

Port Elizabeth City Hall, venue of the four public lectures that formed part of the 2016 NMMU International Architecture Workshop
Image via <http://portelizabeth.co/>



About Baakens River Valley

Landscaping the Valley

The early twentieth century also saw the laying out of the botanical gardens in what is now known as Settler's Park. Exotic plants and birds were introduced and much of the natural vegetation was landscaped. Weirs and dams were also built to allow people to pass over the river and have subsequently had negative environmental impacts.

The demolition of South End

In the 1950s the area of South End was demolished and the residents were re-located as part of the Group Areas Act of the Apartheid Era. This community, which had been so closely linked with the Baakens River and the coast were re-located inland, separating them from their cultural roots.

The influence of Modernism

In the 1960s, the municipality, fuelled by Modernist ideas began to re-plan Port Elizabeth as separate suburbs, linked by large freeways. This greatly impacted the nature of the Lower Baakens as concrete flyovers were built over the river mouth, completely cutting of the city from the sea. There was also a proposal for a highway to connect to these freeways from the suburbs, running down the length of the Valley, but was luckily met with great resistance and never came into being.

Industrialisation of the Baakens lagoon

The turn of the century saw a dramatic change in the role of the Lower Baakens as Main Street (now Govan Mbeki Avenue) was constructed and the inner city began to develop. There are various stories about why the lagoon was filled in. One story suggests that the people swimming in the lagoon were making a noise for the residents on the hill while another indicates that more land was needed for a garden below the fort. Whatever the reasoning, the rubble was excavated for city development and dumped into the lagoon. This later formed the foundations for factories and the mouth of the river was ultimately canalised.

The changing nature of the river mouth

From the historical photos, it is evident that the mouth of the river changed many times with bridges across the mouth often being re-built as the river continued its natural flooding course. The Tramways Building was built in 1897 and although it sits in the middle of the flood plain has remained throughout.

All information via: <http://www.baakensvalleyaction.co.za/historical-interest>



ACROSS

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Nelson Mandela Bay: Making a Place



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Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
for tomorrow

2005-2015

Q&A

Interview with Matías Imbern

Mieke Kotze



What do you find unique and inspiring about South Africa and its architecture?

I believe I did not have enough time to learn and understand South African architecture in order to develop a broader perspective of it. Nonetheless, what I found more interesting are vernacular constructions, using wood as a structure and wicker in the roof. I think this type of structures have potential to be redeveloped using new technologies to address contemporary issues.

Which of your own projects have you found to be the most rewarding, and why?

It is a difficult question, hopefully the most rewarding project will be the next one; luckily, I enjoyed many of them. So, trying to answer the question, I find the Disseminable Pavilion as one of the most compelling ones, even though it was a competition. We did not win, and probably the jury did not understand the proposal. It has not been published, but I show it in every lecture.

Which global challenges do you feel need to be urgently addressed by architects?

Personally, I have a particular interest in technology as a global driver for social change (and therefore architectural change), and I always notice that while new technological advances are immediately embraced in some industries all over the world, as the automobile or the media industries, it takes a lot of time for architecture to incorporate them as a design and fabrication tool. In many countries, especially least development countries, we continue building as 50 years ago or even more.

What strategies would you suggest for aspiring architects to better meet these challenges?

I strongly suggest them to develop an eager attitude in order to gain new knowledge. In a globalized era, the access to information has been facilitated, simplified, so they should take advantage of this condition and not only wait for professor to teach them new things. They should become more independent. Nothing will change if they do not challenge the pre-existing knowledge, understanding change as a leitmotiv for cultural

What do you see the role of the architect becoming/ changing in the future?

Architects are becoming an important piece of a bigger puzzles of interdisciplinary cooperation. My guess, in an increasingly complex future, is that we are going to become more and more interdependent with other disciplines in order to actually address and try to solve new challenges.



Innovative use of computer software to maximize space and light in Imbern's office I+CG[ar]



Proposed design for Guggenheim Centre in Helsinki, Finland



Rendering of proposed on-campus walkway utilizing digitally designed ceramic components

Matías Imbern: Digital/Analog: Architectural Interpolations

Mieke Kotze

On the evening of the 17th of February, Port Elizabethans and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University students converged for the final time at City Hall for the fourth public lecture by Professor Matias Imbern.

Entitled "Digital/Analog: Architectural Interpolations" the presentation focused on the potential of new technologies to shape the way we live, interact, think, and above all create spaces.

Imbern demonstrated through numerous informative illustrations and videos, the manner in which, in recent years, the entire process from design to construction has undergone a digital overhaul. The audience marveled at undulating schematics responding on screen to changing parameters, and futuristic robotic arms constructing complex structures.

He demonstrated the wide

applicability of these technologies by showcasing a number of his recent projects. From his team's inspired submission for the Guggenheim Centre competition, in Helsinki, which included an exterior wall featuring a pixelated image of a forest rendered in brick, to be built by a high-tech robotic arm; to the much smaller yet nonetheless innovative, purpose-built shelving and workspaces designed for his own office, I+CG[ar] in Rosario, Argentina, which utilized software to optimize space and light, as well as to reduce waste and cost.

However, he admits that in developing countries such as Argentina and South Africa,

ground-breaking technology such as digital fabrication tools and software are costly, and thus have been impractical for use in small, private projects, such as homes. This is something which he and his team hope to change. In one of their current projects, a submission entitled "infinite house", to a competition which aims to find creative solutions to Argentina's housing shortage. Imbern and his team are investigating the possibility of applying assembly line technology, used in the automobile industry, to mass produce prefabricated homes, in a number of variations to best suit the needs of inhabitants, addressing needs for individuality as well as taking into account the changing

nature of the nuclear family.

Welcoming these innovations on all fronts, Imbern, in his capacity as a Professor of Architectural Design at the National University of Rosario, and Professor Fellow at the School of Architecture and Urban Studies at the Torcuato Di Tella University, pushes his students to embrace these technological advances in their own work. As indeed he challenged, NMMU's aspiring architects to broaden their horizons and embrace the potential of digital platforms.

Imbern closed by stating that as "society changes, we have to change with it," encouraging students and practicing architects alike to explore these technologies, claiming that it enables the architect to work with greater precision and control, allowing for ideas to be developed and refined in henceforth unprecedented ways. ■

"Society changes, we have to change with it"

Italian Consul Alfonso Tagliaferri, at the International workshop of Architecture, with: The HOD of the Architecture department, Boban Varghese; Prof. Armando Dal fabbro from Iuav, Venice; Arch. Ernst Struwig Senior lecturer Nmmu; Dr. Magda Minguzzi, Senior lecturer Nmmu

