and their descendants would always be allowed to live there.

Today, platinum wealth has enabled the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela to embark on a number of significant developments. One of these is the Moruleng Cultural

IT TOOK FARSIGHTED LEADERS AND COOPERATIVE MISSIONARIES TO WORK OUT WAYS OF ENSURING THAT BLACK COMMUNITIES SECURED THEIR ANCESTRAL LANDS

Precinct on the slopes of the Mmammitlwa Mountain, a site of extraordinary historical, cultural and architectural significance.

The precinct is a wonderful example of innovative, creative heritage practice. The origins go back to 2009, when a Johannesburg-based museum and exhibition collaborative, Totem Media, was approached by Kgosi Nyalala Pilane of the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela Traditional Administration to install a small temporary exhibition in the Mphebatho Museum in Moruleng. Out of this modest installation grew a vision of a cultural precinct that would allow members of the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela community, as well as visitors, to explore the cultural heritage, traditions and history of the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela.

In 2011, Kgosi Nyalala Pilane gave Totem Media and the architectural practice Office 24-7 the brief to renovate the existing museum, restore the old Dutch Reformed Mission Church adjacent to the museum, and develop a precinct with new exhibitions and installations. His vision for the precinct was that it should generate conversations about cultural values, beliefs, knowledge systems and practices as they inform Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela identity and shape possible futures.

Office 24-7 is a thinking practice that is constantly seeking new ways of working: collaborating across disciplines, fields and scales in the frame of heritage, exhibition, and museum design and development. The Moruleng Cultural Precinct is an exemplary example of such a multilayered project. ›

1 *Amphitheatre.* **2** *Kitchen building, exterior view.* **3** *Interior view of new bell tower.*

At the heart of the precinct lies the Mphebatho Cultural Museum, built as a school in 1937 by a Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela initiation regiment. The simple and symmetrical floor plan consists of two wings either side of a central hall with a small yard to the west. The main entrance on the east side leads to both wings via a veranda and has a symmetrical façade with roof gables.

In 1998, together with the architect Peter Rich, the community renovated the school to become a museum for the preservation of the cultural practices and heritage of the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela. Community elder Mmakgotla Grace Masuku sourced artefacts from more than 30 villages, and shared her comprehensive knowledge of Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela customs, traditional healing and conservation.

By 2011, when Office 24-7 started the second renovation, the old school building was clearly suffering from a lack of maintenance and some non-sensitive additions. The architectural strategy was largely to remove the additions (a built-in stoep on the west façade and a defunct bathroom structure), repair structural damage and completely overhaul the exterior façade.

THE ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURES AND LANDSCAPE LAYERING ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE EXHIBITION NARRATIVE. NUMEROUS HISTORICAL INFLUENCES ON THE BAKGATLA-BA-KGAFELA COMMUNITY ARE AT PLAY IN THIS SPACE

The renovated museum allows visitors to experience Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela culture and traditions as they have evolved. The exhibition is split between two key areas. The first considers culture and belief from the inside out. Highly visual and tactile installations introduced by a multiscreen video installation explain how creation stories, traditional beliefs, healing systems and cattle and clay helped the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela navigate their lives over centuries – and still do today. It also explains how the key life stages – birth, initiation, marriage and death – are observed and celebrated.

CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Entering the first room of the exhibition is almost like stepping into an art installation. A curved, scalloped wall central to the exhibition mimics ancient stonewalling, acting as a backdrop for the installation, which has over 2 000 unique parts.

The scalloped wall slips into a re-creation of the landscape that forms the backdrop to the village of Moruleng. Oversized cattle are scattered across the landscape, their scale depicting the value of cattle to the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela.

The design team was committed to working with the raw materials traditionally used by the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela, including wood, copper, rawhide and clay. The scalloped wall fuses precolonial-settlement walls with mud walls featuring *lekgapo* (cow dung) patterns, into a digital, pixelated-textured structure.

Textual information is deconstructed into bite-sized, three-dimensional information 'tweets'. Each conveys an idea, belief or tradition of the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela, and they make for easy reading.

The entire installation pays homage to rural women, and their power. The making of the *lekgapo* marks is symbolic of ploughing the soil, growing food and sustaining life. The intimacy of the small images in the round, copper-edged 'tweets' lauds the role and influence of women in Tswana culture.

WRITTEN HISTORY

The museum's second room looks at Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela history from the outside in, drawing on a variety of written sources, using the lens of traditional museum views. Many of the images are photographs taken by the renowned social anthropologist Isaac Schapera, who spent a number of years in the 1930s living with the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela in Botswana. These images are drawn from an ethnographic archive held at the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) in London. The RAI digitised the collection for the benefit of the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela community.

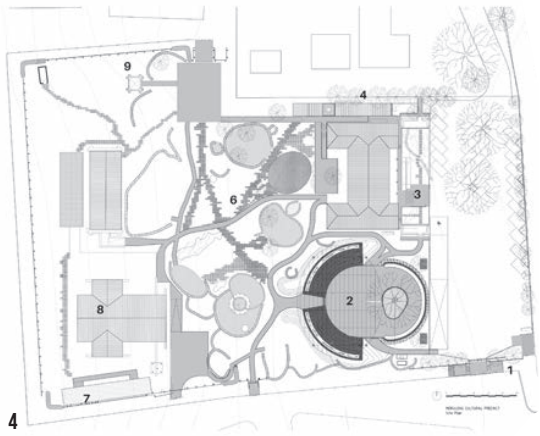
You exit the museum through a small shop into a landscape of iron-age settlement patterns – a detail of the first Kgosi Pilane's settlement that can still be visited in the Pilanesberg National Park.

The precinct forces a complete rethink of the notion of the cultural museum. The architectural structures and landscape layering are an integral part of the exhibition narrative. Numerous historical influences on the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela community are at play in this space, from precolonial stone settlements and systems to how Christianity and apartheid have affected this rural community.

Visitors make their way past the stonewalled structures and through the landscaped terrain to a beautifully restored Dutch Reformed Mission Church, built in 1889. In 2009, it was a virtual ruin, yet its potential was clear. Under the meticulous guidance of architect Nabeel Essa, the slow process of restoration was undertaken, with every detail carefully thought through.

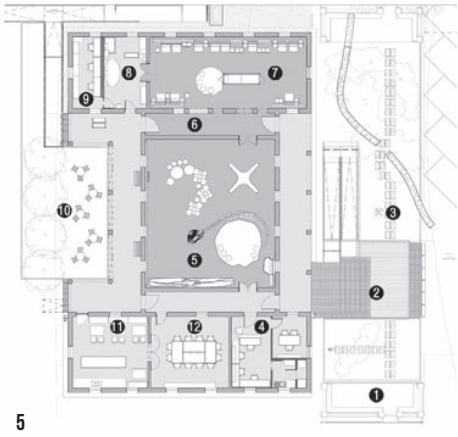
'All we had to go on were two historical photos from the late 1930s and early 1960s. We had to extrapolate from these what the character of the original building would have been,' says Essa. 'We demolished the original southern gable of the church and rebuilt it from concrete stock brick. We reconstructed the front door opening with a triangular head, using the 1930s photograph, and, since there was no information on the timber detail of the original door, we inserted a frameless glass door into the opening. The side door on the east elevation ›

4 *Site plan.* **5** *Mphebatha museum plan.* **6** *Restored Dutch Reformed Church.* **7** *View of sites of interest structure.* **8** *New museum bathroom, exterior view.* **9** *Exhibition interior.* **10** *Amphitheatre.*



4

1. SELEFANA DISPLAY STRUCTURE
2. NEW KGOTLA/ AMPHITHEATRE
3. MPHEBATHO MUSEUM
4. NEW ABLUTIONS AND KITCHEN BLOCK
5. RESTORED DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH
6. NEW INDIGENOUS LANDSCAPE
7. NEW CHURCH BATHROOM AND OFFICE BLOCK
8. EXISTING UNITING REFORM CHURCH
9. NEW BELL TOWER



5

1. NEW LELAPHA STRUCTURES
2. NEW STAIRS AND RAMP TO ENTRANCE
3. KGOSI LINCHWE'S BUST ON NEW PLINTH
4. RECEPTION AND OFFICES
5. EXHIBITION ROOM 1
6. EXHIBITION
7. EXHIBITION ROOM 2
8. MUSEUM SHOP
9. MUSEUM ARCHIVE
10. OUTDOOR SEATING AREA
11. MUSEUM COFFEE SHOP
12. MEETING ROOM

MUCH OF THE PRODUCTION INVOLVED LOCAL ARTISANS AND CRAFTERS DRAWING ON AGE-OLD, ALMOST FORGOTTEN TRADITIONS, THUS ENABLING THEM TO BRING THEIR KNOWLEDGE INTO A MODERN CONTEXT AND PASS ON SKILLS TO A YOUNGER GENERATION



6



9



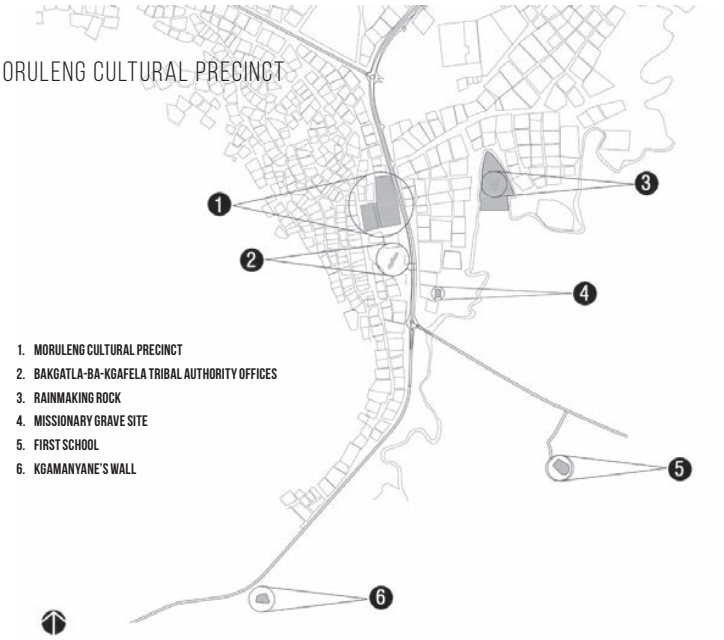
7



10



8



11

was treated similarly. We left much of the original brick unplastered, juxtaposed against new insertions. A new ramp was constructed to deal with level changes. It was made of dark brick to reflect that it is a contemporary insertion, and a shadow detail was used to separate it from the original structure.'

Today, the church is a mutifunctional exhibition and event space. It houses an exhibition, including films, on the impact of missionary and colonial influence on the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela, showing how, over the years, they've found ways for Christianity and tradition to respectfully live alongside each other. A new bell tower has been erected alongside the church. At the top, visitors have a vista over the precinct and the village of Moruleng. The stillness is only interrupted by the lowing of cattle in the distance, the occasional car passing by, the chatter of women and children, and the rustle of grass.

DESIGN AND BUILD

The interior and exterior design of the precinct draws extensively on traditional craft, skills and building methods. Much of the production involved local artisans and crafters drawing on age-old, almost forgotten traditions, thus enabling them to bring their knowledge into a modern context and pass on skills to a younger generation. The master stonewaller of the precinct was a local community member, Mr Ramafoko, who was well into his sixties at the time of construction. Stonewalling has run in Mr Ramafoko's family for generations; as a young boy he worked alongside his father, acquiring not only the skill, but also the patience and single-mindedness needed to become a master of his craft.

Throughout the precinct, deliberate effort has been made to allow visitors to distinguish old from new elements on the site. The new elements were created with a dark-brown brick, while the existing items were restored to their original white exteriors.

11 *Sites of interest.*

AMPHITHEATRE KGOTLA

Another outstanding feature of the precinct is its amphitheatre. Its design draws on the traditional kgotla, or meeting place, often centred around a big tree. The raked amphitheatre kgotla has been carved into the landscape with a latticed pergola structure providing shading. The pergola design is a contemporary reinterpretation of the *lekgapo* patterning traditionally used on floors and walls, but using lathes and steel. When the sun is overhead, beautiful shadow patterns are cast on the ground.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Essa explains the thinking behind the landscaping of the precinct: 'Landscaping was used to establish a unifying framework, and to enforce and enhance new relationships between the heritage buildings on the site. Our intention was to look at the history of the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela though a broad lens. As such, the landscaping overlays and reconfigures the ground by utilising traditional stone walls, reconstructing the pattern of a nearby Iron Age Tswana settlement. We also layered the site with indigenous traditional medicine gardens.'

The precinct is an approachable, accessible space that draws visitors in, and inspires them to engage with the history and culture of a unique traditional community. It talks eloquently to issues of localised identity in a global framework, and its design creates several dynamic moments as you move between interior and exterior, between age-old beliefs and traditions and present-day realities.

The Moruleng Cultural Precinct, officially opened in 2015, has been hailed by community members and visitors alike. It has charted new territory in its realisation of a contemporary rural museum. The precinct will undoubtedly change perceptions of rural communities and, hopefully, inspire others to be equally innovative in their approach to issues of identity, history, culture and the future.

In 2016, Office 24-7 was awarded a Corobrik SAIA Award of Commendation 2015/16 for the The Moruleng Cultural Precinct. In 2015, Office 24-7 received the Pretoria Institute for Architecture Award of Merit and Best Public Architecture Award 2014/15 for the precinct. ■

THE PROJECT TEAM

Architects: Office 24-7
Project team: Nabeel Essa, William Dewar, Beth Stevens, Letlhabile Shubane
Structural engineers: MVW Consulting Engineers
Electrical engineers: CKR Consulting Engineers
Landscape architect: Patrick Watson
Quantity surveyor: Quanco Quantity Surveyors
Museum development and project management: Totem Media
Exhibition design: Brainwave
Community liaison officer: Mr Mankgeli
Contractors: BriDev Projects, Thoma Thabiso Construction
Exhibition contractors: Image K, Digital Fabric